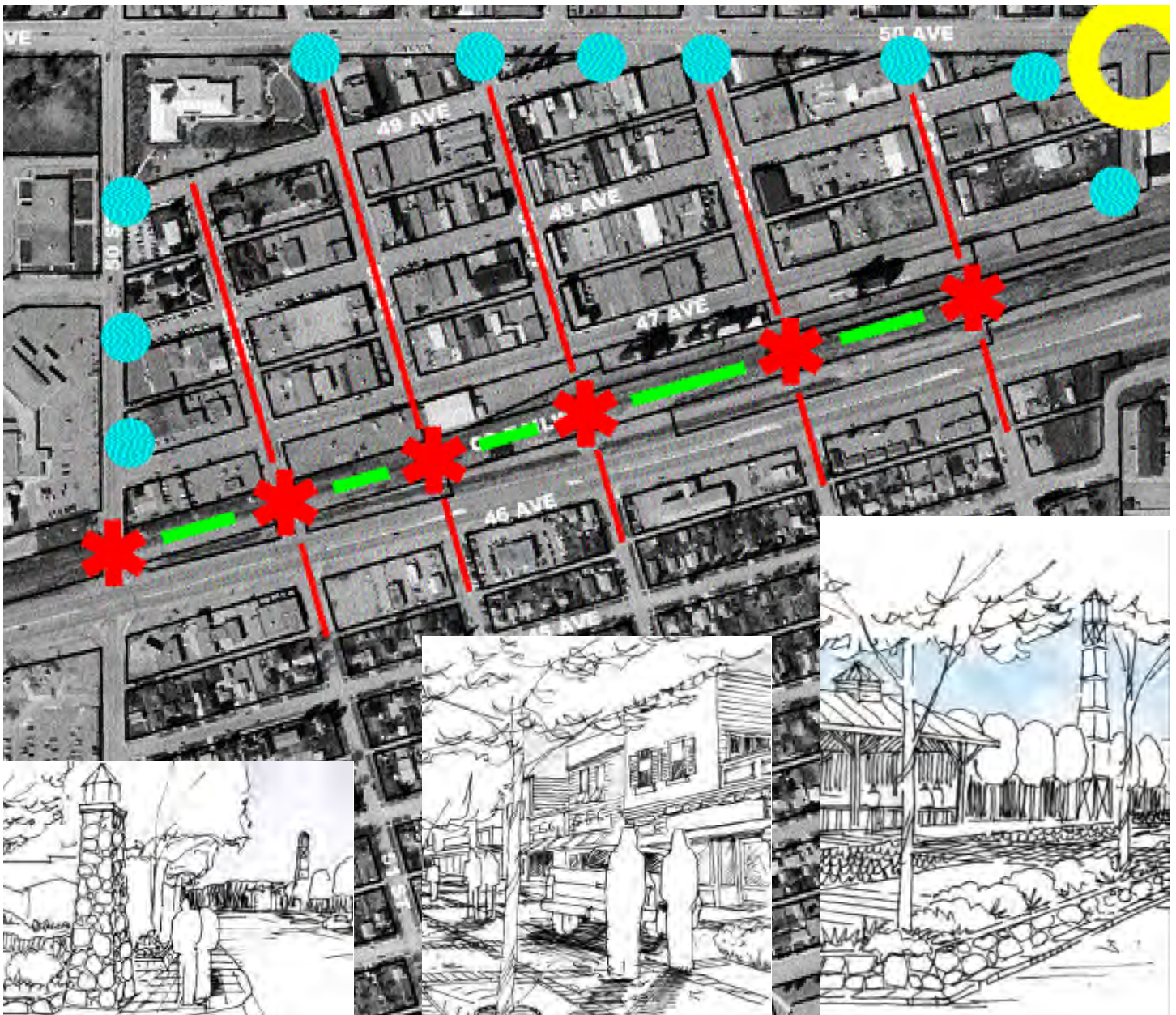


Town of Taber Downtown & Gateways Redevelopment Plan



January 2004



ARMIN A. PREIKSAITIS
& ASSOCIATES LTD.



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Overview

For over 100 years, Taber has been the centre of resource development and community life in southern Alberta with strategic transportation links to major markets. Between 1996 and 2001, the Town's population grew more than 6% to its current population of approximately 7,700 people. By 2026, it is projected that Taber's population will reach 10,000. In addition to its present growth, the Town also serves a primary trade area of more than 23,000 people – all of whom make daily visits to Taber to do business, shop, play and meet people.

In response to this continued growth as a community and service hub, the Town of Taber identified the need to create a series of community gateways to better define, announce and celebrate arrival into Taber, and to establish a downtown redevelopment plan to create a more functional, inviting and dynamic downtown that defines Taber's unique character and history and showcases its wide array of retail opportunities and community events.

In June 2003, Gibbs & Brown Landscape Architects Ltd. and Armin A. Preiksaitis & Associates Ltd. were engaged by the Town of Taber and the Downtown Business Revitalization Committee to establish a shared vision, strategic priorities and action plan for downtown and gateway redevelopment (refer to Figure 1: Location for downtown plan boundary and originally proposed gateway locations). Key objectives of the redevelopment plan are to:



- ▶ Develop a greater sense of community consensus, pride, purpose and direction related to downtown and gateway redevelopment.
- ▶ Establish concept plans and support graphics to illustrate place-making opportunities for the downtown and gateway areas.
- ▶ Address economic development and financing opportunities.
- ▶ Develop an implementation strategy that defines short, medium and long term redevelopment strategies, actions, roles, responsibilities and timelines.

1.2 Planning Process

The Plan was completed in three phases over a seven-month period as outlined below.

PHASE I:	INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS / VISION BUILDING - July to September 2003 <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Review background studies and collect data◆ Tour downtown, gateway areas and Town◆ Conduct focus groups and community vision building
PHASE II:	DRAFT PLAN / PUBLIC REVIEW - September to December 2003 <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Develop Draft Plan◆ Hold Public Open House
PHASE III:	FINAL PLAN SUBMISSION / APPROVALS - December 2003 to January 2004 <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Prepare Final Plan◆ Council Presentation

