

Section 1

Introduction & Administration

1.01 Plan Introduction

Component of the Downtown Revitalization Strategy

Downtown Revitalization represents one of Council's Strategic Priorities (2019 – 2022) and responds to the results of the 2017 Downtown Visioning exercise, which revealed some perceived shortfalls in the downtown and a desire to see it revitalized.

Council defined success for *Downtown Revitalization* as follows:

A revitalized downtown has more people living, shopping and spending money there. Businesses stay open in our downtown. Residents are proud of downtown Airdrie. It is an important part of Airdrie's brand, identity and economic development.

The purpose of the Airdrie Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) is to establish the vision and principles for revitalization and to guide the redevelopment aspects of revitalization in a manner that is complementary to Council's aims. Its objective is to accelerate the pace of redevelopment in support of *Downtown Revitalization*.

The ARP is defined geographically by [Figure XX \(Plan Boundary and Local Context\)](#), consisting of approximately 90 acres located centrally in Airdrie and it represents one component of the overall strategy to achieve *Downtown Revitalization*:

- Background Report
- Supporting Studies
- **Area Redevelopment Plan**
- Implementation Actions
- Development Incentives

The strategy starts with an analysis of contextual information and public perceptions in the Background Report and a review of current assets, trends, market analyses and capacity limitations from the Supporting Studies. These documents support the ARP, which establishes the vision and principles for revitalization and which specifically provides a guide for redevelopment complementary to Council's aims within available servicing capacities. The plan sets out the actions that can be undertaken by the municipality to revitalize the downtown and signals the areas for potential incentives to encourage private investment. The strategy is completed with Implementation Actions comprising of bylaws, bylaw amendments and resolutions of Council to formalize the actions to be undertaken by the municipality and to entrench Development Incentives, as appropriate, for private investment.

No one document is designed to work in isolation. It is the combination of the plan and complementary documents¹ that creates the coordinated strategy to achieve *Downtown Revitalization*.

¹ The reader should note that the supporting reports and other complementary documents have similar, but not identical, boundaries for contextual reasons, particular study purposes, or to best develop the coordinated strategy for *Downtown Revitalization*. More details on the purpose of each of these documents can be found within their respective introductions.

Plan Structure

Section 1 of the ARP outlines how the Plan is intended to address Council's priority of *Downtown Revitalization*. It sets the vision and principles for the plan as well as the objectives and targets for redevelopment as a component of *Downtown Revitalization*. Finally, it introduces foundational concepts for **active frontage** and **complete streets**, which are essential to creating a distinct urban experience for the downtown and are referenced throughout later sections. Administrative notes and supporting information is also called out throughout this section.

Policies regarding development form in [Section 2](#) are intended to help achieve the ultimate land use concept developed during public and stakeholder consultation throughout 2019 (see [Figure XX](#)). This includes descriptions of proposed land uses per the MGA, as well as development intensity and characteristics. The relationship of public space, recreation and overall utility servicing capacities to support the ultimate desired form are also described in that section.

Policies regarding the functions to be undertaken in the downtown, and for which the downtown is responsible within the community, are found in [Section 3](#). This section outlines the approach on such areas as social inclusivity (affordable housing, accessibility) and activity generation (placemaking initiatives, event programming, etc.). To the greatest extent possible, the desired results from these policies are shown visually in [Figure XX](#).

In both of these sections, issues are generally addressed with the following structure to ensure that the philosophical approach aligns with the plan vision, principles and Council's statements of success:

- **Preamble** (Description of Current State/Issue)
- **Objective** (Issue Resolution or Desired End State)
- **Principles** (Correlating Plan Principles to our Intended Approach to Achieve Objective)
- **Policies** (Parameters to Create Change in the Direction of the Objective)
- **Municipal Actions** (Direct Steps by the Municipality in Support of the Objective)

These sections acknowledge the strong relationship between form and function. An active frontage makes it easier to have interactive space and strengthen the positive feelings for downtown. A function like affordable housing will best provide social inclusivity if its form is well-integrated into the rest of the downtown fabric. The policies in these sections reflect that relationship and broaden the nature of the change required to meet both Council's statements of success and the plan vision.

The municipality is committed to defined timelines to take particular steps, make particular investments, or establish specific incentives for potential private investment as part of this structure. Incentives form only part of the overall implementation of the plan. And where they apply, they are intended to achieve the maximum possible return on investment for the taxpayer from any form of subsidy.

[Section 4](#) sets out the key performance indicators by which to gauge success in the implementation of the plan, monitoring the effectiveness of policies, actions and incentives against changing conditions. It provides an unbiased look at what is working and what is not and points to:

- Circumstances to engage the affected communities, businesses, property owners and other stakeholders regarding ongoing implementation processes; and,
- Potential options for changes in policies, actions or incentives when undertaking plan reviews

1.02 Downtown Vision

Downtown Airdrie is the place that people love.

