

DOWNTOWN VITALIZATION LOCAL AREA PLAN

Open House | May 14, 2025

Welcome!

We're crafting the **Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan (DVLAP)** to guide the future of Downtown Courtenay. Building on the Official Community Plan (2022) and Downtown Courtenay Playbook (2016), we're working to create a more connected, inclusive, and vibrant Downtown—anchored in place, community, and culture. The DVLAP focuses on four districts—Riverfront, Downtown Core, Fitzgerald Corridor, and Harmston Park—each offering opportunities to improve public spaces, support housing, enhance transportation, and celebrate community identity.

What You'll Find Today

Take a walk through the boards—explore emerging ideas and let us know what matters most to you. You'll find:

- Big Moves: Key directions and opportunities across Downtown
- Concepts for placemaking, density, and circulation
- Interactive stations to share your feedback and priorities

How to Participate

- Share your ideas at each concept board
- Scan the QR Code to fill out a survey
- Speak with a staff member



How to Stay Connected

[engagecomoxvalley.ca/
courtenay-downtown-plan](https://engagecomoxvalley.ca/courtenay-downtown-plan)
[@cityofcourtenay](https://twitter.com/cityofcourtenay)

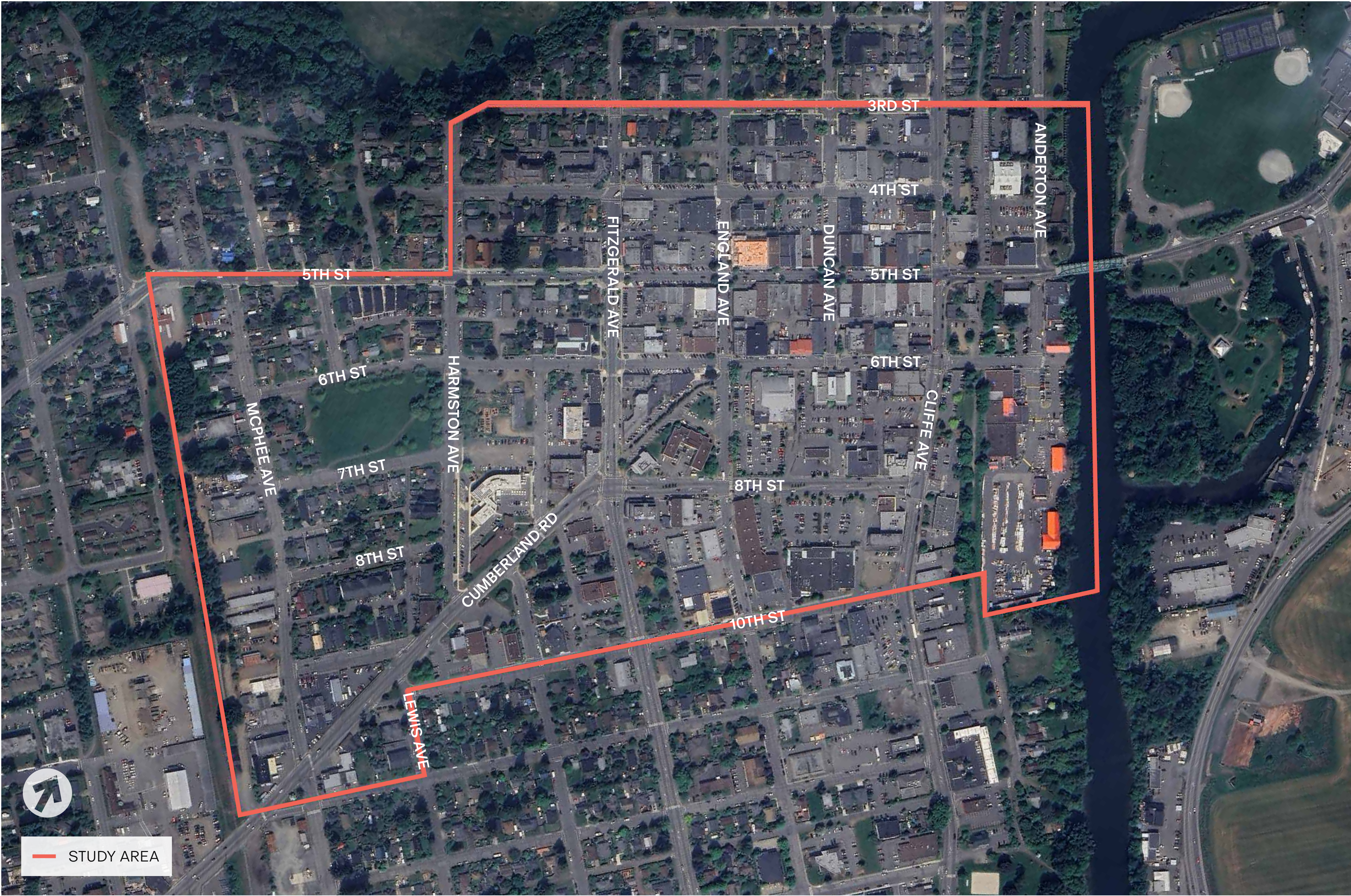


The City of Courtenay respectfully acknowledges that the lands to which this Local Area Plan applies are on the Unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.



WHAT WE'VE HEARD, WHAT WE'RE BUILDING ON

Grounded in Plans and Feedback



DVLAP Study Area

The boundaries of the DVLAP are informed by the OCP and Downtown Playbook. Bringing the boundaries of these two plans together allows for a planning process that comprehensively incorporates the high activity mixed-use Downtown Core with the surrounding lands that influence the history and future of the downtown.

