# DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES FOR SMALL CITIES IN A NORTHERN PRAIRIE CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY OF MEDICINE HAT, ALBERTA

by

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Bachelor of Arts (University of Calgary, 1999)

A Practicum
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of City Planning

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Downtown Revitalization Strategies for Small Cities in a Northern Prairie Context: A Case Study of Medicine Hat, Alberta

Kent Snyder

**ABSTRACT**

The intent of this research was to study downtown revitalization strategies for small cities. The hypothesis is that place-making oriented strategies, which focus on creating an atmosphere where people like to live, work, shop, and be entertained, are the best revitalization strategies for small cities. Creating a sense of place and a corresponding character is essential in achieving this type of downtown. Thus, the purpose of this study is to discover such revamped downtown revitalization strategies, that small cities can employ.

Medicine Hat, Alberta served as the case study for this research. Other small cities in the Canadian Prairies and the Northern United States Great Plains were examined as comparable precedents.

Place-making strategies are effective in revitalizing small city downtowns. The most effective place-making oriented strategies include: historic development; waterfront development; housing; art and culture; and entertainment facilities. Traditional revitalization strategies, such as convention centres and indoor malls, were not as effective.

Other discoveries included the fact that small cities need to take a holistic approach to revitalization. There is no one miracle revitalization strategy. Thus, undertaking small-scale projects is deemed to be valuable for small cities, rather than costly large-scale projects. Community involvement in the revitalization process is essential. Utilizing the community's strengths and having citizens take ownership of the downtown is crucial. There are effective revitalization strategies that are specific to small cities. This research is dedicated to improving the practice of revitalization in small cities.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

## LIST OF MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

## LIST OF TABLES AND CHARTS

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 PREAMBLE

> Downtowns are generally viewed as the heart of the city, a
> heart in need of corrective surgery (Horne 2001, 102).

Primarily, this practicum has been inspired by the struggles which small city downtowns

face in regards to revitalization. Secondarily, it has been inspired by the attempts to

incorporate place making strategies into revitalization. The hope behind this practicum is

to help planners accomplish meaningful revitalization, which would reflect to a better

approach to the practice of revitalization. Personally, I have been inspired by this

phenomenon because of my long-time residency in the small city of Medicine Hat,

Alberta, and I have attempted to incorporate this knowledge and perspective into the

study.

For decades now many downtowns in North American cities have experienced decline.

Since the 1970s North American cities have been dominated by suburban development.

A great portion of new employment, retail activity, power centres, office parks, and

regional malls have been dominated by suburbia (Filion, Bunting, and Gertler 2000). As a

result of this suburban domination, downtowns have declined significantly. Also, this

decline of downtowns has hurt the city as a whole. The health of downtown is directly

related to the health of the city and the region (Palma 2000a). Thus, it is very important

to direct considerable attention to revitalizing downtowns. There are many strategies that

have been developed over time, but most of these strategies are specifically designed for

large cities, +500,000. There is presently in the planning literature a lack of sufficient

attention given to specific problems that smaller cities face when they try to revitalize their downtowns (Robertson 1999).

Many strategies have been employed by planners and cities to revitalize downtowns. Many of the first strategies focused solely on large-scale physical or economic projects. There is a growing desire to increase qualitative aspects into revitalization strategies. Qualitative strategies focus on making downtown a high quality area, with a strong sense of place and character by going beyond merely physical or economic interventions. Qualitative revitalization can be seen as place-making. There is not one accepted definition for place-making; instead, there are a significant range of definitions that exist. Those following the New Urbanism paradigm tend to see their work as practicing the '...lost art of place-making' (New Urbanism Website 2002). Others claim that components of place-making include creating a place that is well used and liked, and also the process is community driven (Maddin 2001). Others offer much more complete definitions: place-making as creating a place that is 'social-able' interactive and friendly, where people can socialize, creating a place that has many 'uses and activities' creating a place that is 'accessible', that is 'comfortable' with a strong sense of place, and a spiritual aspect (Project For Public Spaces Website 2002). It is possible to extract those concepts which tend to be the most prevalent regarding the definition of place-making. Therefore, for the purpose of this research the term place-making refers to creating a place where people can connect with each other, and with the physical and built environment, and experience the historic and spiritual essence of the place, and where they can enjoy a number of activities. Community participation and the feeling of ownership in the place-

making process is also another important component. The aim of this practicum is to elaborate place-making oriented revitalization strategies for small cities, with the hope that this will help planners and strategists.

For the purpose of this practicum a small city is defined as a city that is in the population range of 25,000-99,000. This practicum is specifically interested in those small cities that stand alone at the larger geographic scale, and are not in the immediate area of a large metropolitan city-region.

## 1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEMS

1. In what ways are small cities different from larger cities in terms of downtown revitalization, and what are the implications for planners/strategists?

2. What is the future role of downtowns in small cities?

3. What constitutes a quality downtown in general and, more specifically, for small cities?

4. How can small cities like Medicine Hat improve their downtowns through place-making oriented revitalization strategies?

## 1.3 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

### 1.3.1 Research Problem One - Differences Between Small and Large City Downtowns

This involves examining the differences between small cities and larger cities, in terms of downtown revitalization. There are specific differences between the two classes of cities and this research problem is designed to explore these differences. Attention is then turned from what are the differences, to what implications may these differences have for

planners who are trying to achieve revitalization in small cities. It is important to observe the differences and their implications to discover or craft solutions that are unique and appropriate to specific cities, rather than merely imitating successful revitalization strategies from larger cities.

### 1.3.2 Research Problem Two - Future Role of Downtowns

This involves examining the possible future role that downtown will play in a city-region. Again, where there is literature or examples specific to small cities they are given more attention. In constructing possible revitalization strategies for downtowns it is forward-thinking to examine what the future role of downtown may be in the city. If revitalization strategies are not cognizant of the potential future economic, social, and ecological context of the city then the strategies could be outdated and useless or harmful to downtown. Rather, if revitalization strategies are mindful of the possible future role of downtowns they could provide a direction and opportunities. Thus, this research problem is not intended as an in depth study of the future role of downtowns in cities, but rather is meant to highlight potential opportunities and threats respecting downtown revitalization.

### 1.3.3 Research Problem Three - Defining What Constitutes A Quality Downtown

This involves exploring what makes a quality downtown. It is important to determine what a successful downtown looked like and felt like before revitalization strategies are undertaken. Examples from small city downtowns are accorded a higher degree of attention. This research does not focus on land use, infrastructure and transportation; rather, place making aspects will be in the spotlight. However, the research will not ignore land use, infrastructure or transportation aspects, since these factors can greatly

contribute to the quality of the downtown. Also, what makes an excellent place will be explored.

*1.3.4 Research Problem Four - Small Cities Achieving Effective Downtown Revitalization*
This involves asking how small cities like Medicine Hat can revitalize their downtowns? This research problem represents the underlying interest of this practicum. Specific strategies that planners and cities can use to revitalize their downtown are explored, focusing primarily on relevant theory, and precedents within a small city context. The particular revitalization strategies explored are place-making oriented revitalization strategies. Other, more physical and economic, strategies will be discussed only to the extent that they promote or have a more qualitative outcome.

**1.4 SCOPE OF PRACTICUM**

This practicum targets place-making oriented revitalization strategies. It is not possible to examine all of the strategies that could be considered qualitative in nature. Thus, only those strategies that are most applicable to small cities within the study area will be examined. The research is concerned with small cities that are located in the Canadian Prairies and the Northern Plains of the United States, referred to collectively as the Northern North American Prairies (see p. 7).

The research focuses on small prairie cities; thus, cities outside of the target population (25,000-99,000) range are not considered. The definition of a small city for the purposes of this study is reviewed in section *1.51 Study Area.*

SCOPE OF PRACTICUM

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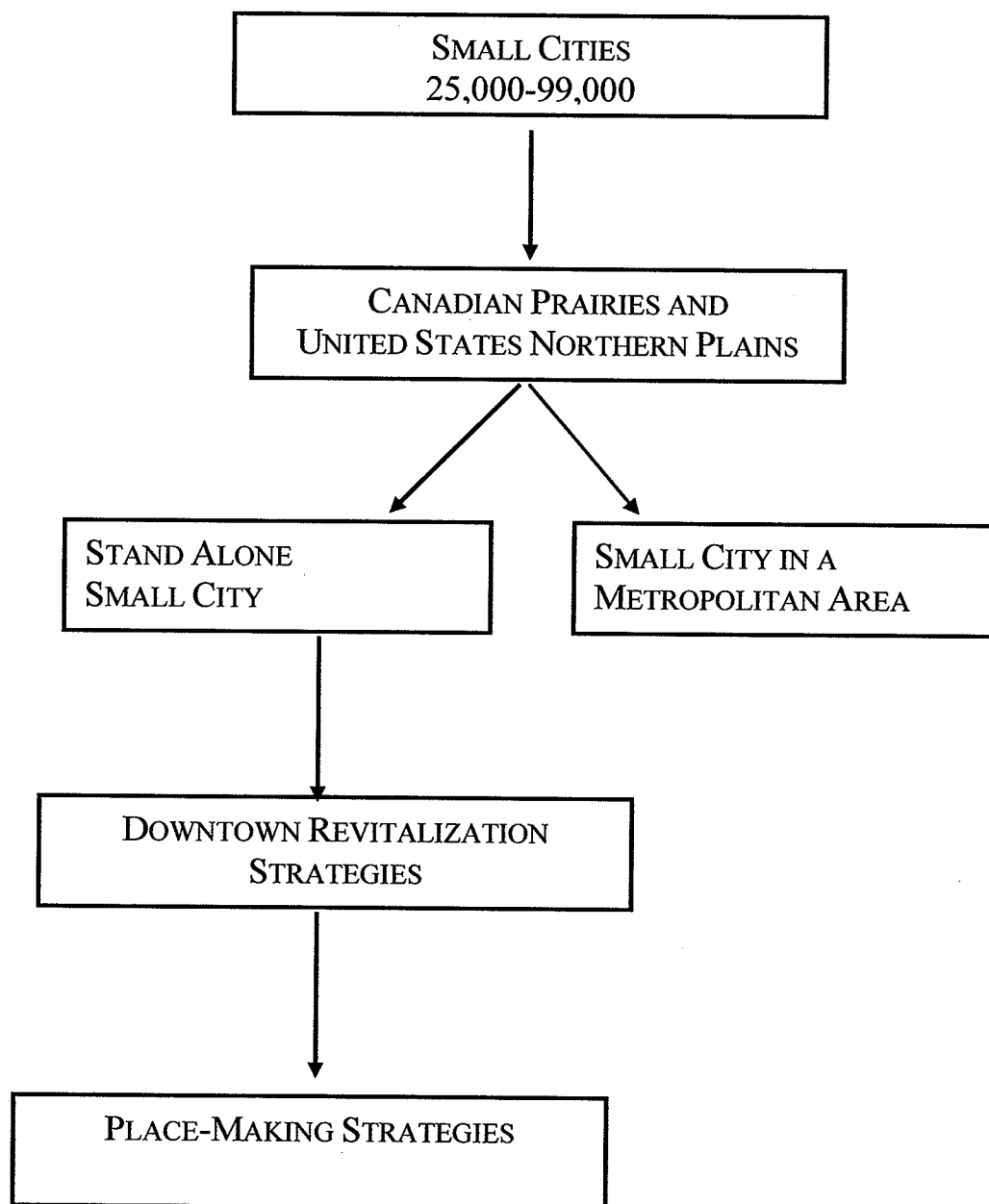
## 1.5 STUDY METHODS

The research strategy employed to investigate this phenomenon, to engage the stated research problems, is a case study. Medicine Hat, Alberta provides the context within which the research problems will be pursued. It is thought that case study method is most appropriate for several reasons. The basic research problem is a 'how' question and case study method allows for this to be explored. Also, the study is primarily exploratory in nature and specific in context, which has also contributed to the decision to use a case study. Thus it has been determined that case study method is the most appropriate method to pursue the research problems and explore the phenomenon.

The phenomenon that will be studied is downtown revitalization strategies in small city settings. The case study in which this phenomenon is explored is Medicine Hat, Alberta. Other small cities that are comparable to Medicine Hat are explored to further the understanding of the phenomenon.

Triangulation of methods and techniques for example, is critical with case study method. Triangulation mainly entails employing multiple methods to explore, and gain understanding of, the phenomenon of interest. Within this particular study, triangulation is used as follows; the three main methods are: a targeted literature review; comparable small city precedents; and key informant interviews.

*1.5.1 STUDY AREA*

The case studied in depth is the small Canadian Prairie city of Medicine Hat. The small prairie cities of the northern prairies, in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and of the northern United States Great Plains, Montana and North Dakota are included in the broader study region. Thus, these small prairie/plains cities will have a generally similar population, economy, and history as Medicine Hat. More specifically, the cities in the population range of 25,000 to 99,000 that are revitalizing their downtowns, and are relevant to the case study, are further studied. Table 1 displays the system of cities for the Canadian Prairies and the Northern Plains of the United States. Thus, those cities that consist of the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier in Table 1 are the cities referenced in the case study. Recent work by Bryant, Coppack, and Mitchell (2000) explained that cities, especially large ones, cast an 'urban shadow' over their region. Within this urban shadow the core city has great influence. All of the small cities in the study area are located beyond the urban shadow of a larger metropolitan city. Rather they cast their own urban shadow over their own, essentially non-metropolitan, regions. Thus the 15 small cities chosen have a population between 25,000-99,000 and they are not located in the urban shadow of a larger city. All of these cities, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier, have been examined, but only those deemed most relevant to the case study are studied in depth.

TABLE 1 - MAJOR URBAN CENTRES IN THE NORTHERN NORTH AMERICAN PRAIRIES

| URBAN AREAS | POPULATION 1996 | URBAN AREAS | POPULATION 1996 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1ST TIER | | 2ND TIER | |
| Calgary AB CMA* | 933,748 | Saskatoon SK CMA | 219,056 |
| Edmonton AB CMA* | 929,145 | Regina SK CMA | 193,652 |
| Winnipeg MB CMA | 667,209 | Fargo-Moorhead ND-MN MSA*** | 174,367 |
| | | Billings MT MSA*** | 129,352 |
| 3RD TIER | | | |
| Grand Forks ND MSA*** | 97,478 | Brandon MB CA | 40,581 |
| Missoula MT MSA*** | 95,802 | Minot ND*** | 36,567 |
| Bismarck ND MSA*** | 94,719 | Moose Jaw SK CA | 34,829 |
| Great Falls MT MSA*** | 80,357 | Butte-Silver Bow MT *** | 33,892 |
| Lethbridge AB CA | 63,075 | Grande Prairie AB CA | 31,140 |
| Red Deer AB CA | 60,075 | Bozeman MT*** | 27,509 |
| **MEDICINE HAT AB CA** | **56,570** | Helena MT*** | 25,780 |
| Prince Albert SK CA | 41,706 | | |
| 4TH TIER | | | |
| Portage La Prairie MB CA | 20,385 | Fort St John BC CA | 15,021 |
| Lloydminster AB CA | 18,953 | West Fargo ND*** | 14,940 |
| North Battleford SK CA | 17,987 | Camrose AB CA | 13,728 |
| Yorkton SK CA | 17,713 | Estevan SK CA | 12,656 |
| Mandan ND** | 16,716 | Williston ND*** | 12,512 |
| Swift Current SK CA | 16,437 | Dawson Creek BC CA | 11,125 |
| Dickinson ND** | 16,010 | Wetaskiwin AB CA | 10,595 |
| Jamestown ND** | 15,527 | | |

1996 Population Statistics Canada  
*1999 Population Statistics Canada  
** 1999 Population Estimate US Census  
***2000 Population US Census

CA – Census Agglomeration  
CMA – Census Metropolitan Area  
MSA – Metropolitan Statistical Area

**MAP 1 - SMALL CITIES IN THE STUDY REGION**
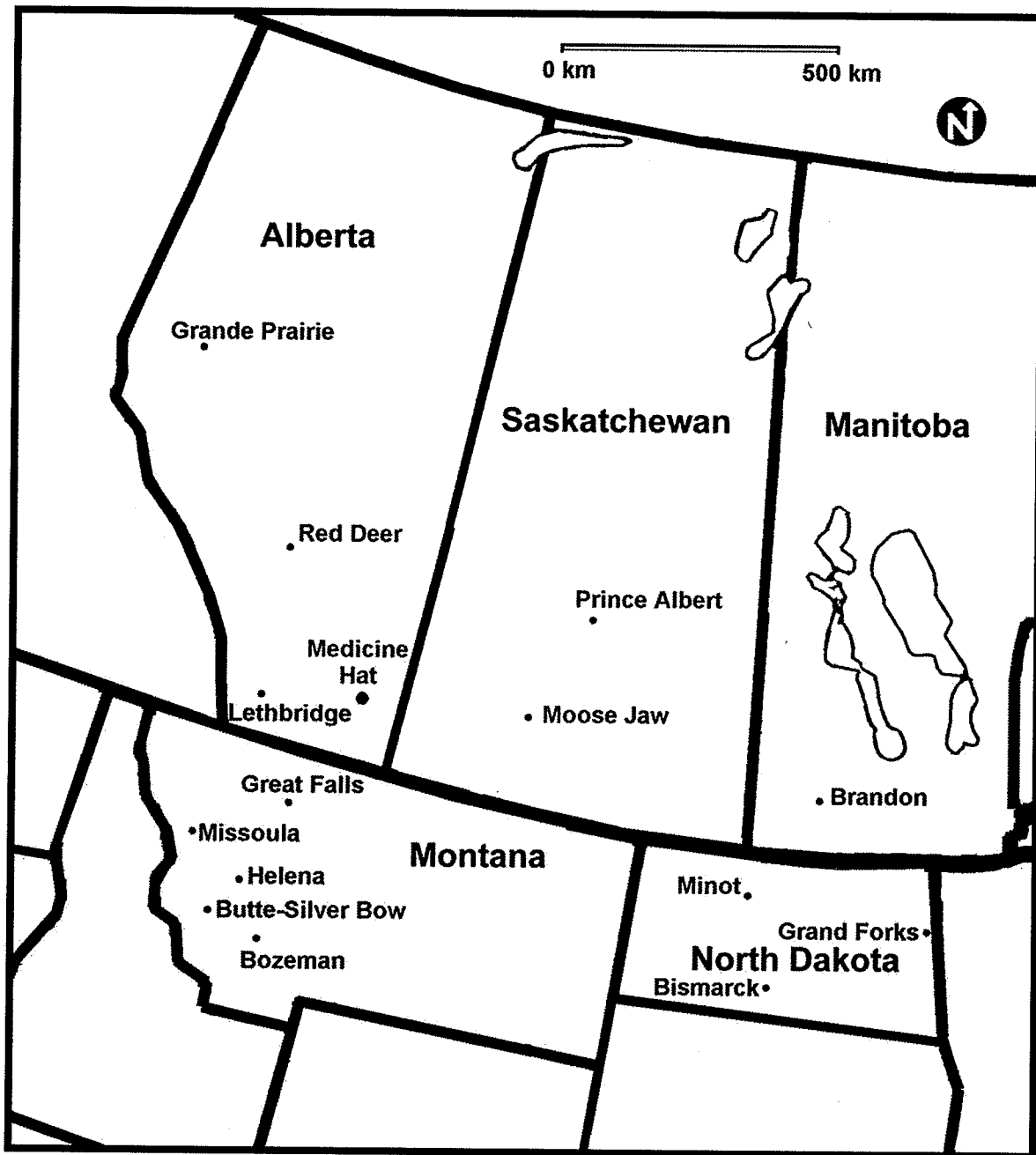


(base map Nelson Canada 1984)

## 1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This topic is significant to the field of planning. The decline of downtowns in almost all North American cities has generated considerable literature on the subject. What has not occurred though is a significant study of the declining downtown in small cities. Generally, planning theory literature has not paid adequate attention to small cities and the problems which they face (Herr 2000).

There are many more small cities than large cities in North America. On the Canadian Prairies alone there are five cities greater than 100,000 compared to 17 cities that are in the 10,000 to 100,000 category (Bunting and Filion 2000). In the United States there are more than 400 cities in the 50,000 to 350,000 range (Paumier 1988).

Therefore, hundreds of small cities in North America are facing 'big city' problems but they do not necessarily have solutions that are designed for them. Rather, small cities experiment with what has worked in larger cities, and try to downscale these solutions to fit their needs (Robinson 1999). Thus, there is a gap in the planning literature that is not presently addressing the needs of many cities in North America.

The City of Medicine Hat was chosen as the case study focus for several reasons. The city has experienced moderate to high population and economic growth in the last decade, yet the downtown continues to lag behind the suburban fringe in regards to retail, office and residential growth. Thus, the city needs to address downtown revitalization. In addition, the political and public climate at this time is conducive to revitalization of

the core. The City of Medicine Hat recently produced a City Centre Strategic Plan, and a new downtown organization was recently created, the City Centre Development Agency; both of these signal a desire for change in Medicine Hat.

## 1.7 ASSUMPTIONS

There are several assumptions that this practicum makes. The first is that smaller cities are different from larger cities. These differences and their implications are discussed later in this practicum, especially in *Section 2.1*. The assumption goes further, suggesting that these differences affect the strategies that should be used in downtown revitalization. Smaller cities simply cannot use all of the prescriptions for big cities, to try to cure the ills of their particular downtowns.

Another assumption that is made is that the cities in the study region do have similarities. Most of the northern prairie/plains, small cities are similar, and they can learn much from each other, at least potentially.

