PREDICTING POLICY PERFORMANCE

Downtown Revitalization Strategies in Small Canadian Cities

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ABSTRACT

Downtown Portage la Prairie, Manitoba is at a crossroads as globalization and urbanization take hold. Its economic base is shifting, population growth is stagnating, and development is peripheralizing, but the city has also seen over $1 billion in new industrial investment since January 2017. Portage la Prairie is optimistic this will turn the tides for the entire city, downtown included, and the City prioritized downtown revitalization in its *15 Year Community Sustainable Development Plan*. Through semi-structured interviews, I examined what factors contribute to effective implementation of urban design plans as part of downtown revitalization schemes in three precedent cities and explored applications for Portage la Prairie. I found effective implementation was predicated on a city's existing endogenous capital, communication, and complementary planning initiatives. In the end, however, design plans are only a small part of the revitalization puzzle and regulation alone will not stimulate development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without contributions large and small from the village around me. I thank my advisory committee, Dr. Richard Milgrom, Dr. Rae Bridgman, Dr. Orly Linovski, and Tom Janzen, for their time and insights that shaped my ideas into a tangible project. I thank MDP Club for motivating me with equal parts shame and encouragement. I thank the University of Manitoba, the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and the Department of City Planning for the University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship I received. Finally, I thank family and friends who supported me and provided welcome respite from schoolwork.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

My goal for this study is to advance the field of urban design at the small-city scale. My objectives are: to evaluate what factors, including policy, demographics, and socio-economics, contribute to the effective implementation of urban design plans; and, to discover applications for the study area (Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Canada) to guide decision making for context-specific strategies to revitalize the area.

Bell and Jayne (2006) point out "the woeful neglect of the small city in the literature on urban studies," and the subsequent lack of understanding of "what small cities are, what smallness and bigness mean, how small cities fit or don't fit into the 'new urban order', or what their fortunes and fates might be" (p. 2). Further Lees (2006) points out that

> [f]or some time now, 'a focus on medium and small-scale communities has been neglected in favour of large metropolitan areas in North America ... this bias has obscured the possibility of observing important connections between local-scale

> physical and social changes and non-locally based regional-scale political and economic developments'. (p. 91)

My research will contribute much needed research to the field of small city studies and explore how urban design works at this scale of settlement.

The ongoing centralization of industry, corporations, money, and people, known as globalization, has generally been a boon for the large metropolis and a curse for the small town. Rural areas are experiencing shrinking job markets, weakening government services, and expanding influence of large corporations at the expense of local merchants. Small communities are generally more susceptible to these changes due to "fewer establishments and, frequently, to the predominance of a single industry" (Hodge & Qadeer, 1983, p. 55). As people, money and resources leave rural areas, and communities experience reduced capacity, resources, and quality of life, those who remain struggle to improve their situation. They may not have the human or financial capital to undertake formal community planning (Hodge & Qadeer, 1983, p. 185-186), often resulting in no clear direction, disjointed development, and weakened main streets. In Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, recent commercial development on the edge of the city pulls money and people away from downtown. Meanwhile its population growth has been virtually stagnant for decades (Statistics Canada, 2017c).

This research intends to explore the practice of urban design in the small city context and at the main street scale. The research will contribute a framework of factors that contribute to effective implementation urban design plans in small cities.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My research questions are:

1. What factors contribute to the effective implementation of urban design plans in small Canadian cities looking to revitalize their downtowns?
2. What barriers and opportunities present themselves should Portage la Prairie implement an urban design plan?

1.3 PROJECT OVERVIEW

This study is structured into two phases. The first explores implementation of urban design plans in three small cities: Prince Rupert, British Columbia; Kenora, Ontario; and Port Colborne, Ontario (precedent cities). The second explores the potential viability of implementing an urban design plan in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba (research site). This structure allowed me to examine practices elsewhere and how lessons learned in precedent cities might apply to the main research site. During the first research phase, I conducted semi-structured interviews with municipal planning and economic development personnel to address my first research question, "What factors contribute to the effective implementation of urban design plans in small Canadian cities looking to revitalize their downtowns?" I compiled findings into a brief that I distributed to phase two participants to review before I interviewed them to explore my second research question, "What barriers and opportunities present themselves should Portage la Prairie implement an urban design plan?"

1.4 BACKGROUND

1.4.1 KEY DEFINITIONS

Small Cities

There are lines separating towns and cities; social constructs that mean different things to different people and in different places. Legislation authoritatively sorts settlements into neat categories of *village* and *town* and *city*, but criteria used to sort settlements vary between provinces and countries. Further, people instinctively differentiate settlements based on their own conceptions of town and city. I am interested in places with a population of 8,000 to 45,000 people that act regional hubs (as opposed to being fully dependent on a larger centre nearby). I will use the terms 'city' or 'small city' interchangeably with 'town,' as literature does not necessarily use the same parameters. Obvious comparisons can be drawn between Manitoban cities and other Canadian prairie cities, but my research does not discount

places in eastern Canada's, western America, or the UK; these contexts all bring a unique yet harmonious voice to the discussion on small cities.

Urban Design

Urban design is "the art of making places for people. It includes the way places work and matters such as community safety, as well as how they look. It concerns the connections between people and places, movement and urban form, nature and the built fabric," (Department of Environment, Transport and Regions [DETR] 2000, p. 8) as well as identity and sense of place, economics, and social equity. In practice, urban design encompasses topics including land uses, architectural form, aesthetics, density, transportation modes, vegetation, and affordability. Therefore, urban design goes beyond aesthetics to produce a functional space, street, or district as well.

Urban Design Plans

Urban design plans are one of many tools with which municipalities attempt to shape the form and function of downtowns back into vital urban places. These plans are often accompanied by design guidelines which restrict the type and form of buildings to enhance aesthetics, with the hope that visual improvements will spur economic investment (Kumar, 2002, p. 240-241). As Linovski and Loukaitou-Sideris (2012) found however, in most cases design guidelines are used to shape a district's aesthetics with little emphasis on social, cultural, environmental, or economic goals (p. 69). Additionally, since observance of design guidelines is typically voluntary, municipalities have no assurance that development will align with any of their goals whatsoever.

1.4.2 PRINCIPLE ISSUES

My research focuses on how urban design is used to revitalize downtown commercial main streets in small Canadian cities. Ongoing societal changes including the gradual population

shift from predominantly rural to predominantly urban (Statistics Canada, 2011b), the ever-evolving retail landscape from pre-war bustling city centres to mid-twentieth century large malls to box stores to twenty-first century online shopping, and lifestyle preferences for larger detached homes with dependence on personal vehicles for transportation, among other factors, have wounded the built environment over the past hundred years. Since the late twentieth century, urbanists have called for a reversal to unconstrained spatial expansion, citing high costs to land supply, the environment, and municipal coffers. These costs affect cities large and small, with unique implications depending on the local context. Urbanists have been calling for a return to walkable, authentic city centres designed to concentrate activity and celebrate local culture (Siegel, 2016).

Municipalities can use a variety of tools to encourage such a return, including urban design plans. In the absence of a competitive real estate market however, developers may view design plans as an additional burden and, all else being equal, build elsewhere. This is where policy comes into play: municipal and provincial policy can incent or discourage developers from investing in a given property. Without an equalizing policy, it might be more cost effective for developers to convert farm land for urban use than to reinvest in an established central business district. For municipalities, though, peripheral development results in additional infrastructure and maintenance costs. However, for many languishing small cities, any real estate or economic development no matter its location or long-term impact is viewed as a success. Thus, there are a host of economic, social, legislative and contextual factors that affect design plans' effectiveness, revealing the tensions between good planning and design, smart economic development, and the realities of real estate development at play in municipalities.

1.4.3 IMPORTANCE OF SMALL CITIES AND TOWNS

During the colonization period of North America through to 1930, towns and villages were established to drive resource industries that included hunting, trading, farming, fishing, mining, and forestry. Some of these nodes grew into metropolises, but the clear majority remained

relatively small in area and population (Hodge & Qadeer, 1983, p. 21). Towns and small cities are still vital to Canada's vast settlement network, acting as both producers and distributors in the economy (Hodge & Qadeer, 1983).

As a percentage rate of total population, rural Canada has been steadily decreasing for over 150 years, but in real numbers the population in rural Canada has increased over the same period (Statistics Canada, 2011b). Statistics Canada (2011a) reports that approximately 79% of population centres (not including villages and hamlets) have a population between 1000 and 10,000 people. In terms of land area, Canada is over 99% rural and even the densest of provinces are over 98% rural (Statistics Canada, 2009). Canada has a significant rural population, a plethora of small settlements vital to the economy, and an overwhelming amount of rural land. Planning for these lands, settlements, and people is vital for the protection and resilience of Canada.

1.5 ASSUMPTIONS

I examined urban design schemes under the assumption that the schemes, as opposed to some other variable, directly caused described outcomes. Further, I assume that these outcomes can be replicated in another jurisdiction (i.e., Portage la Prairie) without significant alterations to the original scheme.

1.6 LIMITATIONS

I studied the physical (i.e., public realm, public spaces, public infrastructure, public-private interfaces) and economic improvement of an area. Improving social conditions of a place, including but not limited to issues of homelessness, criminal behaviour, and low education, is an important but separate concern, outside the scope of this study. Neither did I explore how changes to the built environment may affect these social issues or vice versa.

A comprehensive analysis of all (or many) programs, projects, and policies is not possible due to time and budget constraints. Instead, I focused on three selected instances where downtown revitalization was attempted through urban design. This approach allowed me to analyze individual precedents in more depth and with more nuance but also narrowed the scope, providing only a glimpse of the rich array of strategies and contexts.

1.7 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study explored the intersection of small cities, urban design, plan implementation, and real estate development. Though small cities play important roles in the urban fabric of Canada, many still struggle to remain viable, and this study examined one approach to improve conditions. Urban design is often perceived as a strictly aesthetic exercise, but this study asserts that it can also address economic, social, cultural, and developmental goals. Plan implementation is a vital, yet often lacking, area of urban planning. After all, visions without actions are simply hallucinations. Planners must understand how to implement plans and what factors affect implementation. Finally, cities are largely built by the private sector, so planners must understand how tools like urban design plans affect real estate development and investment. Though this study examined small cities, lessons about urban design, plan implementation, and real estate development can be extracted for planning practice in cities of all sizes.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT

Chapter 1 introduced my research problem, questions, and objectives. Chapter 2 discusses the primary research site, downtown Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, including its history, demographics, economy, built form, and planning context. It then discusses the three precedent cities, Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Kenora, Ontario, and Port Colborne, Ontario. Chapter 3 reviews academic literature on small cities, main streets, revitalization, and economics. It then explores placemaking, urban design theory, and urban design practice

as they relate to small city downtowns. Chapter 4 details the study structure, including its organization into phases, research instruments, methods of coding, and methods of data analysis. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the research while Chapter 6 discusses them in depth. Chapter 7 concludes the study by addressing my research questions, providing recommendations, and setting directions for further research.

2 RESEARCH SITES

This study is structured into two phases: the first explores implementation of urban design plans in three small Canadian cities (precedent sites); the second explores application in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba (research site). This chapter examines Portage la Prairie in depth and includes an overview of each precedent city.

2.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH SITE: PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE

The City of Portage la Prairie, as shown in Figure 1, began a participatory planning process in late 2015 and adopted its *15 Year Community Sustainable Development Plan* in September 2016 (City of Portage la Prairie, 2016). The plan identifies the need to revitalize the downtown core, strengths of the area, opportunities raised by residents, and goals established through the

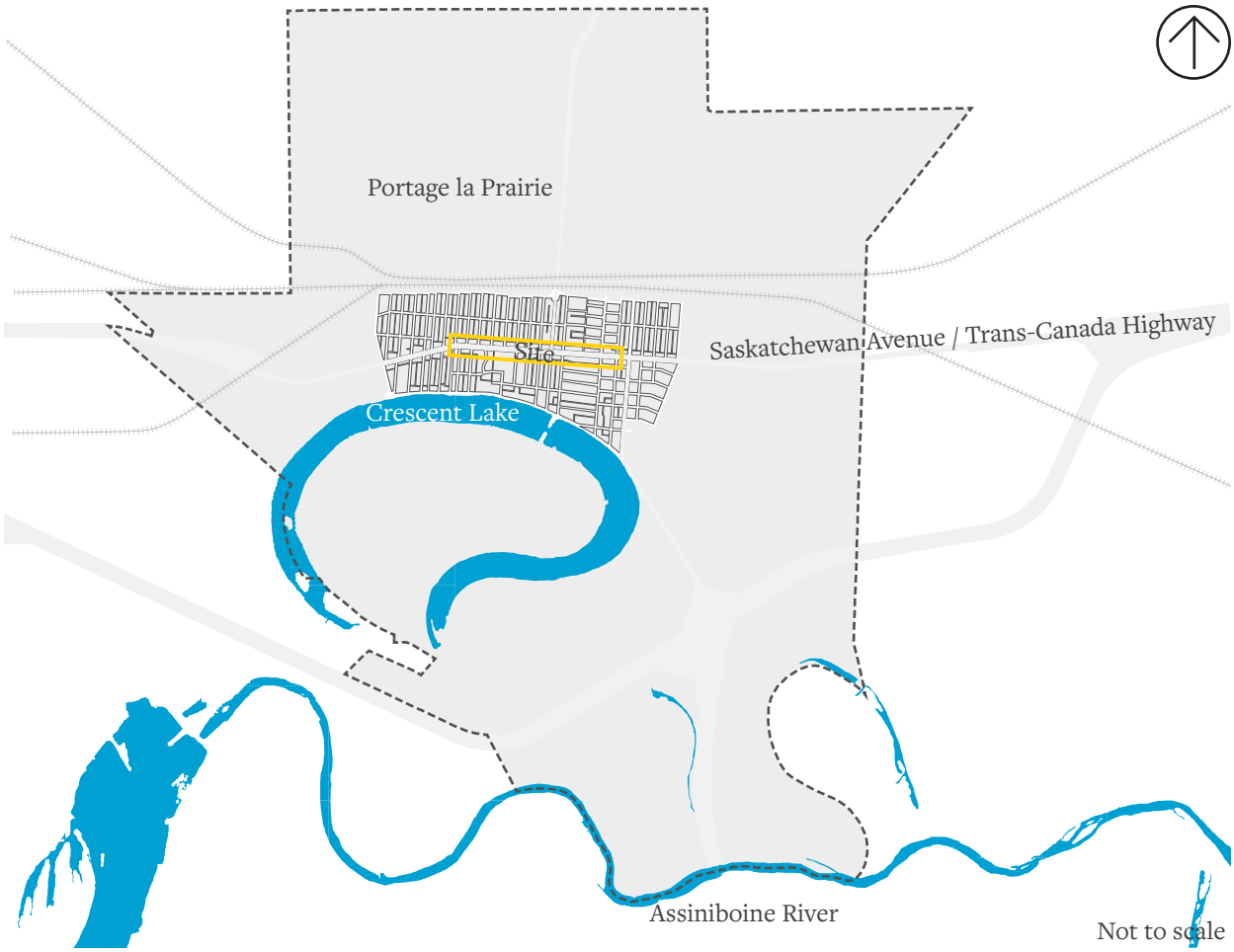


***Figure 1.* Map of Portage la Prairie.** The primary research site is situated in the centre of the city. Adapted from: Portage la Prairie Planning District. (2016). *Zoning Map.* Retrieved from http://www.ptgplanningdistrict.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/City-Zoning-Full-Map.pdf.

planning process. The site for my study, shown in Figure 2, will align with the plan's: a one-kilometre portion of Saskatchewan Avenue from 8th Street NW to 3rd Street NE and adjacent blocks in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. Saskatchewan Avenue runs east-west through Portage la Prairie and the study area is the traditional downtown core of the community.



***Figure 2.* Map of primary research site.** The site extends from 8 Street NW to 3 Street NE along Saskatchewan Avenue. Adapted from: Portage la Prairie Planning District. (2016). *Zoning Map.* Retrieved from http://www.ptgplanningdistrict.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/City-Zoning-Full-Map.pdf.

2.2 HISTORY OF PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE

Since time immemorial, Indigenous people lived on and used the land now known as North America. The Ojibway, Assiniboines, Cree, and Sioux people all lived in the vicinity of modern-day Portage la Prairie at different times in history (Long Plain First Nation, n.d.). They developed a network of trails that converged at present day Portage la Prairie, as shown in Figure 3 (Collier 1970, p. 3), as a part of daily life on the plains including hunting, gathering, and traveling. During the Europeans' discovery and exploration of North America from the

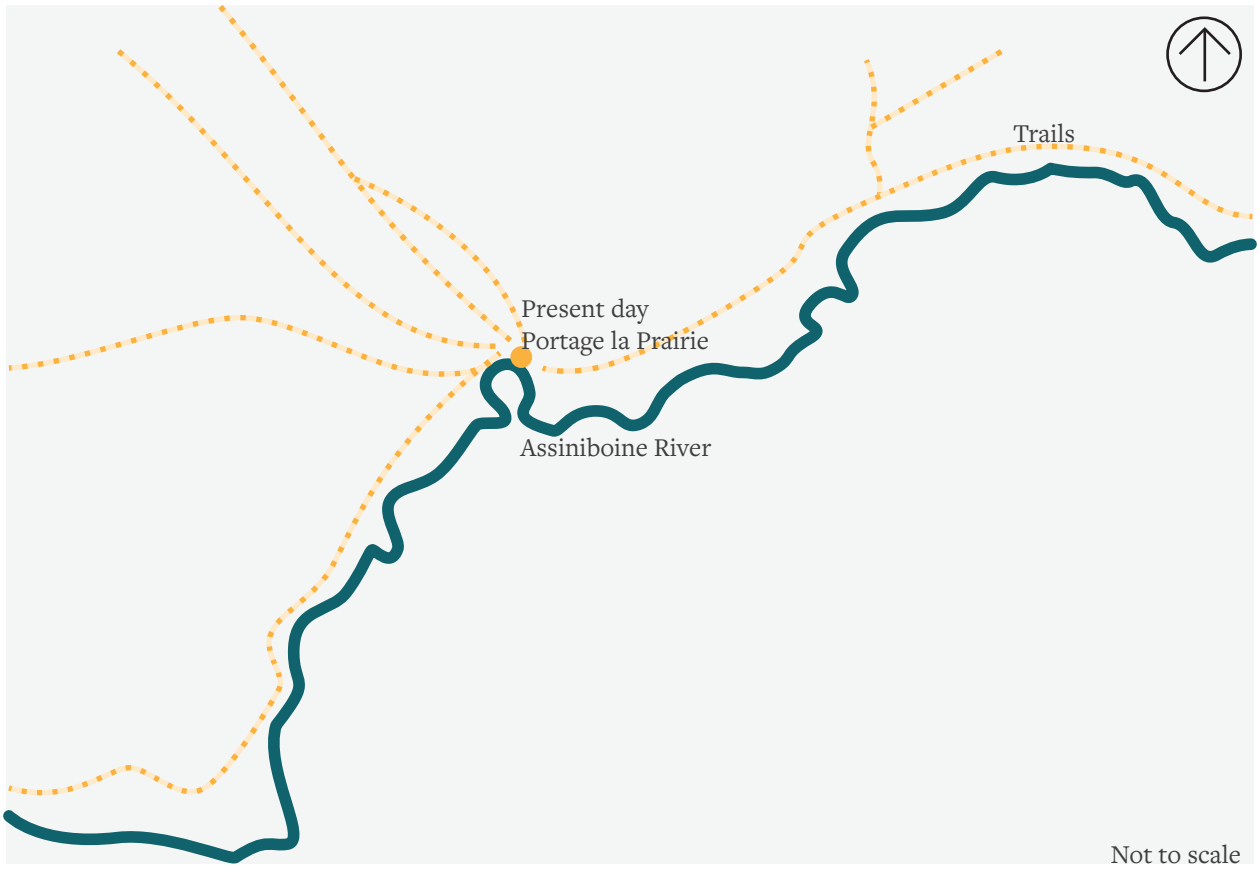


Figure 3. **Indigenous peoples' trails.** Adapted from: Collier, A. M. (1970). *Portage la Prairie 1870-1970*. Altona: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd, http://manitobia.ca/resources/books/local_histories/002.pdf. p. 3.

fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, European explorers rose to power over the Indigenous peoples and recognized the strategic importance of the Portage la Prairie region for the fur trade. Here, traders portaged the prairie between the Assiniboine River and Lake Manitoba for efficient travel across the vast wilderness. As more Europeans came to North America, their

trade operations became more organized and forts were built across the landscape acting as terminals for the industry. In 1738, La Verendrye built Fort la Reine, shown in Figure 4, named after the Queen of France, near present day Portage as his headquarters for trade and exploration (Garrioch 1923, p. 5-6). Though the fur trade was initially dependent on waterways



Figure 4. **Fort la Reine.** A replica of the original fort at Fort la Reine Museum. Source: Fort la Reine Museum. (n.d.). *The Fort.* Retrieved from http://www.fortlareinemuseum.com/collection/.

for travel, overland travel became more viable when Europeans imported the use of carts pulled by domesticated animals to North America. Overland travel between forts was made possible by appropriating and expanding upon the trails established by Indigenous people centuries before, as shown in Figure 5. The Indigenous people's trails near Fort la Reine were taken over by the Europeans and linked to major trade terminals including Fort Garry and Fort Edmonton, present day Winnipeg and Edmonton respectively. This trail was known by different names in different places, but near Fort la Reine, it was referred to as the Saskatchewan Trail – later known as Saskatchewan Avenue – since it led to Saskatchewan (Hall, 1969).