Within the comprehensive planning area are opportunities to develop distinct planning districts: the Courtenay riverfront to the east, the Fitzgerald Avenue corridor on the edge of the core to the west, and Harmston Park neighbourhood beyond including industrial employment generators, significant municipal lands, public parkland and established residences.

Why We're Here

The Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan (DVLAP) will help guide growth, public space improvements, and transportation changes in Courtenay's Downtown. It builds on previous planning, new opportunities, and what we've heard from the community.

We're Building On...

Downtown Courtenay Playbook (2016)

- Defines character streets for 4th (Market), 5th (Shopping) and 6th (Green)
- Envisions Duncan Commons as a central public plaza
- Emphasizes riverfront connections, infill housing, and pedestrian experience.

Official Community Plan (2022)

- Supports more housing, diverse uses, and vibrant public space
- Improves physical and cultural connections to the river
- Recognizes the Downtown as a regional centre for public life

Parks & Recreation Master Plan (2019)

- Recommends improvements to urban parks, trail networks, and access to green space
- Reinforces the role of Downtown parks as key community gathering spaces

Strategic Cultural Plan (2025)

- Positions Downtown as the heart of arts and culture in the Comox Valley

What We've Heard So Far

As a first step in the DVLAP engagement process, the City and MODUS met with key stakeholders in late 2024 and early 2025 to validate a draft SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the study area. These conversations highlighted local challenges and opportunities, refined the engagement strategy, and informed early design directions:

- **Recognize the Cultural District as a Focal Point**
- **Bring People Downtown**
- **Enhance Greenspaces**
- **Support Housing Development & Local Businesses**
- **Utilize the Strength of Community Groups & Potential Partnerships**
- **Align with Other Plans and Strategies**



Timeline

2016	Downtown Playbook	2022	Official Community Plan
DVLAP			
Jul 2024	DVLAP Boundaries Endorsed	Dec 2024	SWOT Analysis Finalized
Jan 2025	Phase 1 Engagement Meetings	Feb 2025	Design Framework Finalized
May 2025	Phase 2 Open House + Survey	Jun 2025	Phase 2 Engagement Summary
Jul 2025	Draft Local Area Plan	Jul 2025	Phase 3 Survey + Meetings
Jul 2025	Phase 3 Engagement Summary	Oct 2025	Final DVLAP

K'ómoks First Nation + City of Courtenay Gov't to Gov't Engagement

BIG MOVES

Key Interventions for the DVLAP

1 Reimagine the Riverfront

Transform the Riverfront into a vibrant, accessible destination by improving public access, enhancing recreational amenities, and fostering development that integrates natural and cultural assets. This includes activating underutilized spaces and implementing flood-resilient infrastructure.

2 Strengthen the Downtown Core

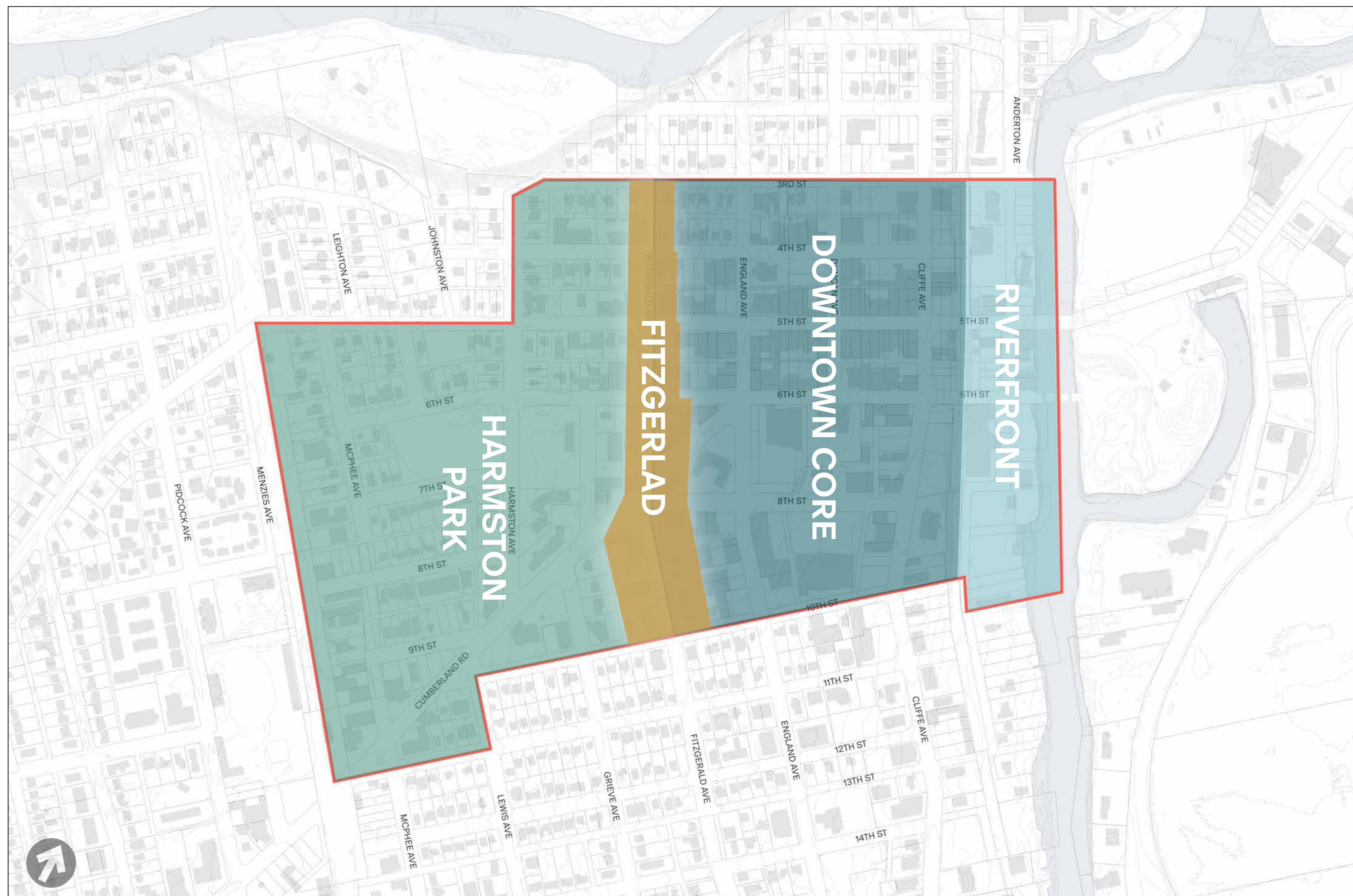
Vitalize the Downtown Core through public realm enhancements, green space creation, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Celebrate Downtown as the cultural heart of the Comox Valley by supporting gathering spaces, creative placemaking, and connections to arts, heritage, and Indigenous expression.

