

4- PA - LD - LIVELY DOWNTOWN

LD - Background

The downtown has been the service centre for the community since the city's inception and the area continues to supply people with their personal services, shopping, and office needs. Williams Lake has an attractive downtown area with a mix of pedestrian, commercial, office buildings, government offices, and housing. It is easy to walk around and the Oliver Street corridor serves as the "Main Street" which contains a variety of shops and services. Residents can buy groceries, do their banking, buy lunch, or visit the Cariboo Regional District Library, all within close proximity. The downtown is the commercial heart of the region and has high occupancy rates.

Beautification and enhancement efforts have taken including community initiatives such as the Communities in Bloom/Winter Lights. Attempts made by local builders to promote the western theme began as early as the 1930s with the construction of Delainey's on Oliver Street. These attempts continued and in the mid 1970s. Guidelines promoting the western theme were implemented and will now continue through the promotion of the "Cariboo Theme" as outlined in the Development Permit Chapter 7. The effect of this initiative can still be felt and new development has adopted similar aspects of this building style including the use of wood and rock in the facades. This can be seen in developments on Oliver Street, First Avenue, and elsewhere.

As the focal point of the community, a healthy and vibrant downtown creates community spirit and stimulates investment. Policies in the *Official Community Plan* which continue to direct retail, food and beverage, entertainment, and institutional uses can help create a positive experience that will help to strengthen existing businesses and encourage new commercial growth. Furthermore, offices should be encouraged to locate in the downtown to reinforce the vitality of the downtown.

In addition to retail and office uses, the downtown residential areas have undergone gradual changes. Portions of the downtown include a mix of medium density and single family housing, retail, home-based businesses and residential-commercial conversions. These developments have created a vibrant and active area, but significant effort is required to make the downtown "the" place to be in Williams Lake and the Cariboo. People who participated in community visioning sessions throughout the ICSP process in 2009/2010 saw this area as the heart of the community and an excellent location for good quality, affordable housing.

Previously, the City's OCP did not seek to prioritize downtown development over the development of other commercial areas of the city. It is now recognized that the downtown will need to be a focal point and a priority for new development and redevelopment in order to remain healthy and sustainable. While supporting existing residential and commercial uses in other areas, the City of Williams Lake intends to work with the area residents, business owners, and developers to retain and enhance the charm, viability and leading role of the downtown.

Another new significant policy direction for the Downtown comes from the Imagine Our Future Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP), which identifies a lively downtown as an essential element of a sustainable community and seeks to incorporate sustainability directions in the downtown and throughout the community.

4.2.2 Goals and Objectives

The goal of a Lively Downtown is to serve as the community's heart and soul – it is a vibrant, distinct and welcoming place for community gatherings and social interactions and acts as the retail, cultural, entertainment, and social centre of the city and it is the principal place for the exchange of locally produced goods and services.

From Imagine Our Future, in 2035, we know we will have achieved this goal when:

...our downtown is **vibrant** and full of life year round and serves as a key gathering place that is inviting to residents and visitors alike and from all walks of life.

...the **form & character** of our downtown is a compact, mixed use, pedestrian oriented place that accommodates a diverse living and working population and is well served by transit, bike and pedestrian connections and absorbs a portion of new residential development.

...our downtown features many **locally produced goods and services**.

...our downtown reflects and celebrates our **unique** heritage, arts, cultural and community identity.

...50% of the energy used to heat, cool and power our downtown buildings is supplied by **sustainable energy systems** (e.g., district heating, biomass, geothermal, solar heating, etc.).

...all new buildings and retrofit projects utilize **sustainable building materials and practices**.

Specific Objectives for the downtown from previous plans and policies that are consistent with the input from the Imagine Our Future process include:

1. Promoting the downtown as the major focal point of the Cariboo for business, finance, government, retail trade, services, recreation, culture, and entertainment.
2. Stimulating and encouraging new private investment in medium to high density residential development in order to provide increased housing choices.
3. Encouraging a process of redevelopment from older to new residential housing to avoid deterioration of the old housing stock and associated neighbourhood decline.
4. Establishing an image and character through a façade program that creates an appealing, interesting, and friendly place to do business, visit, and live specific to Williams Lake.

LD - Specific Policy Directions

Lively Downtown policies have been grouped into five policy directions:

- [Pedestrian Orientation and Accessibility](#);
- [Mixed Use, Housing, and Higher Density](#);
- [Urban Design](#);
- [Animation](#); and
- [Civic and Cultural Facilities](#).

In addition to the specific policies later in this section that are related to the five policy directions, the following general policy is applicable:

- LD.1** Update and continue the implementation of the Downtown Enhancement and Servicing Plan 2004.