The vision is that *Downtown Airdrie is the place that people love* and it's not a cliché, it's a very intentional choice on how to describe the feelings that will come from successful revitalization. After all, when you love something –

- You invest your time, effort, and money on it.
- You prioritize it in your decision-making process.
- You take care of it.
- You protect it.
- It becomes central to who you are, and...
- You want to show it off to the world.

In setting the 2019-2022 Strategic Priorities, Council stated their intent to take on exactly these types of actions as part of *Downtown Revitalization* overall. Council declared, as representatives of all citizens, that they loved downtown, wanted to love it more still – and wanted others to feel the same. The statement of success that Council adopted reflected the outcomes desired from renewed love and commitment for the downtown:

A revitalized downtown has more people living, shopping and spending money there. Businesses stay open in our downtown. Residents are proud of downtown Airdrie. It is an important part of Airdrie's brand, identity and economic development.

Readers will note that there is no description about form in the desired results or success statement. It's not about design guidelines or bylaw revisions. Those are means to an end and are addressed within the document. However, the concept of revitalization, and this plan that supports it, are about creating a feeling. A place that people will love and where they will want to be.

Making an area the place that people love implies that some improvements are needed to reach that status. That is true of Downtown Airdrie and this plan sets out the steps to make those improvements, including incentives and actions for us to take concurrent with plan adoption to get the ball rolling.

The plan tells our story – including the history, the warts, and the roadblocks facing us as figure out as a community how to make the downtown the place that we truly love, and a key part of why Airdrie is “the place to be”. It unfolds over several chapters and is designed to answer the major questions facing the downtown. A reader will be able to pick up this plan and know exactly the direction of the community, represented by its Council, on each of those issues or questions.

As a community story, the plan will always be in progress to some extent. A plan is a living document that will be altered and improved along the way to reflect the needs of the community, the issues of the day, and to update the portions of this plan that have been implemented – successfully or not.

As well it should be.

Any such tweaks will only add to the story of a growing and prominent community and further the plan and the aspirations of its citizens. But this plan is our declaration on how best to reach the vision today, with all available information, best intents and declared support for this strategic priority.

This is our story and this is our plan. We hope that you love it.

Current State

Airdrie has a population just over 70,000, an employment base of 16,000 jobs and a total non-residential assessment value of approximately \$1.85B. Downtown Airdrie, as defined by this plan, is home to 432 residents and 1,898 jobs. With approximately 57,700 m² (621,000 ft²) of commercial building floor area, it has a total non-residential assessment value of \$177.0M.

Airdrie has been a high growth community for more than 25 years, especially for urban residential uses. This has led to an assessment value split of 85:15 for residential to non-residential uses, with little variation over that time. Accordingly, Council adopted a strategic priority to *Attract and Retain Businesses* with a target of a 75:25 residential to non-residential assessment value split. Successful *Downtown Revitalization* can play a large role in reaching the assessment value target set by Council in that complementary strategic priority by leveraging its capacity and potential.

Indeed, the adopted Economic Strategy (2019-2028) describes Airdrie overall as a market of untapped potential, perhaps nowhere more so than in its downtown. In the past quarter-century, the primary development successes in the downtown have only been in the form of new construction on vacant sites along 1 AV and 8 ST. Until the replacement of a service station in 2020, no demolition for the purposes of reconstruction occurred.

The slow uptake may be due to the significant competition with other commercial areas that Downtown faces. Commercial nodes in Gateway, Sierra Springs, Cooper's Crossing and Kingsview compete for local spending, while CrossIron Mills Mall in Rocky View County is a substantial regional draw, grossing approximately \$547M in spending annually (2019 data from most recent Property Fact Sheet).

However, the opportunity in Downtown Airdrie is huge. As identified in the Supporting Studies, the water network in the Downtown can service an additional service demand population of 25,000 while the wastewater collection infrastructure can service an additional service demand population of approximately 5,300. Acknowledging this potential limitation, the City has already made substantial servicing upgrades, and plans to make additional upgrades that would accommodate both the minimum population and employment thresholds examined in Section 1.5, as well as the population and employment aspirations. Downtown Airdrie has the capacity to accommodate more than 7,000 new people and jobs right now.

Downtown Airdrie has a floor area ratio of just 0.24 and ample locations for redevelopment, with associated gains in population, jobs and assessment value. The downtown offers the best opportunity to sustain or improve the non-residential assessment ratio until such time as some of the key industrial areas outlined in the Growth Strategy (12,000 Acres Plan) can be reached. Looking beyond our own boundaries, few locations in the region already represent such a significant commercial, social and employment draw and yet simultaneously have the potential to expand with so few constraints.

Regional Context

The Calgary Metropolitan Region has a population of approximately 1,400,000 and Airdrie is the second largest city in the region with less than 5% of the total. The Interim Regional Growth Plan anticipates an additional million residents by 2045 with only a slight increase in the proportion of persons and jobs locating in the outlying communities, like Airdrie.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the larger urban hub of Calgary may continue to draw the bulk of the additional activity and businesses. However, this does not mean that Downtown Airdrie cannot play a unique and important role for knowledge economy and local tourism attraction with proper focus on its niche elements and competitive advantages – as well as those proposed in the comprehensive *Downtown Revitalization* strategy. It is simply to say that expectations for commercial and employment growth need to be tempered with this in mind, as Airdrie functions very differently in its local and regional context than a stand-alone, urban city of 70,000 people with a corresponding larger trade area otherwise would.

