



A Development Strategy for **NORTHWEST EXCHANGE DISTRICT AND CHINATOWN**

October 2018



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Prepared by:



and



for:



Project Team

Glen Manning, MALA, FCSLA
Monica Giesbrecht, MALA, CSLA
Mark Bauche, MALA, CSLA

Michael Banman, MAA, MRAIC
Kyle Warren, M.Arch.
Scott Suderman, P.Eng.

Johanna Chabluk, M.C.P.
Angela Mathieson, President & CEO

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- Winnipeg Chinatown Development Corporation
- Siloam Mission
- Red River College
- The United Way
- End Homelessness Winnipeg
- Artspace
- Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation
- The Exchange District Business Improvement Zone
- The Downtown Business Improvement Zone
- Central Neighbourhoods
- The City of Winnipeg

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"In designing a new urban neighborhood, before any street arrangement is considered, or the location of any building is determined, the first task should be to define the public social life that will characterize the spirit of the community; to identify social events and occasions that will support public social life; and to design urban spaces to accommodate these social events."

Livable Cities Observed c.1995 , Lennard & Lennard - page 234

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Building on the momentum of CentreVenture's successful district-specific planning and development strategies in the past decade – including the Exchange Waterfront and the SHED – this plan focuses on the opportunities in the Northwest Exchange District and Chinatown, an area within Downtown Winnipeg that has struggled in recent years with underutilized buildings and vacant lots. This plan and vision for the future aims to guide development in the Northwest Exchange District and Chinatown neighbourhood with a contextually, economically and socially appropriate approach.

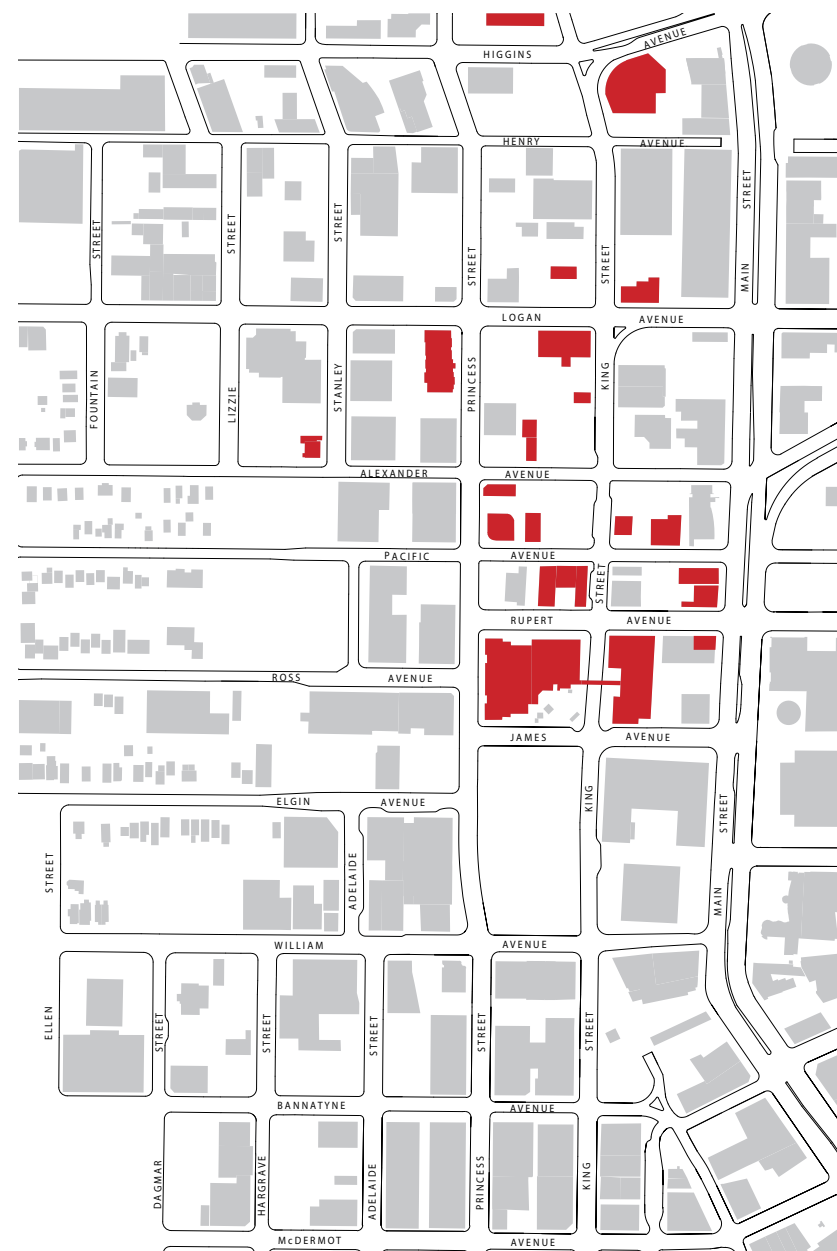
With the imminent development of the adjacent Market Lands and the continued revitalization of the Exchange District and Downtown as a whole, this plan looks ahead to ensure that this area grows and changes with the times, but still remains viable to the maximum number of people who live, work and seek goods and services in this neighbourhood.

