

PUBLIC HEARING FOR BYLAW 13-25 – DOWNTOWN AREA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

Purpose

The purpose of Bylaw 13-25 is to adopt a new downtown area redevelopment plan, known as Our Plan for Downtown.

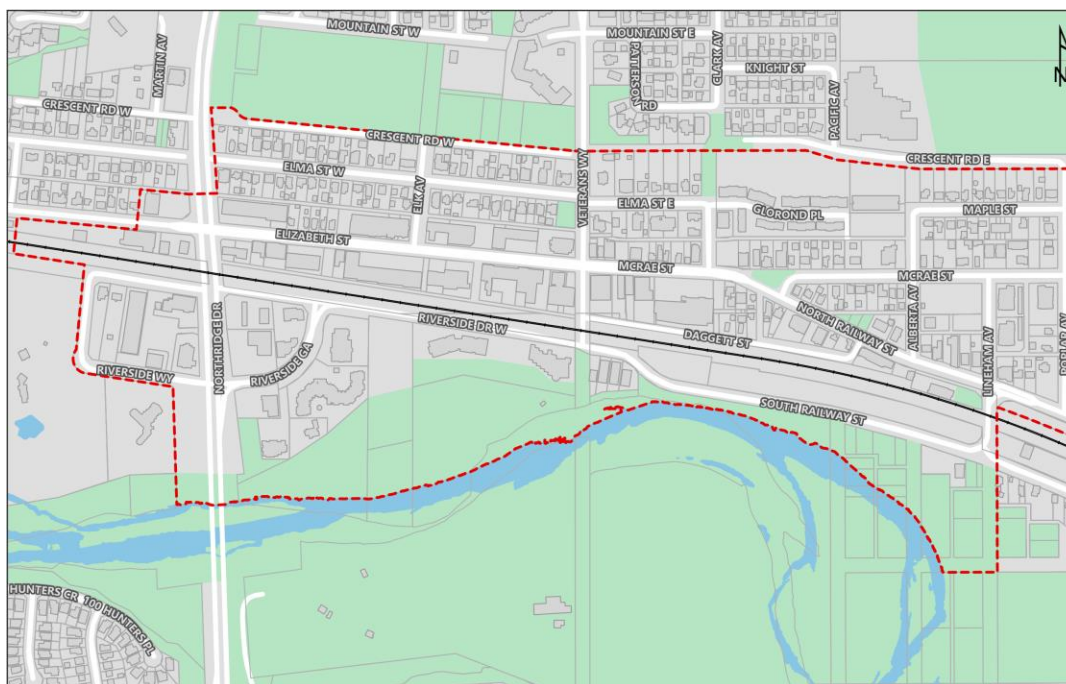
Readings

Depending on the outcome of the public hearing this Bylaw is ready for second and third readings.

Report, Analysis and Financial Implications

Our Plan for Downtown, the proposed downtown area redevelopment plan (ARP), is the culmination and consolidation of the various plans, studies, and bylaws that give direction to the current and future development of the downtown area. The development and adoption of the ARP is a key objective of Council's Strategic Plan goal of a strong local economy and will work in concert with the major infrastructure initiatives currently underway or planned, such as the Main Street Improvements, to enhance and revitalize the downtown area.

The boundary of the Downtown ARP is illustrated below and is defined to the north by the escarpment, to the south by the Sheep River bank, to the west by the commercial lands and Northridge Drive, and to the east by Poplar Avenue north of the railway lands and Lineham Avenue south of the railway lands.



In accordance with section 634 of the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)*, an area redevelopment plan (ARP) enables the Town to designate an area of the municipality as a redevelopment area for matters such as preserving or improving land and buildings in the area, rehabilitating buildings in the area, removing buildings from the area, constructing or replacing buildings in the area, establishing, improving or relocating roads, public utilities or other services in the area, or facilitating any other development in the area. The ARP also allows for the establishment of a redevelopment levy for the area, which can only be used to fund land for parks, school buildings, or recreation facilities that are proposed within the plan area.

