

Downtown Plan

Yellowknife

Northwest Territories



Actions and Policies to enhance downtown Yellowknife



**Approved by City Council
July 22, 2002**

CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE
DOWNTOWN PLAN
July 2002

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INTRODUCTION

Downtown Yellowknife is the heart of the City. It is a strong and stable residential community, the largest employment centre in the NWT, a healthy shopping and service environment, and a strong draw for tourists and visitors. It is more than an accumulation of commercial shops and services. It is a complete, integrated neighbourhood with a special character, and represents a truly urban lifestyle in Canada's north. Downtown Yellowknife is a place to live, shop, work and play.

The Downtown Plan is both a planning document and an action strategy to enhance downtown Yellowknife. It is broad based and visionary, while also being action-oriented and implementation-focused. It represents a detailed "plan of action" to enhance downtown Yellowknife.

This Plan has been prepared in partnership with the Yellowknife community, and through numerous meetings with key stakeholders such as the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, downtown business owners, property owners, the RCMP and others.

DOWNTOWN YELLOWKNIFE VISION STATEMENT

The first step in the creation of an action plan is to identify a downtown-specific vision. Such a vision should be achievable, market based and reflective of "grass roots" community views and priorities. The following downtown vision was developed from the thoughts and aspirations of the study participants. The vision defines the downtown's ideal future, representing the realization of its full potential.

Downtown Yellowknife as a "Northern Urban Neighbourhood"

Downtown Yellowknife is a compact, vibrant and diverse urban neighbourhood, a gem in Canada's north. It reflects the City's challenging northern climate, frontier spirit, multi-cultural character and location in the Canadian Shield, and it boldly capitalizes on the City's golden past and diamond future. The downtown is the heart of our City, and helps to define Yellowknife. It is the focal point of all City and Territorial activities, a place full of destinations, activities, public spaces and special character. It is the place to live, work, shop and have fun year-round; to meet, gather, linger and feel a part of the unique Yellowknife community.

Downtown Yellowknife's healthy and diverse shops and services provide for every shopping need of residents and visitors alike. Its thriving culture and entertainment activities provide life to the downtown, for people and families of all ages and cultures. Its growing residential population provides support and a sense of safety and vitality that comes from people living in the downtown. All this makes the downtown the ideal place to live, work and do business in Yellowknife.