3 Fitzgerald as a Key Connector

Elevate Fitzgerald Avenue's role as a key connector between districts with further streetscape improvements, active transportation infrastructure, and the promotion of mixed-use development. Establishing Fitzgerald as a welcoming gateway to Downtown will ensure it supports the broader vision for the area.

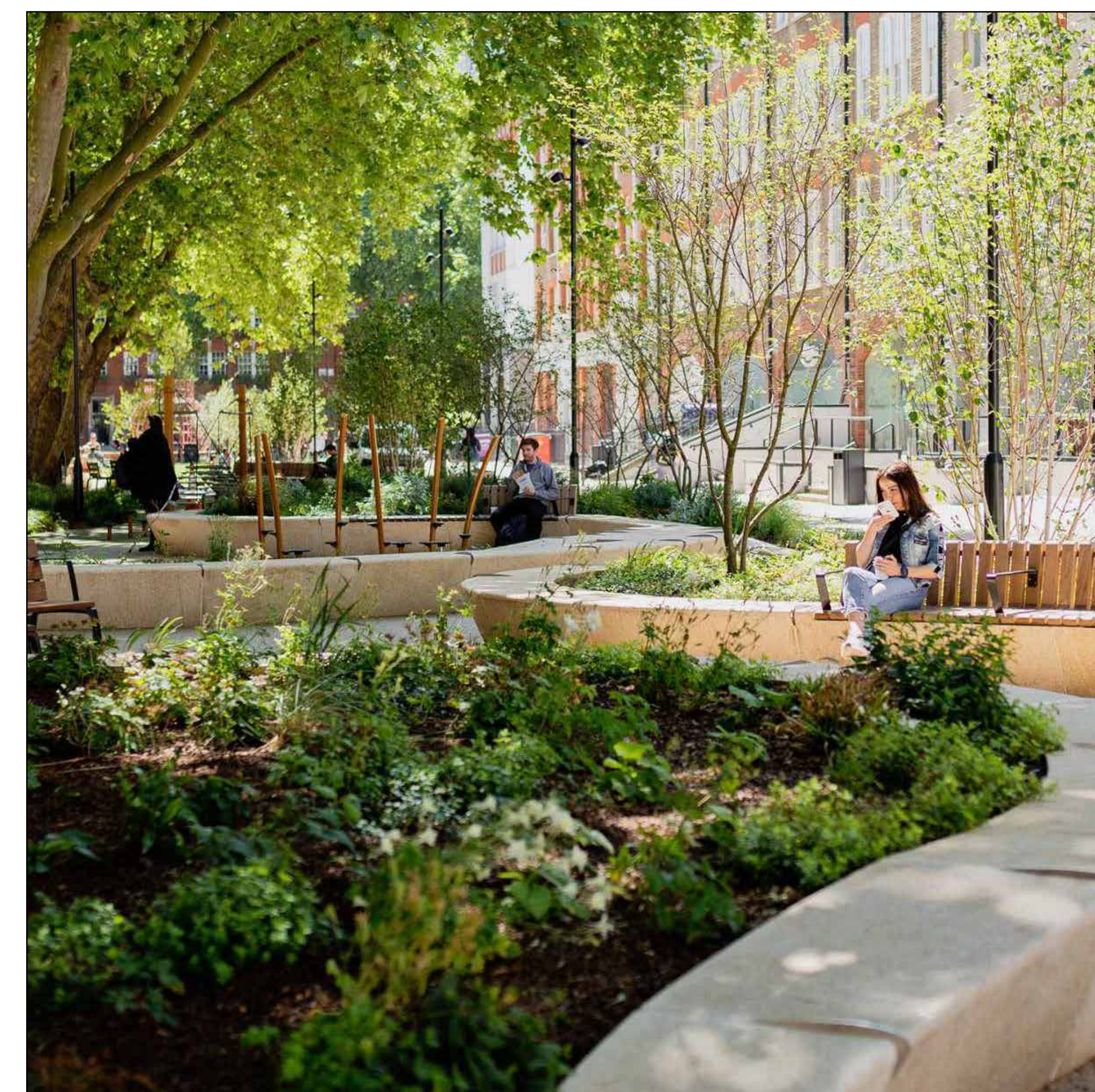
4 Activate Harmston Park

Design and develop Harmston Park as a dynamic community hub, supported by enhanced programming and infrastructure. Opportunities for higher-density housing and innovative uses for adjacent municipal lands, such as partial street closures, can further integrate the park into the community fabric.



