

Vacant No More

A Strategic Action Plan to Address Select Vacant Sites
and Brownfields within the Downtown
Neighbourhood of Fort St. John

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1. Introduction

For too long, select parcels of land within or near the downtown core of Fort St. John have been vacant or underutilized. And as parcels remain vacant for prolonged periods of time, they are at risk of being perceived as having barriers to development.

While past projects were successful in identifying the issues and implications of vacant and underutilized land in the city core, no action plan has emerged that has yielded results that has elevated the city core to match the community vision.

The completion of the *Fort St. John Downtown Action Plan* in 2015 set out a list of objectives, policies, and action items to be implemented through 10 Big Moves. This Vacant No More strategic action plan will support the objectives of the *Downtown Action Plan* and is targeted to meet many components of one of the 10 Big Moves: Vacant No More.

If barriers – real or perceived – restricting downtown redevelopment continue to be present, future development could continue to seek alternative locations, such as greenfield development on the periphery of Fort St. John. Existing businesses may also be at risk to leave the downtown.

This strategic action plan is provided to aid in the role of economic development by selecting brownfield sites within or near downtown Fort St. John with the goal of creating both an interim and long-term strategy for remediation (where required) and infill redevelopment. This strategic action plan does not identify every vacant, underutilized, and/or brownfield site; rather, it focuses on the redevelopment of key sites that can act as a catalyst for future redevelopment within or near the downtown.

Bringing brownfield properties back into productive use creates business opportunities, increases economic activity, manages environmental risk, improves public health, and revitalizes surrounding neighbourhoods and the downtown.

2. Definitions

To be clear on the terms used in this document, the following key definitions are provided for reference and are consistent with the definitions applied in the draft 2017 Official Community Plan:

Brownfield means an abandoned, vacant, derelict or underutilized commercial and industrial property where past actions may have resulted in actual or perceived contamination and where there is an active potential for redevelopment. A site that is

contaminated may also not be a brownfield (i.e. due to the migration of contaminants from an adjacent area via groundwater)

Business Improvement Area (BIA) means an area designated by a municipal council at the request of a business community. A BIA can develop and undertake programs to improve and beautify the improvement area. Tree planting, street furniture, improved parking, flower boxes and baskets, and street banners are typical commercial area public improvements which can be implemented by a BIA. BIAs respond to and reflect the needs of individual areas. They can act as merchant associations, initiators of revitalization projects, coordinators of civic planning processes, a key spoke in the economic development team and a key voice when addressing street issues.

Contaminated Site means an area of land in which the soil or underlying groundwater or sediment contains a hazardous waste or substance in an amount or concentration that exceeds provincial environmental quality standards. A site is contaminated if it is unsuitable for specific uses of land, water and sediment. Many sites in the province became contaminated during past industrial or commercial uses.

Underutilized (parcel) means a parcel that is being used less than fully or below its potential maximum use. Examples of underutilized parcels can include vacant lands that are being used as parking lots, but which could be developed, or lands containing low density development but could accommodate medium or high density development.

Vacant (land) means land with no houses, offices, or other permanent structures or infrastructure. Vacant land may be available for development, or it may be set aside by a government or private owner to remain vacant.

It is important to emphasize that not all brownfields are contaminated sites.

3. Policy Context and Related Documents

The conversation of vacant land, some which may fall under the definition of a brownfield, is not new to the City of Fort St. John. In the downtown area the City has struggled with absentee landowners, land-banking, and large corporations holding on to land with limited annual improvements or maintenance.

Figure 1 (Appendix A) maps vacant sites in proximity to the downtown area in addition to sites that have seen construction or improvements since 2010. The private commercial and residential market has incrementally constructed on vacant lots, but many vacant lots still exist. Figure 1 also indicates vacant sites strategically acquired by the City for future municipal purposes or controlled land disposition.

Studies in recent years relating to redevelopment of vacant downtown lands include inventory mapping, market analysis, and a revitalization plan. The most relevant documents impacting brownfields are described below.

3.1 Inventory – Vacant and Underutilized Land (2012)

In 2012, Urban Systems completed a report titled *Inventory – Vacant and Underutilized Land* which was to be used as a baseline tool to enable City staff and Council to implement, monitor, and analyze land use policies over time. The intent was that the inventory would be reviewed, updated, and modified regularly. In addition to obvious vacant lands, this report also identified underutilized lands based on determining their highest and best use based on zoning at the time.