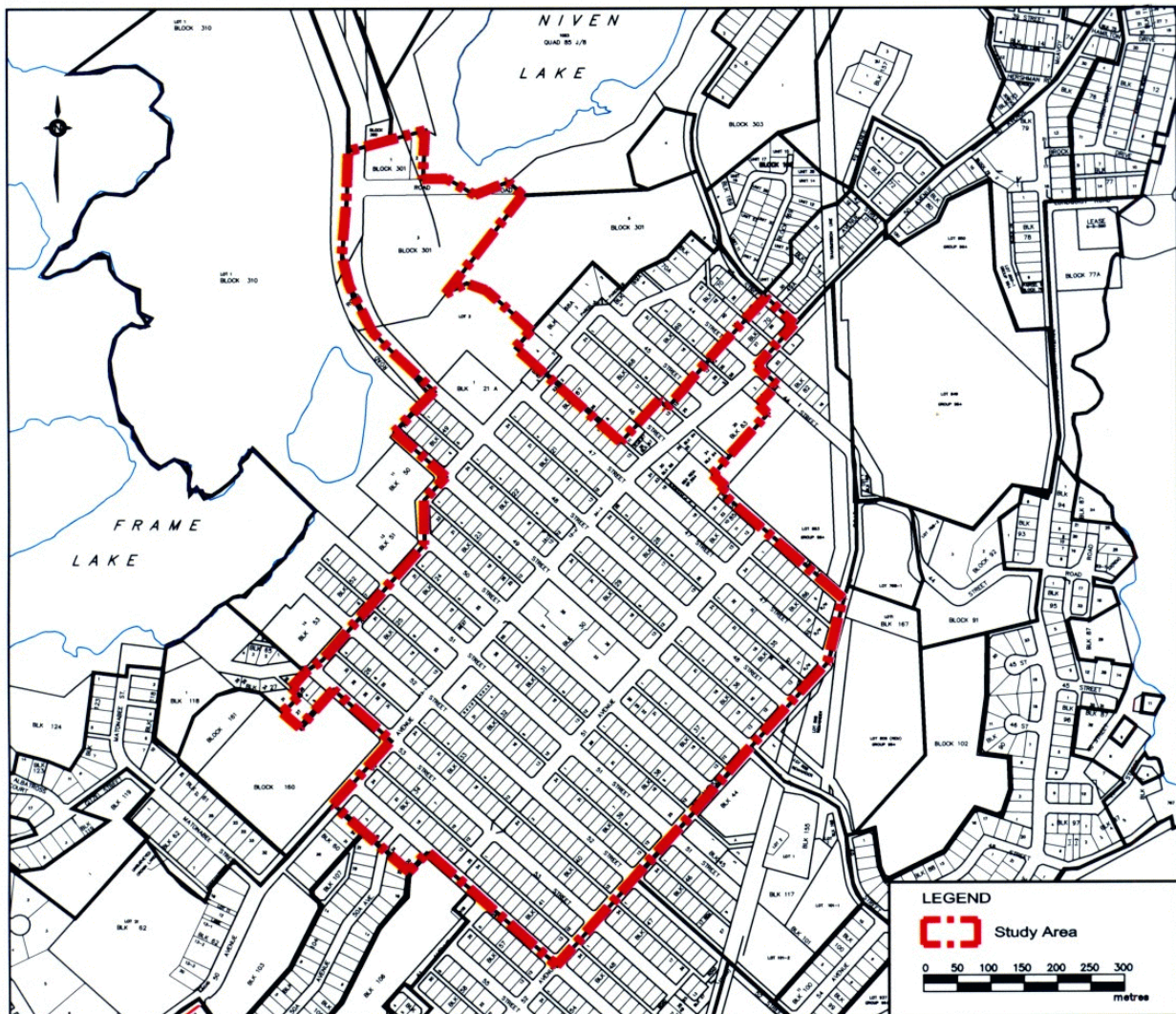


Figure 1: Downtown Study Area

DOWNTOWN PLAN - STRATEGIC THEMES

Downtown Yellowknife is the city's center for business and commerce, shopping, tourism and entertainment activity. The downtown also represents a vital and successful urban neighbourhood where residents live close to work, shopping and other activities.

As Yellowknife experiences population growth and change in the coming years, it will be important that the downtown maintain its vital role, continue its mixed use character, and represent a strong and successful "public face" for the City. To ensure that this occurs, the City has initiated this Downtown Plan. This Plan is an action-oriented planning document for downtown enhancement over the next 15 year period.

To realize the downtown vision over the next 15 year period, the Plan has been organized into five key themes around which specific actions are proposed. These themes were created after initial public input. The five themes are as follows:

- ▶ ***Creating the northern urban neighbourhood*** - a place to live, work, shop and play.
- ▶ ***Designing a special place*** - further downtown visual improvements.

- ▶ **Smoothing the way** - planning and zoning considerations.
- ▶ **Creating the image** - the marketing of Downtown Yellowknife.
- ▶ **Mobilizing for action** - new administrative structures to facilitate improvement.

These five themes provide a framework for specific actions to be undertaken to enhance downtown Yellowknife. Each action is described below. Further clarification of each action is outlined in the Downtown Plan Background Report. Appendix 1 outlines timing to implement the specific actions of the Downtown Plan and their associated budget estimates.

Theme 1 - Creating the Northern Urban Neighbourhood - A Place to Live, Work, Shop and Play

This theme relates to the enhancement of downtown as a “northern urban neighbourhood”. A northern urban neighbourhood represents a mixed use, climate sensitive and mutually supportive environment where people can live, work, shop and recreate. The use of this theme is intended to enhance downtown Yellowknife’s importance in the community, as well as its importance as a vibrant neighbourhood in and of itself. The northern urban neighbourhood will be made up of the commercial core as well as the directly adjacent residential streets. This theme has a particular emphasis on new residential construction, but also includes new development / investment relating to office space and employment, retail and shopping uses, and recreational / entertainment uses.

