

# **Promoting Engagement and Interaction in Rural Communities**

**A proposal for the revitalization of Wetaskiwin, Alberta**

by  
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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis focuses on Canadian Prairie communities and how architecture plays a role in promoting community engagement and interaction. The ideal components of a healthy rural town include its identity, sense of community and a strong relationship to the landscape, all of which are threatened by both internal and external influences. The large urban centers in close proximity to rural communities are a major influence over the direction of development. The growth of the urban fabric is understood only after studying the historical factors that have shaped its foundation, as well as its relationship to larger regional forces.

These forces have changed the urban morphology — shifting from an emphasis centered on community to one that is more focused upon economic development. This change does not suggest that these elements are completely separate from one another, but instead that the emphasis has shifted — bringing with it a whole new set of priorities. Increased development along major arterial highways is favoured over downtown growth; vehicular transportation dominates over the pedestrian; subdivisions are planned and built by developers to maximize economic gain rather than foster a sense of community; and community-based projects are no longer the norm. Unfortunately this has resulted in a loss of citizen participation and engagement.

An in-depth urban analysis of the town is central to the development of future design and development strategies. Case studies of comparable cities, towns or villages will help guide the development of design principles, strategies and processes necessary to promote a healthy rural community. By exploring the complexities of rural development, strategies and interventions that address these issues can be articulated and applied.



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**FOR MOM AND DAD**



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## INTRODUCTION

*“Community has taken on many forms throughout recorded history. Whether it is the wandering tribes of early man, the medieval concept of landschaft, the New England town and commons, the grid of the small-town America, the urban core, or the suburbs, people’s relationship with their environment and other people has fluctuated and adapted to change.”<sup>1</sup>*

The built environment affects relationships amongst the people who live and work within it. In order to foster a sense of community and interaction amidst residents, a focus on the set of conditions that factor in the development of the community is necessary. A primary challenge in creating a sense of ‘community’ includes piecemeal planning that makes limited connection to either place or people. “The proliferation of the automobile compounded this situation by increasing the distances that could be easily traversed as our society pursued the basic requirements of daily life: employment, food, shelter and recreation.”<sup>2</sup> This resulting sprawl has brought disconnect at both community and individual levels.

Local development in small communities is beginning to take on many different forms, with varying emphasis on different areas of development (social, economic, physical, and cultural); the majority being placed on economic development. There is currently a lack of coordination within small communities, resulting in negative effects on long-term development plans, community participation and the degree

of integration of economic, social and environmental aspects. Municipal governments are allowing developers to make design decisions based on economic efficiency, neglecting for the need for public interaction and engagement; citizens are not active in the process of creating a comprehensive community with visions for growth and development.

The people of the community need to have a vested interest in seeing their community thrive. This connection is being undermined by the segregation of neighbourhoods, a lack of diversity in densities, outdated and underutilized social amenities, and the separation of zoned uses (such as commercial and residential). This then results in an apathetic silence amongst the residents. Few voices speak up for the concerns of the whole when the opportunities arise, yet the opinions afterwards are deafening. The municipality needs to engage citizens right from the start and throughout the process in order to enable the community to develop a clear and beneficial plan for the future.

*A Concise guide to Community Planning* states that the players involved in community design are: architects, landscape architects, civil engineers, municipal planners, elected officials, land developers and real estate brokers. Many small communities must go outside the municipality to hire some of these professionals, and there also tends to be conflicts of interest, as many elected officials overlap in some of the above areas. Notably absent from this list is the community at-large; business owners and residents, young and old, families and singles. A co-operative effort between community and government is necessary in order to ensure the success of a planned vision.

Little emphasis has been placed on the roles of architects in small communities, specifically in regards to community engagement and interaction. Their focus is usually on larger urban centres, whose strategies do not necessarily translate into small cities and towns. .  
“Some of the strategies utilized successfully in larger urban centres were adopted, sometimes uncritically, into smaller urban centres and rural

environments, with understandably disappointing results.”<sup>3</sup> These urban guidelines are generic and pertain to larger centres or a downtown area, which limits their application in a smaller context. “Most [guidelines] have a common theme, which is the importance of creating diversity and variety in the built environment and the provision of mixed use where possible. The most successful projects come from strong public leadership, both nationally and locally, and from the involvement of the local community in the decision making process.”<sup>4</sup> Despite the frequent absence of Architects in small town design, there is an increasing awareness that change is necessary to sustain small communities.

In response to the lack of architecture and urban design research focused on rural communities, this thesis is centered on the following question: what is the role of architecture in promoting community interaction and engagement? Specifically, it is focused on rural communities and their ability to sustain a healthy vision for the future. The principle aim of this thesis, then, is to propose a set of design principles, strategies, and processes necessary to promote a healthy rural community.

“Good design in a city context requires a coherent sense of vision which relates to the particular place and circumstance.”<sup>5</sup> This thesis focuses on a small community, Wetaskiwin, Alberta, in the Canadian Prairies. The primary goal of this work is to examine this community’s complete formation and factors that affect the community. The solutions offered will help to propel the community into the future through the use of design strategies and proposals that provide a long-term vision for the future development of a small rural city. It will inform the design/development process by providing salient and purposeful guidelines that can be incorporated into real decision making.

Concepts for revitalization and future growth can be developed through an analysis of the local area. The community analysis of Wetaskiwin presented for this thesis is two-fold. First, local and regional forces and their effects on cultural differences, transportation, and economy will be

discussed; second, a comprehensive mapping analysis will demonstrate town planning and development patterns. By exploring the complexities of rural development, strategies and interventions that address the issues surrounding such communities can be articulated and applied. In so doing, potential areas for growth and redevelopment can be outlined after examining the existing urban morphology. "We must begin by understanding that every place is given its character by certain patterns of events that keep on happening there."<sup>6</sup>

There are two topics this thesis will not specifically address, due to its limited scope. The first is the agricultural industry. Although the areas surrounding Wetaskiwin are agricultural, in this instance, the economic benefits of this industry are not the dominant ones in the city and therefore play a small part in community interaction. The second is the First Nations within Hobbema; the reservation is home to four different First Nation bands. The reservation has attracted attention for its problems with crime and gangs. Hobbema is also a source of concern within neighbouring Wetaskiwin. There have been attempts to solve these issues not only within Hobbema but also with Wetaskiwin, but this subject remains outside the scope of this thesis.

This thesis has been divided into three chapters that provide research and arguments to support the proposal of a set of design principles that promote community engagement and interaction in Wetaskiwin, Alberta. The first chapter examines the existing conditions within Wetaskiwin through a historical review and a series of mapping exercises. The evolution of the community and its current circumstances will begin to inform the vision for the future.

The second chapter of this thesis will present the background, comparative communities, and the design principles derived from the issues and concerns articulated, as well as the analysis from the previous chapter. The first part of Chapter Two will outline community design and urban planning in the twentieth century. The information was gathered



from a variety of sources including books, articles, and in-class lectures. The second part of the chapter is a comparative study of three similar communities within the same geographical region as Wetaskiwin. Lastly, a set of design principles is presented that have been formed from the previous parts of Chapter Two and the analysis of the city undertaken in Chapter One.

The final chapter (Chapter Three) will present a proposal for an urban design for the city of Wetaskiwin, Alberta. A set of design principles based on the lessons learned through the analysis of the site presented in Chapter One and the concepts and urban theories presented in Chapter Two will be applied to the site at two different scales. There will be three large-scale areas looked at and then four site designs set specifically along the main street of Wetaskiwin.

“The reduced scale of the towns, reminiscent of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, addresses the newly kindled desire to escape the gridlock of crowded highways and return to a simpler lifestyle. It seeks to provide the consumer with an alternative to typical suburbia by increasing opportunities for interaction among neighbours that embody the concept of community.”<sup>7</sup>

This thesis offers a set of design principles that will help maintain the ideals and identity of a small rural community. At the same time, these initiatives will support controlled growth, provide the daily necessities of rural residents, and increase the interactions residents have with each other, thereby promoting a healthier environment in which to live and work.



# 01 SITE WETASKIWIN, ALBERTA



“Good design in a city context requires a coherent sense of vision which relates to the particular place and circumstance.”<sup>1</sup>

Two approaches have been used in order to study the growth and development of Wetaskiwin. First there is an examination of the existing conditions within Wetaskiwin through a historical review. This will provide insight into local and regional forces and their effects on cultural differences, transportation, economy, and the evolution of the community. Next will be a series of comprehensive mapping exercises that will demonstrate the current conditions within the community. The evolution of the community and its current circumstances will begin to inform the vision for the future.

**1867** APPROXIMATELY WHEN THE BLACKFOOT AND THE CREE TRIBES MADE PEACE. WETASKIWIN IS CREE FOR “THE LAND WHERE PEACE WAS MADE”  
**1872** THE FIRST DOMINION LAND ACT BRINGS SETTLERS TO THE PRAIRIES **1885** FORT ETHIER BUILT **1891** RAILWAY CONSTRUCTED THROUGH SIDING 16, CONNECTING EDMONTON TO CALGARY. WETASKIWIN WAS JUST A RAIL STOP, NO BUSINESSES OR SERVICES. **1892** WETASKIWIN TOWNSITE SURVEYED AND SUB-DIVIDED; FIRST BUSINESS – A GENERAL STORE, A POSTMASTER, AND THE DRIARD HOTEL; C & E BUILDS STATION **1894** FIRST CITY SCHOOL BUILT **1897** FIRST GRAIN ELEVATOR IN WETASKIWIN, UNTIL THEN THE CLOSEST ONE WAS IN STRATHCONA (SOUTH EDMONTON) **1898** FIRST DISTRICT AGRICULTURAL FAIR IN OCTOBER **1900** WETASKIWIN BECOMES A VILLAGE; THERE WERE TWO RAILWAY CROSSINGS AT THE TIME, NEITHER AT PEARCE ST. (MAIN). THIS CAUSED A BOTTLENECK OF SORTS. **1901** BUSINESSES INCLUDED 65-BARREL FLOURMILL, FIVE GENERAL STORES, TWO HARDWARE STORES, TWO DRUG STORES, A BAKERY, FOUR BUTCHER SHOPS, AND A MERCHANTS BANK. THREE ELEVATORS LINED THE TRACKS. **1902** WETASKIWIN INCORPORATED AS A TOWN; **COUNCIL UNSUCCESSFULLY TRIED TO MOVE THE RAILWAY CROSSING TO PEARCE STEET** **1903** TELEPHONE SERVICE IS INSTALLED: BELL TELEPHONE; IN THE FALL THE CITY ERECTS A FIRE HALL; NEW OPERA HOUSE OPENS **1904** CPR LINE EAST TO CAMROSE IS BUILT. **1906** WETASKIWIN BECOMES A CITY; NAMED JUDICIAL CENTRE FOR THE CENTRAL ALBERTA JUDICIAL DISTRICT; COUNCIL BROUGHT UP THE SUBJECT OF AN UNDERPASS FOR THE RAILWAY CROSSING AND WAS DENIED; THE FIRST AUTOMOBILE APPEARED IN WETASKIWIN; WATER TOWER BUILT **1907** COURTHOUSE BUILT – TO SERVE AS CENTER OF JUDICIAL DISTRICT; **CPR STATION BUILT A NEW SPACIOUS STATION TO ACCOMMODATE INCREASING TRAFFIC** **1908** SCANDINAVIAN HOSPITAL IS ESTABLISHED; FIRST IN CITY **1910** WATERWORKS AND SEWERS SERVE COMMUNITY; SILENT MOVIES AT DREAMLAND THEATRE; CITY COUNCIL DECIDED THE CITY NEEDED SPRUCING UP SO THEY SHIPPED IN TREES AND ENCOURAGED RESIDENTS TO BUY THEM IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE THEIR PROPERTIES **1911** BRICK AND STONE POST OFFICE BUILT **1912** TEN DAILY TRAINS WERE ARRIVING AND PASSING THROUGH WETASKIWIN **1923** WETASKIWIN GOLF CLUB IS INCORPORATED; COMMUNITY OPENED A NEW SKATING RINK **1926** WETASKIWIN'S FIRST CONCRETE SIDEWALKS INSTALLED **1929** GREAT DEPRESSION – NO ONE STARVED IN WETASKIWIN AND NO ONE WAS CRITICALLY DEPRIVED BECAUSE OF THE CITY AND LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS **1930** REROUTED THE CALGARY EDMONTON HIGHWAY FROM ALONGSIDE THE RAILWAY TO THE WEST END OF TOWN BY THE WATER TOWER AND GOLF LINKS **1931** DOMINION WOMEN'S TRACK AND FIELD CHAMPIONSHIPS HELD IN FAIR GROUNDS **1932** PREMIER J.E. BROWNLIE OFFICIATES AT OPENING OF WETASKIWIN COMMUNITY HOSPITAL **1934** WETASKIWIN AUTO DEALERS REPORT IMPROVED BUSINESS CONDITIONS WITH GREAT DEMAND FOR NEW CARS **1935** NEW COVERED ARENA OPENED **1936** THE TIMES ADVERTISER BEGINS PUBLISHING **1939** NEW CITY HALL OPENED **1943** CANADIAN ARMY BASIC TRAINING CENTRE OPENED IN FAIR GROUNDS **1945** NEW MATERNITY WING OPENS AT HOSPITAL **1947** NEW LEGION CENTRE OPENED **1950** CINEMA THEATRE OPENED; MAIN STREET PAVED **1952** DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT OPENS STAN REYNOLDS AIRPORT; TALK BEGINS AGAIN OF AN UNDERPASS OF THE RAILWAY AT 47<sup>TH</sup> OR 50<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE **1953** WETASKIWIN FLYING CLUB FORMED **1954** SECOND RAILWAY CROSSING AT 47<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE **1956** PREMIER MANNING OPENS JUBILEE SWIMMING POOL; WETOKA HEALTH UNIT ESTABLISHED IN WETASKIWIN; SEWAGE TREATMENT LAGOON BECOMES OPERATIONAL **1958** GWYNNE SKI-HILL OPENS; REYNOLDS MUSEUM OPENS **1960** ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ALBERTA GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO CONSTRUCT A NEW SUPER HIGHWAY **1962** NEW HOSPITAL OPENS **1967** CANADA'S 100<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY; CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS AND WINTER CARNIVAL **1976** CITY OF WETASKIWIN ARCHIVES OPENS **1979** WETASKIWIN MALL OPENS **1980** HERITAGE DAYS; KIWANIS MUSIC FESTIVAL BEGINS AS AN ANNUAL EVENT **1983** INDOOR POOL OPENS; NEW PUBLIC LIBRARY OPENS **1984** HOME HARDWARE DISTRIBUTION CENTRE IS BUILT **1985** CPR SUSPENDS PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE BETWEEN EDMONTON AND CALGARY **1986** WETASKIWIN & DISTRICT MUSEUM OPENS **1991** NEW HOSPITAL OPENS **1992** REYNOLDS-ALBERTA MUSEUM OPENS; CANADA'S AVIATION HALL OF FAME MOVES TO WETASKIWIN **1993** WETASKIWIN HOSTS THE ALBERTA SUMMER GAMES **1998** FIRST BOX STORE BUILT **2001** SKATE PARK CONSTRUCTED **2003** JOINT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (JEDI) ESTABLISHED BETWEEN CITY OF WETASKIWIN, TOWN OF MILLET, AND COUNTY OF WETASKIWIN **2004** NEW POWER CENTRE BEGINS CONSTRUCTION **2005** HISTORIC WATER TOWER REFURBISHED **2007** OLD COURTHOUSE RESTORED AS CITY HALL **2008** CITY HIRES ECDEV SOLUTIONS LTD. TO DEVELOP A TEN YEAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MASTER STRATEGY

## SITE AND SITUATION

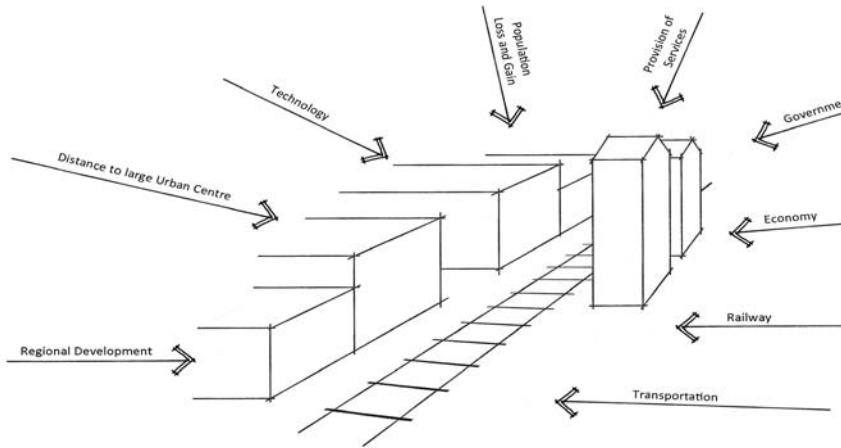


fig. 1.1 Acting Forces

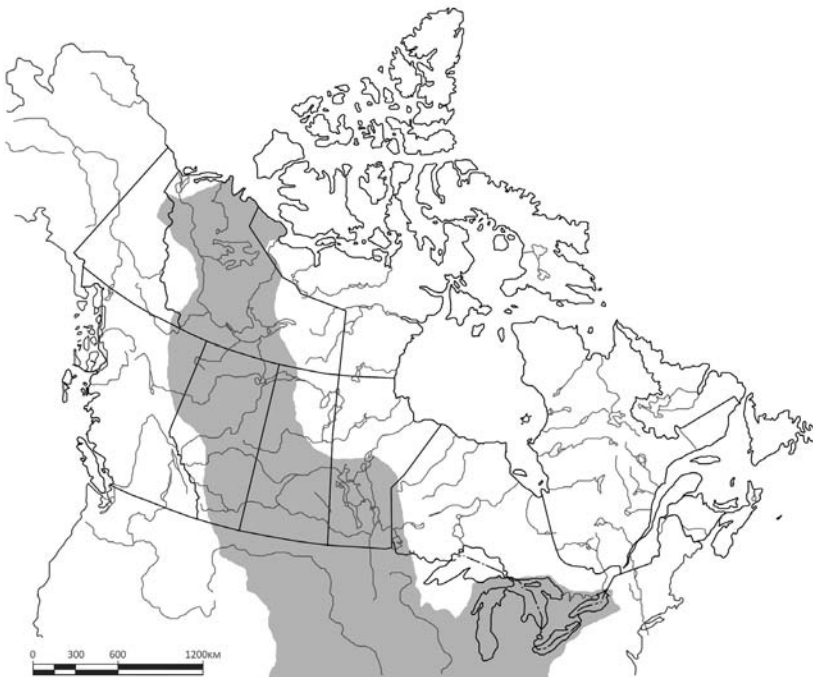


fig. 1.2 Plains of North American

Wetaskiwin is a typical Canadian prairie town. Its foundation is exactly like the next town down the railway or road. The differences, however, are due to the internal and external forces that act upon it — affecting its growth and formation. The primary goal of this chapter is to examine Wetaskiwin's development, including its history and analysis of its current state.

Wetaskiwin has a long history steeped in local tradition that has informed its growth. Major events will be highlighted that have influenced the direction of community planning and development through an historical examination. By understanding its history one can better articulate and assess the major factors (i.e. social, economic, physical, cultural) that have either challenged or celebrated the town. The aspect that makes each town different is the history that is specific to the site and creates a loyalty of its local residents.

The Interior Plains of North America cover the majority of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba (known as the Prairie Provinces). Seventeen percent of Canada's population reside in the Prairies,<sup>2</sup> where the majority of cities and towns are relatively small. The building of the railway and the subsequent settling of the Prairies have developed a unique culture within the small rural towns that dominate the region, which gives commonality to the communities along its length, providing a belief in being part of a larger system.

In the Prairies, each rural town is formed based on Eastern Canadian and British ideals. The service and residential areas are in the same places; even though the surrounding towns are similar in planning, local residents believe their respective town has a unique identity that transforms it into an idealistic image. This image is presented to the general population — a manufactured simulacrum of the rural town. It

fails, however, to tell the whole story, because it only provides one idyllic impression of the place.

Most prairie towns started in one of the following two ways: as a trading post along a trail or river, or as a siding along the railway. At the time when the railway was built, trains could only travel approximately nine miles a day. A “siding” was built at those nine mile points along the rail to allow for refuelling of the train and to provide amenities for the train’s staff, such as a hotel, bar, restaurant, post office and supply store. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) provided options for how these settlements could be laid out, though it was the Grand Truck Railway layout, or a slight variation of, that was predominately used due to its simplicity and ease of implementation for small settlements.

These towns form in a similar way, though variations on the pattern still evolve. These variations stem from the landscape and the history of the geographic site. The river town will form slightly differently than the rail town. Hills impact the prairie grid. Additionally, the history of a site will mark the town. At first glance these towns may appear to be the same but taking a closer look, and considering the past and the present, allows such towns to take on a new identity.