[Figure XX \(Regional Context\)](#) shows Airdrie's downtown along with other features and elements from the surrounding area that influence development within this plan.

1.03 Plan Principles

Stemming from Council's statement of success and the Plan's vision, there are ten principles that have guided our thinking and decision-making toward *Downtown Revitalization* as a whole. These are also reflected in the approach, policies, and actions under every issue facing Airdrie's downtown which will need to be addressed for our *Downtown Revitalization* efforts to be successful.

Heart of the City

Develop downtown as the central core of population, jobs, services, and amenities.

Despite a central location and substantial opportunities, Airdrie's downtown also faces challenges as competing commercial areas outside of the downtown are still building out and have better access to the QE2 highway corridor. Yet, residents and Council have still expressed the view that this is the core of the city, and the desire to make something more of the downtown. This has been affirmed through the City's visioning exercises, Council priorities, and tangible projects already underway – including servicing upgrades and the site selection of a new public library within the plan area. Through this plan and the actions that follow, the City needs to continue to see downtown as Airdrie's core, and the primary location for new investment, residents, services, and employment. Attracting growth and investment in the downtown will make efficient use of the existing infrastructure and build on the foundation already laid by prior work. Prioritizing the downtown supports the prevailing view that this is the heart of Airdrie.

Everyone's Success

Stimulate private investment and redevelopment in the downtown.

For Airdrie's downtown to be successful the businesses, residents, and groups within the area must be successful as well. It is a main objective of the downtown plan – and by extension, the Municipality – to create a downtown where residents choose to live or visit, and where businesses choose to locate. Investment in the area needs to be encouraged, facilitated, and supported by policies in the downtown plan and decisions made by the City and other supporting groups of businesses, landowners, and residents. A vibrant downtown is one where fiscal and emotional investments into projects, activities, and services, are as impactful and successful as possible.

Reimagine Main Street

Strengthen Main Street as the central axis of the downtown.

Through the visioning exercises completed in 2017 which defined the downtown boundary, and the design work done in 2019 to reimagine what new elements would be desired and possible through redevelopment, Main Street has clearly emerged as a key element of the plan. A redeveloped Main Street would be a 'Complete Street', accommodating pedestrians, cyclists, transit, and vehicular traffic, as well as landscaping and placemaking elements, and an active street frontage incorporating buildings and land uses. It should also be an organizing feature in the downtown, with traffic, building frontages, landscaping, plazas and gathering spaces spread throughout the street accordingly. As a complete street and a central focus of the plan, Main Street should also provide services, amenities, and draw interest throughout the day, week, and seasons. This involves an integration of characteristics that may change to suit the flow of people around it – during daytime, nighttime, weekends, and including attention to winter city design.

Think Big

Support large-scale catalysts and anchor projects.

The downtown visioning exercises highlighted support for transformational changes and initiatives from the City to come out of the downtown plan. Accordingly, this document is intended to be a plan of change where City staff, Council, business and residents reframe how we think, plan, talk, and make decisions that affect the downtown. Beyond this fundamental change in the City's approach, the downtown needs strong anchors and catalyst projects which will create interest and energy in the area and drive other businesses, people, and developers to create the same. Already initiated through the decision to locate the new Library downtown in August 2019, more projects, events, and programs have to follow suit to create a critical mass that will attract new investment and redevelopment to the area.

The Place to Be

Generate traffic, activity, and interest throughout the plan area.

For Airdrie's downtown to attract investment and new development, and for it to ultimately be successful, there needs to be a concentration of people, activities, and businesses working collectively to add qualities to the downtown area. Without a residential/customer base, new businesses will not locate in the downtown over other commercial areas in Airdrie or the region, and without activities and services there are no reasons for other residents to go downtown. The Municipality's role here is to market the downtown to prospective investors, and use any policy tools at its disposal to set up the downtown for success by facilitating development, events, programs, and other initiatives to bring more people, businesses, and activity to the area. This should also extend to providing focal points within the downtown; plazas, public art, landscaping and gateways help pronounce areas and keeps people moving, and help build and celebrate the City's identity and reflect the behaviors and interests of the people that live there.

An Investment in our Future

Leverage municipal resources to lead and support revitalization efforts.

The City of Airdrie is uniquely positioned with time, people, and resources that it can invest in the downtown. These can be leveraged to initiate necessary projects and programs as well as to support developers and businesses looking to start projects that will add new activity and raise the long-term value of the area. The City should be open to exploring a range of projects, partnerships, and grants to facilitate new investment in the downtown, as well as City-led programs for local events and community development that can be transitioned to leaders within the community over time. A key part of this will be in building relationships within the community to ensure that we are all working toward the same goal and supporting the downtown so that it can emerge as a successful investment area. City investments will be made with the understanding that they will pay back dividends over a longer timeframe, both in terms of new value added and recaptured in property taxes for individual projects, as well as each new project contributing to a critical mass that would itself generate more interest and development in the downtown.