The study area is organized into four planning districts—Riverfront, Downtown Core, Fitzgerald Corridor, and Harmston Park—each with distinct characteristics, opportunities, and potential for future growth. These districts

provide a framework for focused planning, development, and targeted improvements moving forward.



GETTING AROUND DOWNTOWN

Transportation, Cycling, and Parking Opportunities

Context

Downtown Courtenay is growing and changing — and how people move around will change with it.

Historically, Downtown has been shaped by car-oriented streets and dispersed parking. As the City looks ahead, major investments are being made to improve walking, cycling, and transit options, while managing parking more strategically.

Strengthening connections and creating new choices for getting around Downtown will make it easier, safer, and more inviting for everyone — whether arriving by bus, bike, car, or on foot.

6th Street Multi-Modal Corridor and Active Transportation Bridge

6th Street is being contemplated as a key multi-modal corridor with a new two-way protected bike lane, making it safer and more accessible for cyclists. An active transportation bridge across Courtenay River will complete the connection, linking Downtown and significant parks and amenities across the river.



Cycling Routes, Greenways, and Green Streets

Building on the existing cycling network and guided by the Transportation Master Plan (2019), the DVLAP will explore new and improved cycling routes, greenways and green streets that connect Downtown to surrounding neighbourhoods, parks, and key destinations.

Parking Management

Future parking opportunities will explore mixed-use developments and structured parking options, informed by the Downtown Courtenay Parking Study (2024), to strategically balance the area's needs.

Vehicle Access and Circulation

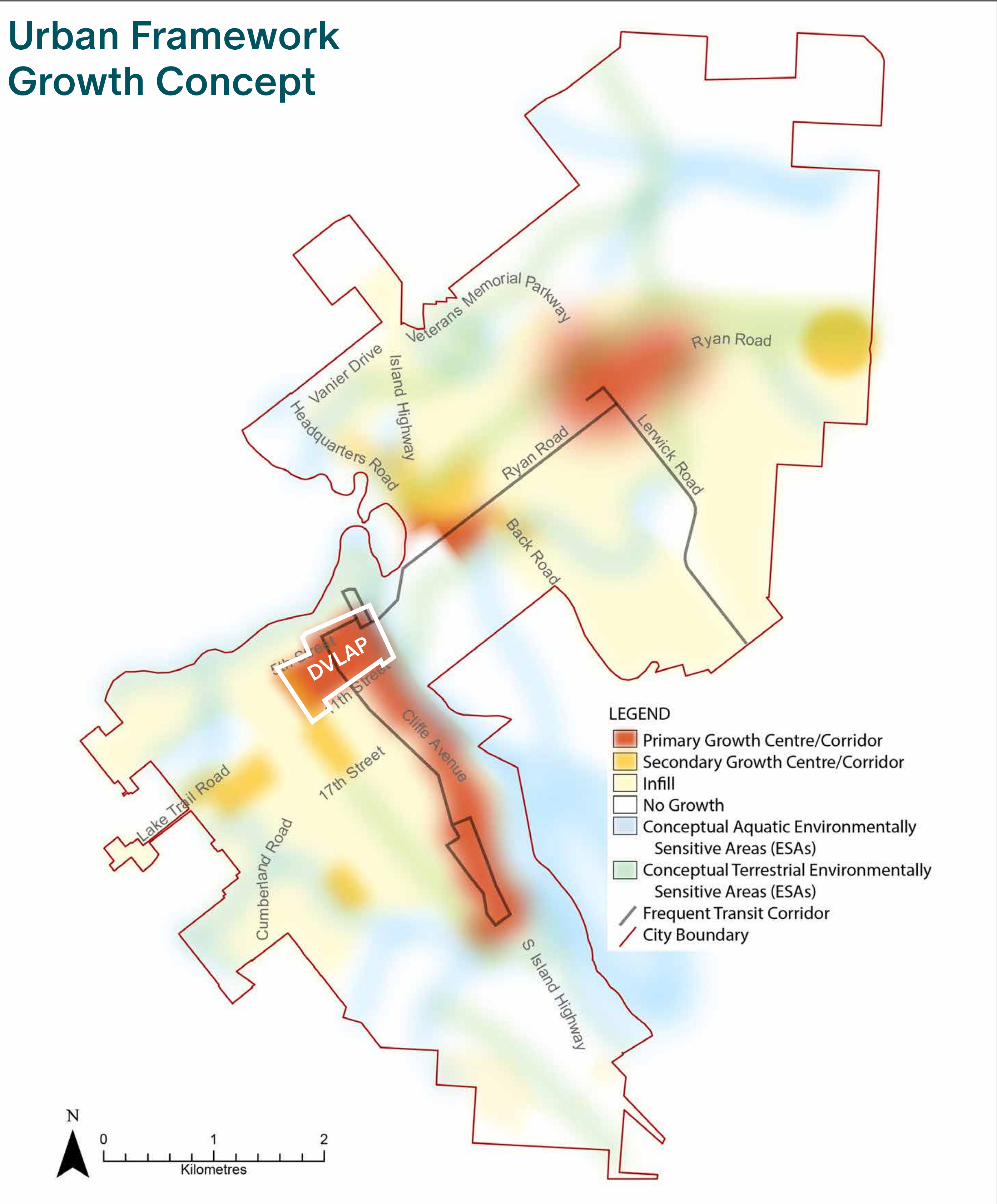
Vehicle access will remain important, with traffic focused along Cumberland Rd, 8th St, 17th St, and Cliffe Ave, as walking, cycling, and transit become stronger priorities.