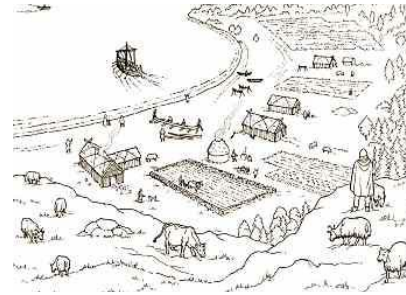


fig. 1.3 River Settlement

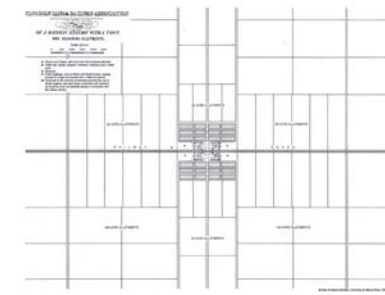


fig. 1.4 CPR Town Layout by Alexander Doull

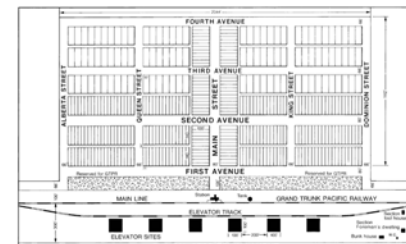


fig. 1.5 Grand Truck Pacific Typical Town Layout

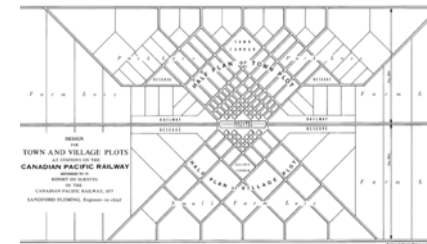


fig. 1.6 CPR Town Layout by Sanford Fleming



fig. 1.7 Railway Settlement



## THE PAST



fig. 1.8 Peace Hills, Alberta



fig. 1.9 Blackfoot Indians crossing the Bow River



fig. 1.10 Indians Gathered for a Pow Wow



fig. 1.11 Settlers coming from the United States

The Peace Hills have been one of the longest inhabited areas in central Alberta since “The buffalo still roamed in large numbers and the only white men in the area were fur traders.”<sup>3</sup> The naming of Peace Hills and Wetaskiwin, Cree for “the hills where peace was made”, stems from an old legend:

The Cree and Blackfoot tribes were bitter enemies. Around the late 1860s the two warring tribes both had very strong young chiefs. After a series of attacks a large battle was imminent. The young chiefs were sent off to check out the enemy and both ended up on the same vantage point within the hills of the area. Battle ensued with both chiefs well matched. They paused for a break and accidentally smoked from the same pipe. In so doing, they had formed peace albeit by mistake so they had to go back to their tribes and tell them the news: they could no longer fight each other.<sup>4</sup>

It is a myth that continues through the centuries. The history of Wetaskiwin incorporates both mythology and fact. Whether the myth is either true or not, it coincided with the advent of the missionary movement as groups moved into the area trying to convert the tribes to Christianity. In so doing, the missionaries helped pave the way for the rail. The settlers then followed the railway and began to inhabit the sidings along it, bringing both businesses and residents to Wetaskiwin.

### Settlement of the West

Originally, the area on which Wetaskiwin was settled was grazing land for buffalo. The Aboriginal tribes hunted the buffalo for food, clothing and tools. Later, this land was developed for agriculture. The government sold the land in inexpensive quarter-section plots to settlers, who cleared the land for crops and cattle ranches. The area around Wetaskiwin is currently dominated by individually-owned farms that produce and sell

their products.

In 1872, the first *Dominion Land Act* provided free homesteads of 160 acres for a \$10 filing fee:

“Any person (including a widow) who was sole head of a family or any male over the age of eighteen was permitted to obtain a quarter section of land. He had to erect a dwelling on the land and reside there for at least six months of the year over three years. Within that time, fifteen acres of the land had to be cultivated. If he lived in the district, thirty acres had to be cultivated. At the end of three years and if the requirements were fulfilled, the settler was given freehold title of the land.”<sup>5</sup>

This process started to draw those who could not afford land elsewhere to the west. As a result, the footpaths of the Aborigines and fur traders were widened to provide enough room for wagons, horses and cattle to move from Calgary to Edmonton and anywhere in between, since the freight rates of the railway were too high<sup>6</sup>.

The late 1870s brought change in land ownership. The giving up of land and the signing of First Nations Treaties made it possible for a more peaceful settlement of the west. The treaty provided the land required for railway construction, though there was still much conflict amongst the tribes and railway workers. As the railway continued to be built through the Prairies, many conflicts and casualties occurred between both groups, but the railway prevailed, and the first steam locomotive arrived in Calgary in 1883.

Communications greatly improved in the 1880s as a result of increased mobility. The trail between Edmonton and Calgary started a stagecoach service allowing for freight and mail to be delivered throughout the area. The trail was surveyed and cleared to be made passable at all points. Edmonton and Calgary became connected by telegraph — a connection between the two cities remains as important today as it was then.



fig. 1.12 The Last Spike - Craigellachie, B.C.



fig. 1.13 Dominion Land Surveyors

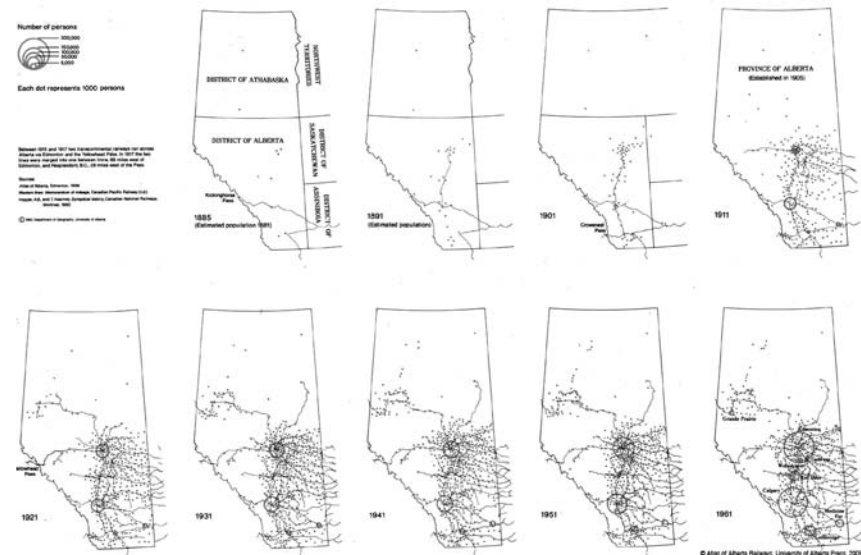


fig. 1.14 Population and Railway Network

## Wetaskiwin

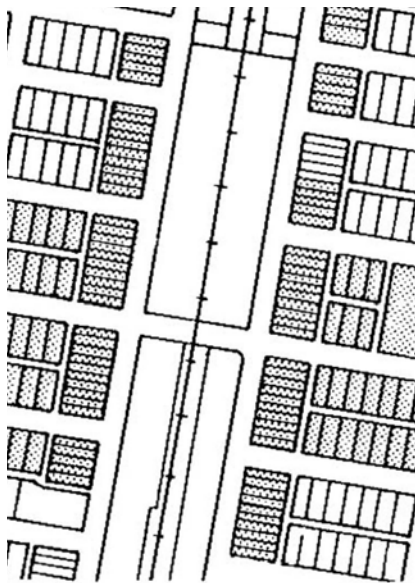


fig. 1.15 Wetaskiwin Crossing Plan

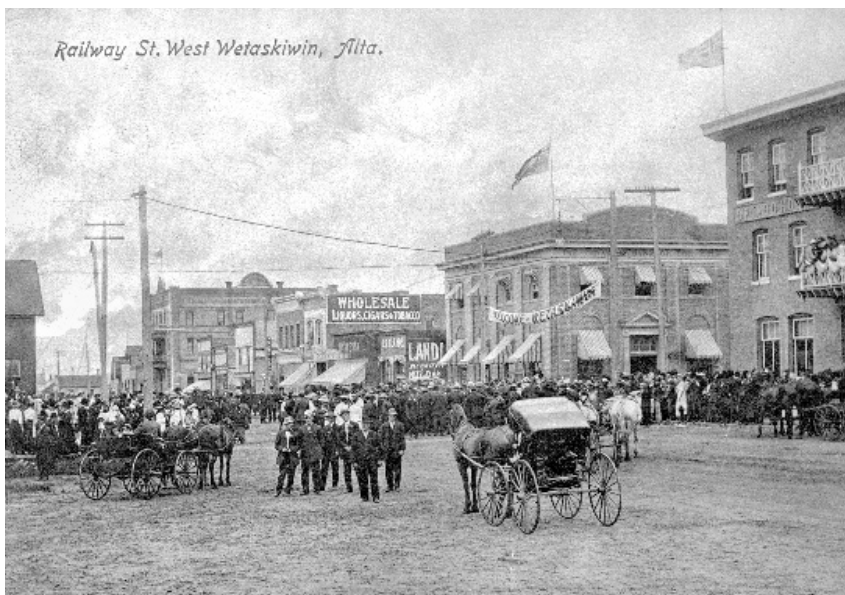


fig. 1.16 Wetaskiwin, Alberta

In 1891, the railway was constructed through Siding 16, later known as Wetaskiwin. The plan for the city was chosen from a few different varieties. These options were used for the majority of sidings along the railway. There were no businesses at this time but they arrived soon after. In 1892 the Wetaskiwin town site was surveyed and subdivided: a general store opened; they had their first postmaster; and a C & E Station and hotel were built. The first school was built in 1894 and the first grain elevator was erected in 1897; until then, the closest grain elevator had been in Strathcona (now South Edmonton).

Over a very quick period of time, six years, Wetaskiwin progressed from a village (1900) to city (1906). There was a constant battle with crossing the railway from one side of town to the other as there were only two crossings and neither was on the main street. Town Council tried to have the crossing moved to Main Street but remained unsuccessful for many years. A crossing under the rail line was considered, but was also dismissed. Today, there are still only three crossings within the main body of town and all can be blocked at the same time by a train.

The railway was built alongside the original stagecoach road and brought the majority of travelers right through the center of town. By 1912, train traffic was increasing and ten trains were coming through town each day. Hotels were built alongside the railway to accommodate long-distance travelers. By 1930, numbers were given to all Alberta highways. Highway 2, which was the old stagecoach road, was rerouted to the western outskirts of town between the water tower and the new golf course. Later, a new 'super highway' between Calgary and Edmonton was built 15 km to the west of Wetaskiwin. This became Highway 2 and the older highway was renaming Highway 2A; the new highway pulled traffic further from the city center. In essence, then, while the railway encouraged a concentration of urban population, the personal automobile scattered it.

The discovery of oil at Leduc in February 1947 began the process of transforming Alberta's economic base from agriculture to petroleum. Due to the pricing of oil, the 1970s brought an even greater prosperity lasted until the early 1980s. "The last half of the 1970s and the early 1980s turned out to be one long construction period due to a boom in the oil industry. As major construction projects followed one after another, the population soared"<sup>7</sup> in Wetaskiwin due to the oil boom in Alberta. Agricultural services shifted from the downtown area to the outskirts and industrial development forged ahead with major construction projects. Two new hotels and a number of fast food restaurants lined a newly expanded highway 2A. "The culmination of the growth of the 1970s was the opening of the eight million dollar Wetaskiwin Mall"<sup>8</sup>, located adjacent to highway 2A. This development added to the already booming car dealerships, and highway 2A became known as the "Automile". Consequently, this growth pulled the majority of shoppers out of the downtown core, perpetuating a decline in that area.

Through this historical review, it can be seen that there are specific events that have impacted the cultural, social, economical and physical evolution of the community. The building of the railway and its subsequent siding brought settlers to the area as well as an economic base of railway and agricultural workers. The repositioning of the highway from along the railway to the outer edge of Wetaskiwin detrimentally affected the city's downtown core. The oil boom of the 1970s brought an influx of people to Alberta and it also allowed for the construction of a new super highway that by-passed many small communities, including Wetaskiwin.

Transportation development has had a major effect on Wetaskiwin's growth; as travel changed from the wagon to railway and then car, each resident was able to travel greater distances. This new mode of transportation initially allowed access to less urbanized regions and in later years provided rural residents with easier access to larger cities with more diverse amenities. A person's perception of "community" was no longer solely connected to that of their neighbourhood or city.



fig. 1.17 Imperial Oil Leduc #1 Well, 1947



fig. 1.18 Highway 2A - Wetaskiwin

## ABCE ANALYSIS SUMMARY

### Description - General

- Small rural Albertan city along the Edmonton-Calgary Corridor. Located 70km south of Edmonton.
- The city name is Cree, meaning the hills where peace was made.
- Founded: 1892
- Incorporated (village): 1900
- Incorporated (town): 1902
- Incorporated (city): 1906
- Area: 16.74 km<sup>2</sup>

### Abiotic

- Major Bodies of Water: Pigeon Lake, Bittern Lake, Dried Meat Lake, and Coal Lake are all within 30 minutes from the city.
- Principle Rivers: Battle River and Pipestone Creek are in close proximity.
- Principle Drainage Basins: Battle River watershed, which is a part of the North Saskatchewan watershed, draining into the Hudson Bay Drainage Basin.
- Climate: continental climate
- Elevation: 760m above sea level.
- Precipitation: ranges from 40 - 60cm
- Snowfall: The average maximum snow depth ranges from less than 30cm to 50cm.
- 4.5 months of continuous snow. It starts in the last half of November and ends in the first half of April.

### Biotic

- Econzone: Prairies.
- Soil: Wetaskiwin sits on what was formerly the coast of the large sea that covered much of Alberta millions of years ago. The northwest end of Wetaskiwin is characterized by hills with sandy soil (formerly sand dunes), while the southeast end of the city is very flat with more silty soil.

### Cultural

- Population: 11,673
- Population Density: 697.5/km<sup>2</sup>
- Median Age: 38.1
- Population over 15: 80.1%
- Education: non-high school - 30%, high school - 25%, Trade - 17%, University - 13%.
- Mode of Transportation to work: 80% drive and 10% walk or bike.

### Energetics

- Income: average earnings \$33,325
- Unemployment rate: 4.9%
- Industry: Agriculture - 5%, Manufacturing/Construction - 14%, Retail - 22%, Finance/Real Estate - 5%, Health/Education - 20%, Business Services - 11%
- Wetaskiwin has the highest level of car sales per capital in Canada.

## THE PRESENT

On a regional scale, the oil industry has become the dominant economic force. At the present time, it does not have a direct influence on the local economy but the area is currently feeling the after-effects of a provincial growth surge in the industry. Since the oil boom in the 1970s, the population has grown at a rather low, but consistent, rate and in recent years Alberta's economy has thrived and the population has increased at an incredible rate. This growth pushed housing prices up and vacancy rates down within the larger cities and as a consequence, this market trend pushed people into the outlying cities and towns where housing was more affordable. Wetaskiwin's growth, however, was lower than Alberta's growth rate: its population rose five percent between 2001-2006; half that of the provincial gain of 10.6 percent and slightly lower than the Canadian average of 5.4 percent in the same time periods. As of 2006, Wetaskiwin stands at a population of 11,673.<sup>9</sup>



fig. 1.19 Figure-ground Plan - 2007

## **SITE ANALYSIS**

The existing conditions of the town will help to determine the issues affecting Wetaskiwin. The areas that will be examined here are residential, commercial, industrial, transportation, green spaces/ public spaces, community amenities and vacant spaces. The challenges and opportunities that these areas of study present will assist in the establishment of a set of design principles, which will then be used to develop strategies to be used in the design.

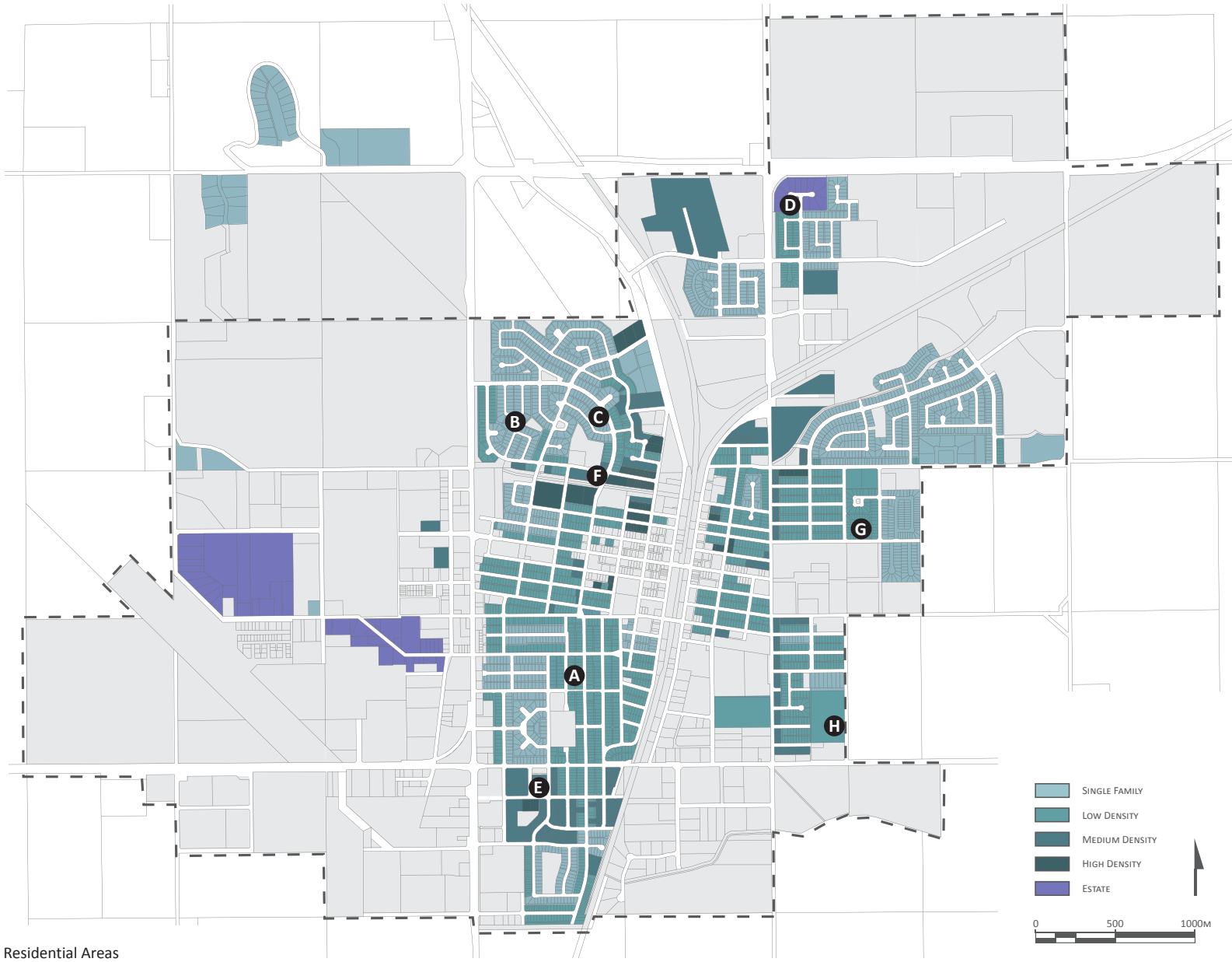


fig. 1.20 Residential Areas



## RESIDENTIAL



fig. 1.21 Single Family Housing



fig. 1.22 Single Family Housing



fig. 1.23 Low Density Housing



fig. 1.24 Estates



fig. 1.25 Medium Density Housing



fig. 1.26 High Density Housing



fig. 1.27 Senior Housing



fig. 1.28 Mobile Home Park

The residential areas of the city are well-defined. The majority of housing is situated in the older areas but one of the effects of the oil industry's growth has been a recent explosion of new residential construction. These new residential areas having been sprouting up on the outskirts of the city where available land allows for the building of single-family homes; this development trend is commonplace in the Prairies. Wetaskiwin is composed of 60 percent single families housing, a relatively low statistic for the area, yet still above the national percentage of approximately 55 percent.<sup>10</sup>

In an attempt to represent community, there has been the construction of new condominiums, senior developments, and single-family neighbourhoods with designated parks areas. With a lack of mixed residential land, especially within the downtown core, as well as isolated subdivisions at the farthest reaches of the city, residents are being segregated from each other and common amenities. This type of development creates a "disconnect" within the community.

There appears to be a boom in rentals for adult only and senior living developments — though families are having a hard time finding appropriate rental housing at reasonable prices. Single parent families unable to afford their own homes and unable to find appropriate rentals are relegated to social housing, which is limited and tends to come with an attached social stigma.

The older housing areas that surround the downtown core work well; the grid-like block pattern allows for easy connection to areas and amenities adjacent to the neighbourhoods. They also support easy walk-ability and are much closer to community amenities.

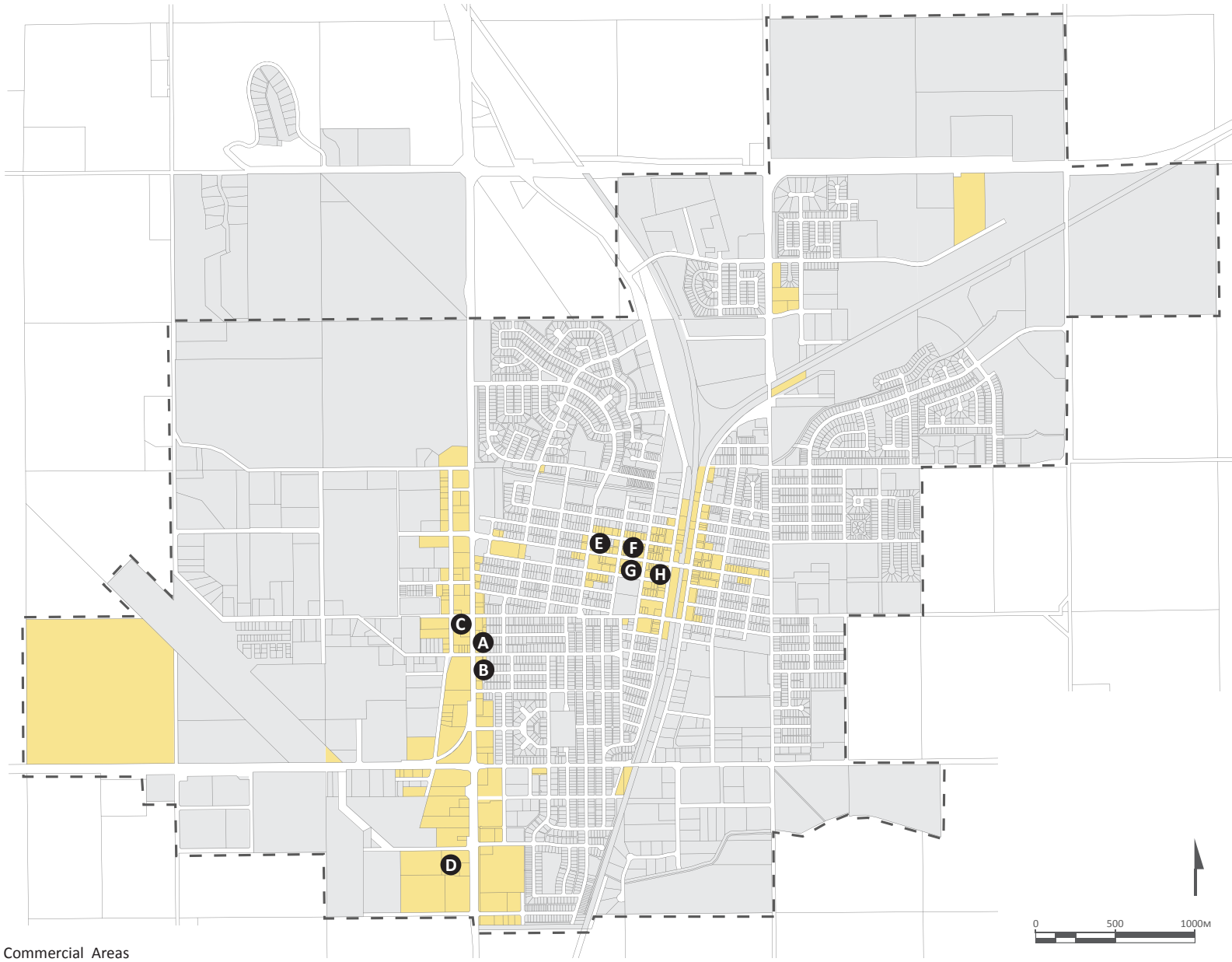


fig. 1.29 Commercial Areas



fig. 1.30 Highway - Strip Mall



fig. 1.31 Highway - Gas Stations and Fast Food



fig. 1.32 Highway - Dealership



fig. 1.33 Highway - Denham Landing



fig. 1.34 Downtown - Typical Single Storey Buildings



fig. 1.35 Downtown - Professional Building



fig. 1.36 Downtown - Vacant Buildings



fig. 1.37 Historic Downtown

## COMMERCIAL

Originally, the commercial zone surrounded the railway station, as it was the centre of the city and allowed for the easy transfer of goods. This downtown commercial area coincided with the historic heart of the community and the town's commercial activity was concentrated there until the 1970s. At this time, the last of the car dealerships left for the "Auto Mile" and farm equipment companies moved to the outskirts of town.