Consultation through roundtable discussions and interviews with area stakeholders throughout the study process has revealed a galvanization amongst the key players, initiating a momentum that has the potential to affect and accelerate positive changes to the district through continued co-operation and participation.

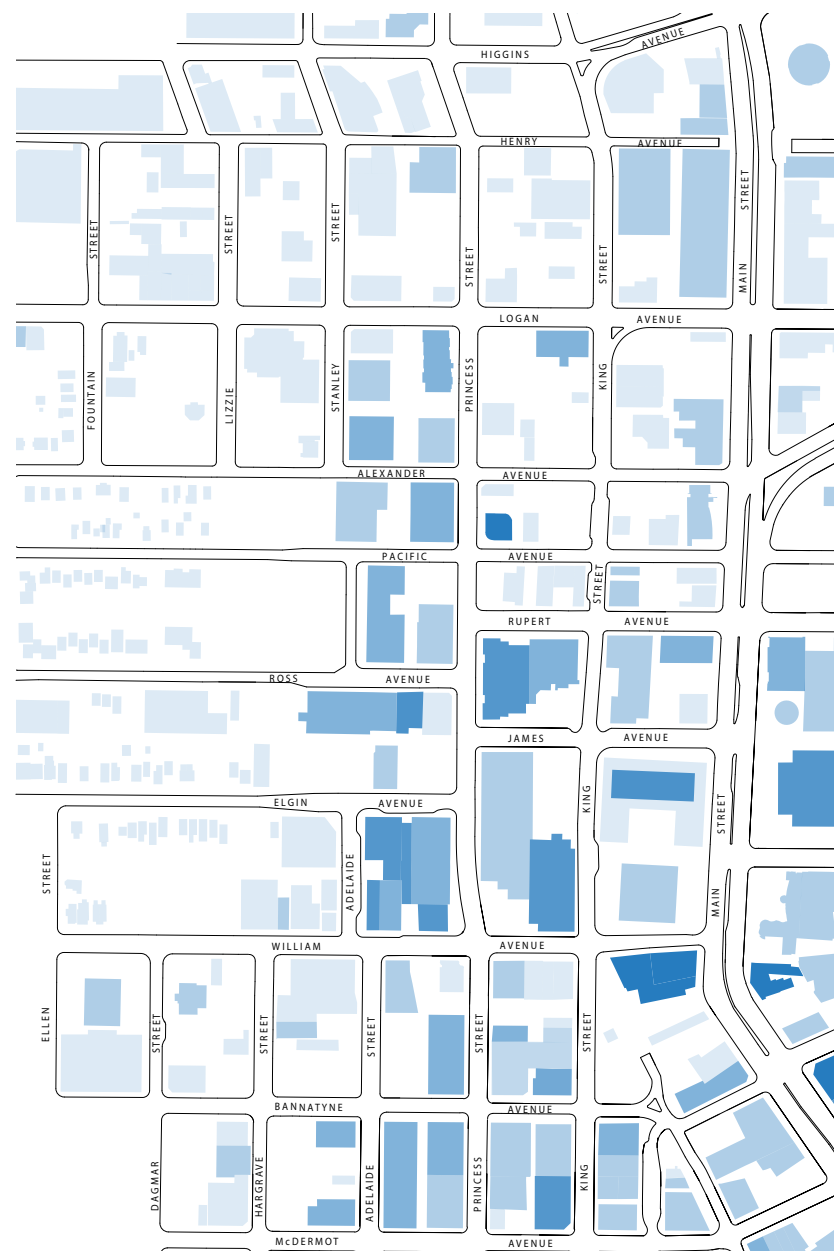
These ideas have been synthesized into six guiding principles and have helped to identify three catalyst zones within the study area where development can be immediately initiated.

Analysis revealed a district characterized by walkable short blocks hosting an inconsistent collection of land uses, building types, conditions, heights and densities. This mixture, and the gaps created by vacant lands and surface parking, degrade the area's cohesion and suggest it is not simply an extension of the tight-knit Exchange District, but a distinct zone in itself that serves as a transition between the Exchange to the south, the social services and light industrial uses to the north and east, and the residential neighbourhood to the west.