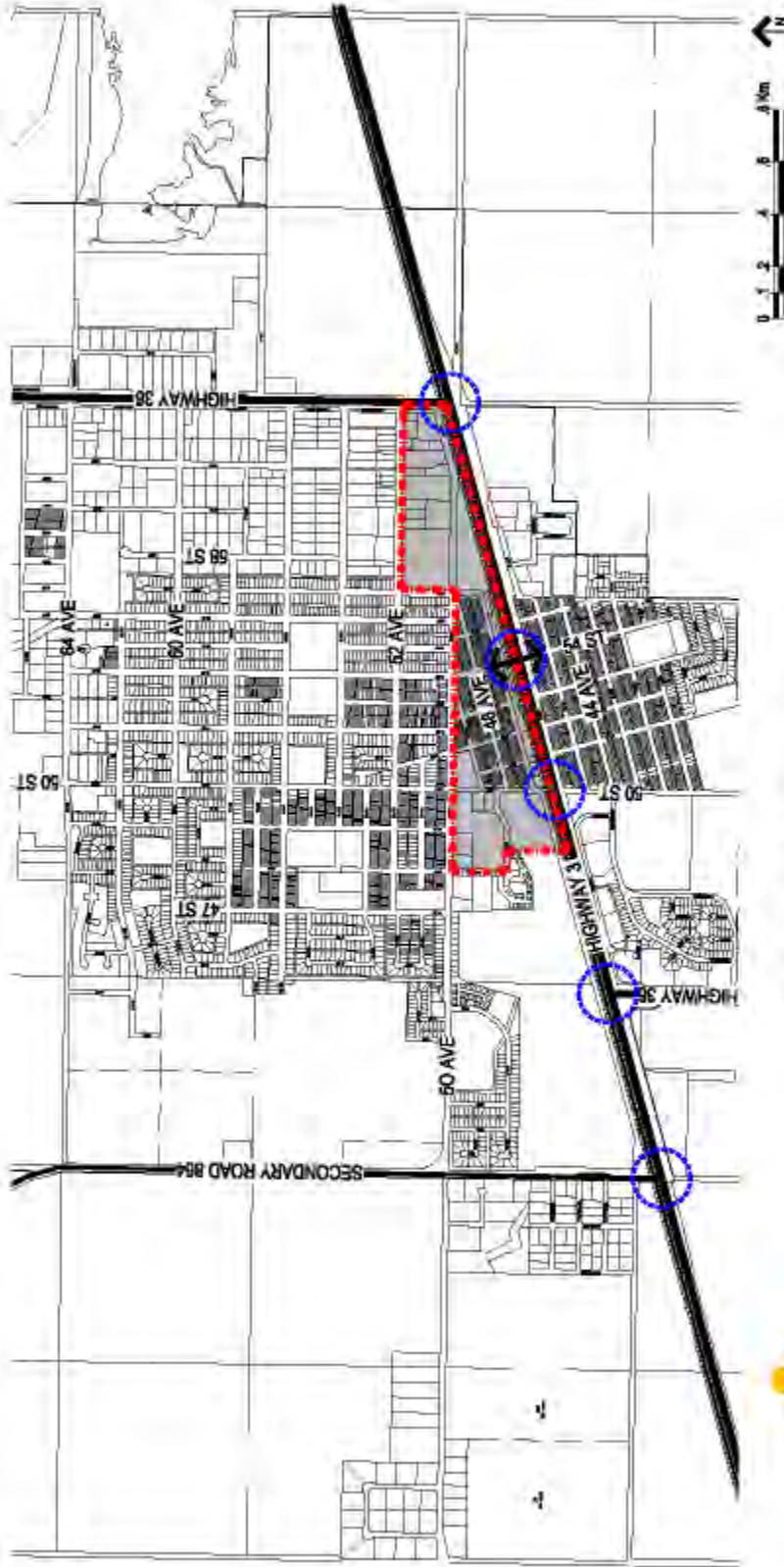


Figure 1: LOCATION
 Downtown and Entranceway Areas Redevelopment Plan



- LEGEND**
- Plan Area Boundary
 - Future Potential Access Point
 - Potential Gateway Locations
 - Highway
 - Secondary Highway
 - Railway

GIBBS & BROWN
 LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS LTD.
 And
ARMIN A. PRIEKSAITIS
 & ASSOCIATES LTD.

1.2 Community Consultation

Stakeholders and community members were consulted during various phases of the Plan. Consultation activities are summarized below:

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were held on September 29, 2003 with property owners, businesses, non-profit groups, youth, members of Council, administration and other stakeholders. A total of 44 people participated. The purpose of the focus groups was to introduce participants to the Downtown and Gateways Redevelopment planning process, have them identify specific issues and opportunities that need to be addressed; and determine community priorities for the Plan. The following summarizes the key findings of participants' responses:

- ▶ *Main downtown customers:* Town residents and rural residents in the trade area.
- ▶ *Five key strengths that downtown should build on:* good customer service, business variety, proximity to Highways 3 and 36, parks and recreations facilities, and an active business community.
- ▶ *Downtown's main competitor:* City of Lethbridge.
- ▶ *Five main weaknesses / barriers to be addressed:* poor and outdated buildings, limited inventory and selection, poor access to and from Highways 3 and 36, litter and irregular store hours.
- ▶ *Organizations that could help with revitalization:* include the Town of Taber, Chamber of Commerce, Municipal District of Taber, faith organizations and community service clubs.
- ▶ *Themes to consider in downtown streetscape improvements:* agriculture, railway, 'country', market garden, historical, 'welcome home', Tank 77 – stop in Taber for a long drink, corn coal mining, oil, pioneer/prairie, 1950s, irrigation and water, sugar beets and factory.
- ▶ *Gateway Hierarchy:* Three categories of gateways were developed to encourage vehicle traffic to stop in Taber and the downtown. Primary gateways would surround the entire downtown area, secondary gateways would promote the downtown in advance of important intersections within the Town and tertiary gateways would mark key intersections leading into Taber.
- ▶ *Possible Gateway Themes:* Taber corn, agriculture, irrigation, Tank 77, coal mining, history / culture, oil and gas, community / family, railway.
- ▶ *Downtown Priorities:* The top five are: improve building facades (storefronts) and building signage, improve cleanliness / maintenance, create better mix of downtown retailers and businesses, improve pedestrian areas, establish a unifying vision and theme.



Community members participated in focus groups and workshops during the early stages of project planning.



Vision Building Workshops

Downtown stakeholders, property owners, businesses, and the general public were invited to two Vision Building Workshops on September 30, 2003. The Workshops were advertised in the Taber Times and on a portable sign in front of the Civic Administration Building. A total of 12 people participated.

The purpose of the Vision Building Workshops was to develop a vision and strategic priorities related to land use, theming, attracting new investment, streetscape improvements, downtown revitalization and community gateways development. The vision for downtown developed during the workshop is in Section 3.1 of this report:

Participants were asked to develop strategic directions for five districts within the downtown:

- ▶ ***Civic Centre:*** Suggestions included renovating / expanding Civic Administration Building, adding small scale commercial services, improving Confederation Park. (add stage and sound system), landscaping and streetscaping improvements, traffic calming along 48 Avenue and Street, Gateway feature along 50 Street, preserve mature trees.
- ▶ ***North Residential Mixed Use:*** higher density residential development with ground floor retail on north side of 50, streetscape improvements along 50 Avenue, maintain and define angle parking, sign and improve municipal parking lot, and develop an affordable housing project at 55 Street and 80 Avenue.
- ▶ ***Retail Office Core:*** implement storefront / streetscape improvements, maintain parking, improve vehicle circulation, encourage compatible infill commercial development, preserve historic / architecturally significant structures, enhance Cenotaph Park, and redevelop industrial uses with yard storage to more intensive commercial.
- ▶ ***Railway Transition:*** Relocated farmers' market and redevelop as year-round public market, add pedestrian friendly development on rail lands with parking at rear or side, consider railway theme and boardwalks on south side of 49 Avenue, provide angle parking and truck / RV parking, encourage storefront improvements.
- ▶ ***Light Industrial:*** Improve appearance along 50 Avenue by screening yard storage and improving landscaping,. Consider a trail connection along railway tracks to create a loop and pedestrian connection to downtown.