Mapping was produced to visually communicate the quantity of vacant and underutilized land and its cluster locations within the city; a summary table communicated a numerical analysis of vacant and underutilized parcels based on zoning types.

At the time of the report, there existed a total of 604 vacant lots with a total land area of 398 hectares, and a total of 405 underutilized lots with a total land area of 183 hectares.

3.2 Residential, Office & Retail Market Analysis (2013)

In 2013, GP Rollo & Associates drafted a report titled *Residential, Office & Retail Market Analysis* that explored the market demand for various uses. Generally, this report predicted growth and demand for all residential, office, and retail markets with a focus within the downtown area.

The results of the report indicated that there exist market opportunities to develop within the downtown, and on vacant sites, to support the forecasted growing markets.

To achieve the broad goals and objectives for the downtown, the 2013 GP Rollo report recommended:

- Coordinating and focusing public and private realm investments to ensure they are mutually supportive.
- Building on and enhancing existing strengths such as the grid street and laneway network, existing small format pedestrian oriented businesses and their traditional street fronting orientation, and the number of civic and community uses and amenities located in or in close proximity to the downtown core.
- Close coordination between City functions and departments.

- Engaging with the community to confirm and refine the vision for downtown and identify strategies, policies and priority actions such as public realm improvements and other capital projects.
- Prioritizing the downtown in the context of community wide growth and change over the coming years and decades.

3.3 Downtown Action Plan (2015)

In 2015, Modus finalized the *Fort St. John Downtown Action Plan* that focused on creating, by 2040, a compact, mixed use, pedestrian, and transit oriented urban place that is the social, economic, and cultural heart of the community and where there are opportunities for downtown living.

The *Downtown Action Plan* affirmed the downtown as a priority for Fort St. John and encouraged developing underutilized or vacant sites as a means to achieve the vision of the *Downtown Action Plan*.

One of the 10 Big Moves of the plan is Vacant No More which involved:

- Encouraging development of vacant sites, including City owned, contaminated, and other prominent sites.
- Redeveloping vacant sites with buildings and uses that showcase the future vision for downtown and implement interim uses/improvements until such time as they are redeveloped.
- Redeveloping contaminated sites by taking action such as:
 - City Council and senior management will lobby owners of contaminated sites to remediate and redevelop their sites.
 - Developing a contaminated sites strategy and information package to make land owners aware of programs and incentives that are available to support site remediation.
 - Working with land owners (and the public) to identify temporary uses for sites that benefit the community until the site can be cleaned up and redeveloped. Temporary uses could include raised-bed community gardens, small parks or plazas, public art displays, or surface parking lots.

The *Downtown Action Plan* was received in principle on November 9, 2015 as per Resolution No. 390/15.

3.4 Draft Official Community Plan Update (2017)

Throughout 2016 and into 2017, the City of Fort St. John undertook an update their Official Community Plan. Currently in a final draft state, the draft Official Community Plan includes Section 6.5 titled *Vacant, Underutilized or Brownfield Lands Development*

which gives guiding direction to facilitate the remediation and redevelopment of existing brownfield sites.

Draft strategies within the *Vacant, Underutilized or Brownfield Lands Development* section include:

- Compile a publicly accessible inventory of all existing brownfield sites within the current municipal boundary.
- Develop an information package for brownfield sites that makes land owners and the community-at-large aware of programs and incentives available for remediation and redevelopment.
- Create a brownfield development strategy and seek financial assistance from agencies and organizations to develop the strategy that:
 - Considers waiving fees associated with the development approvals process for brownfield developments.
 - Considers developing a Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw that provides tax abatement incentives for the remediation and redevelopment of brownfield sites within the city.
 - Supports the undertaking of Environmental Site Assessments for brownfield sites and help property owners seek financial assistance from a variety of agencies and organizations to conduct the required field tests.
- Work with the public and land owners of brownfield sites to identify temporary uses such as plazas, park space or parking facilities, until remediation or development can occur on the site.
- Consider temporary use permits to encourage activities on vacant, underutilized, brownfield or contaminated parcels.