The first permanent settlement by non-Indigenous people was started in 1853 when Archdeacon William Cochrane and fifteen families came from the Red River Settlement in

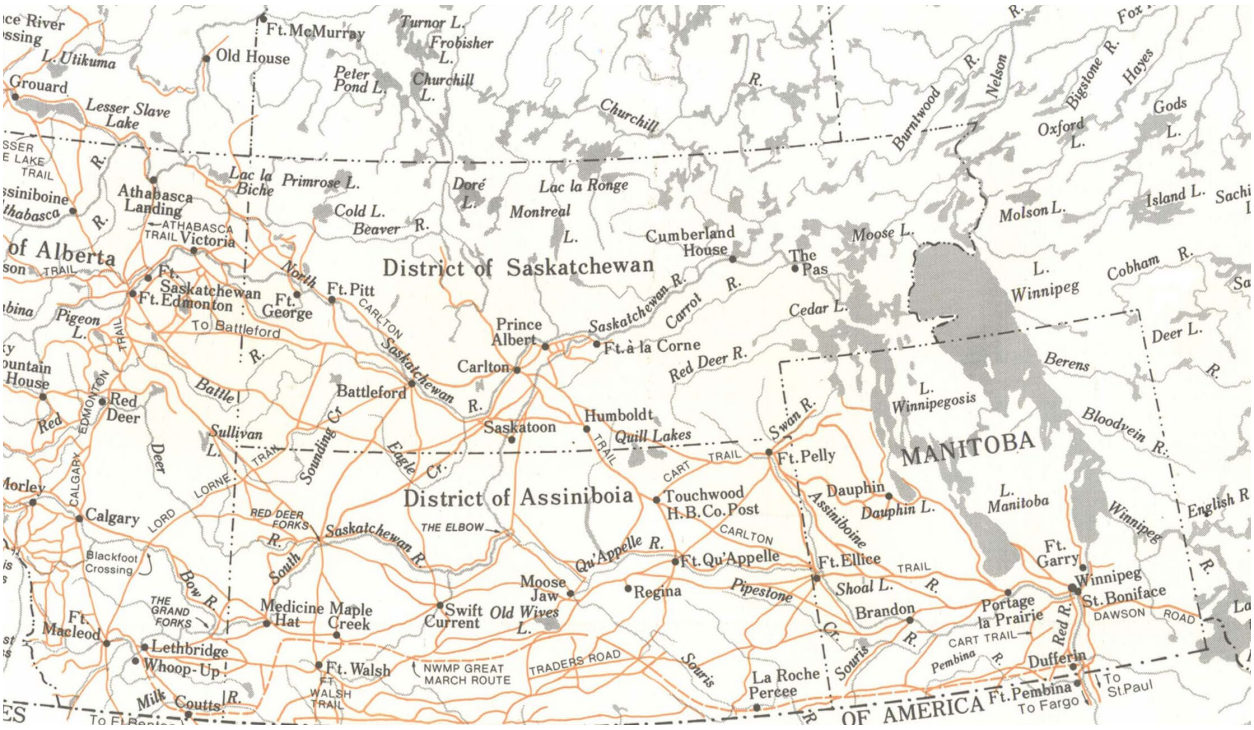


***Figure 5*. Map of ox-cart trails.** Source: Atlas of Alberta Railways. (2005). *Western Canada's Established Trails*. Retrieved from http://railways.library.ualberta.ca/Maps-2-1-2/.

search of better living conditions (Bell 1926, p. 13). The original settlement, comprised of houses, a church, and a school, was concentrated near Crescent Lake as shown in Figures 6 and 7 (Bell 1926). Over the next two decades, settlers from Ontario came to the Portage



Figure 6. **Early settlement housing.** Source: Fort la Reine Museum. (n.d.). *The Paul House*. Retrieved from http://www.fortlareinemuseum.com/collection/.



***Figure 7*. Early settlement school.** Source: Fort la Reine Museum. (n.d.). *West Prospect School*. Retrieved from http://www.fortlareinemuseum.com/collection/.

settlement, further expanding the urban form. During this time, the relationship between the Saskatchewan Trail and the built form was tenuous: settlement was more dependent on the reliable supply of fresh water from Crescent Lake than it was on the trail for transportation.

Following Confederation in 1867 and the incorporation of Manitoba as a province in 1870, Treaty 1 was signed in 1871 by the Ojibway people living near Portage la Prairie, but notably not the Sioux (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2015, p. 2). Regardless, the federal government segregated the Indigenous groups to reserves well-removed from Portage la Prairie. The Ojibway people are now part of Long Plain First Nation and the Sioux were divided between Dakota Tipi First Nation and Dakota Plains First Nations. Other Indigenous people, now known as Sandy Bay First Nation were relocated to the west shore of Lake Manitoba as shown in Figure 8 (Long Plain First Nation, n.d.).

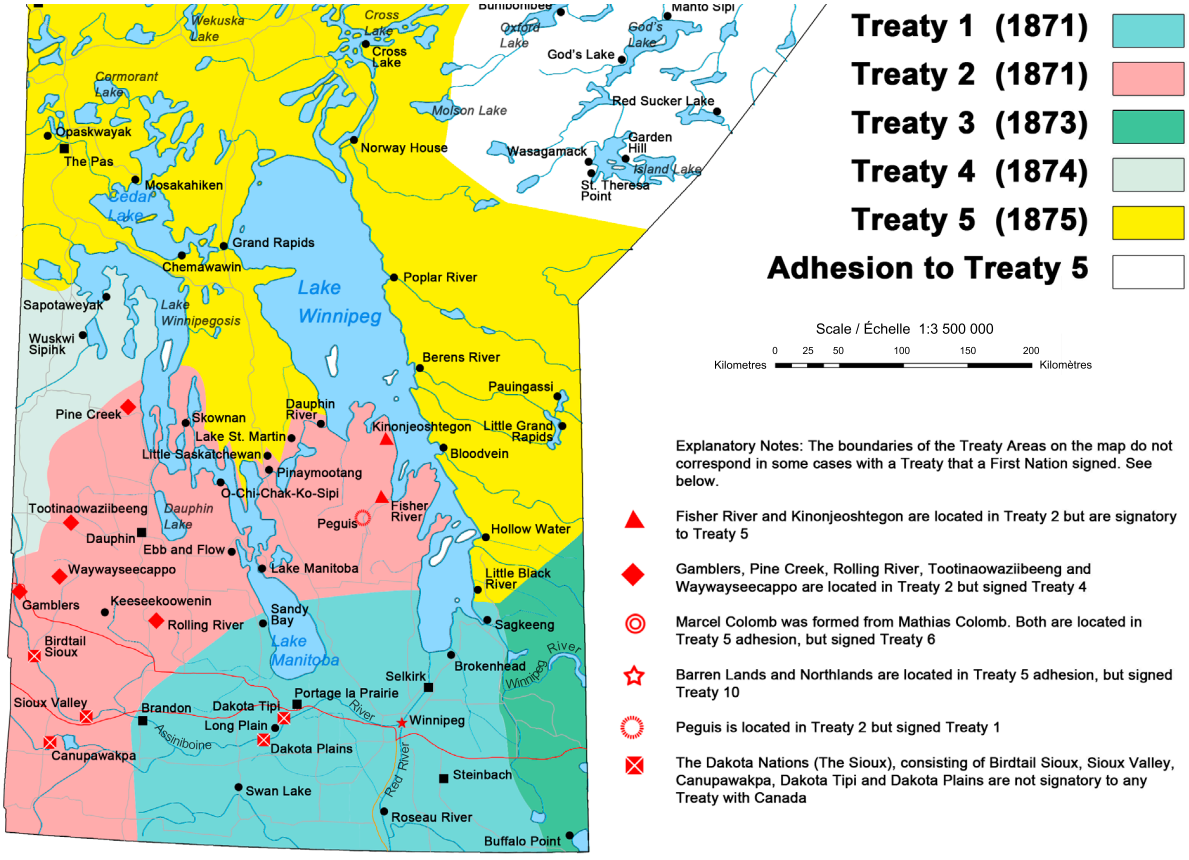


Figure 8. **Map of Treaty areas and Reserves.** Source: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. (2015). *First Nations and Treaty Areas in Manitoba.* Retrieved from https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-MB/STAGING/texte-text/tim2011revised_pdf_1420754107463_eng.pdf. p. 2.

The Portage settlement was incorporated as a town by the end of the decade and its population boomed from eight hundred people in 1880 to thirty-five hundred people in 1882, coinciding with the introduction of rail travel. In January 1880, the railway, as shown in Figure 9, reached Portage la Prairie and was an improvement over existing transportation modes since it proved to be more efficient for the movement of goods and people. As a result, businesses including banks, real estate offices, professional services, hotels, and manufacturers opened to capitalize on the economic potential of the railway. With no other sizeable settlements north of the Assiniboine River, Portage la Prairie was a guaranteed stop for the railway as it expanded westward, regardless of whether the line passed through Selkirk or Winnipeg. The town's population, economy, and footprint expanded during this time. However, by 1882 the real estate boom collapsed, and the town was in major debt as a result (Bell 1926, p. 32-33).

With some rail dependent activity on the north side of town and some water dependent activity on the south, many local shops and services organised along the more central Saskatchewan Trail, as shown in Figures 10 and 11. These shops and services were not

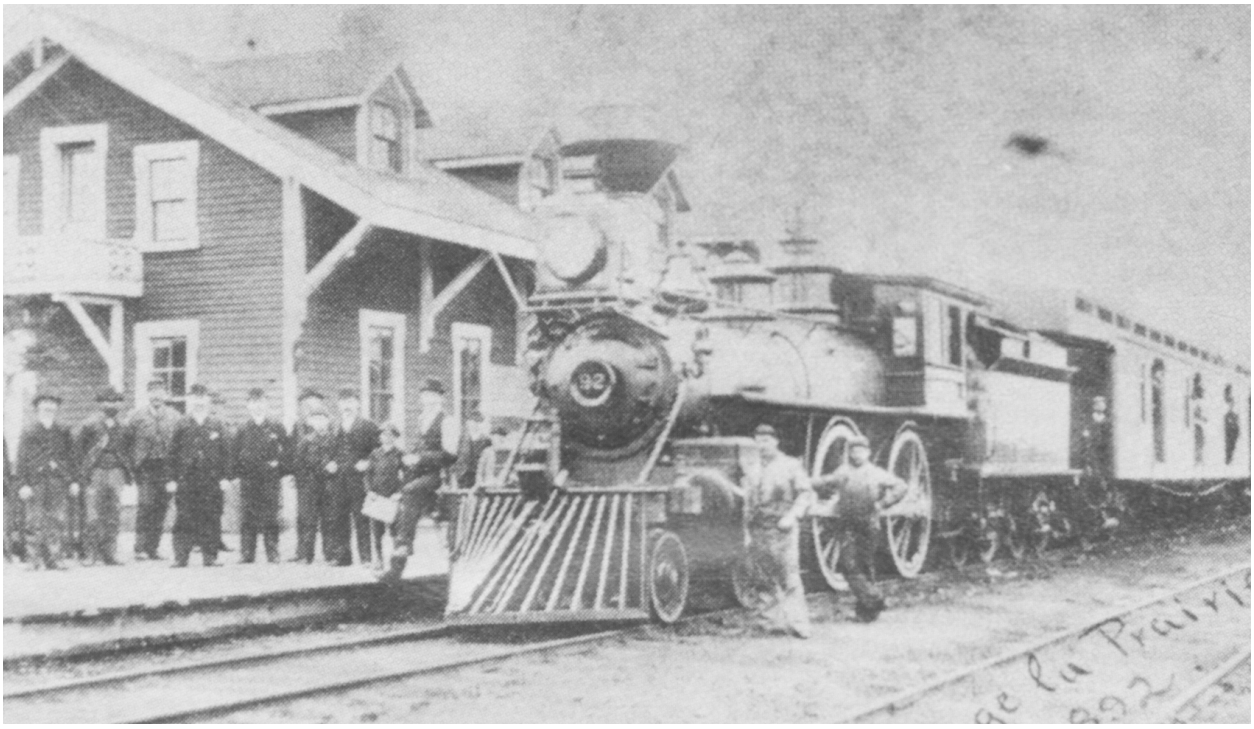


***Figure 9*. CPR passenger train.** Source: Government of Manitoba Historical Resources Branch. (1983). *C.P.R. passenger train at Portage la Prairie, 1892.*

dependent on the railway or the waterway for daily operations. Rather, they served the daily needs of the local population. These included the post office, fire hall, blacksmith shops, hotels and general store (Bell 1926, p. 34). As opposed to the ad hoc development that preceded it, this was a coordinated effort to centralize economic activities and community assets, establishing



***Figure 10*. Saskatchewan Avenue, 1883.** Source: Government of Manitoba Historical Resources Branch. (1983).



***Figure 11*. Saskatchewan Avenue, 1900s.** Source: The Valentine & Sons Publishing Co., Ltd. (1918). *Saskatchewan Avenue, Portage la Prairie, Man.* Retrieved from http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/postcards/PC013378.html.

wide central road through the town lined with buildings that served the daily functions of citizens. This is the origin of the Portage la Prairie's central business district that still exists today.

The twentieth century brought new technology in the form of the internal combustion engine and personal automobile. Though they were at first novelties only used for recreation by the wealthy, over time they became more affordable and people enjoyed the convenience of having a personal automobile. In Portage la Prairie, these changes resulted in less dependence on the railway for transportation of goods and services – dependence on waterways for transportation was negligible by this point – and more dependence on road networks. Road networks were expanded and reconditioned. As shown in Figures 12 and 13, parking vehicles at homes and businesses became a growing concern. People were able to travel further for, and therefore live further from, goods, services, and businesses. The most important outcome of the public's increasing preference for driving was the decentralization of the built form. Thomas (1961) described the urban form along Saskatchewan Avenue as "strip development … directly attributed to the advent of the automobile" (p. 68-69). While businesses were attracted



Figure 12. **Saskatchewan Avenue, 1940s.** Source: University of Alberta Peel Postcard Library. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.prairie-towns.com/portage-27.html.



Figure 13. **Saskatchewan Avenue, 1950s.** Source: Retrieved from http://www.prairie-towns.com/portage-4.html.

to the economic potential of locating along a major arterial road, Thomas found several implications on the built form. Strip development along Saskatchewan Avenue elongated and decentralized the business district, dispersed property values due to unorganized land uses, and restricted options for architectural composition (Thomas 1961, p 70-72).

By the 1950s, Manitoba's highway network was a major component of travel and trade between provinces. By 1962, the Trans-Canada Highway was completed in Manitoba, following the existing path of Saskatchewan Avenue, and connected the town with the rest of the nation by paved roadway (TransCanadaHighway.com, n.d.a). This meant that Saskatchewan Avenue was no longer just important for the daily functions of local residents – it could now also serve the needs of passers-though as they trekked across the province or country.

By this time, Saskatchewan Avenue was firmly established as a prototypical small-town main street. Historically, commercial main streets served citizens' "basic survival, communication and entertainment needs and [performed] several political, religious, commercial, civic and social functions" (Mehta, 2014, p. 55). Hecht (1968) found that Portage la Prairie played a significant role in regional culture and economics. Hecht interviewed representatives of establishments in Portage la Prairie and sent questionnaires to residents in the surrounding region to test the degree and geography of regional dependence on Portage la Prairie's establishments. Figures 14 through 19 show his results, cross-referenced with Collier's (1970) lists of establishments, showing only those along Saskatchewan Avenue at the time.

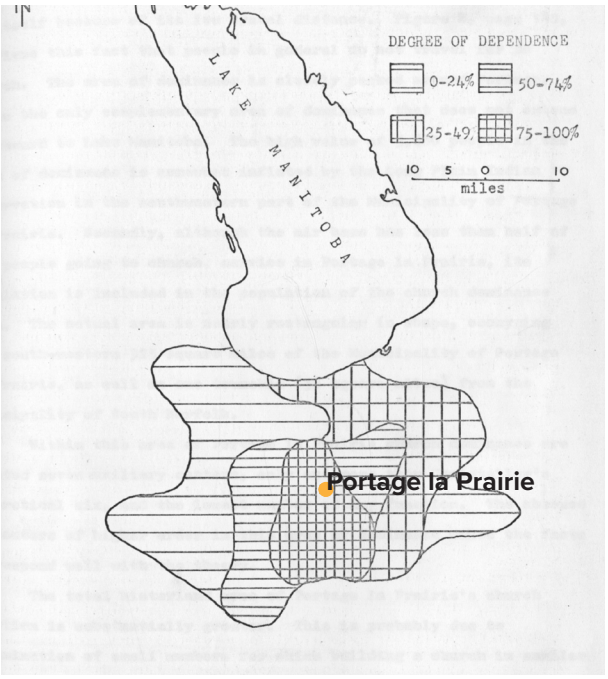


Figure 14. **Area dependence for church services.** Source: Hecht, A. (1968). *An Investigation into Central Place Aspects of Portage la Prairie, with Special Emphasis on the Establishment of an Hierarchy and the Delimitation of the Complementary Area* (Master's Thesis). University of Manitoba. p. 140.

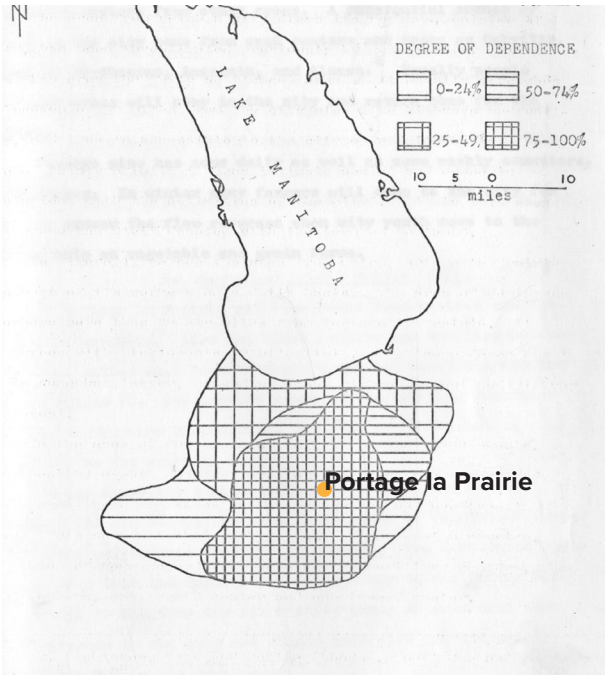


Figure 15. **Area dependence for work.** Source: Hecht, A. (1968). *An Investigation into Central Place Aspects of Portage la Prairie, with Special Emphasis on the Establishment of an Hierarchy and the Delimitation of the Complementary Area* (Master's Thesis). University of Manitoba. p. 165.

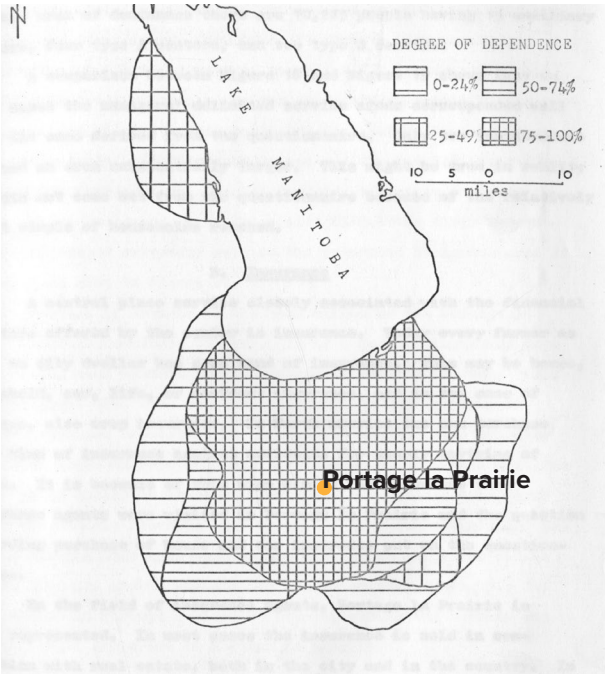


Figure 16. **Area dependence for banks.** Source: Hecht, A. (1968). *An Investigation into Central Place Aspects of Portage la Prairie, with Special Emphasis on the Establishment of an Hierarchy and the Delimitation of the Complementary Area* (Master's Thesis). University of Manitoba. p. 169.

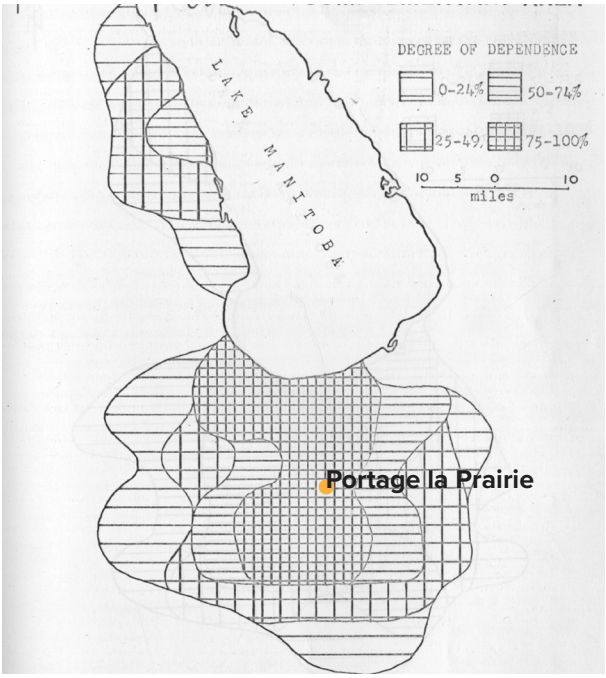


Figure 17. **Area dependence for perishable food.** Source: Hecht, A. (1968). *An Investigation into Central Place Aspects of Portage la Prairie, with Special Emphasis on the Establishment of an Hierarchy and the Delimitation of the Complementary Area* (Master's Thesis). University of Manitoba. p. 215.