Lead by Example

Demonstrate support for the downtown and the plan policies in municipal projects.

When the downtown plan is approved and various implementation projects are initiated, the Municipality will need to assume a leadership role and set expectations for future projects in the area to follow. The new library can be a catalyst project for the downtown but will need to properly execute on commitments to high quality architecture and site design, enhancing both the Main Street corridor and Nose Creek where it has frontage, and setting cues for improvements on the surrounding streets and parcels. Public improvements to streets for better accessibility, complete street designs, landscaping and parking will also set expectations for owners and businesses in the downtown for potential improvements to their street frontage, landscaping, and parking lots. Finally, the City can take the lead on initiatives for downtown events and temporary 'pop-up' uses to increase activity and rally interest in the downtown as redevelopment moves forward.

The Right Rules and Processes

Identify and remove barriers to redevelopment projects.

Planning standards and Land Use Bylaw requirements need to strike the right balance between predictability and flexibility. Rules that are too rigid will not respond to variable elements in marketing and land development, but rules that are too flexible create inconsistencies and uncertainty in how they will be understood and applied from one case to another. There is also a balance that needs to be achieved between supporting private interests in land development and protecting the long-term public benefit for the City and its residents. The downtown plan and any supporting policies, projects, and regulations must ensure that it supports redevelopment and revitalization in the plan area, removing obstacles while supporting good decision-making and ensuring the quality of the built form throughout the downtown.

Connected and Mobile

Create an accessible and well-designed urban centre.

For the downtown area to be competitive and successful, there will need to be a commitment to improving accessibility and connectivity for the entire area. This means providing better east-west connections into the downtown from surrounding areas and improving the north and south gateways into the downtown along Main Street. Key corridors will also have to be improved to be complete streets and support better pedestrian, cycling, transit and vehicle access, and the City will have to work with developers to ensure that parking is appropriately addressed where and when it is needed without impacting further redevelopment and intensification in the area. Above all downtown needs to be accessible to people, keeping attention at street-level, connecting pedestrian walkways, and following standards for accessible and universal design.

Putting People First

Design downtown's form, functions, and experiences with people as a first priority.

Downtowns offer functions that are necessary for the entire community, and in doing so they touch every person that passes through them, creating places for life, community, interaction and culture to thrive. These places build our social context, shape community identities, and celebrate the values and heritage of the people who inhabit them. Residents have communicated the importance for Airdrie to retain its small-town feel, and it is for these reasons that Airdrie's downtown must be a place created for and by people. Achieving this will mean ensuring opportunities are made for a range of services, functions, housing, lifestyles, and activities; that downtown spaces are designed first and foremost for people, understanding our behaviours and interactions with the built environment, exploring senses and interests and offering a range of these elements at any given time.

1.04 Objectives and Approach

Section 635 of the MGA requires an Area Redevelopment Plan to define its objectives and outline the means to achieve them. This subsection outlines the objective for Downtown Revitalization and for this ARP, as well as the specific redevelopment targets and the approach that will be taken to achieve them.

Means to achieve the objectives and targets are presented in Section 2 and Section 3 of this plan. Those sections guide the nature of private redevelopment and outline the municipal actions and potential incentives included in the full *Downtown Revitalization* strategy

Downtown Revitalization Objectives

The objectives for *Downtown Revitalization* have been defined by Council in the following strategic priority statements:

- SP5.1 Residents go to downtown Airdrie.
- SP5.2 Residents support the businesses.
- SP5.3 Residents enjoy the downtown.

A revitalized downtown has more people living, shopping and spending money there. Businesses stay open in our downtown. Residents are proud of downtown Airdrie. It is an important part of Airdrie's brand, identity and economic development.

Council has expressed the objective of *Downtown Revitalization* as a series of outcomes that are tied closely to our emotional connection to the downtown, which is reflected in the vision for *Downtown Revitalization* contained in this plan.

Area Redevelopment Plan Objectives

The objective of the Area Redevelopment Plan is:

To accelerate the pace of redevelopment in support of Downtown Revitalization.

This responds to the premise that redevelopment in the downtown will have a positive impact on the feeling that residents and visitors have for the downtown, and therefore help to achieve Council's statements of success.

Accordingly, specific targets for this objective in the categories of population, employment, and assessed value are described below as thresholds to help achieve success. These targets consider the current state, the regional context, benchmarks from similar communities, and the objectives from other municipal priorities and plans. The approach to achieve these targets considers the gap between the current state and the desired state.

Requirements and Plan Alignment

Section 635 of the MGA states that an ARP is required to address the following:

- Objectives of the plan and how they are proposed to be achieved,
- Proposed land uses
- Reasons for imposing redevelopment levy (if proposed),
- Proposals for the acquisition of land, and
- Any other proposals that council considers necessary.