Public Open House

A Public Open House was held at a downtown storefront location the evening of December 18 and during the day December 19, 2003. The Open House was advertised in the Taber Times inviting community members to view displays and provide comments on the Downtown and Gateways Redevelopment Plan. The Plan was also displayed in the Civic Administration Building during the week of December 22. Approximately 50 people attended the Open House and a total of seven written comments were submitted.

1.4 Plan Format

The Downtown and Gateways Redevelopment Plan is organized as follows:

Section 2.0: Community Profile

Provides an analysis of the community and a 'snapshot' of where it is today. This section reviews past studies, reports and history of relevance to future downtown and gateway redevelopment.

Section 3.0: Vision and Strategic Priorities	Presents a shared vision and strategic priorities for the future downtown and gateway redevelopment to the year 2020. The shared vision and priorities are based upon the outcome of the community Focus Group Sessions and Vision Building Workshop.
Section 4.0: Gateways and Downtown Redevelopment	Looks at achieving the proposed vision by describing key actions for downtown and gateway redevelopment.
Section 5.0: Implementation	Presents recommendations related to the next steps and plan implementation.

2.0 COMMUNITY PROFILE

2.1 Location and Trade Area

Located in south-central Alberta, the Town of Taber is part of the Municipal District of Taber. As shown in the Figure 2, the community serves a retail trade area of 23,000 people and is the hub of the region's agricultural industry. Two primary highways intersect the community. Highway 3 connects Taber to the City of Lethbridge to the west and the City of Medicine Hat to the east. Highway 36, the north-south connector, links Taber to Brooks in the north and to the U.S. border in the south. The area is also serviced by the main Medicine Hat-Lethbridge Canadian Pacific Railway line.

As summarized below, Taber is within 300 km of three major urban centres, a national park and the U.S. border:

- ◆ 108 km (67.5 mi) southwest of Medicine Hat;
- ◆ 50 km (32 mi) east of Lethbridge;
- ◆ 272 km (169 mi) southeast of Calgary;
- ◆ 179 km (111 mi) northeast of Waterton Lakes National Park; and
- ◆ 98 km (60 mi) north of Coutts / Sweetgrass USA Border Crossing.

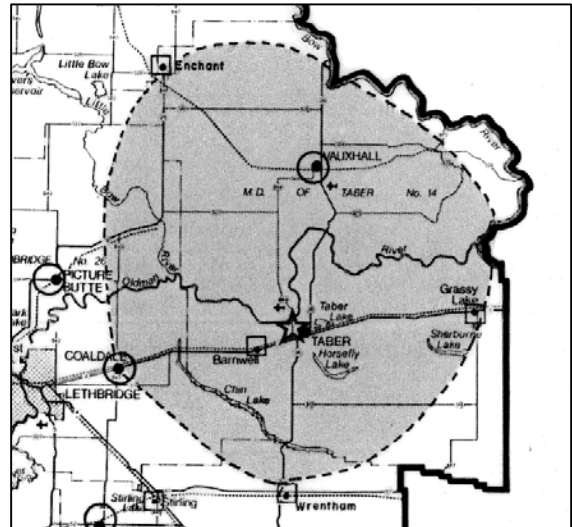


Figure 2: Taber Trade Area

2.2 Historical Development

Originally settled by Mormon homesteaders in the late 1890's and developed as a coal-mining town, Taber has been a centre of resource development and community life in southern Alberta for over 100 years. By 1906, Taber had built the Palace Hotel and Royal Hotels; various general stores and markets, a post office, a real estate and insurance office, a stable, a bank and land was surveyed into lots. The next year, the village of Taber became the town of Taber; John Truswell became the first Mayor and construction of the town office, police station and fire department ensued. From 1910 to 1913, dry conditions forced many residents to abandon their farms and Taber's building boom halted.

With the expansion of irrigation in Southern Alberta in the early 1930's, mining activities picked up again after initially declining dramatically in the 1920's. A new source of economic prosperity was born for Taber. Today, several small oil and natural gas fields are located in the Taber region and many Alberta companies are currently drilling new wells.

With irrigation the production of sugar beets was possible and, by 1950, Roger's Sugar Ltd. (formerly the Alberta Sugar Company) was founded. Roger's operates today as the only sugar factory in Alberta and provides the major source of employment in Taber. A marker of history and local livelihoods, the sugar factory is a landmark in Taber that can be seen from Highways 3 and 36.

Along with sugar beets, other vegetables are also grown and processed in the Taber area including corn, dry beans, potatoes, onions and carrots. Products such as hogs, beef, sheep, poultry, potato chips, french fries, snack foods, aseptic fruit juice and canned vegetable originate from the Taber area. The Town is home to several large

agricultural-processing and packaging factories such as Taber's Hostess Frito/Lay snack foods plant and Lucerne Foods Cannery.



Aerial photo of Taber in the early 1950s.

2.3 Population Growth and Characteristics

The Town of Taber has grown from a settlement of 1,000 in 1907 to a Town of 7, 671 today. Throughout the years, population trends in Taber have reflected worldwide events. For instance, during the Great Depression and war, population growth in Taber and nation-wide slowed. However, post-war prosperity, as evidenced by a dramatic 70% population increase between 1946 and 1951, marked a new start for Taber in terms of being able to attract people and industry.

Though growth patterns have varied during times of economic boom and bust, Taber has experienced a consistent average annual population growth rate of 2% for several years. The last federal Census shows a population increase of 456 (5.95%) during the 1996-2001 period. This reflects a slight slowing of population growth, down from 7.68%, relative to the 1991-1996 period. According to Statistics Canada, population growth in rural Canada has declined by 0.4% over the past five years. Taber is an exception to this trend and continues to display stable growth.

The characteristics of Taber's population reveal a relatively young town. According to Statistics Canada 2001 Census, nearly 25% of the population is school aged and approximately 48% are young adults in the 20 to 54 age group.

2.4 Historic and Architecturally Significant Buildings

The Plan area has six buildings that are of historic and architectural interest. They include commercial, residential and institutional buildings listed below, many dating back to the early 1900s. The Old CIBC and Courthouse buildings both are provincially designated heritage buildings:

- ▶ Palace Hotel
- ▶ Standard Furniture
- ▶ Rex Theatre
- ▶ Old CIBC (now used by First Credit Union)
- ▶ Thrift Shop
- ▶ Old Courthouse

These structures not only add to richness and variety to the community's built form, they are emblematic of early livelihoods in Taber. Community leaders are now realizing the unique opportunities provided by heritage buildings to create a 'sense of place.' This can help downtown areas to differentiate themselves from suburban malls and highway commercial strips. At present, Taber has no specific policies or programs to encourage historic building preservation.



The old CIBC is one of downtown's designated heritage buildings.

Over the years, other buildings in the downtown may have been covered with façade treatments. By peeling back these past façade layers, the Town may discover original facades that could be enhanced to better reflect the rich character envisioned for storefronts in the downtown.