Now, the main commercial zone is located on the west side of the city along the highway. At present, the highway commercial district contains the majority of businesses: car dealerships, hotels and motels, restaurants and fast food chains, a shopping mall and a "big box" centre.

Though the downtown maintains a small base stores and professional businesses now consists only of a small historical area, one- and two-storey commercial buildings with limited variety and niche markets, as well as a host of vacant buildings, stores, and lots. The downtown; however, it is plagued with vacancies and low pedestrian traffic, in need of reinvention.

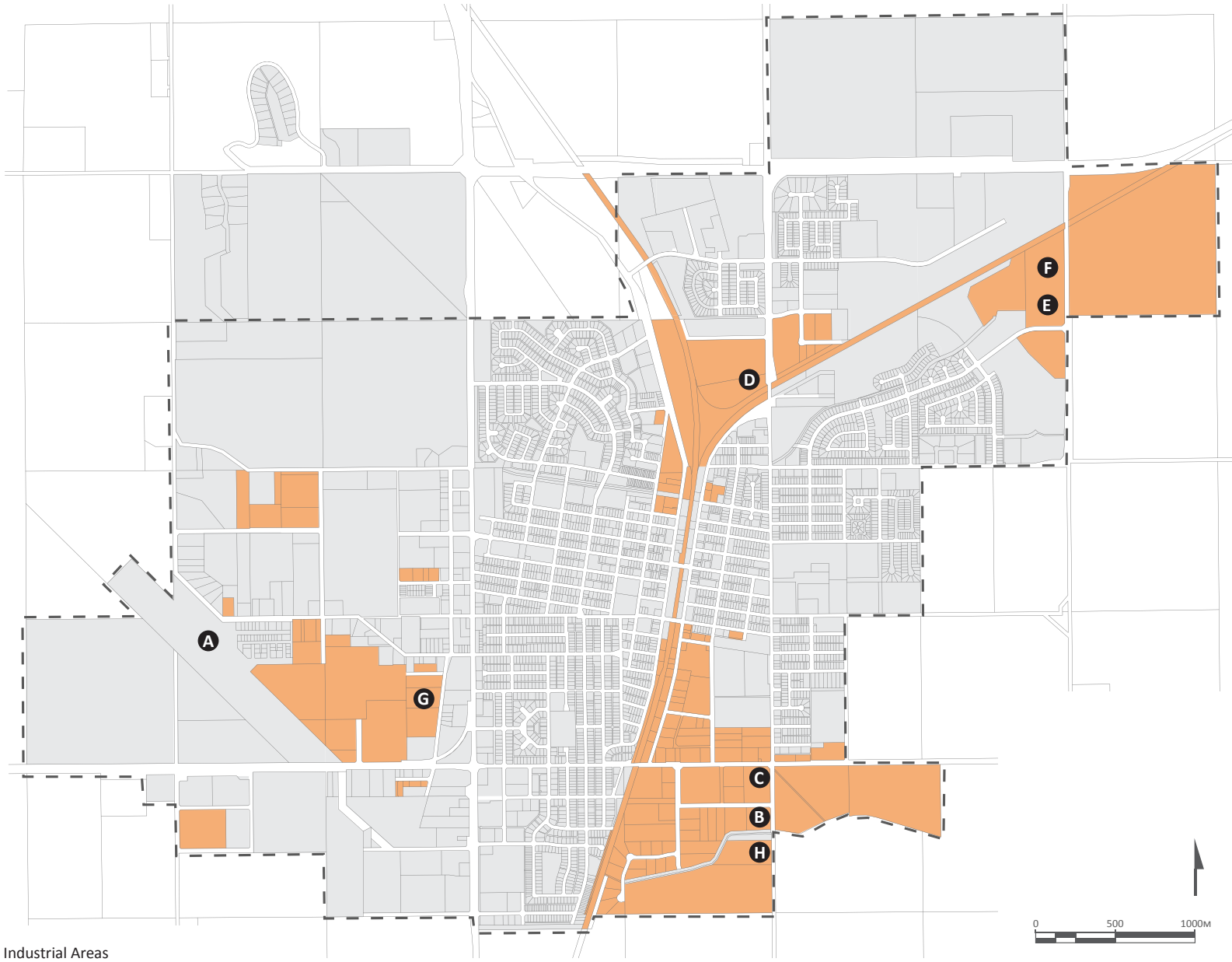


fig. 1.38 Industrial Areas



fig. 1.39 Wetaskiwin Regional Airport



fig. 1.40 Martin Equipment - John Deere



fig. 1.41 Wetaskiwin Co-op Country Junction



fig. 1.42 Supreme International Ltd



fig. 1.43 Home Hardware Distribution Centre



fig. 1.44 Home Hardware Distribution Centre



fig. 1.45 Stan Reynolds Museum



fig. 1.46 Speth Drilling Ltd.

## INDUSTRIAL

The industrial area is now located on the periphery after moving outwards from the downtown area in the 1970s. The largest users of the industrial zones include the Wetaskiwin Regional Airport, and Home Hardware's Western Canada Distribution Centre, one of the largest single employers in the community. Maintaining a presence in the city, the CPR lands snake through the center of town.

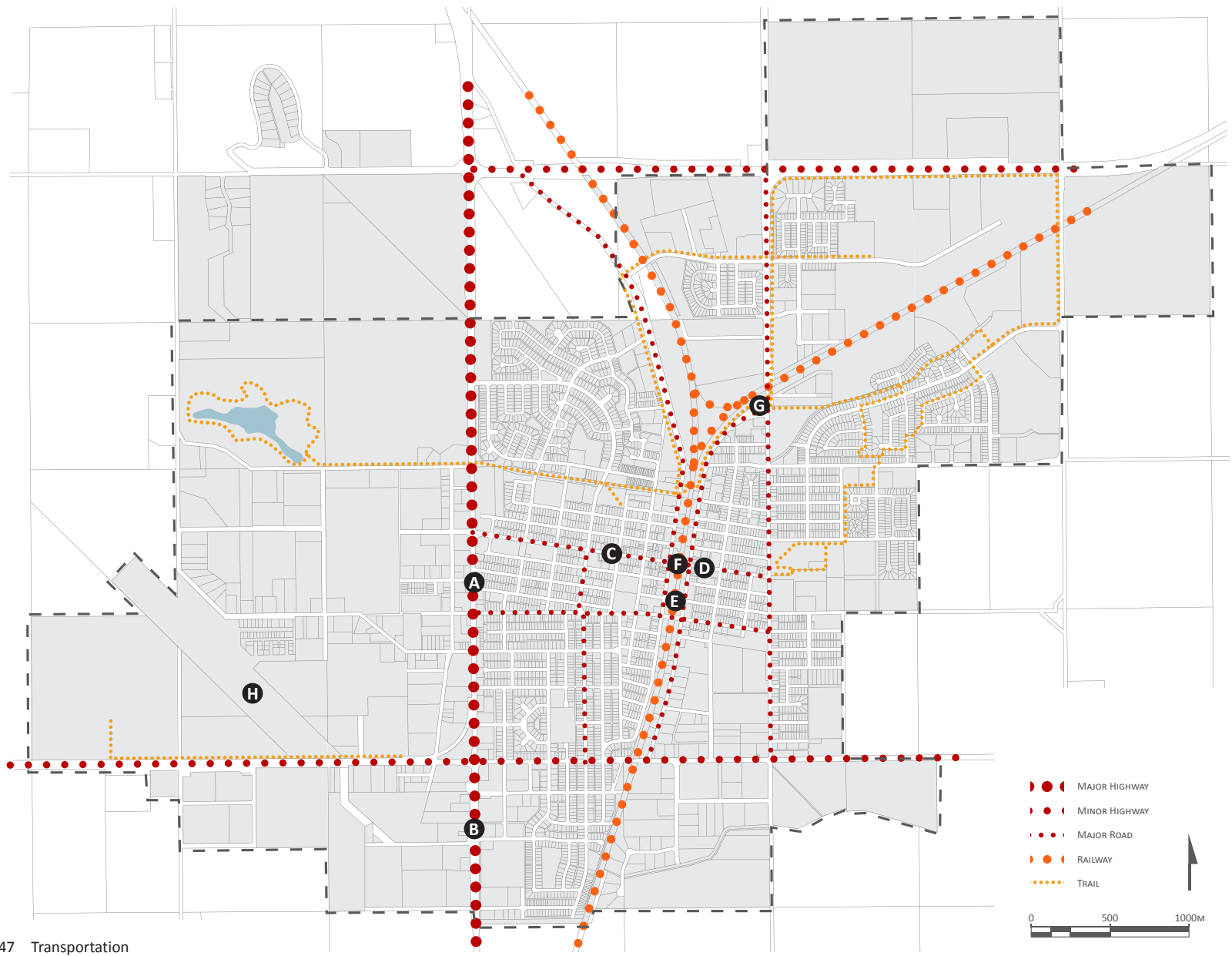


fig. 1.47 Transportation



fig. 1.48 Highway 2A - The "Auto Mile"



fig. 1.49 Wetaskiwin's "Auto Mile"



fig. 1.50 50th Avenue - "Main Street"



fig. 1.51 Main Street looking east



fig. 1.52 Railway Tracks



fig. 1.53 Railway crossing at Main Street



fig. 1.54 Trail along Creek



fig. 1.55 Wetaskiwin Regional Airport

## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation played an important role in the founding of Wetaskiwin. The constant evolution of the means and placement of transportation has always been a large factor in the city's development; exemplified by the rerouting of the Highway, thirteen kilometres away from the city that reduced the amount of accidental traffic coming into town.

Wetaskiwin is predominately vehicular, a culture that resulted from long winter seasons and the lack of a congruent trail system throughout the community. The pedestrian trails are neither well connected nor clearly defined — the city even shows common sidewalks as trail connections with no defining characteristics.

There are five crossings of the railway in Wetaskiwin, three are located in the city proper and two are located in the northern outskirts of the city with only one being an overhead pass. This railway structure essentially divides the town in half when trains come through and has been a constant problem, causing traffic backups, throughout the city's history.

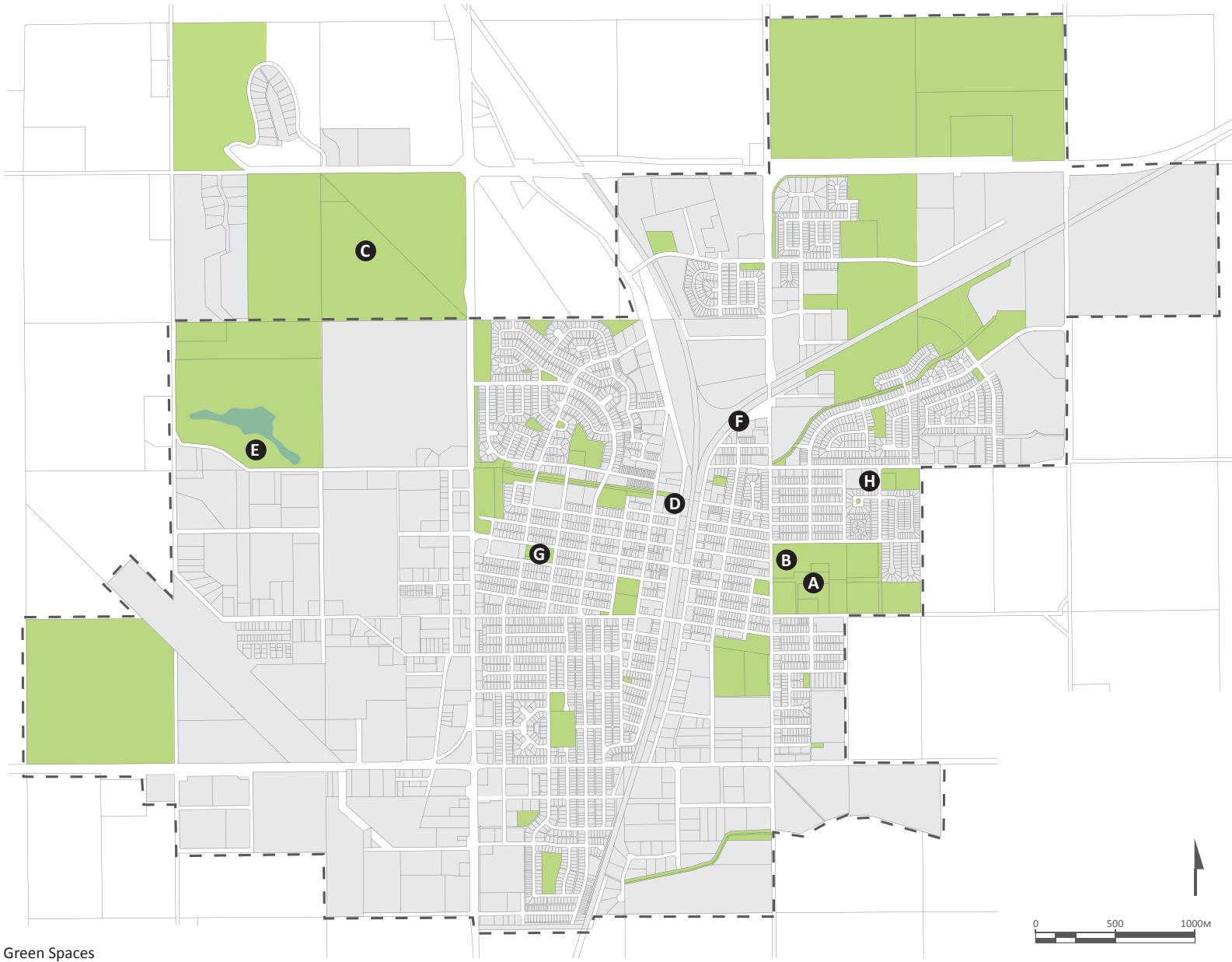


fig. 1.56 Green Spaces





fig. 1.57 Recreation Grounds



fig. 1.58 Recreation Grounds in winter



fig. 1.59 Wetaskiwin Golf Course



fig. 1.60 Sign States "Wetaskiwin Urban Park"



fig. 1.61 By-The-Lake Park



fig. 1.62 Trail along Creek and Railway in Winter

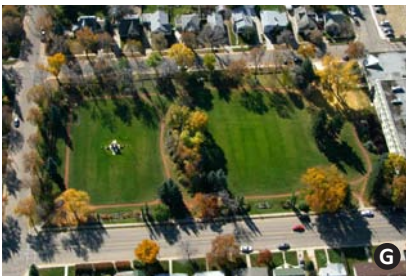


fig. 1.63 Jubilee Park



fig. 1.64 Grass field across from School

## GREEN SPACES / PUBLIC SPACES

The majority of green spaces within Wetaskiwin have a flat topography and typically consist of lawn. There are a few categories of green spaces: public parks, school grounds, recreation grounds, trail systems and private residential lawns. Most of these areas are well maintained but lack diversity and amenities that might draw the public to them.

The trail system in Wetaskiwin lacks a cohesive plan. The connections between different paths in the system are either missing or badly defined and the system is disconnected from the recreation grounds and the downtown core.

Recreation remains important to the city now and has been important throughout its history. Sports are part of every family's life and the recreation grounds provide the town with most of its recreation amenities, including baseball diamonds, a swimming pool, hockey arenas, tennis courts, a football field, a running track, a curling rink, a skateboard park and a small playground. The hockey arenas have recently undergone renovation but other buildings and fields are run-down. During the winter the public spaces that focus on sports are the only ones being used and this happens once the outdoor skating rinks are in operation.

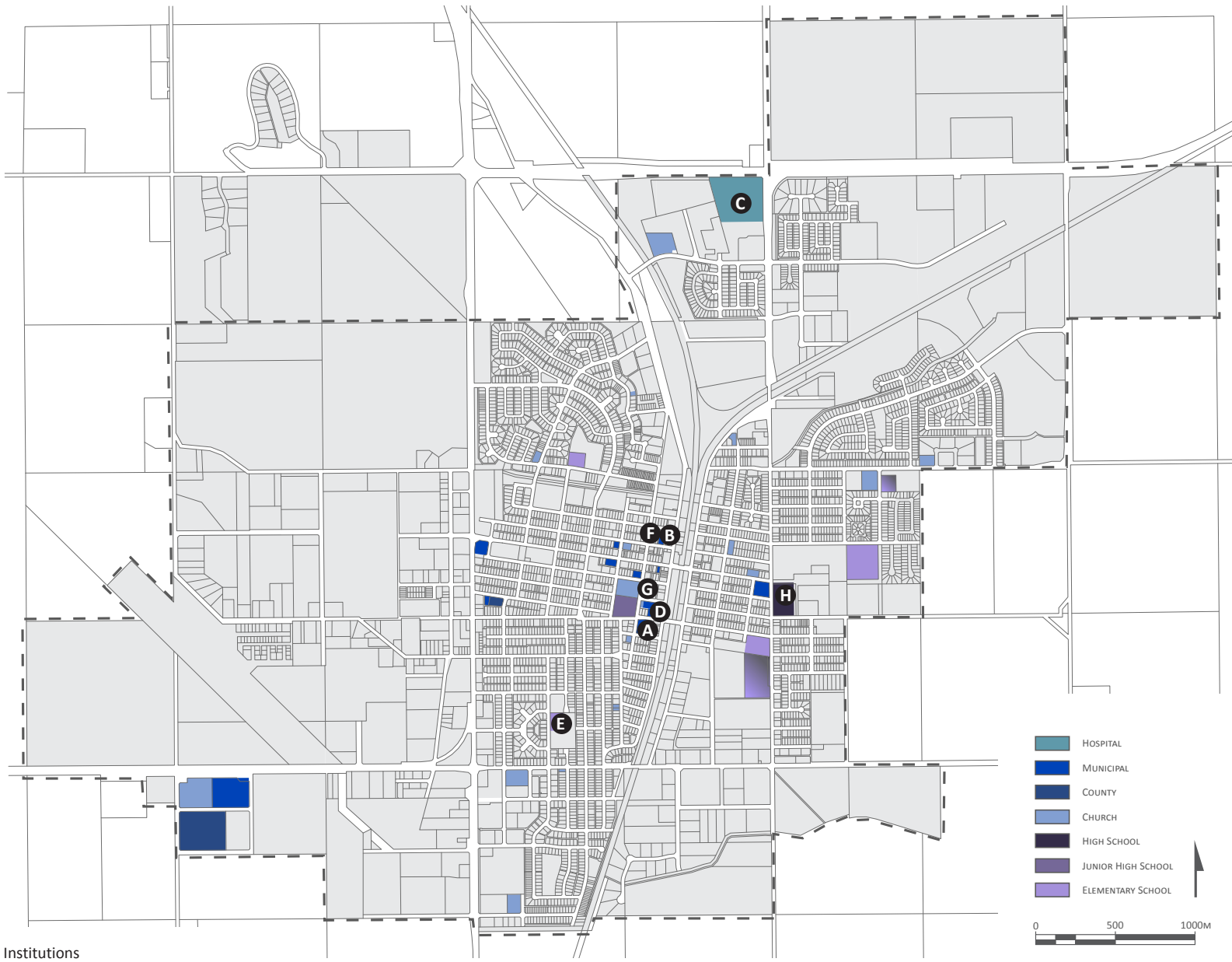


fig. 1.65 Institutions



fig. 1.66 Wetaskiwin Courthouse



fig. 1.67 Wetaskiwin Public Library



fig. 1.68 Wetaskiwin Hospital



fig. 1.69 Wetaskiwin RCMP Building



fig. 1.70 Parkdale Elementary School



fig. 1.71 Salvation Army



fig. 1.72 Post Office



fig. 1.73 Wetaskiwin Composite High School

## COMMUNITY AMENITIES

The recreation amenities are present but many of the buildings and fields are deteriorating or outdated. The region is known for long and cold winters; during this time, it is difficult for both seniors and children to stay active as there few indoor spaces that support a range of recreational activities. Families often travel to other communities to use updated facilities with a larger variety of amenities. The recreational department of Wetaskiwin has with very little manpower making it difficult to maintain its programs and complexes. Most of the community organizations and clubs are spread out throughout the city as they do not have permanent homes.