Target Actions

1. **Use of parking revenue:** Direct revenue from downtown on-street parking (estimated at more than \$200,000 per year) to downtown related incentive programs and physical infrastructure projects. Specifically, funds related to parking revenue could be allocated to Actions 2, 4 and 17 relating to downtown incentive programs, and to specific projects such as Actions 7, 14, 15 and 30.
 2. **Development grant for residential construction:** Create a residential grant program which allocates an amount of funding to be confirmed per multiple residential unit built within the downtown. The grant would facilitate residential redevelopment in the downtown to support the “northern urban neighbourhood” vision. Allocate \$120,000 on a one time basis for this program.
 3. **Downtown tax-back grant program:** As an incentive to redevelopment in downtown, create a program whereby increases in property taxes resulting from improvements to properties or buildings, is granted back to those who have reinvested in the downtown.
 4. **Waiving of application fees for residential development:** Within the downtown area, waive development and building permit fees for residential development.
 5. **Vacant site redevelopment strategy:** Identify all potential downtown sites that are vacant or under-developed and map them. Share information with real estate companies and developers.
 6. **Downtown community centre and park space:** Study the feasibility of constructing a community center or library and/or public grounds in the downtown. Locations just outside the study area (i.e. on Frame Lake, including the potential re-use of the Gerry Murphy Arena) should also be considered. In the context of new development, carefully planned parks should be integrated where appropriate.
 7. **Downtown public market:** Create a summer public market at a location also capable of operating during certain shoulder months. Approach the property owner of the parking lot at the intersection of Franklin Avenue and 50 Street as a potential initial location for a small scale downtown market. In the longer term, if the market concept grows, alternative sites (i.e. Gerry Murphy Arena, City Hall parking lot, etc.) could be considered. Opportunities for a permanent four-season market, potentially incorporated in a multi-use centre design, should be investigated.
 8. **Public washrooms:** Encourage existing property owners and developers of new construction to incorporate public washrooms, accessible at street level, into their developments. Investigate partnership opportunities relative to maintenance costs to make this feasible to private property owners.
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9. **Expand on-street parking times:** Consider having on-street parking on Franklin Avenue at all hours of the day. At present, on-street parking is permitted at all hours except during the morning and evening commuting periods. Expanded parking hours would improve the perception of parking availability, and would act as a “traffic calming” method to slow down traffic throughout the day.
10. **Intersection safety warning sounds:** At time of replacement, consider opportunities and relevant costs for the installation of additional safety warning sounds for stop lights along Franklin Avenue, and key intersections. Such warnings sounds have recently been installed at three intersections along Franklin Avenue. The success and public response to these warning sounds should be generally monitored.

Theme 2 - Designing a Special Place - Further Downtown Visual Improvements

This theme involves continued physical improvements to the downtown area, building on recent streetscape improvements along Franklin Avenue. The physical appearance and character of the downtown is important to its success as a place to live, work, shop and recreate. Physical improvements must not only be visual, but functional as well, and must recognize downtown Yellowknife’s climate, history and unique challenges. Although physical improvements on their own will not lead to an enhanced downtown, such improvements in concert with the other four theme areas are expected to facilitate a strengthened and more frequently visited downtown.

Target Actions

11. **Cross-street streetscape improvements:** Continuing with the improvements completed in recent years, Council should consider additional phased streetscape improvements for key cross streets with Franklin Avenue that would have the most significant visible impact on downtown image. The recommended next steps include streetscape improvements to 50 Street between 49 Avenue and 51 Avenue, and 48 Street between 49 Avenue and 51 Avenue. It is recommended that selected streetscape elements should be slightly more subtle than those used along Franklin Avenue to assist in promoting Franklin Avenue’s role as the primary downtown “main street”.
 12. **Street trees:** For any subsequent streetscaping, opportunities, coniferous (evergreen) trees should be considered in appropriate locations (i.e. in planters) in order to provide “winter greening” using species indigenous to the Yellowknife area. Tree guards should be considered for existing and future street trees.
 13. **Retention of existing vegetation:** In the context of new development, where possible retain existing vegetation and encourage new landscaping that promotes the vision and “sense of place”.
 14. **Mural program:** Institute a public / private funded mural program for key blank walls within the downtown. Establish a list of candidate blank walls where murals would have the greatest visual effect. Mural artistry should be selected in keeping with the downtown vision, the Yellowknife culture, and key local themes or icons. Potential themes include local culture and Aboriginal society, a “winter village” theme, northern adventure, the local diamond industry and the past gold industry, Canada’s northern wilderness, etc.
 15. **Downtown public art program:** Institute a public art program using cultural images distinctive to Yellowknife to promote the vision and “sense of place”. Investigate the promotion of downtown Yellowknife as a “downtown art zone”. In particular, cultural icons (i.e. Aboriginal, winter, northern, frontier) could be promoted.
 16. **Central stove feature:** Research the potential for the creation of a central public space for the downtown, with a working stove and co-ordinated landscaping. A large coniferous (evergreen) tree could be decorated as a “living Christmas tree” and unifying feature.
 17. **Facade improvement program:** Cost-share with the private sector a commercial facade improvement program targeted for Franklin Avenue between 53 Street and 46 Street, including all side streets up to intersections with 49 Avenue and 51 Avenue. Council should commit municipal funds to match private sector funds with the goal of an initial start-up fund of \$60,000 minimum for the first two years of operation. Establish the facade improvement program to involve a grant format and a requirement for businesses to provide matching funds. The grant would be up to \$7,500 and could apply to exterior facade and storefront improvements, signage improvements, or permanent outdoor patio space visible from the street edge.
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18. **Documentation of downtown heritage buildings:** Encourage the City’s Heritage Committee to complete the documentation of heritage buildings in the downtown. Such buildings could form the basis of a historical downtown walking tour and/or the use of signage for existing buildings or sites that have been redeveloped.
19. **Bus shelters:** Establish bus shelters at key locations in the downtown, potentially sponsored by businesses. As an alternative, an awning program in areas adjacent to bus stops could be considered.
20. **Main street window displays:** Institute a program whereby vacant storefronts or ground level window space is used as temporary displays of local artwork or cultural / community events.
21. **Seasonal displays:** Improve seasonal events displays including the return of the large Christmas tree to the downtown.
22. **Bike racks:** Institute a program to install more frequent and visible bike racks throughout the downtown.
23. **Winter colours:** Continue to promote colour selection in keeping with a traditional northern climate image, including bright colours for visibility during the winter months.
24. **Downtown awards program:** Create an award / recognition program to reward: downtown “champions”; unique northern design and architecture; improvements to storefronts and signage; best downtown customer service; etc. Advertise this program and award recipients extensively to ensure a high profile. Work with local media, perhaps as co-sponsors.
25. **Window cleaning:** Organize an early spring downtown window cleaning exercise, as part of a broader streetscaping cleaning program as a downtown fund-raiser (i.e. a “window wash-a-thon”) to either raise funds for downtown improvements or alternatively, distribute funds raised to local charities. Additional sponsorships from service groups and the private sector to be considered.
26. **Downtown maintenance:** Review the downtown maintenance program to identify opportunities to improve frequency of maintenance including street cleaning.