2.5 Existing Land Use

Existing land uses in the Plan area provide the opportunity to create five distinctive downtown districts. Most institutional uses are clustered west of 50 Street where the Municipal Administration Building, Provincial Building and Civic / Aquafun Centre are located. Other institutional uses are situated east of here. Retail and service commercial uses are generally found north of the rail line between 50 Street and 57 Street. Vacant lands, light industrial and the Police Station are found at the east end of the Plan area while an active CP rail line intersects the south Plan area. A mixture of residential uses are north of 50 Avenue between 57 and 50 Streets. Although primarily single family dwellings, the area also contains some low-rise apartments.

2.6 Market Characteristics

2.6.1 Retail and Office

Because Taber acts as a service centre for the surrounding rural area, the downtown has developed a strong retail and business service sector, including financial institutions, legal and accounting firms. It is particularly significant that the existing retail mix includes a higher-end ladies and men's wear store. With the threat of leakage of retail sales to Lethbridge, it is important for businesses downtown to group as a Business Revitalization Zone to undertake the required physical improvements, marketing and promotions to remain competitive.

2.6.2 Housing

Most dwellings in the Town of Taber are owner-occupied single-detached houses. Housing starts between 1997-2001 have fluctuated, hitting highs of over 40 units in 1998 and 2000, and dropping to 16 in 2001. In 2002, Taber's 202 apartments units had a rental vacancy rate of 3.5%, which is significantly lower than the comparable provincial vacancy rate of 6.2%. (Source: Apartment Vacancy & Rental Cost Analysis, 2002, Town of Taber)

There is a good component of seniors accommodation clustered near the golf course west of the downtown. With an aging population in the surrounding rural area, this segment is expected to be a continuing growth market. A need has also been identified for more affordable housing in Taber.

Promoting more residential development in and near the downtown has the benefit of reducing municipal costs associated with suburban development, of providing a stronger local market for downtown shops and services, and of providing additional after-hours security.

2.6.3 Hospitality and Tourism

To many, Taber is known for its corn. This is celebrated annually during the last weekend in August at *Cornfest*, a free outdoor festival featuring a midway, petting zoo, a chilli cook-off, beer garden and a dance. Cornfest prides itself in being Southern Alberta's largest outdoor free festival and it attracts many tourists each year. According to the Taber Chamber of Commerce, about 15,000 people attend Cornfest each year. It is estimated that over 6,000 tourists come to Taber just for the festival making August Taber's peak tourism month.

The Taber and District Irrigation Impact Museum houses artefacts representing the area's history and heritage; it also has a gift shop and theatre room. Taber also hosts monthly indoor rodeos at the Agri-plex and a Pro Rodeo every May along with an annual parade. On the Victoria Day long-weekend, the Chinook Rodeo performs. Out-of-town visitors are accommodated in two downtown hotels and four on the highway. Just four kilometres northwest of the Town is the Taber Municipal Park, which offers year-round camping along the Oldman River.

2.6.4 Arts, Culture and Recreation

Located at the north end of Confederation Park, the Taber Arts and Crafts Centre teaches poetry, weaving, and painting classes. The Taber Public Library provides an array of resources including Internet and computer access to the public. Given the proximity to Lethbridge, there is no movie theatre in town. The introduction of arts and entertainment venues within the downtown would increase its diversity and enhance after-hours activities for all ages.

The newly renovated Aquafun Centre offers pool facilities and a 200-foot waterslide. The neighboring Community Centre contains two ice arenas, a skateboard park, an archery range, a curling rink, an auditorium and a fitness centre. Other recreational facilities in Town include the Taber Golf and Curling Club, the Ken MacDonald Memorial Sportsfield Complex, a bowling alley, fitness centres, soccer fields, racquetball, tennis and squash courts.

The one identifiable gap in the Town's arts and culture infrastructure is the lack of a multi-purpose cultural facility. The Town's MDP identifies the need for a cultural complex, which logically should be located downtown. Policy 3(b) of the MDP states:

"Members of various societies and cultural groups have identified needs for sites, buildings and funding in order to more adequately fulfill their respective mandates. These groups include interests related to a museum, an archives, an art gallery and a performing arts theatre. It has been suggested that combining the efforts of these interest groups in a joint project may enhance funding alternatives and opportunities for a cultural complex in Taber."

2.6.5 Government and Institutional Uses

As the redevelopment area encompasses Taber's downtown core, many of the Town's government and institutional uses are located here, including the municipal and provincial government offices, Public Library, Chamber of Commerce office and two churches.

2.6.6 Town Owned Properties

The Town of Taber owns the following property within the Plan Area. These include:

- ▶ 5219 – 49 Avenue (Lots 10 & 11, Block 45, Plan 5638L) – Library
- ▶ 5220 – 50 Avenue (Lots 7-11, Block 45, Plan 5638L) – Old Police Station

- ▶ 4902 – 53 Street (Lot 12, Block 15, Plan 5638L) – Old Courthouse. This site has the potential for redevelopment in conjunction with the library, old Police Station and Old Courthouse. A new library is presently being planned for 2010, with the site to be determined.
- ▶ Cenotaph Park (Lots 1 & 2, Block 16, Plan 5638L)
- ▶ 5505 – 48 Avenue (Lots 2 & 3, Block 7, Plan 5638L) – Vacant brownfield site that has good potential for redevelopment as a park space to the east and a subdivided retail lot to the west.
- ▶ 5415 – 55 Street (Lots 14-16, Block 41, Plan 5365L) – site of old Fire Hall. This site is currently vacant and has the potential for mixed use, high density development. Earlier this year the Town issued a Request for Proposals for redevelopment of this site into an 'Innovative Mixed-Use Neighborhood Centre.'

2.7 Rail Relocation (CPR)

With the demolition of the grain elevators, CP Rail is currently considering relocating a portion of the rail yard and making a portion of the land on the south side of 47 Avenue available for urban redevelopment.

2.8 Transportation

The Plan area, as well as the rest of the Town, is served by three main highway links. Highway 3, which leads to Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, provides three access points into Taber. Highway 36 runs north-south connecting to Brooks and the U.S. border. The third important road is Secondary Highway 864, which runs north to Vauxhall and connects to Highway 36. Within Town, transportation links consist of local streets feeding off the arterial roads.

Figure 3 shows the traffic volumes at key highway intersections around Taber. Generally, daily traffic volumes in the urban area range from 6,000 to 8,000 vehicles per day, with summer volumes increasing to the 7,000 to 9,000 vehicles per day range. The intersections along Highway 3 receive the most daily traffic, with the 50 Street intersection south of the downtown being the area's busiest.



In 2003, the Town began discussions with Alberta Transportation (with CastleGlenn Consultants Inc.) for a new intersection along Highway 3 between 55 and 57 Streets. During the development of this Downtown & Gateways Redevelopment Plan, the Province had commenced a community / Council review process to determine the feasibility of and appropriate location for the proposed intersection. This proposed intersection would also include the possible closure of 50 Avenue and Highway 36 north to increase queuing distance from the intersection of Highways 3 and 36 north. It has also been suggested that the Province may consider creating a ring road highway connection around the Town, to divert and provide a free flow for highway traffic around the existing intersection connections to Taber and the downtown, and improving the connection between Highways 36 north and 36 south. The timeline for realignment would be 20 plus years. These potential future realignments increase the importance of enhancements identified within the redevelopment plan.