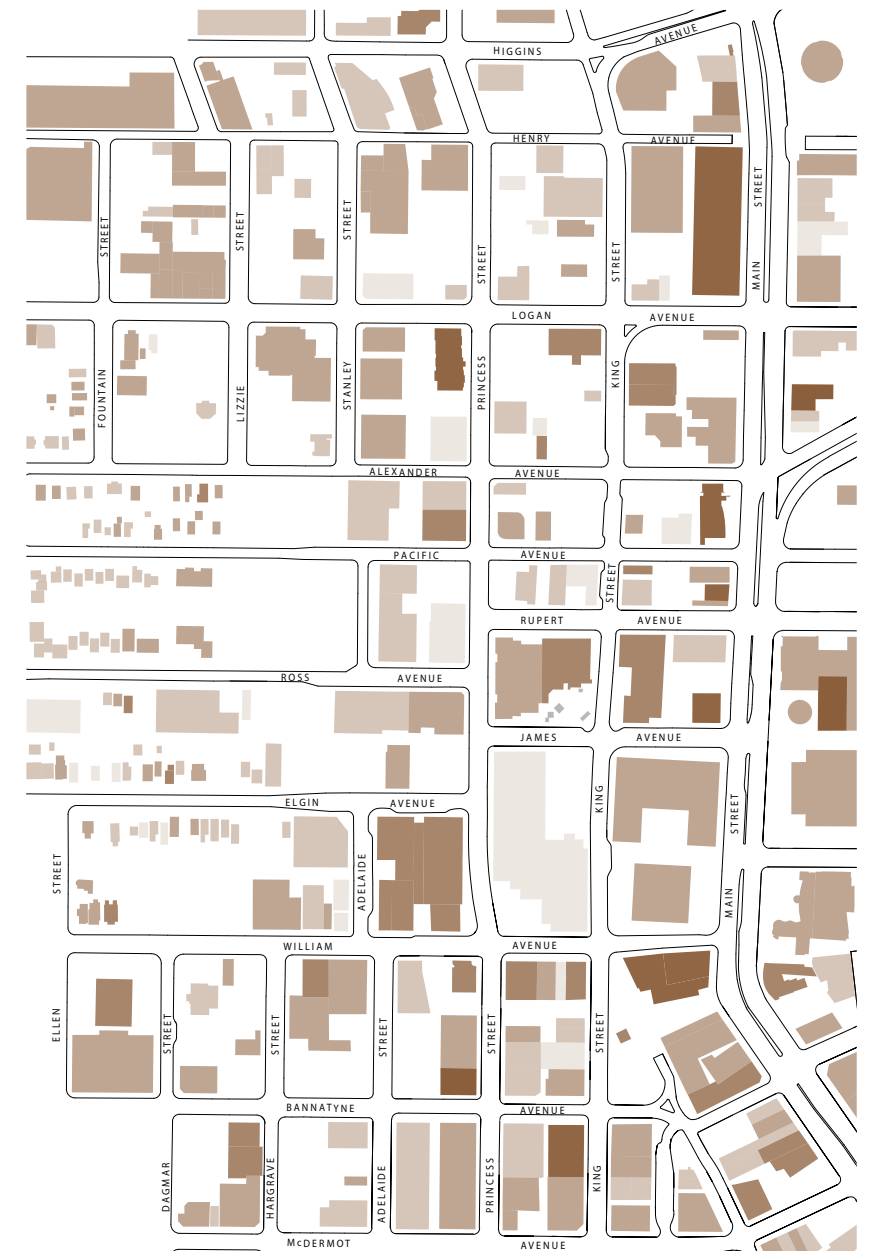




CHINATOWN ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES



BUILDING HEIGHTS <10m 10-20m 20-30m 30-40m >40m



BUILDING CONDITON 1 BLIGHTED 2 3 4 5 NEW

Chinatown provides a unique destination in the heart of this zone, but has neither the size nor the influence to lend its identity to the entire area. Building up density along King Street will offset the loss of key Chinatown anchors like Shanghai Restaurant. The proposed new development at the Market Lands will further tip the activity and revitalization toward the south end of the neighbourhood, but creating strategically developed attractions with broad appeal at the north end of the zone will bring balance to the neighbourhood. The growth and redevelopment plans of active groups like Siloam Mission, Manitoba Centennial Centre Corporation, Red River College, Artspace, and the Exchange District and Downtown BIZes can work to stimulate gradual growth throughout the zone.

A common theme through many of these development plans is housing, which supports the conclusion that this zone should be strengthened as an urban neighbourhood with an identity based on the area's historic authenticity and grit, with a vibrant, locally-oriented commercial presence and opportunities to share or convert uses as the neighbourhood evolves.

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WHAT WE HEARD

The three collaborative workshop sessions and one-on-one discussions revealed many common ideas amongst the group.

Analysis of Existing Conditions:

- Diversity is the defining characteristic of the area: residents belong to a variety of income levels and ethnic groups; This presents an opportunity to expand housing options, and create new stock for more residential growth;
- There is a lack of stable and affordable small spaces for businesses and artists (1500 square feet or less);
- There are large gaps between active properties, which inhibits walkability and creates unsafe conditions; This creates opportunities for infill developments;
- There are a number of existing buildings, many with heritage value, in disuse and disrepair;
- There is a lack of good lighting and evening business activity, which creates safety and comfort concerns;
- Infrastructure in the area is in poor condition (sidewalks, roads, etc.).

New Development:

- There was widespread enthusiasm amongst the group for mixed use, and housing for a diverse and multicultural community including Indigenous people, students, artists, refugees, new Canadians, seniors, and those requiring community supports;
- Clustering of businesses/destinations creates stronger motives for people to visit the area. Commercial development should be focused on King and Princess Streets, with the balance being primarily residential;
- Infilling vacant properties will create continuity and safety at the pedestrian level;
- Catalyst projects can be a starting point that will create opportunities for the community to fill in the gaps and grow organically;
- Forming alliances among key area players can help guide development and ensure the community is being adequately served;
- Walking and cycling should be safe, easy, and encouraged throughout the neighbourhood;
- New development should be well connected to adjacent neighbourhoods.