Theme 3 - Smoothing the Way - Planning and Zoning Considerations

Theme Explanation

Although zoning regulations will rarely lead directly to downtown improvements, changes in such regulations can often facilitate, or at a minimum, permit the types of improvements intended in a downtown area. Existing zoning should support a strong core commercial area within the downtown, and should further facilitate the creation of supporting uses around the commercial core, in particular new residential development.

Target Actions

27. **New downtown zoning:** Divide the existing “CC - Central Commercial” zone into zoning categories, including a main commercial centre “CC” zone along Franklin Avenue and adjacent blocks between 51 Avenue and 49 Avenue, and a “CC-1” transitional zone that would specifically promote uses supportive of the core commercial area (uses such as residential, office space and so on). Retailing uses would be de-emphasized in this CC-1 zone (See Figure 2).
28. **Sunlight and wind regulations:** Revise the Zoning By-law to add regulations relating to building height and other issues that affect sunlight and wind tunnel effects, for Franklin Avenue in particular or for the revised “CC” zone generally.
29. **Allowance of patio space:** Revise the Zoning By-law to allow building setbacks from sidewalks if intervening space is to be used for permanent public spaces or patio space relative to ground floor retailing or restaurant uses.

Theme 4 - Creating the Image - the Marketing of Downtown Yellowknife

Theme Explanation

Experience has shown that image has a strong effect on the success of a downtown. Downtowns can be “branded”, or given a unique marketing profile and image. How people perceive the downtown area will significantly affect their decisions to shop, live, work, and recreate in the downtown. It will also tie strongly to the City’s overall tourism and economic development strategies.

Target Actions

30. **Downtown marketing and promotional plan:** Create an “image package”, including a marketing and promotional plan for the downtown that reflects the downtown vision, and the multiple intended markets for downtown shops and services (i.e. locals as well as tourists). This should include the creation of a distinct image or logo for the downtown to be used on promotional materials, downtown banners, entrance features, retail or advertising and downtown signage. The package should include all aspects of marketing and image building including advertising and promotional materials. Downtown marketing should be tied into the overall marketing and promotion strategy for the City of Yellowknife as a whole, as the “Diamond Capital of North America”.
31. **Downtown web page:** A downtown-specific web page should be established. The web page will have two components; the first will relate to promoting downtown shopping and general visitation, including promotion of shops and services, special events / festivals, tourism, public spaces, etc. It would also promote downtown living and related residential opportunities. The second component would relate to potential downtown investors, and would include information on available, vacant or undeveloped sites including information on land use approvals in place, incentive programs and so on. This second component would be an avenue for economic development within the downtown.

The web page address would be advertised extensively, including on the banners in the downtown. This web page should be linked to the City of Yellowknife web page, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce web page, and the NFVA web page.
32. **Special events:** Review all existing special events and festivals in and around the downtown (i.e. Caribou Carnival, Raven Mad Daze) to determine additional opportunities for year-round image building activities that promote downtown shopping, working and living. Consider opportunities to tie special events located outside of the downtown (i.e. Folk on the Rocks) to related downtown activities.
33. **Downtown walking tour:** Create and promote a pamphlet for a downtown historic walking tour which ties into the existing trail system and Old Town tours.