Additionally, the *MGA* requires that an ARP “must describe (i) the objectives of the plan and how they are proposed to be achieved, (ii) the proposed land uses for the redevelopment area, (iii) if a redevelopment levy is to be imposed, the reasons for imposing it, and (iv) any proposals for the acquisition of land for any municipal use, school facilities, parks and recreation facilities or any other purposes the council considers necessary, and may contain any other proposals that the council considers necessary. No further acquisitions of land are proposed for parks, school facilities, or recreation facilities within the downtown and as such, no redevelopment levy is proposed.

Background

In 2021, the current Municipal Development Plan (MDP) was adopted, which directed the development of a downtown area structure plan. However, there is a long history of plans, studies, and engagement on the downtown area beginning with the original 1980 Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan, which was repealed in 1997, to the more recent non-statutory 2018 Downtown Urban Design Master Plan and the updated downtown policy and provisions in the MDP and the Land Use Bylaw (LUB). In 2023, Council directed Administration to focus on physical enhancement and vitalization of the downtown based on its most recent design concepts than to re-start a further planning and design exercise. As such, the core focus of the new Downtown ARP was on consolidating and updating the available work and direction for the downtown into a single modern statutory planning document that provides clear and certain direction for redevelopment, improvement and growth to downtown businesses, residents and visitors. The main starting point being the 2018 Downtown Urban Design Master Plan, which the ARP would replace, consistent with the vision and policy direction of the MDP supported with development and design regulation in the LUB.

Development and formulation of the ARP built on the Vision and Guiding Principles of the DUDMP. The division of the downtown into four different character areas, which formed the basis of the Downtown District in the 2021 LUB was also a key element in the ARP structure. These aspects were reviewed, brought back to the public for comment as part of a larger engagement process on various downtown projects, known as Downtown’s Next Chapter, beginning in June 2024. This approach was preferred to guide long-term infill and redevelopment of the downtown, while parallel capital renewal projects would bring forward streetscape enhancements and critical utility infrastructure upgrades required to both support long-term development of new communities across Okotoks while attracting new businesses, investment and visitors to downtown as the heart and cultural centre of the community.

Through this process of policy review, technical considerations, and engagement, aspects of the DUDMP were revisited, including the vision and guiding principles as well as revising some of the boundaries and aspects of the character areas. The new vision of “Downtown is the social, cultural, and economic heart of the community; through the continued evolution of a unique walkable area that attracts people and investment” speaks more holistically to the downtown than the DUDMP vision that largely singled out the main street. The vision, along with the guiding principles of vibrant economy and active spaces, connected and walkable, celebrate unique character, enhanced natural spaces, and a place to live; build on the direction from the DUDMP and the downtown policies of the MDP, while providing clear language that is more inclusive to the entire downtown area.

Given the focus on consolidation and updating of existing direction of the downtown, the plan did not include other lands outside of the core downtown that do not have area structure or redevelopment plans in place, such as East Lineham or the Westend (residential area west of Northridge Drive and south of the escarpment).

Land Uses and Character Areas

Holistically, the downtown is a mixed use district that supports a variety of business actively and housing forms. The plan breaks down land use policy into the four separate character areas. These four character areas – Main Street, Elma Street West, Maple, and Riverfront – areas are based on the areas originally established by the DUDMP and enshrined in the LUB, with some minor changes to the boundaries, which are:

- the addition of 149 Elizabeth Street (Lots 30-37, Block F, Plan 1420L) as part of the Main Street Character Area as Council directed this property be considered for Downtown District;
- 18, 22, and 26 North Railway Street being part of the Main Street Character Area instead of the Maple Character Area (referred to as Elma Street East in the LUB) as these properties front onto the Main Street; and
- Lands south of the CPKC railway corridor between Veterans Way and Lineham Avenue as part of the Riverfront Character Area as opposed to the Main Street Character Area as the land has more in common with the Riverfront and supports comprehensive infrastructure planning for the area, including a proposed realignment of South Railway Street.



The Main Street Character Area includes the Elizabeth, McRae, and North Railway Street corridor and the properties fronting onto these roads as well as the Willow and Riverside Gate development areas. Most of the downtown commercial businesses are with this area and it is the primary economic and social activity spine of the Downtown, with street-fronted buildings and wide sidewalks that encourage walking and other means of active transportation.