Collaborative Workshop Session #2



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

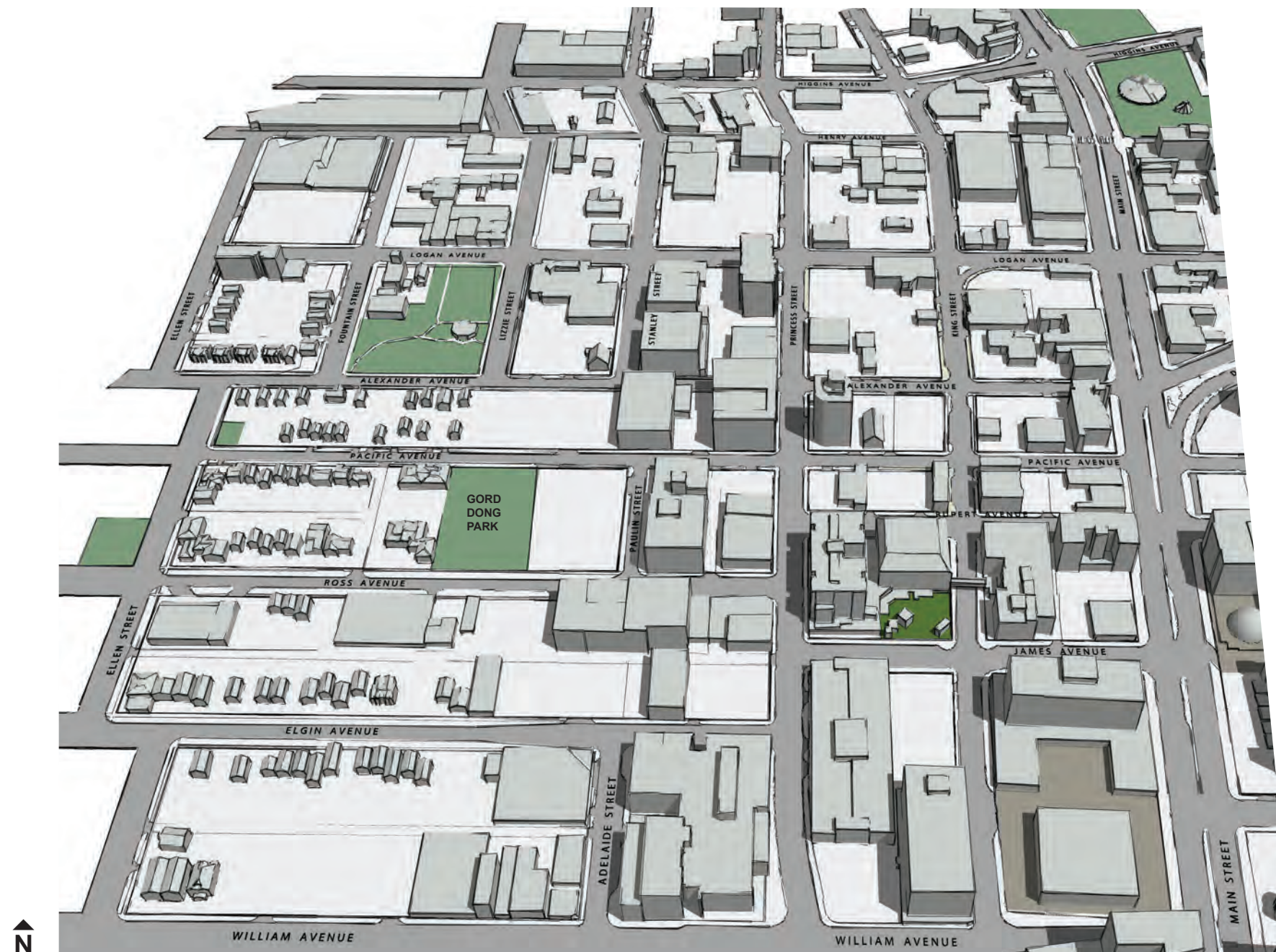
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1. **Close the gaps.** Focus on developing vacant lots and buildings first in order to fill in empty spaces, and build toward continuous street frontages with diverse uses and walkability.
2. **Authenticity drives development.** This area of Downtown Winnipeg has a deliberate mix of history and progress, creating a socio-economic diversity. Future development should build on what is here and celebrate cultural identity, rich histories, and the unpolished nature of the place.
3. **Neighbourhood first.** This zone intermingles the Centennial neighbourhood, the Exchange District, and Chinatown, creating a rich diversity that has the potential to build its own unique character.
4. **A community for all.** In order to build on and improve an authentic neighbourhood, people of all walks of life must be able to afford to live and work here. A mix of market and affordable housing, small spaces for small businesses and artists, and strategically located community services are key to providing neighbourhood residents with a comfortable, affordable and sustainable lifestyle.
5. **Spaces that are flexible and adaptable.** The key to sustainability is allowing for a variety of uses, while working with existing and future development to build on a dynamic downtown neighbourhood.
6. **Focus on local.** Though it is important to draw in those from outside the area to contribute to a vibrant district, there should be comprehensive provisions for the people who live and work here.