Theme 5 - Mobilizing for Action - New Administrative Structures to Facilitate Improvement

Theme Explanation

Without a strong and effective organizational structure, good ideas sit on shelves. For this Plan to be implemented, a organizational structure must be created to lead its implementation, monitor its success, and make alterations as necessary. Such an organization must include all relevant stakeholders in a forum that allows for information sharing, partnerships and constant communication. Without such an organization, and without such partnerships, the implementation of this Downtown Plan cannot succeed.

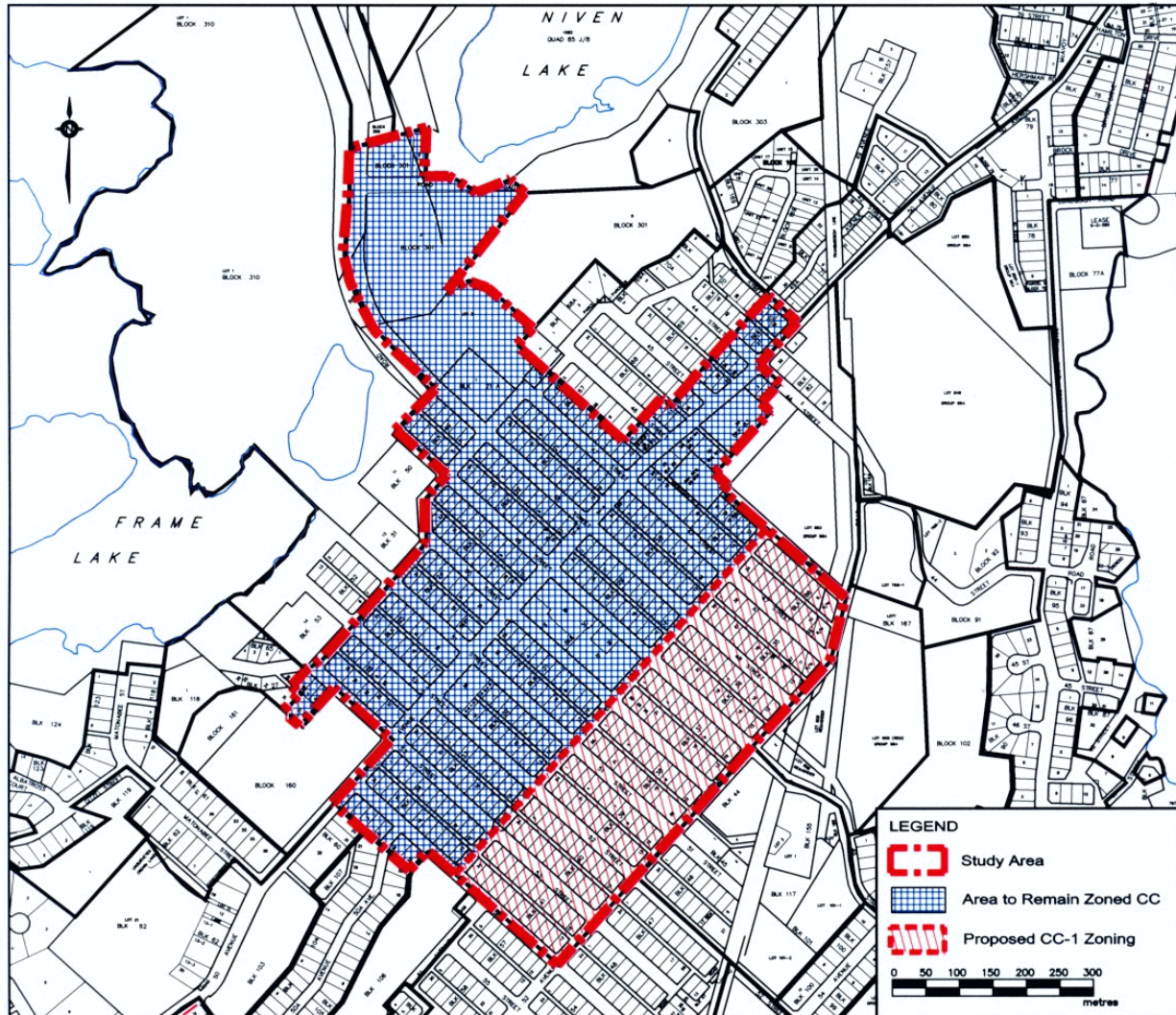


Figure 2: New Proposed Downtown Zoning

Target Actions

34. **Downtown Enhancement Steering Committee:** Create a new Committee of Council, the Downtown Enhancement Steering Committee (DESC), to oversee implementation of this Plan and to focus on realization of the downtown vision. This should be a Standing Committee of Council with membership that should include Council members, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, the GNWT, a Band Council representative, special stakeholders such as the RCMP, and citizen representatives. A staff resource person from the Planning and Lands Division should be assigned to the Committee to provide ongoing assistance. A committee chair, co-chair or vice chair, and secretary should also be identified. City staff representatives should be non-voting members. Citizen appointments to the committee should be made by Council based on applications through an open process.
35. **Developers meeting:** Organize and hold a “developers meeting” to discuss development cost issues, incentive options, cost sharing opportunities and so on. This meeting should be organized and chaired by the City and attended by representatives of development interests, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, GNWT and representatives of Band Councils. Opportunities for ongoing discussions should be investigated.
36. **Downtown safety:** Continue and strengthen the “Project 50th Street” program between the RCMP and Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce for increased police presence at night, and in particular when drinking establishments close.

DOWNTOWN POLICIES

The Downtown Plan includes the following policies to guide land use and planning decisions in the downtown area.

- ▶ The downtown area will continue to function as the City’s primary business, commercial, entertainment, cultural, administrative and institutional area for residents and tourists alike.
- ▶ The downtown will remain a vibrant, diverse and healthy mixed use area with a strong and growing residential component, reflecting the downtown’s role as an urban neighbourhood as well as the city centre.
- ▶ New downtown residential development and residential intensification will be encouraged and facilitated to increase the population of residents living within and around the downtown.