There is limited access to higher learning prospects within the community, as there are only two adult education institutions: Norquest College and Lokken Career Training. Both of these institutions offer upgrading for high school and career training, however, neither have programs that can be taken at a post-secondary level.

Wetaskiwin is home to a number of museums, including the Reynolds-Alberta Museum, Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame, and the Wetaskiwin and District Heritage Museum. The city takes pride in its heritage and has restored both the 1906 water tower and the 1907 courthouse that is now City Hall. A small portion of the downtown has been historically restored.



fig. 1.74 Vacant Spaces



fig. 1.75 Vacant Lot off Main Street



fig. 1.76 Vacant Lot west of Highway 2A



fig. 1.77 Field on East side of Wetaskiwin



fig. 1.78 Vacant Lot on Main Street



fig. 1.79 Vacancy in Professional Building



fig. 1.80 Vacant Building Downtown



fig. 1.81 Field on East end of Wetaskiwin



fig. 1.82 Vacant Building Downtown

## VACANT SPACES

Density within Wetaskiwin is not high because of the large quantity of single-family housing and building height restrictions that consequently promoted sprawl. The prominence of vacant land and buildings results in a lack of cohesion in the city fabric; especially visible in the city's core. The downtown fabric along Main Street has businesses that are interspersed with vacant lots and empty storefronts resulting in inconsistencies that is not conducive for attracting pedestrians. Behind the buildings with Main Street frontage are large parking lots intermixed with retail and civic buildings.

Vacant lots within the city limits include old gas station sites, farming fields, CPR land, and other urban reserve. A typical highway commercial that is generously spaced with plenty of large parking lots lines Highway 2A. To the west of the highway lies much undeveloped land and low-density areas.

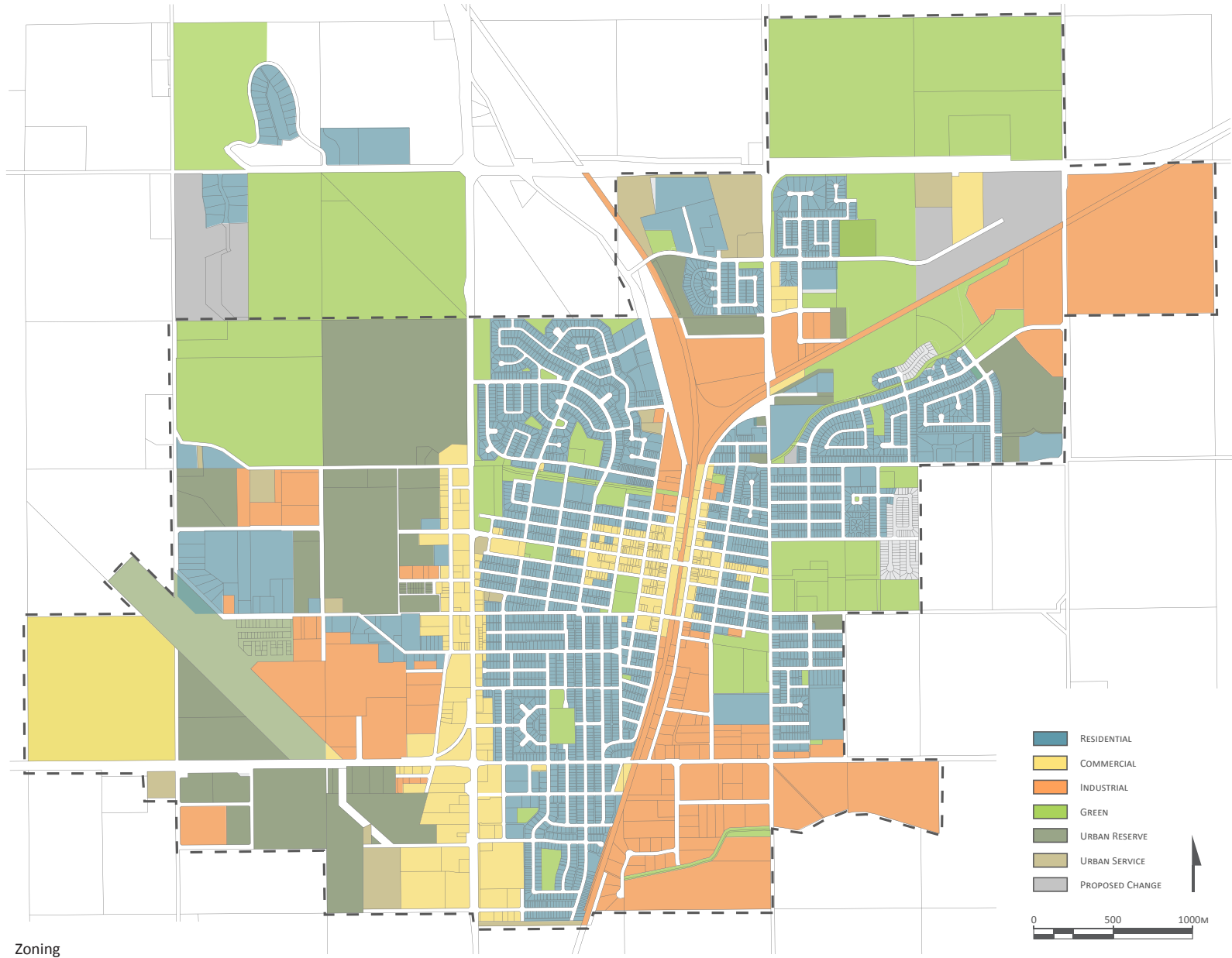


fig. 1.83 Zoning

## IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES

*Rural Alberta: Land of Opportunity (2004)* Identified a number of important challenges for rural Alberta

### Human Resource

- Rural communities are losing their youth and their skilled professionals, both sources of potential leadership.

### Social Infrastructure

- Many areas are losing important services, like schools, health care, and recreational and cultural programs which support economic and community development.

### Physical Infrastructure

- Rural communities regard public buildings as community assets and want them used effectively. They are concerned about the affordability of essential services like water treatment and community facilities. Many feel roads and other transportation services in their community are not adequate.

### Business and Economy

- International, national and local crises have had a disproportionate impact on rural communities. Opportunities exist for the diversification of the rural economy, but access to necessary skills and tools, like technology and financing, is limited.

### Working Together

- Regional collaboration can help meet many of the challenges facing rural communities, government ministries and industry.

### Culture and quality of life

- Preservation of their heritage and quality of life is essential to enhance the attractiveness of rural communities as good places to live and invest.

### Environment

- Good stewardship of the environment is seen as critical to maintaining industries like agriculture and tourism, and as a source of economic diversification. However, rural Albertans are concerned that they bear the costs of good stewardship while all Albertans enjoy the benefits.

### Government

- Rural Albertans believe that government funding formulas, policies and regulations do not recognize their unique circumstances and that it is increasingly difficult to get rural concerns on the provincial agenda.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Communities are always changing and self-organizing. Wetaskiwin is at a turning point: the boom in Alberta is resulting in a large influx of people and there is semi-forced growth within smaller communities in close proximity to larger urban centers. The growth within Wetaskiwin is in the residential areas and is lower than other surrounding communities. The city has yet to play catch up in other areas, such as adding and improving community amenities, retail, and education, in helping to balance and maintain the community's current status.

Wetaskiwin is close enough to Edmonton and other surrounding cities for residents to travel there for entertainment and shopping. Commuting for work is not as common as it is in other communities that lie closer to Edmonton. So what is it that makes a city unique? Stronger community interaction and amenities — by providing these, Wetaskiwin can compete with smaller cities that offer not only convenience of location but a sense of “home” as well.

There is a sense of apathy within Wetaskiwin. Some community leaders take initiative in creating a vision for the city; they work hard at making Wetaskiwin a better place for everyone living there. Unfortunately, majority of citizens show a lack of interest in the city until it is too late and decisions about the community and its future have already been made.

Wetaskiwin realizes that something needs to change — how to making the change and who is involved in the decision-making process is the issue. The refurbishing of the water tower and the renovation of the historic courthouse were efforts intended to create a stronger sense of community, but instead seemed to divide the city in half. The local government is increasing its involvement in finding a solution within the economic sector of the city by hiring outside consultants. But how will this affect the social and environmental areas?





## 02 BACKGROUND



## **THE PROBLEM**

In the twentieth century, little emphasis has been placed on the roles of architects in small communities, specifically in regard to community engagement and interaction. The focus is usually on larger urban centres, and the strategies that work there do not necessarily translate into small cities and towns. The guidelines and design principles currently in use all have a common theme of creating diversity in the built environment. Strong public leadership and local community involvement are required in order to make community planning successful. Architects tend not to be as frequently involved in small town design, but there is an increasing awareness within the industry that there is a need for change in order to sustain small communities.

The people of the community need to have a vested interest in seeing their community thrive. A primary challenge to the community includes piecemeal planning that does not emphasize connections to either place or people. A lack of diversity and little variation in density within the city leads to the segregation of its citizens. Interaction and engagement is vital to the formation of a community identity; if residents do not feel connected to the place they live, they will distance themselves from its planning. The municipality needs to engage citizens within the process from the start in order to enable the community to develop a clear and beneficial plan for its future.

“What is required is the replacement of abstract opinions with knowledge based on real human contact and personal realization applied to the work.” – Samuel Mockbee

In recent years, Wetaskiwin has begun to recognise its need for change, the Economic Development department and the Planning and Development department are actively seeking ways to boost economic prosperity. They have hired an outside company to analyse the community and formulate a master economic development strategy for the city; but what about social, environmental and cultural aspects? These community qualities are all linked and one cannot improve without the fostering of the others.

Wetaskiwin is not growing as fast as nearby comparable communities. Examining the characteristics of similar communities will help to bring forward solutions that relate to problems affecting Wetaskiwin. No two cities are the same, but the lessons learned from how other communities actively try to solve their own issues can help to define the possibilities for Wetaskiwin.

## THE ARCHITECTURAL RESPONSE

“The community by definition is a comprehensible thing.”<sup>1</sup>

Much of what is being said about community development and sustainability has to do with the economy. While social, economic and environmental aspects are not singular and should be integrated, this thesis will focus on the social aspects of community engagement—the idea of building community through interconnected relationships, not just built form. In so doing, meaningful development can occur that supports local community needs.

According to Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary, community is “an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location” or “a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society.”<sup>2</sup> So what does this mean in regards to city planning? Architects and planners affect more than the physical look of a place; they provide spaces and opportunities for interaction to take place.

“In past societies, the relation between man and total space was shaped by religion (medieval age)—to have faith; political economy (nineteenth century)—to possess; administration (twentieth century)—to manage.”<sup>3</sup> It is this management that that has shaped the cities and communities of today. Architects and urban theorists, such as Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander, Le Corbusier, and the Architects of Team 10, have been involved in the planning of cities for a long time. However, they have primarily focused on large urban cities.

Strategies designed for these large centres can be adapted to smaller cities, but such adaptation can only go so far. Large urban cities have multiple centres and communities within them; if one centre is declining, then another more prosperous area can help offset this. Small cities and

towns have one centre, and if it is declining, the community could fail. Rural cities and towns have been, for the most part, left on their own to figure out how to manage and plan their communities.

## Architecture and planning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Around 1900, a movement began that involved providing the people of a city with healthier environments within their communities. The concept of garden cities started to form, starting at a much smaller scale of only a few thousand residents. In the prairies, mall settlements were appearing along the railway line. People were immigrating to the prairies and western Canada from other provinces, the USA, and Europe, due to the completion of the cross-Canada railway in the late nineteenth century. It can be seen that the planning of these settlements was based on eastern Canadian and European models.

By the 1920s modernism was in fashion and the garden city ideal grew to large-scale propositions championed by architects such as Corbusier. Efficiency and comprehensive design were the goals at this time, so large-scale rebuilding of cities became a focus, although they were not fully implemented until after WWII. The mass production of the motor vehicle allowed for a new range of movement. The general public could now live farther away from where they worked, and travel into town from the county became easier.

The 1950s saw a growth in the transportation industry with a greater public dependence on cars. This spawned the development of suburbs, the beginning of community segregation. "In the past, villages, towns, and cities have all had in common the provision of facilities for the full range of human activity in a relatively concentrated area."<sup>4</sup> In the prairies, the railway encouraged the concentration of an urban population, while the automobile scattered it; this type of community can be defined as "an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location."<sup>5</sup> Your culture or background does not matter; it is just about where you live. During this time, the role of the architect, like other professionals in the construction industry, was that of a technical expert based on rationality, order, and efficiency.<sup>6</sup>

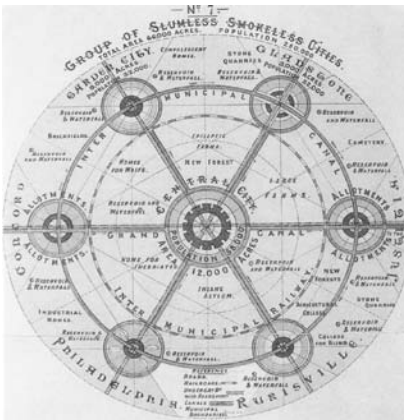


fig. 2.1 Garden City by Ebenezer Howard

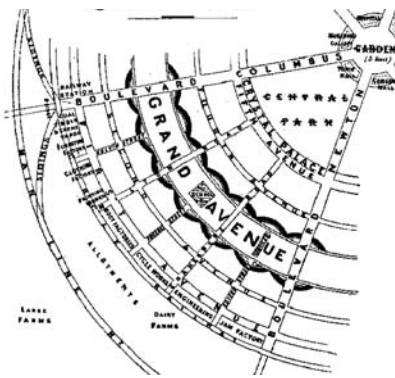


fig. 2.2 Garden City Detail



fig. 2.3 Aerial view of Levittown, PA circa 1959

In the 1960s the architect's role changed to that of mediator; the outlook for architects was one of change. Community groups formed to discuss and evaluate architecture and past, present, and future planning. The discussions invariably led to new ideas and ideals of the role of architects. The Team 10 discussions in the late 1960s concluded that "we should create for men, by technical means, physical, psychological, and aesthetic conditions, so that he may have the possibility to define in space his personal opinion about life."<sup>7</sup>

The trend to involve the members of a community in planning and building decisions continued into the 1970s. With the recession, the energy crisis, and the advent of historical preservation, the role of the architect was negotiator. Managing economic development began to increase in small communities. Urban renewal schemes—especially for public urban space—defined an era based on large-scale housing and retail projects, resulting in what contemporary critics have described as "placelessness." Consumer patterns changed from walking around the downtown areas to driving to strip malls, often located on the outskirts of town. At this time, in rural communities, the agricultural companies also moved from the downtown to the outer industrial areas. The dynamic between community members shifted because chance meetings on the street became less frequent as people relied on their cars to move them from place to place.

The 1980s began to show devolution of government and the evolution of communities that are healthy and encompass sustainable development. According to David Bruce, "Communities are expressing a growing mistrust and uncertainty about the future. Those with leadership have an exhausted volunteer core, while those without leadership lack direction. Communities also are feeling the pressure to address a multitude of issues related to the economy, social development, the environment, and infrastructure. Coordination and direction are being



fig. 2.4 Meeting of Team 10: Italy circa 1974



fig. 2.5 Strip Mall



fig. 2.6 Regional Mall and Highway Commercial





fig. 2.7 Samuel Mockbee and Students



fig. 2.8 Students Building the Shiles House



fig. 2.9 Rural Studio - HERO Childrens Center



fig. 2.10 Rural Studio - Newbern Baseball Field

sought.”<sup>8</sup> The architect took on a new role as facilitator to deal with the growing rift between community and government. Depopulation of small urban communities in Canada occurred during and after the recession.<sup>9</sup> People flocked to the larger cities looking for work.

With the advancement of globalization throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, education and the creative sector gained momentum. Architects began to take notice of depopulation’s impact on smaller communities. One example is that of the Rural Studio of Auburn University, Alabama. Started in 1993 by Samuel Mockbee, the Studio forms teams of architecture students that plan, design and build community projects and charity homes in rural Alabama. Mockbee’s “inspirational and authentic architecture served to improve the lives of the most impoverished residents of rural Alabama through his work at Auburn University’s Rural Studio.”<sup>10</sup> The buildings created by the students foster community through the process of integrated design and community interaction, resulting in residents who are proud of the buildings and their own participation in the creation of them.

In 1995, academics and practitioners across Canada gathered to discuss the challenges and opportunities faced by Canadian towns and villages; their discussions produced a book, *Challenge and Opportunity: Managing Change in Canadian Towns and Villages*, within which was a consensus that Canada’s smallest settlements were evolving and that their future viability would be a function of their ability to manage change.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, a paper by David Bruce focuses on the capacity for small towns to manage change to ensure long-term sustainability within the community. Bruce looks specifically at changing the roles and responsibilities of leadership and citizens in the community by bringing the two groups together to create a vision for the future.

## Community Vision

A vision for the community/city needs to be created in order to provide a base from which to work. “Every part of the environment we build is to be lived in, in some way or other. We cannot afford to relegate any part as a dead area.”<sup>12</sup> Certain spaces help to create a dynamic for interaction and engagement. For example, the street is considered a place where social contact between residents can be established. “The sequence of streets and squares as a whole potentially constitutes the space where it should be possible for a dialogue between inhabitants to take place.”<sup>13</sup> These ‘newfound’ spaces becomes an opportunity to experiment with space and see what aspects help provoke interaction.

Residents’ lives overlap in positive ways. “The point is to give public spaces form in such a way that the local community will feel personally responsible for them, so that each member of the community will contribute in his or her own way to an environment that he or she can relate to and can identify with.”<sup>14</sup> In the simplest terms, people who live there know best what they need.

The role of the architect needs to be all of these things: expert, mediator, negotiator, facilitator, educator, and consultant. If an architect conceives of their client in a narrow way, say as that of client and bill payer, they will lose sight of the fact that the client is the ultimate user of the space being created and will have the most insight into how it will be used. Ultimately, community engagement should fall to both planners and architects. Currently, in rural communities, the architect is nearly absent in the development of the built city. Developers have taken over the planning of the areas that they own and the municipalities have set out few guidelines, allowing for a “hodgepodge” effect on the city fabric.

“The objective for any community is to manage change to achieve a sustainable community.”<sup>15</sup> The capacity for change within a community is dependent on the actors involved; community associations may feel

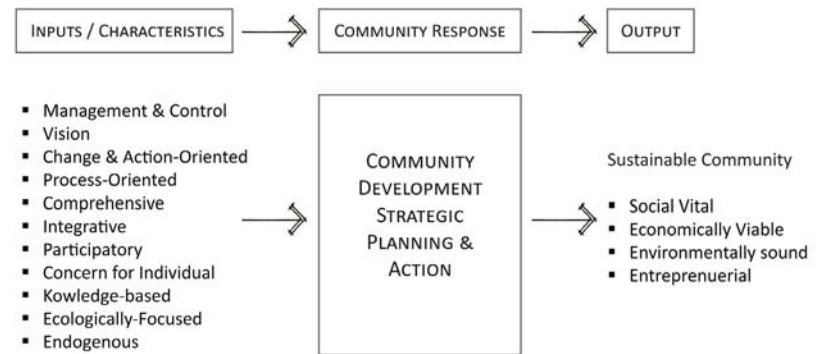


fig. 2.11 Sustainable Community Inputs / Outputs

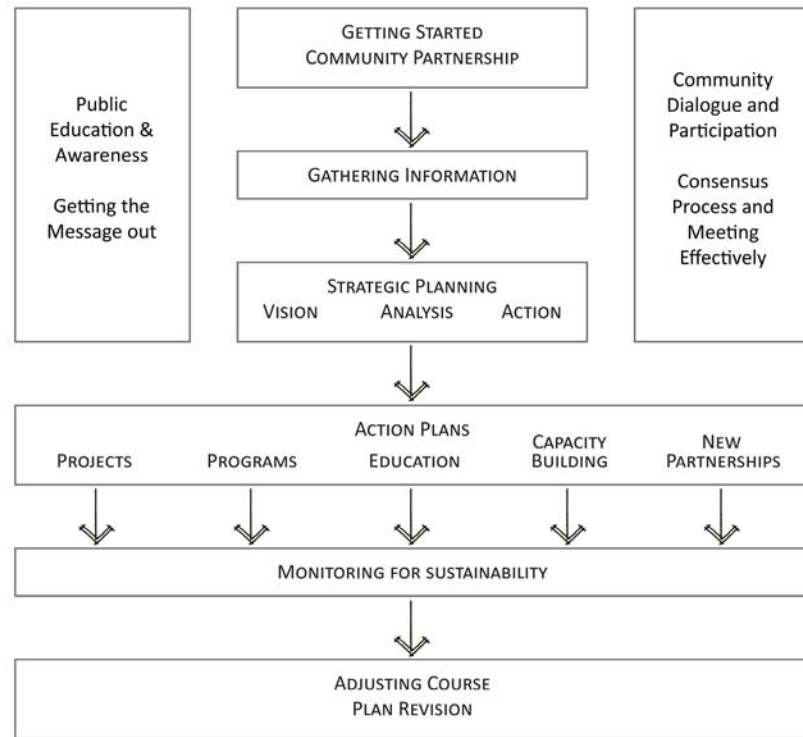
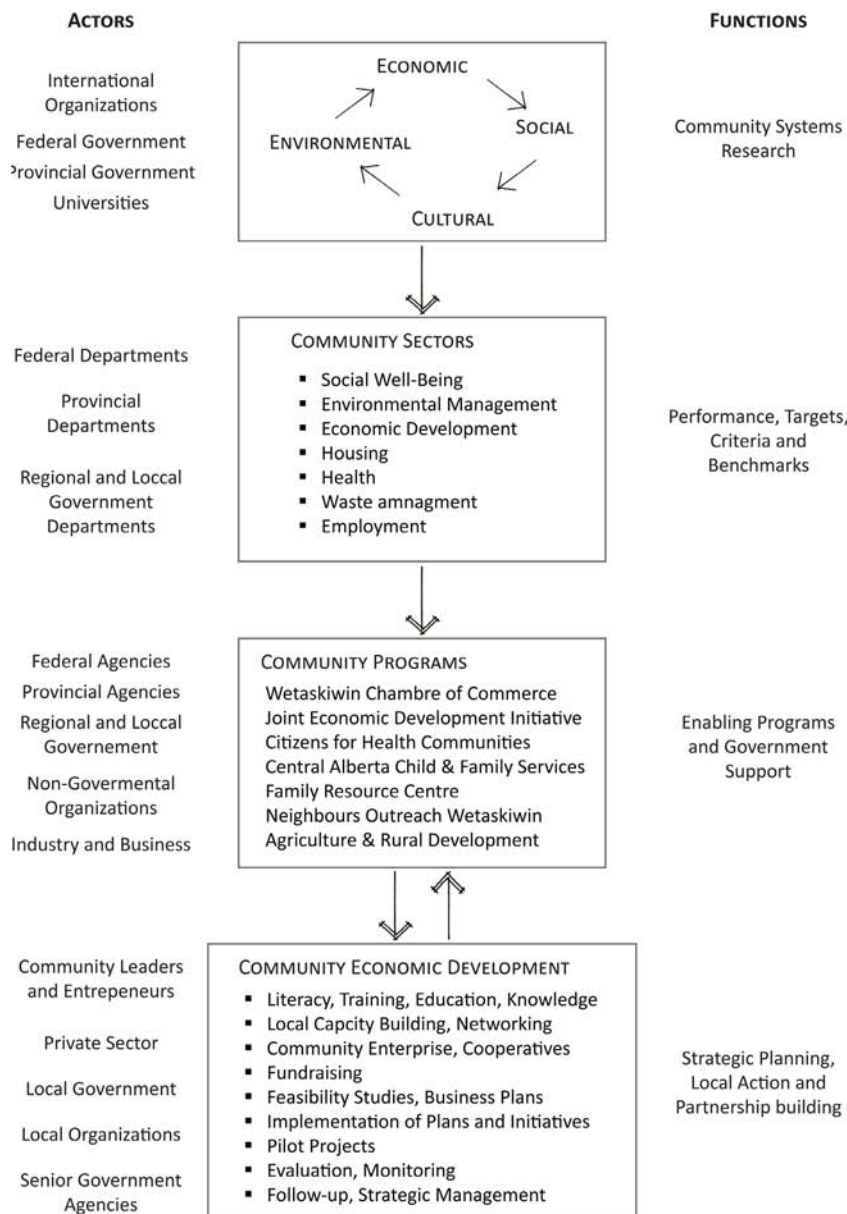


fig. 2.12 Leadership, Partnerships, Community Collaboration



pressure from both the municipalities and lack of citizen participation while a lack of trust in municipal leaders can cause uncertainty about the future. Communities “with leadership have an exhausted volunteer core, those without leadership lack direction.”<sup>16</sup> Change in the structure of rural communities needs to take place at all levels with clear direction, defined roles, strong leadership and an eagerness to learn.