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DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

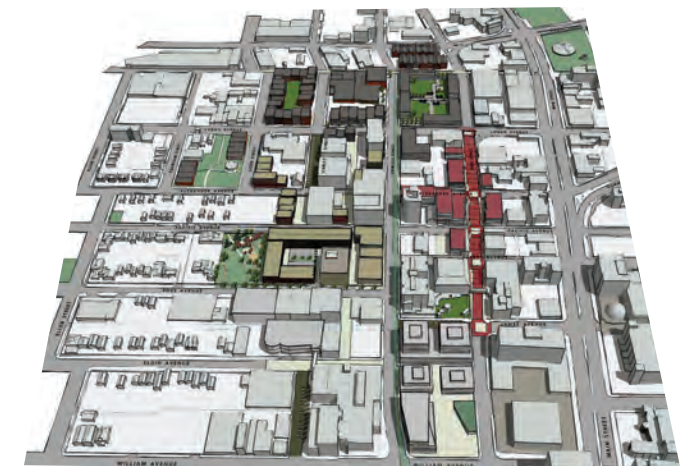
The Guiding Principles help to establish a vision for a vital neighbourhood that is built upon its own character and strengths. This vision starts by seeding three catalyst zones, where development can be intensely focused as a means of attracting new residents and businesses to the area. From here, the infill spaces between the catalyst zones will become attractive opportunities for development.



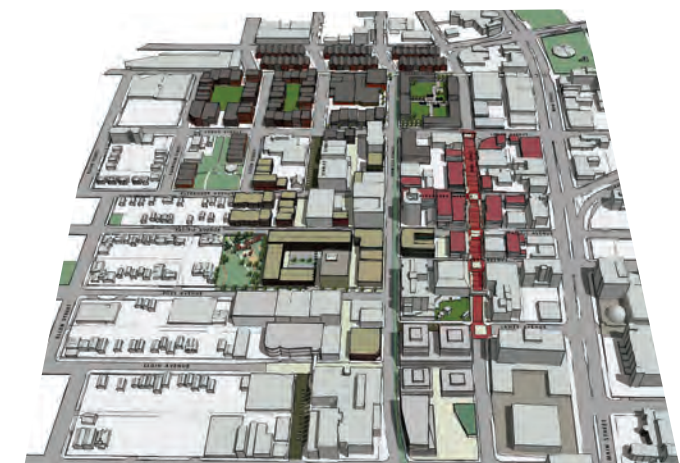
Northwest Exchange District / Chinatown Existing Conditions