The Elma Street West Character Area includes the historic properties along Elma Street West that contain a mix of commercial and residential uses. The vision of this area is to blend old and new, with retention and conservation of heritage assets while new buildings are added or renovated in a way that blends in seamlessly. Local small businesses and residents both flourish, visitors are drawn to unique shops and services, while the area provides a unique location where people can still live and work on the same property. The streetscape provides for all modes of transportation, with sidewalks on both sides of streets and a continuous tree canopy.

The Maple Character Area is a mainly residential area in the northeast portion of the Downtown that has a variety of attached and detached residential units developed displaying architectural design of various eras. The area provides Downtown with a growing population base to support businesses. Properties closest to Main Street have seen growth of home-businesses, which is likely to continue and expand. The ARP and LUB support redevelopment of sites to midrise residential buildings, which will add to the economic and social activity in the Downtown.

The Riverfront Character Area is largely defined by the Sheep River and the naturalized landscape and open space along the shoreline, which provides a transition from the Main Street area to the river. Contextually sensitive development, where flood mitigation can be implemented, can be considered. The Riverfront includes the Okotoks Arts and Learning Campus as well as a mix of commercial and other institutional uses.

Mobility

In conjunction with the ongoing utility infrastructure and surface improvements to key linkages in the downtown, the Downtown ARP provides direction and support for enhancements to downtown streets to improve walkability and accessibility, safety, and maintain a sense of place. The Downtown ARP supports unifying aspects of current and future streetscape improvements, including a standardized 'kit of parts' for public realm areas, such as benches and bollards, core design elements for public realm areas. The intention is to support the direction of the MDP in prioritizing pedestrians first while still managing and supporting access for motor vehicles.

Parking remains a key focus for downtown to support visitors, businesses, and residents of the area. There are currently more than 2,000 on-street and off-street parking spaces in the Downtown, with additional opportunities for parking being considered as part of public realm improvements in the Downtown, such the new formalized parking that was constructed along Daggett Street in 2024.

MDP Policy 8.3.4.a directs that parking in the Downtown should be carefully managed to provide enough parking supply to entice people to shop in the area and support local businesses, while avoiding onerous parking standards that dominate the public realm and discourage new development. The recently adopted Land Use Bylaw removed the requirement for minimum parking standards for all uses but contains standards on how parking is configured, if it is provided on-site.

In 2024, Bunt and Associates was commissioned to update and expand on the Town's 2013 downtown parking analysis to assess both the current conditions and the impact of further redevelopment and densification on parking supply. The parking study identified that there currently is no significant parking shortfall in the downtown area. Of the total available on-street spaces, there is up to 524 on weekdays and 566 on weekends. There are sufficient off-street (onsite) spaces at up to 536 on weekdays and 834 on weekends available during the peak parking periods. Although the current parking demands do not exceed the available parking supply, there are a few areas that are experiencing high-use, which makes it difficult to park in front or very close to some locations, but parking is available within 2-block walking distance during the peak periods.

The report also concluded that substantial redevelopment and infill of downtown properties can occur before any significant parking issues are anticipated to occur. However, the current and future parking situation should be reviewed periodically to determine if any further parking management measures should be implemented. These possible measures include changes to time period restrictions for parking, the introduction of market pricing for parking spaces; the sufficiency of access to transit and active transportation networks; addition of bicycle and scooter parking stands, including bike shelters for winter cycling; and additional Town investment in centralized public parking opportunities.

A secondary main line for CPKC (Canadian Pacific Kansas City Rail) runs through downtown, providing a critical goods route for rail transportation. The line also provides a potential opportunity for heavy rail passenger transportation, if regional passenger rail is introduced in the Calgary Region. The provincial government is currently developing a Passenger Rail Master Plan that is expected to be completed later this year. However, the railway also provides a challenge for noise, vibration, and safety to the community from the transport of dangerous goods and moving trains. The railway also provides a barrier through the Downtown limiting access to only a few key crossing points. Policy direction of the MDP and the regulations of the LUB currently guide development considerations within 75 m of the railway corridor and railway proximity policy was not reviewed as part of the Downtown ARP.

Environment and Natural Assets

Natural assets are the naturally occurring features of an area, such as trees, soil, and wetlands, that provide important services to citizens. For example, wetlands store water, improve water quality, and moderate climate through carbon storage. Vegetation such as trees, regulates local microclimates and reduces urban heat island effects, thereby improving physical health and human comfort. The Downtown contains riparian areas of the Sheep River, natural escarpments, and numerous mature trees that should be protected and enhanced to the extent possible. The Downtown ARP provides direction on enhancing natural assets in support of the directed under the MDP.