The architect’s role is to educate the community so that they can move forward with an appropriate vision for the future. A dialogue between all participants can allow for the creation of a sustainable community environment that provides interaction between both people and built form.

fig. 2.13 An Enabling Approach to Managing Change

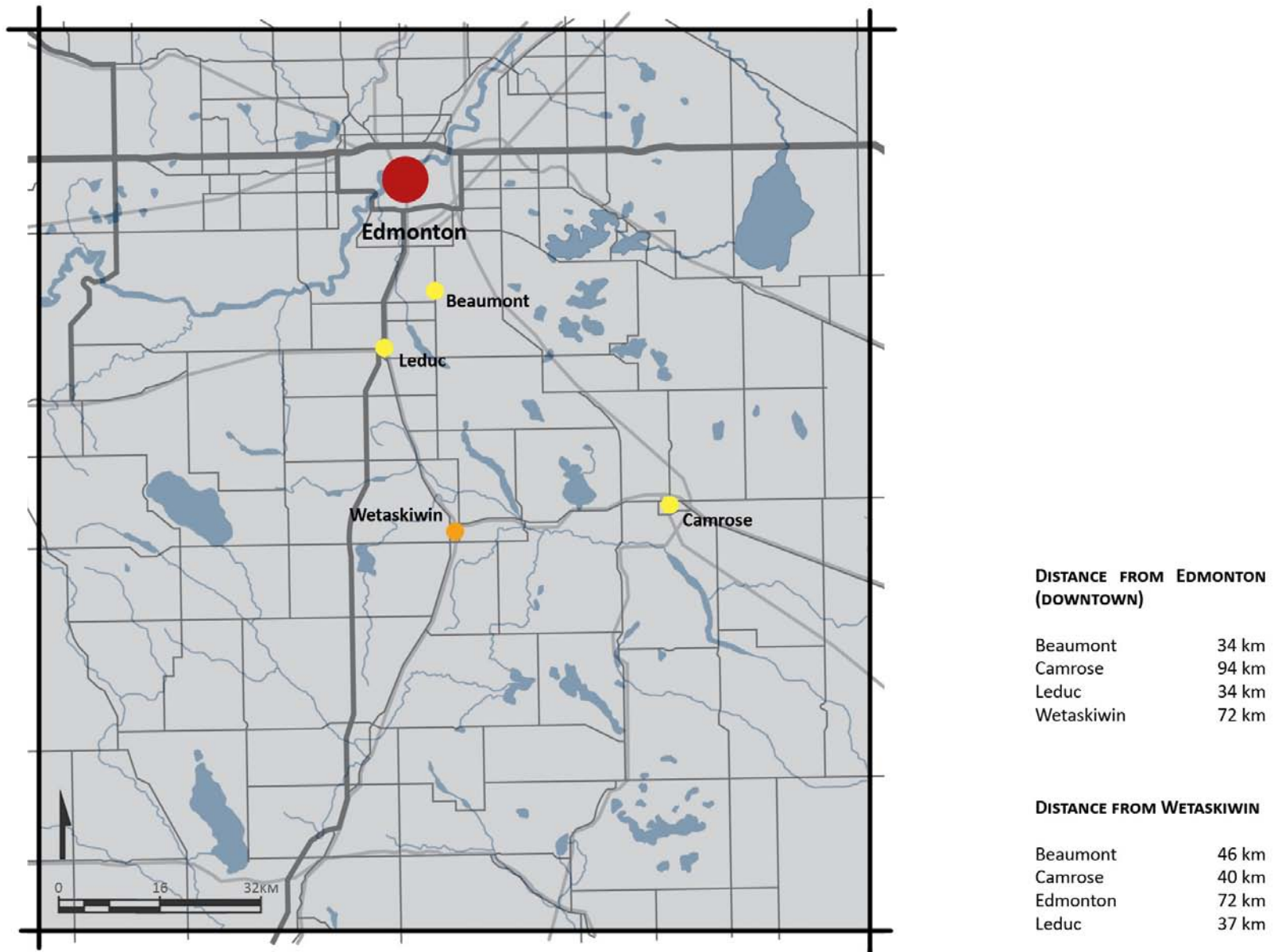


fig. 2.14 Case Study Sites

## **THE COMPERANDA**

The following communities share a similar urban form; they are small communities within a 100 kilometre radius of Edmonton and consist of predominantly of single detached houses (residential areas) centred around a core, making the towns easily walk-able. These communities differ from each other and Wetaskiwin by their defining characteristics, including proximity to a large urban centre (Edmonton), cultural identity, post-secondary education, community amenities and public spaces.



fig. 2.15 Beaumont Aerial Map



fig. 2.18 Lion's Water Play Park



fig. 2.19 Library Fun Run Day



fig. 2.20 Beaumont French Catholic Cathedral



fig. 2.21 Lion's Skate Park



fig. 2.16 Beaumont French French Village Street



fig. 2.17 Walking Path



fig. 2.22 Typical Residential



fig. 2.23 Commercial Street corner

## **Beaumont, Alberta**

Beaumont is a town located in central Alberta, approximately 10 kilometres from Edmonton's south end and 34 kilometres to the downtown core. Its population was 8,961 people as of 2006. The town's roots are as a French farming community, and the French culture can still be seen throughout the community. Beaumont is considered one of the fastest growing communities in Canada; over the last five years, the town has seen an increase in population of 27.9 percent. Beaumont has become a bedroom community to Edmonton, as almost 70 percent of its workforce is employed outside of the city.<sup>17</sup>

Due to the town's strong French culture, in 1992 Beaumont made an addition to their central area redevelopment plan to include French Village Design Guidelines.<sup>18</sup> In doing this the town has set in place an overall vision for the community, resulting in a sense of identity and community pride. Beaumont recently enlisted Stantec to undertake a Central Area Redevelopment Plan for the downtown core.<sup>19</sup> The plan was presented in January 2009 and follows the same vision set by the local government.

Beaumont doesn't have a large downtown core, and its proximity to Edmonton allows for easy access to community amenities, larger institutions, and diverse employment. As a result, there is not an immediate need for the town to focus its efforts and money in these areas.



fig. 2.24 Aerial View of Camrose



fig. 2.26 Mirror Lake Park



fig. 2.27 Augustana University College



fig. 2.28 Downtown



fig. 2.29 Downtown



fig. 2.25 Camrose Trail Map



fig. 2.30 Big Valley Jamboree Stage Area



fig. 2.31 Big Valley Jamboree Performance



fig. 2.32 Outdoor Spray Park



fig. 2.33 Big Box Stores on the West side



## **Camrose, Alberta**

Camrose is a city located in central Alberta, approximately 94 kilometres from downtown Edmonton. Its population consists of 15,620 people, and the median age of the city is 41.8 years, the highest of these case studies, due to the large population of retirees. Camrose also has the highest percentage of people that live and work within the city, at 69 percent.<sup>20</sup>

Camrose is farther from Edmonton than Wetaskiwin. Due to its distance it has a large big box area on its west side that has rapidly developed and helps support the farming communities to the southeast of Edmonton. This commercial development not only supports local residents but also brings in consumers from the surrounding areas, including Wetaskiwin.

A key strategy for community revitalization is a presence of institutions. Camrose is home to the Augustana Faculty of the University of Alberta. This post-secondary institution has five departments and hosts a Faculty of Nursing. The school draws professionals and youth into the community through its regular courses and its Learning and Beyond Program that emphasizes connection to the community through student engagement.

Camrose has a large park and trail system that runs north-south through the middle of the city. The park system offers events and activities for all seasons of the year, including an outdoor splash park in the summer and skating rinks in the winter.

The city's largest draw for tourism is the Big Valley Jamboree, an annual four-day country music festival that brings in tens of thousands of people each year. A 400-acre mini village (Camrose Regional Exhibition area) supports the performers and concert-goers. It includes campgrounds, concessions, and a marketplace.



fig. 2.34 Leduc, Nisku, and the Edmonton International Airport



fig. 2.35 Leduc's Parks and Trails



fig. 2.36 The New Leduc Recreation Centre



fig. 2.37 Garden Plots that can be rented



fig. 2.38 Leduc's Downtown

## **Leduc, Alberta**

Leduc is a city located in central Alberta, approximately 33 kilometres from Edmonton. Its current population is 16,967, though Leduc has experienced an increase in population of 12.9 percent over the last five years. Leduc's economy is largely based in the oil industry.<sup>21</sup>

The Edmonton International Airport, which borders the city, provides a large source of employment. Just north of Leduc is Nisku, a large business and industrial park that is home to more than 400 businesses and has helped maintain the steady growth of Leduc by supporting its workforce.

Leduc has over 35 kilometres of trail systems that are cohesive and well kept, 25 kilometres of which are cleared throughout the winter to ensure year-round access.<sup>22</sup> It is predominantly paved and passes through the majority of the city, allowing for a variety of activities; the trails also connect the many parks and recreational activities that Leduc has to offer, including lakes, a golf course and a large recreation centre that hosts an annual outdoor rodeo.

Like Beaumont, the proximity to Edmonton has boosted the population growth but has also provided easy access to other amenities, such as stores, restaurants, and entertainment. The new commercial development in Leduc is focused along the highway instead of the city core in hopes of attracting through traffic, but is not as easily accessible to local traffic.

## SUMMARY

These communities all have challenges, but they also each have specific approaches toward sustainability. The strategies implemented by these cities have started to develop community interaction, but seem to be lacking complete visions for the future; where overall schemes exist, architects are rarely involved.

Proximity to a large urban centre plays an important role in the continued growth of small cities. There is more population growth in communities that are close to large centres, but these communities fall easily into the category of “bedroom” communities. In the case of Beaumont, the majority of the residents do not work in the town, which can pull commercial activity out of the community, and lessen public interaction as people commute to and from their homes to work. Communities that are farther away, like Camrose tend to develop an internal strategy by providing the required amenities so people do not have to travel far from the community.

These communities are predominantly zoned for single uses; the residential, commercial, and industrial areas are distinct from each other. Encouraging “pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods that offer a mix of activities within walking distance of homes”<sup>23</sup> will start to promote interaction between citizens.

The Rural Studio is merely one example of an architect’s capacity to directly apply improvements to a community. The integration of architects in a leadership role and the involvement of community residents as both clients and collaborators begin to “engage the citizens in identifying a community vision for growth.”<sup>24</sup>; taking citizens from apathy to having a sense of pride in their community and what they can achieve.

There is not a single solution or strategy that works for every town, but by

examining existing approaches, several strategies become apparent that can be used to develop a set of design principles. The design strategies derived from the lessons learned in this chapter, as well as the analysis from the previous chapter, will be presented and applied in the following chapter.



## **03** DESIGN + APPROACH





## **APPROACH**

This thesis develops a set of design principles that will help promote a planned vision for the future development of Wetaskiwin. The purpose of these principles is to set up a framework for design that, when implemented, encourages social interaction, a sense of place, and community engagement and involvement during and after the planning process. These design principles were formed using two methods: through research of community and urban design methods and theory, as well as a thorough examination of the existing site conditions that included site visits, a personal connection to the community and key informant interviews (see Appendix A1).

The first part of this chapter outlines the design principles and strategies that define a complete and cohesive vision for the city itself. The second part presents components of an overall urban design for the City of Wetaskiwin. Strategies will be presented for each area using the design principles laid out at the beginning of the chapter. The third part will focus on Main Street and offer four site-specific designs that follow the presented strategies on a smaller scale. The designs proposed provide an example of what urban design areas of focus and buildings might look like. Community involvement in the planning and design process is essential to the success of the city's vision for its future.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### **Create standards for further development within the city**

Government, developers, and the community need to work together in order to provide a more cohesive form of development. Interaction needs to occur between the region and the city.

### **Promote social interaction**

Provide public spaces and common thoroughfares with varying functions to allow for informal interaction between individuals and groups.

### **Vary residential densities to enable interaction**

Mix single-family housing with medium- and high-density housing to intensify the fabric and create gathering spaces within the neighbourhood.

### **Develop strategies for multi-use zoning**

Combine different zoning types to help animate public areas: downtown, intersections of residential zones, vacant sites, and underutilized commercial areas and buildings.

### **Develop infrastructure that connects the community**

Use the infrastructure to tie together live, work, shopping, outreach, and other amenities. This will promote a mix of activities, allowing for more community interaction.

### **Create nodes of varying activity along trails and within parks**

Allow for a variety of activity that appeals to different people. Make the trails multifunctional. Organize benches, playgrounds, activity areas, tables, shaded areas, gardens, and recreational areas throughout the spaces.

### *References:*

*Mitchell (1997), Porterfield (1995)*

*Mitchell (1997), Porterfield (1995), Seasons (2006)*

*Wells (ND), Seasons (2006)*

*Wells (ND), Jacobs (1961), Oppenheimer Dean (2005)*

*Porterfield (1995), Jacobs (1961), Wells (ND)*

*Porterfield (1995), Jacobs (1961), Wells (ND)*

**Develop community interaction through the built environment**

Use building fabric and community amenities to form public spaces where individuals, groups, and families can interact with the spaces as well as a larger demographic of people.

*References:*

*Porterfield (1995), Jacobs (1961), Oppenheimer Dean (2005), Perry (2000)*

**Involve the community in developing a vision for the city**

Authorities, community associations, and citizens need to start a dialogue. Educate the community so that decisions can be made with full knowledge.

*Seasons (2006), Oppenheimer Dean (2005), Porterfield (1995), Jacobs (1961)*

**Provide connection to regional amenities**

Undertake feasibility studies on commuter/public trains and buses. See about partnering with other communities or piggybacking upon regional plans.

*Wells (ND), Porterfield (1995), Sieverts (2003)*

**Intensify urban fabric**

There are many vacant buildings and spaces throughout the city. Reclaim these for commercial, residential, and industrial use. Encourage more compact development by offering a wider variety of uses within a small area.

*Alexander (1979), Wells (ND), Porterfield (1995)*

**Connect community residents to their environment**

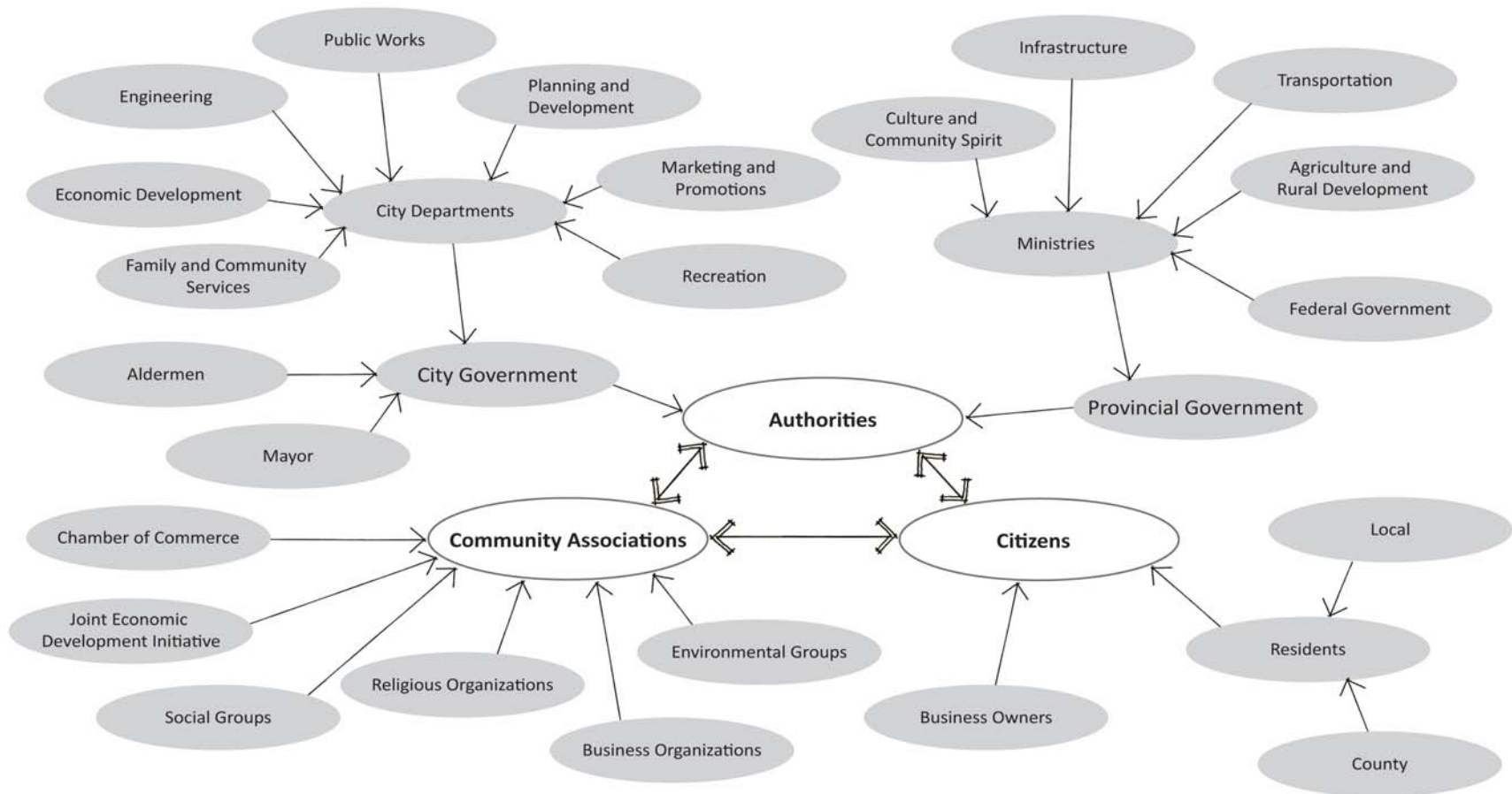
Promote a well-defined path system. Upgrade trails running through the city and connect to green spaces, commercial, institutional, and other community amenities.

*Jacobs (1961), Seasons (2006), Porterfield (1995)*

**Provide a sense of community**

Increase social amenities and tie them together throughout the city in order to connect residents and form community bonds both within the city and outside of it.

*Jacobs (1961), Oppenheimer Dean (2005), Seasons (2006), Porterfield (1995)*



	Role/Function	Capacity/Resource	Interest
Authorities	Administrative/service providing	Economic, Political, formal & Professional resource	Cooperation & understanding of public programs/efforts
Community Associations	Intermediate role between authorities & citizens	Informal network and contact/flexibility	Promotion & understanding of project/community act
Citizens	Participatory citizen role	Personal resource & experience	Personal/citizen

fig. 3.1 Actors Involved in the Planning Process

## **ACTORS**

These design principles are intended to guide the organization of the community. Strong leadership and community involvement are paramount to the success of an overall vision. The people of the community need to have a vested interest in seeing their community thrive. The municipality needs to engage citizens in the process from the start in order to enable the community to develop a clear and beneficial plan for its future. This will provide a greater sense of ownership and community identity as the projects and vision are realized.