Notwithstanding, an ARP must also be consistent with the broader land use and transportation patterns established under the City's Municipal Development Plan and in turn, any Intermunicipal Development Plan and/or Regional Growth Plan.

The Downtown Airdrie Area Redevelopment Plan addresses these requirements by reviewing the issues primarily related to form (i.e. development intensity or characteristics) in [Section 2](#) and those primarily related to function (i.e. social services, community hub, activity generation) in [Section 3](#) to create the desired feelings for the downtown expressed by Council in their statements of success.

Plan Timeline and Review

The plan is written to address specific issues facing the downtown and defines actions to be undertaken by the City within the first five to seven years following its adoption. This is intended to set a foundation to reach targets for population, employment, and assessed value within the first ten years, with the ultimate development concept being realized within a 20-30 year horizon.

Individual actions and initiatives can be reviewed on a year-by-year basis as they are resourced through typical Business Planning and Budget processes, and the plan and associated documents that make up the *Downtown Revitalization* strategy should be reviewed not less than once every five years, or more frequently if directed by Council.

Plan Interpretation

In reading the plan, the intent or text preceding a policy is provided only as information to enhance the understanding of the associated policies.

Policies that use "should" indicates action that is preferred but not mandatory. If The City deems that the policy is not reasonable, practical or feasible in a given situation, proposed alternatives will be considered. Where "shall" is used in a policy, the action is considered to be mandatory. Policies that use "may" indicates action by the City that is discretionary and dependent on the circumstances.

The boundaries or locations of any symbols or areas shown on a map are not intended to define exact locations except where they coincide with clearly recognizable physical features or fixed boundaries such as property lines or road and utility rights-of-ways.

The guidelines contained in the Appendices are to be applied at the land use, subdivision or development permit approval stages as determined appropriate. While a guideline should be complied with, where compliance is deemed unreasonable an alternative solution may be considered.

1.05 Approach to Redevelopment

The limited redevelopment experienced in Downtown Airdrie over the last 25 years and the results of the Downtown Visioning exercise indicate market forces alone may not be enough to achieve Council's description of successful *Downtown Revitalization*. This plan asserts that a bold new approach will need to be taken to accelerate the pace of redevelopment:

We will have to attract in order to accelerate.

Fortunately, Downtown Airdrie has several elements that can be used to attract redevelopment and other forms of investment:

- A local trade area comprising of 4,420 residents within 400m (a 5-minute walk) and a total of 23,029 within 2km (a typical 10-minute bike ride, transit ride or private vehicle trip), illustrated on [Figure XX \(Downtown Catchment Areas\)](#).
- A regional trade area of 110,000 with an average household income of \$149,000;
- Approximately twice the required number of on-site and on-street parking stalls that can be converted into new development;
- Permissive zoning regulations that allow for 8 storeys “as of right” and many permitted uses;
- Recently augmented servicing capacity that allows for approximately twice the current amount of development; and,
- No off-site levy bylaw payments required for use of this increased servicing capacity

As a key component of the comprehensive strategy for *Downtown Revitalization*, resolutions for issues in this plan consider the existing competitive advantages. But critically, they also identify, create and market other potential advantages to be broadcast regionally, provincially, nationally, and even internationally, for private investment. These competitive advantages influence the recommended Implementation Actions and Incentives that form part of the *Downtown Revitalization* strategy and it can best be said that in applying our proactive approach:

Marketing competitive advantages will be central to our attraction efforts.

Attraction from competitive advantages is designed to bring private investments to the downtown. These may not always immediately take the highest and best form. But the aim of investment attraction is to move the needle on the targets established in this subsection and our approach is designed to translate opportunities into incremental steps that make progress in reaching the targets.

Our approach supports incremental redevelopment and intensification under the maximum heights and densities envisioned in the Plan, or where phrased as limits in the Land Use Bylaw. Such support is contingent on the proposed development providing an increase to the intensity, activities, and/or land uses and facilities offered on the site, and that the incremental intensification is accommodated in such a way so as not to limit future intensifications. Our approach recognizes that:

Incremental results from our competitive advantages also move the needle.

Ultimately, success breeds success and our approach to redevelopment in the downtown suggests that reaching a critical mass of energy, activity and redevelopment will create a virtuous cycle for long-term success and achieve Council's *Downtown Revitalization* statements. More residents living in (or travelling into) the downtown, and more activity (events, festivals, gatherings) throughout the downtown area are needed in order to attract new investment, businesses, activities, and corresponding redevelopment. The influx of more businesses and activities will, in turn, draw more people wanting to live in and travel to the area. This creates a positive feedback loop that supports the objectives for *Downtown Revitalization* and this plan. The proactive approach recognizes that any competitive advantages that we create in the form of incentives must also be evaluated during the recommended plan review horizons to determine if they are making incremental improvements and helping to achieve the critical mass that will sustain investment in the downtown. Our approach acknowledges that not everything will work perfectly and that:

Actions and incentives must help achieve critical mass in order to be retained.