## 1.8 LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this study. Due to the fact, that this is a case study of a specific city, the results and recommendations made for Medicine Hat will not necessarily be applicable to other cities. It is hoped though that the general ideas generated can be considered in other cities in similar circumstances as Medicine Hat.

The study focuses on revitalization of small cities. Thus, the research for the study considers revitalization in large cities only if there is an apparent direct application to small cities.

Another limitation is due to the context in which the case study city was chosen. The study is limited to small cities that are not, nor lie within the sphere of influence of, large metropolitan areas. Also, the study focuses on small cities in a Canadian Prairies and United States Great Plains context (see Map 1).

## 1.9 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 1.9.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF URBAN REVITALIZATION

Downtowns across North America have experienced decline, some to a greater degree than others. Downtowns in Canada have not been exempt from this trend. However, they have generally fared better than their United States counterparts, and have not declined as dramatically (Gad and Matthew 2000). Governments, cities and planners have worked hard to renew and regenerate downtowns. Therefore, there is a long history to revitalization strategies in North America. This section is devoted to briefly reviewing the various overarching strategies used to accomplish revitalization. Although it must be noted that large cities experienced much more of these revitalization strategies than small cities, it is nevertheless important to review the progression of revitalization.

As downtowns began to decline after World War II, massive revitalization strategies became prevalent. One of the first culprits associated with downtown decline was the improved transportation system in North America. City centres began to notice decline

when auto usage dramatically increased and highways were constructed to facilitate this increased usage (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). Once access to cheaper land on the fringes of cities was available, development moved rapidly from the downtown to the suburbs. Thus, one of the first strategies of revitalization was to improve auto access to and within downtown. Downtown highways and ring roads were constructed, streets were widened and parking was increased in an attempt to maintain downtown as the single most important centre in the city (Abbott 1996). Thus, downtowns lost much of their original pedestrian character and became much more auto-oriented in this time period. The next stage of revitalization was much more dramatic and came about in the 1960s (Gibson and Langstaff 1982).

In the late 1950s and the 1960s, the rise of the suburbs created a sputtering real estate market downtown (Abbott 1996). Thus, in an attempt to rectify the downward spiral of the downtown, dramatic renewal efforts were undertaken. This time period is often characterized by the terms 'urban renewal', 'slum clearance' and the 'bull dozer'. During this phase of renewal large-scale revitalization projects took place downtown (Abbott 1996). These projects included bull-dozing blocks of undesirable buildings to make way for new more desirable developments. This urban renewal strategy did not achieve healthy revitalization. Often the land that was cleared of existing development, to make way for more desirable development, remained vacant and was turned into large parking lots (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). Also, the improved auto transportation downtown, related to these large-scale projects, decreased the pedestrian-friendliness of downtown (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). Therefore, this renewal strategy

undertaken in the 1960s and early 1970s was not successful and often made the downtown worse off.

The 1970s saw a more compassionate response to downtown decline. Community conservation became more important along with preserving historic structures (Abbott 1996). In addition, housing in the downtown was given much more attention (Gibson and Langstaff 1982). The practice of large-scale urban renewal for the most part became history in this decade, with more of a gradual selective clearance approach (Gibson and Langstaff 1982). The late 1970s and early 1980s saw public investment in cultural facilities, retail markets, open spaces and parks, which was intended to improve the quality of life and attractiveness of downtown (Abbott 1996). Thus, the practice of renewal died and the concept of revitalization came to the forefront.

From the mid 1980s to the present the private sector became much more involved in downtown investment and revitalization. This was a major shift in downtown revitalization. Prior to the 1980s most of the investment into downtown was from public sources (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). Downtown office development became a key revitalization strategy. Large cities tried to capitalize on global economy growth and create an area where office development was encouraged (Abbott 1996). Cities tried to make their downtowns a modern and efficient business centre that could compete globally (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). This large amount of private investment in downtown created the privatization of much space shrinking the public realm and degrading a positive sense of place (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). Another

important trend that influenced revitalization strategies was the rise of the service economy. The service economy allowed downtowns to incorporate upscale marketplaces, convention centres and entertainment facilities (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). These activity generators were used as revitalization strategies to bring people downtown.

Strategies to deal with downtown decline and the rise of suburbs have progressed over the last 50 years. They originated as large-scale publicly funded urban renewal projects and then shifted to small-scale private sector-led projects. There is also, at present, the movement of small-scale incremental community revitalization projects occurring in many cities.

### 1.9.2 BRIEF HISTORY OF REVITALIZATION IN SMALL CITIES: A CASE STUDY OF MEDICINE HAT

Due to the size of small cities they are not likely to have devoted efforts towards a specific plan for downtown revitalization in the past. Now though, as planning becomes increasingly important, and as small cities try to curb downtown decline, planning for downtown is a growing practice.

In the case of Medicine Hat, the city completed its first City Centre Strategic Plan in 2000 (City of Medicine Hat 2000a). This plan is not a detailed secondary plan but is rather a general plan, full of policies. The policies are general in nature and many of the policies could easily be espoused for another city. Thus the plan does not appear to be designed from 'scratch' as a Medicine Hat concept. Nevertheless, the plan does have clear action strategies and a strong implementation component.

The City of Medicine Hat Municipal Development Plan, as revised in 2000 (City of Medicine Hat 2000b), does include a section on the downtown. However, the downtown section primarily focuses on economic development and little attention is given to social and cultural needs downtown. Therefore, the city does specifically recognize the need for such plans and strategies for the downtown area.

Prior to the City Centre Strategic Plan, the City of Medicine Hat employed a number of revitalization strategies. During the 1980s downtown underwent a major street beautification program with funds came from the Alberta Government's Heritage Main Street Program (City of Medicine Hat 2000a). Improvements were made to building facades and extensive streetscaping occurred. Also, in the 1980s a parkade/transit centre was constructed downtown (City of Medicine Hat 2000a). Previous, to these strategies an underground walkway was constructed, under the CPR rail lines, to link the two areas of downtown, the traditional core and the North Railway Exchange.

The decline of downtowns in small cities needs to be addressed. Presently much of the literature focuses on the challenges of large urban centres and there is a void regarding the challenges of small cities. The intent of this research is to address the needs of small cities regarding downtown revitalization. The next chapter will provide the targeted literature review and the theoretical foundation for this research.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 SMALL AND LARGE CITY DOWNTOWN DIFFERENCES AND THE IMPLICATIONS

There are specific differences between small and large cities; these differences are important because they impact downtown. Thus, it is critical to be aware of these differences, in order to successfully employ appropriate revitalization strategies for small cities. These differences are significant to downtown revitalization plans, and therefore there are implications for planners. This section will examine a few of the major differences between small and large cities, and possible implications for planners and strategists.

Large cities often have a multi-nodal form. Therefore, the downtown may not be seen as the heart of the city by the residents, it is just another major hub within a greater region. In small cities the downtown is usually the only major node or hub in the city. Thus, the downtown of a small city is often described as the heart and centre of the city (Robertson 1999). This is an important difference between small and large cities; it allows planners in small cities to draw on this perception, and to develop downtown as the heart of the city.

Large cities often have many different districts within the downtown. Small cities rarely have more than a few districts within their downtown (Robertson 2001). Thus, downtown in small cities can be seen as more of a uniform area. In addition, the surrounding neighbourhoods in a small city are also quite uniform. In small cities the downtown is often very well-linked to the surrounding neighbourhoods, where downtown workers could live. This is not the case in large cities, where there are often very large

transition zones between the downtown and the main residential neighbourhoods (Robertson 2001). Thus planners in small cities can and should view the core neighbourhoods, surrounding the downtown, as vital to its revitalization.

Smaller cities have a great advantage over larger ones because of the scale of the urban form. Large cities are often accompanied by large towering skyscrapers and buildings that dwarf the people and street below. Small cities are much more on a human scale, with no or few massive structures (Robertson 2001); creating a downtown that is more human in scale is much easier to accomplish in a small city.

Usually small cities have low population densities and there is not a dense concentration of services or activities. Thus, small cities are challenged, for example, to provide an effective public transit system. Often in small cities, due to the low densities, planning is auto-oriented (Bunting et al. 2000). For this reason downtowns are at a comparative disadvantage to the suburbs, where auto traffic is better accommodated. Small cities do not have extensive transit systems, and therefore their downtowns suffer due to the primary mode of transport being personal vehicles. The implication for planners is that they must plan for a downtown that does not have an effective transit system. They must accommodate vehicular traffic downtown, because in small cities that is the primary mode of transportation.

Large cities provide high-order cultural activities and employment. Small cities lack these types of jobs and activity generators (Bunting et al. 2000). Rather, small city

downtowns must rely on small businesses to generate employment. In general, small cities cannot attract large developments, and therefore developments are small in nature. The downtown of a small city does not have the market area, or the employment, or the existing attractions needed to create synergy between downtown uses, which in turn drives development (Robertson 1999). The implication for planners is that they must design strategies that fit the context of a lower order of cultural and employment activities, that does not generate as much activity as is common-place in larger cities.

Small city downtowns usually do not have an active nightlife. The downtowns in small cities only have activity during the day; after the workday is over the downtowns are seen as slow and dead (Robertson 1999). Downtowns in small cities often do not have quality dining, entertainment, and cultural facilities to sustain activity after peak workday hours, whereas large cities often have these amenities, attracting people into the core long after the day workers have left. Planners need to be aware of this fact and try harder to create an atmosphere downtown that will attract people to the core in the evenings, and on the weekends.

Planners in large cities often have to contend with traffic congestion in their downtowns. In small cities traffic congestion downtown is not usually a great problem (Robertson 1999). Thus, small city downtowns do not have be as concerned with traffic congestion when considering revitalization plans. The implication for planners is that in small cities they may have more freedom to be innovative in the physical design of the downtown, because there is not such a great concern for traffic flows.

Another problem that plagues large city downtowns is crime and fear of crime. In small cities, these are not such great problems (Robertson 1999). This gives smaller cities a head start in revitalization. Large cities have to market downtown as a safe place, and in smaller cities this effort may not be necessary. Therefore planners and leaders in small cities can focus on other issues.

There are many differences between large city downtowns and those in smaller cities, these differences are important because they influence revitalization plans. This is why small city downtowns cannot borrow, or downscale, revitalization strategies from larger cities. It is essential that the differences between small and large cities are known in order to achieve a successful revitalization strategy designed specifically for small city downtowns.

## 2.2 FUTURE ROLE OF DOWNTOWNS IN SMALL CITIES

It is important to try to determine what the future role of downtowns may be. Far-sighted planning may help downtowns by realizing and tapping into future trends and opening new possibilities. If no recognition is given to the future role of downtown, potential opportunities may be lost and harm may be done to downtown via implementation of outdated strategies.

North American cities will likely continue to sprawl in the form of low density landscapes (Krieger 2000). Thus, as cities expand outward, downtowns will have to continue to battle for a market and a significant role in the city-region. Canadian cities

are still dispersing in form, falling densities will be associated with further sprawl, and suburban living will continue to dominate (Bourne 2000). Thus, in the immediate future, revitalization strategies cannot assume that there will be a mass exodus from the suburbs into the central city. Also, in many cities the central downtown will have to compete against other quasi centres in the suburbs (Bourne 2000).

Another trend that could affect downtowns is the aging baby boomers (Krieger 2000). The changing demographics of North America will have a large impact on society and will undoubtedly affect cities and downtowns (Hyett Palma Publications 1990). Seniors and the aging baby boomers have great mobility. This aging segment of the population will choose to settle in areas that have excellent 'quality-of-life amenities' (Moe and Wilkie 1997, 175). Thus housing for seniors, and services that are oriented to this segment of the population, provide downtowns with a great opportunity, to accommodate this demographic.

The economic outlook for downtowns is mixed. There is not likely to be a great amount of office development occurring in the future, due partly to tele-communication technology changes (Gad and Matthew 2000). There are those though who disagree with this future possibility, of what the U.S. Department of Transportation calls 'telesprawl' (Moe and Wilkie 1997). Either way, there are other potential opportunities for downtowns in the future. There are great possibilities in increased residential development, and in areas such as entertainment, education, tourism, and culture (Gad and Matthew 2000). Other potentials include catering to the hospitality industry via hotels and convention centres (Levy 2001). The hospitality industry could become an

increasingly important part of downtowns in the future, and therefore any revitalization strategy should acknowledge this. Another future potential possibility for downtowns is the return and resurgence of retail businesses. The suburbs have dominated the retail market and recently this market has reached a saturation point; developers and retailers are thus expected to return downtown to reach untapped markets (Krieger 2000). Downtowns likely do have a bright economic future. One potential market for downtowns, especially small city downtowns, relates to small business development. In the near future the major source of economic growth will be small businesses (Hyett Palma Publications 1990). Downtowns could be marketed as a friendly environment for small businesses to locate and flourish. Also, small cities are increasingly able to access international markets (Mayer 2000). This access to global economies will allow small businesses and downtowns to compete with other larger businesses and cities. Although it is not likely that many downtowns will regain their regional economic supremacy in the near future, they can proceed with a new role. The downtowns of the future will be a service centre and economic hub for local core neighbourhoods, while still having a few regional attractions in particular areas (Bunting et, al 2000).

The regional attractions that will likely be located downtown in the future are the arts, culture, entertainment, fine dining, and high quality sporting events (Levy 2001). Downtowns can draw on these strengths to better themselves. In the future, arts and culture will become increasingly popular. In the near future the North American population will be better educated, and thus they will attend and participate in arts and cultural events more often (Krieger 2000). With this increased demand for high quality

arts entertainment, downtowns have the chance to expand their cultural and arts

infrastructure to accommodate this demand.

Another potential opportunity for downtowns in the future is the desire of people to enjoy

high quality spaces where they can experience a sense of community. People are

increasingly seeking to discover a place and community within their cities, due to the

rapidly changing world around them (Krieger 2000). Downtowns are for the most part in

the best position to capitalize on this public need. They often have the historic buildings

or the waterfront or the civic spaces that provide for a feeling of community and

connection. Thus, in the future, planning for downtowns will need to address the public's

desire to have a meeting place and a community space. Downtowns are moving away

from being the transportation, government, and economic hubs of the city and moving

toward being the "...back drops for public activity..." and the place where

"...participation in civic life..." is possible (Partners for Livable Communities, 2000,

123).

## 2.3 COMPONENTS OF A QUALITY DOWNTOWN

> The possibility of the accidental meeting is what makes the
> city a fertile place (Sucher 1995, 25).

This section is devoted to discovering what the academic literature states about creating a

quality downtown, focusing on the qualitative. The objective of creating a quality

downtown is to create a place where people want to meet, live, shop, work, play, and be

entertained.

It is difficult to define what constitutes an excellent place. The Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment distributes awards for excellent places and the processes used in place making. The award sponsors also have trouble defining what makes an excellent place; they do not have any specific criteria regarding what an excellent urban place looks like (Schneekloth and Shibley, 1995). The International Downtown Association (IDA) also distributes awards for excellence. Excellence for the IDA is defined as the ability to improve the sense of place for the downtown, being innovative, and being capable of duplication. It is also judged on the process and the final result (IDA Website 2001). Thus, defining an excellent place is not an easy task. The rest of this section will review some of the main characteristics of a quality downtown, that help create an excellent place.

Cities today in North America are dominated by suburbs. There has been much literature on the physical and social isolation that these suburbs promote. Many people today are seeking a place where they can experience a sense of community. People want to have the ability to have 'by-chance' meetings (Partners for Livable Communities 2000); a quality downtown allows for the social interaction of people with the chance of unexpected meetings.

One of the most important aspects of a high quality downtown is the street activity. Successful downtowns reflect a great concern for the street level pedestrian environment and beautification (Pindell 1995). Such things as sidewalk furniture, benches, trees, waste baskets, parks and open public spaces go a long way in providing a quality

environment for pedestrians (Pindell 1995). Street level activity is essential to the health and perception of downtown. With a pedestrian-first attitude, downtown can really distinguish itself from the rest of the car-dominated city. The core needs to be seen as a special place that is active and vibrant, and having a pedestrian-friendly downtown can accomplish this.

A quality downtown is a place that offers great residential opportunities. Residential housing downtown must be close to services (Bunting et al. 2000). Homes near services are a great convenience for residents. Downtown is seen as having nice-looking older homes that exhibit a great sense of character (Bunting et al. 2000). The old homes offer a sense of character and quality that many of the newer suburbs severely lack. Another positive quality that makes a great downtown is the mix of housing types and the variation of socio-economic groups (Bunting et al. 2000). The presence of residential dwellings, both affordable and expensive, will provide increased activity and diversity in the downtown due to the increased population permanently living in the area and the variation of housing options (Pindell 1995). A quality downtown provides for a mix of housing types, and prices, and has services conveniently located.

Many downtowns are often seen as, or perceived as, unsafe and dirty. Therefore, a quality downtown must be safe and clean (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000). Physical safety is extremely important. Two factors of safety include personal safety, and the appearance of the area, in terms of trash, and graffiti (Palma 2000a). If people feel physically unsafe or the area is dirty they will not want to shop or live downtown. Another safety issue is the social presence of individuals or groups seen by mainstream

society as undesirable (Palma 2000b). Although these groups may not be a threat to individuals they can by their presence detract from the public's image of downtown. A quality downtown is one where all members of the city are welcome, and where none are fearful to go at anytime, day or night.

A quality downtown is an area of the city that is unique and has a strong sense of character. People are looking for experiences and choices not available elsewhere in the city (Partners for Livable Communities 2000). A quality downtown incorporates niche retail. Niche retail offers unique products and services that cannot be found elsewhere in the city. These retail establishments focus more on quality and customer service rather than price and convenience (Pindell 1995). Many segments of the population are seeking this unique shopping and entertainment experience, as a remedy for the homogenous products, services and formats that exemplify suburban malls (Moe and Wilkie 1997). Downtowns can accommodate this need and become a special 'real' place in the city, as compared to the artificial atmosphere found in malls.

Downtowns that have a strong sense of place and are seen by the community as a great place to work, live and shop, will undoubtedly attract visitors. A staple of successful and quality downtowns is tourism (Pindell 1995). Tourists will add to the existing activity and bring a new dimension to downtown. Although a high quality downtown is not one that serves the needs of visitors only, attracting tourists is an important component of creating a good mixture of people enjoying the place.

Another key to creating a quality downtown is to create recreational opportunities (Pindell 1995). Residents and tourists need a place downtown to fulfill their recreational needs. The more opportunities downtown provides the more it will be used and the more people will enjoy downtown. Thus, since recreation is a very large part of the North American culture it makes sense to include this crucial component.

Ownership is a key ingredient in creating a high quality downtown. Residents of the city and downtown must feel they are connected to the downtown in a special way. Therefore the feeling of ownership of the downtown by residents is very important (Partners for Livable Cities 2000). In order to achieve this feeling of ownership, the revitalization process should be community based and driven (Burayidi 2001). Having the community initiating and guiding the process, rather than outside consultants, will further the resident's feeling of ownership of this special place. If residents perceive they own or are a part of a great downtown they will frequent the area more often and care about its future.

Before a revitalization strategy can be developed a city must first discover what citizens want their downtown to be like. It is important for the public to decide this and to participate in stating what is wanted in their downtown.

There are many aspects that relate to a high quality downtown, that has a strong sense of place. One of the underlying factors is activity. A quality downtown is a place where there is much activity, many events going on during the day/night and the year, and a

great deal of pedestrian street activity. Downtown needs to be seen by residents as a special place that is fun, safe, clean, and holds plenty of opportunities for social interaction at all times of the day. Thus, a quality downtown should be one of balance; a balance between uses - retail, office space, residential; a balance between activities - recreational, cultural, entertainment; and a balance between types of social and economic categories of people - residents and tourists. Thus, a downtown should be the celebration of cities where all types and mixes of people and activities can flourish.

It should be noted that creating a quality downtown, via place making, is not a one-time event. These special places are constantly changing and will always need to be improved (Schneekloth and Shibley 1995). Likewise, what makes a quality place is not the physical design alone. A quality place is where good physical design allows people to interact and enjoy their surroundings. Thus, in essence, a quality place is defined by the social interactions that occur there.

## 2.4 PHYSICAL, ECONOMIC AND FUNCTIONAL REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

It is important to briefly review for comparison and contrast purposes, the major physical, economic and functional revitalization strategies that small cities have used. Thus, this section is devoted to examining, and briefly critiquing, these strategies, setting the stage for the next section, which examines the more direct place-making oriented strategies that can be potentially more effective in revitalization.

### 2.4.1 SPECIAL ACTIVITY GENERATORS

*Special activity generators* are commonly used as a quick fix for downtown problems. Examples of special activity generators are large retail/entertainment centres, large sport

complexes, arts facilities, convention centres, and large office developments (Robertson 1999). Also, large complexes in the downtown that house movie theatres, coffee shops and big box book stores can be included in this category (Partners for Livable Communities 2000).

The idea behind this revitalization strategy is that if these large projects are constructed and the old decrepit buildings are removed, then people will return downtown (Kemp 2000). This is a myth. The large vacant areas are not likely to experience reinvestment first; rather the small spaces will be first (Moe and Wilkie 1997). This type of revitalization is far more common and all of the reinvestment into small spaces will create a much more positive environment than the large projects could create (Moe and Wilkie 1997).