In approaching an overall vision for the community, all the actors involved must play a part to inform decision-making at all levels. If the players involved in the community design are not found locally then the city must recruit expertise from elsewhere; this may include architects, engineers, urban planners, landscape architects, etc. The community can then learn from the knowledge and skills outside experts have to offer and develop these skills for future use.

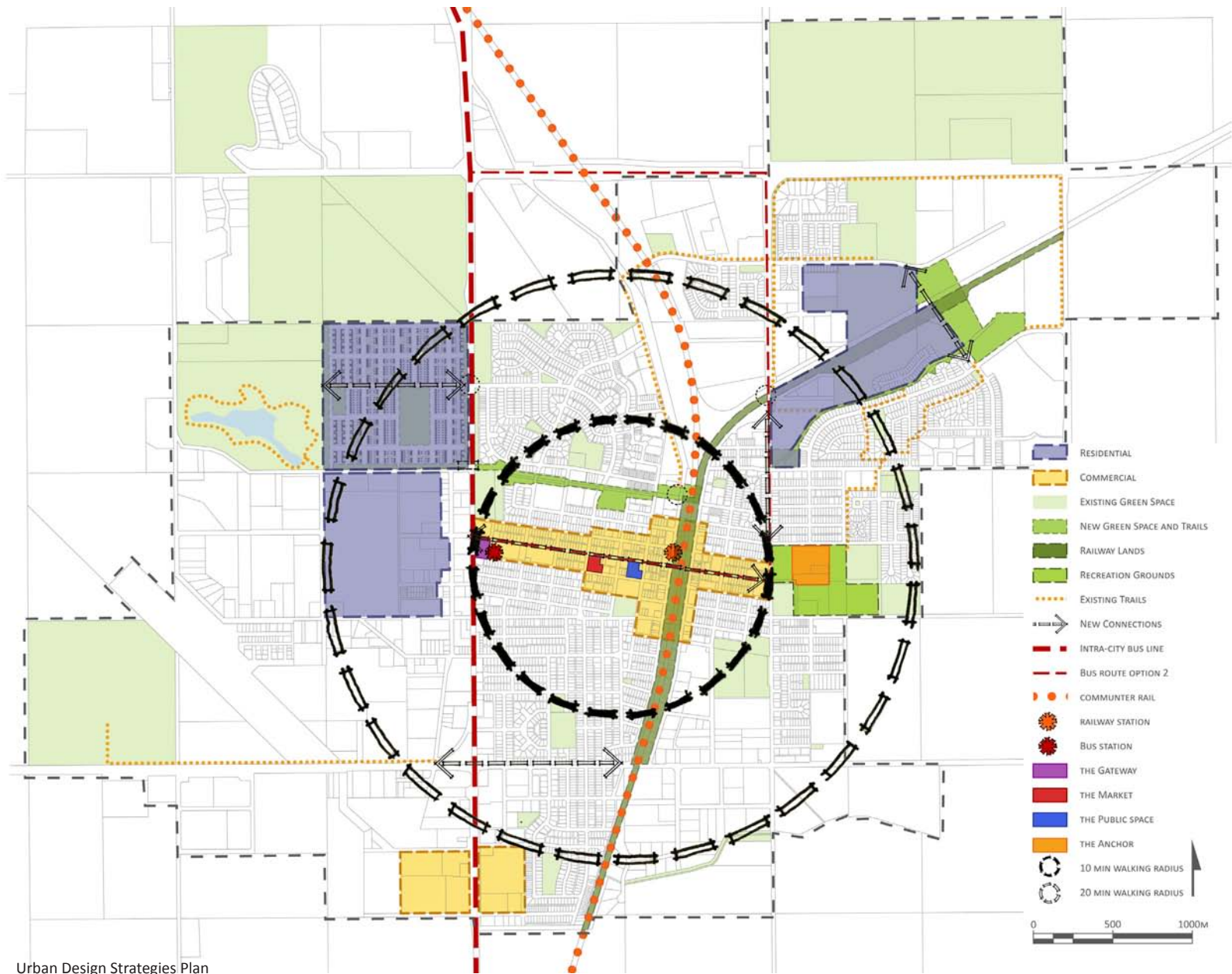


fig. 3.2 Urban Design Strategies Plan

## **URBAN DESIGN**

“In cities, liveliness and variety attract more liveliness; deadness and monopoly repel life. And this is a principal vital to not only the ways cities behave socially, but also the ways they behave economically.”<sup>1</sup> – Jane Jacobs

Although the site analysis discussed many areas, for the purpose of design this thesis will focus on four main areas: green spaces, connectors, residential, and commercial. The connection to community is currently undermined by the segregation of neighbourhoods, a lack of diversity in densities, outdated and underutilized social amenities and the distinction between zoned uses, like commercial and residential. The large number of motor vehicles has compounded this situation by increasing distances to basic requirements of daily life: employment, food, shelter and recreation. This resulting sprawl has brought out a disconnection at both the community and individual levels. The increase of social amenities will be important to the success of the projects in relation to community interaction and engagement.

## GREEN SPACES / PUBLIC SPACES

This proposal aims to connect the current trails to form a well-defined path system throughout the city by using infrastructure to tie together home-life, work, shopping, outreach and other amenities, promote the integration of activities and allow for more community interaction. The green spaces, public spaces, and trails will provide nodes of varying activity levels appealing to a diverse set of users. The trails will be expanded and new connection will be added. The system will be broken down into three different areas: the trail along the creek, the trail along the railway lands, and the connections between the trails and green spaces located along city streets.

The current trail running east-west along the creek will be upgraded and expanded to include larger trails for both bike and pedestrian access, as well as sitting areas and urban furniture. Crossings from both sides of the creek should be added for better access to the path. Connections to the pathway through residential areas should be made at regular intervals to ensure safety and ease of use of the trail and its amenities. Pedestrian flow will be enhanced with a pedestrian bridge that passes over highway 2A and two pedestrian crossing lights at other busy vehicular intersections. The main concept for this trail is the opportunity for a variety of activity levels, from high exercise to an evening stroll.

The current trail that runs along the railway will be extended north and south. In doing so, the trail will start to connect the community along its north-south axis instead of just east-west. The CN rail lands can be appropriated so that the spaces along the rail line can be adapted for an improved pedestrian experience. An art or history trail could wind through these spaces and provide moments for people to stop and rest. A concept that could be incorporated into this system is an art walk that could include local culture and historical significance; art and sculptures could be chosen from a competition, to encourage younger students







fig. 3.3 Flagstaff Urban Trail



fig. 3.4 "Bois de Boulogne" Exhibition, Paris



fig. 3.5 Chollas Creek, CA Trail Enhancement Program

and local artists to participate and have their own work shown along the trail. Another option is the use of historical signage along the trail to describe the origins of the community and provide an opportunity for residents to connect back to those origins. This could be done in conjunction with an art walk and may begin to form a cultural axis within the community.

Connections will be made along city streets in order to tie together the previous trails and form a cohesive trail system. The street trails will follow sidewalks, which will be enhanced by adding trees, a difference in paving, way finding, and street furniture. The street trails can then begin to connect the social amenities within town excluded by the green trails, in order to connect residents and form community bonds.

All the parks and trail systems should follow a set design standard. Urban furniture such as benches, tables, garbage receptacles, bike racks, light standards, and water fountains should be placed regularly along the trail. The style of the urban furniture should remain similar throughout in order to form a visual connection between the different trail systems and parks. The paths will be utilized if they offer a cohesive network amongst social areas of the community which the citizens can easily use and follow.

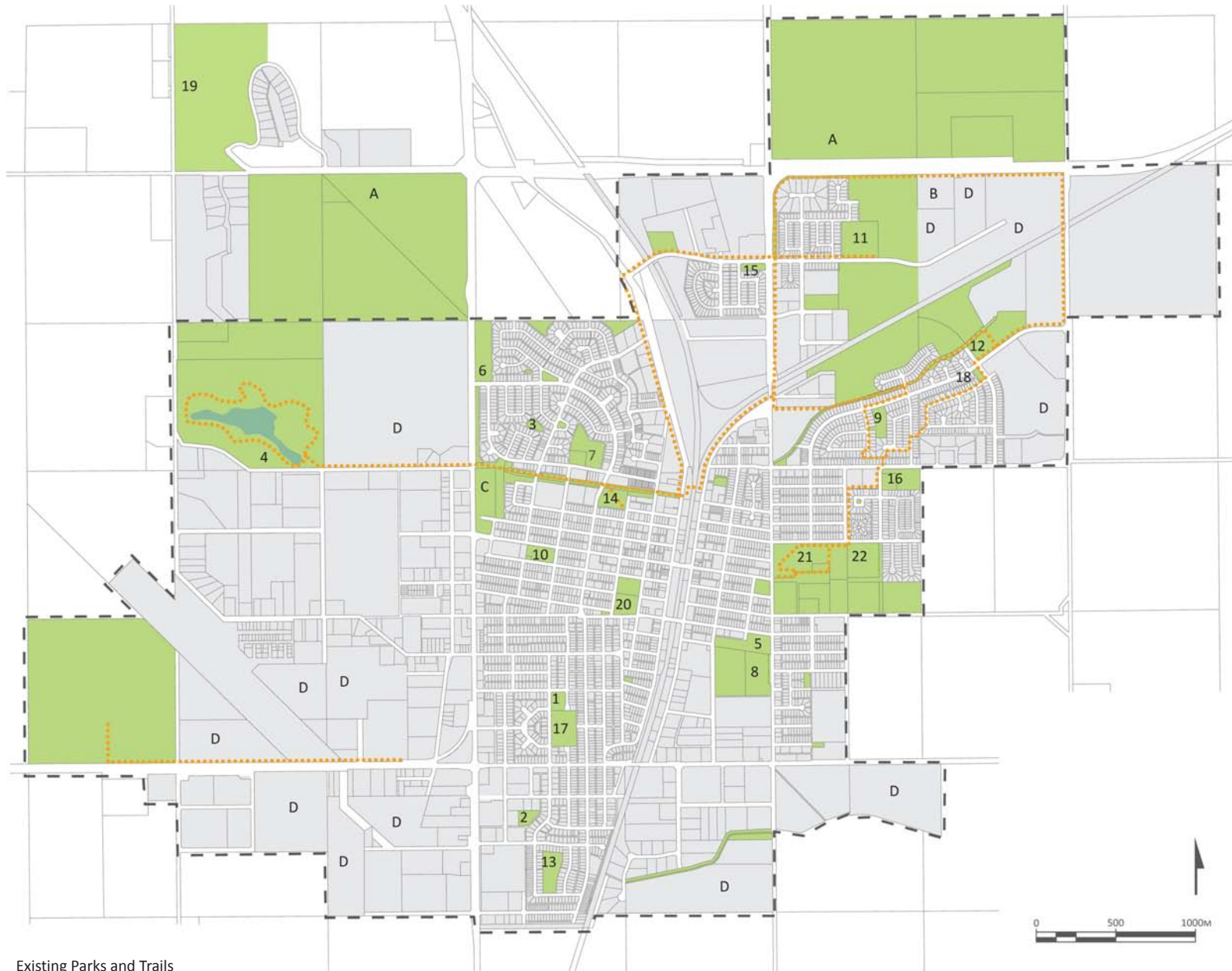


fig. 3.6 Existing Parks and Trails

## WETASKIWIN PARKS

Park	Location	Open Space	Natural Green Space	Play Ground	Picnic Table / Bench	Water Body Nearby	Trail Access	Washroom	Sports Fields	Other
1	Ashoro Park	54 St & 43 Ave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
2	Back Alley Park	Off 39 Ave, btwn 55 St & 54 St	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						
3	Back Alley Park	Behind Elm Cres & Oak Dr	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						
4	By-The-Lake Park	6128 - 56 Ave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		Building for Group Use, Change Areas, Wet & Dry Playgrounds, Canoeing, Biking and walking trails, and Winter Activities
5	C. B. McMurdo School	54 St & 43 Ave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						Basketball Hoop
6	Centennial Drive Park	At Centennial Dr & Hwy 2A	<input type="checkbox"/>						<input type="checkbox"/>	Basketball Courts
7	Centennial School	5310 - 55 Ave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	Baseball Diamond
8	Clear Vista School	4510 - 47 St	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	Basketball Hoop, 3 Soccer Pitches
9	Garden Meadows Park	Garden Meadows Dr & Garnet Cres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
10	Jubilee Park	53 St & 50 Ave	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>				<input type="checkbox"/>	
11	Kinsmen Park	222 Northmount Dr	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	Kinsmen Hall, Baseball Diamond, and 6 mini Soccer Pitches
12	Knights of Columbus	East end of Garden Meadows Dr	<input type="checkbox"/>				<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	2 Baseball Diamonds
13	Lynalta Park	37 Ave & 54 St	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						Baseball Diamond
14	Montgomery Park	53 St & 52 Ave	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>			
15	Northmount Drive Park	South of Hospital on Northmount Dr		<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>			Basketball Hoop
16	Norwood School	5505 - 44 Ave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	Basketball Hoop, Baseball Diamond
17	Parkdale School	4107 - 54 St	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>	Basketball Hoop, Baseball Diamond
18	Parkside Drive Park	Parkside Dr & Garden Meadows Dr		<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>			Basket Ball Hoop
19	Peace Hills Park	Landfill Road, North of Golf Course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				Baseball Diamond, Walking trail, BBQ Area, Off-leash dog run, Disc Golf, and Winter Activities
20	Queen Elizabeth School	4720 - 51 St	<input type="checkbox"/>						<input type="checkbox"/>	Baseball Diamond
21	Recreation Grounds	47 St & 52 Ave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4 Baseball Diamonds, Concession, Rugby,Soccer, Football, 4 Tennis Courts, Track, Batting Cage, Horseshoe Pits, Pool, Skate Park, Curling Rink, 2 Hockey Rinks,Civic Centre, and a Basketball Hoop
22	Sacred Heart School	4419 - 52 Ave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	Basketball Hoop

- A Golf Course
- B Camp Ground
- C Cemetery
- D Farmland

fig. 3.7 Chart of Wetaskiwin Parks



fig. 3.8 New Parks and Trails



fig. 3.9 Forgotten Rail - Paris, France



fig. 3.12 North Toronto Community Centre - Toronto, ON



fig. 3.15 St. James Town Library - Toronto, ON



fig. 3.19 Climbing Wall



fig. 3.10 Urban Trail - #8 The Iron - Asheville, NC



fig. 3.13 Proposed Pedestrian Overpass - WndSOR, ON



fig. 3.16 Railway Station Platform at Clare Country Park



fig. 3.11 Urban Trail - #2 Crossroads - Asheville, NC



fig. 3.14 Suspended Running Track - Cincinnati



fig. 3.17 Parc de l'Espanya Industrial - Barcelona



fig. 3.18 Parc de l'Espanya Industrial - Barcelona



fig. 3.20 Milton Leisure Centre, Milton, ON



fig. 3.21 New Transportation Routes



fig. 3.22 Monorail, Indianapolis



fig. 3.23 Ecolibus - RTC Quebec City



fig. 3.24 Intra-City Bus

## TRANSPORTATION

The development of an intercity bus that connects surrounding areas will provide opportunities for nearby smaller communities to work or shop in Wetaskiwin. There is already consideration within the city and county about joining with other communities to form an intra-city network or piggybacking upon the regional plans. The Greyhound station would move from the partially vacant mall to a central location at the intersection of the city Highway and Main Street. Moving the station to a new building will provide a gateway to the city centre and easy access for both cars and pedestrians to the bus station. A second option on the bus route allows for greater access within the city for the people who live there. It follows a route that accesses amenities in the downtown core, including, but not limited to, city hall, library, recreation areas, schools and the hospital.

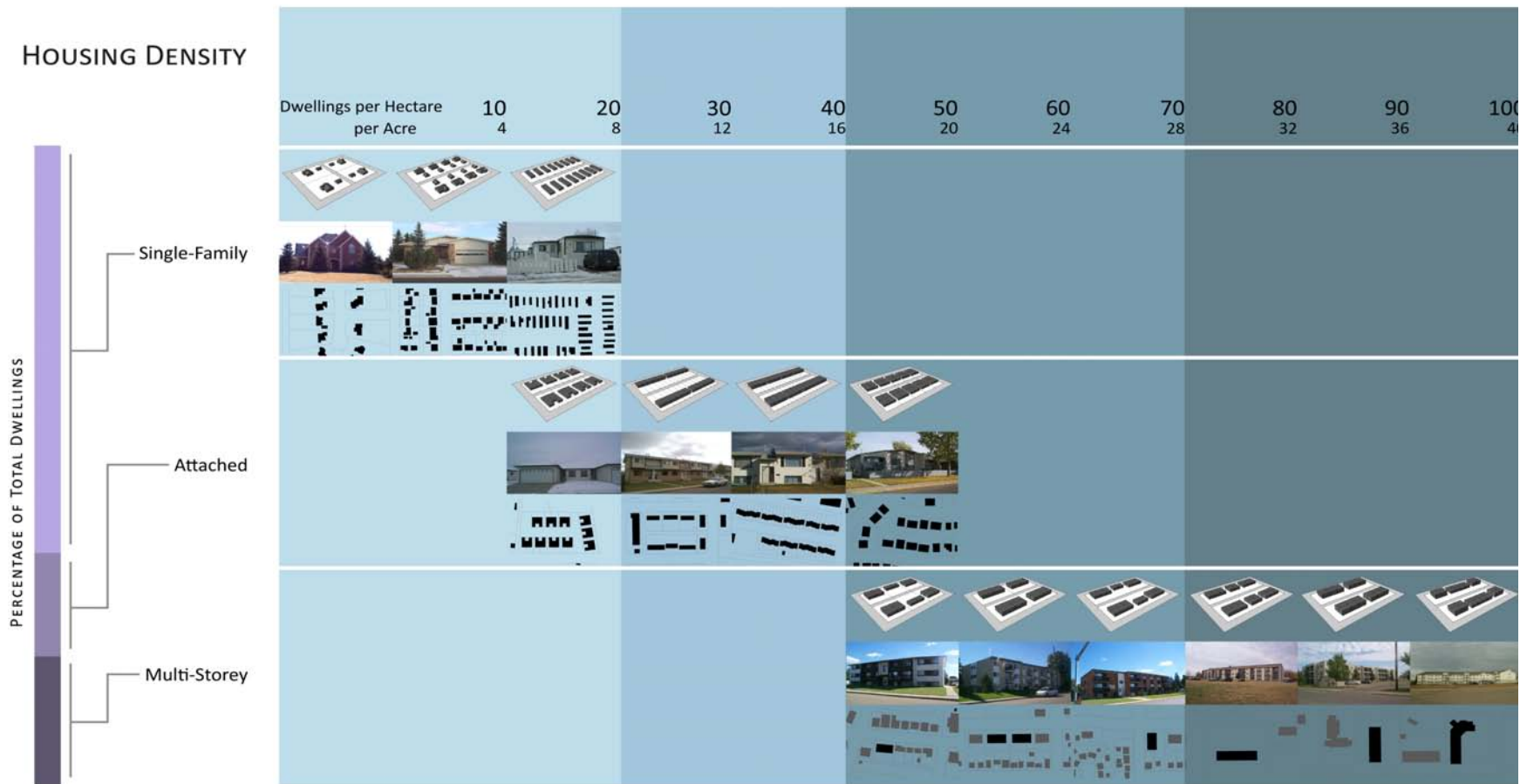
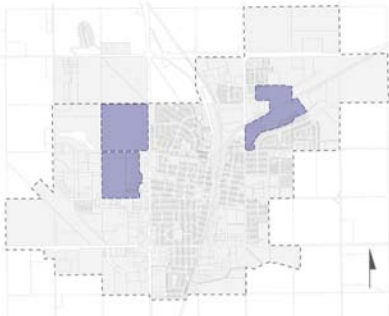


fig. 3.25 Existing Housing Density in Wetaskiwin





## **RESIDENTIAL TYPOLOGY**

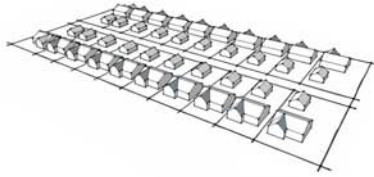
In the last five years, the recent oil boom has brought a residential influx into Wetaskiwin. Housing prices in the larger urban areas have risen extremely high, and people are looking for alternatives. In a city with 4,770 dwellings, an increase of 300 new residences in a short period of time is a large expansion. The space within the city limits is starting to disappear with the construction of many new single-family residential units. This becomes an opportunity to vary the type and density of residential areas as well as bring mixed uses into neighbourhoods.

In existing residential neighbourhoods, methods of varying residential densities in existing neighbourhoods will help promote interaction; there will be a higher likelihood of crossing paths with others in the community, as more people will reside in them. By reclaiming vacant land, or rezoning areas for a higher density and building new housing, the fabric can be intensified by mixing medium and high-density housing in areas that are typically single-family housing. For example, the re-zoning of the downtown core will allow for residential units above ground level stores, helping animate the streets by bringing a consistent presence of people to the area and businesses.

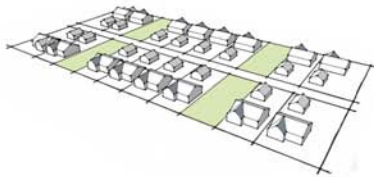


fig. 3.26 Proposed Residential Plan

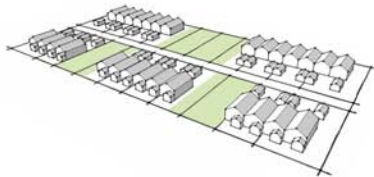
01 Typical Single Family Housing



02 Single Family Housing w/ Shared Gardens



03 Row Housing w/ Shared Gardens



04 Multi-storey Housing w/ Shared Gardens

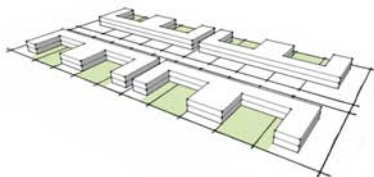


fig. 3.27 Proposed Residential Blocks

The intervention designed for this thesis is located in a farmer's field within the city limits. Using a typical Wetaskiwin block layout, a grid was set up and the blocks organised. Agriculture has played a role in the lives of many Wetaskiwin residents and the city's location in an agricultural area brings many retired farmers into the community; therefore, the design incorporates urban agriculture and community shared gardens. The new layout will increase density by adding row housing and multi-unit buildings while allowing for a larger amount of public green space where individuals, groups, and families can interact.