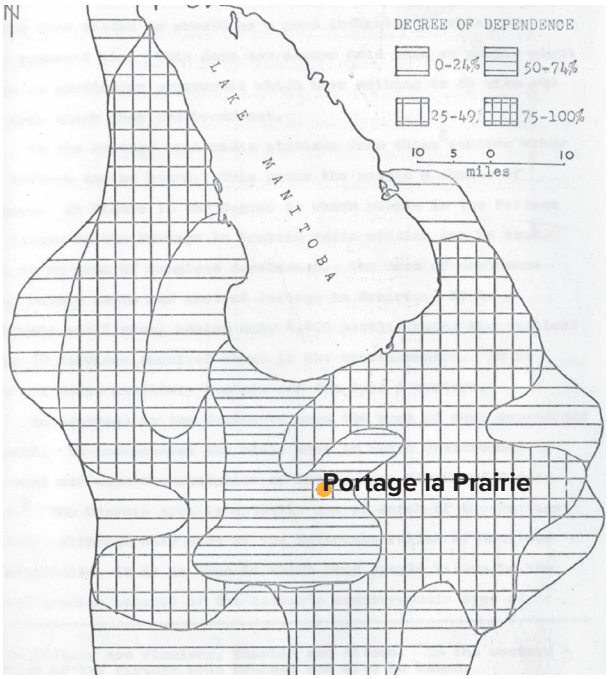


***Figure 18.* Area dependence for radio.** Source: Hecht, A. (1968). *An Investigation into Central Place Aspects of Portage la Prairie, with Special Emphasis on the Establishment of an Hierarchy and the Delimitation of the Complementary Area* (Master's Thesis). University of Manitoba. p. 161.

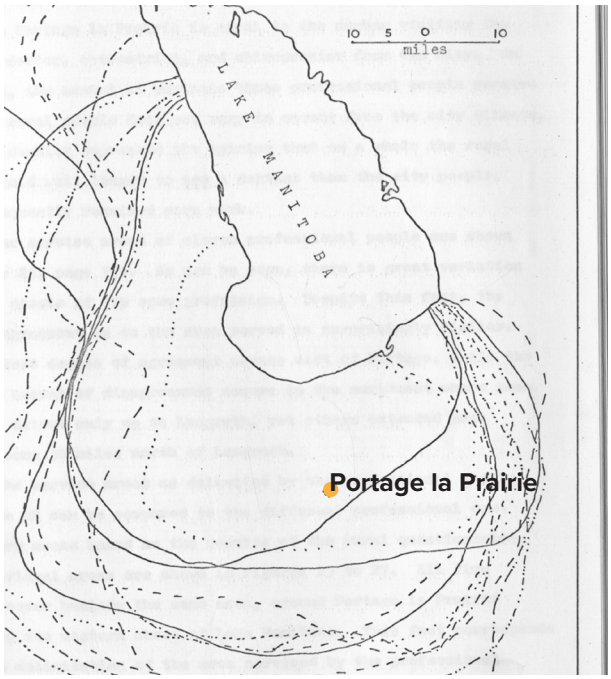


***Figure 19.* Area dependence for professional services.** Source: Hecht, A. (1968). *An Investigation into Central Place Aspects of Portage la Prairie, with Special Emphasis on the Establishment of an Hierarchy and the Delimitation of the Complementary Area* (Master's Thesis). University of Manitoba. p. 176.

In 1970 a by-pass on the Trans-Canada Highway was opened, giving vehicle traffic the option to drive around Portage la Prairie rather than through along Saskatchewan Avenue, as shown in Figure 20 (TransCanadaHighway.com, n.d.b). This was done to allow through-traffic to continue around Portage la Prairie at high speed and to relieve congestion along

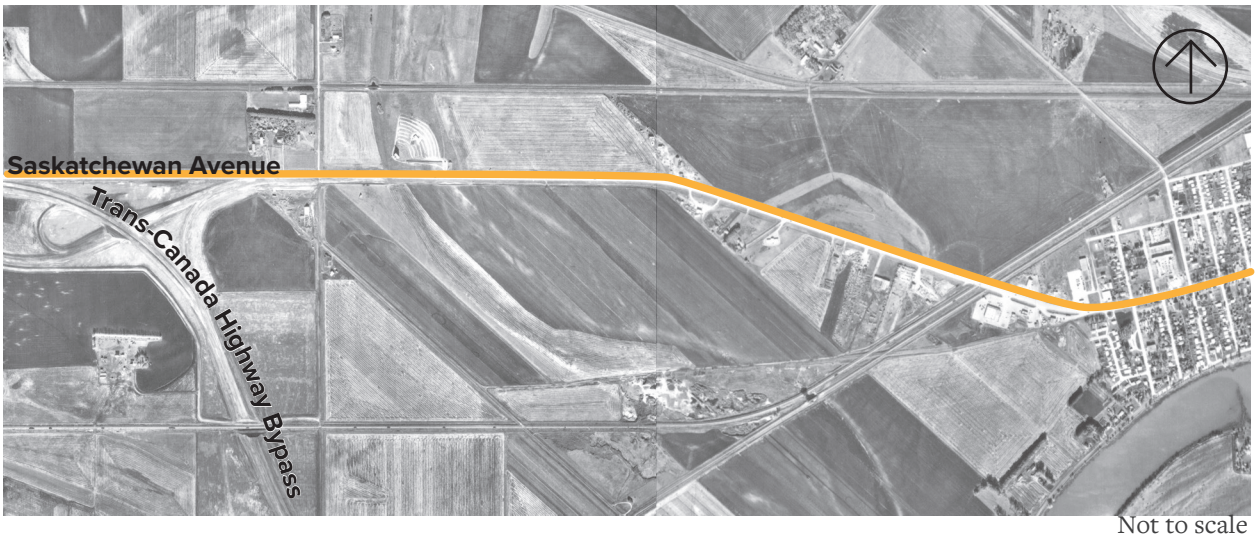


***Figure 20.* Trans-Canada Highway bypass (west end, 1976).** Source: Manitoba Air Photo Library. (1976).

Saskatchewan Avenue. Though some of Hecht's (1968) interviewees were concerned about the negative impacts the by-pass would have on business, the majority were not (p. 190-191). Studies from Kansas (Babcock & Davalos, 2004) and Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Transportation, 1998) found that highway by-passes generally had statistically insignificant, if any, negative effect on a by-passed town's economy. They also found by-passes could have positive effects on the town's central business district in the form of relief from congestion, noise, and emissions. In the decades since the by-pass was constructed, big-box development was established on Portage la Prairie's west side, inside the by-pass, as shown in Figure 21. This type of development is an example of Thomas's (1961) strip development observation – an elongating of commercial land use along the arterial road. While there is no evidence that the presence of the by-pass caused the fringe development, the fringe development further decentralized the central business district. As shown in Figure 22, Portage la Prairie's population growth has been stagnant since 1961, so it is unlikely that there was demand for more economic activity. Rather, it is likely that the fringe development replaced economic activity occurring elsewhere in the city. Still, the development speaks to the ongoing importance of Saskatchewan Avenue for commercial activity for the city and region. Whereas previous changes in development had built up the downtown, this latest shift to big box commercial expansion on the city fringe has (arguably) weakened it.



Not to scale

***Figure 21.* Trans-Canada Highway bypass (west end, 2015).** Source: Google, Inc. (2015).

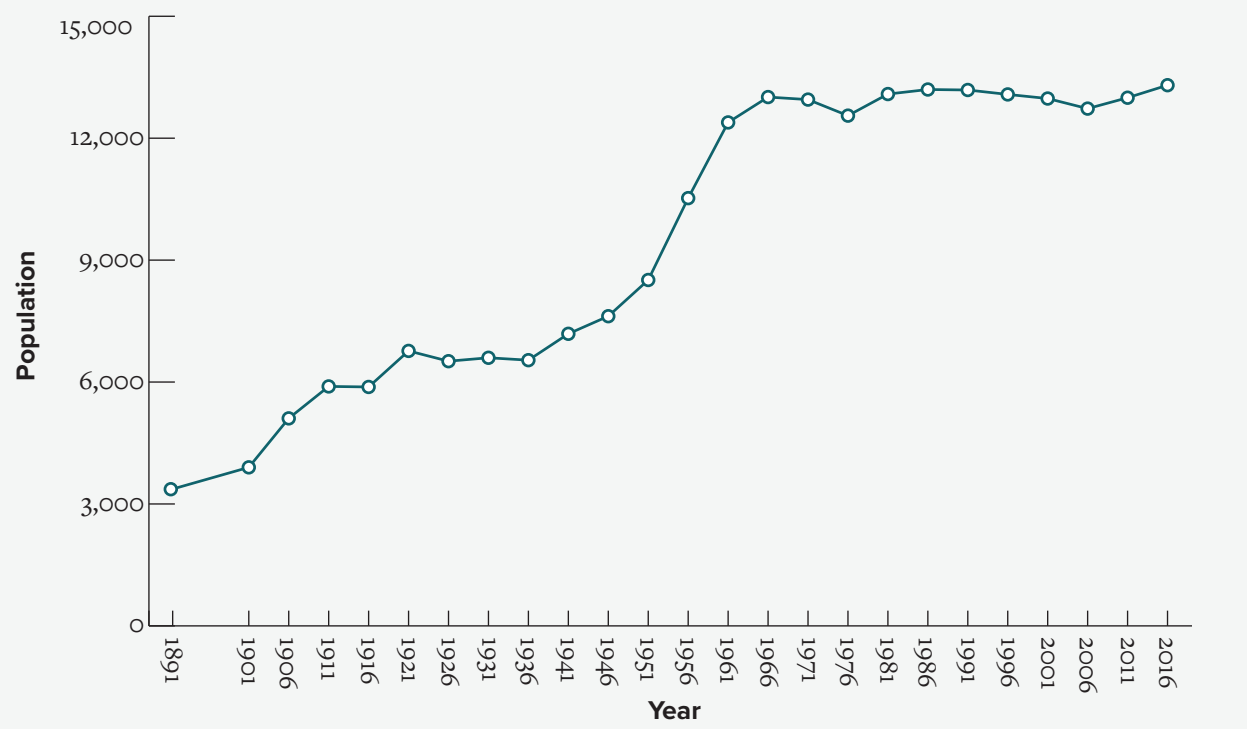


Figure 22. **Population of Portage la Prairie**. Adapted from: Goldsborough, G. (2017). Retrieved from http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/municipalities/portagelaprairie.shtml.

2.3 DEMOGRAPHICS

Long-range population statistics for Portage la Prairie show growth periods pre-World War 1 and post-World War 2, with a relatively steady population of approximately 12,000 to 13,000 since 1961. Population growth from 2011 to 2016 was 2.7%, lower than the province at 5.8% and significantly less than similarly-sized communities like Steinbach and Winkler, shown in Figure 23 (Statistics Canada, 2017c). This is likely part of the national trend of an urbanizing population. Typically, low population growth or population decline outside of large urban areas is often due to migration and aging (Bryant & Joseph, 2001).

Portage la Prairie's population age structure is similar to that of Manitoba's. However, Portage la Prairie has proportionately fewer working-age people aged 15 to 49 and proportionately more retirement-age people aged 55 to 85, shown in Figure 24 (Statistics Canada, 2017c). As Bryant and Joseph (2001) found, the broader trend of urbanization leaves

communities with "deteriorating levels of job opportunities and investment that fuel out-migration" (Bryant & Joseph, 2001, p. 135). When youth leave to further their education, they might not return, and therefore do not contribute much needed labour to the local economy (Bryant & Joseph, 2001).

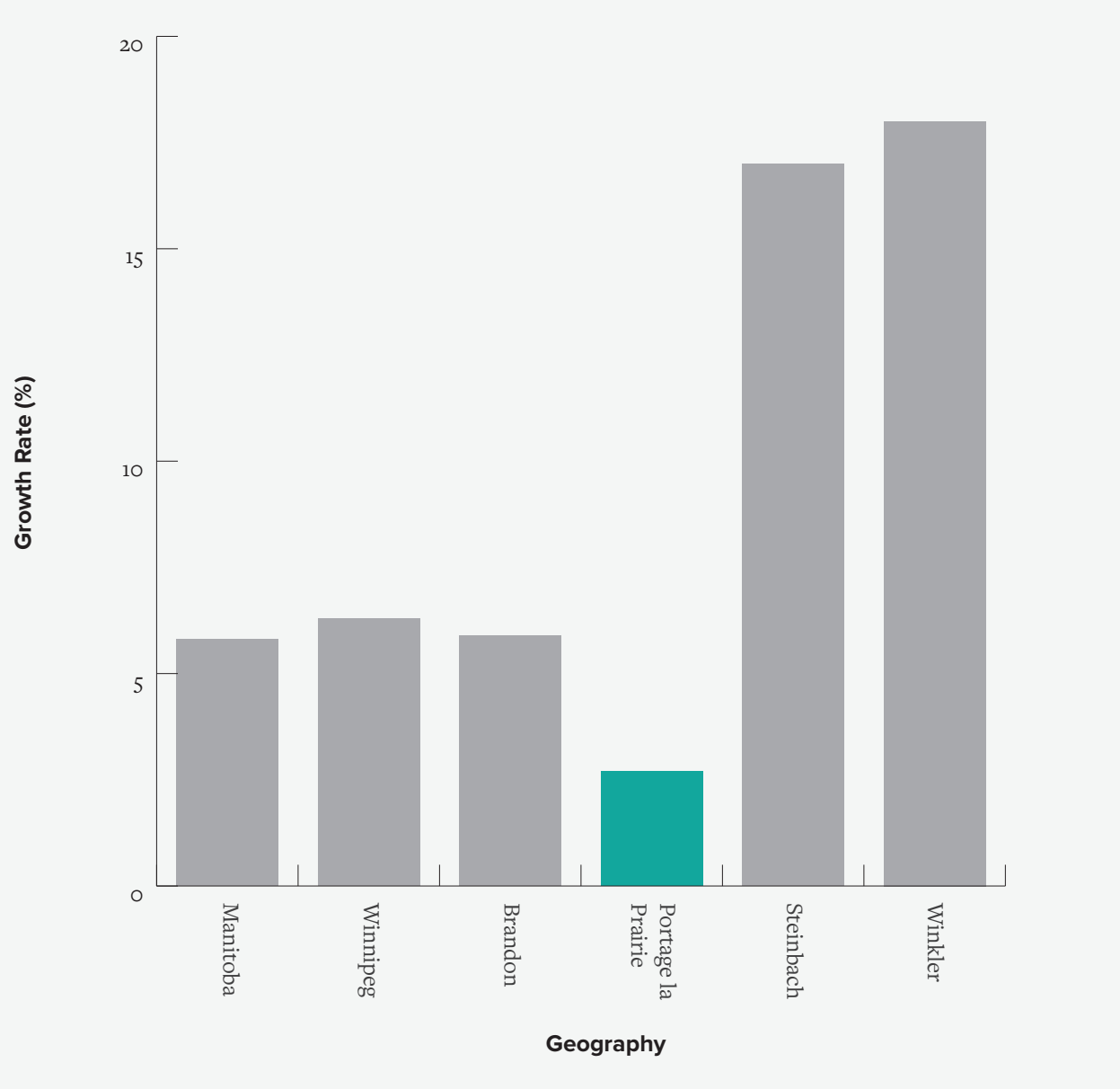


Figure 23. **Population growth in Manitoba.** Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winnipeg, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Steinbach, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Brandon* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winkler, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.

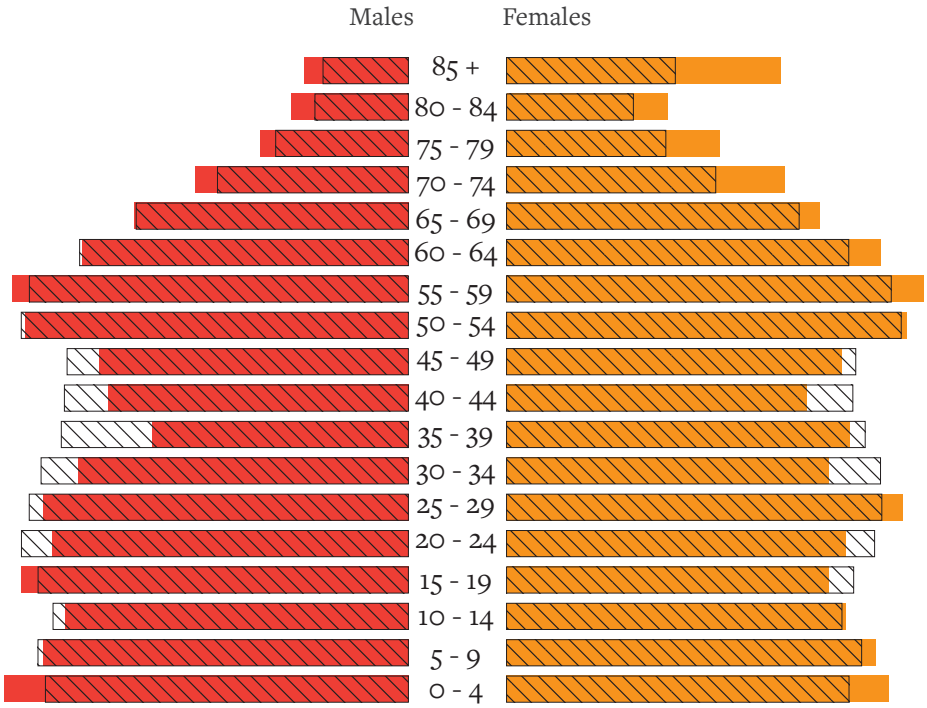


Figure 24. **Age chart.** Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.
Legend: Manitoba Portage la Prairie

In the 2016 census, Statistics Canada reported that much of Canada's population growth was coming from immigrant and Indigenous populations. Portage la Prairie's population has proportionately fewer immigrants and proportionately more Indigenous people compared to Manitoba. In Portage la Prairie, 6% of the population identify as an immigrant compared to 18% in Manitoba, as shown in Figure 25. In Portage la Prairie, 32% of the population identify as having Aboriginal identity compared to 18% in Manitoba, as shown in Figure 26 (Statistics Canada, 2017c). This may be attributed to two factors: a growing off-reserve Indigenous population, fueled by the nearby Long Plain, Dakota Tipi, and Dakota Plains First Nations; and more people self-identifying as Indigenous, particularly following the court decision to include Métis as "Indians" under the Constitution (The Globe and Mail, 2017). Knowing that population growth in Canada can generally be attributed to new immigrant and Indigenous populations, leaders in Portage la Prairie can shape policy, planning, and development to entice these demographics to make Portage la Prairie home.

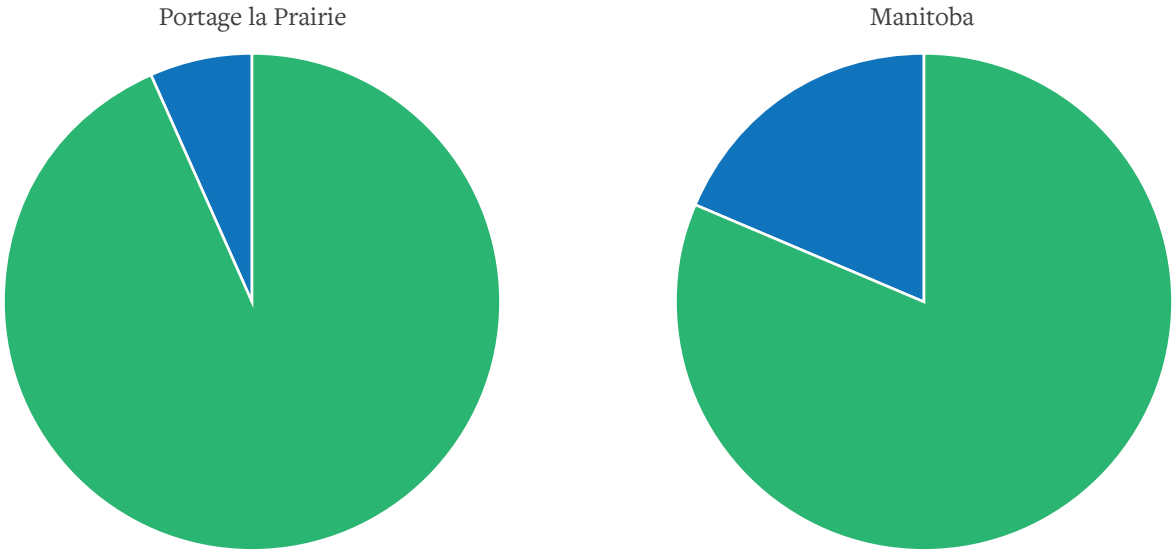


Figure 25. **Immigrant population in Portage la Prairie.** Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.