4. Incentives and Penalties to Promote Behaviours

With a history of identifying vacant, underutilized, and potential brownfield lands, a visionary *Downtown Action Plan* that relies on eliminating vacant sites, and a commitment by Council in principle to support the *Downtown Action Plan*, there exists the problem on how to eliminate brownfield sites. The past method of waiting for the market to choose to develop on brownfield sites has been only marginally successful.

To succeed, the City needs to promote, create, and implement a combination of incentives and penalties (the 'carrot and stick' approach) to induce action in redeveloping brownfield sites.

4.1 Incentives for Redevelopment

4.1.1 The City of Fort St. John (local government)

Revitalization Tax Exemptions

Under section 226 of the Community Charter, local governments are given the authority to exempt property from municipal property value taxes. This financial tool enables local governments to encourage various types of revitalization to achieve economic, social, and environmental objectives. It incentivises development to occur in a defined area by positively affecting cash flow and reducing taxes for a period of time for each property owner that meets the objectives.

Objectives of such a bylaw are to:

- Encourage new multi-family residential development in a defined area (downtown).
- Encourage new mixed-use development in a defined area (downtown).
- Improve the vibrancy and activeness of a defined area (downtown).
- Generate employment opportunities in a defined area (downtown) through new commercial and office space improvement.
- Improve the City's tax base over the long term through efficient and compact land use.

If the objectives are met by a development proposal, an example of a Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw would be to exempt 100% of the increased value of assessment for a period of up to 5 years.

In 2016, Urban Systems drafted a Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw as part of implementing strategies to incentivize redevelopment in the downtown area. This incentive could also be applied to areas outside of the downtown core to encourage brownfield redevelopment in target areas.

Downtown Improvement Grant in lieu of Revitalization Tax Exemption

As an alternative to implementing a Revitalization Tax Exemption, the City could create a conditional Downtown Improvement Grant. The City would annually fund the Downtown Improvement Grant and properties that meet specific requirements of the grant – yet to be determined – would be eligible to receive funding. The Downtown Improvement Grant would be administered by City staff where they would review and evaluate grant application submissions.

Downtown Reinvestment Fund

The City could create a Downtown Reinvestment Policy where the City will place 100% of the increased value of assessment of properties in the downtown core for a period of time (example: 5 years) in a dedicated Downtown Reinvestment Fund.

This Downtown Reinvestment Fund would only be used to fund downtown improvement projects – such as constructing new sidewalks, adding public art, or purchasing and installing street furniture and street trees. The City would choose the projects to fund each year.

By marketing this incentive to future developers, it will incentivize development by raising the confidence that the City will place a shared investment into improving the downtown.

Combinations: Downtown Improvement Grant + Downtown Reinvestment Fund

A Downtown Improvement Grant could be paired with a Downtown Reinvestment Fund policy to guide funds over a fixed period of time for developments that meet specific objectives. Programs can be combined together depending on how aggressive the City wishes to incentivize the revitalization of vacant property.

Business Improvement Area

The City could work with land owners and businesses operating within the downtown to define a Business Improvement Area (BIA) and dedicate annual funds to a BIA management group – such as a Businesses Improvement Association. This management group would undertake programs to improve and beautify the improvement area. Often BIA members are a highly motivated sector of the community and can act to produce positive economic results for the defined area they represent.

By providing funding to a BIA, the City would not have control of which projects the BIA management group selects.

Parking Revenue for Downtown Improvements

Given many existing and future commercial properties in the downtown area share public parking opportunities – such as curbside metered parking – an incentive for property redevelopment is to direct the funds collected by the meters directly back to the area in which they were collected.

Funds collected through parking meters could go to enhancing local on/off-street parking options or to fund local improvements – such as planting trees or enhancing the streetscape. Wherever the funds are directed to, this should be communicated to the community so they recognize their parking meter payments directly fund future improvements in the local area in which they park.

Density Bonusing

Density bonusing is a tool that can be applied as an incentive to attract investment and development on eligible sites by allowing developments to surpass the maximum Floor Area Ratio established in the zoning bylaw.

DCC Exemptions

Based on conversations between the City of Fort St. John, Urban Systems, and Modus in 2016, the City confirmed that exempting DCCs is not something that the City will explore as an incentive tool.

Standardized and Streamlined Approval Process for Redevelopment Proposals

The City confirmed that providing preferential approvals process for specific types of development is not an incentive the City wishes to implement. Under recent process changes at the City, all applications will be processed within fixed time periods. For example, Development Area Permit applications are processed within 120 days.