*Special activity generators* are not very successful in small cities. The high cost to construct these projects and the fact that these projects are often not a good fit for downtowns, results in a poor revitalization strategy for small cities (Robertson 1999). Very often large amounts of money are invested in these projects and the end result is a very low utilization rate in small cities (Robertson 1999). In addition, these types of projects need high pedestrian traffic and repeat visits to be successful (Peterson 1998). Small cities are not likely able to produce the high pedestrian traffic needed, and therefore it may be difficult for these facilities to survive, especially if they are privately-owned. There are though certain special activity generators that can be successful in small cities. One of the most successful special activity generators is large office

development. This is due to the changing economy emphasising the service sector and the increased need for office space in small cities (Robertson 1999). By contrast, large sporting complexes in small cities are not the answer. These large complexes often do not fare well in large active downtowns (Rosentraub 1997). Large-scale sporting and cultural facilities are not the way to revitalize downtown. These projects only bring one time visits to downtown, to a specific location and do not encourage people to live and work downtown (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000).

## 2.4.2 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

Many planners and strategists have viewed the problems of the declining downtown as being related to the accessibility of downtown (Robertson 1999). As history has shown, downtowns in North America underwent a transformation to better accommodate auto traffic. One-way streets were introduced, streets were widened and parking facilities were built (Robertson 1999). Although it is important to consider transportation circulation and accessibility, too much emphasis should not be placed on auto traffic because the result is a downtown that does not have a pedestrian-first atmosphere.

Parking is also perceived to be a downtown problem. Therefore many cities have undergone changes to improve parking in the core area. This strategy of adding more parking will not revitalize downtown (Kemp 2000). There are other more innovative solutions to parking than large vacant lots.

The strategy of improving transportation access will not have much effect on downtown. However the need for transportation improvements cannot be overlooked, and should be part of a more comprehensive strategy.

*2.4.3 RETAIL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*

> As chain stores replaced independent merchants, critics
> mourned the loss of local character. Yet, this was an
> unavoidable outcome of the decision to use shopping
> centres... (Frieden and Sagalyn 1989, 236).

There have been many attempts to revive downtown's economy. This section will quickly review a few of the major retail initiatives designed to stimulate economic growth downtown.

In an attempt to compete with large suburban shopping malls many downtowns created their own indoor shopping centres. These centres were usually very similar to their suburban counterparts. The problem with these large indoor shopping centres is that they destroyed the unique retail character downtown. Of all the tenants in downtown indoor shopping centres, more than two-thirds of the stores are national chains (Frieden and Sagalyn 1989, 236). Thus, downtown indoor shopping centres are not the best revitalization strategy, because they turn downtown's unique character into a mundane and ordinary suburban shopping mall. Thus, downtown is forced to compete with the suburbs. This is not desirable; downtown should reject all that is suburban, because it is not equipped to compete against the suburbs in a game of malling (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000). It is therefore advisable for downtowns to purse niche strategies

(Milder 1997). Niche marketing will set the downtown apart from other shopping centres and could build off downtown's unique character.

There are other consequences that indoor shopping centres have on downtowns. They are inward-focused and often do little to add to the street life and vibrancy of downtown. Removing these indoor malls from downtown has the potential to bring back street level activity (Partners for Livable Communities 2000). The latter is further hampered due to the fact that often, to connect indoor shopping centres, skywalks are used above the streets. Skywalks, which so often accompany indoor malls, have negative effects on downtown. They detract from street level activity, they destroy sight-lines, and they often separate social classes (Robertson 1993). Thus, indoor downtown malls are not an effective revitalization strategy; they present too many negative side-effects and do not present many benefits.

There is a recent movement within revitalization strategizing away from large projects towards smaller ones. Not only do small cities not need an indoor shopping mall to survive, they do not even need a department store to anchor the downtown (Kemp 2000). Rather, small stores, not large department stores and malls, are the key to downtown's survival.

Another attempt to encourage retail and economic development downtown is by creating business improvement districts (BIDs). Often they promote retail outlets, attempt to attract new businesses, engage in marketing downtown, and stage special events

downtown (Houstoun Jr. 1997). The programs offered and the amount of influence of BIDs often correlate to the size of the city. Large cities have BIDs involved in many activities while small cities, if they have an organization, are involved in fewer activities (Houstoun Jr. 1997). There is debate about the effectiveness of BIDs in revitalization, but they are not likely an effective strategy for small cities.

## 2.5 PLACE MAKING REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

Place making revitalization strategies are those which are primarily concerned with improving the quality of downtown for people. These strategies aim to create a sense of place downtown and build on downtown's character. These strategies are not focused exclusively on physical design, they include social and spiritual aspects of place. Place making strategies are used to create a downtown that is loved by the people of the city and promotes the downtown as the heart of their community. This section of the literature review examines strategies used to achieve a quality downtown with a strong sense of place.

### 2.5.1 WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

From a previous section, it has been determined that establishing or re-enforcing a sense of place can contribute greatly to the quality of downtown. Many cities have undergone waterfront development to revitalize their declining downtowns. Waterfront development can do more than provide economic benefits. It can draw downtown back to its historical past and provide an impetus for developing a sense of character. Waterfront development can provide for a number of opportunities to improve the quality of downtown. It can be undertaken as historic preservation to save the city's historic roots (Breen and Rigby 1994). Also, waterfront development can be undertaken to

enhance recreational opportunities (Breen and Rigby 1994). In most small cities water played an important role in a community's history (Robertson 1999). Access to the downtown waterfront is extremely important in revitalization efforts. A physical connection to water is essential and could go a long way to re-establishing a link between the water and residents (McBee 1992).

## 2.5.2 HISTORIC PRESERVATION

> Main street persists because we instinctively believe that architecture and design affect behaviour and can enable us to keep a sense of our roots, a valuable asset in times of great social and economic change. (Francaviglia 1996,179-180).

One way to create a sense of place is to draw on the natural historic character of downtowns. They are traditionally the centre of the city and often have the oldest buildings and the richest history in the city. Thus, a downtown's historic character can be used to further a sense of place. Historic preservation of this character is extremely important to the sense of place and the quality of life associated with downtown (Mintz and Gratz 1998). Not only will historic buildings retain the roots of the city it will improve the quality of downtown. Preserving those buildings with historic significance will create a visually stimulating environment (McBee 1992). Thus, historic preservation is a powerful way to create a sense of place for downtown and provide a visually appealing environment.

Small cities have an advantage over large cities in terms of using historic preservation as a qualitative revitalization strategy. Large city downtowns have usually experienced substantial growth, and many of their historic buildings have been lost. This is not so for

small cities, where there is often many historic buildings, because of the lack of demand

for new development downtown (Robertson 1999). Therefore, small cities have much

more choice, and options available to them, in terms of historic preservation.

*2.5.3 PEDESTRIANIZATION AND DESIGN*

> The success of revitalization within small cities hinges on
> understanding the interaction of the elements of the urban
> environment, woven together by sidewalks, streets, and
> public spaces. (Means 1997, 29)

Quality downtowns have a lively atmosphere that creates excitement. A way to achieve

this active atmosphere is to have a downtown that caters to pedestrians in a compact form

(Paumier 1988).

An attempt to draw on this pedestrian power was to use transit and pedestrian malls as

revitalization strategies. These types of strategies were very popular in the 1960s and

1970s. Roads were closed to auto traffic with the hope that this would increase retail

activity (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). Today this strategy is seen primarily as a

failure and is not often used as a revitalization strategy (Robertson 1993). However,

there are other ways to achieve this lively atmosphere.

There are specific ways in which to cater to pedestrians and create an active street life.

Auto traffic in the core should be discouraged. Widening the sidewalks and providing

benches are ways of catering to pedestrians (Robertson 1993). The major pedestrian

corridors in the downtown should be 15-20 ft wide to provide for space to walk, benches

to sit and places for public art and trees (McBee 1992). The increased width of sidewalks

also allows for performers and vendors (Sucher 1995). These street performers will add a

social dimension that will help downtown strengthen its sense of place. Catering to pedestrians and designing for their needs will increase street level activity and make the streets places that are for people not cars (McBee 1992). It is not advisable though to ban vehicles from downtown. Vehicular traffic does add to the diverse nature of downtown (McBee 1992). Downtown streets should have two-way traffic which, will slow traffic and allow increased accessibility for cars (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000). Slower traffic will further enhance the pedestrian environment. Also, if traffic is a problem, traffic calming techniques can be employed, and if necessary streets can be closed to increasingly cater to pedestrians (Sucher 1995).

Another important part of catering to pedestrians is to provide an interesting environment. Streetscapes can be a major factor in creating a quality atmosphere. Great attention should be given to the quality of the street level pedestrian environment, this is so important in creating an environment that people want to experience (McBee 1992). One such street design is to incorporate trees into the urban fabric (McBee 1992) Trees, plants and water will add to the pedestrian environment. There should be continual building frontage, instead of gaps of paved parking lots, in an attempt to create a pleasurable pedestrian environment (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000).

Parking lots are a negative aspect that downtowns need to accommodate. Parking lots account for 40-60% of the area of downtowns, resulting in a loss of potential commercial and residential space; furthermore, they detract from the pedestrian environment (Mintz

and Gratz 1998, 94). It is therefore beneficial to keep parking lots out of sight-lines involving the pedestrian environment.

In order to make downtown a special place, and a part of the city where there is a strong collective sense of place, it needs to draw on its unique features. Downtown should be noticeably different from the rest of the city. However, planners and city officials should be very careful not to design out what is authentic about downtown, and replace it with fake attractions that do not fit with downtown's character (McBee 1992). The buildings downtown should have complementary architectural styles, but variation should be allowed and diversity celebrated (McBee 1992). Downtown should market itself as different from the rest of the city. Creative designs of gates, signs, fire hydrants, man-hole covers and banners can help distinguish downtown as a special place (Sucher 1995).

A goal of the city should be to build a downtown where social interaction is possible. Physical streetscape design can encourage social encounters (Sucher 1995). Benches, open spaces with access to sun and water, and unique tables with chess boards, for example, will set the stage for social interaction, and become a favourite place for residents (Sucher 1995). All age groups should be accommodated downtown, so that it becomes a special place for everyone. Such elements as open spaces and playgrounds downtown will give young people a chance to interact and enjoy the atmosphere (Sucher 1995). Special attention should be given to the quality and detail of all streetscape projects (Sucher 1995). People want to be in an environment that is of high quality, where there is much to look at and enjoy. Such techniques as using different patterns on

sidewalks, to decorating man-holes, can enhance the quality of downtown (Sucher 1995).
Downtown should be a unique place where people want to be and identify with, as a
quality environment with a lively atmosphere.

Creating a sense of place downtown hinges on creating a quality physical environment.
To ensure that only quality projects are undertaken in the downtown, the local
government needs to become involved. Creating the downtown's sense of character is
not achieved easily without design guidelines (Burayidi 2001). These design guidelines
are important because they will ensure quality streets, buildings and signs. Thus, the
local government should put design guidelines in place to ensure a level of excellence in
this very special area of the city.

### 2.5.4 A 24-Hour Downtown

A 24-hour place is where there is always some activity happening, no matter what time of
the day. This is not a component of most cities, especially the suburbs. The downtown's
potential to create a 24-hour atmosphere gives it a great advantage over other areas in the
city. Thus, creating a 24-hour downtown has been a key revitalization strategy for cities.
This strategy is effective because it creates a vibrant and active street life anytime of the
day (Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck 2000). Although it would be very hard for small
cities to have a true 24-hour downtown, they could definitely extend the hours in which
activity is occurring in the core.

Creating a 24-hour downtown is not easy; a number of factors need to be considered.
One of the keys is density, creating a place where there are many different uses and

people in a compact area (Mintz and Gratz 1998). Diverse neighbourhoods provide places where people can eat, work, live, shop, socialize, be entertained and experience culture (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000). A way to achieve this diversity of uses downtown is accomplished by allowing mixed use zoning. Mixed uses will add to the activity of downtown and create synergies that do not exist outside of downtown (McBee 1992). Thus it is very important that cities allow mixed uses to occur downtown.

Housing within downtown is important in creating a 24-hour place. Both upscale and affordable housing is needed in order to achieve the diversity that downtowns want to pursue (Miller and Orfield 2000). Services and goods needed by those living downtown have to be close and convenient, so that downtown residents do not have to travel to the suburbs for these products.

In order to attract those not living downtown to the core, after working hours, entertainment facilities are needed. High quality entertainment downtown will attract people into the core in the evenings and will create a nightlife (Mintz and Gratz 1998). Small cities, especially, have underdeveloped entertainment options in their downtowns (Robertson 1999). Three entertainment activity generators that will bring people downtown are restaurants/bakeries, bars/pubs and large bookstores (Mintz and Gratz 1998). Thus, there is an opportunity to expand the hours that downtown attracts people, by expanding the entertainment options in the core.

In order to have an active downtown that is used at various times, public buildings and services should be located in the core. Such public buildings as the library, post office, and courthouse can attract a large number of people downtown (Mintz and Gratz 1998). One possibility is to make large public buildings multi-purpose. This will keep these large buildings active at various times of the day (Hyett Palma Publications 1990). Also, educational institutions could bring a vibrant and active street life, via students. Thus, when possible, post-secondary institutions should be located downtown (Mintz and Gratz 1998).

In order to achieve a 24-hour downtown the area must be perceived as safe. There should be a strong show of security and police to keep the downtown community safe at all times of the day (Miller and Orfield 2000). Another key is to make downtown as accessible as possible. There should be good access to major city roadways and there should be a major public transit station downtown (Miller and Orfield 2000).

There are many factors that contribute to creating a 24-hour downtown. The key ones involve providing many different uses downtown. Although the possibility of small cities creating a 24-hour downtown is rather remote, they can attract more people downtown after the workday. A 24-hour downtown creates a vibrant and exciting place that is truly the heart of the city.

### 2.5.5 HOUSING

Downtown housing is very important. Housing in the downtown provides high quality living options and it aids in creating an active 24-hour place. If people live downtown

the area instantly becomes active. Housing is a way to achieve a quality downtown. Downtown businesses and the downtown in general do much better if the core neighbourhoods around downtown are densely populated (Bunting et al. 2000). It is also beneficial to the city as a whole to have housing downtown. It is much more cost-effective to intensify development in the city centre than to develop in the suburbs (Bunting et al. 2000). Housing can successfully revitalize downtowns and it generally works in both large and small cities (Palma 2000). Although housing is a good way to spur revitalization in both large and small cities, small cities may have a more difficult time attracting residents to the city centre. Downtown workers that have a 20 minute commute or less to downtown are not likely to move downtown due to convenience (McBee 1992, 176). Therefore it is harder for small cities, which usually are not spatially large enough to generate a commute longer than 20 minutes, to attract residents downtown. Small cities must then focus on the quality of the housing, and the unique character that downtown offers.

There are certain needs that must be met before housing downtown can be a viable living option. High quality downtowns often have on at least one of their edges a neighbourhood that has undergone gentrification (Pindell 1995). Gentrified neighbourhoods provide downtown with middle income residents that have disposable income. Another component needed to make downtown housing a viable option is to allow for mixed uses downtown, through the relaxation of codes and regulations (Mintz and Gratz 1998). This will allow more housing options in the core and will create an investment-friendly atmosphere (Mintz and Gratz 1998). In order for downtown housing

to be successful there must be services located close. Such things as grocery stores are essential in attracting residents downtown (Sucher 1995). There are many factors that need to be observed before downtown housing becomes a popular option, but having residents downtown is essential to achieving a quality downtown.

Downtown housing offers many advantages that suburban housing cannot offer. Downtowns have a great diversity of housing options. There is choice of housing type and price, and therefore downtown living has a large potential market (McBee 1992). In large Canadian Prairie city downtowns it was discovered that those living downtown experienced a strong feeling of community (Charette 1994). They also claimed that downtown, their neighbourhood, had a strong sense of place (Charette 1994). This sense of place and a feeling of community is an essential component to creating a quality downtown.

Not all age categories and family types are equally likely to live downtown. Bunting et al. (2000), determined the market for downtown housing could be divided into categories. They are: seniors, moving from houses to apartments; those aged 45-64, who are moving into condominiums; students; and those who are interested in renovating older character homes. The most likely people to live downtown are students, and those who are risk-takers (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000). Obviously, students and young risk takers do not yet have a lot of capital, and thus they are interested in inexpensive housing. This group is looking for character, something out of the ordinary and edgy (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000). Very often this is the group that is seeking lofts that are

moderately renovated from old manufacturing buildings (Mintz and Gratz 1998). Once

the area has been 'tamed' by the risk-takers, and the area is seen as desirable, those with

more income will find the area attractive (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000). The

aging baby boomer population should be seen as a great opportunity for housing in the

core. As this group ages, a shift from market-driven housing to life-style-driven housing

is occurring (Hyett Palma Publications 1990). This places downtown, with its strong

character, sense of place and quality life style, at the forefront in providing housing for

baby boomers. The hardest demographic to attract to downtown are families (Miller and

Orfield 2000). Downtowns are not seen as family-friendly places. The lack or quality of

schools downtown has to be a great concern. To create a downtown with high quality,

qualitative aspects, then diversity is needed. It is clearly beneficial to have many

demographics represented downtown.

## 2.5.6 FESTIVALS AND MARKETPLACES

Festivals are a part of urban life. They can be a powerful tool for revitalization and

promoting a healthy image of downtown. There are primarily two general types of

festivals. There are large world-class spectacles, and there are local festivals (Ley 1996).

Small cities do not often have the chance to host a world class festival, and therefore the

focus in this section is on the small local festivals. Outdoor concerts, performances and

parades have been used as strategies to revitalize downtowns. These outdoor events

increase pedestrian traffic around downtown retailers (McBee 1992). Thus, festivals can

have strong economic benefits for downtown businesses (Ley 1996). Also, they can

create a sense of place and give residents pride in their downtown and community.

Festivals can have many benefits, they can provide entertainment, social interaction and

promote the overall health of residents. Winter cities often create winter festivals to combat the depression associated with winter and give people a chance to interact with the community during the winter months (Pressman 1987). Festivals can make downtown a special place in which people gather for events that are not present in other areas of the city.

Marketplaces, or farmers markets, provide the opportunity to shop in a vibrant and active atmosphere. Marketplaces offer a mixture of shopping, entertainment, arts, and local products (Ley 1996). In Canada, these marketplaces have been successful; they have accommodated the shopping and entertainment needs and wants of the middle class (Ley 1996). More importantly, marketplaces offer a place for social interaction. They have the ability to attract a diverse group of people, giving them an excellent place to interact (Mintz and Gratz 1998). Marketplaces are a useful revitalization tool because they can be established almost anywhere downtown, and they can be open air, meaning there is no need for buildings (Mintz and Gratz 1998). Another positive aspect of marketplaces is that they can establish a sense of community identity and place. They showcase local goods and talents, which further enhances the unique local flavour and character of downtown (Mintz and Gratz 1998).

## 2.5.7 ART AND CULTURE

A strong arts and culture component is often associated with quality downtowns. Arts and culture can add to the quality of life for those downtown and to the city as a whole (Houstoun Jr, 2000). Culture and the arts can also bring many people downtown, which provides activity and vibrancy. Arts-related institutions in the United States consistently

attract more visitors than professional sporting events (Houstoun Jr, 2000, 44). Thus, culture and arts are very important in attracting people downtown. The added visitors that frequent the art and cultural institutions provide economic spin-offs. Spin-offs are most noticeable for downtown hotels, restaurants and increased demand for office space (McBee1992). If there is a large cultural facility built downtown, efficient planning could maximize spin-offs. Parking for the centre should be at least a block away from the facility, and the walkway should be interesting (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000). Having the parking away from the cultural centre will ensure that visitors will experience and add traffic to area businesses (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000).

Informal art and culture downtown is also extremely important. This informal art can add to the quality of life and sense of place to the entire downtown, while large cultural facilities only add to the quality of life for those who attend a performance. Thus, the informal art scene downtown should be promoted and encouraged. Downtown should be providing space for amateur music and art (Sucher 1995). Public art in the downtown is important, because it creates a sense of place and signifies individual ownership and pride (Sucher 1995). Art can be a conversation piece between strangers and promote social interaction (Sucher 1995). This feeling of community and pride is a component of a quality downtown. Wall murals are a display of art, and are often found in small cities. These murals add to the experience of being downtown (Sucher 1995). Artists creating the art will add to the downtown street activity (Sucher 1995). Informal art is crucial in creating a quality downtown and establishing a sense of place. This art can bring downtown back to a human scale (Sucher 1995).

## 2.6 REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES FROM COMPARABLE PRECEDENTS

This section is devoted to exploring the status of downtown revitalization of the small cities in the study area. It is not a comprehensive review; rather, it is a brief exploration into possible cities in the study area that could be further explored. Due to the fact that this is a review of all the small cities in the study region, there was not enough time to undertake an in-depth review of all these cities. The research that was conducted relied on various sources, with the majority coming from websites, official city websites, chamber of commerce and downtown business association websites.

### 2.6.1 CANADIAN COMPARABLE PRECEDENTS

#### 2.6.1.1 CITY OF BRANDON, MANITOBA

Brandon is a city of 40,581 located in south western Manitoba. Brandon appears to be a city that is actively moving to revitalize their downtown. It is concerned about the downtown, indicated by the existence of the Brandon Business Improvement Area and a municipal heritage committee (Brandon Website 2001). Also, the city has a winter festival, Frost Fest.

#### 2.6.1.2 CITY OF MOOSE JAW, SASKATCHEWAN

Moose Jaw is a city of 34,829 located in south central Saskatchewan. There is no planning department; all planning is done through the engineering department. There is also no mention of a downtown plan (City of Moose Jaw Website 2001). There is though much revitalization occurring downtown. There are a number of projects in the works or recently completed : a cultural centre, Temple Gardens Mineral Spa expansion, Tunnels of Moose Jaw expansion, River Street revitalization, downtown casino tourism

information centre, and a Moose Jaw-Regina tourism corridor historic train ride (REDA Website 2001).The revitalization appears to be focused on tourism.