A significant portion of the downtown is within the established provincial flood hazard area, which provides areas of flood fringe and floodway within a 1:100 year flood event. This current mapping is enshrined in policy direction and development regulations under the Municipal Development Plan and the Land Use Bylaw. Both of these plans take precedence over the Downtown ARP. The provincial government is currently working on a Sheep River Hazard Study, which provides a much more comprehensive look at flood hazard along the length of the Sheep River but that study is not yet complete. Once the Sheep River Hazard Study is completed, the flood hazard area policy in the MDP and LUB will be reviewed to ensure consistency with the provincial mapping.

Plans and Policy Considerations

The proposed Downtown ARP supports the relevant direction under the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan for the subject lands, specifically policies to support efficient use of land and strengthening communities. As of February 18, 2025, alignment with the Calgary Region Growth Plan is no longer a requirement for new area redevelopment plans or the circulation of plans through the regional evaluation framework, but the DARP does align with a preferred place type of infill and redevelopment as well as other Growth Plan policies that apply to the area, including flood hazard policies.

The Okotoks-Foothills County Intermunicipal Development Plan (Bylaw 12-16) does not provide any specific direction for the subject lands and the boundaries of the Downtown ARP fall outside of the Intermunicipal referral area; therefore the plan was not circulated to Foothills County for review and comment.

Municipal Development Plan	Downtown ARP Alignment (green – supports; yellow – supports with some caution; red – conflicts)
1. Managing Growth	The Plan encourages infill and redevelopment (s. 1.1.3) of the downtown, acknowledges and doesn't conflict with flood hazard area provisions (s 1.4.1), acknowledges intention to relocate utilities underground (s 1.4.3), as well as acknowledges and does not conflict with railway proximity direction (s 1.10.2).
2. Neighbourhood Planning + Design	Policy and design direction within the Plan ensures alignment with the livable and sustainable neighbourhood guidelines (s. 2.1.1), identifies and provides direction to protect heritage (2.3.3), provides direction for appropriate infill (s. 2.5.1)
3. Integrated Transportation	The Plan, along with related downtown projects, prioritize people-oriented street design considerations (s. 3.1.2) and provides direction to support reduced car dependency and parking standards (s. 3.3.2)
4. Climate Change, Community Resilience + Environment	The Plan specifically directs the need to protect and enhance natural spaces and urban tree canopy to reduce the heat island effect (s. 4.1.2)
5. Housing	The Plan supports redevelopment and increased density of housing (dwelling units) in the downtown.
6. Employment Lands	The Plan encourages attractive mixed-use development (s. 6.2.2)
7. Parks, Recreation + Natural Areas	The Plan strengthens the connection with the Sheep River (s. 7.1.2), supports Dark Sky standards (s. 7.1.5), identifies the important environmentally sensitive areas of the Sheep River and escarpment (s. 7.2.6), provides direction to enhance the urban forest (s. 7.4.1), and supports flexibility of existing parks over time.
8. Downtown	<p>The Plan constitutes the ARP for the downtown as required under section 8.1.1. The specific policy direction for the downtown was considered in the development of the Plan to ensure the area redevelopment plan was building upon and supporting the MDP direction.</p> <p>Of note, in adopting the ARP is that section 8.2.2(e) is being interpreted so that residential uses are only permitted behind or above commercial uses is only mandated for the Main Street Character Area to allow for flexibility of development and mid-rise residential in the Maple Character Area. In addition, the design direction of the area redevelopment plan is considered to fully replace the direction of the Downtown Urban Design Master Plan for the purposes of section 8.3.6.</p>

9. Culture, Heritage + Arts	The Plan identifies and protects historical buildings and sites within the down (s. 9.1.1), the Plan draws on direction from the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (s. 9.1.2)
Part D: Maps	<p>Map D.8: Downtown – The boundary of the Plan has been modified slightly to include the commercial property on the west boundary of the plan area as part of downtown based on the direction of Council for the redesignation of the plan to Downtown District.</p> <p>Map D.11: Area Redevelopment Structure Plan Areas – The final boundary of the Plan is proposed to more closely match the core downtown area identified in Map D.8 than include the additional lands identified in as part of the Downtown ARP under Map D.11, which have a very different character than the main downtown area.</p>
Appendix E: Implementation	The Plan generally aligns with the Content of Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) requirements. However, some content such as forecasting of population, housing needs, and employment specific to the downtown was not included given the focus of the Downtown ARP as largely a consolidation plan.