4.1.2 BC Regional Economic Trusts – Northern Development Initiative Trust

The Northern Development Initiative Trust has two programs that are appealing to incentivizing downtown redevelopment: Marketing Initiatives program; and Business Façade Improvement program.

The Marketing Initiatives program provides up to \$200,000 in grant funding for municipalities to undertake a marketing initiative project. Projects must be focused on development and implementation of a marketing initiative that will directly increase revenues within the region.

The Business Façade Improvement program provides annual grant funding for municipalities that participate in combined regional development accounts. Annual funding of \$20,000 is available to each municipality to enhance economic development by encouraging private sector investment in business façade improvements. To obtain the business façade improvement grant, applicants to the program are required to develop and submit their business façade improvement plan/guidelines to give direction to local business owners on the eligibility criteria of their improvements. The Downtown Action Plan includes a downtown development permit area guidelines for form and character that can be used for this purpose.

4.1.3 First Nations

Urban land acquisition is a growing economic development priority among First Nations throughout Canada. Many nations are turning to urban areas to improve the economic and social conditions of their communities through land acquisition and development in urban areas. In Northeast BC, many Treaty 8 nations have expressed interest in acquiring land in Fort St. John and Dawson Creek.

Recent settlements involving longstanding land claims between the Federal Government and individual Treaty 8 nations are nearing completion. Industry agreements related to projects, such as the Site C project, have also been negotiated between industry partners and individual nations. Both developments have greatly increased the capacity of First Nations to expand their land bases through land acquisition and cash settlements. In addition, programs available through Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada can provide funds for planning and capital works related to economic development initiatives for First Nations. The result is opportunities to engage with and potentially partner with local First Nations on acquiring and redeveloping vacant and brownfield sites.

Both the City and First Nations may mutually benefit from focused outreach with local First Nations to identify what their land acquisition and development priorities are in Fort St. John and how they could meet those priorities through brownfield and vacant land acquisition.

4.1.4 New Building Canada Fund

Small Communities Fund

The Small Communities Fund (SCF) is a program within the New Build Canada Fund (NBCF) that provides funding to support the development of eligible infrastructure projects in communities with populations under 100,000 residents. Brownfield redevelopment is a subcategory of the eligible projects that are funded under the SCF. Eligible projects under the SCF include all categories of NCBF eligible infrastructure projects, construction of municipal use public parks and affordable housing. Applicants can receive funding up to a maximum of two-thirds of the total eligible project costs.

4.1.5 Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Green Municipal Fund

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has taken a leadership role on brownfields and provides municipalities resources and funding to redevelop brownfields.

Under the Green Municipal Fund (GMF), they offer the following incentives:

- Loans at the remediation stage.
- Innovative funding methods.
- Funding that can be combined with other funding programs.
- Year round application acceptance.

In terms of financial funding, the GMF offers:

- Grants for Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plans or Community Brownfield Action Plans (50% of eligible costs; grant maximum of \$175,000).
- Grants for feasibility studies (50% of eligible costs; grant maximum of \$175,000) and pilot projects (50% of eligible costs; grant maximum of \$350,000).
- Loans for brownfield capital projects (up to 80% of eligible costs).
- Loans and grants for capital projects in the energy, transportation, waste and water sectors (up to 80% of eligible costs).

4.1.6 Other Canadian Municipalities

Looking at success stories of municipalities across Canada shared by FCM, and summarizing some of their incentive strategies, common themes arise such as providing grants to complete Phase I and/or Phase II Environmental Site Assessments and to defer or reduce property tax increases on the increased property taxes following redevelopment. Although it is a non-exhaustive list, a summary of successful municipalities and their incentives are summarized below in **Table 1**.