The proactive approach commits Council and Administration to seek those that wish to invest in the success of Airdrie's downtown and to offer something unique and advantageous to them. But it also requires us to evaluate our actions and results. Fundamentally, the approach relies on the flexibility to try something new where our initial action or incentive does not achieve the target in the desired timeline without stepping away from the objectives stated by Council for *Downtown Revitalization*.

However, this does not mean that the target is pursued at all costs. Our willingness to manufacture and market competitive advantages through incentives or other means is not intended to create a financial drain for the municipality. This is not a "free lunch" proposition. Rather, a positive return on investment – in either social or economic terms – is desired and required from any incentive developed to help us reach our development and/or revitalization targets:

Incentives should achieve a positive return on investment for the taxpayer.

Our approach views incentives as investments in the social and economic potential of the downtown and a way to help Airdrie meet its other strategic priorities and retain its strong competitive position within the region. As investors in this community, residents will benefit from this approach.

1.06 Aspirations and Targets

Establishing Targets

The definition of success for *Downtown Revitalization*, the current state, the regional context and our intended approach frame the discussion for targets to achieve in the downtown.

As described in the Background Report, Council adopted a non-statutory growth study (2018) that forecasts population and employment growth and corresponding land demand requirements for the Airdrie for out to the year 2065. This gives a picture of growth for the City of Airdrie as a whole but does not identify how new residents and jobs will be split between greenfield and redevelopment, and provides no specific growth targets for the Downtown area.

Likewise, the Airdrie City Plan and the AirdrieONE Sustainability Plan do not set a specific population threshold, employment threshold or overall redevelopment target for the downtown. Therefore, other benchmarks need to be reviewed in the absence of specific targets in these areas.

Other Benchmarks

Researching the range in potential growth for Downtown Airdrie, there is general alignment on some benchmark targets that would position the Downtown Plan for success. As a suburban town centre within the Calgary Region, consider that:

- Calgary's City-Wide Policies target minimum thresholds of 100 people or jobs per gross developable hectare for "Activity Centres" in order to support quality transit service, and higher minimum thresholds of 200 people or jobs per gross developable hectare are set for Major Activity Centres and Main Streets.
- Ontario's Transit Supportive Guidelines and Growth Plan Performance Indicators suggest a minimum density threshold of 100 combined residents and jobs per hectare to support Frequent Bus Service with the potential for future development of Light Rail Transit (LRT) or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service. Mid-sized Communities (50,000–150,000 population) have established "growth centre" targets of 150 combined residents and jobs per hectare.
- Additional literature on Transit Oriented Design (TOD) and Transect Planning suggest targets for downtown areas similar to Airdrie's size and context (e.g. suburban town centres) of at least 37 people per hectare and up to 100 jobs per hectare.

Aligning with similar thresholds, the Downtown Plan could set a reasonable target to accommodate between 3,700 and 5,500 combined population and jobs within the plan area. An aggressive, stretch goal would target an equivalent threshold to the one set by Calgary for "Major Activity Centres" and "Main Streets", pursuing a total of 7,300 combined population and jobs within Airdrie's downtown.

The Supporting Studies confirm that such benchmarks for new population and employment creation can be achieved presently with the recent servicing infrastructure investments made by the City.

Our Aspirations and Targets

Our aspirations and targets for population, employment, and assessed value describe the desired end state in terms that can be quantitatively reviewed and which will allow for review of our approach. They are founded on review of current state, regional context, our intended approach and realistic benchmarks for success:

Population and Employment Target

A minimum of 4,000 new residents and jobs within the Plan area.

Population and Employment Aspiration

7,000 new residents and jobs within the Plan area.

Assessment Value Target

\$65,000,000 in new assessed value in any form within the Plan area.

Assessment Value Aspiration

\$130,000,000 in new assessment value, with at least \$65,000,000 in new non-residential assessment value within the Plan area.

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1.07 Foundational Concepts

Within this plan, the objective is to accelerate redevelopment and that objective is based on the premise that significant redevelopment in the downtown will change its land use and activity composition, and help achieve Council's statements of success for *Downtown Revitalization*.

Indeed, several of Council's statements of success speak very directly to the idea of changing the perceptions and feelings about the things that we have contact with, and experience, in the downtown:

- Residents enjoy the downtown.
- Residents are proud of downtown Airdrie.
- Downtown is an important part of Airdrie's brand, identity, and economic development.

This plan set targets and aspirations for development intensities and assessed values, and these represent clear thresholds for the tangible aspects of the objective. However, there are intangible aspects of Council's statements of success that require additional thinking and effort for the type of **urban experience** that we are looking to create.

For the purposes of this plan, **urban experience** is defined as:

Our perception of the degree of distinctiveness and the associated feelings of enjoyment, from the combination of physical, social, and environmental elements with which we make practical contact.

These perceptions and feelings are not guaranteed to be positive. But the **urban experience** matters because the needle in achieving Council's statements of success moves based on whatever those feelings and perceptions might be from those that experience our downtown.