- ▶ Medium and high density residential construction / conversion in particular will be encouraged as an opportunity to increase the downtown population and provide additional market support for other components of the downtown’s mixed use nature.
- ▶ The City will encourage new investment and reinvestment within the downtown and will consider opportunities to facilitate such investment through municipal initiatives, public / private sector partnerships, and other appropriate means.
- ▶ When new development is contemplated, built form, massing, scale, height and setbacks of new buildings or expansions should be compatible with the existing physical character of the downtown. Wherever possible, uniform building setbacks will be maintained, unless appropriate front yard uses such as patio space or civic spaces are contemplated. No parking in front of buildings should be permitted. Within the downtown, one storey buildings are strongly discouraged.
- ▶ Multi-level buildings along Franklin Avenue should have ground floor retail or service uses wherever possible.
- ▶ Where larger downtown uses are proposed, building entrances should be located in such a way to enhance the ground floor public realm. Architectural features including windows will be used to enhance visual appearance and minimize negative visual impacts of large blank walls. Where such large uses are contemplated, opportunities for design forms such as liner shops¹ should be considered to provide a positive and vibrant ground floor environment.
- ▶ In general, building design, materials and colours should be compatible with the existing character of downtown Yellowknife and should reflect the downtown’s culture and climate.
- ▶ Wherever possible, new civic spaces and gathering places should be considered in the context of new development / redevelopment. Such spaces should be designed to integrate with, and relate well to, building uses to ensure they are well used. Climate issues should be carefully considered in designs.
- ▶ Urban design and streetscaping should serve to establish a high level of pedestrian comfort and convenience. Design elements should be human scaled and should reflect Yellowknife’s culture, climate and identity.
- ▶ When new development is considered, the effects on sunlight and wind tunnel effects should be carefully considered with the following in mind:
 - North and east sidewalks should have access to sunlight. The City may request shadow length calculations to determine building height restrictions and setback limits.
 - Any new development proposed for the northeast corner of an intersection of Franklin Avenue or 51 Avenue shall dedicate 5% of the site area as a public amenity space within the streetscape. This space should be located in the southwest or “sunny” corner of the site. Design of the area may include such features as widening of the sidewalk, seating, landscaping and bicycle racks.

¹ Liner shops are defined as small retail / service floor plates attached to larger buildings along street edges visible and directly accessible from the sidewalk.