2.6.1.3 CITY OF PRINCE ALBERT, SASKATCHEWAN

Prince Alberta is a city of 41,706 located in central Saskatchewan. It does not have a downtown plan (City of Prince Albert Website 2001).

2.6.1.4 CITY OF GRANDE PRAIRIE, ALBERTA

Grande Prairie is a city of 31,140 located in northeast Alberta. It does have a downtown strategic action plan. The Downtown Strategic Action Plan was completed with the help of the business community and the downtown business association (City of Grande Prairie Website 2001).

2.6.1.5 CITY OF RED DEER, ALBERTA

Red Deer is a city of 60,075 located in central Alberta. There is a downtown action plan for the city. It is a 15 year plan that is intended to increase recreational opportunities and improve the pedestrian environment (City of Red Deer Website 2001). Red Deer however is only now beginning work on revitalization plans.

2.6.1.6 CITY OF LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

Lethbridge is a city of 63,075 located in south western Alberta. Located downtown is a new state of the art city hall, and two indoor malls. In the past the city has also removed the rail lines and yards from the downtown. There is no mention of a downtown plan.

2.6.2 AMERICAN COMPARABLE PRECEDENTS

2.6.2.1 CITY OF MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA

Minot, North Dakota is a city of 36,567 located in north central, North Dakota. The city does have a planning department, but there is little mention of planning for the

downtown. However, the planning department is involved in a large community visioning project, planning for the distant future (City of Minot Website 2001). The downtown hosts a newly remodelled performing arts centre downtown (Minot Chamber of Commerce 2001). Also, the downtown is home to the annual Festival on Main and Street Dance (Minot Area Chamber of Commerce 2001).

## 2.6.2.2 CITY OF BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

Bismarck, North Dakota is a city of 91,939 located in south central, North Dakota. It is home to the state capital; thus it is also home to many government functions. There is no mention of downtown revitalization or planning. The downtown is home to a civic center.

## 2.6.2.3 CITY OF HELENA, MONTANA

Helena is a city of 25,780 located in the Rocky Mountain foothills in Western Montana. Helena is the state capital. Thus, like Bismarck it is home to many government functions and services. Planning in Helena is under the Community Development Department (Helena Website 2001). The downtown is designated by the city as a historic district. There are various events that occur in the downtown, they include a Fall Art Walk, Live @ Five performances, Holiday Stroll and lighting of fire tower, the Last Chance Blue Grass Festival (Helena Chamber of Commerce 2001).

## 2.6.2.4 CITY OF BUTTE SILVER BOW, MONTANA

Butte-Silver Bow is a city of 33,892 located in the Rocky Mountains in Western Montana. It has recently been consolidated. Due to this consolidation there is not information available about planning and revitalization in this community.

## 2.6.2.5 City of Bozeman, Montana

Bozeman is a city of 27,509 located in the Rocky Mountain foothills in Southern

Montana. There is no explicit mention of downtown planning, but they are concerned

with historic preservation, they have a Historic Preservation Board and a Historic

Preservation Office (Bozeman, Montana Website 2001).

## 2.6.2.6 Grand Forks, North Dakota

Grand Forks is a city of 95,461 located in east central North Dakota. It is located on the

Red River and recently in 1997 experienced a flood that destroyed much of their

downtown. The city now is challenged with constructing a new downtown. It is working

on creating a downtown that is a meeting place, and which is the physical and symbolic

centre of the city (Suchman 1998). What has been proposed is creating three districts

downtown. There would be a residential, retail and entertainment district with a town

square near the river (Suchman 1998).

## 2.6.2.7 City of Great Falls Montana

Great Falls is a city of 80,357 located in Western Montana. It is located on the banks of

the Missouri River, and engaged in considerable riverfront development to capitalize on

its riverside location. Most of the waterfront development has been in the form of an

extensive river's edge trail (Recreational Trails Inc 2001). The downtown is home to a

civic center which accommodates conventions and theatre events (Great Falls Website

2001). Also, there are sidewalk sales and an Art Walk located in the core (Great Falls

Chamber of Commerce 2001). There is no mention of a downtown revitalization plan.

## 2.6.2.8 CITY OF MISSOULA, MONTANA

Missoula is a city of 95,802 located in the Rocky Mountain foothills in western Montana. Missoula is a progressive city, with a planning department that is active, though there is no specific mention of downtown planning (City of Missoula Website 2001). The city has an active downtown business association that stages a number of events; Downtown Tonight, Out to Lunch, farmers market, peoples market, and Holiday Stroll (Missoula Downtown Association Website 2001). Missoula is a good city to further study because of its high quality of life, progressive ideas, and citizen participation.

## 2.7 SUMMARY OF REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

TABLE 2 - SUMMARY OF REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

| REVITALIZATION STRATEGY | SMALL OR LARGE CITY APPROPRIATE | SCALE | EFFECTIVE OR DESTRUCTIVE | COMMENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SPECIAL ACTIVITY GENERATORS | Large | Large-Scale | Destructive | -Under utilized in small cities.<br>-Very expensive to construct. |
| TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS | Large and Small | Can be both | Effective | -Can be effective if included with other strategies. |
| BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS | Large | Can be both | Effective | -Little benefit for small cities. |
| WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT | Large and Small | Large-Scale | Effective | -Improves recreational opportunities.<br>-Connects community to the past and its roots. |
| HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT | Large and Small | Can be both | Effective | -Can further a sense of place.<br>-Improve quality of downtown. |
| PEDISTRIANIZATION AND STREETSCAPING | Large and Small | Can be both | Effective | -Creates quality atmosphere.<br>-Enhances sense of place. |
| CREATING A 24 HOUR DOWNTOWN | Large | Small-Scale | Effective | -Creates lively atmosphere.<br>-Hard to create in small cities. |
| INCREASE HOUSING | Large and Small | Can be both | Effective | -Increases market for downtown.<br>-Increases activities and uses downtown. |
| FESTIVALS AND MARKETPLACES | Large and Small | Small-Scale | Effective | -Adds vibrancy.<br>-Enhances local business and sense of place. |
| ART AND CULTURE | Large and Small | Small-Scale | Effective | -Add to uniqueness and sense of place. |

## 2.8 SUMMARY OF COMPARABLE PRECEDENTS

### 2.8.1 SELECTION CRITERIA FOR FURTHER STUDY

Choosing the appropriate small cities for further study was not an easy task. All of the cities in the study region warrant further study in the future. A city being selected for further study, at this time, does not mean that it is superior to a city that was not selected. Rather the selected cities are a better fit with the selection criteria and this particular study. There are cities in the study region, that exhibit advanced revitalization strategies, but they were not the best comparable precedents for this case study. Thus, the selection of the cities for further study was based on: comparability to Medicine Hat, they represent a diverse set of revitalization strategies, they are at various stages of downtown revitalization development, and they are geographically dispersed.

Two of the small cities in Tier 3 are disqualified from further study because they are state capitals. Both these cities are home to many more government functions and services than Medicine Hat.

The small cities of Missoula and Brandon have been selected for further study because they have been planning for their respective downtowns for many years – Missoula since 1978 and Brandon since the mid-1980s. It is important to further study these cities because they could offer suggestions and insight into downtown planning that the other cities may not be able to offer.

Grand Forks ND, Red Deer AB, and Grande Prairie AB are cities that are developing or have very recently developed downtown plans. Although they are quite similar, Grand

Forks was chosen for further study, over Red Deer and Grande Prairie, because it has had to completely re-establish its downtown, due to the flood of 1997. This makes for a very intriguing comparable precedent. Also, it has an interesting connection to Medicine Hat, as a portion of Medicine Hat's city centre and inner city was threatened by a flood in 1995.

Moose Jaw SK, Great Falls MT, Minot ND, Bozeman MT, Prince Albert SK, and Lethbridge AB do not have a formal downtown plan. All of them have gone about downtown revitalization in a unique way. Revitalization in Moose Jaw is particularly notable, due to the fact that most of the revitalization has been driven by business interests and tourism, making it a good candidate for further study.

By this stage of the selection process all geographic regions had also been represented; (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, North Dakota, and Montana), geographic dispersal was not therefore a factor. All of the cities are comparable to Medicine Hat. Thus, any one of the remaining cities could have been chosen and would have likely produced appropriate results. Great Falls was chosen for two main reasons. It has undertaken extensive riverfront development in the form of pathways, and has a strong downtown organization. Medicine Hat has done little riverfront development, but it has recently created a new downtown organization. Thus, Great Falls seemed the appropriate choice. Lastly, Great Falls is interesting because it is struggling in terms of the city as a whole, but the downtown is showing signs of life. Moose Jaw and Great Falls were deemed most compatible for this research.

The City of Butte Silver Bow was not selected for further study. It is undergoing major organizational changes at this time. It may provide for an interesting study in the future on how these two communities join together and the impact this has on their downtowns.

Once again, the cities chosen for further study are not necessarily the cities with the strongest downtowns or the best revitalization strategies. The cities that were chosen were: geographically dispersed across the wider study region; employed various revitalization strategies; were most comparable to Medicine Hat; and are at different stages of the revitalization process. Those cities that were not chosen for further study would make for an excellent study at a later date.

# Chapter 3: Characterization of Medicine Hat, Alberta

## 3.1 CITY OF MEDICINE HAT CHARACTERISTICS

### 3.1.1 LOCATION

Medicine Hat is located in South Eastern Alberta, (see Map 1). Located on the TransCanada Highway, it is also the starting/end point for the Crowsnest Highway. The city is approximately 50 km west of the Saskatchewan border, 175 km north of the Montana border, 175 km east of Lethbridge, and 300 km southeast of Calgary. The town of Redcliff borders Medicine Hat on its northwest side. The hamlet of Dunmore is located just southeast of the city. The city is located in what is called the Palliser triangle, which is a semi-arid region, in the southern Canadian Prairies.

### 3.1.2 DEMOGRAPHICS

Medicine Hat has experienced moderate growth over the last ten years. Chart 1 displays the growth of the City of Medicine Hat. It has a reputation as a retirement community, but the city is actually well represented in all age categories. Chart 2, displays the age breakdown of the city. The largest demographic in the city is the 25-44 year category, comprising 30% of the population. The city has a large young demographic. Approximately 30% of the population in the city is under the age of 25. Thus, the city has a fairly even and healthy demographic. The city will continue to have a large 50 plus population who move to the city to retire.

**CHART 1** - POPULATION GROWTH IN MEDICINE HAT: 1986-1999
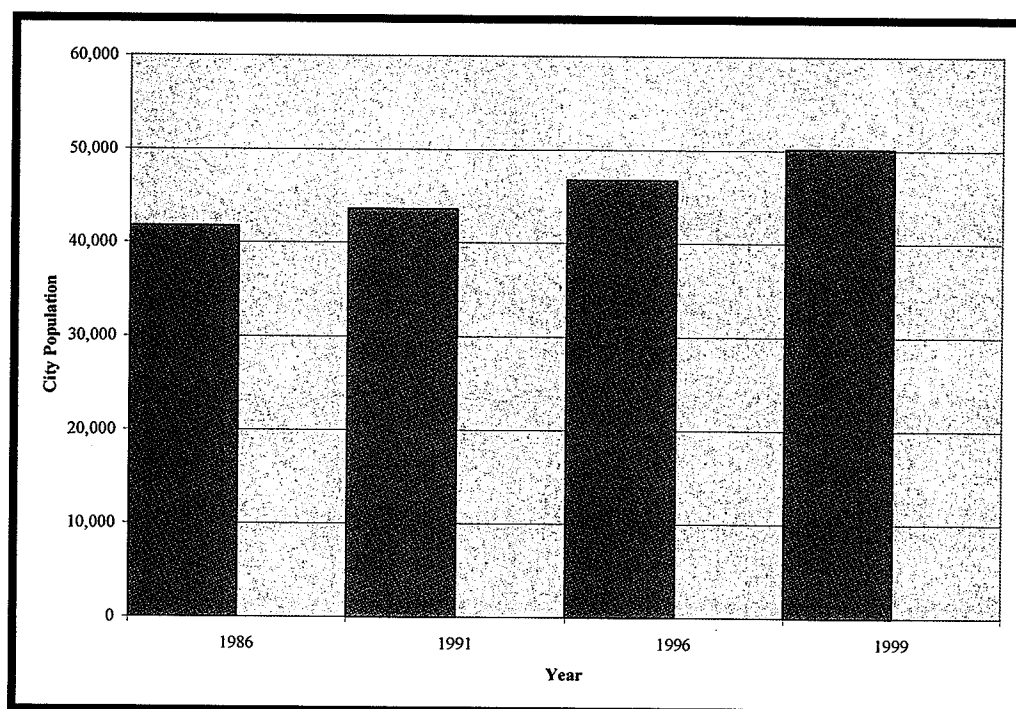


(Source  Statistics Canada 1996 Census and Medicine Hat Census 1999)

**CHART 2** - AGE BREAKDOWN OF MEDICINE HAT: 1999
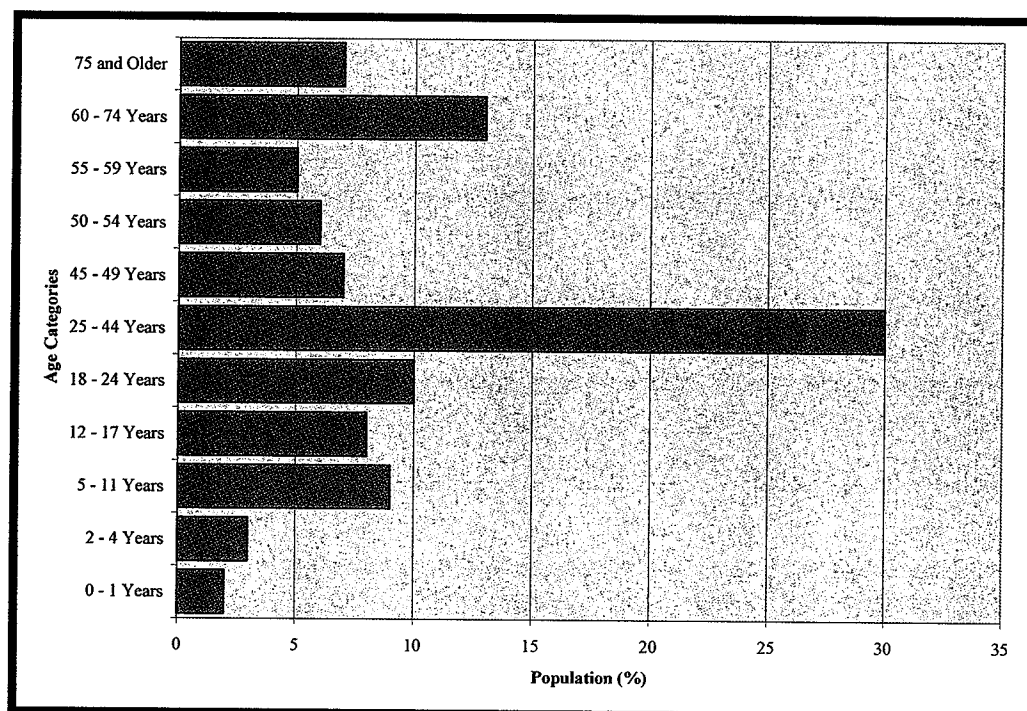


(Source Medicine Hat Census 1999)

The population of Medicine Hat is primarily focused in the southeast quadrant of the city.

Map 2 is a map of the City showing the population by neighbourhood, the shaded area

includes the city centre; it also includes an inner city neighbourhood as well. Thus the total population living within the boundaries of the city centre is less than 2,051. The population of the city centre has been fairly stable, whereas most other neighbourhoods in the city have experienced significant growth in the last decade (1999 Medicine Hat Census).

MAP 2 - MEDICINE HAT POPULATION BY NEIGHBOURHOOD: 1996
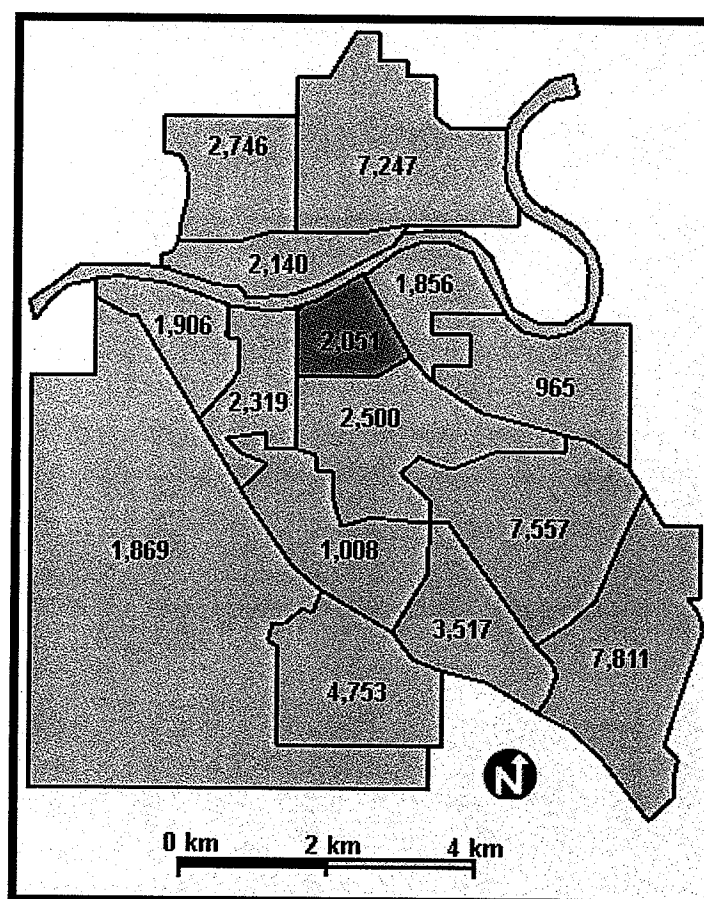


(Base Map and Statistics Medicine Hat Census 1999)

*3.1.3 ECONOMY*

Medicine Hat has a diversified economy, and is a regional centre. Chart 3 below displays the breakdown of the labour force in the city. The two categories that employ the most people in Medicine Hat are business and community services, and retail and wholesale.

## CHART 3 - LABOUR FORCE IN MEDICINE HAT
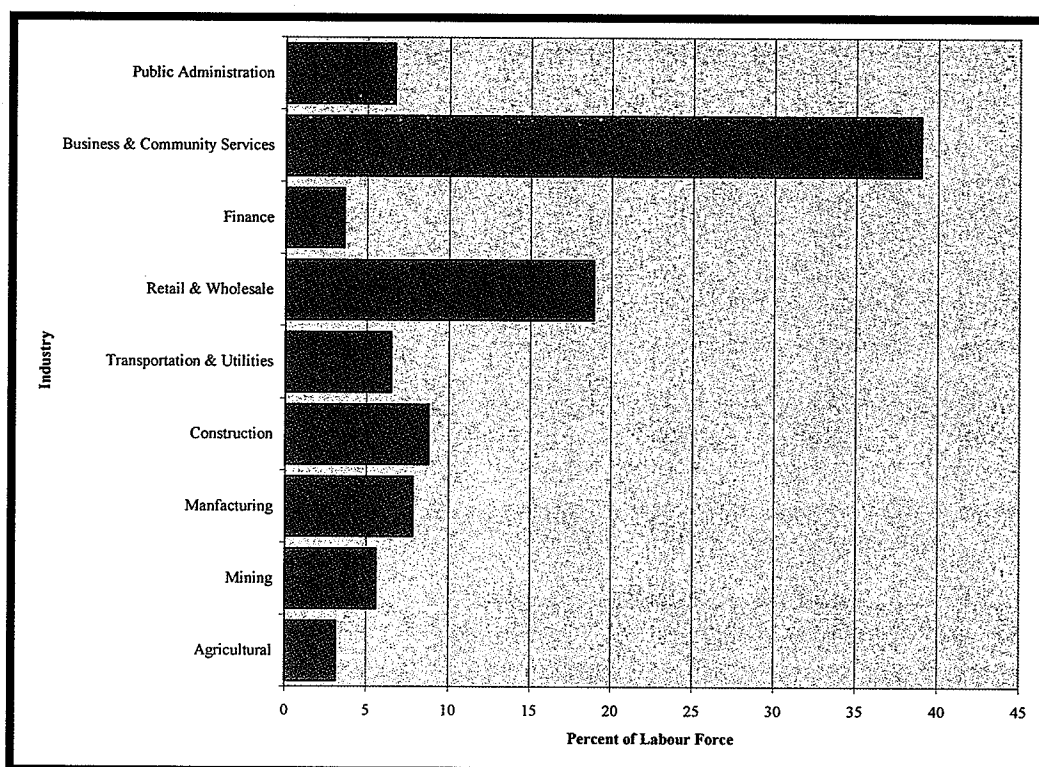


*(Statistics Canada 1996 Census)*

CFB Suffield is a very large Armed Forces land base located just over 50 km north of the city. The base is shared with the British Army Training Unit. The base is known for its cutting-edge technology application. Advanced weapons technology and military robotics are a major focus on the base (Alberta First Profile 1999). The base also provides an economic boost to the city, it is estimated that the base contributes $80 million a year to the local economy (Alberta First Profile 1999).

The regional airport is city-owned and offers scheduled flights to other small cities in the region and daily flights to Calgary. The airport also serves military aircraft due to its close location to CFB Suffield.

Recently the growth of the city has occurred in the southeast quadrant. The growth has included not only residential, but retail and office development as well. Map 3 shows where this rapid expansion has occurred and where the city centre is located. The city centre is divided into two areas, the traditional core and The North Railway Exchange. The two areas are separated by the CP main line and yard.