In order to influence the feelings and perceptions that make up the **urban experience**, two design aspects matter more than any other, that of:

- **Active frontage**; and
- **Complete streets**

The tremendous amount of influence that these two design aspects have in creating the urban experience stems from the way that they draw together the purposes (i.e. land uses and activities) and the mechanisms to reach them (i.e. transportation corridors and modes) at intersecting points that we can experience simultaneously.

Therefore, it is critical to implement the best practice elements of **active frontage** and **complete streets**, where called on in this plan, in order to achieve a positive urban experience.

Creating Distinctness and Marketability:

Accelerated redevelopment is expected to further distinguish the downtown from other areas in Airdrie and the experiences from those areas. The manner in which the increased height, density, and activity from redevelopment are managed through **active frontage** and **complete street** design elements will impact how people perceive the downtown. Executed well, this provides the opportunity to create a distinct and marketable urban experience. Therefore, to achieve the intent of the intangible aspects of Council's statements of success, the overarching approach is:

To create a distinct and marketable urban experience.

The following sections highlight the design aspects and explain the elements that go into each.

Active Frontage

A lot of work goes into creating a good relationship between buildings and the street. Concentrated effort and intent has to be given to the elements of each of the buildings, the street, and the spaces in between in order to create positive experiences and feelings from those areas.

Active frontage is the end result of applying certain elements to these three categories of spaces. Done well, it can drive so much about the downtown's character, sense of place, and how people experience it. As such, it is a key part of creating the kind of environment described in Council's statement of success, and the feeling sought by the vision statement of this plan. Successful active frontage attracts people and energy by virtue of its design, and we focus on these elements in several sections of this plan that call for creating active frontage within the downtown.

The Downtown Plan identifies twelve such elements that must be addressed² to create active frontage. These are described below, and outlined in [Figure XX \(Active Frontage Elements\)](#).

Building Design

1. Buildings should apply a comprehensive and cohesive design, with massing and architecture working together and considering the building's relationship with surrounding spaces and developments. Readers should note that this does not imply that building designs should be 'the same as' the surrounding development – in fact, there are certainly circumstances where unique design styles and elements are supported or even encouraged – but any design should still relate to its surrounding environment.
2. Buildings should establish a clear relationship to the street and surrounding public space. This is created and enforced by making the height of the façade in proportion to the width of the sidewalks and right of way, and ensuring that there are windows and detailing facing into the street along the building frontage. The massing of buildings also affects this relationship, and larger buildings may need to include variations along the length of the street frontage or step back taller buildings to keep the massing of the building appropriate at the street level.
3. Building and architectural features should express conscious thought and detail in their design. While the downtown plan purposefully does not set a specific architectural theme or style, it is expected that buildings should apply detailing along the façade as well as textures and materials in service of enhancing the building where it is visible along the street. This should be pursued both to improve the individual site and recognizing that each building contributes to the overall experience and character of the downtown.

² Descriptions of the twelve elements in this section are intended to guide the City and developers in understanding how they should be assessed qualitatively. Where **Active Frontage** is referenced in other sections of this plan, it is intended that all elements are to be considered and applied in a way that is appropriate to that context; understanding that there is no one specific formula or solution. Discretion to require specific elements is outlined throughout this plan for certain geographic areas or circumstances, and readers should note that there are some sections which require the twelve elements of **Active Frontage** as well as additional elements or considerations.

Land Use Elements

4. Individual land uses should promote activity at the street level. This should focus specifically on restaurants, retail, and recreational land uses, some institutional uses such as Libraries or Museums, plazas, and public or community-oriented uses that remain open to the public (e.g. Parks, Community Gardens). These uses should be dedicated for spaces immediately facing onto the street where possible and other, more passive land uses (e.g. offices, professional services) can be placed above the first storey or away from the dedicated building frontage.
5. The primary access for buildings and land uses should face the street. The access should always be directly accessible and have a clear line of sight from the sidewalk.
6. Buildings and land uses should have appropriate setbacks from the front property line. In most cases, this setback can be reduced to zero, but there are some cases where a deeper setback can be appropriate - to allow for variation in the building façade along the length of the street, or to provide for additional space for landscaping, gathering spaces, or amenity along the front of the building.
7. Wherever possible, land uses should be allowed to extend into the street. Retail displays, restaurant patios, seating areas, and gathering spaces help to generate activity and interest along the street frontage and should be strongly encouraged.

Site Improvements

8. Site improvements should include landscaping and amenity features. These should be designed to work with the architectural details along the building to provide a variety of elements and attractions within the area, contributing to create interest and activity along the building frontage. Features are meant to include changes in paving or surface material, benches provided for seating, bike racks, and similar items that provide some attraction or amenity to those travelling within the right of way.
9. The placement of buildings, landscaping, and other improvements should respond to climate and weather considerations. This is meant to include considerations like ensuring that patios and public gathering spaces are south-facing or not shadowed by surrounding buildings, making provision for snow clearing and storage space from sidewalks within the right of way, and ensuring that the massing of buildings does not create wind tunneling effects.
10. Individual sites and the streets connecting them should prioritize pedestrian traffic. This is mostly accomplished with appropriate design within the road right of way, but it can be supported through the individual sites and along building frontages by varying setbacks to provide space for sidewalks, plazas, and gathering spaces. Sites can also incorporate wayfinding and traffic or access control measures to ensure that traffic of various modes does not come into conflict.