Future Transit Exchange

A new transit exchange is being built at England Avenue and 8th Street to create a central hub for regional and local bus connections.

DENSITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Downtown in the Context of the City



Focused Growth in Courtenay

The City's Urban Framework Growth Concept identifies growth centres as areas where 70% of Courtenay's growth should occur. Developed with the community through the OCP consultation process, the growth concept emerged to address community goals of growing in a way that protects natural spaces, provides affordable housing and transportation choices, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and infrastructure costs and creates unique and vibrant neighbourhoods.

As the centre of town, the Downtown is intended to function as a location of significant growth to support its function as the local, city-wide and regional centre of cultural, civic, culinary, economic, and public life with the widest ranges of activities and attraction for residents and visitors, day and night, throughout the year. The recent Complete Communities Growth Assessment identified the Downtown as one of the most infrastructure-ready parts of the City for water and sanitary services, supporting development-readiness for growth.

New Residents and Housing Needs

Courtenay's most recent Housing Needs Report (2024) identifies that Courtenay could grow to a total population of 42,000 by 2041. This means that Courtenay will welcome approximately 13,000 additional people, and plan for an additional 8,350 homes by 2041.

Within the Downtown this could mean 3,000 to 5,000 more people, and 1,500 to 2,500 additional homes by 2041. New homes will be a mix of ownership and rental, and of varying cost with special attention to below-market affordable housing options, special needs and supportive housing and housing for seniors and families.

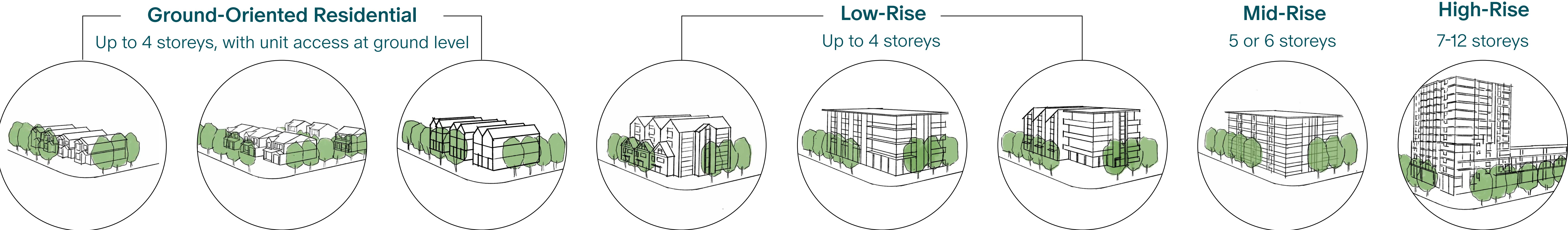
Help Us Identify Where Growth Should Go!

Within the Density and Development Board, three approaches are provided to guide a discussion of where new development is appropriate. These approaches explore opportunities for increased density, height, and mixed-use development in key areas of the Downtown Courtenay DVLAP study area. The level of density and height increases from Approach 1 - 3, creating more options for housing, businesses, and community life.

As You Think About Density Approaches, Please Consider the Following:

- The timeline for development and re-development is not known. Some development concepts will require land to be consolidated to accommodate larger development.
- A target range of 1,500 – 2,500 homes are used to guide the discussion, and is not a specific requirement.
- Growth that does not occur in the Downtown will have to be accommodated elsewhere such as the other growth centres, through neighbourhood infill or through possible City of Courtenay boundary extensions.