Land Use Bylaw	Downtown ARP Alignment (green – supports; yellow – supports with some caution; red – conflicts)
Part 1: Purpose and Authority	No issues
Part 2: Maps and Overlays	<p>The Downtown ARP currently includes lands designated as Downtown (D) District, Traditional Neighbourhood (TN) District, and Natural Areas (NA) District. If the Downtown ARP adopted by Council, subsequent redesignations may be introduced to Council to ensure long term alignment between the Downtown ARP and Land Use Districts.</p> <p>The Flood Hazard Overlay applies to the area and the Downtown ARP defaults to the LUB development requirements.</p>
Part 3: Land Use Districts	Most of the Downtown ARP is designated Downtown (D) District, which is also separated into four different character areas. The Downtown ARP contemplates minor changes to the character area boundaries from the LUB.
Part 4: Signs	The Downtown ARP largely defers to the LUB on signage for private development apart from the Main Street Character Area, which provides additional limits on the size of window signs and restricts new freestanding signs on Main Street.
Part 5: Administration	No issues

Redevelopment within the downtown will also be subject to the Water Allocation Policy, which limits the further subdivision and redevelopment approvals based on the availability of licenced water supply. The provisions under the Policy and the associated Administrative Clarifications will guide when and how much development can occur in the same manner as other established areas of Okotoks.

Should Council adopt the Downtown ARP, future amendments to the Land Use Bylaw will be brought forward to Council to address areas of alignment.

Strategic Plan Goals

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Responsibly Managed Growth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrated Environmental Leadership
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strong Local Economy		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organizational Excellence	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced Culture & Community Health

Community Engagement Strategy

The public engagement for Our Plan for Downtown was not undertaken in isolation. Engagement on the downtown has occurred over time through a number of different plans and projects, including the Downtown Urban Design Master Plan, the Municipal Development Plan and the Land Use Bylaw as well as visioning workshops, industry roundtable discussions, and technical studies through the years.

Drawing from the Urban Design Master Plan for the vision and guiding principles in the development of the plan framework, the Town consulted with the community in conjunction with infrastructure renewal projects that moving forward within the downtown to tell a wholistic story of the importance and ongoing work within the downtown. This comprehensive engagement strategy was called Downtown's Next Chapter.

The combined engagement included two distinct phases, which are fully detailed in the attached What We Learned Reports:

- Phase 1 was held in from June to July 2024 with an open house and online survey, with mailed as well as social media notification to the community. There were 106 people that attended the open house and 100 online surveys were completed.
- Phase 2 was held in November 2024 with an open house (held in the morning and evening) and online engagement opportunity. There were 72 people that attended the open house and 21 that provided feedback online. Additional information on the plan and infrastructure projects were added to the website.

Additionally, ongoing information and updates are provided on the project engagement site at <https://shapeourtown.okotoks.ca/downtown/downtown-plan>.

The public hearing was advertised in the Okotoks Western Wheel on April 23 and 30, on the Town engagement website, on social media, and through letters send out to all landowners

within the plan area and adjacent to it on April 17. These advertisements meet and exceed the public hearing advertising requirements of section 606 of the *Municipal Government Act*.

No correspondence has been received on this bylaw at the time of writing of this report.

Alternatives for Consideration

n/a

CAO Comments

I support second and third reading of this bylaw dependent upon the outcome of the public hearing.

Attachment(s)

1. Draft Bylaw 13-25 Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan
2. Draft Bylaw 13-25 Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan - Schedule A Our Plan for Downtown
3. September 2024 Downtown's Next Chapter What We Learned Report
4. November 2024 Downtown's Next Chapter What We Learned Report
5. 2024 Downtown Parking Study Update Report

Prepared by:
Colin Gainer
Planning & Urban Design Team Leader
April 28, 2025