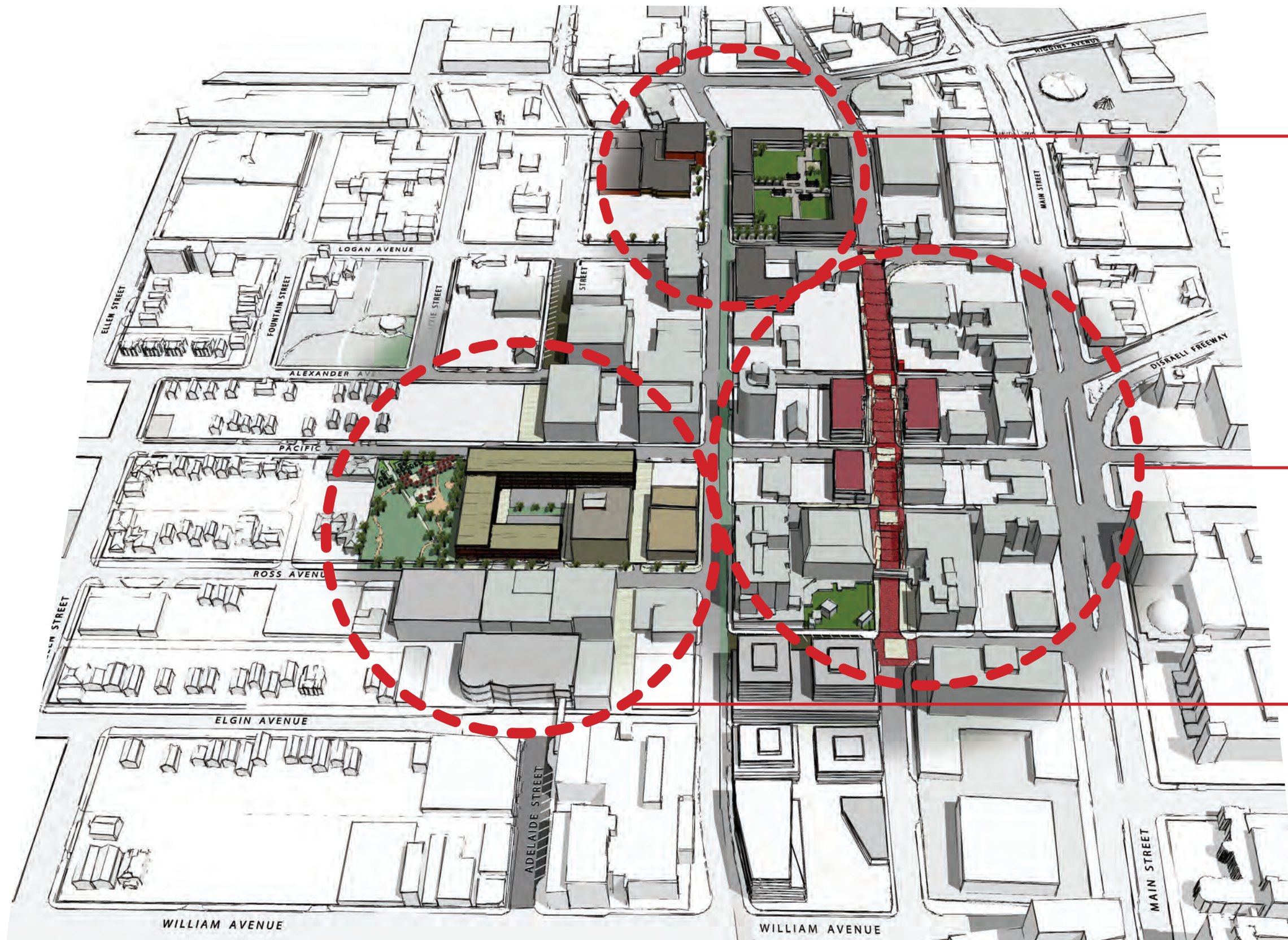
10-Year Projection



25-Year Projection



50-Year Projection



Catalyst Zone 3:
Henry Avenue Commons

Catalyst Zone 2:
Chinatown High Street

Catalyst Zone 1:
Ross Avenue Urban Living Lab

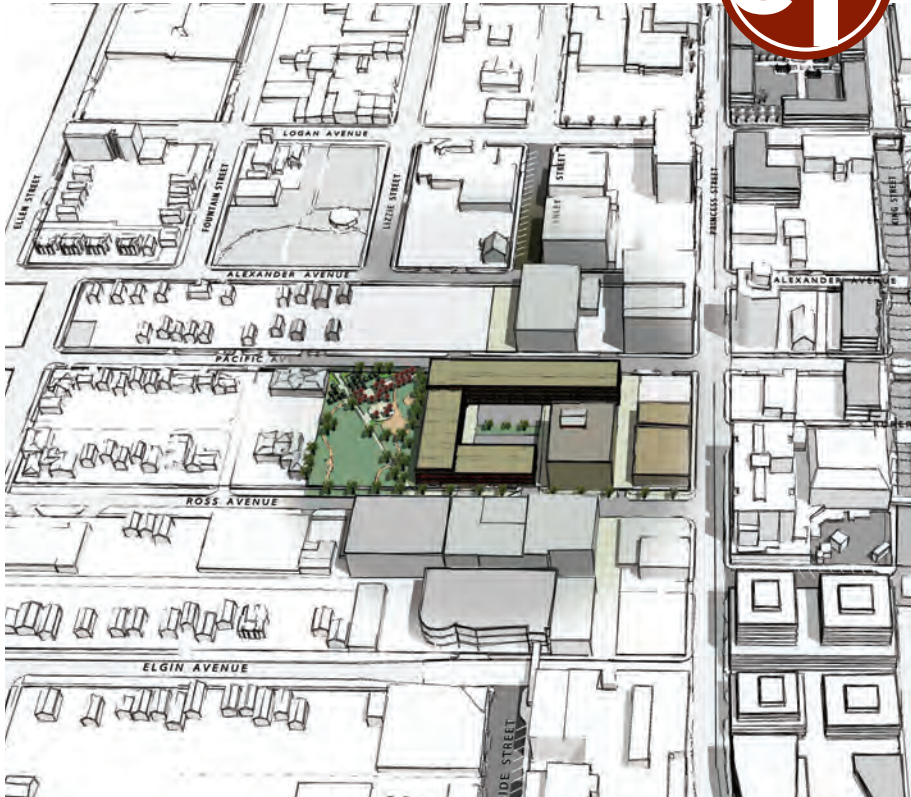
Catalyst Zone 1: **Ross Avenue Urban Living Lab**



1a. Enhance the makings of a neighbourhood by encouraging mixed-use and mixed-income residential development at three to six storeys, to transition in size and scale from the warehouses of the Exchange District to the lower rise housing stock of the Centennial neighbourhood. Development should focus on affordability, to encourage the widest range of new downtown residents. Main floors of heritage buildings may be designed to be convertible flex spaces for residential, community or commercial uses.