Municipality	Grants	Property taxes
City of Kingston	Up to \$10,000 to assist in Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessment reports	Defers property taxes during remediation and redevelopment (max. 3 years); Tax rebate equivalent to 80% of the increase of property taxes that results from redevelopment to cover the cost of remediating a property
City of Edmonton	Up to 50% of the cost of a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment with a maximum of \$20,000	Property tax rebate equivalent to 80% of the increase of property taxes that results from redevelopment to cover the cost of remediating a property
Region of Waterloo	Up to 50% of the cost of a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment with a maximum of \$40,000	Property tax rebate (grant) funded from the increase of property taxes that results from redevelopment to assist the cost of remediating a property
City of Ottawa		Property tax rebate (grant) for a maximum of 50% of the cost of remedial work. Grants funded to 50% of the increase of property taxes, annually, for up to 10 years.
City of Edmonton	Up to \$5,000 or 80% of a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment Up to \$80,000 or 80% of a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment Up to \$200,000 or 80% of a Phase IV Remediation/Exposure Control with Interim Solution	Property tax rebate equivalent up to 50% of the increase of property taxes that results from redevelopment over a 6 year term to cover the cost of remediating a property (*up to 100% for LEED Silver buildings)

Table 1: Successful brownfield incentive strategies applied by other municipalities and recognized by FCM.

Note: exact details of incentives may vary as the highlights were extracted for easy comparison. All contained clauses that the total amount of assistance cannot exceed eligible costs.

4.2 Penalties for not Redeveloping

4.2.1 Brownfield Tax Class

Unfortunately, few opportunities exist for local governments in BC to apply penalties land owners not redeveloping brownfield sites. This shared observation for lack of tools resulted in recent executive recommendations from the North Central Local Government Association (NCLGA) of which the City of Fort St. John is a member.

In 2016, the NCLGA endorsed a resolution, supported by the NCLGA executive, for the NCLGA to lobby the provincial government to create a new tax class for brownfield sites so that local governments can tax these sites accordingly (NCLGA reference 2016-B104). If legislation changes in BC, this holds the potential for brownfield sites to be taxed based on highest and best use.

In response to the 2016 NCLGA resolution, the provincial government indicated that it is not currently considering a separate property class for brownfield sites. The province pointed out that “the cost of remediation, if required, is often prohibitive and can even exceed the market value of the property,” and expressed reservations about unintended consequences and challenges resulting from taxing brownfields at a higher rate.

With municipalities still facing challenges, in 2017 the NCLGA endorsed the following resolution (2017-B9): “that the Assessment Act Prescribed Classes of Property Regulation be amended to add a separate property class; ‘Class 10 – Brownfield’, which applies to any vacant or deserted properties that are classified as a brownfield”.

4.2.2 Zoning Bylaw

The City of Fort St. John Zoning Bylaw, Consolidated Version (Bylaw No. 2181, 2014) can apply penalties for violations of the bylaw. Fines can range from a minimum of one hundred dollars to a maximum of ten thousand dollars. For offences that continue for more than one day, separate fines may be issued for each day of which the offence occurs or continues.

For C-2 Downtown Core Commercial zones, chain link fences are not permitted unless they incorporate vegetative screening on the side of the fencing visible from outside the parcel. Enforcing this clause to sites with chain link fences surrounding their parcel is a tool to improve site appearances.

For full details, please refer to Bylaw No. 2181, 2014.

4.2.3 Nuisance Bylaw

For properties that fall within the "nuisance" definition of the City of Fort St. John Nuisance Bylaw (Bylaw No. 1645, 2003) – such as the accumulation of building material on any property other than premises licensed under the Business Licence Bylaw – the City can serve an order to have the nuisance dealt with by its owner, or failing to do so, the City can take action on the removal of the nuisance and recover the costs and apply a penalty.

The Nuisance Bylaw is a tool that can be used to incrementally improve the appearance of brownfields to the public realm and can result in positive value to the surrounding area.

For full details, please refer to Bylaw No. 1645, 2003.

4.2.4 Unsightly Premises Bylaw

For properties that meet the defined criteria of the City of Fort St. John Unsightly Premises Bylaw (Bylaw No. 1223, 1992) – such as no owner or occupier of real property shall allow such property to become or remain unsightly or cause or permit water, rubbish, or noxious, offensive, or unwholesome matter to collect or accumulate around their premises – the City can take remedial action to improve the site condition and recover the costs from the property owner.

The Unsightly Premises Bylaw is a tool that can be used to incrementally improve the appearance of brownfields to the public realm and can result in positive value to the surrounding area.

For full details, please refer to Bylaw No. 1223, 1992.

5. Interim Uses

The City recognizes that redevelopment from a few key sites can act as a catalyst for future redevelopment and add vibrancy to the downtown area. But before redevelopment occurs, there are strategies to implement interim uses to create a more pleasing public realm environment as a way to make a more appealing neighbourhood to develop in.