Legend: Immigrant Non-immigrant

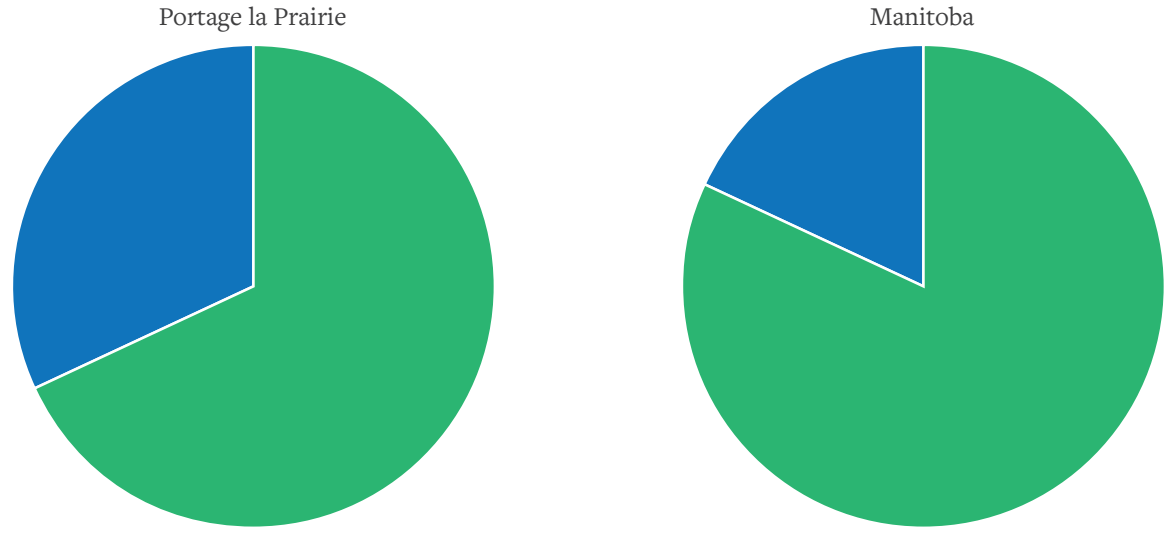


Figure 26. **Indigenous population in Portage la Prairie**. Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.

Legend: Aboriginal Non-Aboriginal

2.4 ECONOMIC INDICATORS

In many small cities, the primary economic engine has evolved over time, from agriculture to manufacturing to services (Lysgård, 2016). The shift to a post-industrial economy is often fraught with difficulties and not all cities come out better for it. In Portage la Prairie, this change is well underway where more people report working in public administration, health, and education industries and fewer in agriculture and manufacturing industries compared to similar Manitoba cities, as shown in Figure 27 (Statistics Canada, 2017c). At the same time,

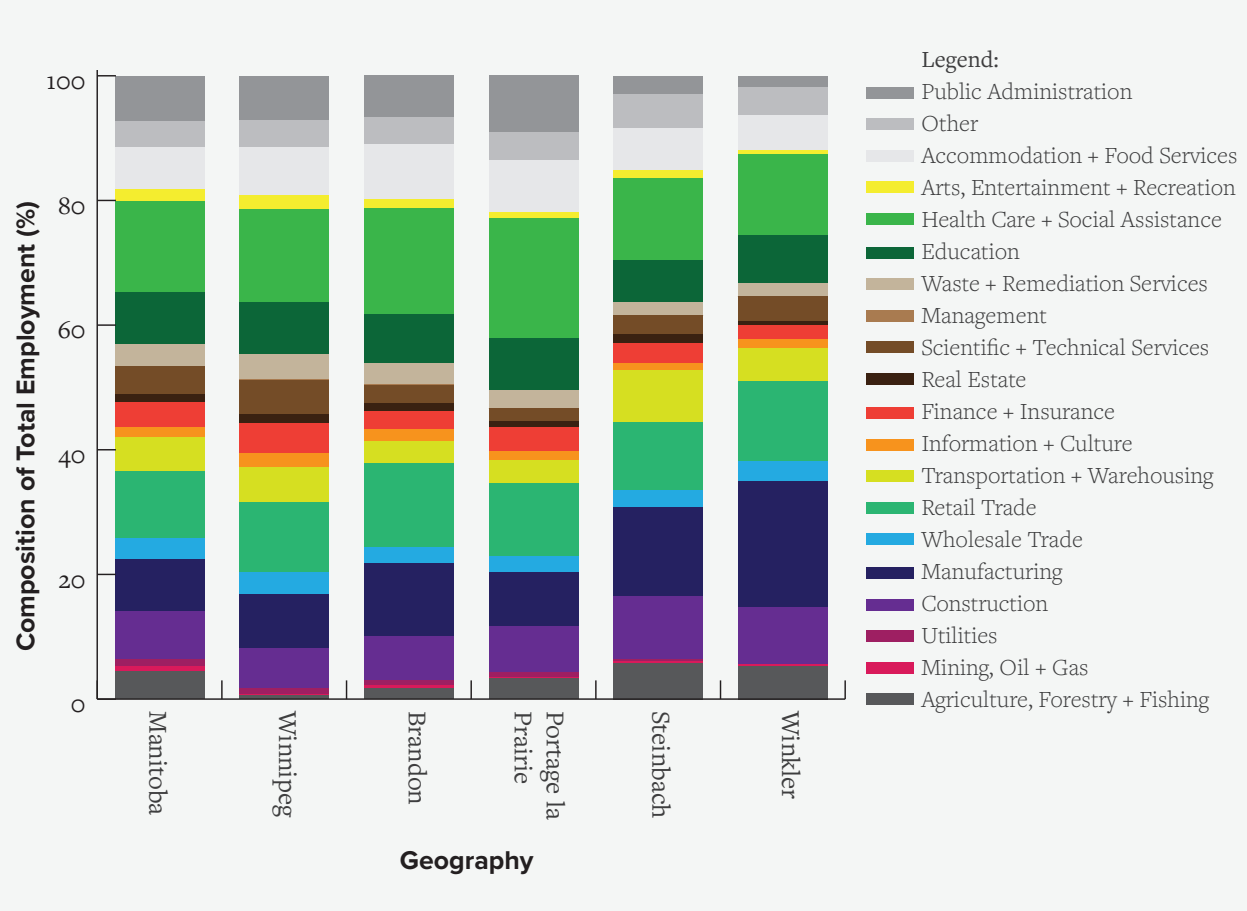


Figure 27. **Employment industries in Manitoba.** Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winnipeg, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Steinbach, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Brandon* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winkler, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.

Portage la Prairie has slightly lower rates of employment and employment participation. It has a slightly higher unemployment rate, as shown in Figure 28 (Statistics Canada, 2017c). This could indicate a mismatch between the predominant industries and existing labour skills or experience. Further, Portage la Prairie residents generally have a lower level of education attainment than Manitobans, as shown in Figure 29 (Statistics Canada, 2017c). Taken together, lower employment and education levels could be worrisome, but Agarwal, Rahman, and Errington (2009) describe economic (i.e., employment) and human (i.e., skills and education) capital as only two important determinants of economic health; additional research beyond the scope of this project could shed more light on the whole economic picture in Portage la Prairie.

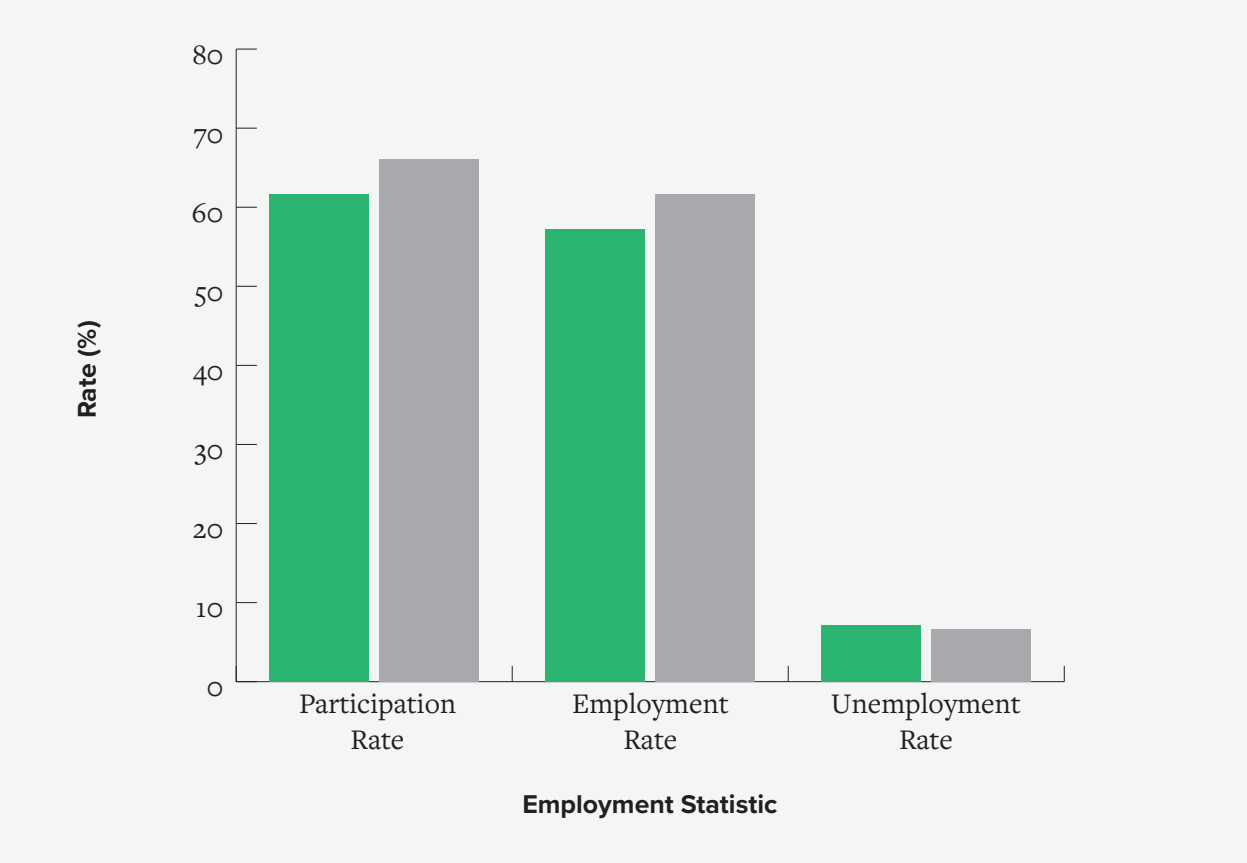


Figure 28. **Labour force status in Portage la Prairie & Manitoba.** Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.
Legend: Manitoba Portage la Prairie

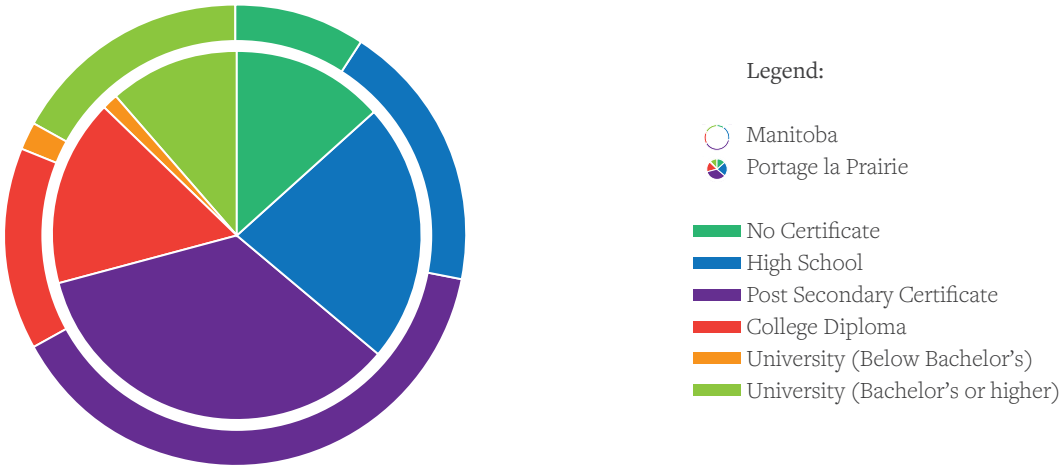


Figure 29. **Education attainment in Portage la Prairie & Manitoba.** Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.

2.5 LAND USE & BUILT FORM

The land use zoning in the research site, as shown in Figure 30, primarily designates commercial use. The Central Commercial Zone is intended to guide "the central business area for a diversity of *uses* including retail, business, social, cultural, residential and *institutional* land *uses*" (City of Portage la Prairie Zoning By-law 10-8492, p. 5-1). The Avenue Commercial Zone is intended to provide

> locations for commercial *uses* that are dependent upon high traffic volumes and access to appropriate transportation thoroughfares and considers the impact of commercial *uses* under this zone on any adjoining residential *uses*. Within this zone, attention is paid to ensuring adequate traffic management measures, adequate parking, and *site* landscaping considerations for aesthetic purposes so as to minimize impact on adjoining *development*, transportation systems and any adjoining residential *uses.* (City of Portage la Prairie Zoning By-law 10-8492, p. 5-1)

A small portion of the study area is zoned for Open Space / Recreational use or Residential Single Family. Land adjacent to the site is zoned for commercial or residential use. Building uses generally conform with their land use zoning designations and most buildings are being used for commercial purposes including offices, retail shopping, restaurants, services, grocers, and hospitality.



Figure 30. **Land use zoning in the research site.** Adapted from: Portage la Prairie Planning District. (2016). *Zoning Map.* Retrieved from http://www.ptgplanningdistrict.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/City-Zoning-Full-Map.pdf.
Legend: C2 Central Commercial; C3 Avenue Commercial; Open Space / Recreational; R1 Residential Single Family; R2 Residential Two Family; R3 Residential Multiple Family

The built form is assembled upon a rectilinear grid street network. Saskatchewan Avenue runs through the centre of the network, acting as a spine for circulation and commerce. Saskatchewan Avenue is a leg of the Trans-Canada Highway, and as such is wider than adjacent streets, accommodating four lanes of through traffic in addition to dedicated parking lanes in some stretches. Blocks along Saskatchewan Avenue are generally 80 metres to 150 metres in length. Intersections in the central downtown area have curb extensions (i.e., bump-outs), which are commonly used to calm traffic and increase pedestrian safety. Building frontages, especially in the central downtown area can be as narrow as 6.5 metres, but newer buildings can be up to 90 metres wide. Further, most buildings are either one or two storeys tall, which combined with the generally minimal setbacks, create a cohesive street section across the site. However, the area west of central downtown tends to have more surface parking lots and larger building setbacks.

2.6 CIRCULATION

Using a car, whether as a driver or passenger, is the predominant mode to commute to work in Portage la Prairie and other small cities where public transit is not an option, though a higher percentage of commuters in Portage la Prairie walk or bike to work than similar communities in Manitoba, as shown in Figure 31. Though most commuters travel within their census subdivision, a percentage of commuters in small cities traveled outside of their census subdivision but within their census division, as shown in Figure 32. Further,

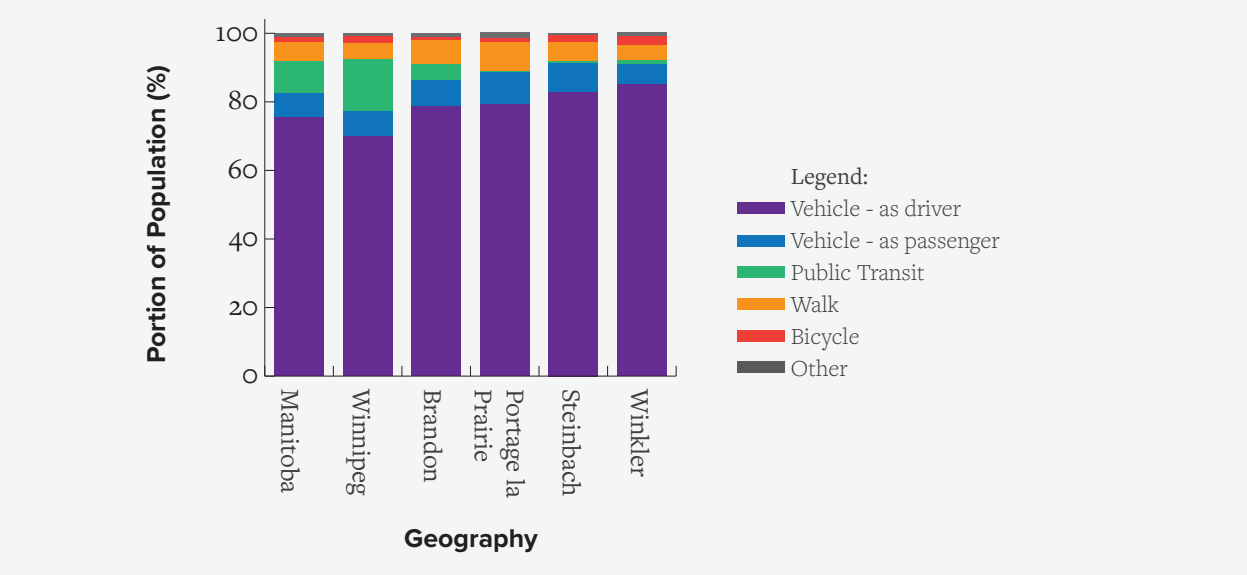


Figure 31. **Mode of commuting in Manitoba.** Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winnipeg, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Steinbach, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Brandon* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winkler, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.

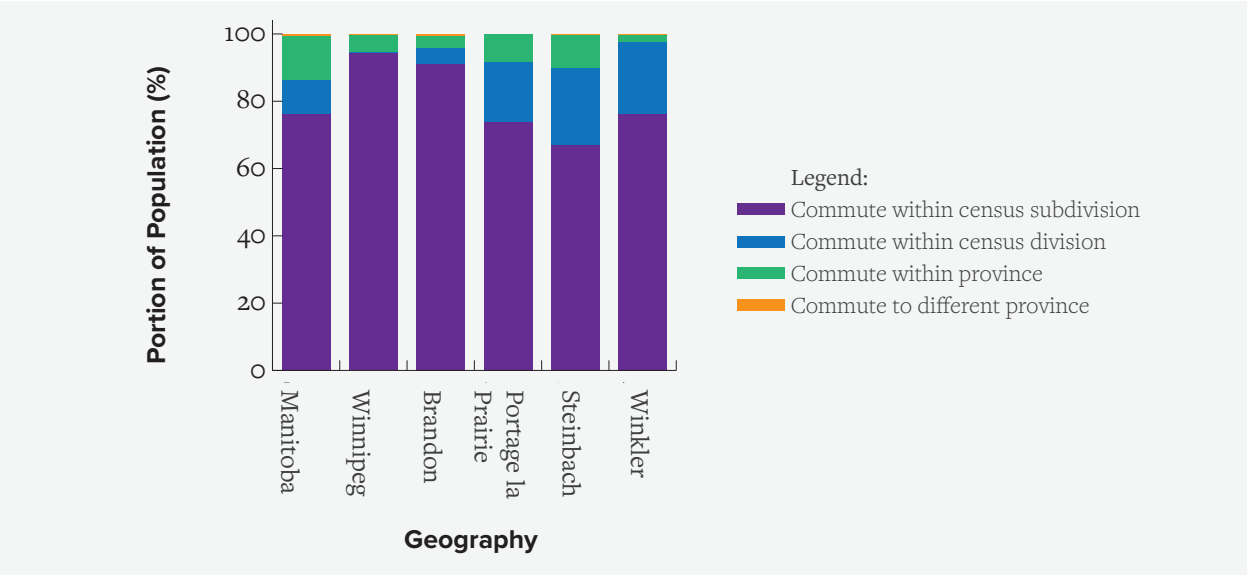


Figure 32. **Commute destination for Portage la Prairie residents.** Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winnipeg, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Steinbach, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Brandon* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winkler, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.

a significant portion of commuters traveled outside their census division but within the province, possibly to larger cities like Winnipeg and Brandon. This indicates that though most commuters stay within the Portage region, there is still an element of dependency on super-regional employment. A higher percentage of commuters in small cities had a commute under 15 minutes compared to Winnipeg and Brandon, as shown in Figure 33. However, a higher percentage of commuters from Portage la Prairie and Steinbach spent more than an hour traveling. Taken together, this could indicate a small cohort of people commuting longer distances to work in places like Winnipeg.

Saskatchewan Avenue is the highest-order road in Portage la Prairie, with two travel lanes in each direction, median turning lanes, and dedicated lanes for street parking. The speed limit is 50 kilometres per hour. Adjacent streets are arranged in an imperfect grid network intersecting regularly with Saskatchewan Avenue. According to Jacobs (1961) a street network like this, with frequent intersections and short blocks, leads to more opportunities for interaction and slower vehicle traffic, contributing to a pleasant pedestrian experience. Further, residential areas between the railway and Crescent Lake are within a five-minute walk of the amenities along Saskatchewan Avenue via sidewalks.

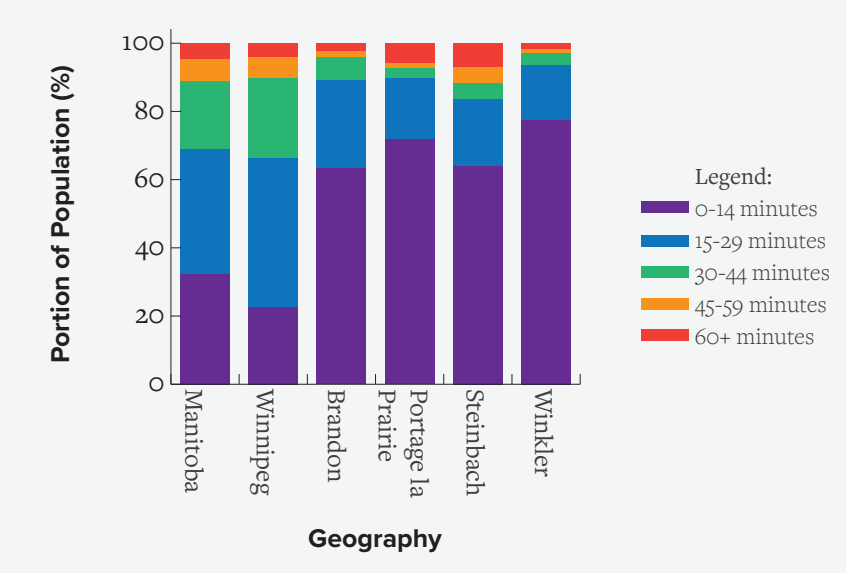


Figure 33. **Commute duration for Portage la Prairie residents.** Source: Statistics Canada. (2017). *Portage la Prairie* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winnipeg, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Steinbach, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Brandon* [*Population centre*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E; *Winkler, CY* [*Census subdivision*], *Manitoba and Manitoba* [*Province*] (*table*). Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E.