Figure 3: Traffic Volumes at Key Highway Intersections - 2002

Location	Average Annual Daily Traffic	Average Summer Daily Traffic*
Hwy 3, West of 50 Street	8,390	9,060
Hwy 3, East of 50 Street	7,900	8,530
Hwy 3, East of Secondary Road 864	7,090	7,660
Hwy 3, West of Hwy 36 North	6,360	6,870
Hwy 36 North, North of Hwy 3	6,080	6,570
Hwy 36South, South of Hwy 3	1,650	1,780

Traffic Volume History, 1993-2002, Alberta Transportation

*Covers the period May 1 to September 30.

2.9 Proposed Infrastructure Improvements

According to the report prepared by Associated Engineering, improvements to streets downtown are identified in the Medium Term Capital Priorities Plan between 2004-2007. The water treatment plant has a capacity to accommodate a population of 10,000. Continued replacement of cast iron mains is recommended. Infrastructure and roadway improvements should be coordinated with planned streetscape improvements.

2.10 Parking

As illustrated in Figure 4, the Plan area has a generous supply of parking with 11 public and private parking lots, over 650 marked street parking stalls and a number of unmarked parallel parking stalls. Most of the downtown is signed "Two Hour Parking 8am to 5pm." Just west of 50 Street, there is public parking for the Civic Centre and the Town Administration Building. Additional Town of Taber public parking is located north of 50 Avenue on 53 Street, north of the alley. The remaining parking stalls are privately owned and are located beside the IGA, the old Safeway, the Hotel, the Liquor Store, the Ice Cream Stand, along the railroad tracks and across the street from the Administration Building.

The shortage of truck and RV parking has been described as an issue. If improved, there is an opportunity to attract RV 'snowbird' traffic enroute to the U.S.



2.11 Existing Policy Context

2.11.1 Town of Taber Municipal Development Plan Bylaw A-387

The Town of Taber MDP provides a number of relevant policy directions under its *Commercial Land Use Policy Considerations*. Policies 1 to 3 and 5 to 10 encourage:

- ▶ downtown commercial developments proceeding according to a uniform development plan, as outlined on page 34 of the MDP;
- ▶ future highway commercial development that is high quality to enhance the attractiveness of the Highway 3 corridor;
- ▶ accommodating commercial expansion in the downtown through a combination of (a) infill of vacant lots, (b) redevelopment, (c) gradual expansion into Block 43 between 50 and 51 Streets and 50 and 51 Avenues, and (d) a shopping mall at the east end of downtown;
- ▶ second storey residential use in the downtown to accommodate both business operators and other residents;
- ▶ second storey development to increase the efficiency and rates of return on downtown land for office space;

- ▶ improved accessibility to the physically handicapped throughout the downtown; including buildings, sidewalks and open spaces;
- ▶ lane paving in the downtown and highway commercial areas to upgrade appearances;
- ▶ a Town entrance enhancement project in conjunction with the Highway 3 upgrading; and
- ▶ gradual elimination of overhead wiring in the downtown.

Additionally, Policy 6 under *Townscape Urban Design Policy Considerations* in the MDP states “*That as a start to the preparation of an urban design plan, the following areas be considered as essential image districts:*

- ▶ *the downtown,*
- ▶ *each of the Town entrances, and*
- ▶ *each of the major activity nodes.”*

2.12.1 Town of Taber Land Use Bylaw No. A-277

Most of Downtown Taber falls within the Retail Commercial – C-1 Land Use Bylaw District. Permitted uses include a range of governmental, office, public assembly, restaurants, retails and service uses. Although a front yard setback may be required by the MPC, we recommend wherever possible that new developments be encouraged to build up to the property line to maintain a continuous, strong pedestrian orientation.

A portion of the downtown area is zoned Railway – RY. With the demolition the grain elevators, this area should be rezoned to Retail Commercial to better integrate it into the existing downtown fabric. Various industrial lands located in the eastern portion of the downtown near the police station should be encouraged to develop commercially in accordance with the Retail Commercial – C-1 or a more vehicular-oriented commercial use along 50 Avenue.

3.0 VISION AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This section of the Plan presents a summary of the vision development that occurred during four Focus Group sessions and two Vision Building Workshops held with community members on September 29 and 30, 2003. During Focus Groups, participants were introduced to the downtown and gateway redevelopment planning process and were asked to identify specific issues, opportunities and community priorities for the Plan. These issues, opportunities and priorities were presented at the Workshops, where participants were further asked to establish a vision and strategic priorities for downtown and gateway redevelopment.

3.1 A Vision Statement for Downtown Taber in the Year 2020



In providing an action strategy for developing downtown and community gateways, a dynamic vision plan is illustrated in the Town of Taber Downtown Vision Plan (see pull-out at back of report). The plan illustrates the various elements and key project components of the vision established by the community. An illustrative vision plan can be a far more powerful tool in fostering economic growth and development than the traditional land planning / zoning approach. Shopping centre developers have repeatedly employed this technique to promote their visions in an effort to distinguish their centres from their competitors.

3.2 Strategies for Achieving the Vision

The following provides an outline of the eight key strategies for achieving the vision, established during the Focus Group Sessions and Vision Building Workshops.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1: IMPROVE STOREFRONTS (FACADES) AND SIGNAGE ON BUILDINGS

Storefront (facade) improvements create curb appeal to make the area more marketable to both customers and potential investors. Although a comprehensive set of design guidelines should be prepared, the following are some general design guidelines to be considered:

- ▶ Designs / improvements should reflect and be consistent with the cultural and historic character of downtown and as much as possible should incorporate indigenous materials.
- ▶ Upper facade improvements should be respectful of original architectural elements such as window placements, cornices and transoms.
- ▶ Storefronts are encouraged to have large windows and recessed entranceways where possible.
- ▶ Traditional storefront features, such as overhanging signs, front-lit signboards, extendable awnings and so on, are encouraged.
- ▶ For buildings identified by the Town as having historical merit, designs must replicate historic elements and be consistent with the historic appearance of the building.
- ▶ Design should incorporate, wherever possible, a variety of colours and textures, including distinct accent colours.
- ▶ Where possible, architectural details to break-up floors / levels (i.e. lower cornices) should be incorporated.



Example of storefront improvements that respect the historic character of their buildings.

Like other centres that have embarked upon a store façade improvement program, it is recommended that a Storefront Improvement Incentive Program be developed that provides a combination of tax relief, grants and technical assistance to encourage downtown owners to improve their storefronts. Additionally, an award program that recognizes quality façade improvements can be an added motivator to business owners. Interpretive plaques / signage identifying historic structures and their significance to the community, add richness to the urban fabric of any community by helping to keep history alive.

To ensure high quality storefront renovations, possibly in keeping with a theme, a detailed set of design guidelines is needed. These would be used in conjunction with the incentives proposed as part of the Storefront Improvement Program. The Design Guidelines can be modelled after the "Development of Design Guidelines Template" available through the Alberta Main Street Programme.