- To address wind effects, buildings should not be permitted which are higher than three times the average height of the surrounding built form, except where it can be established that such buildings would not generate winds at the pedestrian level in a manner adverse to walking, strolling or standing for short periods of time. If developments are proposed over six storeys in height or greater than three times the average height of surrounding built form, a “boundary layer wind tunnel test” may be required to determine wind effects on adjoining public spaces.
- Where a commercial, retail or residential development proposes a parking lot or open space area, the parking lot shall be landscaped so as to create a “shelter belt” for adjacent sidewalks, pathways or amenity spaces. The minimum shelter belt height shall be three metres and consist of coniferous trees and shrubs.
- ▶ Where possible and appropriate, sidewalk widths for streets crossing perpendicular with Franklin Avenue should be widened to improve the pedestrian realm at the time when such streets are reconstructed.
- ▶ Where parking areas are adjacent to the street edge, all opportunities to buffer such parking from the sidewalk through landscaping or architectural features such as low decorative walls, should be implemented. Pedestrian pathways should be incorporated into such buffers so that access is not restricted.
- ▶ The downtown should be fully accessible to all modes of transportation including public transit, pedestrian movement, cycling and private automobile. Movement within the downtown should be accessible wherever possible to all residents of all physical abilities.

PLAN CONTEXT

The City of Yellowknife had an estimated population of 17,702 in 1999. The City’s population is projected to grow to 22,982 by the year 2019. Currently the downtown area of the City acts as a viable and healthy urban neighbourhood, with an interaction of residential, commercial, institutional and recreational uses. As the City’s population grows however, the significance of the downtown as both a neighbourhood and viable commercial mixed use area may lessen if all population growth continues at the City’s edge.

In Yellowknife, there are numerous reasons why the promotion of residential infill development and redevelopment with existing built-up areas, including the downtown, are a logical planning goal. Growth in Yellowknife is affected by impediments that limit opportunities for further edge/suburban growth including:

- * Location of lakes, rock outcropping and ice rich soils
- * Availability of lands not subject to land claims
- * Location of two gold mines
- * Location of the airport
- * Location of the seismic lands

There are additional factors that lend to the creation of a compact urban form through higher density infill development. These factors include the harsh climate, cost of new infrastructure and materials for new development, and Yellowknife’s relatively stable and aging population.

For these and other reasons, it is appropriate to facilitate and encourage residential infill development in the downtown both as an appropriate approach to growth management, and ensuring the continued importance of the downtown both as a commercial area and as an urban neighbourhood.