2.7 PLANNING & POLICY CONTEXT

Planning in Portage la Prairie is shaped by a combination of provincial legislation and municipal bylaws. The Province of Manitoba uses three main policies to guide local development: The Provincial Land Use Policies (PLUPs) establish broad, consistent, high-level planning goals for the province (Province of Manitoba, 2009); the Planning Act sets out planning regulations, procedures, and responsibilities (Province of Manitoba, 2018); and the Municipal Act defines the extent of power for municipal governments (Province of Manitoba, 2017);. Under the Planning Act, municipalities may band together to form regional planning districts. The City of Portage la Prairie and the surrounding Rural Municipality of Portage la Prairie have done so to form the Portage la Prairie Planning District. The Planning District administers regional development plan, building and zoning bylaws, building inspections, permits, conditional uses, and variations. It is governed by a board comprised of representatives from each municipality (Portage la Prairie Planning District, 2018).

The *Portage la Prairie Planning District Development Plan* (2006) discusses intentions and associated policies for the city including specific topic areas like the downtown, retailing, and Saskatchewan Avenue. In addition, the City of Portage la Prairie created its own plan, the *15 Year Community Sustainable Development Plan,* in which it earmarked ten million dollars toward downtown improvements (City of Portage la Prairie, 2016).

2.7.1 STAKEHOLDER ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to the provincial, regional, and municipal bodies mentioned above, several local groups are actively involved in planning and economic development in Portage la Prairie. Portage Regional Economic Development promotes investment across the region to spur economic development. Portage la Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce is a business association that advocates on behalf of the business community.

2.8 PRECEDENT CITIES

2.8.1 PRECEDENT CITY SELECTION

Prior to selecting precedent cities, I defined a set of Portage la Prairie's attributes that, ideally, would be reflected in the precedent cities as well and prioritized the criteria as important, somewhat important, or desirable, as shown in Table 1. I had hoped to keep these criteria constant and use population growth rate as a variable, however this did not come to fruition due the limited numbers of communities that agreed to participate in the research.

CRITERIUM	PARAMETER
Population	8,000 - 45,000
Distance From Population Centre	35 km +
Planning Goals	Downtown Revitalization
Completion Date	5 Years +

Table 1. **Precedent city selection criteria.**

Important factors included population, distance to major centre, design plan age, and plan focus. I define a small city as having a population of 8,000 – 45,000 people for the purposes of this research and I aimed to study cities with a population as close to that of Portage la Prairie as possible. Second, I aimed to study cities at least 35 kilometres, ideally 75 kilometres, from a population centre of 100,000 or more people to reflect the nature of more remote small cities that are not fully dependent on major centres for jobs, shopping, and amenities. The third important factor was design plan age. I aimed to study cities that had implemented their plan at least five years ago to allow some time for real-world results and perspective from participants. Lastly, I aimed to focus on cities where downtown revitalization and economic development were explicit goals in their planning documents.

To find precedent cities that fit my criteria, I first used Statistics Canada information to create a list of cities within the set population range (see Appendix V). I then narrowed these cities down to those which had design plans or urban design guidelines available online, leaving me with fourteen cities to examine further. I eliminated four for being too close to major centres and two for having double-digit population growth which is not typical of

small Canadian cities, potentially skewing research findings. Three more were eliminated because their plans were created within the past five years. The remaining five cities met all the important criteria, so I contacted municipal planning and economic development staff via email using online directories to gauge interest in participating in my research. Staff in one city declined due to a commitment to another research project and staff in another did not respond, leaving Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Kenora, Ontario, and Port Colborne, Ontario. A summary comparing the precedent cities and Portage la Prairie can be found in Table 2.

	PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE	PRINCE RUPERT	KENORA	PORT COLBORNE
Population (2016)	12.949	12,687	10,687	15,037
% Population Change (2011-2016)	2.7%	-3%	-3%	0%
Population Density	1373.5 people/km^2	54.2 people/km^2	796.3 people/km^2	1275.6 people/km^2
Distance From Population Centre	85 km (Winnipeg)	718 km (Prince George)	209 km (Winnipeg)	35 km (St. Catharines)
Design Plan	-	Downtown Development Permit Area Design Guidelines	Kenora Downtown Revitalization	Olde Humberstone Community Improvement Plan
Completion Date	-	2009	2004	2008
Goals	-	To enhance: • pedestrian activity, • amenities, • safety, • identity, and • sense of place	• improved wayfinding, • inviting pedestrian realm, • universal accessibility, • attractive to tourists & residents, • safe, • engaged with lake, • consider climate, • appealing for investment	• ensuring Main Street becomes a vibrant, attractive, and walkable focal point for tourism, • the village core should be memorable for residents and tourists

Table 2. **Comparison of research sites.**

2.8.2 PRINCE RUPERT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Prince Rupert is a port city on the Pacific Coast in central British Columbia. In 2016 its population was 12,687, a 3% decline from 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2017d). At 54.2 people per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2017d), its population density is the lowest of the cities examined. Prince Rupert is the most remote of the cities examined; it is 718 kilometres from the nearest population centre, Prince George. Its design plan, *Downtown Development Permit Area Design Guidelines,* was completed in 2009. The plan includes a streetscaping master plan, design guidelines for historic, commercial, and infill buildings, streetscaping design guidelines, and landscaping design guidelines. Its stated goals include enhancing pedestrian activity, amenities, safety, identity, and sense of place. Objectives include guiding the urban form to embrace buildings with minimal setbacks, frontage that is permeable to passersby, and off-street parking hidden from view (City of Prince Rupert, 2009). The plan replaces 1994's *Downtown Development Guidelines* and accompanies 2008's *Quality of Life Community Plan* (City of Prince Rupert, 2009, p. 1).

2.8.3 KENORA, ONTARIO

Kenora is a cottage-country city on the shores of Lake of the Woods in northwestern Ontario. In 2016 its population was 10,687, the smallest of the cities examined and saw a 3% decline from 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Its population density was 796.3 people per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2017a) and it is 209 kilometres from the nearest population centre, Winnipeg. Its design plan, *Kenora Downtown Revitalization,* was completed in 2004. The plan encompasses infrastructure, traffic and pedestrian movement, heritage preservation, image and branding, public-private partnership opportunities, and implementation steps. Its stated goals include improved wayfinding, visitors can easily park their cars before walking to destinations, an inviting pedestrian realm, and universal accessibility. The urban realm should be interesting, stimulating, memorable, attractive for both tourists and residents, clean, safe, engaged with the lake, considerate of the climate, and appealing for investment (City of

Kenora, 2004). The plan accompanies 2017's *Harbourtown Centre Community Improvement Plan* and 2015's *City of Kenora Official Plan* (City of Kenora, n.d.).

2.8.4 PORT COLBORNE, ONTARIO

Located on the shores of Lake Erie in southern Ontario, Port Colborne is the largest city I examined. In 2016 its population was 15,037, about the same as it was in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2017b). Its population density was 1275.6 people per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2017b), the highest of the precedent cities, but still short of Portage la Prairie. Of the cities examined, it is the most proximate to a population centre; it is 35.2 kilometres from St. Catharines. Its design plan, *Olde Humberstone Community Improvement Plan,* was completed in 2008. The plan encompasses infrastructure, transportation, parking, and municipal administration. Its stated goals include ensuring its Main Street becomes a vibrant, attractive, and walkable focal point for tourism, while the village core should be memorable for residents and tourists. The plan employs design principles centred on sustainability (City of Port Colborne, 2008). The plan accompanies Port Colborne's various other Community Improvement Plans, heritage preservation initiatives, and 2013's *City of Port Colborne Official Plan* (City of Port Colborne, n.d.).

2.9 SUMMARY

This chapter delved into the main research site, downtown Portage la Prairie, including its development history, demographics, economic indicators, land use, built form, circulation, and planning context. It then provided an overview of the precedent cities, Prince Rupert, Kenora, and Port Colborne.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 SMALL CITIES

Small cities occupy a unique place in the Canadian urban fabric: they are neither celebrated metropolitan hubs nor inconsequential peripheral places. All over the globe they are important nodes in the urban fabric, providing essential services, goods, employment opportunities, and connections to transportation for residents both local and regional (Wirth, Volker, Muller, & Yamamoto, 2016, p. 62). However, their traditional roles as "social, cultural, administrative, communication, shopping and business centres," (Wirth et al., 2016, p. 62) are being eroded by changing and/or declining population. This may be exacerbated as technology permeates daily life and threatens to supplant the dominance of physical spaces for social, communication, and shopping functions.

While these trends are true on a broad scale, Bryant and Joseph (2001) caution against conceptualizing small settlements as homogeneous. Wirth et al. (2016) note that, while some

small centres are prospering, especially those proximal to larger centres, "thereby profiting from urban sprawl effects," (p. 62) many others are declining. They see fewer job opportunities, social erosion, aging demographics, and reduced capacity for positive change (p. 63). Therefore, to understand the heterogeneity of small cities, one must unearth local commentaries (Bryant & Joseph, 2001). Even as some centres lose their traditional roles, Wirth et al. (2016, p. 64) point to a number of advantages they may have over larger centres: better quality of life and public security; closer-knit social networks; shorter lines of communication; and nimbler decision-making processes. In this sense, physical development and planning in a rural small town in necessarily different from that in a large metropolis.

Hodge and Qadeer (1983, p 162-164) identify four dimensions of physical development to consider in the rural context. The *scale* of town population and land area is small; within this smallness, though, is a mix of land uses, activities, occupations, and buildings. It follows that planning problems and solutions are small in scale as well, though not easy or unimportant. The *range* of activities within a town is often limited and new development, whether residential, industrial, or commercial, often follows the existing pattern rather than attempting unproven typologies. The *intensity* of development in towns is generally low but may put increased pressure on existing services and infrastructure. The *pace* of development tends to be intermittent, as a single development can meet local demand for several years; development and growth is best measured in real numbers, not percentage change over time.

Given these four dimensions of physical development, Swanson (1985) identified four major participants involved in development in small cities: residents, policy makers at all levels of government, practitioners (e.g., planners, developers, and engineers), and academics. He emphasizes the quandary that local residents, decision-makers, and practitioners face; they may know the most about their city but lack the capacity to reverse negative change. These actors are faced with a multitude of potential planning approaches. Comprehensive-rational planning recognizes the interconnected nature of the modern world and those who follow this approach attempt to account for all variables in its processes. This approach aims to objectively

determine an all-encompassing set of goals, problems, and solutions. In theory, this approach leads to the best possible results for all involved due to its sweeping scope, though critics point out its impracticality and the unequal distributions of resources, power, and money. Lindblom's (1959) conception of incrementalism, in contrast, prioritizes smaller achievable steps that improve a situation rather than large-scale plans (p. 79-80). This is particularly applicable in the rural small-town context where time, civic capacity, and financial resources are limited, though "incrementalism is a more practical necessity than a desirable model to be followed" (Cullingworth & Nadin, 2002, p. 4-7). Swanson (1985) argues that actors should select planning and development approaches that work well for their unique contexts. They should consider the public will, capacity, and effort required to make positive change in the built environment (p. 171).

3.2 MAIN STREETS

In many small cities, the commercial "Main Street is the principal thoroughfare … and accordingly has a defined status within the hierarchy of a local geography" (Orvell, 2012, p. 3). Settlements were organized outward from Main Street, where commercial and civic functions centralized. Traditional Main Streets served citizens' "basic survival, communication and entertainment needs and [performed] several political, religious, commercial, civic and social functions" (Mehta, 2014, p. 55). Further, Mehta (2014) argues that public spaces like Main Streets have four main social roles: "as an arena for public life; as a meeting place for different social groups; as a space for the display of symbols and images in society; as a part of the communication system between urban activities" (p. 55). This alludes to the notion that Main Street is simultaneously a built form and an abstract manifestation of social life. Orvell (2012) argues that a small city Main Street is not only a built form, but also "a cultural icon in our society. It is the dual reality of Main Street—as place and as idea—that gives it its centrality in [sic] culture" (p. 3). Since the place and idea of Main Street are interconnected, they build and reinforce each other over time in the cultural milieu.

However, in modern Western societies, many traditional roles of public space are increasingly served by private corporations, technology is transforming social life and daily routines, and commercial main streets are declining. At the same time, good public spaces remain vital for facilitating daily social interactions, commercial functions, neighbourhood identity (Lawton, 2007; Mehta, 2011; Mehta, 2014) and for the larger "social and psychological health of modern communities" (Mehta, 2014, p. 56). When small cities decline, it is most visible on Main Street. Vacant commercial storefronts and deteriorating civic infrastructure weaken Main Street as place and idea. But is the reverse also true? When Main Street is revitalized, does it spur positive change in the whole community?

The problems facing Portage la Prairie's downtown main street are not unique; many North American towns and cities' downtowns have experienced decline since their heyday. In the late nineteenth century, retailing grew in many North American settlements due to spatial centralization of settlements and economic prosperity (Robertson, 1997, p. 384). With the proliferation of the electric streetcar around this time, downtowns became the most accessible part of cities and downtown retailers' market areas grew. Further, economic prosperity during this time meant people had more disposable income, thereby strengthening the retail sector (Robertson, 1997, p. 384). The process of centralization played out slightly differently in Portage la Prairie since it never had streetcars, but nevertheless, its retail and civic functions centralized along the Saskatchewan Trail – present day Saskatchewan Avenue – during this time as discussed in Section 2.2.

Throughout North America, downtown retailing peaked in the 1920s and declined through the rest of the twentieth century. By the 1950s, the personal automobile was the preferred mode of transportation and cities experienced decentralization of many functions, retailing included, often taking the form of enclosed suburban malls (Robertson, 1997, p. 384-5). In Portage la Prairie, the trend took hold a couple decades later: its mall was built in the 1970s (Green, 2016). Malls proved to be popular because, unlike downtown Main Streets, people perceived them to be safe, clean, easy to drive to, and easy to park at. In recent years as cities

are considered how best to revitalize their downtowns, many looked to the suburban mall for inspiration (Robertson, 1997, p. 385).

3.3 REVITALIZATION

3.3.1 CONCEPTUALIZING REVITALIZATION

After decades of decline, many cities are taking action to revitalize their downtowns. But Palen and London (1984) caution that the term *revitalize* implies that the change at hand is inherently good. Language, whether it is *revitalization, gentrification, back-to-the-city,* or any number of other terms, can be used to frame the same phenomenon and to "shape and create our perceptions of the world around us" (Palen & London, 1984, p. 6). This is not to say one term is better than another, but rather to be sensitive to the fact that what one actor describes as an improvement another may describe as an imposition. The focus of my discussion is on the deliberate actions initiated by actors intended create positive physical and economic change in a given place.

3.3.2 DOWNTOWN RETAILING & SUBURBAN MALLS

Robertson (1997) draws comparisons back to the suburban mall to understand which aspects of malls drew people away from downtown retailing in the first place and which might inspire them to return. He argues the formula for malls results in predicable physical features including "a climate controlled and inward-orientated structure where access to most mall establishments is limited to a single entrance off an interior pedestrian street" (p. 386). Goss (1993) likens these interior streets to "the traditional urbanism" seen in Europe or New England (p. 23) because they are "designed to sustain-relaxed strolling, window-shopping, and people-watching- seem reminiscent of flanerie, the progress of the voyeuristic dandy who strolled the streets and arcades of Paris in the nineteenth century" (p. 35). For Robertson (1997), these highly controlled interior spaces are meant to embody an "idealized image of a streetscape ... that is free of disorder, of vehicular traffic, of pollution, or intrusion of weather

and, most importantly, of the presence of lower-class individuals," in an effort to entice people to spend more money at the mall (p. 386). He argues that certain attributes of suburban malls, like their controlled designs, retail mix, and organization, may work to revitalize downtown retailing.

Robertson (1997) identified a variety of retail revitalization strategies that have been deployed, to varying degrees of success, including pedestrian malls, festival marketplaces, indoor shopping centres, and main street programmes. A pedestrian mall is a defined strip of a downtown street where pedestrians are prioritized above vehicles. Though this is reminiscent of European plazas, pedestrian malls in North America are generally focused on revitalizing the retail sector and are not "tied more closely to conservation of the city fabric and improvement in downtown residential conditions," (Robertson, 1997, p. 388). Robertson found that these malls, outside of a few examples close to existing high-pedestrian-traffic areas, largely failed because it was unrealistic to expect one street closure to have a rippling effect throughout downtown, it was difficult to attract retailers back from shopping malls, and they could not fully replicate all the elements that make shopping malls successful.

Festival marketplaces leverage unique aspects of the urban form to differentiate themselves from the suburban, including historic buildings, historic districts, and waterfront amenities. Successful festival marketplaces have a unique hook (e.g., historic district, waterfront site), a large regional population base, and an established tourism base. Though they can be successful in larger cities, mid-sized cities often struggle to attract enough people, subsidies are often used to keep them financial solvent, and a proliferation of them throughout North America have turned them from unique to commonplace (Robertson, 1997, p. 391). In contrast, a downtown indoor shopping centre copies many aspects from suburban shopping malls, but the form tends go up instead of spreading out. Downtown malls often require significant financial incentives from government to work and do not necessarily generate the turn-around for the surrounding area people expect (Robertson, 1997, p. 394).

3.3.3 MAIN STREET PROGRAMMES

Robertson (1997) argues that the main street programme is a more relevant scheme for smaller cities. This approach was deployed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States and by the Heritage Canada Foundation (HCF), now called the National Trust for Canada. Both focus on organizational development, marketing, design, and economic development to revitalize downtown main streets (Heritage Canada Foundation, 2009; Robertson, 1997). For the HCF (2009), organizational development refers to the community-led process which builds capacity in local coordinators, volunteers, and merchants. While local talent is supported by the provincial program, they are in charge of engaging stakeholders, building consensus, setting goals, and implementing an action plan (p. 10). Marketing and promotion are important to create a positive image of downtown by building on the strengths and traditions of the community to entice commercial activity and investment (p. 13).
The main street programme helps communities enhance the physical appearance of their commercial districts by offering professional advice on façade improvements, infill options, streetscaping, historic preservation, and adaptive reuse (p. 13). Lastly, the approach fosters economic development through "competitive management, business recruitment, real-estate principles, tourism development, and through the appropriate use of planning, legislation, funding and incentive programs" (p. 14).

3.4 ECONOMIES IN SMALL CITIES

3.4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC & ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

Traditionally, a city's downtown acted as its economic core, with a mix of businesses offering a range of goods and services to a regional market along with a concentration of employment opportunities. At the same time, it was a social, cultural, and civic hub, with churches, tourist attractions, heritage, museums, theatres, courthouses, hospitals, and the like. As such, "a city is often judged by the economic, social and cultural vitality of its downtown" (Hernandez & Jones, 2005, p. 789). Small cities often struggle to maintain downtown vitality as they grapple

with ongoing demographic and economic restructuring.

As Bryant and Joseph (2001) found, the broader trend of urbanization leaves communities with

> deteriorating levels of job opportunities and investment that fuel out-migration. Youth also leave these communities because of lack of higher education opportunities. The exodus of youth is also a withdrawal of potential entrepreneurial resources, particularly given the importance of small and medium sized businesses in the country's economy in the past quarter century. (p. 135)

Lysgård (2016) points to economic shifts "from agriculture and manufacturing to a more service-centered economy," and "from a production-oriented culture to a more consumption-based focus on rural living" (p. 1). Further, the retail and service-based industries that should work well downtown have been "eroded by more than three decades of retail suburbanization" (Hernandez & Jones, 2005, p. 792), meaning the businesses that might have normally locate along Main Street are being shuttered due to large format retailing on the city's fringes. Lastly, small cities must now also contend with competition from larger urban centres that draw consumers away from their local retailers (Hernandez & Jones, 2005, p. 795). Taken together, small cities are experiencing shrinking local and regional market populations, dwindling human capacity, increasing competition from urban centres, and the need to make major economic pivots to new sectors to remain viable. But they are not doomed. By focusing on their enduring strengths and assets, small cities can reverse their fortunes.

3.4.2 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

Agarwal et al. (2009) and Lin (2001) discuss five types of capital that small cities can exploit to make positive contributions to their economic situations. First, economic capital is the "capital resources that are invested and mobilized in pursuit of profit" (Lin, 2001, p. 3) and includes concepts like productivity, employment, investment, and innovation (Agarwal, et al., 2009). Second, human capital is "the value added to a laborer when the laborer acquires knowledge, skills and other assets useful to the employer or firm in the production and exchange processes" (Lin, 2001, p. 5). This includes concepts like education and skills, but also

entrepreneurship, migration, housing, and quality of life (Agarwal, et al., 2009). Third, social capital "refers to the connections among individuals and social networks and to reciprocity which arises from these connections" (Agarwal et al., 2009, p. 310), including concepts like trust, autonomy, and cooperation. The fourth type, cultural capital, lacks a unified definition, but often refers to heritage, place identity, and civic engagement (Agarwal et al., 2009). Lastly, environmental capital includes natural resources, remoteness, maintenance costs, pollution, and congestion (Agarwal et al., 2009).