Possible interim uses include:

- Greenspace.
- Community gardens.
- Food truck parking and outdoor dining.
- Festival use.
- Show and shines.
- Farmers' Markets.
- Interim use agreements.
- Temporary commercial/industrial.
- Parking lots.

Endorsed in 2017, the City of Fort St. John Parks and Recreation Master Plan identified the need for a downtown park. With the downtown vision aiming to increase downtown living, a downtown park complete with a children's play area helps support people and families choosing to live in the downtown.

6. Long Term Uses

The ultimate goal of the City is to have all brownfields within the City developed to their highest and best use.

Redevelopment should follow the vision of the City's Official Community Plan and Downtown Action Plan.

By taking proactive actions such as connecting with potential developers before they purchase land elsewhere, actively promoting the downtown for development, making public investments to improve the downtown, disposing of City owned land on the condition of development, and inspiring the public and development community of the future of the downtown through the use of visionary renderings, the City can positively influence achieving the desired long term uses of the downtown.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Excite

1. Create visual renderings of the future of each brownfield site by applying recommendations from the Downtown Action Plan and display them near each site to activate public demand for redevelopment.

7.2 Educate

1. Through the City's Strategic Services department, contact each land owner of brownfields and communicate to them about re-development incentives offered by federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government, and inform them of funding available through other organizations.
2. For brownfield sites owned by major petroleum companies, in addition to the first educational bullet, educate them on the negative impacts the vacant land has on the community. In lieu of making financial donations to City or community programs, lobby and encourage major petroleum companies to remediate and redevelop their sites.

7.3 Redevelop City Owned Sites

The City is a large landholder of vacant lands within the downtown area (Figure 1, Appendix A) and successful development of their current assets can promote development of nearby brownfield lands. This provides the City the opportunity to be a catalyst for future development and lead by example. It is recognized that prior to selling any land, the City will ensure that the land will be improved to complement the City's vision of the downtown. It is recognized that the City take the following sequential steps prior to developing or selling land with development conditions.

1. Amend the Official Community Plan to establish two new downtown land use designations: Downtown Residential; and Downtown Commercial & Mixed Use.

These proposed amendments were drafted in the fall of 2016 and directly follow recommendations from the *Downtown Action Plan*. They are reflected in the City's draft Official Community Plan.

2. Amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow for increased housing types to promote infill development and densification.

These proposed amendments were drafted in the fall of 2016 and directly follow recommendations from the *Downtown Action Plan*.

3. Amend the Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw to require the use of lanes winter city elements, include paseos, and allow for parking flexibility.

These proposed amendments were drafted in the fall of 2016 and directly follow recommendations from the *Downtown Action Plan*.

4. Undertake recommendations from the 2013 *Downtown Planning Baseline Inventory & Analysis Report* (Rob Barrs and Associates) which, presented again for convenience, could include:

- Spot zone/pre-zone and sell

This approach ensures the use and form the City wants to see while virtually eliminating risk to the City. It may reduce the potential to negotiate amenities or additional gives from rezoning, however much could be considered to be written into the spot zoning already. Selling minimizes potential return for the City as a result of the lack of risk taken on. Theoretically, rezoned land value would be higher than existing value.

- Sales agreement with specific conditions for development

Virtually the same approach as pre-zone and sell, perhaps with the potential to negotiate additional benefits through the rezoning. Likely a lower value realized from selling under current zoning.

- City as developer

This is potentially the best return for the City; however it carries a significant amount of risk. It also requires both ability and appetite to finance the project. It also ensures the City gets exactly what they want, when they want it.

- City partners with developer

Similar to the City as developer, but less risk and the returns will be far less, although they should be higher than selling the land outright. Partnerships of this nature usually determine equity shares based on contribution to costs, and land is often a relatively small portion of total project costs.

Redevelopment should follow the vision of the City's Official Community Plan and Downtown Action Plan. The draft 2017 Official Community Plan has an objective to have all downtown vacant brownfield sites developed and/or redeveloped by 2030.

7.4 Incentivize

1. Create a Downtown Improvement Grant and/or a Downtown Reinvestment Fund to encourage redevelopment, in a specified area, of specific types of development such as: New Multi-family residential infill projects of 4 units or more; or new mixed use (commercial retail/residential or commercial retail/office) buildings of 2 storeys or more.
2. Create a Brownfield Grant Program to assist funding in Phase I and Phase II Environmental Assessment Reports.