Street frontage on Ross Avenue



Ross Avenue Urban Living Lab Vision Plan

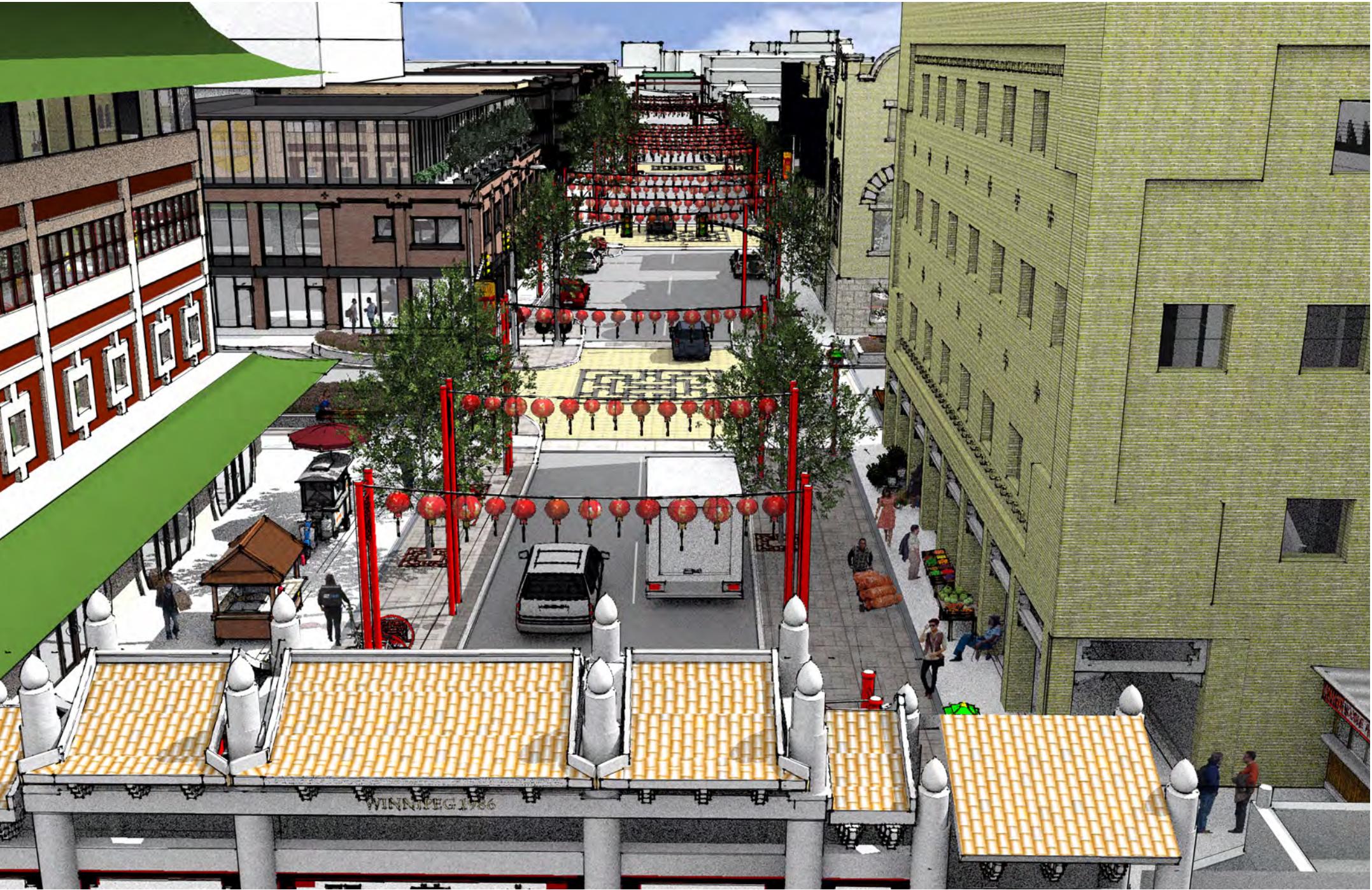


Residential frontage onto a newly revitalized Gord Dong Community Park will enhance safety and quality of life.

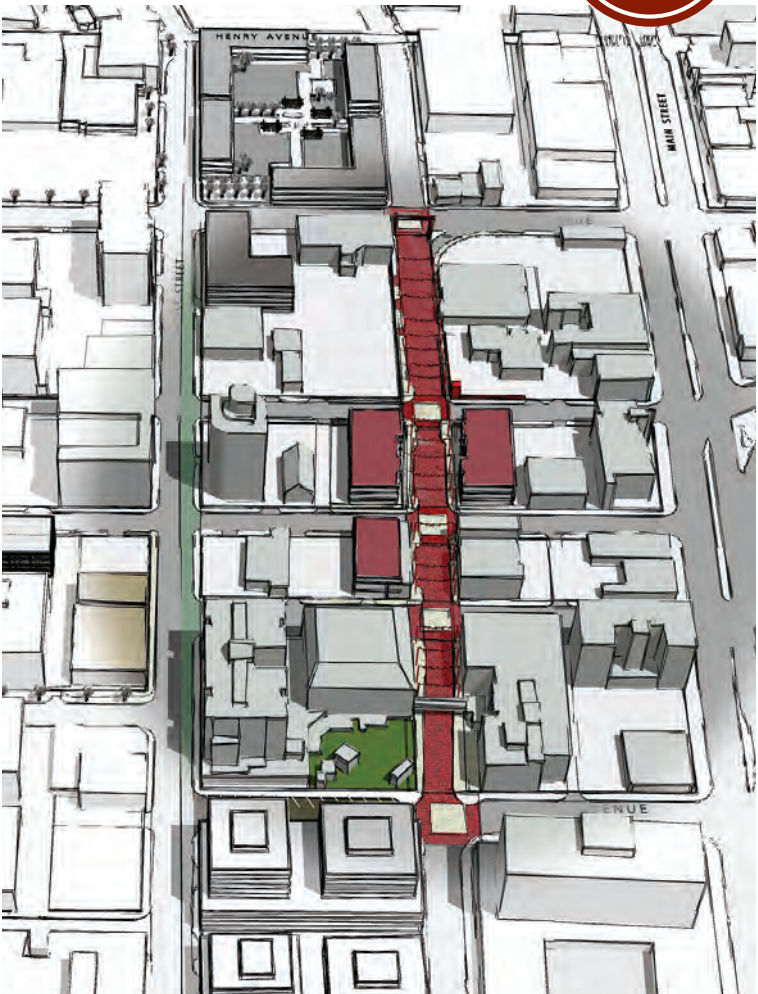


Integrated laneway, parking lot and greenspace

1b. Create pedestrian-first shared use laneways that provide north-south connectivity within the development adjacent to the newly revitalized Gord Dong Community Park.