It is also important to distinguish which facets of the five types of capital are endogenous, or locally produced, as opposed to exogenous, or externally determined (Agarwal et al., 2009). For instance, a city's heritage buildings are endogenous because they were produced and are maintained locally, whereas its public education curriculum is exogenous because it is largely controlled at by the provincial government. Cities can begin to address their economic potential by inventorying their economic, human, social, cultural, and environmental capital. They can then categorize which factors are under local control and which are external. Finally, they can analyze how to leverage their capital to positively contribute to their economic development.

3.4.3 COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The notion of a bottom-up approach to development in rural areas is not new, but the extent and pace of economic and demographic restructuring emphasizes the need for local actors to play larger roles (Markey, 2005). The Community Economic Development (CED) model aims to improve communities through "structural economic change, local ownership of resources, social development, environmental stewardship, labour market development, and access to capital" (Canadian Community Economic Development Network [CCED-Net], n.d. p. 1), often taking the form of social enterprises or cooperatives. This model is used variety of contexts – international development and in the revitalization of inner-city neighbourhoods especially – where change must be driven by and sustainable for the local populations. In the

rural context, Frank and Hibbard (2016) note that communities are empowered through social learning to change their "economic development, governance, and social development" (p. 6) outcomes. When the line between planning and development blurs, for them, community plans must address a range of issues outside the typical realms of planning. These may include "immigration, food sector, environmental standards, [and the] agricultural sector" since there are strong links "among physical, economic, and social development, including the traditional sectors of land use planning, design of the built environment, and economic development" (p. 6).

Though CED is often conceptualized as a bottom-up process, Markey (2005) emphasizes the roles the local governments and institutions can play: "local governments are major economic actors; they represent large workforces and provide local populations with goods and services; and they play a significant planning function that influences the structure, forms, location and performance of the economy" (p. 360). Institutions meanwhile, including private sector and non-government organizations, can contribute to community democracy and organization (Markey, 2005). In rural communities that have lost any sense of control over their fate, Hibbard (1986) suggests that the social learning approach can use local social structures to empower residents to make positive change. After achievable community goals are established, local people and social structures set out to solve problems, thereby improving both the community and the capacity of its citizens (p. 196-197).

3.5 PLACEMAKING

Perhaps the declines of small cities, of downtowns, and of Main Streets are for good reason. Perhaps their economic and social roles have been replaced over the decades. Perhaps it is better to give in than to fight for obsolete places. After all, change is inevitable and "every cultural landscape has evolved, sometimes violently, more often slowly, over the centuries. … Signs of abandoned or superseded spatial organizations surround us" (Jackson, 1984, p. 67-68). On the other hand, a slow decline, like that seen in small cities, might indicate a long series

of incremental, forgotten, ill-conceived decisions and choices (Hayden, 1995; Jackson, 1984). If that is the case, and since these places have not been fully abandoned, these places might not be obsolete, but simply lack the ongoing, intentional, thoughtful, and positive attention required to keep places viable, notions central to placemaking (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995).

3.5.1 PLACEMAKING & PLACE IDENTITY

For Schneekloth and Shibley (1995), "placemaking is the way all of us as human beings transform the places in which we find ourselves into places in which we live," but it "is not just about the relationship of people *to* their places; it also creates relationships *among* people in places" (p. 1). Hayden (1995) highlights the complexity that arises when one attempts to describe the interactions amongst people and places. As people form an attachment to a place, they invest in its spatial, social, cultural, political, and economic attributes. Schneekloth and Shibley (1995) argue that places are symbols or physical manifestations of society, which in turn shape society's perception of a place's identity. When our Main Street is idle, empty, ignored, and crumbling, we assume our community is as well. But the reverse is also true. When places are the beneficiaries of care and attention, they acquire "the power of self-fulfilling prophecy: The positive assumption of emerging social health frame the actions that created such health" (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995, p. 174).

Given the intertwining spatial, social, cultural, political, and economic nature of public space, it follows that the process of placemaking can be contentious. The process must be open and inclusive since "the inclusion and exclusion of peoples and knowledges frame all action by limiting what can be known and who is empowered to make decisions" (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995, p. 14). The process should avoid tokenism and strive for inclusive cultural citizenship and a sense of cultural belonging (Hayden, 1995, p. 8). In doing so, places embody both the personal and collective memories of their inhabitants: "urban landscapes are storehouses for these social memories, because natural features such as hills or harbors, as well as streets, buildings, and patterns of settlement, frame the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes"

(Hayden, 1995, p. 9).

Placemaking is also an ongoing, mundane, and incremental process (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995, p. 191). With every small change, decision, and choice, a place evolves, sometimes to its benefit, sometimes to its detriment. Even though a single tidied-up playground or renovated storefront will not, on its own, mark a dramatic shift in a place, it is a meaningful contribution to its identity. Small actions support the placemaking process and in turn create a sense of ownership for participants. As Schneekloth and Shibley put it, "to decide to be someplace as members of a community demands that we become active placemakers again, that we participate with others in our communities in thoughtful, careful, responsible action" (p. 18).

3.5.2 URBAN PLACE MARKETING

While placemaking is the local, inward process of discovering and celebrating place identity, place marketing is the outward strategy to capitalize on that identity. Though it lacks a simple definition, Warnaby, Bennison, Davies, and Hughes (2002) describe urban place marketing in three dimensions: collaboration to strengthen commercial activity, meeting people's needs of a place, and commodifying a place's positive attributes (p. 878-879). The last of these, the commodification dimension, is a culmination of placemaking and community economic development. After collaborating to ascertain a local, internal, positive place identity, that identity is marketed beyond the place's limits to attract external people and investment. This identity might include aspects of a place's economic, human, social, cultural, and environmental capital (Agarwal et al., 2009) to build on its emerging cycle of renewal. However, Hubbard (1995) argues that "rather than simply extolling the virtues of a given city, current approaches to place marketing typically try to reimage or re-invent the city, weaving 'place myths' which are designed to make the city attractive as a site for external investment" (p. 244). Further, these advertising campaigns often coincide with major urban redevelopments, such as waterfront renewal projects. Though place marketing has been

criticized as a disingenuous attempt to attract investment and tourist activity at the expense of local concerns, Hubbard argues they have become key strategies for post-industrial cities.

3.6 URBAN DESIGN THEORY

Cities as physical manifestations can be explained through three arms of theory. First, planning or decision theory attempts to understand how and why decisions are made, or the process of city-building. Second, functional theory attempts to understand how and why the built form functions. Last, normative theory attempts to understand connections between values and urban form, or what makes for good a city (Lynch, 1981). These three types of theory are interdependent – the process of city-building, function of cities, and values that make a good city all go hand-in-hand. Lynch (1981) asserts, however, that the first and second of these are well-documented and discussed, and the third is not: "There is dogma and there is opinion, but there is not systematic effort to state general relationships between the form of a place and its value." (p.99). We see this through the waxing and waning of planning movements over the last century or so: Garden City, Neo-rationalism, Townscape, Humanist Planning, Modernism, post-Modernism, New Urbanism, and Smart Cities. Some of these repackage ideas from others, some developed in reaction to others, and some offer something new to the field, but none are perfect. The common thread through these movements is an attempt to make better cities, and ultimately, better experiences for city-dwellers.

3.6.1 EXPERIENCES OF URBAN FORM

Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, and Jan Gehl weave threads of people-oriented planning into their persistently relevant theories. In her seminal work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs (1961) dissented against urban renewal schemes that created slums and major highway projects that tore through vibrant neighbourhoods. Jacobs used her own neighbourhood, Greenwich Village in New York City, to demonstrate how urban form and human life relate to one another.

Jacobs begins with streets. She acknowledges that, yes, streets are used for circulation, but they are also places. Places where children play, parents chat, and grandparents rest. Streets are not just the corridors between the activities we call life, but also, when done well, places where life happens. Jacobs asserts that healthy, continuous, and active street and sidewalk life is foundational to functional, equitable, and prosperous cities. To accomplish this, she advocates for urban forms to be designed with a mix of uses, small blocks, aged buildings, and a concentration of people (Jacobs, 1961). When a district and its components have two or more functions, different people "on different schedules ... are in the place for different purposes, [and] are able to use many facilities in common" (p. 152) creating a constant flow of people. A constant flow of people in streets and parks makes them safer; a constant flow of people to stores makes them economically viable.

Small blocks with regular interruptions from streets mean there are many routes one can take to their destination. With more routes, one might choose a new route and explore different areas of their neighbourhood, rather than isolate themselves to major or predictable routes. Socially, this means people are in tune with their surroundings much more than if they had never stepped foot on an adjacent street. Jacobs argues that short blocks mean people's paths will converge more frequently and in more places. These confluences are the only places where economic activity is viable. And so, economic activity won't be isolated on major streets, but sprinkled throughout a neighbourhood (Jacobs, 1961).

Older buildings, not necessarily of any historical value or architectural prestige, but regular, inexpensive, old buildings are vital to neighbourhood affordability. This applies both to commercial and residential buildings. Since new construction is inherently costlier to users, only a select few businesses and individuals can afford to occupy them. Older buildings, on the other hand, are often more affordable for merchants and residents (Jacobs, 1961). Finally, a concentration of people supports specialization – of business, culture, housing, employment – that serve diverse needs. This means there is a larger volume of people on the streets, which supports a mix of uses, street safety, and economic activity (Jacobs, 1961).

3.6.2 PERCEPTIONS OF URBAN FORM

Where Jacobs' observations were rooted in the human experiences in the city, Kevin Lynch (1960) explored human perceptions of the city. *The Image of the City* delves into the notion of legibility of a city, "the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern" (p. 2). He argues a city's structure, organization, legibility, and patterns help people easily move around and acts as a "starting-point for the acquisition of further information" (p. 4). People form mental maps and images of the city based on their perceptions. These maps and images will be clearer when the urban form is more legible. A sharp image can act inhabit the minds of many individuals, creating a collective memory on which social life is built (Lynch, 1960).

For Lynch (1960), our image of the city is composed of five elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. *Paths* are perhaps the most significant since they are the lines on which we circulate through the city and the foundation on which other elements are arranged. These are often streets, paths, and sidewalks. *Edges* are usually boundaries between two distinct aspects of a city, perceived as barriers or seams. These can be shores, walls, and railways. *Districts* are a section of a city with a unifying characteristic, often bounded by edges. These can be neighbourhoods, downtowns, and industrial parks. *Nodes* are places with an intensity of people or uses, often coinciding with and intersection of paths. These can be street corners and public squares. Last, *landmarks* are physical points-of-reference that are distinct from their surroundings. These may be clock towers, sculptures, and mountains (p. 47-49).

Lynch's mental maps and five elements of urban form can be used to describe an urban environment but can also be employed to structure an intentional reshaping of one. While every individual will have a unique image of the city, a well-structured and highly legible urban form has a greater chance at forming a sharp, collective image in the minds of many. Lynch acknowledges that this can be achieved with urban design plans and various planning tools but cautions that the "final objective of such a plan is not the physical shape itself but the quality of an image in the mind" (p. 117).

3.6.3 DIMENSIONS OF URBAN FORM

In 1981's *A Theory of Good City Form*, Lynch presents a normative theory for good city form, with human life once again at the centre. He discusses six "performance *dimensions*, that is, certain identifiable characteristics of the performance of cities which are due primarily to their spatial qualities" (p. 111), though he does not advocate for specific standards, instead recognizing people will place different value on each dimension. While these dimensions are more qualitative than Jacobs' recommendations of good physical characteristics of an urban environment, Lynch argues that they are measurable and therefore not strictly abstract. *Vitality* is the concept that an urban form that should support good human health for individuals and society (p. 121). *Sense* is related to legibility or how easily the urban form can be perceived and interpreted (p. 131). *Fit* refers to how well the urban form matches the actions of its inhabitants (p. 151). *Access* refers to how easily people can get to and from home, work, open space, and social gatherings (p. 187). *Control,* or regulation of space and behaviour, includes presence, use and action, appropriation, modification, and disposition (p. 205). Lastly, *efficiency* and *justice* consider the financial, social, and environmental costs of achievements in the urban realm and how those achievements and costs are distributed throughout society (p. 221).

3.6.4 HUMAN ACTIVITY & URBAN FORM

Drawing on the work of Jacobs, Gehl (1987) examined how to design an inviting public realm. He categorized human activities into three groups that influence and are influenced by the built environment in different ways: necessary, optional, and social activities. Gehl examined public parks, squares, gardens, and commercial streets and found a certain stickiness when people see other people doing activities. Children did not play in places without people, like tucked-away parks, but rather on streets and stoops where the action was. People did not stop in front of passive façades like banks and offices, but rather in front of active ones like toy stores because "people and human activity are the greatest object of attention and interest" (p. 31). Where there is poor urban design, "only the bare minimum of activity takes place. People hurry home"

(p. 13), but where there is high-quality design, more people venture out and tend to linger longer.

He prioritizes pedestrian conditions above automobile traffic, mixed use areas above separated land uses, and density above dispersal. When streets were closed to vehicle traffic and became pedestrian only, he noticed improvements to the quality of social activities, "a doubling of the number of pedestrians, a lengthening of the average time spent outdoors, and a considerably broader spectrum of outdoor activities" (Gehl, 1987, p. 35) all of which he attributes to a higher-quality built environment. He also noted that the converse was true: when vehicle traffic increased on a given street, pedestrian activity diminished. Gehl argues that a built form with reasonably low buildings, a street face devoid of vacancies, pedestrian-oriented design, and a tight spatial arrangement of a range of uses creates sticky places where people want to be, thereby attracting even more people and activity (p. 33). However, people do not interact because of a great built form, but because of some common economic, political, or ideological interest. Even so, a great built form can enhance opportunities for social life while a poor one diminishes these opportunities.

3.7 URBAN DESIGN IN PRACTICE

Municipalities have a wide range of plans, programs, projects, and policies at their disposal to shape and develop urban form. Kumar (2002) found that 92% of the municipalities he studied regulated urban design, mostly through zoning bylaws, policy statements, and heritage preservation guidelines. In addition, municipalities can draw from planning theorists like Jacobs, Lynch and Gehl to steer their design plans to incorporate their recommendations for high-quality urban form. This section will explore the real-world effects of well-intentioned design plans and academic theory. In other words, do design plans make any difference?

3.7.1 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Demand for public participation in governmental operations and programs has increased

in recent decades (Arnstein, 1975) to prepare, create, communicate, and implement new public policies (Berman, 2017). This requires paradigm shift from unilateral procedures to collaborative participation in community consultation; where unilateral procedures are superficial, manipulate citizens, and ultimately discourage participation, collaborative participation celebrates local insights, builds relationships, and invites citizens to participate (Berman, 2017). According to Arnstein (1969), when done well, participatory planning processes have real impacts on and benefits for communities rather than being an empty ritual full of false promises. A good participatory planning process, then, must redistribute power to include citizens to move away from non-participation and tokenism models; as citizen power increases, the participatory process moves up Arnstein's ladder toward full citizen control, as shown in Figure 34. Contributing local knowledge is one mechanism that enables citizens to gain power in a participatory planning process. Local knowledge is defined by Berman (2017) as "residents' genuine spatial needs, perceptions and desires" (p. 1), but, according to Roggema (2014) may also include tacit knowledge, the silent intuitive understanding of a place (p. 16). The underlying assumption in public participation discourse is that public involvement is desirable for decision makers and citizens alike. According to Berman (2017), increased public participation and citizen involvement are desirable because, when done well, they create policies that have the broadest appeal, reduce potential conflicts, and ensure the stability of solutions.

3.7.2 DESIGN PLANS, PROGRAMS, PROJECTS & POLICIES

Urban design plans are just one tool of many that can be used to shape development. While commonplace zoning by-laws focus "on the type of use allowed on the land" and assume "each space should have one, singular use" (City of Marshall, n.d., p. 2), alternatives attempt exert more control over the physical characteristics of the built environment. Instead of focusing on land uses, form-based codes, such as the SmartCode, emphasize "building form as it relates to streetscape and adjacent uses" and strive "to preserve the assets and character of a

community" (City of Marshall, n.d., p. 2). But there are many more tools that municipalities use that intentionally and inadvertently shape the physical environment; below I identify three categories of tools that are commonly used by municipalities, though not necessarily at the small city scale.

For the purposes of this study, I divide revitalization schemes into three categories: programs, projects and policies. I define revitalization *programs* as multiple private sector actors spending public monies (or deferring payment to public coffers in the case of some incentives) in a coordinated fashion to achieve a common goal. Programs may be brief or long-term in nature. This could take the form of a facade improvement program whereby a government (municipal, provincial, and/or federal), business improvement district (or similar), or non-profit group awards funds to property owners for the express purpose of beautifying building exteriors. Similarly, some tax regimes and development incentives leverage public resources to incent private development over a period.

A revitalization *project* is a distinct one-time investment of public funds into the public realm. This could take the form of street upgrades whereby a government (typically municipal) improves publicly-owned street, sidewalk, lighting, and furniture infrastructure in an area. Mega-projects such as publicly funded arenas and convention centres also fall into this category. Lastly, revitalization *policy* is a municipality's formal by-laws or regulations that affect built form across the city. This typically takes the form of Euclidean zoning, property tax scales, urban design guidelines, or occasionally a specialized district overlay policy, though form-based codes (and hybrid deployments) are slowly gaining momentum in Canada as well.

These programs, projects, and policies, or the absence thereof, constitute a place's urban design context, affecting the quality, quantity, and arrangement of the built environment. At minimum, communities across Canada are subject to planning policies from provincial and local levels. But public policy can only guide development, not ensure private investment, so communities may undertake programs and/or projects with the intention of spurring development. In each case, these schemes are intended to build on existing or spark new

revitalization momentum. These tools can be applied to shape development in a targeted area or more broadly over the entire community, depending on decision-makers' goals.

3.7.3 DESIGN PLANS: CONTENT & CRITICISMS

Hubbard (1995) discusses "the tendency for design professionals to take a detached view of design, divorcing architecture from its social and economic context" (p. 244). This view is echoed by Linovski and Loukaitou-Sideris (2012) who found that contemporary design plans in North America primarily focus on urban aesthetics and, to a lesser extent, protection of the natural environment and disregard social and economic concerns. Further, they found design plans and guidelines were disconnected from academic literature and analytical methodologies. Similarly, Kumar's (2002) survey of design regulation across Canada found more emphasis on aesthetics and disregard for "some of the key components of urban design, such as legibility, vitality, social justice and environment" (p. 252) pioneered by scholars like Lynch. Though Hubbard's (1995) case study in Birmingham found that high-quality urban design was "a successful proactive strategy for creating a suitable business environment and enhancing the competitive advantage of a local economy" (p. 250), he cautions that this approach may not work in every case. He argues design plans should include measures that distribute the benefits of investment across society to address, rather than mask ongoing social issues.

Kumar (2002) found design regulations across Canadian municipalities were varied not due to "provincial planning statutes, size of the community, topography, and climate" (p. 258), but rather by the will of local council and historic character. In fact, the most frequently addressed design principle was historic preservation, while climate and environmental concerns were rarely addressed. The preoccupation with historic preservation is concerning because it puts too much emphasis on the built form and ignores people inhabiting the urban realm. If left unchecked, it can lead to façade-ism of buildings and museum-ification of districts without genuine meaning or function. When this happens, the urban form becomes so geared toward beautification to attract tourists that it stops functioning for residents (Kumar,

2002). This can result in a loss of place identity. As Southworth (1989) observes, "many plans fail to recognise what is unique and special about the city and instead emulate other plans and places using 'boilerplate' urban design solutions that could be 'Anywhere, USA'" (p. 401). Another concern with over-reliance on historic preservation is the tendency to gloss over uncomfortable aspects of history and to glorify only the history of the dominant socio-economic class (Hayden, 1995). Last, a public realm design for residents' need would prioritize holistic street and open space improvements in tandem with individual building upgrades (Kumar, 2002).

3.7.4 WALKABLE URBAN FORM & LOCAL ECONOMIC IMPACTS

A central tenet to Jacobs (1961) and Gehl (1987) is pedestrian-friendly, if not pedestrian-oriented, urban form. Jacobs and Gehl came to their conclusions by observing public life using qualitative methods. Kang's (2016) empirical investigation into access to pedestrians and retail sales figures Seoul, Korea support Jacobs' and Gehl's works. In a review of existing studies, Kang found "that higher walking activity and better walking conditions increase retail sales in the neighborhood" (p. 110). The issue is muddled somewhat because studies indicate that the relationship between pedestrian volumes and retail sales is not unidirectional. Even so, pedestrian-friendly urban forms are broadly associated with increased property values, rents, housing development, mix of land uses, and retail sales (Kang, 2016). In Seoul, Kang found a walkable urban form, when combined with friendly retail policy, can strengthen the local retail sector. Success also depends on considering local conditions like retail and street typologies. Further, "a well-organized street network configuration that appeals to pedestrians would be a highly effective solution to draw various retail stores and increase the potential demand of residents and visitors" (Kang, 2016, p. 119). While Jacobs and Gehl advocated for an enticing pedestrian urban realm for a multitude of reasons – safety, social life, economics –

Kang primarily focused on economic impacts. Still, Kang's study supports their hypothesis and indicates that a walkable urban form strengthens local economies.