With this program, applicants would apply for a grant under the Brownfield Grant Program, managed by the City of Fort St. John, and be awarded based on qualified proposals subject to availability of funds at the time of application.

The City would fund the grant by annual contributions.

3. Create a Downtown Reinvestment Fund to dedicate annual public investments into the downtown. Many public investments are recommended in the Downtown Action Plan including streetscape improvements, infrastructure upgrades, transportation and parking changes, and City-owned building enhancements.
4. Establish a BIA with annual funding to broaden the advocates for downtown redevelopment. The resulting BIA management group will choose where to best spend the funds based on the needs of the area.

7.5 Embrace the Interim

Apply creativity and flexibility to work with different City departments and land owners to embrace the interim and take action such as:

1. For sites that are fenced, place screenings to add colour and visual interest to unappealing sites.



Trail, BC applies colourful screenings over chain-link fences surrounding vacant land to add visual appeal to the public realm.

2. Encourage temporary or interim land uses such as dedicated food-truck rental pads, greenspaces, community gardens, or parking lots. To do this on privately owned sites, it will take a collaborative effort between the City and the private land owner.

Brownfield land owners could temporarily improve their surface by adding seating and planters to create an outdoor patio environment which could be serviced by a collection of independently owned and operated food trucks. Food truck owners could pay a rental fee for utilizing this space.

A downtown greenspace or community garden with raised beds could be established as a temporary use as well. The City could support this initiative by providing water or street furniture. This action is supported by the need for more greenspace in the downtown by both the *Parks and Recreation Master Plan* and the *Downtown Action Plan*.

As development of vacant sites in the downtown increases, the abundance of uncoordinated free parking will decrease. This could result in economic opportunities for private brownfields owners to improve their surface and charge for parking as a temporary measure.

For all City owned vacant sites, it is recommended that the City creates architectural concept renderings showcasing the potential of the downtown once on the land is developed. These renderings should be placed on large signs on each vacant site as a way to excite the public and investors about the future of the downtown, and to provide visual interest.

For selected vacant sites within and near the downtown, it is recommended that the City creates specific site strategies to recommend interim uses while the markets work towards developing each site to its highest and best use that is complimentary of the City's Official Community Plan and Downtown Action Plan.

7.6 Enforce

1. Enforce existing bylaws to the greatest extent to increase the visual appeal of brownfields.

8. Summary

To fight blight and realize the vibrant city and downtown that is desired by the community as reflected in the draft 2017 OCP and Downtown Action Plan, action must be taken on vacant, underutilized, and brownfield sites to make them *vacant no more*.

While local governments in British Columbia struggle with legislation restricting them from penalizing brownfields, innovative communities must look to creating incentives and embracing interim solutions while the private investment market takes time to develop urban vacant sites.

Implementing interim solutions will take time, collaboration, and continued financial investment from land owners, municipal, provincial, and federal governments. But the outcomes are positive and encouraging to build the character and attractiveness of the downtown.