The expansion in the southeast has included a regional shopping mall, several power centres, many large format retail stores, Canadian Tire, Future Shop, Wal-Mart, Sport Chek, London Drugs, Leon's Furniture, Cineplex Odeon theatres, Micheal's, Real Canadian Superstore, Value Village, and others, and office development. The southeast is also home to many new senior-oriented housing complexes. There are six major complexes in close proximity, which are all 4 to 5 stories high. There is also a bungalow-style seniors housing village in the area. Thus, in recent years the city has experienced growth and much of it has been located in the southeast. The southeast easily has retail dominance for the city and the region. There is also new development, very recently, in the north end of the city, which could experience future growth in the retail sector.

**MAP 3** - CITY OF MEDICINE HAT RETAIL & OFFICE LOCATIONS



(Base Map Imap City of Medicine Hat Website 2001)

## 3.2 MEDICINE HAT'S CITY CENTRE

### 3.2.1 LOCATION

The city centre is located on the south banks of the South Saskatchewan River, and is in the river valley (see Photograph 1). Medicine Hat's city centre is divided into two areas, the traditional downtown core and the North Railway Exchange.

The traditional downtown core is located west of the CP lines and yard. It is home to most of the retail and office activities in the city centre. It is also home to most of the

government services in the city (see Photographs 2-3). There are many old buildings in the core. Most of the buildings are two to three stories tall, with two buildings being over 10 stories tall. The heart of the core, or the area with the most activity would be 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Streets.

North Railway Exchange is located east of the CP lines and yard (see Photographs 4-5 and 15). It is home to the historic CP rail station and a few old buildings. Most of the exchange is older buildings that for the most part have not been maintained. Along Maple Avenue there is retail in the form of strip malls, and in the extreme south section of the exchange there is a big box store, the Brick. Most of the buildings are two stories tall, with a few four storey buildings present. The heart of this section would likely be North Railway Street.

Map 4, displays the basic street structure of the city centre. Map 5 shows the location of the most important places and buildings located in the city centre. The areas located in the shaded section are within the city centre boundaries. As can be seen from the map there are several important city functions located in close proximity to the east of the city centre.

**MAP 4 - CITY CENTRE ROAD NETWORK**



(Base Map Imap City of Medicine Hat Website 2001)

**Map 5 - Medicine Hat City Centre**



Riverside Park · CPR Bridge · YMCA · Arena · Ball Park · City Hall · Finley Bridge · Curling Rink · Court House · Police Station · Public Library · Central Fire Station · Rotary Park · Future Performing Arts Centre · Parkade & Public Transit Central Station · St. Barnabas Church · Historic CPR Station · Provincial Building · 5th Avenue Church · 0 m · 250 m · 500 m · N
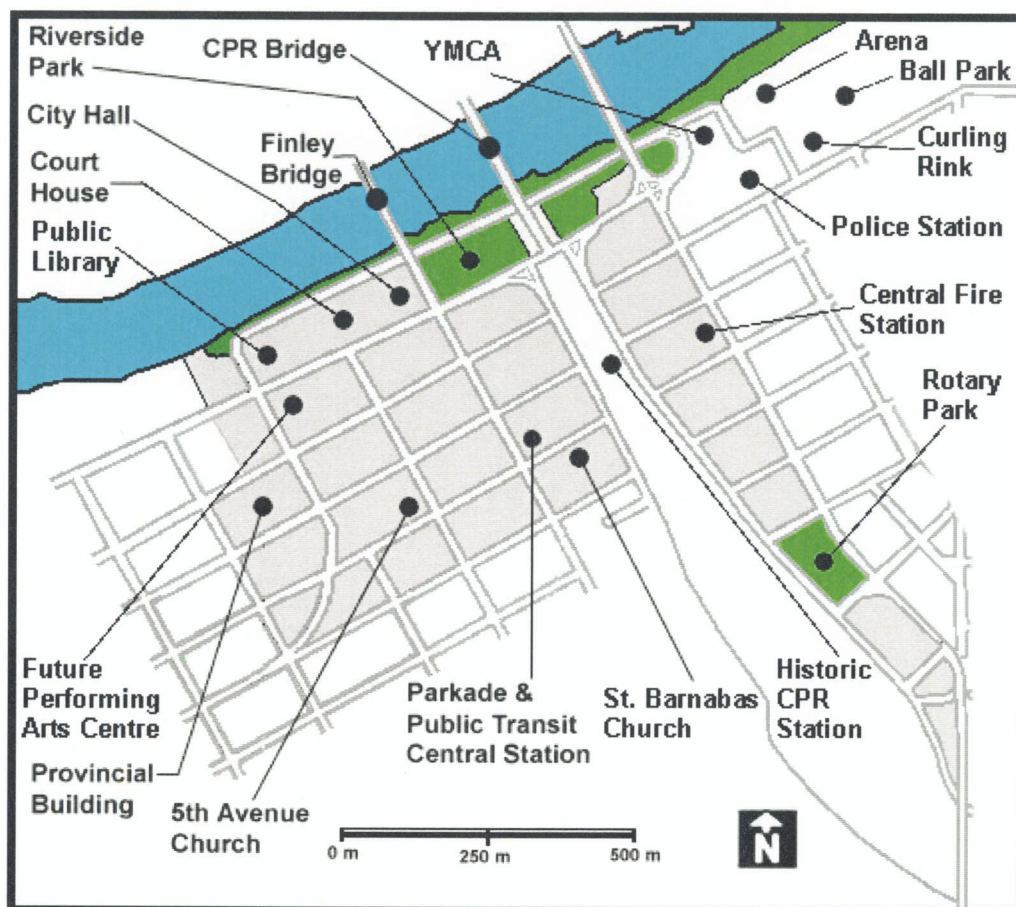
(Base Map Imp City of Medicine Hat Website 2001)

*3.2.2 COMPOSITION*

3.2.2.1 POPULATION

The city centre of Medicine Hat does not contain a large population. It contains approximately 4% of the total city population. Also, the while the city as a whole is experiencing growth the downtown population remains stable or is even decreasing slightly. The city centre's population decreased from 1994 to 1999 by 1.9%, while the city grew by 9.3% (City of Medicine Hat Census 1999).

3.2.2.2 ZONING

Map 6, displays the zoning for the city centre and the immediate surrounding area. Most of the city centre falls into the zoning category of Downtown Commercial. Within this

zone the typical downtown uses are allowed, such as dense commercial activity, high rise residential, entertainment and cultural facilities and other typical downtown uses (City of Medicine Hat Zoning Bylaw 2001). There are minimal design guidelines for new development within the city centre.

MAP 6 - ZONING IN THE CITY CENTRE
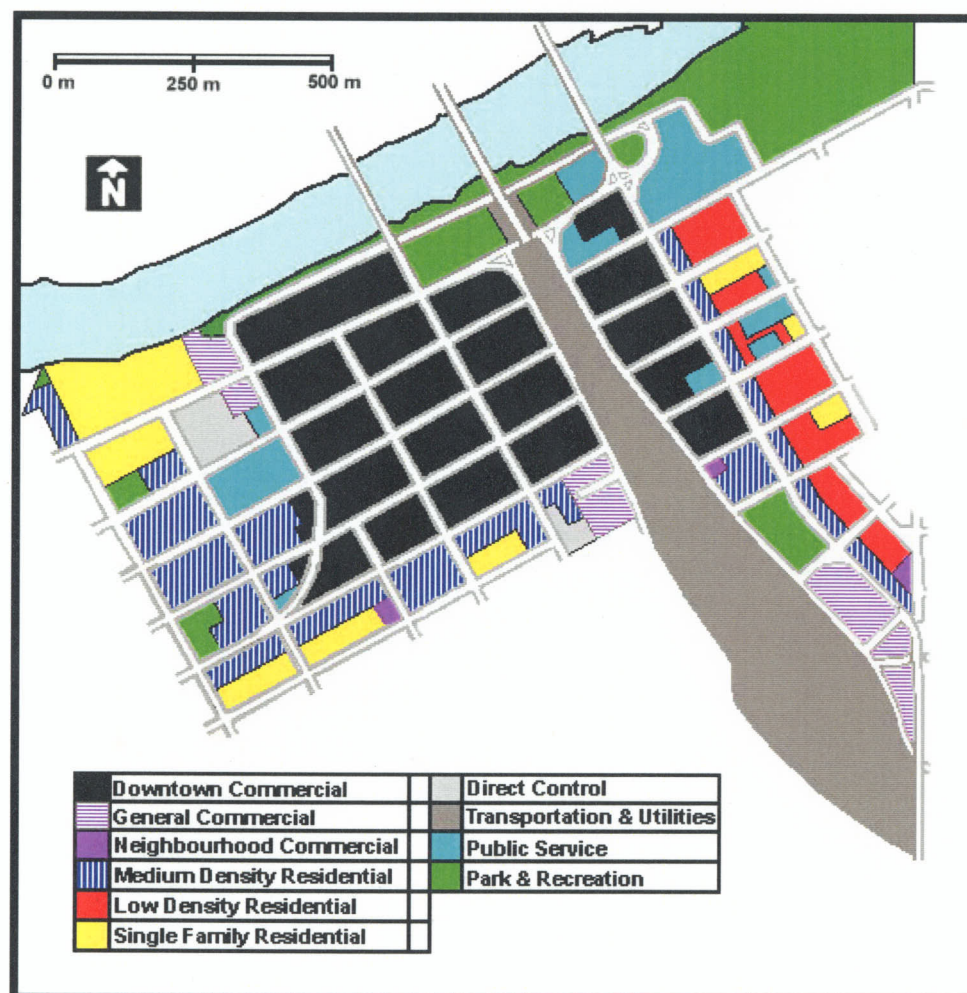


(Base Map Imap City of Medicine Hat Website 2001)

## 3.2.2.3 HOUSING

Medicine Hat's growth has placed a strain on the housing market in the city. Presently there is a housing crisis in the city. Housing supply has not kept pace with the rapid growth that has occurred. The housing strain is particularly focused on the affordable

housing sector. The city currently has a rental vacancy rate of less than 0.2% (Mayor Vallely's Vision for the Future Statement 2001). Thus, there is real opportunity for the downtown to provide housing and thus benefit from the increased population in the immediate area.

Within the city centre boundaries there is not much housing at present. There are a few apartments above retail stores, and there are a few apartment buildings and single family homes. There is one high-rise apartment building in the traditional core. However the strong housing market is producing housing construction on the fringes of the city centre (see Photographs 6-7). Most of the new construction is producing middle to upper income housing.

The area south of the traditional core is home to an old neighbourhood that is located on a hill climbing up from the river. The area is well treed. The area west of the city centre, along the river, is also an old neighbourhood that has a tree canopy and is home to many fine old homes. The area east of the city centre, known as the North Flats, is also an old neighbourhood. Today it is a well treed and is home, for the most part, to a low-income population. North of the city centre on the opposite side of the river is the old community of Riverside. This community is also well treed. This community is experiencing some gentrification, with old homes being torn down and large homes being built along the river.

The earlier literature review suggested that there are two key components necessary to encourage people to live downtown, - grocery stores and schools. The location of the schools and grocery stores in the inner city can be seen in Map 7. There is not a school within the city centre boundaries. However, there are elementary schools, a junior high school and a large high school in the area.

There is a small IGA grocery store in the North Railway Exchange on Maple Avenue. The store is small and is not within walking distance for those living in the traditional core due to poor pedestrian connections. Presently there is a Safeway store being expanded southwest of the city centre, it will be double its original size. Although it is not within walking distance it will save those living in the city centre a trip to the suburban grocery stores.

MAP 7 - INNER CITY GROCERY STORES & SCHOOLS
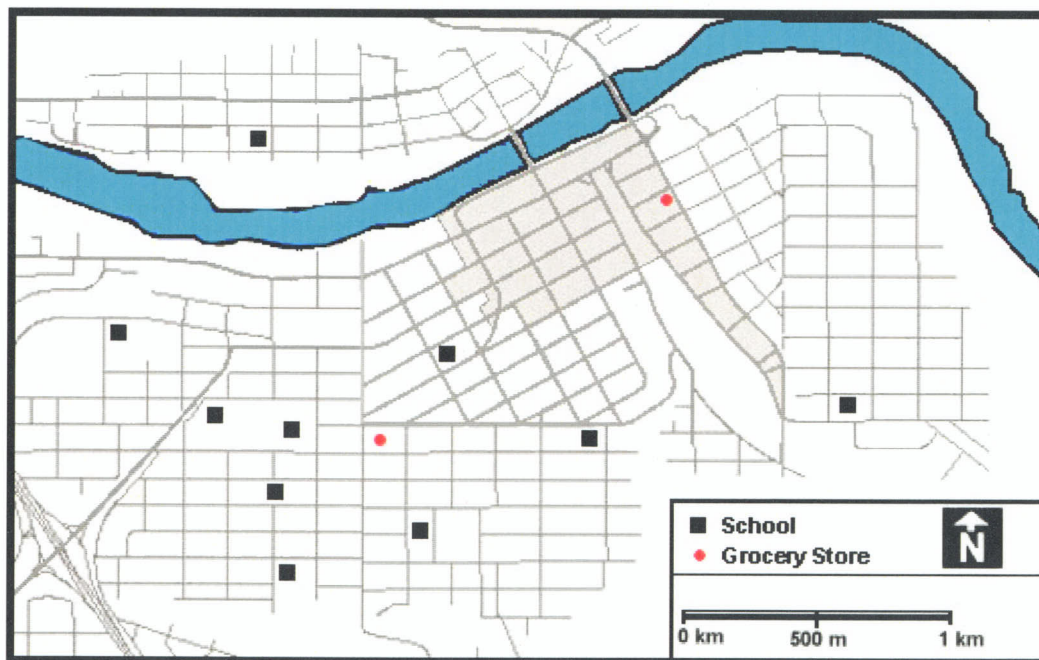


(Base Map Imap City of Medicine Hat Website 2001)

### 3.2.2.4 ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The transportation access to the city centre from all areas of the city is adequate. The major routes into the city centre include Maple Avenue, South Railway Street, and 3rd Street. Most of the roads in the city centre are two lanes with two-way traffic. The major exception is 2nd and 3rd Streets. Both these streets have two lanes and are one-way streets. They both have parallel parking on both sides of the street. Vehicular traffic in the core is never very congested. The only vehicular access from the traditional core to North Railway Exchange is 1st St. which goes under the CP main line.

There is a pathway along the river, which is well used (see Photograph 7). The path connects to Lions Park and Strathcona Island Park in the east, and north across Maple Ave. to Police Point Park. The city centre is well connected to the other pathways in the city. There are over 80 km of trails within the city (Alberta First Profile 1999). Within the city centre there are only three pedestrian connections between the downtown core and North Railway Exchange. The pedestrian tunnel under the CP main line is the major pedestrian connection between the two areas.

**MAP 8 - ACCESSIBILITY IN DOWNTOWN MEDICINE HAT**
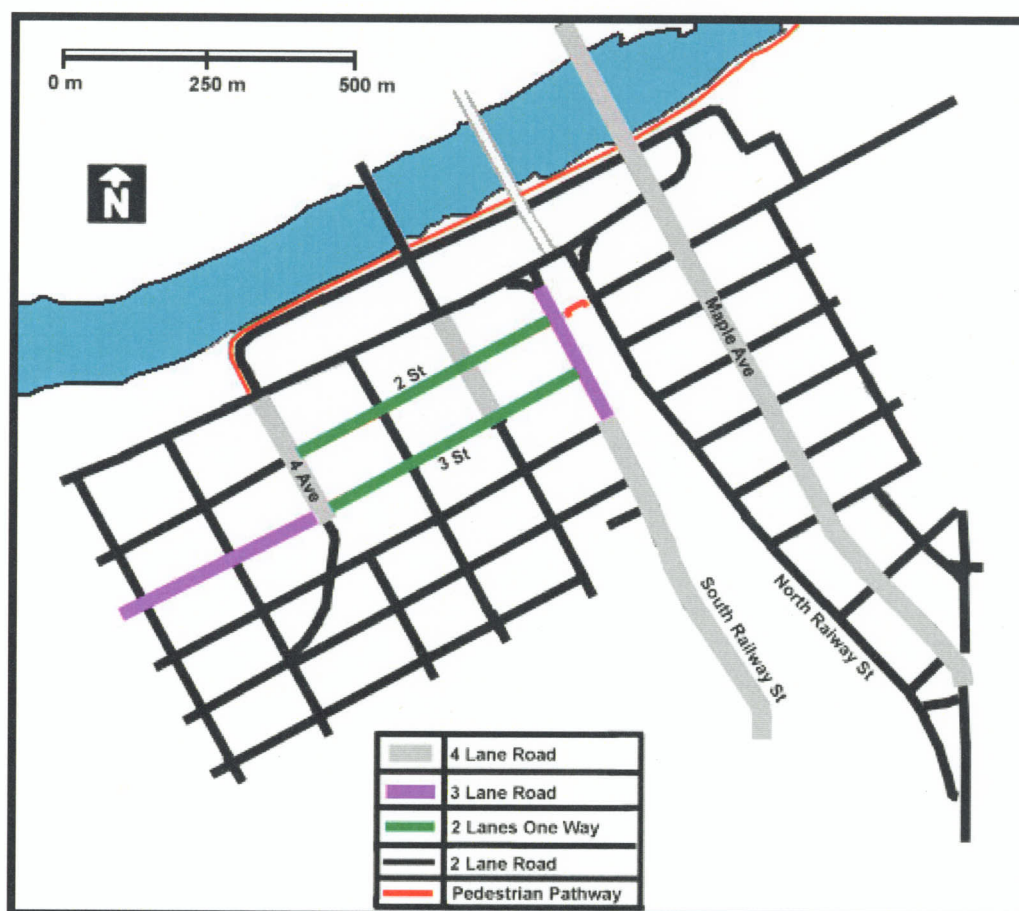


(Base Map Imap City of Medicine Hat Website 2001)

## 3.2.2.5 ECONOMY

The city centre economy is based primarily on retail, office and government services and functions. In 1999 the city centre hosted 2,000 full time employees (City Centre Initiative 1999). Retail in the core has struggled, due to fierce competition from the suburbs. As a result, much of the retail now located in the city centre is niche or speciality retail. There are a few restaurants located in the city centre and there are two movie theatres with a total of four screens. The theatres are in competition with the new Cineplex Odeon theatre in the southeast which features the newest in technology and 10 screens. The majority of the retail stores and services downtown are not national or regional chain stores; rather, they are locally-owned. This gives the city centre a different

and unique feel from the national chains located in the southeast. It was identified that the most likely markets to target, for the city centre, are financial services, professional services, speciality retailers, and restaurants/pubs (City Centre Stakeholders Luncheon Notes 1999).

Most of the businesses in the city centre do not own their own buildings (Pat Adams Interview 2001). Thus, a good majority of the downtown buildings are leased and not owned by businesses. This can create the problem of absentee landlords and the deterioration of buildings.

### 3.2.2.6 CHALLENGES TO THE CITY CENTRE

- Expansion of city in the Southeast. There has been a great expansion of the city to the Southeast. New residential and commercial development has located there, and therefore the momentum, to keep developing, in that area is great.

- There is no large grocery store, especially west of the CP lines, located in the city centre. A grocery store is an important key for residential development. A grocery store located in the core moved out many years ago (City Centre Initiative 1999).

- Although downtown organizations have had moderate success in the past, there is a lack of effective marketing of downtown retail, services, and development opportunities in the city centre (City Centre Initiative 1999).

- There are many regulatory barriers to development in the city centre. Barriers include restrictive building codes and regulations in the city, which restrict development and downtown events. There is a lack of incentive for developers

and business owners to locate or renovate downtown, because of low lease rates for buildings in the core. Often structural improvements are needed to improve old buildings, and these renovations are expensive (City Centre Initiative 1999).

- Much of the land located in the city centre is owned by a few individuals, who are unwilling to redevelop (Steve Welling Interview 2002).

- There are vacant lots in the city centre, see Map 9. However the vacant lots are isolated and too small to attract large scale developments (City Centre Stakeholders Luncheon Notes 1999).