The shared gardens will vary in size and will be interspersed throughout the neighbourhood, using mixes of community and co-op gardens that include vegetables, herbs, fruits, and flowers. Residents will be able to interact with others and share a common interest in the gardens. The large field in the middle of the plan will act as agricultural space, with room for small crops, sheep, goats, chickens, and even cows. Not only will this design bring people together, but the food can then be consumed by the gardeners or sold at the farmer's market, generating even greater opportunity for contact within the community.





fig. 3.28 Community Gardens in a low density neighbourhood



fig. 3.32 St. Helier Estate - London, UK



fig. 3.34 High Point Market Garden - Seattle, WA



fig. 3.33 Urban Loft Houses - Texas



fig. 3.35 Mixed Use Condos - Vancouver, BC



fig. 3.29 Social Housing - London, UK



fig. 3.31 La Finquita community garden - Holyoke, MA



fig. 3.36 Community Garden - Edmonton, AB



fig. 3.30 High Point Market Garden - Seattle, WA



fig. 3.37 Bourne Estate (1901-7) - London, UK



fig. 3.38 North Hills East - Raleigh, NC



fig. 3.41 The Grove Retail - Maple Grove, Mn



fig. 3.42 Griffintown Retail - Montreal, QC



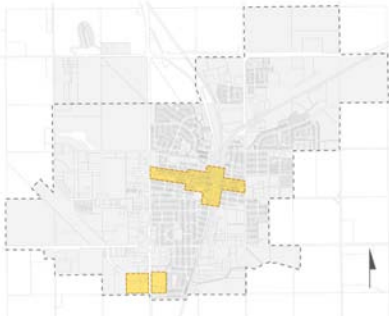
fig. 3.39 Mixed Use Housing - Pittsburgh, Pa



fig. 3.40 Mixed Use Housing - Pittsburgh, Pa



fig. 3.43 Mixed Use Big Box Retail - Arlington, Va



## COMMERCIAL TYPOLOGY

There are two main commercial areas within Wetaskiwin. The original commercial zone is the downtown area along Main Street and the railway. It is the origin of the community and includes a small historical area. In the 1970s, commercial businesses started to shift to Highway 2A, running along the west side of town. This has now become the focal area for Wetaskiwin's commercial growth.

Highway 2A is populated by strip malls, fast food, car dealerships, and gas stations. It is highly vehicular and pedestrian amenities are nonexistent. The mall and the big box shopping area at the south end of the strip are predominantly vacant. The need to drive a car to get to these shopping areas and the lack of pedestrian amenities has limited social interaction among residents. Redesigning the big box area into a more pedestrian friendly space is a key possibility, and could include eco-friendly stores, park space, and mixed uses. The regional mall is currently over fifty percent vacant, especially with the departure of its three major anchor stores, Safeway, Canadian Tire, and Wal-Mart, into separate buildings. One option for the mall may be to change its actual use from retail to mixed use. This could include bringing in community amenities or residences to promote a mix of activities that allow for community interaction.

Main Street and the downtown commercial zone are prominent connectors in the city and have the potential to benefit immensely from provisions of public space. Their addition of varying functions will allow for informal interaction between individuals and groups. This thesis presents four interventions along Main Street. Running right through the heart of downtown, they include proposals to increase social amenities and connect them with existing public areas throughout the city to connect residents and form community bonds both within the city and outside of it.



fig. 3.44 Site 1 Existing Photographs





### **SITE 1 - THE GATE**

This site is located at the junction of Main Street and Highway 2A. The intersection is flanked by a fast food restaurant, gas station, and a Chamber of Commerce/Information Centre that is set back and nondescript. The only distinguishing object at this intersection is the recently renovated historic water tower on the northeast corner that is still currently in use.

The water tower is an important icon for the city and the proposal for this site will compliment the water tower to create a gateway to the city core. A new Greyhound bus station placed on the southeast corner of the intersection, along with the water tower will frame the entrance to Main Street and create a connection into the region with a notable point of entry. The location of the bus station adjacent to the information centre, and within walking distance to most amenities encourages a pedestrian-friendly environment for passengers coming into town.



fig. 3.45 Site 1 Aerial Plan

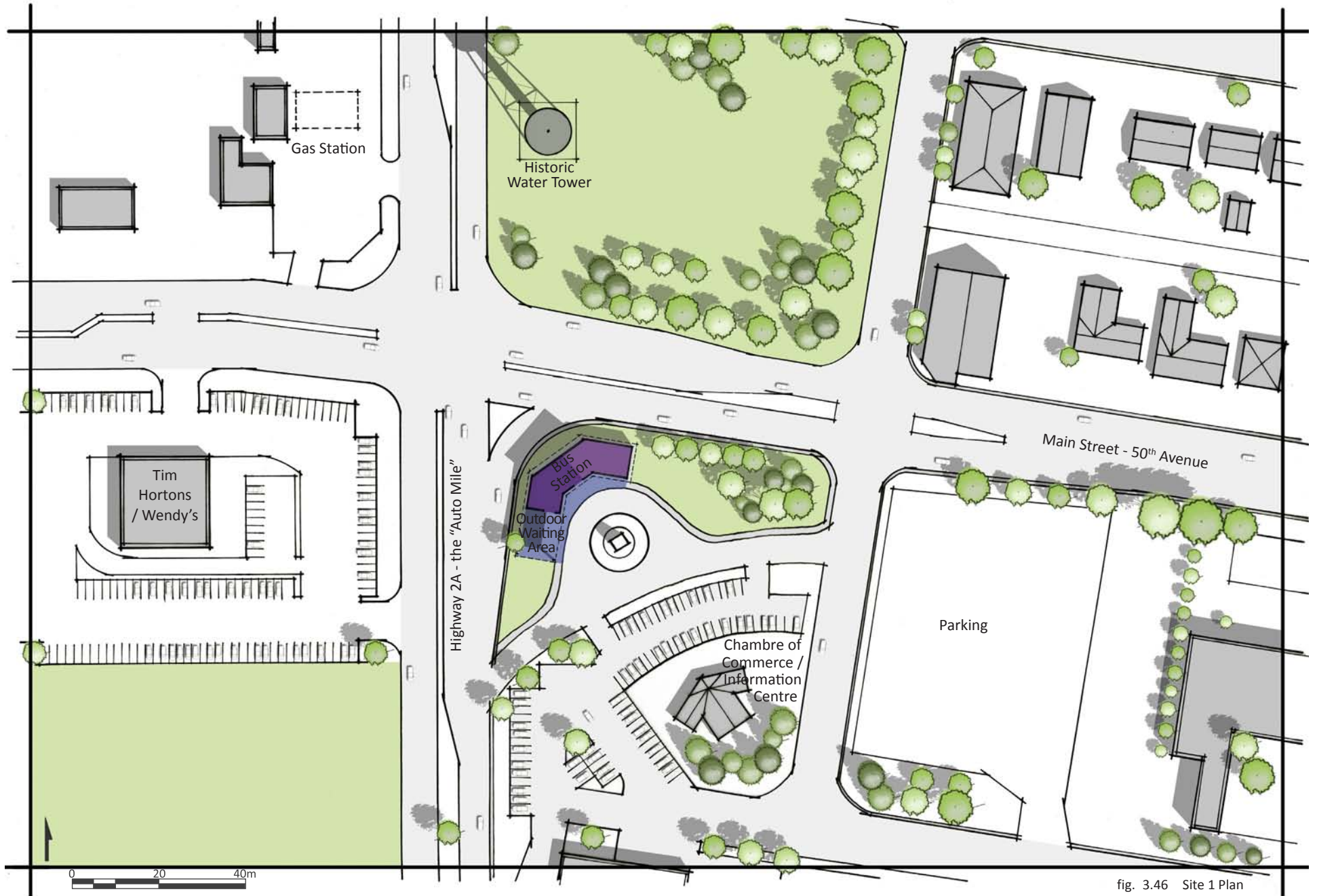


fig. 3.46 Site 1 Plan





fig. 3.47 Site 1 Elevation



fig. 3.48 Existing Site 1 Photograph

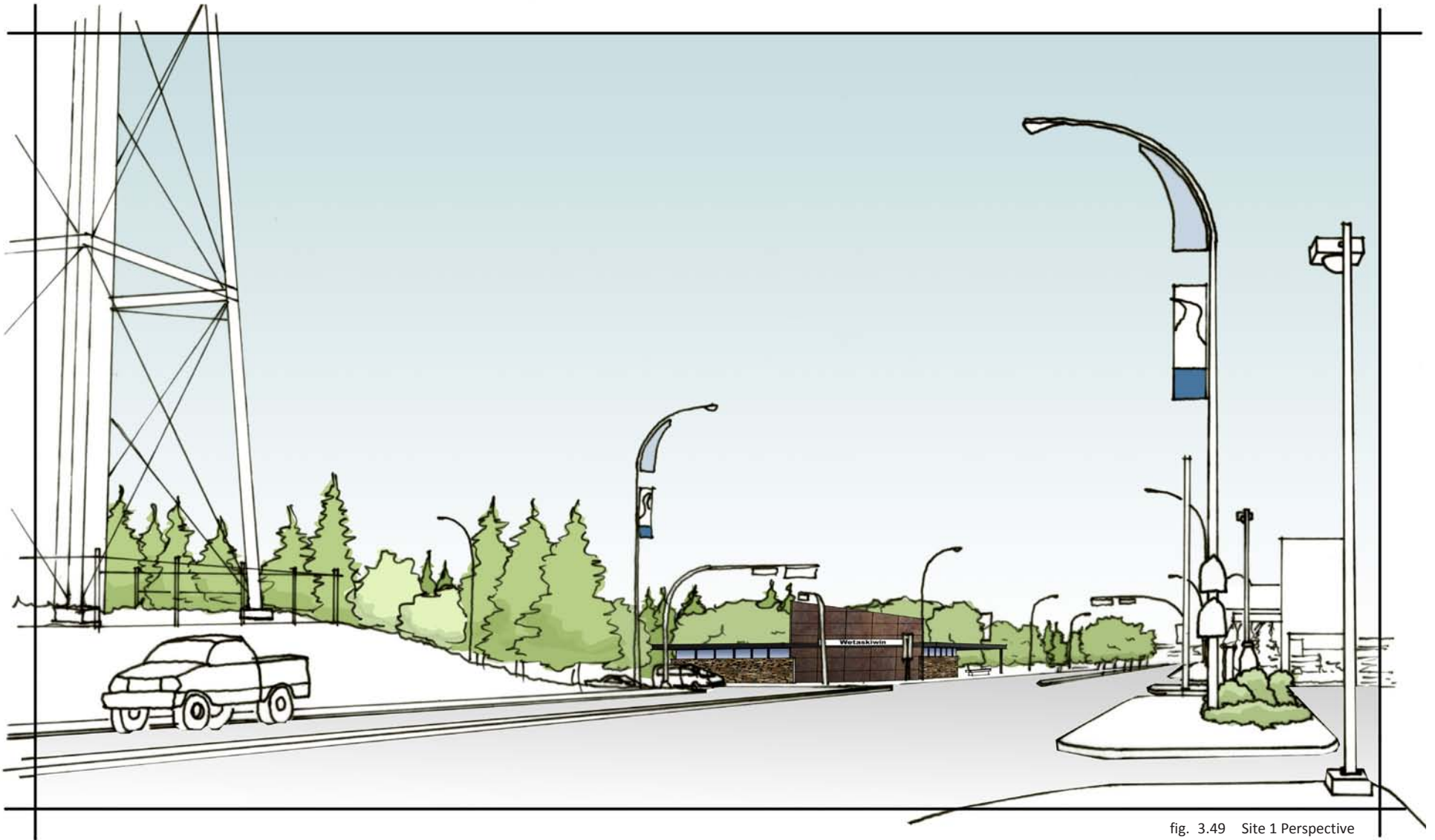


fig. 3.49 Site 1 Perspective

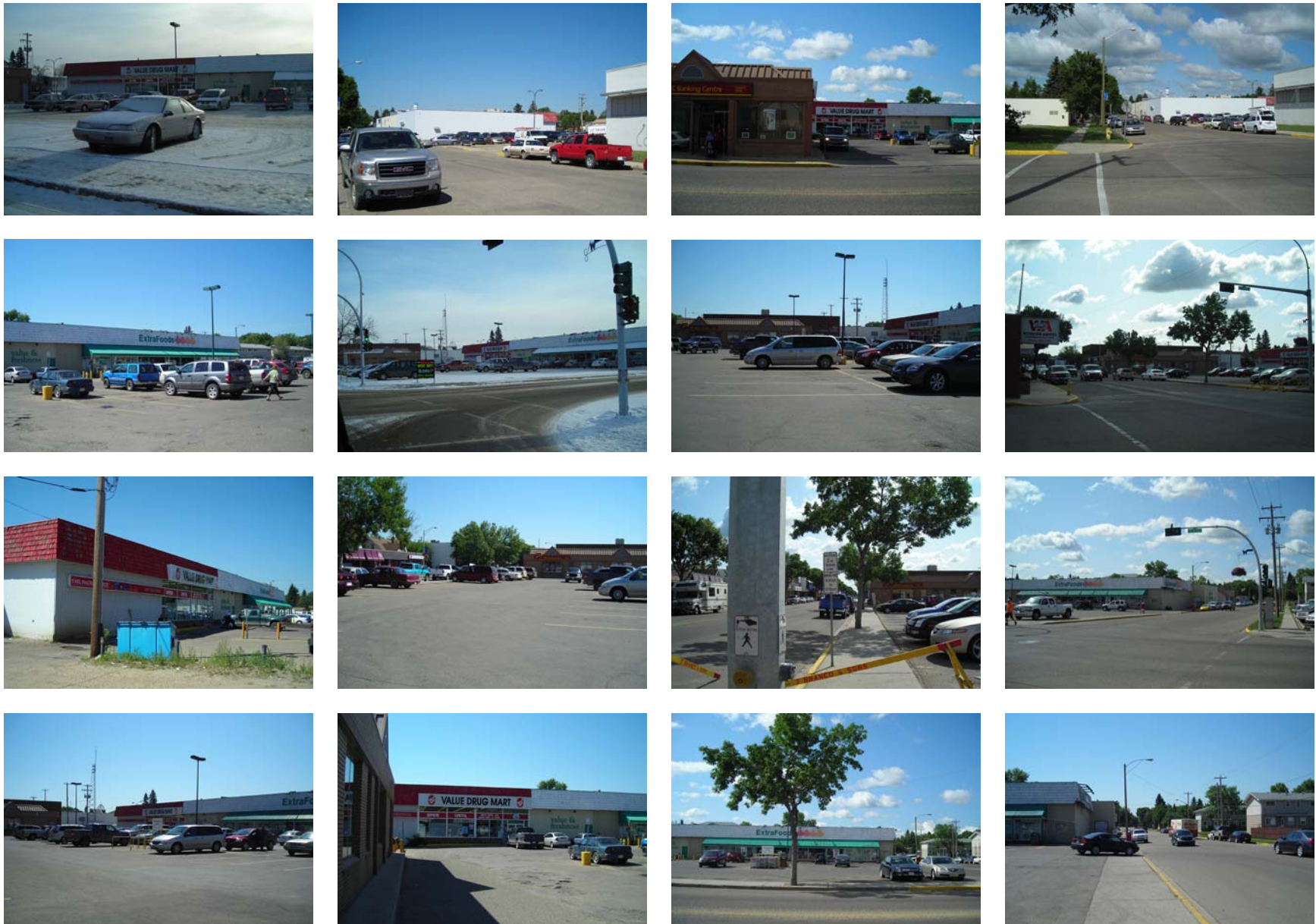


fig. 3.50 Site 2 Existing Photographs





## SITE 2 - THE MARKET

Site two is located at the corner of 50th Avenue and 53rd Street. It marks the beginning of the main street commercial area in the city core. The site currently includes a large parking lot, Value Drug Mart, Extra Foods and a CIBC bank. Extra Foods is slated to be moving to a new site in the highway commercial area, which will leave yet another large vacant building.

The proposal for the site is a new market and incubator store space. The market at this site is in a central location within easy walking distance of many residential areas. Proposed is a renovation of the current Extra Foods building to utilize existing meat coolers, fridges, and freezers to allow local farmers to sell meat and cheese products at the market, consequently bringing in more local goods. The market will take over a smaller portion of the existing space, as it is only open one day a week and can spill out into the parking lot during the summer.

The larger portion of the building will be dedicated to incubator stores that will allow new businesses to start in an affordable public space and build up their cliental until they are able to move into a larger space. Typically, incubators provide hands-on management assistance and arrange exposure to business or technical support services. They also offer entrepreneurial firms shared office services, access to equipment, flexible leases, and expandable space—all under one roof. By providing a separate entrance and an atrium space to divide the two uses, the incubator stores will be able to set their own hours separate from those of the market.