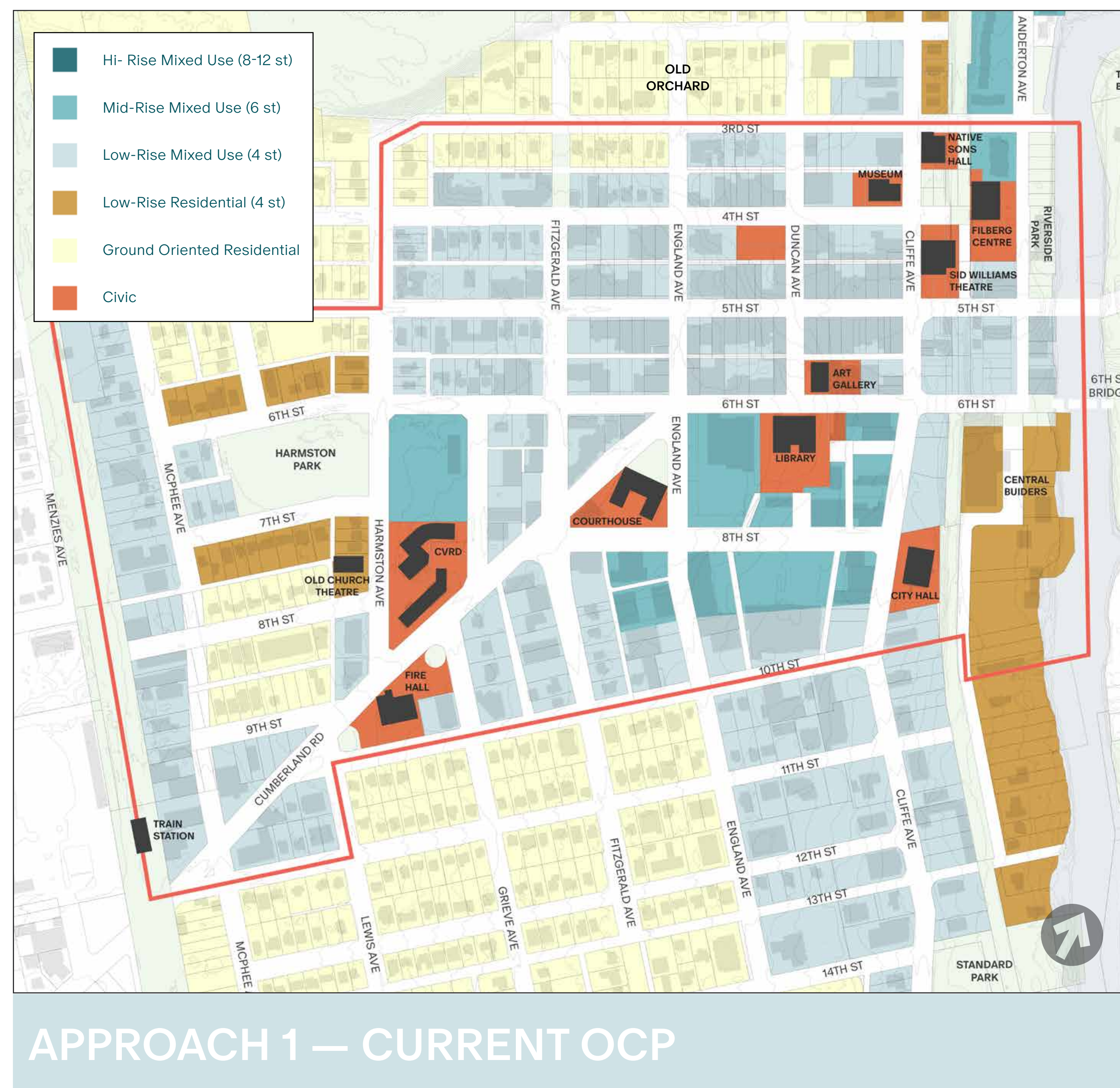
The icons below demonstrate potential building heights and forms, based on the OCP.



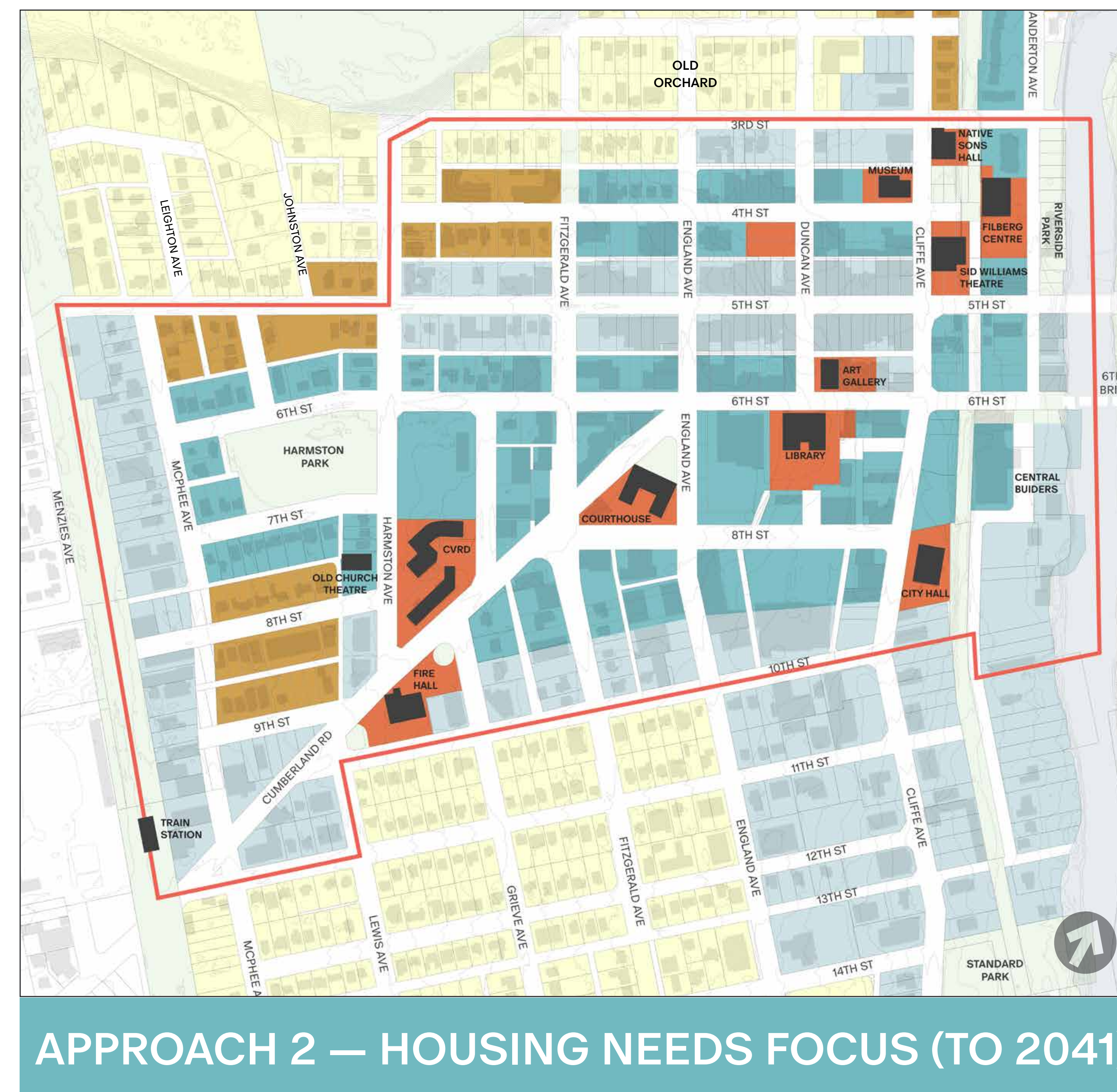
DENSITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Height, Scale, and Built Form