MAP 9 - MAJOR VACANT LOTS IN THE CITY CENTRE
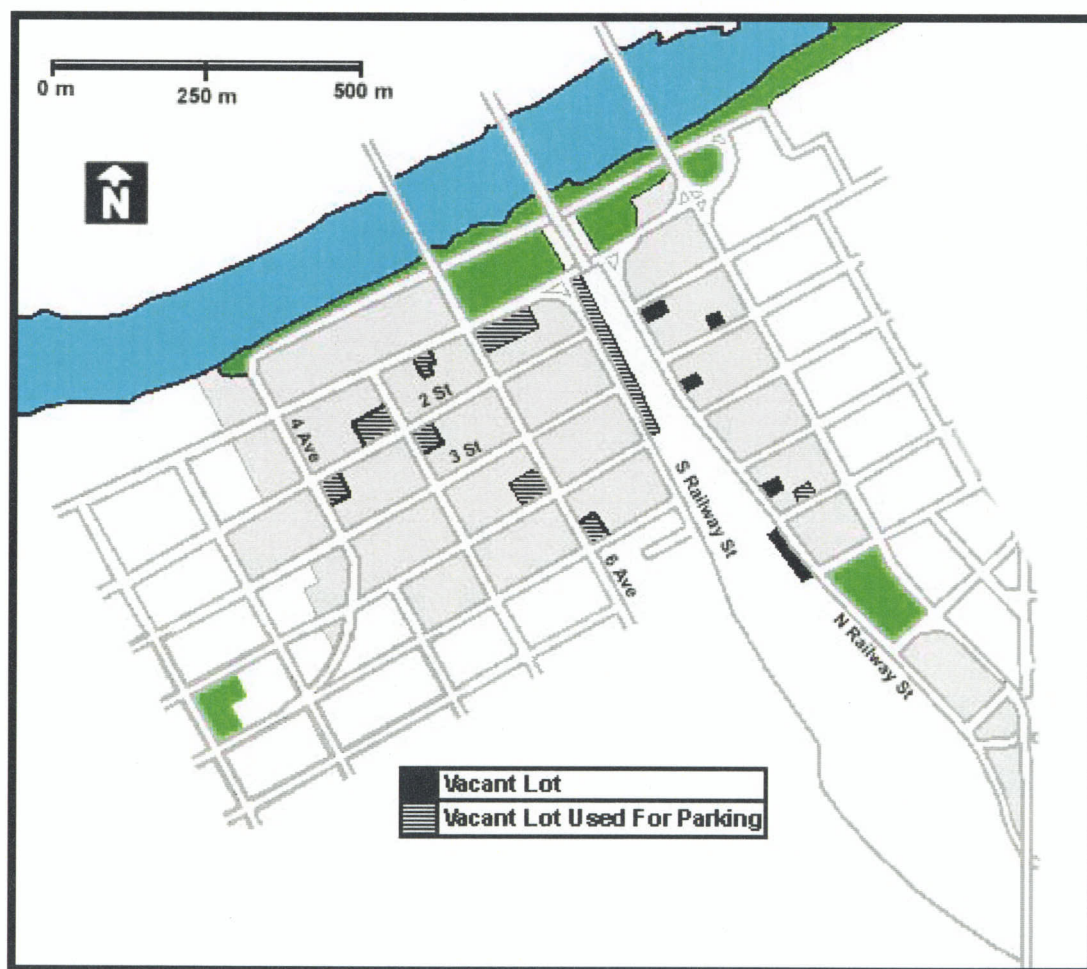


(Base Map Imap City of Medicine Hat Website 2001)

- There is a lack of recreational opportunities in the city centre as well as a lack of a quality accommodation for tourists and business people (City Centre Stakeholders Luncheon Notes 1999).

- The CP rail lines and yard act as an almost impervious barrier between the downtown core and the North Railway Exchange. They decrease the accessibility between the two areas, both pedestrian and vehicular. CP's land at this time appears dirty and run-down; it is an eyesore.

- Running a downtown organization in a small city invokes special economic considerations. The cost of maintaining streetscaping and other place-making techniques already in place can be significant. For example $5,000 out of the former Downtown Business Area's $17,000 annual budget went to watering downtown flowers (City Initiative 1999).

- There is little in the way of design guidelines for the city centre and little in the way of enforcement resources.

*3.2.3 REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES*

3.2.3.1 CITY CENTRE DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

> The vision is a viable and interesting City Centre made up
> of thriving stores and businesses and unique attractions
> located in a beautiful river valley setting – a clean, safe and
> friendly place in which to shop, visit, work, and do
> business. The City Centre is an exciting gathering place
> important to the whole City, as well as a distinct
> neighbourhood with unique housing opportunities.
> (Vision Statement City Centre Strategic Plan, 2000)

Created in early 2001, the City Centre Development Agency (CCDA) was a merger

between the existing Downtown Business Area and the North Railway Exchange

organizations. The mandate of the CCDA is to implement the City Centre Strategic Plan

and to promote development in the city centre. The CCDA is funded by a one-time start-up cash injection by the city and is supported by a tax on all businesses that are located within the city centre's boundary. The immediate concern of the CCDA is to undertake a business inventory of the city centre, work on design guidelines, marketing, and creation of an investment group to promote development in the city centre (Bruce Dynes Interview 2001). The CCDA is still in its infancy and it is yet to be known if the CCDA will become a critical component in the revitalization of the city centre; nevertheless it is a positive and encouraging step forward.

### 3.2.3.2 FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Spectrum, a summer festival, used to be located downtown. The festival was incredibly popular and brought thousands of people into the core, every year, over a June weekend. The festival included a wide variety of activities. Riverside Park was the centre of the festival, where performers would use the band shell to entertain. Entertainers included local talent, and talent was also brought in from other cities. Many local restaurants would set up food booths in the park. A street in the downtown core was closed to traffic and a basketball tournament took place there. Also, a vacant parking lot was closed and a great amount of sand was brought in for a beach volleyball tournament. The festival has activities for all age categories, and is loved by the residents of Medicine Hat. Several years ago though, due to the great success of the festival, it was moved from the downtown to the large urban park Kin Coulee. Business owners in the city centre were very upset by this and fought hard to keep the festival downtown. Spectrum has been hosted in Kin Coulee Park for the last several years, and does not appear to be returning downtown. Spectrum brought traffic and an economic boost to downtown businesses

(Interview Bruce Dynes 2001). Also, it solidified downtown as the city's gathering place.

There are other smaller events that occur in the city centre, but they are not on the same scale as Spectrum. Every summer there is a chilli cook-off downtown. Also, there is an annual Jazz Festival. The festival takes place at various locations around the city including the downtown. Every year there is a popular concert on top of the city-owned parkade. Also, every year at Stampede time in the city, there is a large parade that winds its way through downtown streets. The parade is well-liked and well attended on a regional scale.

There is a farmers market in the city that runs every summer. However this market is located at a suburban location in a field house, which is good protection from the elements. The farmers market is well liked and well attended.

3.2.3.3 ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

The city has undergone several transportation improvements in an attempt to improve the city centre. The two major projects included changing 2nd and 3rd Streets into one-way streets. The other major project included building a large parkade and transit centre downtown (see Photograph 11). The bottom level of the parkade is the central hub for the Medicine Hat transit system. The top two levels are used for parking. The parkade is open to the public, and there is a charge. Opinion regarding the effectiveness of these projects today is mixed.

## 3.2.3.4 STREETSCAPING & PEDESTRIANIZATION

The city has attempted to improve the streetscape of the city centre (see Photographs 10-12). Gas street lamps have been introduced to the downtown, to draw on Medicine Hat's reputation and history of being a city that has large natural gas fields in the area. Also, during the summer, hanging flower baskets can be seen throughout the downtown. Also, many trees have been planted in the downtown. In addition mid-block pedestrian crossings were constructed on 2nd and 3rd Streets. These mid block crossings feature flowers, shrubs, and benches. The streetscaping improvements have improved the pedestrian environment. Today, during the warm months, one can experience street-side cafes located near and around these pedestrian improvements (see Photograph 1). Although the streetscaping improvements have been moderately successful, they need to be improved, and expanded to other areas of the city centre.

## 3.2.3.5 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the city centre there has been historic site development and conservation. Many old buildings have been restored. Most of these buildings have retained the exterior historic character, but have undergone extensive interior renovations. Within the traditional core the court house is an obvious example of historic conservation. Also, an old building on the corner of 3rd Street and 6th Avenue was completely renovated on the inside; in recent times it was home to Eatons. This three-storey building is now the Gas Light Plaza, and is home to many small retail and office tenants.

In the North Railway Exchange there is the historic CP Railway station (see Photograph 14). Several retail stores now use space in this building. Also in the Exchange, there is

the attempt to theme it as a historic area. The area has undergone some work and the improvements are noticeable. Since the historic development has taken place new tenants have located in the Exchange.

### 3.2.3.6 ART & CULTURE

Within the city centre there is a move to increase the cultural opportunities available. The city is currently in the early stages of constructing a large multi-use facility in the downtown. The Medicine Hat Arts and Heritage Centre is targeted for completion by the Alberta centennial celebration in 2005. The building will house the new Medicine Hat Museum and Art Gallery, and be home to a 700-seat performing arts theatre. Several buildings will have to be demolished to make way for the centre. The new centre is intended to be the cultural hub of the city. It is also intended to be used for, and by a wide assortment of activities and people. The centre will accommodate: theatre performances, museum exhibits, conferences, community and school programs (Medicine Hat Arts and Heritage Centre Functional Plan 2001). Thus, the centre has the potential to bring a large amount of residents and tourists to the city centre. There is also the potential for numerous economic spin-offs.

In recent years murals on the sides of buildings have become quite popular in the city centre (see Photograph 15). The murals are located throughout the city centre and are on the sides of blank walls of buildings. The murals are of varying sizes, but what they do have in common is their historic theme. The murals have improved the visual quality of the city centre.

### 3.3 CONCLUSION

Medicine Hat is a growing vibrant city. However, its city centre is not the perfect model of a successful downtown. There are many opportunities and challenges facing the city centre. It has lost retail dominance over the region-and the much loved Spectrum Festival, but the newly formed CCDA and the new performing arts centre give renewed hope.

In the past a number of revitalization tactics have been undertaken in the city centre in an attempt to improve the core. Strategies included parking improvements via free downtown parking and a transit centre and parkade. Also, streetscaping improvements have occurred in the city centre. Benches, hanging flower pots, gas street lamps, and mid-block pedestrian crossings all have been constructed in an attempt to revitalize the city centre. Also, transportation and accessibility improvements have occurred. Constructing a tunnel under the CP rail line was an attempt to improve accessibility, furthermore so was turning several roads in the city centre into one-way streets.

Like many other small cities, Medicine Hat has struggled to make its downtown a quality place that thrives in the city. However, it can improve its downtown. A start for the city is to examine what has been successful in other comparable precedents. The next chapter, Chapter four, begins the exploration of the comparable precedents, which could help Medicine Hat revitalize its city centre.

81

**PHOTOGRAPH 1** - DOWNTOWN MEDICINE HAT
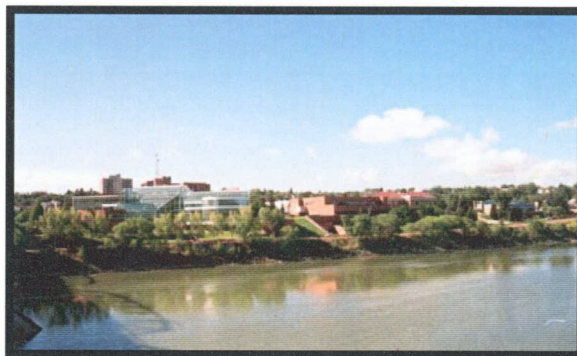


**PHOTOGRAPH 2 -** COURT OF QUEENS BENCH COURTHOUSE



**PHOTOGRAPH 3 -** CITY HALL



**PHOTOGRAPH 4 -** RAILWAY YARDS DOWNTOWN

**PHOTOGRAPH 5 -** NORTH RAILWAY STREET



**PHOTOGRAPH 6 -** NEW CONDOS ON EDGE OF DOWNTOWN



**PHOTOGRAPH 7 -** CONDOS ON THE EDGE OF DOWNTOWN



**PHOTOGRAPH 8 -** TRAIL NEAR RIVER
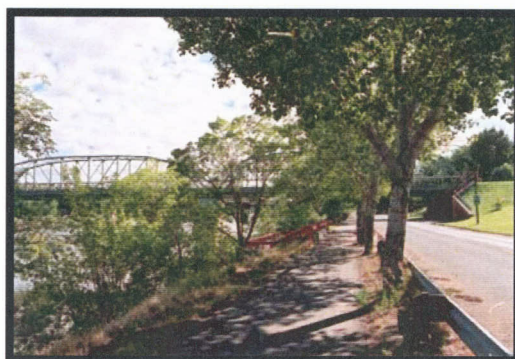
**PHOTOGRAPH 9 -** DOWNTOWN PARKADE & TRANSIT CENTRE



**PHOTOGRAPH 10 -** 6TH AVENUE



**PHOTOGRAPH 11 -** SMALL STORE ON 6TH AVENUE



**PHOTOGRAPH 12 -** STREETSCAPING ON 3RD STREET

**PHOTOGRAPH 13 -** SIDEWALK CAFE ON 3RD STREET



**PHOTOGRAPH 14 -** HISTORIC RAILWAY STATION



**PHOTOGRAPH 15 -** DOWNTOWN MURAL
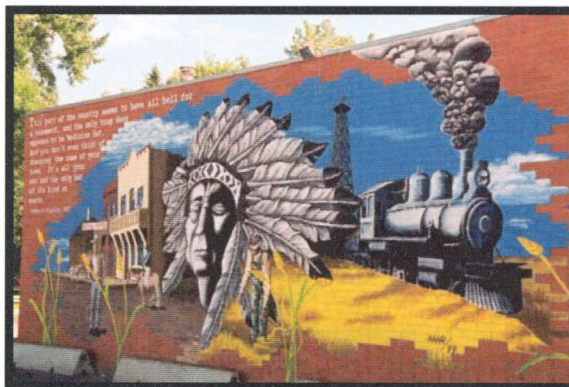
# CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODS

## 4.1 REFINED COMPARABLE PRECEDENTS SAMPLE

The comparable precedents were chosen for their similarity to Medicine Hat, the case study setting. All of the comparable precedents are a stand alone city with a population between 25,000 and 99,000. Also, there was an effort to select comparable precedents that have a similar physical geography, history, social, political and economic background to Medicine Hat. The cities included in the refined study area: are comparable to Medicine Hat, represent a diverse set of revitalization strategies, are at various stages of downtown revitalization development, and are geographically dispersed. Thus, the cities from the study area that met this criteria are listed below. These cities will be examined further.

TABLE 3 - COMPARABLE PRECEDENTS IN STUDY REGION

| CITY | POPULATION | DEMOGRAPHICS | RIVER/LAKE | POST SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Missoula | 95,802 | 0-19 = 29%<br>20-54 = 53%<br>55+ = 18% | Clark Fork River | Montana State University |
| Grand Forks | 97,478 | 0-18 = 21%<br>18-44 = 51%<br>45+ = 28% | Red River | University of North Dakota |
| Great Falls | 80,357 | 0-19 = 30%<br>20-54 = 48%<br>55+ = 22% | Missouri River | Montana State – Great Falls<br><br>University of Great Falls |
| Brandon | 40,581 | 0-19 = 27%<br>20-54 = 49%<br>55+ = 24% | Assiniboine River | Brandon University |
| Moose Jaw | 34,829 | 0-19 = 28%<br>20-54 = 45%<br>55+ = 27% | N/A | SIAST Palliser Institute |
| **Medicine Hat** | **56,570** | **0-19 = 29%<br>20-54 = 49%<br>55+ = 22%** | **South Saskatchewan River** | **Medicine Hat College** |

Missoula Source (Missoula Montana Website 2001)    Moose Jaw Source (Statistics Canada Website 2001)
Grand Forks Source (City of Grand Forks Website 2001)    Brandon Source (Statistics Canada Website 2001)
Great Falls Source (City of Great Falls Website 2001)
Medicine Hat Source (Statistics Canada Website 2001)

## 4.2 RESEARCH METHODS

Within this case study multiple research methods were used. In addition to the targeted literature review, an internet search and key informant interviews were conducted, to further investigate the sampled precedents.

An extensive internet search was done to discover downtown revitalization strategies used by other comparable small city precedents. The initial exploration included all the cities in the Tier 3 category in Table 1.

Those comparable precedents in the study region that met the selection criteria (see Section 2.8) were explored further. The local person that was contacted in each case was a planner or leader within the community. A key informant interview with that person was conducted to learn about the community's downtown revitalization strategy. Only one participant from each of the sampled comparable precedents was interviewed. The research focused on the positive aspects of revitalization and the programs and strategies present in the small cities. The research has not involved trying to gain a complete perspective of revitalization in the comparable precedents. Neither has the research been intended to provide a critical analysis of the comparable precedents. Therefore, only one participant was needed from each comparable precedent. The participant was chosen because of their knowledge about their downtown.

Also, leaders and planners within the Medicine Hat context were interviewed. These key informant interviews were undertaken to further knowledge of the community and to

assess the informants' opinions and insights concerning the applicability of strategies from other cities to Medicine Hat. Three participants were recruited for interviews concerning Medicine Hat. Due to the fact that Medicine Hat is the case study a more complete perspective of the downtown is needed. Thus, unlike the comparable precedents three interviews were conducted in Medicine Hat due to its importance to this research.

## 4.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Background data collection from the Tier 3 small cities in the study region, in regards to revitalization strategies, was undertaken primarily via the internet. Internet sites containing information about these cities were explored. Then the cities were subjected to the selection criteria, see *2.8.1 Selection Criteria*, to determine which cities should be further explored, via key informant interviews.

The key informant interviews employed a semi-structured format. This format allowed the researcher to have prepared questions that needed to be answered, but left open the possibility for new information to be entered by the interviewee (True 1989). Thus the line of inquiry was known ahead of time, and was created from information gathered from the internet search or from other sources. Also, the prepared questions were specific to each small city. The interviews were guided by an interview guide, (see Appendix), that had the same general format, length and intent. The line of inquiry focused on that community's specific revitalization strategy, challenges to implementing such strategies, ranking of revitalization strategy elements in their city, and general information about that community to fill any information gaps. The key informant

interviews, with leaders or planners in the small cities of the study region, were conducted via a phone interview.

The key informant interviews conducted in Medicine Hat were also phone interviews. There was no concern of interviewees being afraid to be open and to share their information. Rather, it was discovered that the interviewees were proud and excited to talk about the accomplishments in their communities.

### 4.3.1 INTERVIEWS

The interviews took place during the last three weeks of October, 2001. All the interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted anywhere from 35 minutes to 50 minutes. The interviews were taped, with the permission of the interviewees, so that they could be transcribed and analyzed later. The interview participants were chosen because of their excellent and comprehensive knowledge of revitalization and downtown planning in their respective cities (see Interview List, p.133).

### 4.4 ANALYSIS

### 4.4.1 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The sections which asked the interviewee to rank the revitalization strategies were averaged. All of the rankings given for each strategy were averaged and presented as one number for each strategy. This allowed the researcher to determine which of the strategies were effective revitalization strategies, and which were not. Also, from this information it was possible to determine what strategies are likely to be used in the future. These averages were placed in a table and are discussed further in Table 6 and 7.

*4.4.2 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS*

Due to the fact that many of the interview questions were open-ended and qualitative in nature these data were analyzed on a case by case basis. Responses from key informant interviews were examined to determine if there were common patterns among the small cities. Furthermore, the data collected from the interviews from the small cities were analyzed for usefulness and applicability to the case study of Medicine Hat. Data collected from leaders and planners in Medicine Hat were used to justify final recommendations relating to the Medicine Hat case.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

The comparable precedents offer a glimpse into the downtowns of other similar cities. The small cities that were selected do not necessarily have the healthiest downtowns, nor do they necessarily employ the best revitalization strategies. Rather, they were chosen because they represent a diverse set of revitalization strategies, are at various stages of downtown revitalization development, and are geographically dispersed. The research examined the revitalization strategies of these comparable precedents. The revitalization strategies that worked well in the comparable precedents were examined to determine if they could be beneficial to Medicine Hat. The next chapter is an analysis of the research findings.

# CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS

**5.1 SPECIFIC STRATEGIES USED BY SMALL CITIES IN THE STUDY AREA**

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of the data gathered. The small cities included in the refined comparable precedents sample are analyzed first. The specific strategies that are used by the small cities are examined first, then the general strategies that the small cities employed are analyzed. The final section of this chapter is devoted to analyzing the revitalization strategies from the comparable precedents to determine if they are applicable to Medicine Hat.

*5.1.1 MISSOULA – IMPROVING THE HEART AND SOUL OF A SUCCESSFUL DOWNTOWN*

- Downtown is the heart of Missoula. Residents love the architecture and the connection to the past it offers, the scale of the buildings and the vibrancy.

- Downtown has been so successful and is so niche-oriented that it now works with the suburban mall to encourage shopping in Missoula.

- At present Missoula is trying to develop 'park' and 'rides' from the periphery of downtown. The purpose is to keep the core of the downtown pedestrian-oriented.

- Riverfront parks and trails have been successfully developed and they are well-used and add to the character of downtown.

- They have attempted to make the pedestrian environment more interesting, with paving stone patterns on street corners.

- There is a very popular farmer's market downtown every Saturday during the summer. The market has become a very popular community meeting place.

- A weekly summer music concert is held downtown in the evenings. This is also a very popular event and attracts many people downtown to listen to high quality entertainment and to socialize.

- Downtown features a large pavilion which has become a type of market square. It is very popular for medium-to-small events, and it attracts many people and groups downtown.

- There was an effort to provide excellent art and cultural facilities downtown. There are three independent bookstores, a children's theatre and a 1000 seat historic theatre downtown.

- Currently trying to develop housing opportunities downtown for high income residents.

- Missoula has tried to accommodate development downtown. For example, there is no off-street parking requirements for new development.

- "…we have been able to keep it (downtown) vibrant, and historical…that said, almost everybody will complain about parking, whether there's a problem or not, they will complain about it" (Geoff Badenoch Interview 2001).

## 5.1.2 BRANDON – HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND AN ACTIVE DOWNTOWN ORGANIZATION

- Downtown is the heart of the city by default.

- A revitalized indoor mall is now the hub of downtown activity.

- There is a very active BIA (Business Improvement Area). It has led the effort in organizing Brandon's entry into the Communities in Bloom national competition. They produced greening guidelines for downtown businesses, and they have taken a historic inventory of downtown buildings. They instituted voluntary design

guidelines for downtown. Also, to encourage business owners to follow these guidelines, they offer free landscape design consultations. The BIA was instrumental in a spin-off organization, the Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation.

- They recently reduced time restrictions on parking meters and the result was many more people staying longer and later downtown.

- Working on placing sculptures downtown, to enhance the uniqueness and sense of place.

- Working hard to get heritage tax credits, to encourage historic preservation.

- Cooperation between the BIA and the city has led to many successful revitalization efforts.