Activities & Promotion

11. Areas along the frontage should incorporate features and activities that are intended to attract people. This could include public art installations, fitness equipment installations, chess tables, shared library kiosks, and many other innovative concepts that would animate the frontage around buildings and within the road right of way.
12. Sites and the surrounding road right of way should incorporate programming and events to promote as much activity and vibrancy within the area as possible. Spaces should be designed to allow for events to take place, and these areas can be prioritized as outlined in later sections of this plan.

Complete Streets

Participants at the design charrettes specifically called out Main Street and sections of other roads through the downtown to be redeveloped as "Complete Streets." In the context of these charrettes, this was used to identify streets that would not just accommodate vehicle traffic but would also equally consider pedestrians, cyclists, transit, parking, landscaping improvements, retail space, and other elements in their design.

This concept is echoed through the Airdrie's Transportation Master Plan and supporting documents. A Complete Streets Toolkit was developed in 2014 to guide both Airdrie and developers in taking a more holistic approach to accommodating the needs of all roadway users. The 2020 Transportation Master Plan Update (140K Plan) applies more updated recommendations for the integration of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and recognizes the connected nature between the functionality of a roadway and the land uses located along the corridor. The 140k Plan provides a number of standard road cross-sections but also provides "a la carte" options and alternatives to allow for customization of design elements of any cross-section. This approach recognizes the various functions that streets can serve and allows different functions and modes of travel to be included and prioritized within a Complete Street, accounting for sidewalks, landscaping, cycling, transit, parking, and vehicle travel within the roadway.

Complete Streets are identified through several sections of this plan, and this is used to identify areas where existing roads are to be designed and transitioned to better accommodate multiple functions. The transition of existing roads into Complete Streets involves the potential addition of bike lanes, sidewalk connections, and placemaking improvements to the pedestrian environment. There are nine elements that must be considered as part of a Complete Street. These are described below and outlined in [Figure XX \(Complete Streets Elements\)](#).

Transportation Modes and Connections

1. Streets must accommodate all modes of transportation. The road right of way should be designed to ensure that there is space provided for pedestrian traffic as a top priority, but also for cyclists, transit, personal, and service vehicles.
2. The design of the street should consider how it can best connect to the wider transportation network while it accommodates the required modes of transportation. Conscious thought should be applied in order to harmonize the various transportation modes accommodated within these standards to that of the broader network throughout the city.
3. The design of individual sites and buildings should work with the street design to facilitate accessibility. This can include situations where private sites should provide access and connect to adjoining properties, but it also means designing appropriate places between the site and the road right-of-way for parking and loading spaces and vehicle accesses that don't interrupt other important elements in the right of way.

Relationships with the Existing Environment

4. The design of the street should improve permeability and connections along the length of the corridor. This requires careful design to manage access for pedestrians, cyclists, transit, and vehicles, acknowledging that there may be conflicts and limitations for certain transportation modes. Means to increase permeability and connections may include crosswalks, mid-block connections, and coordination between the City and property owners to connect sidewalks and pathways across individual sites.

5. In many cases, design standards for complete streets will need to work within existing road widths and building setbacks which may provide less space than required for specific standards and cross-sections. Accordingly, this may compel adjustments to the overall street design in order to ensure that the highest priority elements are accommodated.
6. Streets should be designed to support street-facing land uses and buildings. The Transportation Master Plan emphasizes the importance of street interface and the relationship between land use and transportation, and calls for minimizing features like back-lotting, buffers, and street-facing parking lots. This should also avoid barriers like sound fencing and utility corridors that restrict more integrated designs along the street frontage.

Landscaping and Character

7. To improve walkability and better support multiple modes of transportation, streets throughout the downtown should provide enhanced landscaping and amenity. Improvements to these aspects ensures that the street contributes to the character of the downtown and create an attractive environment along the corridor.
8. As part of its inherent design, the street should be able to accommodate multiple functions. It should support surrounding land uses by having space for the right combination of parking, event sites, gathering spaces, landscaping features, and extensions from commercial spaces, as may be appropriate. It develops part of its character from these additional functions, and that character contributes to the overall urban experience.
9. Additional details should be provided along the street that enhance the character of the downtown. These include spaces that can be converted for pop-up uses and events, site furniture, unique streetlights, wayfinding signage, banners, public art, and pavement markings.

The prior sections introduced the Downtown ARP and established the plan vision, principles, objectives, and targets. It set out the City's approach to *Downtown Revitalization* overall, and the key concepts towards accelerate the pace of redevelopment and support a positive urban experience in the Downtown. The next two sections will address specific issues facing *Downtown Revitalization* – relating to both the form of future development and the functions of the downtown.