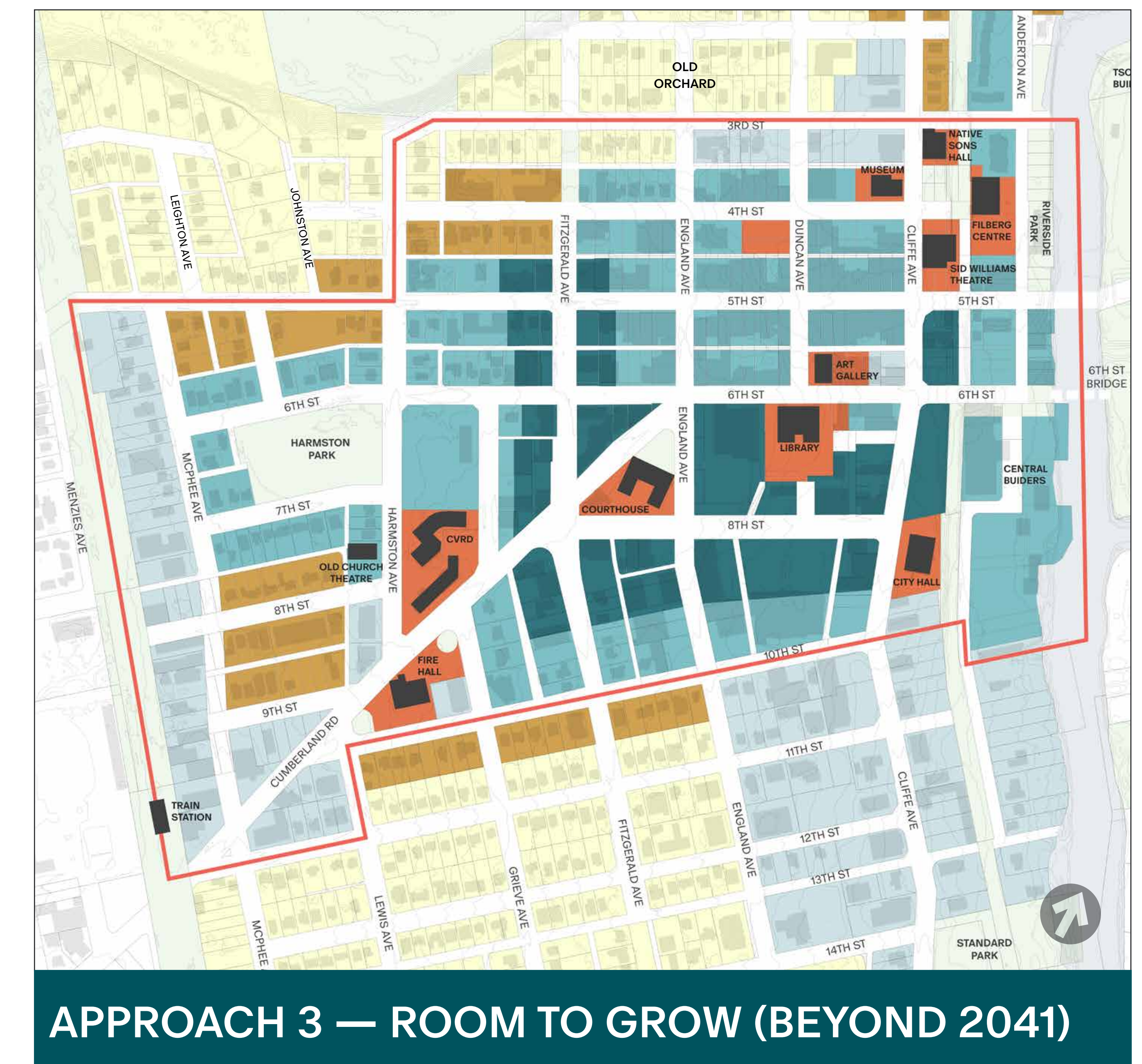
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Approach 1 follows most closely the vision established in the Official Community Plan in which low-rise buildings are along 5th Street and adjacent urban neighbourhood areas, and where mid- and high-rise buildings are considered for only select areas of the Downtown.



Approach 2 would allow for more housing needs to be accommodated in the Downtown, while still maintaining low-rise buildings along 5th Street and within the Riverside district south of the 5th Street Bridge.



Approach 3 looks even further into the future, beyond 2041, with a revised vision of a more urban Downtown with higher densities throughout most of the planning area.

Old Orchard Heritage Interface: The Old Orchard neighbourhood has some of the oldest settler homes in Courtenay and is an area known for its heritage character. The neighbourhood does not have formal heritage protection status, however there is potential for official Heritage Conservation Area designation for the neighbourhood which will be explored through the Official Community Plan update process happening later this year. Heritage Conservation designation would mean that a Heritage Alteration Permit could be required for any renovations or additions to designated buildings.