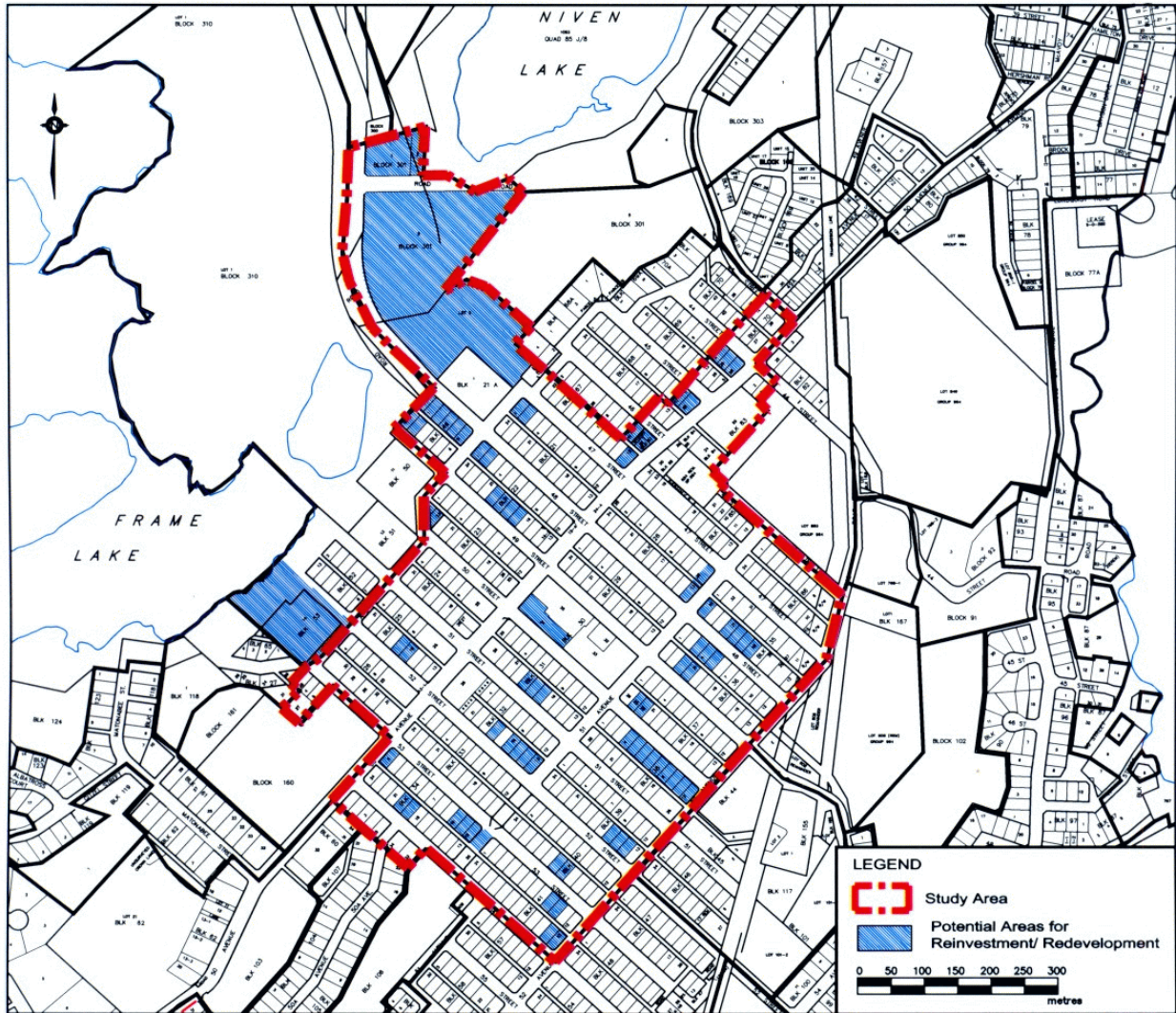


Figure 3: Potential Areas for Reinvestment / Redevelopment

APPENDIX 1

**DOWNTOWN PLAN
IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE AND BUDGET ESTIMATES BY PRIORITY**

<i>Target Action</i>	<i>Leader</i>	<i>Implementation by</i>	<i>Budget Estimate</i>
34. Downtown Steering Committee (DSC)	City YK	2002	(\$10K*) then reallocate City budget
27. New Downtown zoning	City YK	2002	staff time
33. Downtown walking tour brochure	Heritage Comm.	2002	\$5K (Heritage Committee budget)
30. Downtown Plan marketing	City YK	2002	(\$5K*)
31. Downtown web page	City YK	2002	staff time
3. Property tax-back grant program	City YK	2003	deferral of tax revenue
4. Waive Development and Building Permit Fees	City YK	2003	estimated revenue loss of \$27K/yr*
26. Downtown maintenance	City YK	2003	staff time - reallocate City budget
28. Sunlight and wind regulations	City YK	2003	staff time
29. Allowance for patio space	City YK	2003	staff time
35. Developers meeting	Downtown Steering Comm. (DSC)	2003	staff time
36. Downtown Safety	Project 50 th Street	2003	staff time
1. Use of Parking Meter Revenue (ie: allocation of funds for Target Actions 2, 14, 17, 30 & 34)	City YK	2004 (subject to budget approval)	\$200K (one time fund)
2. Development grant for residential construction program	City YK	2004	(\$120K*)
17. Facade improvement program	City YK	2004	(\$60K*)
5. Vacant Site redevelopment strategy	City YK	2003-2005	staff time
9. On-street parking - Franklin Ave.	City YK	2003-2005	none
10. Intersection warning sounds	City YK	2003-2005	\$3.5K per intersection
11. Streetscape improvements	City YK	2003-2005	\$65K per block

APPENDIX 1

**DOWNTOWN PLAN
IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE AND BUDGET ESTIMATES BY PRIORITY**

14. Mural Program	City YK	2003-2005	(5K*) (cost share w/private sector)
20. Window displays	DSC	2003-2005	none
21. Seasonal displays	DSC	2003-2005	City/DSC budget
22. Bike racks	City YK	2003-2005	\$5K
6. Downtown community center/park	City YK	2005-2008	requires further study
7. Downtown Public Market	DSC	2005-2008	requires further study
8. Public Washrooms	City YK	2005-2008	O&M cost share w/private sector
12. Street Trees	City YK	2005-2008	see Target Action 11.
15. Public Art program	City YK	2005-2008	partner w/private sector
19. Bus shelters	City YK	2005-2008	\$4K per shelter
32. Special events	DSC	2005-2008	staff time
13. Retention of Existing Vegetation	City YK	2003-2011	none
16. Cental Stove	DSC	2008-2011	\$10K
23. Winter colours	City YK/DSC	2003-2011	none
24. Downtown awards program	DSC/Chamber of Commerce	2003-2011	partner w/ private sector
25. Window cleaning	DSC	2003-2011	none
O&M BUDGET TOTAL - 2002			\$15K
O&M BUDGET TOTAL - 2003			\$42K
O&M BUDGET TOTAL - 2004			\$227K
CAPITAL BUDGET TOTAL 2003-2011			\$695.5K

* denotes funds that are a subset
of the \$200K parking meter revenue reallocation fund