### 5.1.3 GRAND FORKS – REBUILDING AND COPING WITH SUBURBAN DOMINANCE

- Heart of city is shifting to the suburbs. "I would say it is shifting away…I don't think people perceive the downtown as the heart and soul of the community any more" (Dennis Potter Interview 2001).

- Help has come from the state government. All cities can have a Renaissance Zone; in this zone property owners are encouraged to invest downtown. In return they receive state income tax reductions and municipal property tax reductions.

- Public-private partnerships are important to revitalizing downtown.

### 5.1.4 MOOSE JAW – REVITALIZATION THROUGH BUSINESS LEADERS AND TOURISM

- Downtown is seen as the heart of the community.

- Business leaders have led the revitalization movement. The city backs them in terms of tax breaks.

- Business entrepreneurs invested in downtown tourism projects. Including a very modern and well-respected spa, as well as a casino.

- Trying to save much of its historically-significant architecture. They have retro-fit many historic buildings to retain the character of downtown.

*5.1.5 GREAT FALLS – REVITALIZATION IN THE FACE OF DECLINE*

- Downtown is still the heart of the city, but not an especially strong heart.

- Vacant street level buildings damage the public's perception of downtown, and therefore they are trying to encourage retail activity.

- Working hard to change the public perception and culture of the people in Great Falls to value their downtown.

- There has been extensive riverfront development. They are now working on linking the river trails and parks to the downtown via signage and bike racks.

- Working on educating property owners about historic preservation.

- Realize that improving the quality of life in the downtown, and economic development downtown, go hand-in-hand.

The cities that were interviewed tended not to be cutting-edge in terms of planning, but neither were they conservative. Rather, most of the cities, in terms of planning, are moderately progressive. The planning ethic can be characterised into three categories. Planning for the public is traditional planning. Planning by the public is often seen as cutting edge. The cities in the study area for the most part practice the planning ethic of planning with the public. Table 4 displays the perceived planning ethic for the cities.

TABLE 4 - PLANNING ETHIC FOR CITIES IN THE STUDY REGION

| PLANNING ETHIC | MOOSE JAW | MISSOULA | BRANDON | GREAT FALLS | GRAND FORKS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Planning For the Public | X | X | | | |
| Planning With the Public | | X | X | X | X |
| Planning by the Public | | X | | | |

Table 5 displays the status of a formal downtown plan for the cities that were studied.

Missoula and Brandon, the cities which have the most developed downtowns are the two

cities with formal plans for their respective downtowns. Missoula has a well developed

and very successful downtown, which could in part be related to the fact that they were

seriously working on and thinking about their downtown over two decades ago.

Brandon's downtown plan originated in the mid-to-late 1980s. The informal plan that

Grand Forks follows, from the Urban Land Institute, was created after the devastating

flood of 1997.

TABLE 5 - DOWNTOWN PLANS FOR CITIES IN THE STUDY REGION

| CITY | DOWNTOWN PLAN |
|---|---|
| Missoula | Yes – Urban Renewal Plan adopted in 1978 |
| Moose Jaw | No – But they are working on one |
| Brandon | Yes |
| Great Falls | No |
| Grand Forks | No – But follow informal Urban Land Institute Plan |

## 5.2 GENERAL STRATEGIES USED BY SMALL CITIES IN THE STUDY AREA

Table 6 (p. 99), displays the average scores from the interviews conducted, regarding the

question, "what revitalization strategies were most effective in improving downtown?".

A score of 10 represented a highly effective strategy and a score of 1 meant that the

strategy was destructive to the downtown. Those strategies that are shaded in the table

have been deemed for the most part to be place-making oriented strategies.

For both the five cities and Medicine Hat, the revitalization strategy of historic development ranked as the most successful strategy that has been employed. This confirms the literature that states historic development is a powerful revitalization strategy for small cities. None of the strategies when averaged out were deemed destructive, a score of one. The most ineffective strategies, indoor shopping centres and sports arenas are older traditional revitalization strategies, while the top three most effective strategies are place making strategies: historic development, entertainment facilities, and art and culture. Thus, those strategies that enhance downtown's character and sense of place scored very high.

Historic development, and art and culture are the only strategies that have been highly effective in the revitalization of downtown Medicine Hat. All of the other strategies were ranked as average to ineffective. It should be noted that an ineffective strategy may not be a reflection of the specific strategy, but rather the resources available for, and commitment of the city to, those strategies.

Table 7 (p. 99), displays the average scores of the five cities interviewed and the score from the Medicine Hat interviews, regarding what revitalization strategies would be used in the future. A score of 10 is a revitalization strategy that is highly likely to be employed and a score of 1 is never. The strategies that are shaded in the table are, once again, those that can be deemed place-making strategies.

For the five cities, their future revitalization projects rely heavily on place-making strategies. Waterfront development scored very high. Also, historic development and art and culture are at the top of the list for future revitalization strategies.

Medicine Hat scored the strategies much like the five cities. There were two major exceptions though. Medicine Hat only scored a 5 for waterfront development, unlike the five cities that ranked it very high with a ten. The low ranking could be explained by the lack of space left along the river to further develop the waterfront. It is likely that many see Medicine Hat's waterfront as near fully utilized. The other major difference between Medicine Hat and the five cities is that Medicine Hat ranked BIDs and downtown organizations higher. This could be explained by the optimism in the city due to its new downtown organization, the City Centre Development Agency.

The lowest ranking place making strategy, street art and culture, is ranked quite low for both the five cities and Medicine Hat. An explanation for this may be that small cities do not have the critical mass to provide quality street art and cultural performers, and there may not be the interest in street art and culture. Also, it could be that this is an emerging strategy, whose potential is not yet recognized.

TABLE 6 - EFFECTIVENESS OF REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES IN SMALL CITIES

| REVITALIZATION STRATEGY | AVERAGE SCORE OF THE 5 CITIES | MEDICINE HAT SCORE |
|---|---|---|
| Historic Development | 8.75 | 7.50 |
| Entertainment Facilities | 8.40 | 4.00 |
| Art & Culture | 8.20 | 7.00 |
| Parking Improvements | 8.20 | 5.00 |
| Accessibility & Transportation Improvements | 8.00 | 4.00 |
| Waterfront Development | 8.00 | 3.00 |
| Office Development | 7.40 | 4.00 |
| Business Improvement Districts & Downtown Organizations | 7.40 | 6.50 |
| Housing | 7.25 | 4.50 |
| Streetscaping & Pedestrianization | 7.20 | 6.00 |
| Creating a 24 Hour Downtown | 7.00 | 3.00 |
| Festivals & Marketplaces | 6.80 | 3.50 |
| Convention Centres | 5.75 | n/a |
| Street Art & Culture | 5.20 | 4.00 |
| Sports Arena | 5.00 | n/a |
| Indoor Shopping Centres | 4.20 | n/a |

TABLE 7 - REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES THAT WILL LIKELY BE EMPLOYED IN THE FUTURE

| REVITALIZATION STRATEGY | AVERAGE SCORE OF THE 5 CITIES | MEDICINE HAT SCORE |
|---|---|---|
| Waterfront Development | 10.00 | 5.00 |
| Historic Development | 9.60 | 8.50 |
| Art & Culture | 9.00 | 9.00 |
| Entertainment Facilities | 8.60 | 5.00 |
| Housing | 8.60 | 8.50 |
| Office Development | 8.20 | 4.50 |
| Creating a 24 Hour Downtown | 8.00 | 2.00 |
| Business Improvement Districts & Downtown Organizations | 7.80 | 9.00 |
| Accessibility & Transportation Improvements | 7.80 | 5.00 |
| Festivals & Marketplaces | 7.60 | 7.00 |
| Streetscaping & Pedestrianization | 7.60 | 5.00 |
| Parking Improvements | 7.20 | 6.00 |
| Street Art & Culture | 6.00 | 6.00 |
| Sports Arena | 5.40 | 2.00 |
| Convention Centres | 4.40 | 6.50 |
| Indoor Shopping Centres | 3.00 | 1.50 |

Below are points that repeatedly came up in the interviews. These trends and commonalities are examined in more detail.

- All cities encountered competition from suburbs at some time, with most of the competition being in the retail sector.

- Most of the public buildings, library, city hall, court house, etc., are located downtown.

- All have some form of downtown organization. Some are more formal than others, and some are more effective than others. Most see this as a key component to downtown revitalization. Downtown organizations are involved in marketing, historic development, economic development, downtown activities, streetscaping, and design guidelines.

- The political climate in all of the cities is pro-downtown.

- Champions or leaders of revitalization are present in all of the cities. They come from diverse backgrounds including business owners, councillors, attorneys, mayors, academics, and property owners.

- All cities have a rail line or yards within or bordering their downtown. A few have rail lines acting as a barrier between downtown and the river, others have the rail line and/or yards cutting through downtown or acting as a hard boundary on the edge of downtown.

- Many cities suggested that their downtowns were too specialized. In an attempt to be different from the suburbs the downtown focused on niche retail, and thus many of them do not offer a wide range of retail options. An example of this can be uncovered in Missoula. The Executive Director of the Missoula

Redevelopment Agency commented on how he could within 600 feet of his office get a cup of coffee from four different coffee shops, but could not get a light bulb anywhere in the downtown (Geoff Badenoch Interview 2001). All cities wanted to increase the diversity of services, functions and activities downtown.

- In all cases there was a consensus that planning has been a part of the solution and has not been part of the problem.

- Partnerships achieved in the process of revitalization projects are sometimes more valuable than the specific revitalization project at hand.

- There has been heated conflict between planners, business owners, and developers. At times internal competition occurred over the direction and leadership of downtown projects.

- All of the cities were involved in some form of information-sharing network. The network included the International Downtown Association, Heritage Foundation for Historical Trust, National Main Street Association, American Planning Association, Canadian Institute of Planners, and downtown associations in other cities.

- The network interaction takes place via newsletters, email, internet, and conferences. They were happy with the network in place and did not see the need to expand it.

## 5.3 APPLICABILITY TO MEDICINE HAT

Within this section the strategies and ideas used elsewhere are tested out in Medicine Hat. Interviews were conducted with those who are very knowledgeable about Medicine Hat and have been involved in downtown revitalization. Their responses are summarised

below. The responses helped create the recommendations for Medicine Hat's city centre in Chapter 6.

1. Would a weekly downtown festival/event, summer or winter, be feasible in Medicine Hat? Other small cities have used these events to draw many people into the downtown. In other cities these events have improved the public's perception of the core and turned it into the city's primary gathering place.

- There is nothing planned in terms of a weekly festival or annual festival. There are plans for a one time arts festival to happen at the same time as the 2002 Alberta Winter Games, being hosted by Medicine Hat. There will be a large art show, and art will be displayed throughout the city centre. There will also be street performers downtown (Bruce Dynes Interview 2001). Thus, establishing a downtown festival would be feasible in the city centre.

2. What type of festival/event would work best in Medicine Hat? Crafts? Farmers market? Sports theme? Music concert? Arts and culture event? Garden theme? Cultural? Historical? Other cities have used a variety of events but the most popular is a farmers market.

- A variety of festivals and events could be feasible downtown. Several events have been discussed which would centre around the new performing arts, museum, and art gallery centre. Such ideas as moving the Jazz Festival from the Medicine Hat College to the new performing arts centre, and creating a Shakespeare Festival which would use the new performing arts centre downtown (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

3. What is the prospect for providing more housing downtown? Is there the opportunity for high income housing downtown? Student and art studios in the city centre?

- There has been housing built in the core and at the fringe of the city centre. Currently there is a 10 unit townhouse development on the edge of downtown and two 16 unit apartment buildings are being built also on the edge of downtown. There is market demand for housing in the city including downtown. An old industrial building near the downtown (Crystal Dairy Building) was recently converted into upscale condos, but they did not sell - so they are now renting. Thus, this could be a sign that condo ownership in the city centre is not as strong of a market as the rental market in the downtown (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

- There are some ideas to create low income housing using vacant buildings in the city centre. The idea is to create a number of rooms for residents with shared facilities. The land use bylaw and the building code would have to be accommodating to allow this to happen (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

- There is potential for housing within the city centre. The most likely market is student housing. Medicine Hat College and the city as a whole are facing a housing shortage. Shared accommodation or dormitories located in the city centre could ease the student housing shortage and increase the city centre population (Steve Welling Interview 2002).

- From a city perspective, the building codes and the zoning are not restrictive in the city centre. The codes cannot be relaxed because of the potential risk to those who would live in the redeveloped buildings. The building codes are the same

everywhere in the city, and no location has any advantage in terms of relaxed

building codes (Steve Welling Interview 2002).

4. Would a convention centre downtown be feasible?

- Convention centres in large cities do not often work and thus it would not be a

  good idea to locate one downtown for revitalization purposes. However, a multi

  use building in the city centre that would be used much more frequently by a

  number of different groups would be beneficial (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

5. Is there the potential for large-scale tourism development in the city centre?

- There is no solid foundation on which to base such an attraction. The only

  possibility is using the new performing arts, museum and art gallery as an

  attraction. There is also a lack of large vacant spaces in the city centre that could

  accommodate a large-scale tourist attraction (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

6. Is there an opportunity for riverfront development, or to develop better links to the

river via parks/paths?

- Various ideas have been discussed in the past, but no substantial development has

  occurred. River Road would be an excellent area that could be converted from

  vehicular use to riverfront development. The problem though is that River Road

  is a key transportation link. The City Hall and Court House have underground

  parking access from River Road and it is also a key emergency services route (Pat

  Adams Interview 2001).

7. Is there the potential to move the rail lines and yards from the city centre? This would

undoubtedly free up additional space for development, improve accessibility and improve

the visual quality of downtown?

- The cost of removing the CP lines and yards would be astronomical. The city could not afford to remove them by itself. It has been discussed with CP, but they are not interested in the removal of their lines and yard from the city. Medicine Hat is the cheapest place for CP to cross the river. The rail line running through the city is definitely a safety issue. There are combustible products and compressed gases that sit in rail cars in the city centre (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

- Accessibility is also a problem between the downtown core and North Railway Exchange. There is a pedestrian tunnel that is not ideal. There was an idea to build a pedestrian bridge over the rail lines, but the cost was too high. CP needed to have a 20 foot clearance under the bridge and that is what increased the costs (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

- Improving the visual quality around the CP lines and yard is possible and would be beneficial to the city centre. The problem lies in the fact that CP owns the land right up to the City streets, and therefore CP permission would need to be granted before any landscaping could occur (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

- It would be very beneficial to the city centre if the shunting yards are removed from the city centre. This would leave two CP main lines, and a much reduced right-of-way. Thus, the barrier between the core and North Railway Exchange would be dramatically reduced. This would greatly improve the visual quality of the city centre. Removing the CP main lines completely would be a mistake. CP workers have shift changes at the station and come into the city centre to the retail establishments. Also the historical significance of the railway in the city is great.

"If the railway was not here, I don't know if Medicine Hat would be here" (Steve Welling Interview 2002).

8. To improve accessibility, and to add character to the city centre, has any form of trolley or mini bus being discussed to link the downtown core and North Railway Exchange?

- Such an idea likely would not be feasible in Medicine Hat. There is not enough retail or office development in the North Railway Exchange to warrant such a service (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

9. Would closing a road in the city centre for a block be feasible in enhancing the uniqueness and character of the city centre?

- That has been discussed in the past, and it was thought to be a good idea. What would have a greater impact on the downtown is to change the one-way streets back into two-way streets (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

10. What is the prospect of creating a 24 hr downtown or at the least extending the life of the city centre late into the evening?

- In order for that to happen there needs to be more residential housing in the city centre. There are restaurants open until midnight downtown, but a true 24 hour downtown in Medicine Hat is many decades away (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

11. Is there potential in the city centre to add more recreational opportunities?

- There is not enough space to incorporate recreational facilities that require large tracts of land. There is resistance to the recreation that occurs in the core presently. There are a number of skate boarders who use Riverside Park as a recreational area (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

12. Are design guidelines feasible in Medicine Hat?

- Presently the City has minimal design guidelines and they need to be stricter. There is resistance to guidelines from local owners and others who do not want restrictions placed on them (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

- There needs to be expanded design guidelines for the city centre. It is hopeful that the CCDA will work on establishing design guidelines. The design guidelines are only a piece of the revitalization picture (Steve Welling Interview 2002).

13. What direction should the marketing of downtown take?

- Downtown businesses working together to add to the value of the services they provide could be effective. For example, a restaurant working together with the local ball club to provide a night of family entertainment, a dinner and a ball game for a special price; there could be many such linkages to promote downtown businesses (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

14. Are tax breaks a successful way to promote downtown development and the historic preservation of buildings?

- Tax breaks in Medicine Hat have not and will not be an effective revitalization strategy. They are not an effective form of economic development. With small cities and especially Canadian cities there is a diseconomy present that does not allow for tax breaks (Pat Adams Interview 2001).

- Tax breaks are not effective in a Medicine Hat context. In terms of property taxes, the city cannot offer much incentive to land owners. The property tax has to be equitable for the entire city. There may be other breaks that the city could

give to developers, especially if the city owns the property. (Steve Welling

Interview 2002)

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

The comparable precedents in the study region all have positive and negative aspects

regarding their downtowns. The specific strategies that were employed by the

comparable precedents were varied and diverse. For example, Missoula, for the most

part, is trying to make their downtown the meeting place of the city, while Moose Jaw, is

incorporating large-scale tourism into their revitalization efforts.

There are commonalities between the comparable precedents, as was observed in this

chapter. A few of the strategies employed by the comparable precedents are applicable to

Medicine Hat. In the next chapter, those strategies that are applicable to Medicine Hat

form many of the recommendations.

# CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY

## 6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING MEDICINE HAT'S CITY CENTRE

Through the extensive literature review and the key informant interviews with the comparable precedents recommendations have been developed to revitalize downtowns in small cities. This section is devoted to the recommendations specific to Medicine Hat; the next section will have recommendations that are more general and which could be applicable to all small cities in the study region.

The recommendations are made, and then an explanation follows. The target audience for these recommendations is the City Centre Development Agency. The recommendations are intended to give direction and encourage the new organization to employ place-making strategies. The first three recommendations are based on festivals/events and marketplaces. These types of events give the city centre the reputation as a gathering centre, they help downtown businesses, and they improve the quality of life for all city residents.

1. Establish a weekly summer event in the city centre

   - Several cities in the study area have had great success with weekly events in the city centre. Due to Medicine Hat's warm dry climate it could easily have a weekly summer event located in the city centre. The premier festival in Medicine Hat is Spectrum, which was originally a downtown festival. It is not likely that the festival will move back to the city centre, but a weekly event very similar, but smaller, could be held downtown. The weekly event could draw on Spectrum's reputation in the city by using a similar name like Spectrum Lite or Spectrum Nights. The large Spectrum Festival would not likely become upset over the

weekly event and it is likely that it would increase the reputation of the larger annual event. Spectrum Lite could have entertainment from local singers, music groups, artists, and musicians. A food fair featuring local restaurants or a large community BBQ could work. The weekly event could host recreational events such as skateboarding demonstrations, ski-doo demonstrations on the river, and other more traditional recreational events. Spectrum Lite could be held in one of the vacant lots or parking lots in the city centre. Also, the old-two lane Finely Bridge could be closed to vehicular traffic for the evening and the event could be held on the bridge. This location would allow residents to reconnect with the river and would also be a beautiful setting with the city centre in the background. A weekly event, like Spectrum Lite, would bring people into the city centre after the working day hours, and thus improve the economic condition of the restaurants and retail stores. More importantly though, a weekly summer evening event would provide the residents of the city a place to gather and socialize, and would further the city centre's reputation as the heart and soul of the city.

2. Establish an annual winter festival in the city centre

- Medicine Hat will host the 2002 Alberta Winter Games. Downtown will be home to the opening ceremonies, and an art festival will take place in conjunction with the games. The art festival is a one time event for the downtown, but this could become an annual art festival. The 2002 Winter Games could be a great start to an annual art festival in the downtown. A winter festival in the city centre would improve the reputation of the city centre in terms of a place where residents can gather for events year round. When the performing arts centre and museum is

completed it could give a boost to the already operating downtown winter art festival.

3. Build off of existing festivals and events

- Medicine Hat is already home to a few great events and festivals. Thus, the city centre should work on building on the foundation that these existing events have created. Already existing festivals could be moved into the city centre or expanded to include downtown venues. Once the new performing arts centre and museum are complete a portion or all of the annual Jazz Festival could be moved to the city centre from Medicine Hat College.

- Although there are recommendations to create and expand festivals and events in the city centre, this needs to be done with caution. The city centre needs to be seen as the community's meeting place, but it is important to have a well-rounded downtown. The danger with festivals and events is that they may instil the public perception that the city centre is a once-in-a-year place to visit for events. It is important to create a downtown that is active and vibrant outside of the events.

4. Cooperate with the suburbs and do not compete against them.

- Many of the cities in the study area that had successful downtowns, for the most part, do not compete against the suburbs. The city centre organization should work with others in the suburbs to improve the city as a whole. Regarding retail, the city centre merchants could, in the evenings, vary their hours to not compete against the suburban shopping centres. Currently both the retail outlets in the city centre and the suburban shopping centres are open late in the evenings, late in the week. Thus, the retail stores in the city centre could stay open late early in the

week, Monday or Tuesday. The hours could be coordinated to coincide with the weekly summer event early in the week. Although this scenario may not be feasible, downtown retailers should be innovative in their businesses and marketing.

5. Better utilize buildings and create linkages.

- Some of the buildings in the city centre sit vacant, and many are not fully utilized. There is the potential to accommodate other uses in these buildings, to create activity in the city centre. One such additional use is a Medicine Hat College downtown campus. Arts/drama students could have classroom space in one or a few of the vacant or underutilized buildings. The students could use the performing arts centre in the day, thus adding activity to the downtown, and ensure that the performing arts centre and museum are well used. Having students downtown would create additional spin-offs. It would create a student housing market and an increased vibrancy downtown.