PLACEMAKING

Parks, Plazas, and Public Space

Context

Downtown Courtenay includes valued parks, plazas, and public spaces — but many are aging, underused, or ready for renewal. The DVLAP offers an opportunity to reimagine these spaces to better support residents, workers, visitors, and businesses.

Building on the **Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP, 2019)**, the plan will explore ways to activate public spaces as gathering places that reflect Courtenay's identity and support community life.

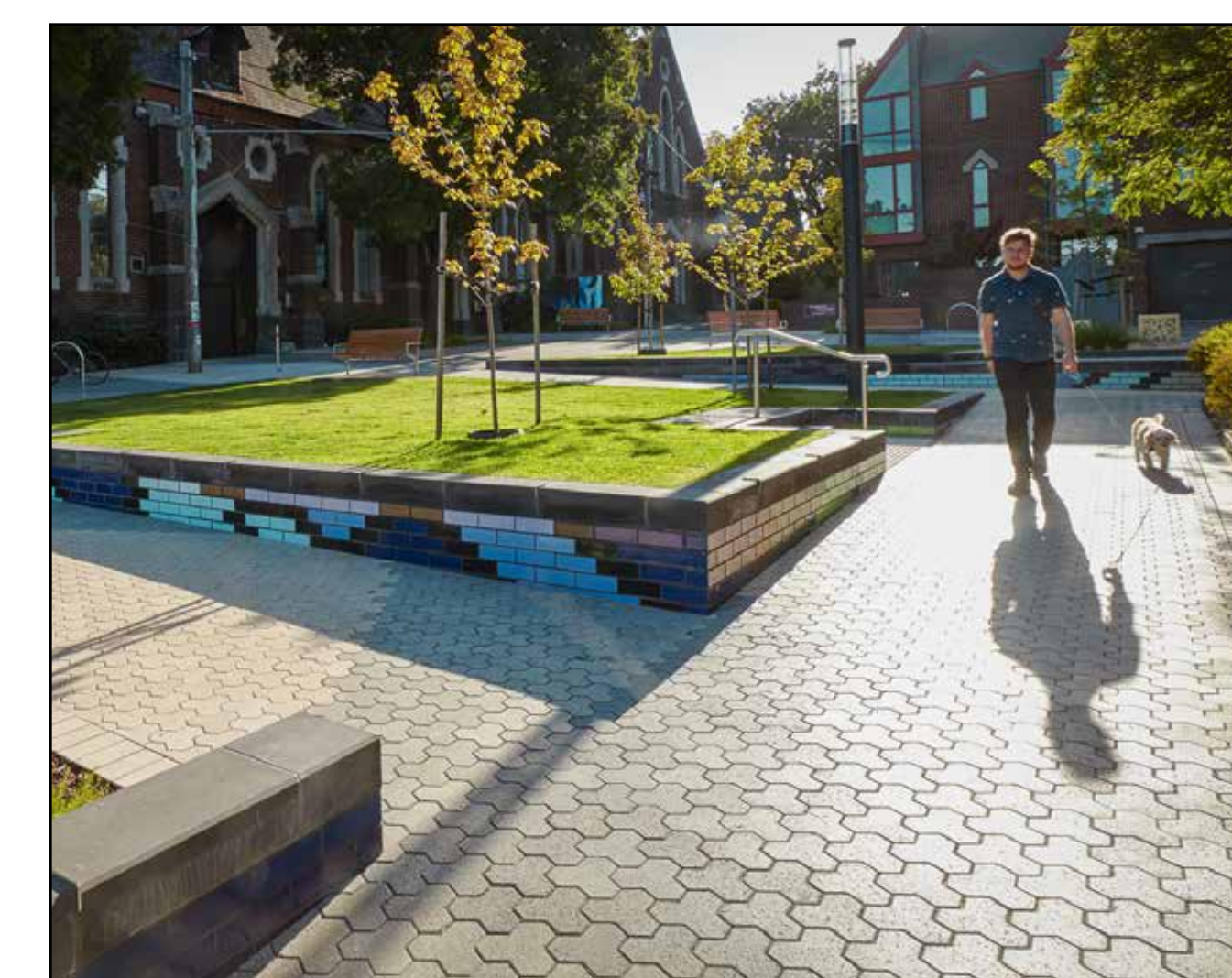
Opportunities for New Parks

The PRMP highlights a lack of park space in the Downtown and recommends a new neighbourhood park in the Old Orchard area. It also identifies a need for improved trail connections along the riverfront and more recreational amenities and gathering places near the water. The DVLAP will consider these gaps and opportunities as part of a broader public space strategy.



Harmston Park

Harmston Park is a key public asset with potential to become a vibrant community destination. The DVLAP will explore design and programming to enhance its role as a welcoming, multi-use space.



Strengthening Downtown Plazas

Several important Downtown plazas are being explored for potential improvements, including Duncan Commons and Mews, the Cultural Plaza between Native Sons Hall and Sid Williams Theatre, and the Courthouse Plaza. Enhancements could include new seating, landscaping, public art, lighting, and creating flexible spaces for community events.

Improvements to Riverside Park and the riverfront area will also be considered as part of broader placemaking strategies.

Upgraded plazas will help create a more comfortable, active Downtown experience and support local businesses.

Street Market Options

As part of the DVLAP, the City will explore options for a future Downtown location that supports the needs of street markets.

Potential locations being considered include 5th Street or a revitalized Harmston Park, offering better space, access, and visibility for vendors and visitors.