LD - Pedestrian Orientation and Accessibility

The following policies will help move Williams Lake towards the objective of a pedestrian friendly and accessible downtown.

- LD.2** Prioritize the creation of an attractive, safe, and comfortable pedestrian environment in the downtown and promote, on a continuing basis throughout the downtown:
- a. Visual continuity and pedestrian interest at grade;
 - b. Effective focal points of interest; and
 - c. Attractive development of building façades, signage, street furnishings, additional street trees, and enhanced landscaping.
- LD.3** Support initiatives to encourage a pedestrian-oriented commercial downtown by providing attractive options such as pedestrian and cycling amenities, sidewalk cafes, street festivals, public art, attractive landscaping, and frequent transit service.
- LD.4** Encourage stronger pedestrian connections throughout the downtown with links to other neighbourhoods in Williams Lake, including attractive and safe connections between and through parks and open spaces.
- LD.5** Examine the possibility of providing peripheral recreational vehicle parking in locations that have good accessibility from Highways 97 and 20, are close to the downtown area, and have good transit connections to the downtown.

LD - Mixed Use, Housing, and Higher Density

The downtown will accommodate a variety of compatible land uses, including residential, commercial, institutional, and recreational. Compatibility can be achieved by applying performance standards and design guidelines to mitigate any potential impacts to livability, including noise, fumes, view corridor protection, and visual intrusion. It is essential that it be a place where people live and not just work, shop, and recreate. These policies will promote continual residential growth in the downtown.

- LD.6** Direct businesses, financial institutions, government offices, retail outlets, personal services, recreation, cultural entertainment and multi-family residential uses to the downtown area shown on **Map 3** the Land Use Map.
- LD.7** Encourage multi-family residential development within the downtown area:
 - a. As part of mixed-use development with residential uses above commercial uses; and
 - b. Where the site meets the location criteria outlined in Table 6-3 in the Land Use Chapter 6.
- LD.8** Encourage new residential development in the downtown that incorporates Universal Design principles and looks to provide housing affordability to residents of a variety of income levels, life stages and lifestyle.

LD - Urban Design

The following policies encourage a high quality urban design to be applied throughout the redevelopment of the downtown to establish it as an attractive place to be. This applies to buildings, structures, streets, signs and open spaces, in both the public and the private realm. Where development in a particular area of the downtown is not anticipated in the immediate future, initiatives will be encouraged to create interim enhancements, such as landscaping, mini-parks, banners, murals, public art, etc.

- LD.9** Ensure that all development is consistent with the “Cariboo Theme” as outlined in the Development Permit Chapter 7.
- LD.10** Work collaboratively with the community to develop detailed plans and urban design guidelines for the downtown, including applying innovative techniques to develop the plans, such as design charrettes.
- LD.11** Explore measures to encourage tourists and other highway users to visit the downtown without creating negative impacts on livability, such as traffic congestion or the visual intrusion of excessive parking facilities, particularly at-grade.
- LD.12** Encourage the use of extensive, low-impact tree planting and landscaping in the public realm and in new and existing development projects.
- LD.13** Consider alternatives to visible surface parking to create a more livable downtown, such as parking behind buildings, parking on the periphery of the downtown, and underground parking.

- LD.14** Ensure that there is adequate parking available to accommodate 15-minute visits to downtown and Disabled Persons parking that does not adversely impact other street users in order to maintain the viability of local businesses.

LD - Animation

While designed to be attractive and livable for a wide variety of users, the downtown will be a place that will be active and vibrant throughout the day from the morning to evening and throughout the week. The following policies promote the downtown as “the” place to be in the city and region.

- LD.15** Partner with the Business Improvement Association (BIA) on downtown enhancement programs, including beautification and the programming of events that animate the downtown for residents and visitors throughout the year.
- LD.16** Identify and implement measures in partnership with other stakeholders, including the RCMP, BIA, and residents, that enhance the comfort and safety of community members in the downtown area, particularly at night.
- LD.17** Explore a performance-based, flexible zoning approach that promotes a wide range of economic activities to occur in the downtown, such as live/work options compatible with surrounding land uses and maintain livability.
- LD.18** Encourage the use of Spirit Square for community events, celebrations and gatherings in the downtown.

LD - Civic and Cultural Facilities

The downtown, as the focus of activity, should be the preferred location for all major civic and cultural facilities.

- LD.19** Work with community partners to encourage the creation of a central cultural district and to place cultural facilities within the downtown in locations that are easily accessible and are well served by transit.
- LD.20** Locate all new civic buildings and cultural facilities that are not neighbourhood-serving in the downtown and ensure that these are well integrated into the surrounding urban form.
- LD.21** Encourage the relocation of older civic offices and facilities that are in other parts of the city to locate in the downtown where feasible.