Historic structures should be identified with plaques or signage.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2: IMPROVE GENERAL CLEANLINESS AND MAINTENANCE

Dust and litter are problems in the downtown area. Standards should be developed and enforced requiring owners of property being used for surface parking to pave and landscape these lots. A particular problem with litter control is prevalent on the parking lot in front of the Recreation Complex and Aquafun Centre. The Town of Taber in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce could work to develop and implement a community "Pitch In" program to increase the number of public waste receptacles (e.g., "Hide-a-Bag" system – combining waste management and recycling system). Another project both the Town and Chamber of Commerce could jointly implement is an annual clean-up campaign that includes at least three "Community Beautification" weeks and one "Business Clean-up" Day. These should involve all of the community (businesses, residents and volunteers, etc.).

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3: HELP CREATE A BETTER MIX OF DOWNTOWN RETAILERS AND BUSINESSES

This can be achieved by identifying and targeting potential retailers and service businesses that would complement the current downtown business mix. This should be carried out by the Town's Economic Development Officer with help from local realtors. A summer student could be hired to inventory the existing businesses downtown, square footages they occupy and vacant space and sites that exist. An investor marketing package needs to be designed and developed, building upon the brand and marketing strategy established as part of Strategic Priority #5. It should include:

- ▶ maps of available sites and aerials of downtown;
- ▶ testimonials from existing merchants and businesses;
- ▶ a slideshow on downtown plans and prospects (could be on CD-ROM); and
- ▶ adding information to the Town's website.

Working with real estate brokers, property owners, newly formed BRZ, Chamber of Commerce, and others, an Ambassadors' Program could be established to identify and market to prospects.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4: UNDERTAKE A STREETScape IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TO ATTRACT MORE SHOPPERS AND VISITORS

Streetscape improvements include special pavement treatments, ornamental lighting, bulbging of corners and mid-block crossings, tree planting and landscaping, special signage, benches and waste receptacles. Well designed improvements enhance not only the visual attributes of the street, they can contribute a sense of comfort, safety and security to pedestrians.

The importance of providing a safe, clean, attractive pedestrian environment within downtown cannot be overstated. The following are important guidelines that need to be considered in expanding streetscape improvements to other downtown streets.

- ▶ Ensure that streetscape improvements are consistent in colours, materials and styles to convey a uniform theme.
- ▶ Use tree planting to create a canopy and enhance the streetscape and edge conditions.
- ▶ Consider both pedestrian and vehicular street lightning.
- ▶ Select street furniture that is low maintenance and designed to minimize the effects of vandalism.
- ▶ Promote information signage and kiosks to aid in wayfinding and minimize the posting of notices on buildings and light poles.
- ▶ Interpretive art additions to blank building facades.
- ▶ Introduce a maintenance program that includes timely removal of graffiti.



Banners and light standards decorate downtown Edmonton's Warehouse District.

Typically, streetscape improvement costs are shared between the owners of properties and the Town. Property owners usually pay the costs through a Local Improvement Assessment Bylaw. Sometimes the Town is able to get other sources of funding from the Federal and Provincial Governments for infrastructure upgrades.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #5: ESTABLISH A UNIFYING VISION AND THEME

The vision for the future of the Town of Taber Downtown & Gateways Redevelopment Plan has been introduced at the beginning of this section. Focus group participants made suggestions for themes that could be used in the downtown area and at community gateways. Suggestions related to agriculture (corn, sugar beets, irrigation), history (Tank 77), natural resources (oil and coal) and the railway. Themes could be portrayed and reinforced through street furnishings and lighting, signage, banners, public art, storefront improvements, façade art, etc.

It was generally agreed that themes should:

- ▶ Stand the test of time
- ▶ Improve signage / wayfinding
- ▶ Create a strong sense of place
- ▶ Be authentic
- ▶ Represent and interpret the uniqueness of Taber
- ▶ Reinforce and reflect a sense of pride

More work is needed to develop a recognizable 'brand' and marketing strategy for both the downtown and gateway areas. Key target markets include downtown customers, investors and tourists.



Themed streetscape furniture along 104 Street in downtown Edmonton.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #6: COORDINATE ADVERTISING AND TRAFFIC BUILDING EVENTS BY DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES

Much the same as the centralized management typically found in suburban shopping centres, BRZ's undertake consumer marketing by producing festivals and events, coordinating sales promotions, producing maps and newsletters, launching image-building and advertising campaigns, and erecting directional signage (wayfinding) and business directories. The Cornfest is an important traffic-building event; other opportunities need to be identified for special promotions and events (e.g. a "Turn on the Lights" downtown prior to Christmas shopping season or development of a public market).



Special events can be used to draw people downtown.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #7: ESTABLISH BUSINESS RETENTION AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Helping retain existing businesses and expand their market needs to be a priority. Conducting market research, producing data-oriented reports, offering financial incentives to fill empty storefronts, and marketing to investors are ways to grow business downtown. The Chinook Community Futures Development Corporation may be a potential partner for some of these initiatives.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #8: ESTABLISH A BUSINESS REVITALIZATION ZONE (BRZ)

The Town of Taber can only afford to provide a basic level of service to the downtown area. A BRZ provides an organizing and financing mechanism that can be used by property owners and merchants to determine the future and improve the competitiveness of their commercial area. The BRZ program is one of self help through taxation whereby a bylaw is passed establishing the BRZ, enabling additional taxes to be collected by the Town and then returned in their entirety to the BRZ. These funds would be used by the BRZ to purchase supplemental services (ie. Increased maintenance, installation of banners, planting of annuals, promotions and special events, and capital improvement (ie. street furniture, trees, signage, special lighting, business directories, etc.) beyond the services and improvements normally provided by the Town of Taber.

4.0 GATEWAYS AND DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT

This section conceptually illustrates and provides a suggested action plan for gateway development and district redevelopment within the downtown.

4.1 Gateways

“As we enter cities, we gain our first and often most lasting impression of communities. Consequently, entrances should be informative, pleasurable and civilizing - whether approaching a small town, suburban centre or metropolitan core.... They are critical to the life and form of our cities.”

Warren Boeschstein

During the focus groups and workshop sessions, a hierarchy of gateway development was established by community members to create an enhanced ‘sense of arrival and entry’ into the Town of Taber and its downtown. The hierarchy includes primary, secondary and tertiary gateway features that collaboratively confirm destination and arrival; create landmarks; establish recognition for community-based features, entry points and points of interest; provide information, interpretation and way-finding; and relate to an overall theme for the community.

Community members proposed a variety of gateway themes: agriculture (corn and irrigation), natural resources (coal, oil and gas), history (Tank 77), the community/family and the railway. The following provides an overview of the proposed gateway hierarchy (refer to Figure 5).

Primary Gateway

It is proposed that the primary gateway into the Town of Taber be developed as a ‘linear gateway’ along the north side of Highway 3 between 50 Street and 57 Street (refer 5a). The linear gateway would include a formal ‘windrow’ of trees and landmarks that define the uniqueness of the downtown grid pattern and capture the attention and interest of Highway travellers. Additional primary gateway features would include trail development, private property improvements (within the Railway Transition District) and landscape / pedestrian-oriented improvements (eg. sidewalks, lighting, benches, etc.) along the south side of Highway 3 from Highway 36 south to 60 Street.