3.7.5 DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Though many stakeholders value the potential economic, social, and environmental benefits of high-quality urban design, "developers and investors have had varying degrees of interest in urban design" (Madanipour, 2006, p. 177) and may be more focused on short-term business case than broad, drawn out public initiatives. In this context, Punter (2007) stresses the importance of capable municipal staff, appropriate public engagement processes, and efficient controls and review processes to ensure a degree of certainty and predictability throughout the application process (p. 195). Finally, design plans in large, prosperous, growing cities are necessarily different from smaller, slower-growing cities "where development is more difficult to stimulate, and where local politicians are afraid to negotiate improved design for fear of driving away prospective developers" (p. 198). This speaks to a misconception that good design is necessarily costlier, but Punter (2007) argues that is not the case, especially in the long-term.

3.8 SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the academic literature on small cities and their differences from larger centres, the roles of main streets, approaches to downtown revitalization, economies of small cities, placemaking and place marketing, urban design theory, and urban design practice.

4 RESEARCH METHODS & ANALYSIS

4.1 STUDY STRUCTURE

My research was structured in two phases. The first was designed to answer my first research question, “What factors contribute to the effective implementation of urban design plans in small Canadian cities looking to revitalize their downtowns?” Through semi-structured interviews with municipal planning and economic development staff, I examined how Prince Rupert, Kenora, and Port Colborne implemented an urban design plan. Interviewees discussed seventeen factors that affected implementation of their plans, which I arranged into four major themes. The second phase was designed to answer my second research question, “What barriers and opportunities present themselves should Portage la Prairie implement an urban design plan?” Through semi-structured interviews with informants involved in municipal

administration, development, and business in Portage la Prairie, I applied my findings from the first phases to determine which of the seventeen factors and four themes were present in Portage la Prairie and how downtown revitalization might unfold.

4.2 PHASE ONE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.2.1 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

I conducted semi-structured interviews with research participants to examine how precedent cities implemented their urban design plans. According to Gray (2014), interviews are ideal when trying to understand experiences, opinions, and attitudes, when probing may be required, when obtaining personalized data, and when a high return rate is needed. I asked interviewees about the administration, effectiveness, successes, challenges, and outcomes of the urban design plans. Interview questions, based off Southworth's (1989) survey sent to organizations whose urban design plans he examined, are listed in Appendix I. I found that the interviewees' experiences, opinions, and attitudes revealed the reasoning behind decision-making processes. The semi-structured interview format allowed a certain degree of flexibility, including probing and exploring new pathways of questioning as the arose, generating distinct data for each precedent.

Interviews were conducted over the telephone and recorded using an audio-recording device. Following each interview, I transcribed the audio recording and documented potential themes, factors, and areas to explore further during the coding process. I reviewed the completed transcript while listening to the audio recording to check for errors and additional themes before sending the transcript to the interviewee. In keeping with my research ethics protocol, interviewees were given the opportunity to review transcripts of their interviews to check for errors and redact any information they had second thoughts about sharing publicly.

4.2.2 CODING & ANALYZING THE DATA

Once all the interviews were complete, I began to formally code the data, using Gray's (2014) steps as a guide: transcribing the data, coding the data, familiarizing myself with the data, focused reading, reviewing codes, and generating theory. As discussed above, the coding process began while I transcribed interviews, when I became more familiar with the data and teased out potential themes using a blend deductive and inductive approaches. I first used a deductive approach by reading and re-reading the transcriptions and noting potential codes. At this stage, I was seeking manifest content, or "those elements that are physically present and countable" (Berg, 2007). Following Berg's method of open coding, I uncovered answers to my first research question by seeking "naturally occurring classes of things, persons, and events, and important characteristics of these items" (p. 134). Next, used an inductive approach by reflecting on my literature review to guide my thought process, constantly organizing and re-organizing codes into major themes that arose in the academic research.

Once I had established a set of factors and themes, I systematically coded the transcripts by hand using coloured markers, by assigning each factor a unique colour. During my first pass, I colour-coded blocks of text according to the master list of codes, occasionally coding the same passage with multiple codes. This allowed me to see which codes overlapped or were frequently adjacent to each other, while also giving context for the coded passages. However, I noted some important data that did not quite fit the established codes, so I re-worked the coding system to integrate more factors. During my second pass, I found the new coding system worked well. On my third pass, I performed latent content analysis on each coded passage to determine its meaning and significance. From these codes, I wrote a brief (one page) discussion paper to prepare for the second phase of research, attached in Appendix II. The paper included the seventeen factors organized into four themes, along with brief descriptions, for phase two participants to read and reflect upon prior to being interviewed.

4.3 PHASE TWO RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The second phase was designed to answer my second research question, "What barriers and opportunities present themselves should Portage la Prairie implement an urban design plan?" Through semi-structured interviews with informants involved in municipal administration, development, and business in Portage la Prairie, I applied my findings from the first phases to determine which of the seventeen factors and four themes were present in Portage la Prairie and how downtown revitalization might unfold.

4.3.1 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

I contacted potential informants involved in municipal administration, development, and business in Portage la Prairie via email using online directories, four of whom agreed to participate in my research. Approximately one week prior to the interview, I sent participants the one-page discussion paper with a summary of my research structure and in-profess findings. Participants were also given my interview questions and a map of the study area.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with research participants to examine which of the seventeen factors found in phase one were present in Portage la Prairie, and if present, if they were considered an opportunity or barrier. According to Gray (2014), interviews are ideal when trying to understand experiences, opinions, and attitudes, when probing may be required, when obtaining personalized data, and when a high return rate is needed. I asked interviewees general questions about each major theme and followed up with more specific questions about the seventeen factors. Interview questions are listed in Appendix III. The semi-structured interview format allowed a certain degree of flexibility, including probing and exploring new pathways of questioning as the arose, generating distinct data for each precedent.

Interviews were conducted over the telephone and recorded using an audio-recording device. Following each interview, I transcribed the audio recording and documented potential points for discussion and areas to explore further during the coding process. I reviewed the completed transcript while listening to the audio recording to check for errors and additional

themes before sending the transcript to the interviewee. In keeping with my research ethics protocol, interviewees were given the opportunity to review transcripts of their interviews to check for errors and redact any information they had second thoughts about sharing publicly.

4.3.2 CODING & ANALYZING THE DATA

Once all the interviews were complete, I began to formally code the data, roughly following the steps Gray (2014) outlines: transcribing the data, coding the data, familiarizing myself with the data, focused reading, reviewing codes, and generating theory. As discussed above, the coding process began while I transcribed interviews, when I became more familiar with the data and teased out potential findings. The set of codes established in the first research phase served as a launching point for the coding process. I read and re-read the transcriptions, noting potential connections and seeking manifest content (Berg, 2007). Following Berg's method of open coding, I sought answers to my second research question, "What barriers and opportunities present themselves should Portage la Prairie implement an urban design plan?" I reflected on my literature review and first phase of research to guide my thought process. I found that much of the data fit within my established codes, although I fine-tuned or expanded several definitions to better reflect the now-complete data set.

Just as in the first phase, I coded the transcripts by hand using coloured markers, by assigning each factor a unique colour. During my first pass, I systematically colour-coded blocks of text according to the master list of codes, occasionally coding the same passage with multiple codes. This allowed me to see which codes overlapped or were frequently adjacent to each other, while also giving context for the coded passages. During my second pass, I performed latent content analysis on each coded passage to determine its meaning and significance. Lastly, I created an index document sorted the coded data from all nine interviews by code rather than by interviewee. This document was formatted with codes as major

headings and verbatim excerpts underneath, colour coded to indicate to which interviewee it should attributed. This provided a "comprehensive means for accessing information," and "a means for counting certain types of responses" (Berg, 2007).

4.4 SUMMARY

This chapter reported the structure of my research, divided in two phases. In both phases, I conducted open coding to find patterns and meaning in the data. I systematically used a blend of deductive and inductive approaches to organize manifest and latent content.

5 FINDINGS

I found 17 factors affecting implementation of urban design plans in Prince Rupert, Kenora, and Port Colborne. I organized in them into four major themes: communication, planning initiatives, endogenous capital, and design plan qualities. I then asked interviewees in Portage la Prairie whether these factors were present, and if so, whether they were a strength or weakness. This chapter presents findings from the first phase (interviews with municipal planning and economic development staff from precedent cities) followed by findings from the second phase (interviews with people involved in municipal administration, business, and development in Portage la Prairie).

5.1 COMMUNICATION

The first theme is **communication**. Participants from each precedent city mentioned the importance of informing the public, consulting stakeholders, and discussing the implications of

urban design plans. It was often linked to increased uptake of projects and reduced opposition to the plan. Factors in this theme included four communication methods: community-wide *public engagement* when creating the plan; *stakeholder engagement* when creating the plan and when monitoring programs post-implementation; *applicant meetings* regarding a specific development application; and *passive methods* like staff being available for general inquiries and having plans online.

5.1.1 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Precedent cities conducted community-wide *public engagement* before creating, while creating, and when implementing design plans. Interviewees discussed the importance of gauging community support before creating the plan to ensure they would be well-received: "For the most part, for each of our planning documents, we have had community engagement talking with various stakeholders. So, our documents are supported by our public and community groups" (Interviewee 2, Kenora). While creating the plan, community engagement was used to facilitate two-way learning between community members and the City: "...our community engagement has been a big success in terms of bringing the community together, educating them on what's been going on or just to talk and see what they envision [the city] to be" (Interviewee 2, Kenora). Finally, community engagement was used to promote the plan and make sure the public was aware of them: "It's all about that – just getting out into the community because it is still, after a year and a bit, it's still foreign to many people" (Interviewee 3, Kenora). Interviewees used a range of engagement methods including design charrettes, workshops, surveys, and open houses to facilitate discussion between the City, stakeholder groups, and the general public.

In Portage la Prairie, unlike in precedent cities, planning services are provided by an external body, Portage Planning District, rather than in-house staff. Planning districts were a Provincial initiative meant to consolidate planning services into regional bodies to encourage cooperation and reduce costs for partner municipalities. The Portage Planning District

provides planning services to both the City and Rural Municipality of Portage la Prairie. As such, public engagement for planning matters is done "through the planning district. They do all those engagement pieces" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). The City also does public engagement "a lot of the time when an issue comes up [and] they put community surveys out and say, 'What do you think should be done about this?'" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). Communication and public engagement is seen as a strength in Portage: "As it is right now, it's an open communication. City Hall is open to people. There's ample transparency there that you don't find in all cities. ... I have nothing bad to say about dealing with the City of Portage la Prairie" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie).

5.1.2 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement is similar to public engagement but is focused on those groups directly affected by or most likely to use the design plan such as downtown business owners, property owners, and developers. As mentioned above, engagement was conducted to give stakeholders a chance to shape the plan and to promote it: "There was a great event [where] staff provided a very nice information session for the businesses that are interested. Local businesses that applied and were successful, provided case studies" (Interviewee 3, Kenora). These engagements typically used a similar format to community-wide engagements, with "community workshops, surveys online, public hearings or meetings open to the public" (Interviewee 2, Kenora). Cities also engaged with stakeholders post-implementation when issues arose: "...so they come in here, we spend a lunch, we chat about it. You tell me what you think, and I will tell you how those words work in the regulations" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert). These took the form of informal working meetings in offices rather than structured engagement events.

In Portage la Prairie, stakeholder engagement is common practice as well. Concerning a recent issue in the community, officials "had the stakeholder groups come in and said, 'Okay, what do we see for Portage in five to ten years? How do we see that taking shape? What are

our concerns?'" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). In particular, the City and the Chamber of Commerce meet monthly and the Chamber distributes "communication from the City in their newsletters and on their website" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). Interviewees emphasized the "positive relationship[s]" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie) among the City, business community, and development community. Interviewee 7 (Portage la Prairie) suggested increased stakeholder engagement could be an effective alternative to other approaches: "I think cooperation and facilitation for people that want to do things in the downtown ought to be the first place because it doesn't cost anything." Communication in Portage la Prairie through stakeholder engagement was seen as an effective way to accomplish goals and build positive relationships in the community.

5.1.3 APPLICANT MEETINGS

Planners in precedent cities took the opportunity to discuss the specific implications of urban design plans with developers during *applicant meetings*: "We have pre-consultation meetings, where if a person is looking at building a structure or undertaking something that would require a Planning Act application, site plan control, or minor variance, we have them come for pre-consultation," (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne). These meetings might be initiated by the applicant if they sought clarifications or by the planner as they reviewed an application. Interviewees cited these meetings as an opportunity to educate applicants and to shape development to align with the design plan: "At that point we make them aware, if they weren't already, of the urban design guidelines … . For the larger scale, we intervene at that stage and suggest that they look at them and hopefully come up with something that is sympathetic to the guidelines" (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne). In some cases, this took the form of "heavy-duty negotiations" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert), but other times the process was more collaborative: "We like to work with people to overall improve their property which overall improves the appearance of the municipality" (Interviewee 4, Port Colborne).

Applicant meetings in Portage la Prairie take two main forms. First, investors may partner with Portage Regional Economic Development (PRED), a regional partnership between the City and Rural Municipality of Portage la Prairie to provide economic development services, "to develop their proposal in a way that has the greatest chance of success with Council" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). In a sense, PRED works as a liaison between developers or investors and Council or the Planning District. Second, applicants may have a fully developed proposal that they submit to the Planning District where they "get their permits, so that creates a natural opportunity for the conversation with the building inspectors to make sure the zoning complies, and you've considered everything else that's going to be involved here" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). The procedures in place at PRED and the Planning District are similar to those in precedent cities and the mechanisms are in place to intercept applications, so they can be shaped by staff if needed.

5.1.4 PASSIVE METHODS

Finally, interviewees discussed ways that design plans are continuously being communicated to the public using *passive methods*, such as making them available online, newsletters, or responding to general inquires. Though seemingly insipid, these methods were cited as a good way to make potential applicants aware of the plan: "... or even pre-pre-consultations where it's just people showing up at the counter, people calling me just to find out – they want to build a facility downtown or something like that – that's where we would make people aware of the guidelines" (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne). Interviewees in Portage la Prairie, much like the precedent communities, cite passive methods such as incoming phone calls, in-person visits, and online resources as ways to be communicate with the public.

5.2 PLANNING INITIATIVES

The second theme was **planning initiatives**. Participants noted that urban design plans were often coupled with other planning policy, programs, and projects: *provincial policies and*

partnerships such as legislation and funding for planning; *municipal plans* such as Development Plans and Secondary Plans; *financial incentives* such as grant programs for building improvements and reduced application fees in targeted geographies; *branding and marketing* of the district; *reports and studies* including formal studies and informal online research; and *public realm improvements* including investment in streetscaping and public parks.

5.2.1 PROVINCIAL POLICIES & PARTNERSHIPS

Provincial policies and partnerships include provincial legislation, policies, funding streams, and regional plans. Interviewees noted that provincial legislation was meant to be a broad framework within which municipalities have the ability to plan for local conditions: "We have the Provincial Policy Statement which is the broader legislative authority for all development matters in Ontario at a high level. Within the PPS, it discusses … the authority for the government to develop a Planning Act" (Interviewee 3, Kenora). Legislation and policies were often framed as a distant authority with which to comply but had little bearing on day-to-day planning: "Well when it comes to design guidelines themselves, there's nothing specific the province has in place. They want to have a healthy community, an attractive community, but there's nothing that is highlighted to the fact that design guidelines should be in place by the local municipalities" (Interviewee 4, Port Colborne). Provincial funds for planning initiatives, however, could make a difference: "I also had a stint in a smaller community … where they entered into … a process in [the province] that was called Downtown Revitalization where you would get grants to do the designs" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert). Further, Interviewee 5 (Port Colborne) discussed how a regional growth plan with an objective to see "intensification of uses in the downtown area using the existing infrastructure and street fabric that's available," resulted in, "residential units being re-established over-top of commercial spaces."

Portage la Prairie is subject to similar legislative authorities as precedent cities, where the Planning Act requires municipalities to have a Development Plan that adheres to the Provincial Land Use Policies. Historically, Portage la Prairie has relied on several regional

bodies established by the Province of Manitoba for planning, economic development, and tourism. As discussed in Section 5.1.1, the Portage Planning District provides planning services for the Portage region. The economic development office had been a joint regional effort between several municipalities, "but when the Province pulled the funding on these regional initiatives, all the partners except for Portage la Prairie, the City and the RM, decided they didn't want to be part of it anymore," (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Following the collapse of the regional economic development office, the City and Rural Municipality of Portage la Prairie collaborated to form Portage Regional Economic Development (PRED). The City also worked with the Province's tourism arm, Travel Manitoba, to "come up with a new brand, a new logo, a new word mark, a new slogan," in 2017 (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). The Province plays a more direct role in development in Portage through its Hometown Manitoba Main Street Enhancement Program, which provides funding for storefront improvements along Saskatchewan Avenue: "The Chamber along with the City promotes the Hometown Manitoba Grant through the Province. The City puts $10,000 aside in their budget every year for the Hometown Manitoba program" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). Finally, interviewees noted revitalizing Saskatchewan Avenue could be "tough because it's provincially regulated … because it's the #1 Highway," under the jurisdiction of Manitoba Infrastructure, not the City of Portage la Prairie. Planning and development in Portage la Prairie is shaped by the Province of Manitoba through its legislation and policies, funding streams and partnerships, and jurisdiction over Saskatchewan Avenue.

5.2.2 MUNICIPAL POLICIES

Precedent cities used an array of *municipal policies* to shape development alongside urban design plans. Precedent cities were all required to create Development Plans (or equivalent – names vary between provinces) by their provincial government that complied with provincial policies and legislation, thereby binding local decisions to provincial priorities. Development Plans (known as Official Plans in Ontario) and zoning bylaws set the tone for local planning

activities: “Our Official Plan 2015 is a huge document that we use for our development and then also our zoning bylaw. That one was also recently amended in 2015” (Interviewee 2, Kenora). Secondary Plans (known as Community Improvement Plans or CIPs in Ontario) are not required, but can be used to guide development within a specific area of the city: “we also have Community Improvement Plans … . Those go into a bit more detail in terms of what is planned out for those areas and discusses in detail incentive programs and a bit more background information on those spots,” (Interviewee 2, Kenora). Such a plan “puts in place certain directions to improve that area and as part of that improvement, design guidelines were created and developed” (Interviewee 3, Kenora).

Planning in Portage la Prairie is largely shaped by its Development Plan and zoning bylaw; however, many other policies and bylaws have implications for downtown revitalization. Unlike Kenora and Port Colborne which use Secondary Plans (referred to as Community Improvement Plans or CIPs in Ontario) Portage la Prairie does not have such a plan in place: they have a variety of “documents but nothing comprehensive” (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). For example, “there’s a bylaw that prevents outdoor patios on Saskatchewan Avenue” (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie) because they experience “lots of traffic and lots of semi traffic” (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). Also, there was a plan approximately fifteen years ago “to focus on beautification of downtown,” but it was “under-funded or not funded to the full purpose of it” (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie) so it was only partially implemented. Lastly, interviewees pointed to current parking policies as a potential influence on consumer behaviour: “Don’t blame Walmart for being a one-stop-shop for all. The fact is, they’re a one-stop-shop for all with free parking. Rather than going downtown and having to pay for multiple meters as you navigate from one place to the next, maybe we need to recognize that Portage la Prairie isn’t big enough for paid parking downtown” (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). These interconnected municipal planning policies affect downtown vitality in nuanced ways and the City recognizes the need to plan now to make the most of the recent shift in momentum.

5.2.3 FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

As part of their Community Improvement Plans, Kenora and Port Colborne use *financial incentives* to shape development. Funds were available to incent private businesses downtown to commission design drawings, install secondary dwellings above commercial uses, renovate façades, change signage, install lighting, and landscape. Applications are reviewed to see if they comply with design guidelines before being approved. If approved, applicants were reimbursed 50% of their costs, up to a set cap: "For example, we have that building façade improvement grant. We have a maximum of $15,000, 50% matching funds toward improving those façades" (Interviewee 3, Kenora). By attaching criteria to funding, cities were able to target geographic areas or vacant properties to entice reinvestment. Further, cities were able to leverage the incentive to shape projects: "Every time the business changes, they need a new sign. If they want some financial assistance towards their sign to have a proper one that means our urban design guidelines, then they can apply for the CIP program and money will only be approved: a) if there's money available; and b) if the sign or any project really – façade improvement – meets the urban design criteria. So that's the best tool we have to try to steer people towards it," (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne). However, total funds and funds available per project were always capped, meaning some applications might not be approved due to limited resources. Still, interviewees highlighted how incentives could stimulate small-scale upgrades to storefronts.

Portage la Prairie has and does use financial incentives to shape development. In the past, these have been focused on industrial property, but "nothing has produced. It's things like we will sell you the land at a reduced rate or a commitment of a refund if you develop the land within two years and create ten jobs. Basically, what it works out to is you end up getting the land for free after two years if you do that" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). In its downtown, the City partners with the Province of Manitoba to offer grants under the Hometown Manitoba Main Street Enhancement Program "to improve the appearance of your business. It can be paint, it can be siding, it can be new windows, it can be a new sign. The Province pays up to

$1,000 and the City will also put in up to $1,000. If you get $2,000, you have to spend $2,000" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). However, "The City has a $10,000 cap, so if it goes over $10,000, they break it up amongst all the applicants. Even if they don't get approved by the Province, the City will still give them money for their project" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). In the eleven years the program has been active in Portage la Prairie, "approximately 115 businesses have shared in grants to assist the completion of $570,000 in projects designed to enhance the exterior appeal of their businesses. $80,000 was approved under the Hometown Manitoba Main Street Enhancement Program and another $71,000 in funds made available through the City of Portage la Prairie" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). Though the financial incentives in Portage la Prairie are narrower in scope (e.g., façade improvements only), lower in budget, and have less stringent criteria than those in Kenora or Port Colborne, they have nonetheless resulted in widespread enhancements to downtown businesses.