Existing building stock can be adapted to new uses, contributing to vibrant street life.



Chinatown High Street Vision Plan

2b. Focus on converting heritage buildings and infill lots into a mix of uses with ground floor commercial spaces fronting onto King Street.

2c. Refresh the existing Chinatown Gate, Chinese Gardens, and streetscape elements along King Street. Enliven the street through widened pedestrian zones populated with seating areas, pop-up kiosks, pocket plazas and seasonal patios, and add colour through lighting, lanterns, banners and vivid signage.

2a. Develop a vibrant concentrated three block commercial “high street” experience that celebrates the history and culture of Chinese Winnipeggers, while encouraging business growth by creating opportunities for microbusiness start-ups, pop-ups, and incubator spaces to meet a growing demand for the ‘shop local’ movement.



A vision of King Street teeming with colour and activity, paying tribute to the cultural heritage of Chinatown.

Catalyst Zone 3: *Henry Avenue Commons*

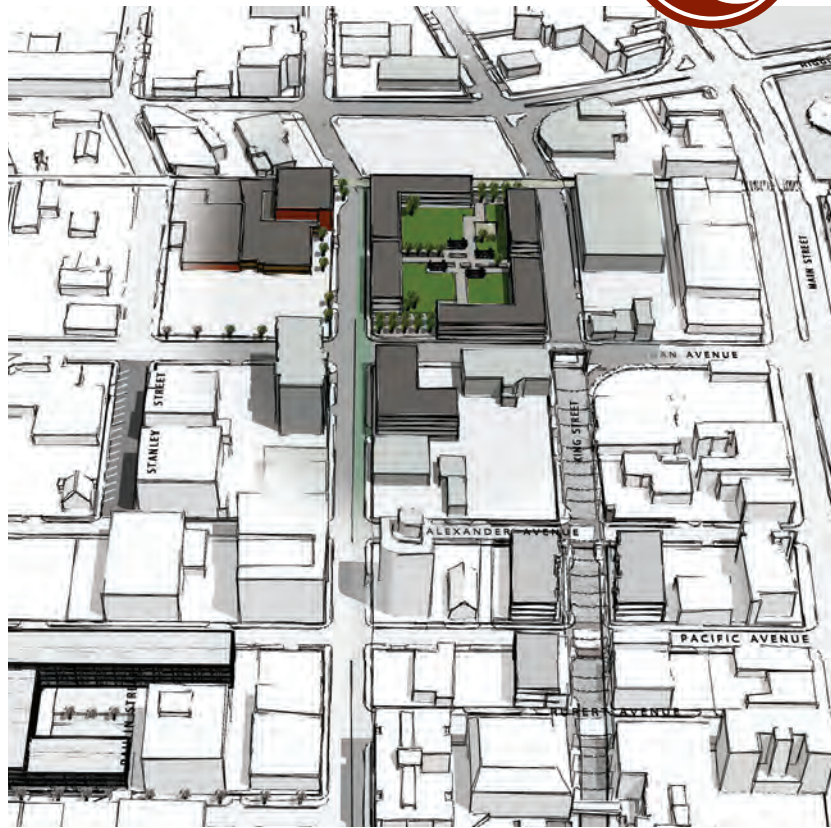


3a. Capitalize on Canada’s new housing strategy to create a sustainable residential area between Henry and Logan Avenues that provides affordable options for young professionals, college students, seniors, immigrant and refugee families, young Indigenous adults and others wanting to live downtown.

3b. Develop a community commons at the heart of this area, complete with playing fields, food gardens, public washrooms, healing spaces, and a small community centre that provides year-round community health and life skills programming.



Common courtyard space for shared community use



Henry Avenue Commons Vision Plan



Henry Avenue as a vehicle-restricted pedestrian/cycle route



Open space creates opportunities for community gardening, gathering space, and recreation activities



"What I get enthusiastic about is when I hear to some degree that there is a flavour for mixed housing and mixed use... In my view that could absolutely thrive within [this neighbourhood]."

- Jim Bell, CEO, Siloam Mission

A birdseye view of a vision for the Henry Avenue Commons, with subdivided lots and interlocking shared courtyards



MOVING FORWARD

The value of the open discussions and sharing of ideas that led to this plan is immeasurable. The momentum and relationships built during the workshop sessions will be an important launch point for the improvements laid out in this document. To that end, the following steps should be taken to advance the proposed strategies:

- **Convert momentum to action** through the formation of a working group to develop a framework for laying out responsibilities and action plans in the community;
- **Continue to build on relationships** created during the study process by encouraging further dialogue on issues that affect this neighbourhood;
- **Develop a community input process**, where residents, businesses and consumers can share their ideas on how to make continual improvements to the neighbourhood;
- **Create opportunities and incentives** for pop-up retail events, incubator spaces, and art installations within the study area to bring visitors to the community in order to help change perceptions, increase foot traffic, boost neighbourhood businesses, and showcase a growing and changing community.