fig. 3.51 Site 2 Aerial Map



fig. 3.52 Site 2 Parking Plan



fig. 3.53 Site 2 Market Plan

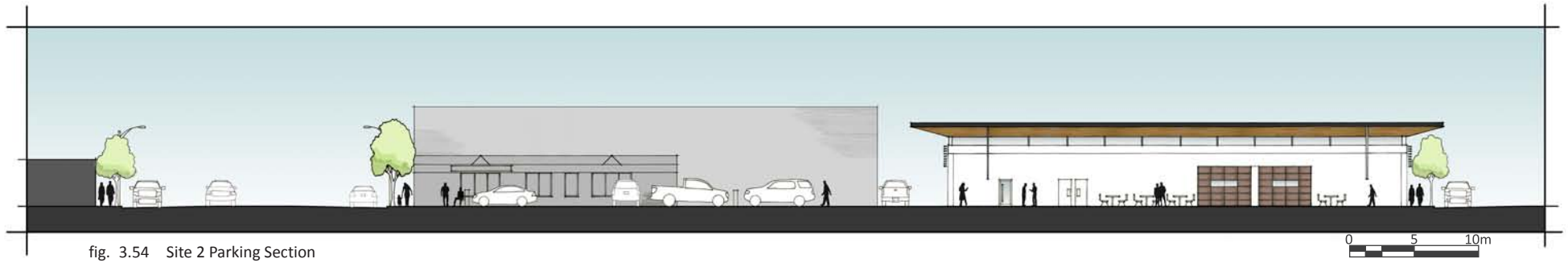


fig. 3.54 Site 2 Parking Section

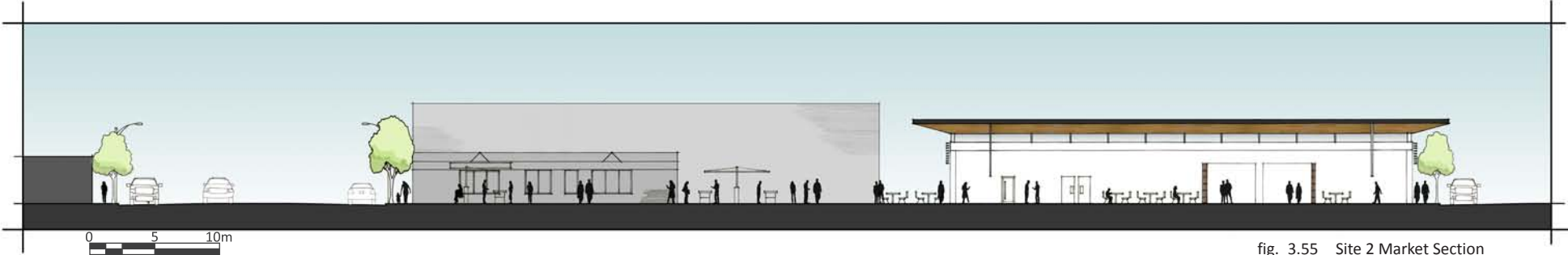


fig. 3.55 Site 2 Market Section

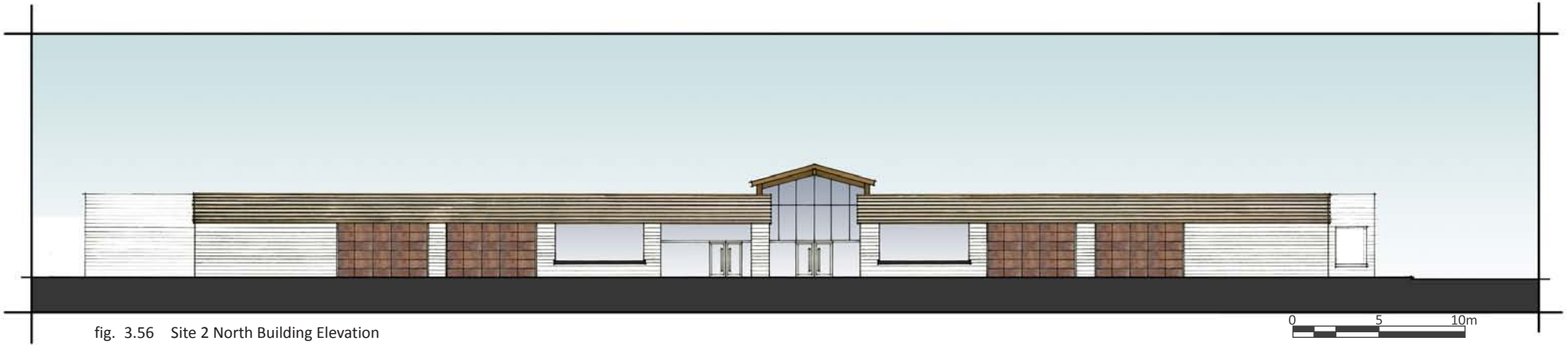


fig. 3.56 Site 2 North Building Elevation



fig. 3.57 Site 2 North Public Space Elevation



fig. 3.58 Existing Site 2 Photograph



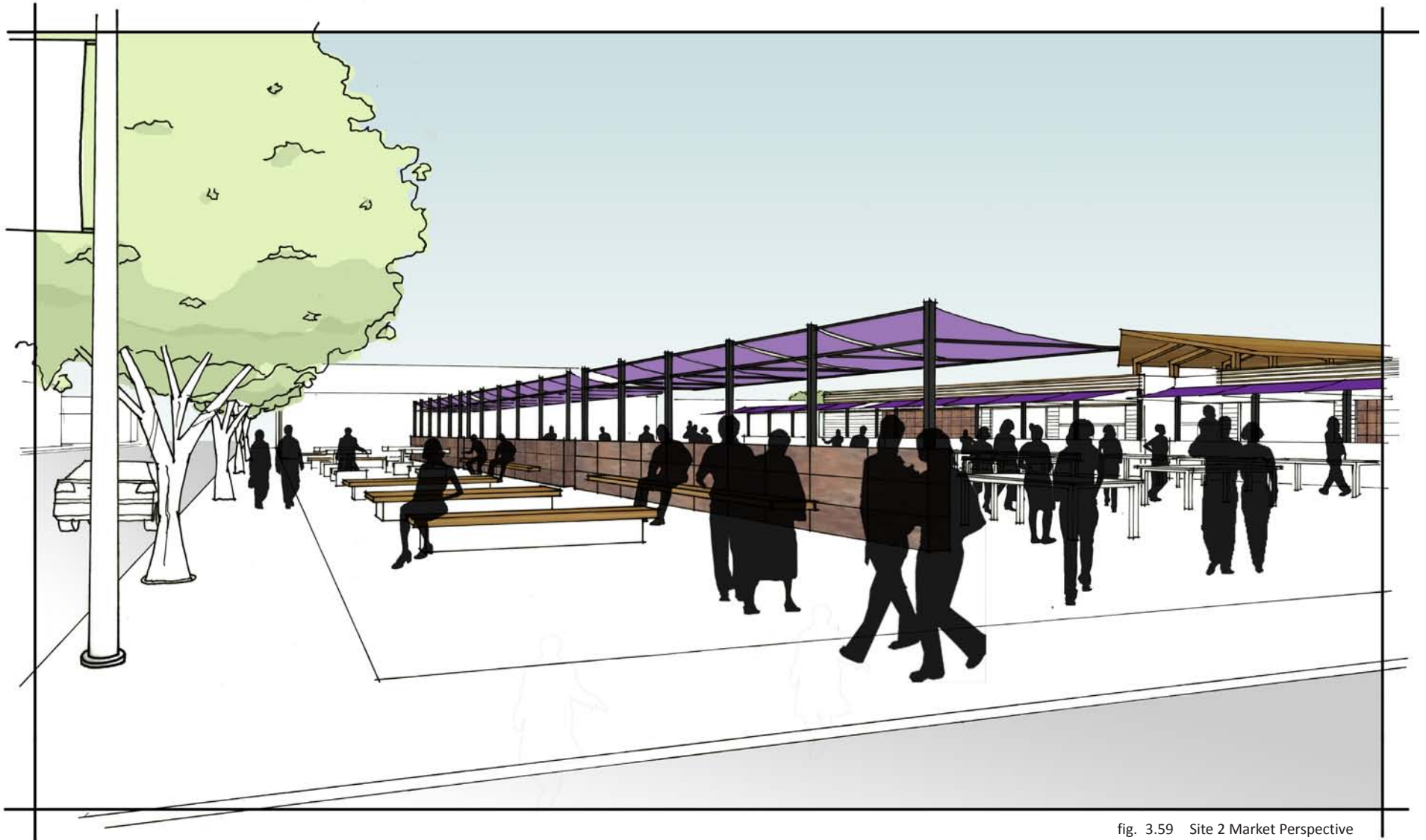


fig. 3.59 Site 2 Market Perspective



fig. 3.60 Site 3 Existing Photographs



### **SITE 3 - THE PUBLIC SPACE**

Site three is located one block off Main Street (50th Avenue) on 51st Street. This site is the previous location of the Wetaskiwin city hall and as a historically significant building it cannot be demolished. The fire department, located at the back of the building, has moved locations. Currently, the city archives are housed in the basement and the rest of the space sits empty.

The proposed intervention is an addition to the existing building. Access from Main Street is provided to the new building via a new urban square that is formed by demolishing three buildings along the street. An aspect of the removal of these buildings is to illustrate to the city that with good reason it can be appropriate to reconsider the permanence of a particular building. The current tenants could be moved into underutilized buildings with more suitable spaces, as there are many vacant buildings in the downtown core.

The proposed program for this site is a conference centre, exhibition and gallery space and the urban square connecting the building to Main Street. The new square will become a type of public forum that provides the gallery and conference centre the ability to extend out. The city and community will have a common place to hold events and exhibitions where individuals, groups, and families can interact with the new and historical spaces and with a larger demographic of people.



fig. 3.61 Site 3 Aerial Map

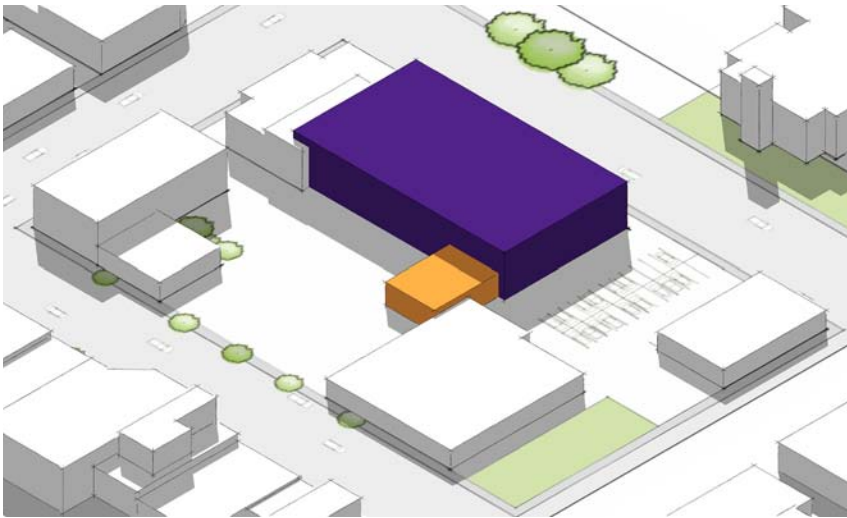


fig. 3.62 Site 3 Axonometric Diagram



fig. 3.63 Site 3 Plan



fig. 3.64 Site 3 North Elevation



fig. 3.65 Site 3 South Elevation



fig. 3.66 Existing Site 3 Photograph



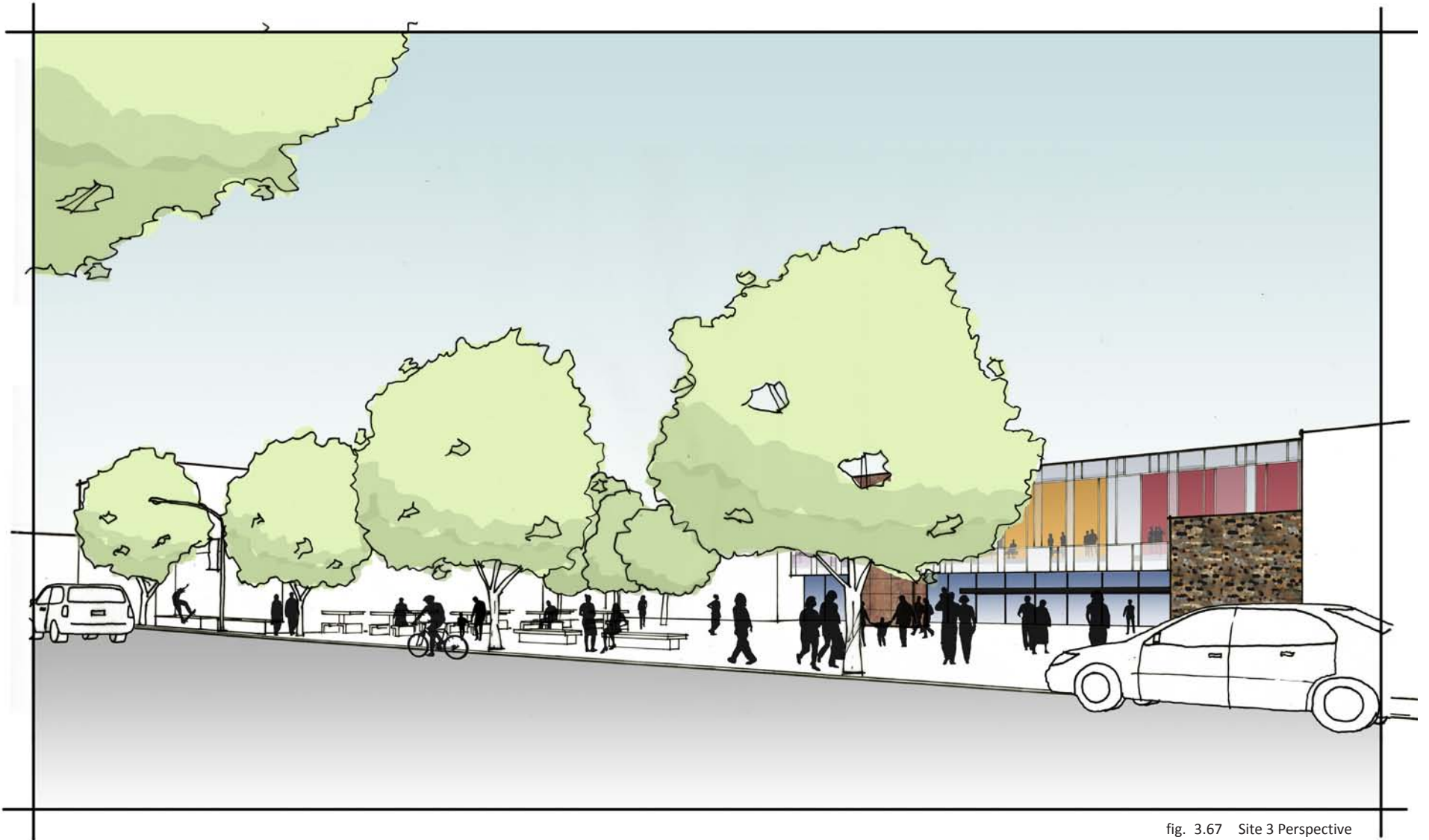


fig. 3.67 Site 3 Perspective



fig. 3.68 Site 4 Existing Photographs



#### **SITE 4 - THE ANCHOR**

Site four anchors the east end of Main Street. As the community's main recreation grounds, it contains the facilities for many sporting activities, including tennis, baseball, hockey, curling, swimming, football, and track and field. The recreation grounds are currently at full spatial capacity.

The proposed building will be an amalgamation of a library, aquatic centre, community rooms, and a field house/fitness centre. The parking lot is to be re-oriented with north-south drive lanes to allow for easy access to both complexes. A wider median between parking stalls follows the axis from the entrance of the civic centre through to the atrium flanked by the new building, a connection to the city trail system and residential grid beyond.

The community rooms will connect all the spaces together, allowing for views into the library, aquatic centre and fitness centre. Seniors will have an indoor walking trail, particularly helpful during winter months, that connects the community rooms and main parts of the building and provides ample circulation space with nodes of varying levels of activity.



fig. 3.69 Site 4 Aerial Map

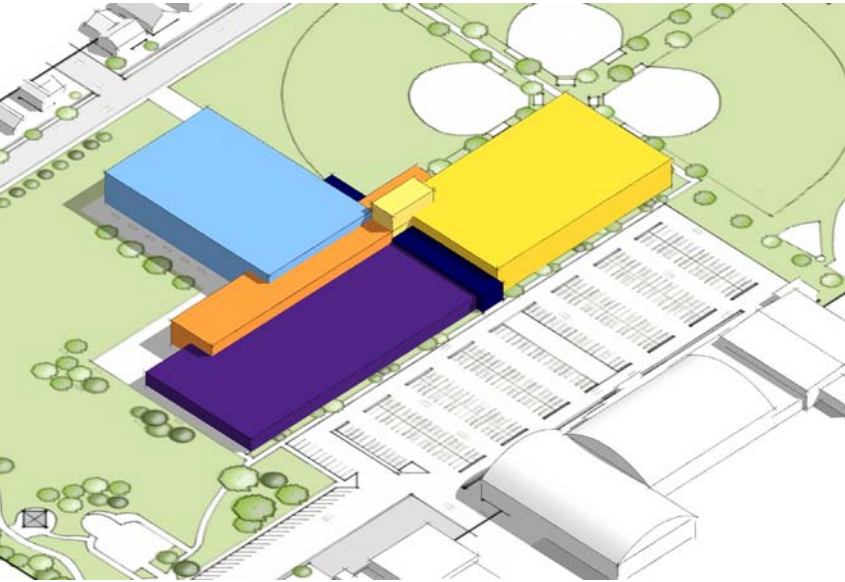


fig. 3.70 Site 4 Axonometric Diagram



fig. 3.71 Site 4 Plan



fig. 3.72 Site 4 South Elevation



fig. 3.73 Site 4 West Elevation



fig. 3.74 Existing Site 4 Photograph





fig. 3.75 Site 4 Perspective



fig. 3.76 Existing Site 4 Photograph



fig. 3.77 Site 4 Perspective



## **CONCLUSION**

This thesis contends that the lack of architecture and urban design research focused on rural communities, specifically, the role of architecture in promoting interaction, has led to disconnect at both the community and individual levels. This detachment affects long-term development plans, particularly the degree of integration between economic, social, and environmental planning, and the extent of community participation.

The focus of this thesis is the formation of a set of design principles that, when implemented, act as a catalyst to foster a sense of place and encourage social interaction, community engagement and involvement. The goal of these principles is to establish guidelines that communities can adapt to their own circumstances, keeping in mind that this adaptation may require a set of external actors; as such, city officials must recruit the necessary expertise. Strong community leadership and a willingness to work together toward a common vision are paramount to the overall success of the community plan. It is vital to define long-term goals that the community can realistically work towards. These goals must be attainable and projects must be implemented incrementally to keep the process moving forward and the community engaged. Municipalities should include their citizens in the process from initial planning and design stages to encourage a comprehensive, clear and beneficial plan.

The design proposals for this thesis had two main influences: meetings with key informants; and the design principles. The meetings with key

informants allowed for a realistic approach to the site selections and specific program for the each project. For example, the city has plans to build a new aquatic centre, with hopes of combining it with the library and, in the future, a field house. Therefore, the program for Site Four's design includes these three key elements. The proposals are something that, when presented to the city, will be seen as realistic and attainable options.

The design principles helped form the designs in a variety of ways; they increase density and mix uses and provide infrastructure at varying scales, from buildings to the region as a whole. The mixing of different types of activities and uses provide places for interaction amongst a variety of individuals and groups.

The proposals are intended to be part of a larger series of achievable goals that acknowledges that not every project be funded simultaneously. The first thing Wetaskiwin needs is the expansion and connection of the trail system. The ability to easily traverse a city by foot allows for accidental interactions that would not happen during vehicular travel. Developing this infrastructure will tie together a mix of activities and areas that instigate community interaction. Once this has been achieved the next step will be based on the immediate needs of the community. These needs should be established by discussing directly with the members of the community itself and involving them in the decisions for both the next step(s) and the larger future plan.

At the next scale, the move of the greyhound station connects Wetaskiwin by providing infrastructure that also integrates itself close to the center of the community, thereby promoting greater interaction between passengers and residents.

One of the main goals of the principles is to connect different groups of people to form a common bond through the use of the new spaces. The move of the market to Site Two from two separate city edge locations to

a central location will provide easy accessibility for all citizens. The site is at a connection point between residential areas and the downtown commercial core. This move not only makes use of a partially vacant building but will increase the exchange between citizens within the downtown commercial district. Proximity to community is key in the success of the market. The addition of coolers allows local farmers to sell their products and incubator stores provides a public space with greater visibility for start up businesses. Combining different businesses within the same space will allow for an intermixing of local businesses to create a colourful and dynamic commercial base ready to spread into the city.

The proposal for Site Three is a program that has been discussed within the Development Department and city council, although there is minimal community demand for a new conference centre. The program is intended to open up the site and provide a common area for community gatherings. The conference centre will bring groups from other areas of the county into the downtown core, opening the heart of the city to new consumers. The art gallery exhibition space in this proposition is multi-functional; it can showcase local artists, provide a gathering space for high school concerts and art exhibitions, or open up into the square for community events. The design principles used in the program and spaces of this building will bring people of different backgrounds and interests into a common zone by making provisions for a variety of activities that encourage social interaction.

For the City of Wetaskiwin, these possibilities need not be limited to the interventions included in this thesis. Potential exists for a variety of future projects; for example, areas of further research can include an in-depth look at the economics of rural communities and its effect on sustainability. This analysis can be done in conjunction with the design principles presented in this thesis. There is an opportunity to meet and work with civic leaders and citizens of the community by presenting the ideas and concepts of this thesis to an audience selected by the

Development Officer as well as the public at large. This thesis may be the catalyst necessary for Wetaskiwin to progress in a future plan for the city as it provides options of development with clear outcomes that the community can. The process can then continue in the collaboration with the community to articulate and adopt of a set of design principles and strategies, after which, achievable projects and goals can be established. Moreover, these design principles can be employed to to other western communities to test their applicability.

The design principles outlined in this thesis are the beginning of a process that will work towards a common goal. They initiate a dialogue of possibilities that can be turned into a vision for the future and need not be limited to the interventions proposed. A collaborative effort will provide a greater sense of ownership and community identity as projects and visions are developed and fully realized. These strategies can be applied to many types of projects and communities, though the first requirement for implementation is flexibility in the techniques employed. This is especially important given that no two communities are exactly alike and communities as entities are always in flux. There is neither a single solution nor strategy that works for every town; the use of a set of standards that informs design and planning processes will ultimately lead to a cohesive community vision.







## ENDNOTES

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# APPENDIX



## **KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS**

The potential participants included adults (over 18 years old) who are professionals that work, live and are involved in local government and community interest/service groups. The key informants who are interviewed will represent the various components of the community ranging from community services to municipal government. Out of approximately thirty participants contacted only three agreed to take part in the one on one interviews.

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

The key informants will be given the same standardized set of open-ended interview questions to encourage the consistency of the data gathering. As open-ended questions, participants are encouraged to answer each of the questions. They may return/refer to previous questions/answers at their own discretion to further compose their opinions:

### **Community Issues**

Section A asks general questions about positive and negative issues facing Wetaskiwin. The purpose is to test awareness of respondents' knowledge about their community by asking them to decide on what values/parameters that they place on their community. This question also helps to identify issues and opportunities that they perceive are relevant to community planning and design.

***Q1. What does “community” mean to you? Please explain.***

Note: I am looking for the general knowledge of the respondents with respect to community values and planning/design principles.

Parameters/prompts: social (sense of belonging, family, interaction, needs are being met, activities), economic (local businesses, tourism, business associations), and physical (locality, vernacular, built form, city boundaries)

***Q2. What are some of the challenges facing Wetaskiwin today? Which one do you think is most important and why?***

Note: This question is focusing on specific issues facing this particular community.

Parameters/prompts: lack of community services, downtown decline, public apathy, racism, substandard housing developments (public and private), population growth/decline, aging population, aging infrastructure, lack of public space, lack of accessible and aging buildings, increased municipal taxes, quality of life, big box developments, lack of community pride and community activism, disconnection from community - no sense of belonging, poor planning and design, limited opportunities for community engagement, poor road quality, the division of the town by the railway tracks.

***Q3. What do you think is the greatest opportunity? Which one do you think is most important and why?***

**Note: This question is to see if the responses corroborate or contradict the information gathered through the literary review.**

Parameters/prompts: design and planning, active community associations, political and community cooperation, new growth in larger-scaled business and industrial development, active community groups, new buildings, new areas for public space, walk able city, stable housing market, small business development and entrepreneurship, small town feel, sense of belonging - know everyone, quality of health care, community pride and community activism, growth in the community, and social networks.

### **Design/Planning Considerations**

The purpose of this section is to find out/determine what areas /parameters respondents feel are important when designing and planning the community. This information will be particularly useful in deciding on factors that are required to build community rather than just focusing on the built form itself.

#### ***Q1. What amenities are important to provide community interaction? Please explain why.***

Note: This question is to see what is important to the respondents' believe are the best activities and design features to support interaction amongst the community.

Parameters/prompts: social groups, book clubs, spaces for gather – large and small, outdoor activities, recreation centres, community centres, health associations, youth groups, seniors associations, churches, schools, pedestrian activity, protective services, parks, retail, cultural facilities.

#### ***Q2. What do you consider are the features needed to support an engaged community? Why?***

Note: This question is to see if the responses corroborate or contradict the information gathered through the literary review on what attributes support community interactions.

Parameters/prompts: integration/linking of different activities and services, downtown revitalization, quality of life, pedestrian lanes, public spaces (intimate and accessible), variety of housing stock and densities, green space, capitalizing on local amenities, authentic development that mirrors community values, sustainability, amenities.

***Q3. What type of developments do you think prohibit community engagement?***

Note: This question is to see if the responses corroborate or contradict the information gathered through the literary review on what factors do not support community interactions.

Parameters/prompts: built form, car dependant development (ie highway retail, big box), suburban development, weak infrastructure, lack of public space, inaccessible buildings, vacant buildings, dispersion.

***Q4. Do you feel that the present plans or built forms are capable of building community? Please explain.***

Note: The question is to gauge the respondents understanding of their own city and the built form within it, as well as starting to provide guidelines to be considered for developing a master plan.

**Recommendations**

The purpose of this section is to provide direction and insight about design and planning strategies and related initiatives. These recommendations will be adapted into various principals and overall framework for a proposed master plan.

***Q1. Where do you see the future of Wetaskiwin?***

Note: The purpose of this question is to determine respondents' opinions about the direction that the city has taken with respect to Wetaskiwin.

***Q2. What planning and design recommendations would you make for the city?***

Note: The purpose of this question is to identify the communities' opinions on establishing design and planning parameters that will be considered in a master plan.