Secondary Gateways

Two types of secondary gateways have been proposed to demarcate entry into the Town, along Highways 3 and 36, and on entry into the downtown. Five ‘highway’ gateway features have been identified, which include east and west of Town along Highway 3; north of Town along Highway 36 North; south of Town along Highway 36 South; and within the Town at the intersection of 50 Avenue and 57 Street. Another site, if space allows, is at the intersection of Highway 3 and 50 Street (west corner). As shown in Figure 5b, these gateway features should be visual, incorporating the underlying theme and including landscaping and interchangeable sign components that can be used to announce and celebrate special community events and features.

Entry into the downtown should be defined at each intersection with 50 Street and 50 Avenue. As shown in Figure 11, a vertical cairn has been conceptually used to define access into the downtown and integrate with the proposed streetscape approach for the downtown.

Tertiary Gateways

Trail blazers have been proposed as tertiary gateway markers along all highway approaches into Town. As shown in Figure 5c, trail blazers would incorporate a themed gateway identifier and announce the Town's distance, key intersection access points into the downtown, and location of information laybys and points of interest.

In reference to Warren Boeschstein's quote, the proposed gateway hierarchy is articulated and structured to establish a desired first and lasting impression of the Town of Taber and is critical to the future life and form of the community.

4.2 Downtown Districts

Creating identifiable districts is a common planning practice for downtown areas. We suggest organizing Taber into the following five districts:

- ▶ Civic Centre
- ▶ North Residential / Mixed Use
- ▶ Retail Office Core
- ▶ Railway Transition
- ▶ Light Industrial

A desirable future or goal has been developed for each of the districts. Goal statements and details for each of the five districts follow. Concept drawings are also used to illustrate potential development scenarios in each district. These are conceptual and depict potential options for developing Taber's downtown.

A. Civic Centre District

Goal: To improve and reinforce Taber's Civic Centre area as the seat of government, culture, recreation and community events for the Town and surrounding region.

The Civic Centre area is home to the Administration Building, which houses both the Town and M.D. offices. The community's Recreation Complex and Aquafun Centre is the most dominant building within this district. The district's Confederation Park features attractive green space that is used for both passive and active recreation uses. West of the Park, an enclave of seniors housing has developed and a Seniors Drop-In Centre occupies part of the Park. The Provincial Building provides attractive architecture with its clock tower and well-landscaped grounds.

Details:

- ▶ Potential renovation and expansion of the Civic Administration Building to include:
 - new library
 - theatre (300-350 seats)
 - multi-use conference and meeting facilities
 - potential relocation of some municipal / M.D. office functions to the Provincial Building, which is currently underutilized.
- ▶ Ball diamonds may not be the highest and best use of the area – potential redevelopment for more seniors' housing should be examined.
- ▶ Introduce some small-scale commercial services like a coffee shop and teahouse.
- ▶ Introduce improvements to Confederation Park to better accommodate Cornfest and other special events (eg. a central stage and sound system) and to create a 'family' park area (eg. upgraded playground, water park, skatepark, youth programs). Park improvements should incorporate and link to a future cultural complex and seniors housing within the District.
- ▶ Landscaping and streetscaping improvements around the Auditorium, Chamber of Commerce and Aquafun Centre to provide visual relief and improve the appearance of what is now a "large expansive paved parking lot" at a key entry point into Taber and the downtown.
- ▶ Traffic calming measures along 48 Avenue and 48 Street to make the area around the seniors' housing more pedestrian-friendly and safe.
- ▶ Streetscape and gateway features along 50 Street.
- ▶ Preserve existing mature trees in Confederation Park and around the Provincial Building.

Figure 6 on the following page illustrates the existing and potential improvements along 50 Street.

B. North Residential / Mixed Use District

Goal: To create a residential mixed use district on the north side of 50 Avenue that allows for higher density residential development and complementary commercial uses in a pedestrian-friendly environment as a compatible northward transition between downtown and the adjacent neighbourhood.

The area features a mixture of older housing stock, vacant lots and newer commercial and residential development. At present, 50 Avenue is a wide arterial roadway; landscaping and streetscape improvements could help introduce a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

Details:

- ▶ Consider higher density residential development with ground floor retail on the north side of 50 Avenue. This could occur on vacant infill sites or in conjunction with the redevelopment and intensification of older housing stock in the area.
- ▶ Introduce streetscape improvements to enhance the appearance of 50 Avenue as the main east-west arterial roadway. The development of a median could reduce the wide expanse of the street, although some focus group participants favoured keeping the street wide.
- ▶ Maintain and clearly define angle parking. Building out corners could make it easier for pedestrians to cross the wide street.
- ▶ The municipal parking lot could be clearly signed and improved with landscaping additions, lighting, etc.
- ▶ Develop an affordable housing demonstration project at 55 Street and 50 Avenue.

Figure 7 on the following page illustrates roadway improvements along 50 Avenue.

C. Retail Office Core District

Goal: To enhance and improve the Retail Office Core District's role as a pedestrian-oriented mainstreet shopping district.

This is the historic downtown shopping district for Taber, providing a wide range of retail and service business. For the most part, retail continuity has been maintained by having buildings built to the property line and not allowing parking in front. Continuing this historic development pattern is a critical design consideration. Strip mall style development should not be allowed.

Details:

- ▶ Implement storefront and streetscape improvement programs.
- ▶ Maintain existing on and off-street parking while providing opportunities for streetscape improvements.
- ▶ Improve vehicular circulation by pursuing street closures at –
 - existing 53rd Street access to 50th Avenue; and
 - 48th Avenue access to 50th Avenue.
- ▶ Encourage compatible infill commercial development.
- ▶ Preserve historical and architecturally significant structures.
- ▶ Enhance Cenotaph Park by creating a “village square” that incorporates 49 Avenue (east of 53 Street). In conjunction with this, ensure that the Courthouse Building is preserved and introduce storefront improvements to adjacent buildings while maintaining service vehicle access along 49 Avenue.
- ▶ Redevelop existing industrial uses with yard storage to more intensive, pedestrian-oriented commercial uses.

Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11 on the following pages illustrate potential storefront / streetscape improvements along 48 Avenue, enhancements to Cenotaph Park and 49 Avenue, mid-block / service lane improvements, and typical streetscape / site furnishing plan and elevation enhancements.

D. Railway Transition District

Goal: To redevelop and integrate the surplus railway lands into the downtown fabric to create a downtown tourist destination that illustrates Taber's railway heritage.

The north side of 47 Avenue has a mixture of commercial and light industrial uses. CPR is in the process of freeing up a portion of the railway yards for redevelopment. It is important that future development integrates and is compatible with development patterns on the north side of 47 Avenue. Strong potential exists for theming and development of tourist-related facilities and attractions.