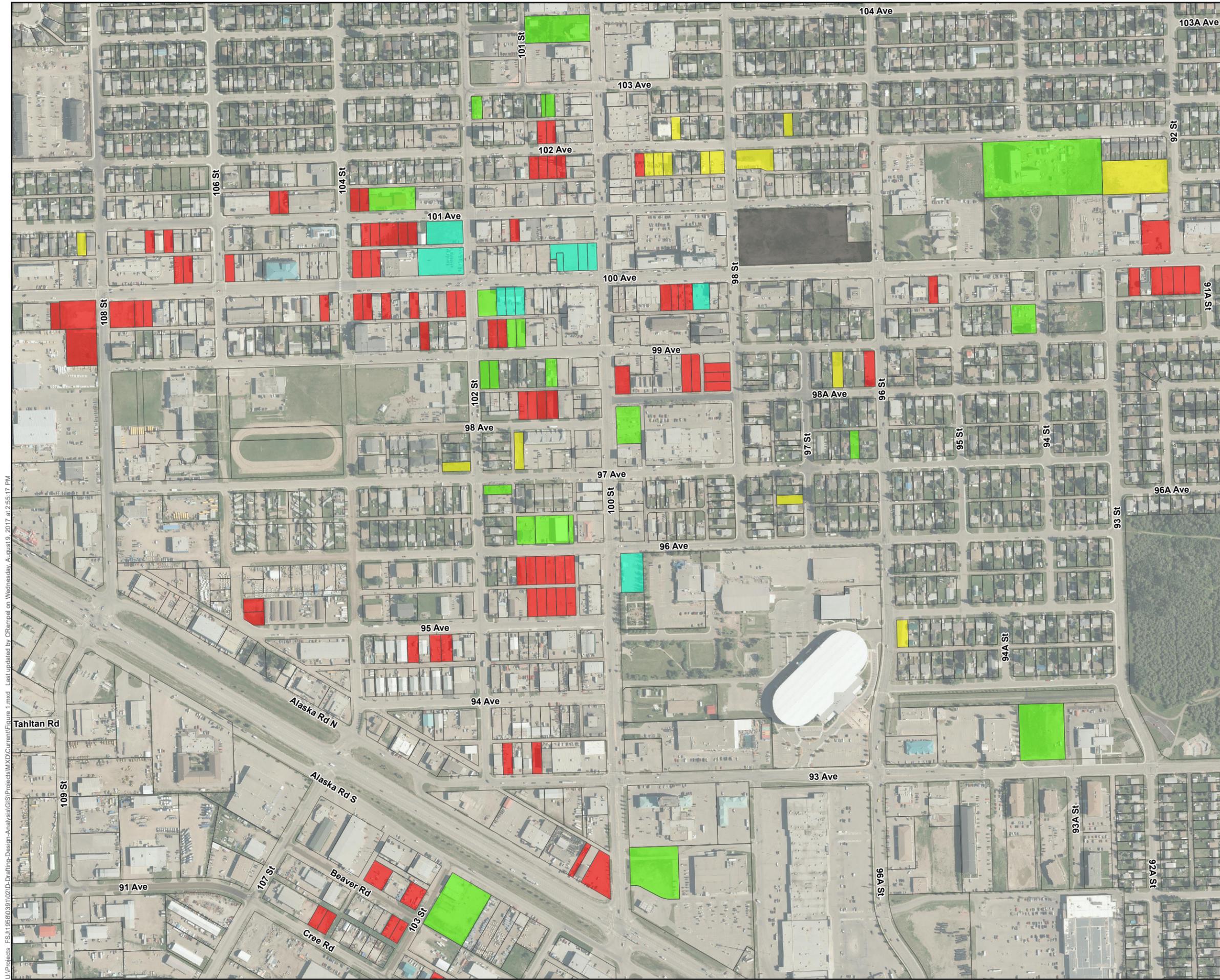
For City owned sites, there exist unique opportunities to lead by example and act as a catalyst for developing vacant sites within the downtown. Whether the City takes the lead on development, forms a partnership, or disposes of the land with development conditions, positive value can result to transform the downtown to create its vision articulated in the Downtown Action Plan.

The City's interim improvements to the corner of 100 Street and 100 Avenue by adding topsoil, grass, trails, and seating has become a celebrated community amenity. This greenspace has been activated by the public through uses such as hosting inflatable

jumping structures, multi-cultural celebrations, parade gatherings, and winter dog-sled touring. It's with this proof of concept that vacant sites in Fort St. John can transform from unsightly gravel parcels to cherished community spaces used in all seasons until their full development is achieved.

Appendix A

Figure: Vacant Site Summary



City of Fort St. John

Vacant No More

**Downtown Core
Vacant Site Summary**

- Residential - Vacant
- Commercial - Vacant
- Constructed since 2010
or Construction Imminent
- City Owned - Vacant
- Other - Vacant

The accuracy & completeness of information shown on this drawing is not guaranteed. It will be the responsibility of the user of the information shown on this drawing to locate & establish the precise location of all existing information whether shown or not.



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 10N
Scale: 1:6,000

Data Sources:
 - Base data provided by the City of Fort St. John.
 - Original vacant land information based off of work completed by Urban Systems as part of the 2012 Vacant and Underutilized Land Inventory project. The information as shown has been updated by Urban Systems to better reflect current conditions.

Project #: 1958.0391.02
 Author: CR
 Checked: CC
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 Revision: A
 Date: 2017 / 8 / 9



FIGURE 1

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