- The upper floors of buildings that have retail uses on street level should be used for residential purposes. The city has a severe housing shortage and the city centre could help accommodate this need.

- There are many buildings in the core and the North Railway Exchange that could be transformed into living spaces. The city, building owners and developers should work together and be creative in creating lofts and living/working studio spaces for students and artists.

6. Create linkages with other tourism attractions in the city.

- Although the city centre does not have a single large tourist attraction, the city as a whole does. Southeast of the city centre, still in the inner city, is Medalta Potteries which is located in the North Flats National Historic District. This area has the potential to become a large tourist attraction focusing on history, pottery and art. Once the performing arts centre and museum are built, there could be linkages between Medalta and the museum and art gallery. They could together provide for a large and reputable tourist attraction that would draw tourists and residents into the city centre.

7. Enhance the street art in the city centre.

- The performing arts centre and museum could be linked to many activities in the city centre. Street art could benefit from this new facility. Residents will have an increased interest in culture and art. Street art does not include graffiti. Street art can include: murals on walls and sidewalks with permission, street performers, music, etc. Street art is performed mainly by amateurs. Restrictions, for example stating that only professionals are allowed to perform, should be avoided; this is elitist and does not allow the vast majority of artists to participate. Street art should be encouraged because of its ability to further the sense of place of the city centre.

8. Involve the strengths of the residents to promote and improve the city centre.

- It is extremely important to involve the citizens of Medicine Hat in the revitalization process, not just in the idea gathering phase, but in the action phase too. Thus, citizens could volunteer to help in many downtown projects and could

become downtown ambassadors. One demographic that Medicine Hat could utilize is the senior population. Medicine Hat senior residents could easily be trained to do weekly voluntary historic city centre tours for residents and tourists. It would provide a cost effective way to show off downtown and it would give a very important part of Medicine Hat's demographic some ownership of the revitalization process. The senior population is a demographic that has a great potential to help the revitalization process. They have the free time and possibly the knowledge and connection to the city and region's past. This is only one idea, and volunteers from all demographics could vastly improve the resources available to the city centre. It would allow many more residents to have the feeling of ownership and involvement in the revitalization process. The interview with Brandon representatives providing some input on how to get the community involved in downtown events. The idea is very basic; it is to work with non-profit groups in the city. "Create an event that involves every non-profit in that town or city and you will get every person out there giving 110%, feeling really good about it. Magic formula" (Carol Maggiacomo Interview 2001). There are many other opportunities to get the community involved in the city centre. Medicine Hat has a very deep sports attachment and this could be tapped.

9. Do not focus on moving the CP main line.

- There is the potential to build off of the rail history in the city to enhance the sense of place in the city centre. The CP rail line preserves the rail history which was so important to Medicine Hat in the past. Also, the activity on The CP property adds vibrancy to the city centre. However, there are definite safety

concerns that need to be addressed, and therefore the shunting yards should be removed from the city centre.

- The removal of the yards would decrease the CP right-of-way. This would decrease the physical distance separating the traditional core and The North Railway Exchange, and it would relieve some safety concerns. Also, the land freed up, from the removal of the shunting yards, would allow for opportunities in terms of landscaping, i.e. a new park, or development.

10. Landscape the CP property to improve the visual quality and attractiveness of the city centre.

- There is the potential to improve the visual quality around the CP lines and yard. Thus the city should partner with CP to landscape CP property in key visual locations, and landscape these areas with small parks, trees, and berms.

- In Medicine Hat's past there was a CP garden, see Photograph 16. This garden could be re-introduced to the city centre on vacant CP land. The garden could have flowers, trees, benches, fountains and be a place of pride within the city. The garden could help link the city centre to the railway past and also reverse CP's declining public image in the city.

**PHOTOGRAPH 16 - CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY GARDEN IN MEDICINE HAT**
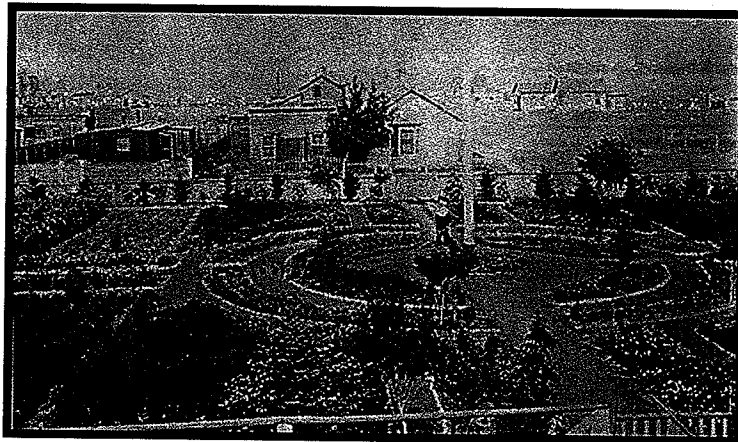


(Glenbow Archives NA-2003-18)

11. Establish design guidelines for the city centre.

- Design guidelines are a very important part of creating a quality environment. Design guidelines will add to the visual aspect of the city centre and ensure a quality environment. The design guidelines must allow for some variation and not be too restrictive. The design guidelines should not be used to create an artificial theme and destroy the authentic qualities of the city centre.

- The city and the City Centre Development Agency should partner with a private business to provide free landscape design consultations for downtown businesses. The consultations would advise developers and building owners on how they could follow and benefit from the design guidelines. The consultations could also be expanded to 'greening' downtown buildings.

12. Increase the recreational opportunities in the city centre.

- Sports and recreation are a huge part of Medicine Hat. Yet the city centre does not offer any active recreational opportunities. There are no large tracts of land available in the city centre that could be developed into recreational space. There

are many small vacant lots, some of which are not used for parking. Thus, several

of these lots could be turned into playgrounds, basketball courts, and outdoor

street hockey courts. There are ugly vacant lots in the city centre that could be

transformed into recreational opportunities easily and cheaply.

13. Return all one-way streets to two-way streets in the city centre.

- The one-way streets on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street should be returned to two-way streets.

   There are many reasons for this. First, there is not the traffic in the downtown to

   warrant a one-way street system. Also, two-way streets slow traffic, add

   vibrancy, retain a pedestrian focus, and improve vehicular accessibility.

14. Continue historic development in the city centre.

- Historic development has been successful in the city and it should continue to be a

   priority. Historic development preserves the past character of the city. To

   encourage this successful strategy more and greater economic incentives should

   be offered to building owners and developers. To protect building owners' and

   developers' investment into historic development there should be design

   guidelines.

15. Address underlying economic issues facing the city centre.

- Place making alone cannot solve all of downtown's problems. Thus the

   underlying economic conditions of the city centre should be examined and

   improved. Such matters as tax rates, building codes, zoning, and other economic

   considerations should be addressed.

- Also, the city and the City Centre Development Agency should aggressively

   target and attract key missing retail and economic components to the city centre.

For example Medicine Hat's city centre is under-accommodated in quality hotel accommodations. Also, another void in the city centre and the city as a whole is a large quality bookstore. These types of retail outlets should be sought after because they have the potential to attract traffic to the city centre.

- Due to the fact that a large portion of businesses are small businesses and that most of the growth in the future will be from small businesses, an effort should be made to accommodate them and make the city centre the most attractive place for them to locate. The city centre could become the small business mecca for upstart businesses. In an attempt to accommodate small businesses a common multi-use building could be created. This building could include common office space, secretarial service, computers, internet access, fax machines, work spaces, and small conference rooms. The idea would be to create a business park in the city centre for small businesses.

16. Increase the housing options in the city centre.

- Work with the city, developers, and building owners to determine if there are barriers, building codes, zoning, parking requirements, to housing in the city centre.

- Encourage student housing in the city centre. Create shared living spaces and possibly a Medicine Hat College residence in the city centre.

## 6.2 GENERAL APPROACHES TO BETTER REVITALIZATION PRACTICES

These recommendations are not targeted at a specific city. Rather, they are general in nature, and are applicable to all small cities in the study region.

- Downtown should not compete against the rest of the city when possible. It should be active in the rest of the city. Downtown should enhance and add to the city.

- Downtown should work with other groups, non-profits, local community groups, and sports teams, to make downtown the meeting and gathering place within the city. Downtown should work hard to become the central meeting place and the host of community events.

- Downtown should become a leader within the city. Downtown can lead in many different ways. Downtown should set local trends and be proactive rather than reacting to trends set in the suburbs. For instance the downtown could become a model neighbourhood for the city in terms of becoming the greenest, most ecological, area in the city. Downtown could market itself as being the most ecologically-friendly area in the city, where there is the best balance of ecology, economy and social sectors.

- Downtown should pursue a course to become both a distinct neighbourhood and an area that is home to regional attractions. The regional attractions should focus on culture, art, history, festivals/events, and sporting events. The retail located downtown could be effective if it is niche retail selling high end goods, speciality goods, antiques or other appropriate goods and services. The downtown should not try to compete for regional retail dominance.

- Leaders, planners, and strategists should tap into the community's specific strengths. There are generally many good ideas and available resources within

the community. Get people from the community involved and they will feel a strong link to the downtown and have the feeling of ownership.

- There are many great ideas and plans for downtown revitalization, but a plan is only as strong as the commitment to the plan by local officials and the community. Thus, the city, organizations and residents need to give the strategies/plans a great deal of resources and commitment or they will likely fall flat, through no fault of the strategy or plan.

- Realize the potential of place-making strategies. Many argue that these strategies just make things look pretty and do not address root issues. This is a superficial argument and underestimates the idea of creating a quality environment where people not only shop and work, but where they meet and are entertained, and socialize. People are not downtown just to support downtown businesses. This idea that place-making strategies are separate from economic issues is common place. The interview with the Executive Director of the Great Falls BID included much of this sentiment "Planning is trying to get at the quality of life in the community, and then on the other side there is always these people who wanna get at development and job creation, they don't understand how that all kinda goes hand in hand" (Dr. Madson Interview 2001). People need to be informed that place-making strategies are linked to economic issues, but also, strive to connect people with the past, give the area a sense of place, and tap into the spirituality of the place. This will improve the quality of downtown and make it a place where people can come together and work, play, socialize, be entertained, live, and shop.

- Take a holistic approach to revitalization. Do not focus exclusively on one strategy; rather, strive to attain a balanced comprehensive revitalization strategy. Revitalization of downtown is a process and all of downtown's problems can not be solved with one intervention.

## 6.3 NETWORKING – SHARING OF REVITALIZATION KNOWLEDGE

There is no need, or desire, for small cities to establish new networks where information about revitalization can be shared. All of the cities in the study region were part of a few networks that they were happy with. Many of the networks are not local; rather, they are national. Thus what is recommended is a sharing of newsletters from downtown organizations within the study region cities. Many downtown organizations in the study region produced a monthly or quarterly newsletter. The newsletters could be shared, by mail or more likely and efficient, via the internet. Thus, planners/strategists from other cities can tap into new ideas and request further information if they are interested. Also, the internet could be a tremendous asset to those concerned with small city downtowns. Such internet companions as email newsletters and message boards concerning the topic could be helpful. However it is too broad of a subject, and it would be too much of a tangent from this research, to go any further with this topic. Networking small cities together via the internet is worth further study at a later time.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

This section revisits the initial research questions, and builds to the conclusion that place-making oriented strategies are very effective in the revitalization of small city downtowns.

The first research question that was posed was concerned with the differences between small and large city downtowns, and what this meant to choosing a revitalization path. There are challenges that small cities face that large cities do not. Small cities often have a hard time providing an effective transit system due to low densities, and there is usually a lack of quality entertainment facilities in small city downtowns. In several aspects, small cities have an advantage over large cities in terms of revitalization. Due to the fact that there are usually only a few major hubs in small cities (rather than the multi-nodal form found in large cities), it is easier to establish place-making oriented strategies, and make downtown the soul of the city. As well, the built environment is much more on a human scale, there is less traffic in small city downtowns, and thus they are more pedestrian-friendly. There are differences between small and large city downtowns. These differences can be seen as beneficial for small cities, because they can help them establish place-making oriented strategies.

The second research question was interested in the future role of downtowns in small cities. The downtown, in small cities, in the future, will be a distinct neighbourhood within the city that offers several regional services and functions. Downtowns will continue to be home to government services, and to regional attractions such as: art and cultural facilities, entertainment facilities, high quality sporting events, as well as a meeting place. It is important to plan with a realistic notion of the future role of downtown.

The third research question looked to establish what constitutes a quality downtown. It is important to answer this question before a revitalization strategy is chosen, because it helps establish a goal for downtown: what it will strive to become. There are many components to a quality downtown. Those aspects that are continually mentioned in terms of quality include: downtown as a meeting place where people can socialize; plenty of street-level activity; residential development; safe in both actuality and perception; a feeling of ownership by the residents, and a strong sense of place and character. It is important to recognize such aspects which define quality, and strive to incorporate them into the downtown revitalization planning.

The last research question, and the most important, queried how small cities, such as Medicine Hat, can improve their downtowns through place-making oriented strategies? It was discovered that place-making strategies are effective in revitalizing small city downtowns. The most effective place-making strategies include: historic development; waterfront development; housing; art and culture; and entertainment facilities. The more traditional revitalization strategies, such as convention centres and indoor malls, were not as effective. Place-making oriented strategies are effective in small cities especially.

There are specific recommendations that were made that can help small cities like Medicine Hat revitalize their downtowns. Keeping the revitalization strategy small-scale is essential; large-scale projects are expensive and often drastically change the character of the downtown. Small-scale strategies attempt to improve the downtown

incrementally. This strategy realizes that there is no large project that will fix all of downtown's problems.

Involving the community in the revitalization process is also essential. Involvement should be throughout - in the idea generation and visioning phase, and continuing into the action phase. Keeping the community involved will allow downtown strategists to utilize a vast pool of skills and knowledge. Also, community involvement will give the participants a feeling of ownership, and thus they will care about what happens to the downtown.

Taking a holistic approach is very important. Applying as many revitalization strategies as possible will help to ensure success. Important considerations such as the economic base of downtown, and the marketing of downtown, need to be part of a comprehensive strategy.

Employing place-making strategies in small cities is particularly effective. Place-making strategies entail trying to achieve a certain look and feel for the downtown. It involves trying to enhance the sense of place and character, and to re-establish the link to the city's past. It is attempting to create a place where people can connect with each other and have a collective sense of place. It is about establishing a place where the people of the community want to be - where they can feel at home even if they don't live in the core - where they can live, where they can socialize, where they can be entertained, and where they can shop if they want. However, the idea behind place-making is not to give

downtown an edge in retail sales over other locations. Rather, it is about creating a very special place in the city that represents the essence of that city. Downtown may never be the economic heart of the city again, and that's alright. However, it is the soul of city, the essence of the place. This is what place-making is trying to attain. It is attempting to feed the soul of the city, and this soul is generally located downtown where cities are concerned.

Finally, no one revitalization strategy will alone prove to be highly effective. A successful downtown is like a jig-saw puzzle. Many pieces are needed: place-making, economic development, marketing, physical improvements, and, like a puzzle, revitalization will not be highly effective until the pieces of the puzzle come together. The more pieces that can be put together the more energized the city centre will become. Many cities only play with one piece of the puzzle and expect to see downtown revitalized. A strong revitalization strategy is only available when many pieces are put together well. Thus, planners and strategists should have a goal of trying to put all the pieces together, to achieve the big picture and to realize effective revitalization. The puzzle metaphor is not entirely accurate though, due to the fact that downtown revitalization is a process. Thus the puzzle will never be complete and cities will, over time, be continually adding pieces to their downtown and they will, over time, see positive change as the puzzle comes together, and the downtown 'place' is made, and re-made.

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## INTERVIEW LIST

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# APPENDIX

*INTERVIEW GUIDE*

The questions asked in the interviews were primarily qualitative. However, there were a few quantitative questions in the ranking of strategies sections. The interview guide for the interviews was designed to tap the knowledge of key informants in small cities, in the study region. The guide was followed in the interview, but the main intent was to discover successful revitalization strategies, and therefore if the interviewees took the interview in another direction it was followed if it was seen to be beneficial. Thus the interviews were structured, but allowed the interviewees to expand on their answers or allowed them to explore other relevant topics.

The areas explored in the interview guide included the current health, of and also general information about, their downtown. The next two sections of the interview guide asked the participants to rate the effectiveness of specific revitalization strategies and to rate which strategies they will likely use in the future. The next section asked questions about the primary revitalization strategy used in each city. This is the most open portion of the interview where participants could relay their own experiences, successes and failures regarding downtown revitalization. In another section of the interview, barriers and conflicts to revitalization were discussed. Also, information sharing and networks were discussed. Lastly the interview guide included a section concerned with the status of planning within the downtown and the city as a whole.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to identify downtown revitalization strategies that have worked well in small cities, which are comparable to the case study of Medicine Hat. The research is concerned with all revitalization strategies, but is specifically focused on those strategies that employ place making. Your city has been chosen along with 4 other cities, out of a group of 15 small cities in the northern North American prairies.

## I STATUS OF YOUR DOWNTOWN

**1.** Is your downtown generally healthy? Is your downtown growing, stable or declining?

Prompts - *What is healthy? Indicators?*

**2.** Is there a lot of competition for the downtown?

Prompts - *Suburban malls and Power centres? Office development? Fringe Nodes? Entertainment and cultural facilities? And high density residential outside downtown?*

**3.** What is the composition of your downtown? Retail? Entertainment? Housing? Government?

**4.** Are most of the public buildings located downtown?

Prompts - *library, museum, city hall, art gallery?*

**5.** Are there downtown organizations (i.e. Business Improvement Districts) in your city?

Prompts: *Downtown Improvement Districts? Other Downtown oriented organizations?* Do you find them to be effective?

**6.** What is the political climate regarding downtown revitalization in your city?

Prompts – *Is downtown revitalization a priority for the local government? Is there cooperation between various levels of government regarding downtown revitalization?*

**7.** Are there any champions or leaders in downtown revitalization?

<u>Prompts</u>: *Individuals who take responsibility and take action and become leaders in the revitalization of downtown.*

**8.** Are there barriers present in your downtown?

<u>Prompts</u> - *physical i.e. rivers, rail lines and yards? Economic? Political?*

**9.** Is the downtown divided into districts?

<u>Prompts</u> - *Is the downtown too large or too small, need to expand? Is it too specialized or too diversified?*

**10.** What is the public perception of downtown?

<u>Prompts</u> - *Have there been public perception surveys regarding downtown in the recent past? Do most see it as the heart of the city? The soul of the city? Just a node of many?*

**II RANKING OF STRATEGIES**

**1.** Please rank the effectiveness of these strategies that your city has employed. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being highly effective and 1 being destructive. (Only rank those strategies that your city has used).

(a) Indoor Shopping Centres

(b) Convention Centres

(c) Sports Arena

(d) Parking Improvements

(e) Accessibility and Transportation Improvements

(f) Business Improvement Districts

(g) Waterfront Development

(h) Historic Development

(i) Streetscaping and Pedestrianization

(j) Creating a 24 Hour Downtown

(k) Housing

(l) Festivals and Marketplaces

(m) Art and Cultural Facilities

(n) Street Art and Culture

(o) Office Development

(p) Entertainment

2. Please rank what strategies your city is planning to use or will likely use in the future.

On a scale of 1-10, 10 being very likely and 1 being never.

(a) Indoor Shopping Centres

(b)Convention Centres

(c) Sports Arena

(d) Parking Improvements

(e) Accessibility and Transportation Improvements

(f) Business Improvement Districts

(g) Waterfront Development

(h) Historic Development

(i) Streetscaping and Pedestrianization

(j) Creating a 24 Hour Downtown

(k) Housing

(l) Festivals and Marketplaces

(m) Art and Cultural Facilities

(n) Street Art and Culture

(o) Office Development

(p) Entertainment

### III PRIMARY REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

This section included a few qualitative questions that were designed specifically for each city. The questions attempted to discover more about the city's specific revitalization strategies that they have employed. For example the questions for Moose Jaw were designed to uncover more about their strategy of using tourism to revitalize their downtown. This section for the case study of Grand Forks focused on their attempts to recover and rebuild their downtown after the major 1997 flood.

Prompts: Successes and disappointments in revitalization attempts? Lessons learned?

**1.** What ingredients are needed for successful downtown revitalization?

Prompts: *public participation? Public private partnerships? Strict design guidelines?*

### IV BARRIERS AND CONFLICTS

**1.** What are the major barriers to revitalization in your city?

Prompts - *Has planning been part of the solution or problem? Has planning been able to facilitate cooperation?*

### V NETWORK AND INFORMATION SHARING

**1.** Is your city/planning department connected to a network where revitalization strategies can be shared with other small cities?

**2.** If yes, What is the network? Who is involved?

**3.** If yes, what would be the best way to accommodate this interaction?

Prompts: *Internet? Conferences? Other?*

## VI STATUS OF PLANNING

**1.** What is the planning tradition in your city?

Prompts - *Is planning influential or weak, conservative or aggressive, proactive or reactive, innovative or follow others examples*

Prompts: *What has been the planning ethic in your city? 'planning for' 'planning with' 'planning by' the public?*

**2.** Is planning valued in your city?

Prompts - *Is planning responsible for many functions and activities? Economic planning? Downtown planning?*

*- Does your city have a downtown plan?- where did this plan originate, is it borrowed from another city?*

*- Are there any benchmarks or indicators to monitor quality? Compare to other cities?*