Details:

- ▶ Relocate the farmer's market and redevelop it as a year-round public market to serve as a focal point and tourist attraction for the district.
- ▶ Pursue compatible pedestrian-oriented development on railway lands with parking lots located at the rear or side of the buildings and buildings built to the sidewalk (not another strip mall).
- ▶ Provide for a railway theme / motif with potential for boardwalks on the south side of 49 Avenue.
- ▶ Provide for angle parking.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for on-street / lot truck and RV parking.
- ▶ Encourage compatible storefront improvements.
- ▶ Provide for future trail development to tie into the Town's proposed trail network.
- ▶ Incorporate proposed primary gateway features with district improvements.

Figure 12 on the following page illustrates streetscape and infill development enhancements along 47 Avenue.

E. Light Industrial District

Goal: To improve the aesthetics of existing industrial uses and encourage infilling of compatible light industrial and commercial uses.

A number of industrial uses on the north side of 50 Avenue have yard storage that should be screened from the view of pedestrians and vehicles. Opportunities also exist for light industrial and commercial infill development east of the police station.

Details:

- ▶ Generally improve the appearance and aesthetics along 50 Avenue as a major eastern gateway to downtown by screening yard storage and improving landscaping in front buildings and adjacent to parking areas.
- ▶ Examine the feasibility of incorporating a trail connection along the railway tracks to create a trail loop / improved pedestrian connections to downtown.
- ▶ Light industrial and commercial infill development east of the police station should be architecturally incorporated, complete with landscape development along 50 Avenue and facing Highway 3.

Figure 13 on the following page illustrates light industrial / commercial infill and landscape enhancement along 50 Avenue within the Light Industrial District.

5.0 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Why an Effective Implementation Strategy is Necessary

Most Plans flounder at this stage because of inadequate resources to implement the Plan and lack of an organization or 'point group' to oversee its implementation.

The required public expenditures must be regarded as a strategic investment that is necessary to attract and leverage new private investment. This investment of tax dollars will yield the following public benefits:

- ▶ Assessment growth for making downtown more attractive to developers and investors.
- ▶ A sales tool to promote more economic development and tourism.
- ▶ Creation of an entertainment and cultural focus for the region.
- ▶ Reduced capital and operating costs associated with continued suburban expansion
- ▶ Increased sense of community pride and identity.

5.2 Staged Implementation

Successful implementation will depend on both the Town of Taber's commitment to making public funds available for implementation and the private sector responding with contributions to streetscape and storefront improvements. The following is a proposed project schedule staged over a number of years for priority project initiatives.

Short Term Actions (2004–2009)

<u>Action</u>	<u>Lead Responsibility</u>	<u>Potential Funding Sources</u>
1. Gateway, Towers, Cairns & Landscaping	◆ Town of Taber	◆ Tax Levy – Town Budget ◆ Corporate Sponsorship ◆ Service Clubs ◆ Fund Raising Activities
2. Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Signing	◆ Town of Taber	<i>Same as above.</i>
3. East Highway #3 Entrance / Exit	◆ Town of Taber	<i>Same as above.</i>
4. Lay-by Directory Development	◆ Chamber of Commerce	◆ Corporate Fund Raising Sponsorships
5. Civic Centre Façade & Parking Lot Improvements	◆ Town of Taber	◆ Tax Levy – Town Budget ◆ Provincial and Federal Grants ◆ Corporate Sponsorships ◆ Service Clubs

<u>Action</u>	<u>Lead Responsibility</u>	<u>Potential Funding Sources</u>
6. Civic Administration Building Redevelopment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Town of Taber 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Tax Levy – Town Budget ◆ Provincial / Federal Grants ◆ Community Fund Raising for Library and Theatre Space
7. Streetscape Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Town of Taber ◆ BRZ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Tax Levy – Town Budget ◆ Provincial / Federal Infrastructure Grants ◆ Private Local Improvement Assessment
8. Storefront Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ BRZ ◆ Property Owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Property Owners ◆ Town Grant / Tax Relief
9. 49 Ave. Road Closure East of 53 Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Town of Taber 	
10. Railway Transition – Removal of Spur Lines (subject to CP Rail)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ CPR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ CPR
11. More Senior Housing Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Private Developers ◆ Non-Profit Developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ CMHC Programs ◆ Alberta Seniors Programs

Long Term Actions (2010 +)

<u>Action</u>	<u>Lead Responsibility</u>	<u>Potential Funding Sources</u>
1. Boulevard Development Along 50 Ave.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Town of Taber 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Town Capital Budget
2. Replacement of the Ball Diamonds to a Higher and Better Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Town of Taber 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Town of Taber
3. Residential Mixed Use Along 50 Ave. N.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Private Sector ◆ Town of Taber provides zoning and encouragements 	

5.3 Development of Gateway Features

Detailed designs and costing are needed for the proposed gateway features described in 4.1 – *Gateways*. Public and private funds should be sought for implementation. Sponsorship by the Chamber of Commerce and corporate and service clubs are needed.

5.4 Streetscape Improvements

Conceptual plans and illustrations for streetscape improvements are recommended in Section 3 - Strategic Priority #4. These include:

- ▶ ornamental lighting;
- ▶ flared corners and mid-block crossings to reduce pedestrian crossing distances;
- ▶ special pavement treatment; and
- ▶ tree planting.

Typically, these costs are shared between a municipality and private property owners through a local improvement assessment. Sometimes municipalities are able to reduce these costs by accessing grants for infrastructure improvements from both federal and provincial government sources.

It is recommended that detailed design and costing would need to be done to accurately determine costs and apportion them. A formula that is commonly used is having the municipality assume 2/3 of the costs and property owners assume 1/3 of the cost.

5.5 Storefront Improvement Program

Strategic Priority #3 in Section 3 recommends that the Town of Taber establish a Storefront Improvement Program. For the greatest impact, it is recommended that streetscape and storefront improvements be carried out simultaneously. Many municipalities establish Façade Improvement Programs that provide grants, interest-free loans, property tax relief, or technical assistance to encourage owners to undertake storefront improvement. There are a number of sample programs that have used either one or several of these tools in combination. It is also important that the community formally acknowledge and celebrate such contributions with an award program.

5.6 Establish a Downtown Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ)

The establishment of a BRZ is essential to the implementation of a downtown revitalization program. To date, much of the leadership and resources have come from the Town of Taber. In Alberta, enabling legislation for establishing a BRZ is found in Alberta Regulation 377/94 of the *Municipal Government Act*, Business Revitalization Zone Regulation.

Council should request the Downtown BRZ Committee spearhead the establishment of a BRZ.

5.7 Benchmarking: Measuring Success

The Town of Taber Downtown & Gateways Redevelopment Plan should be a “living document” that is results-oriented and not a dust collector. Implementation progress needs to be monitored and measured. Baseline data needs to be gathered as part of Strategic Priority #3. Specific measurement that could be used include:

- ▶ track record for implementing elements of the Plan;

- ▶ increases in retail sales figures;
- ▶ value of downtown building permit activity;
- ▶ amount of public and private funding secured; and
- ▶ growth in downtown tax assessment.

5.8 A Process for Monitoring, Evaluating, and Updating the Plan

It is recommended that a brief annual report card be prepared annually to report to the community how various benchmarks are being achieved. A systematic review and update to the Plan should be undertaken every three years.

6.0 REFERENCES

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