5.2.4 BRANDING & MARKETING

Place *branding and marketing* is the outward strategy to capitalize on a place's identity as discussed in Section 3.5.2. The presence of a strong place brand was linked to long term interest and support from the public and business community, which built momentum for positive change. On branding, Interviewee 1 (Prince Rupert) said, "you cannot brand the community artificially. You have to go through this process to see what the branding for a certain area is – for a certain community – and in fact, I now doubt that it is really that useful. The branding has to come from the community upwards. You almost don't have to seek it." An authentic place brand could them be marketed outside the community to attract new investment and development.

Interviewees acknowledged that Portage la Prairie "held this reputation of being rough. It's a rough town" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie) even though "it's not anything like what [people] perceived it to be. It's actually more warm, hometown hospitality" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Recognizing the need to let "people know that it's a nice quality of life"

(Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie), PRED recently embarked on a rebranding campaign for the city-major. They worked with Travel Manitoba to "come up with a new brand, a new logo, a new word mark, a new slogan" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie) in 2017 "to market the region as a tourism region. That message was *Island on the Prairies*" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). The campaign is centred on attracting tourism and economic development but does not include "any marketing specific to downtown" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). In fact, "a lot of the focus is on the island and getting people to the island … downtown gets kind of lost in that" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). Interviewees were optimistic about the current campaign saying, "it's had a pretty profound impact from what I've seen. People seem to buy into it more" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie).

5.2.5 REPORTS & STUDIES

Precedent cities used *reports and studies* to monitor existing programs' effectiveness and learn from other cities, respectively. Reporting where municipal monies, like financial incentives, are spent is a part of good transparent governance and can include bringing "forward an information report to Council to show the before and afters of the applications that were approved. So, they see that firsthand and it's made available to the entire public to view" (Interviewee 4, Port Colborne). These reports can also demonstrate the popularity of a program: "Well if there's an incentive program available, review the money annually and find out if there's a big uptake and more people are getting denied because of a lack of money than people getting approved, then see if there's a way to get a few more dollars added to the available pot" (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne). Studies were used to collect evidence to prove the success of a program. Interviewee 3 (Kenora) indicated that the local "economic development division is working [to calculate the return on investment] with regard to what the impact was on that business," following a façade renovation. Finally, cities can learn from other cities' initiatives and seek lessons for the local context:

> I kept Googling... and I stumbled upon this work in the City of Whitehorse. ... The City of Whitehorse, ten years ago, did a study and started policies that would encourage retail and entertainment. ... They updated the study in 2017 I believe, maybe 2016 – ten years after – and they have marked improved in their retail and entertainment which shows market improvement in commerce. So, I said, 'I have a check mark.' So, I started this inventory of our commercial sector by lineal metres. ... How many lineal metres are occupied? How many lineal metres are occupied in retail, offices, service commercial, clinics, housing, vacant lots? (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert).

The data collected indicated strengths and opportunities, which informed policy like urban design plans.

Since Portage la Prairie does not have a design plan in place, there is no reporting on them. However, the City recently partnered with a student from the University of Manitoba to study "parking meters and parking inventory in the downtown" (Interviewee 6 Portage la Prairie).

5.2.6 PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

Lastly *public realm improvements* to public spaces, parks, and streetscapes can accompany improvements to adjacent private property. Interviewee 4 (Port Colborne) spoke about how public realm improvements could set the tone for further reinvestment: "[The City] should be the lead on how those streets should look. Lead by example." Thus, public realm improvements should be included in design plans, to ensure public and private investment is all working toward the same goal: "And [design guidelines] can also be used for public spaces aside from the streets. It could be a public park. So, the design guidelines should be honoured as to how that park area should be developed" (Interviewee 4, Port Colborne). Even though civic leaders and community members, "will agree that having parks and open spaces and gathering spaces on public property is a good idea" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert), there are "different opinions on what direction those should take" (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne). For example, in one precedent city people agreed that improvements were needed but could not come to consensus on what specific improvements should be made: "The streetscaping ... has been a little more

divisive: should we have bump outs; should we not have bump outs; should we have cycle lanes; or should we have more on street parking? There's division along those lines but I still think there's general consensus that we do need to have these programs, we do need to have public realm improvement" (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne).

Public realm improvements in Portage la Prairie have taken different forms in recent years. Approximately "fifteen years ago, there was significant effort to focus on beautification of downtown. You're looking at changing over to cobblestone type sidewalks, traditional light standards, that type of effort" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). Due to maintenance concerns and some elements nearing the end of their life cycle, there was discussion of another streetscaping effort three to five years ago, but as "other emergencies have come up or other priorities have emerged, it's been pushed back," and might not materialize (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Still, interviewees think that "streetscaping ... should be done. Everyone spends a disproportional amount of their budget on their main streets and there's no reason for [Portage la Prairie] to be any different" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). They discussed a variety of things that could be done to improve the downtown streetscape including "narrowing the road," "incorporating some traffic circles" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie), improving "accessibility efforts," and upgrading "lighting" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). However, some business owners, including downtown business owners, did not support downtown streetscaping and didn't "think this is a big issue right now, a priority" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). Interviewee 8 (Portage la Prairie) had a similar thought, saying "When I talk the beautification efforts, it's still not a bad downtown in regard to beautification." Other improvements in the public realm include upgrades to Island Park where "[t]hey've done a fair amount of that in the park ... which is beautiful. They've enhanced their golf course and it's readily accessible" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). Finally, there was an initiative a few years ago to "build a public stage on [a vacant] lot and they made it this community event space" in the downtown but proved to be too time-consuming to program and has since been shuttered (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Portage la Prairie has made various improvements to the

public realm including streetscaping initiatives, upgrades to public parks, and creating event spaces. Though there has been some discussion of making more public realm improvements, it does not appear to be a high priority for the City or the community.

5.3 ENDOGENOUS CAPITAL

The third theme relates to Agarwal et al.'s (2009) five types of capital that small cities can exploit to make positive contributions to their economic situations, specifically those that are locally produced, or **endogenous capital**. Participants discussed the importance of strengthening existing assets and acknowledging potential limitations including: *economic capital* or the strength of the commercial sector and costs to business and property owners; *social capital* or the presence of civic associations and levels of civic engagement; *cultural capital* or place identity, heritage, views, and public spaces; *physical capital* or the mix and arrangement of land uses, built form characteristics, and pedestrian environment; city-wide *human capacity*, expertise, and experience to interpret, review and understand the plan; and *development pressure* for new buildings and level of interest in upgrading existing buildings.

5.3.1 ECONOMIC CAPITAL

Economic capital refers to the strength of the commercial sector, costs to business and/or property owners, costs to developers, and costs to the municipality. Interviewees recognized the importance of a strong downtown, especially as the economic base of small cities shift: "You know economy drives downtown. … If you are getting smaller because the resource industry you're dependent on is drying out, then you have less commerce and therefore you have less means" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert). Precedent cities were sympathetic to the challenges of running a business and recognized that adding regulation may only exacerbate issues: "The majority of the owners, they are so financially depressed that they can't afford to even open the store, but they need to fix the awning. And I want them to have an awning of a certain type. And they can't even pay rent" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert). While they can be

yet another financial and regulatory burden, "design guidelines are a good idea, but you really have to work either in synchronicity or advance your economy, understand your economy, in order to have design guidelines take hold" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert) because guidelines will not stimulate the economy. The City may not be in a position to help either: "There's not always funding available. … it's something they want to do and the City's not able to support them. That's true with anything: resources are always fixed" (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne). Of course, the converse is also true: when businesses are thriving, the municipality might also have more resources.

Portage la Prairie's economic capital "has been relatively flat for many, many years. They've had some industry, they lost some industry" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). In fact, until "last year, the last significant investment Portage had was 15 years ago" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). This set up, both for citizens and investors, a mentality of, "What's wrong with this town that they haven't had any activity?" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). This changed in 2017 when there was

> $1.02 billion in new investment announced in Portage la Prairie. The [Roquette] pea plant kicked it off. The next big announcement was Simplot expanding their plant here. Combined between those two investments alone, it's $860,000,000. We've made up the balance of $150,000,000 in other projects, which in and of themselves would have been huge by Portage la Prairie standards. (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie)

These announcements marked a shift in the economic capital and mentality in Portage la Prairie: "Things are going very well here. We're on a roll" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Notably, these are industrial projects with little direct impact on the downtown, though interviewees were optimistic that this investment would beget more investment throughout the city, including the downtown: "We're already starting to see it. We've already got inquiries from commercial developers saying to us, 'Yeah, we want to be downtown'" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). As of now, downtown Portage has "a lot of independent stores, mom and pop types shops, still very active in the core area. There's not a lot of vacant storefronts" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). Further, the commercial sector is "experiencing some

growth right now," including "lots of business expansion with our downtown businesses" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). Still, implementing an urban design plan would likely result in higher costs to businesses upgrading their properties because "they've increased the property value of the building and now they're levied with triple-sized tax increase … It's a real deterrent for other people to invest in their property at least through the proper channels" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Design plans might also affect site selection for new businesses and major chains: "If somebody wants to open up a Sobeys, you can tell them they have to spend an extra $1,800,000 on architectural elements because they do their budget based on their sales and it's just an easy 'no' then" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). Further, "It's tough to sell people on a prospect when you already have a difficult time attracting them in the first place. That addition burden and regulation is a difficult sell" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie).

Retailers in Portage la Prairie may still be adapting to shifting economic trends like centralization of commerce to larger hubs like Winnipeg: "You didn't have the woman's dress shop necessarily in the small town because they're just not generating enough sales. The jewelery stores – they're out. Everything went to the city" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Even though Portage la Prairie is not fully dependent on Winnipeg for basic goods and services, "it suffers from a great all-weather four-lane road to Winnipeg" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie), and as a result, "a drive to Winnipeg is no big deal" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). While some municipalities might offer financial incentives for businesses to locate in a certain area or renovate their storefront, municipal resources are scarce and there is no shortage of competition for them: "well there isn't grants and things like that because the City doesn't have that kind of money" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). Further, "when you talk about new initiatives, you get CAOs and City Managers say, 'Okay, where am I going to get the resources to implement this?'" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). In fact, past projects such as the recent streetscape plan were delayed or canceled due to more pressing needs: "Something came up – oh, maybe our waste water plant needed something. It was a huge amount of money

and I think they decided the money could be spent in better ways" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). Finally, developers also struggle with economic factors: "The high construction costs in Manitoba [compared to other provinces] have held a lot of things back, large cities and small" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). Procuring capital for building projects is competitive because "Lenders only have so much money to lend. As it is, it's a little hard to get the out of the major cities, to get them out of Toronto and Vancouver. ... Adding all the prescriptive things can chase away needed capital" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). Though interviewees are optimistic that recent investment in Portage la Prairie will mark a positive change in economic momentum, they still have very real concerns that design plans would add costs to businesses, the municipality, and developers.

5.3.2 SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital refers to the presence of civic associations and levels of civic engagement in a community. Formal business associations, or even an informal group of merchants, are a common example of social structures that could be used to help organize and communicate planning initiatives: "The Downtown Business Improvement Association. ... I believe they keep their members informed regularly and I think we use them as a bit of a conduit for information about the CIP programs when funding is available and when funding was increased" (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne). Interviewee 1 (Prince Rupert) also discussed a city beautification group which inspired civic pride and engagement by painting murals throughout the city: "And so, everybody that was in that group, including councilors, the schools joined in, people off the street joined in. We're painting [the city]. Every weekend there was a massive party painting [the city] and every Monday there were three or four buildings that were painted." These social structures are channels through which the City can communicate, build support for its initiatives, and even delegate responsibilities.

Social capital in Portage la Prairie takes the form of engaged citizens, formal advocacy groups, and relationships among groups. While there are many "people that sit on multiple

committees and are involved in a number of different non-profits and causes, [there is] another segment of the population that's just genuinely disengaged," which is "probably true in every community" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Still, "[w]henever we are doing something important and need people to sound off, they do" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie), and "there seems to be a pretty active citizen base that … could take on a project like [design guidelines]" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). Advocacy groups in the city include "an organization that's involved in active transportation and incorporating a network of bike paths and walking paths throughout the whole city" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie) "a parks committee … they advocate for parks in certain areas and make that happen," and a Chamber of Commerce that "advocate[s] to the City for areas [they] believe are important for development and upgrades" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). Finally, interviewees emphasized the positive relationships among the business community, the City, and Portage Planning District, especially around communication. Further, there is "a fair amount of cooperation with the Rural Municipality that wasn't always the case. I think maybe it was more competitive before. I think they need to celebrate each other's successes" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). Established social structures in Portage, both formal and informal, are already a used as a means to mobilize resources and improve the city.

5.3.3 CULTURAL CAPITAL

Cultural capital refers to place identity, heritage, views, and public spaces. Place identity refers to the unique sensibility of a place: "partially because it is that funky area that you find in port cities in transition, partially because of the name because it's so unique, they didn't have to brand it or anything …" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert). Further, in small cities, "where identity is so important to people, it's obviously a challenge to maintain that sense of identity, but then also be open to new development" (Interviewee 2, Kenora). Cultural capital will always be unique to a locality. It includes the mix of natural features, built heritage, cultural amenities, and views present in a place. In one precedent city, there were few heritage buildings, but

harbour views were important, so "The anchor is around view cones and height of buildings so that as [the city] grows we don't cut out the visual aspect" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert). A well-defined set of valued cultural assets can help establish a clear vision for the future that the community can latch onto and support.

Portage la Prairie's cultural capital hinges on heritage buildings, a cluster of cultural institutions, and its identity. There are "lot of legacy buildings, a lot of old stone buildings right along Saskatchewan Avenue that have been there since the City was incorporated 110 years ago" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). While they have "had reinvestment in them or at least consistent tenancy, [there has] been no push for these buildings to be upgraded or to be torn down" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie) and "you need local entrepreneurs to take advantage of the great architecture and make that commitment," as opposed to major brands (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). The cluster of cultural institutions downtown includes "the William Glesby Centre which is a performing arts venue … Under the same roof, they have the Portage and District Arts Centre… . Right across the street from it is the regional library and right across the parking lot from it is the local movie theatre" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Depending who you ask there are either "a lot of fantastic independent restaurants" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie) or "very little restaurants" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie) nearby the cluster. On downtown identity, Interviewee 9 (Portage la Prairie) said, "It's kind of lost. There's some new businesses, there's some old businesses. It has no identity I would say. So much of the focus is, especially with this new branding, is always our island, so everything's about the island, the island, the island." Even without an established identity, downtown Portage la Prairie has other cultural assets that could be protected, enhanced, and leveraged to build an identity.

5.3.4 PHYSICAL CAPITAL

Physical capital refers to the mix and arrangement of land uses, built form characteristics, and pedestrian environment. Interviewees emphasized the need for a variety of uses to "get

people coming downtown. Service commercial, clinics, offices, they bring people downtown" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert). Increasing downtown population, either by "bringing residential downtown," for the first time (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert), encouraging a "return to residential use," to the area (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne), or simply having a dense residential district adjacent to downtown was key to ensuring economic viability downtown. This mix of uses, when combined with an "already established built form and few vacancies" (Interviewee 3, Kenora), was thought to entice people to walk downtown and support the local economy:

> The truth is, downtown ... is quite walkable. It's one of the few places in [the region] where you could actually get away without a car for the most part. There's a grocery store downtown, there's several drugstores, there's a good number of services and restaurants. The 2,000 homes or so that are within a ten to fifteen-minute walking distance of downtown – the people actually do walk down here, and they support the local businesses. (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne)

The physical characteristics of a place ultimately contribute to whether people occupy it or not. Downtowns need a mix of uses, services, and establishments supported by a concentrated nearby population to be healthy and economically viable.

The conversation about physical capital in downtown Portage la Prairie focused on the mix of land uses and the width of the right-of-way. The dominant land use in downtown is commercial and many storefronts are retail establishments, but there are also "lot of service agencies in Portage la Prairie" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). There are also "two or three family-run [grocery] shopping centres, where you just don't see that anymore" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). Further, since "the downtown of Portage is really more defined as a long, several blocks along the main street" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie) flanked by residential arranged on a grid pattern rather than a dense downtown cluster, "the city is very walkable" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). The Saskatchewan Avenue right-of-way is wide, in part because it has always served as a major path for transportation across the country. Currently, the street has "two big lanes and a big turning lane," "a huge boulevard," and parking lanes (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). This represents an opportunity to "make the sidewalks

bigger or add a bike lane" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie) should the desire and funding align. Downtown Portage la Prairie's physical assets include its mix of land uses, walkable environment, and wide right-of-way.

5.3.5 HUMAN CAPACITY

Human capacity refers to the expertise and experience of people across different sectors in the city to interpret, review and understand a design plan. This includes planners, city administrators, developers, business owners, property owners, and designers. When interviewees compared their city's human capacity with that of larger centres, they indicated larger centres were

> a little bit more advanced, they're more savvy, and they know that in those kinds of communities there are guidelines I have to follow. So generally, those conversations end up being a great deal different. Here, in downtown, I have a new planner here and the idea is that we are still training people to think that before they do something, they have design guidelines to work with. (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert)

Further, in contexts where the economy has been flat, and growth has been slow, planning departments may lack the experience to implement a design plan: "I think we're too green … we're not there yet" (Interviewee 3, Kenora). Depending on the development review process, Cities need expertise either in-house (e.g., planning staff) or in the community (e.g., community experts who sit on a review panel). Interviewees discussed professional development days, for both public and private sectors, as one method to build human capacity in areas where it might be lacking. Professional expertise is important for all those who interact with the development industry and who navigate the relevant regulatory framework.

Interviewees from Portage la Prairie discussed the capacity of the business, development, and planning professionals who would interact with the design plan regularly. While overall "in terms of guidelines, people are pretty clear" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie), Interviewee 8 (Portage la Prairie) said:

> I don't know if we're there. It's not a slight against anybody in Portage. I just don't see that momentum quite there yet and I don't see that capacity quite

there yet. But I don't think we're far off.

Similar to precedent cities, professional can gain expertise through "professional development … such as courses through [a university] (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). However, sometimes expertise was framed as antagonistic to innovation, like when a professional "want[s] to talk about those projects that didn't work out almost as a rationale not to support whatever's in front of us today" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). It is difficult to speculate if professionals in Portage la Prairie would have the capacity to implement a design plan effectively, but they recognize that training and professional development are effective means of increasing human capital.

5.3.6 DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE

Development pressure refers to the number of new buildings and level of interest in upgrading existing buildings (i.e., low growth, high growth). Interviewees recognized the appeal for business to locate in larger centres rather than in small cities: "We are a smaller town, we are a smaller market. We do get tourists in the summer, but not so much in the winter. It might not be the most advantageous place to open a business" (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne). As such, new development among precedent cities was generally small in number, but not necessarily in scale or impact. Instead, more redevelopment was occurring by way of "more small scale" projects that revitalize the "downtown area" (Interviewee 2, Kenora) In Kenora, "[i]f you ever come down Main Street, you can see that reinvestment, how its materialized. It's quite beautiful" (Interviewee 3, Kenora). In small cities where growth is slow and development pressure is low, even small reinvestments into existing properties were celebrated and viewed as momentum-builders for future investment.

Development pressure in Portage la Prairie is on the rise according to interviewees. Following the $1 billion in new investment last year, they are already seeing spin-off effects in the form of "inquiries from commercial developers," "building happening on spec in the

downtown area" (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie) "rental housing in the pipeline," "single-family in the pipeline" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie), and "business expansion in the downtown" (Interviewee 9, Portage la Prairie). While some of this development may be downtown, "there's going to be some room for expansion and growth, particularly to the west end," as well (Interviewee 6, Portage la Prairie). Interviewees also thought that "increasing their population base by 25-30%" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie) or "closer to that 15,000 as a community," there would build "a bit more of a momentum for attracting retail clients" (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie). There is optimism about new development coming to Portage la Prairie and people are eager to see how recent industrial investments will translate into job, population, and commercial growth in the city.

5.4 DESIGN PLAN QUALITIES

The final theme was **design plan qualities**. Participants mused about having more *rigid* or more *permissive* guidelines including the tensions between predictability for applicants, costs to businesses, cohesive design of the public realm, and being open to development. Cities were caught trying to balance downtown improvement with attracting investment or development: "So again, there's nothing too rigid. We want it to be very easy and approachable for new development to come in" (Interviewee 2, Kenora). Another said, "I cannot stop the commerce in lieu of our guidelines when I know that commerce is not as healthy as it should be" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert). As a result, they approve a broad range of development, even if they don't completely adhere to the design plan: "In a sense, we'd like to see people redevelop so we're not that strict … We're not too heavy-handed" (Interviewee 4, Port Colborne). This is especially true in the case of large national or international chains: "But when I deal with them on signage, and I say, 'Your sign is too big,' they don't listen because their entire thing is cookie cutter. It comes from Toronto" (Interviewee 1, Prince Rupert). Even with chains that were easier to work with, there was a tension between design and development:

> He's developed a building that, while it still meets the corporate image requirements for Wendy's, it still lends itself towards what we're trying to achieve. It still looks like a Wendy's. It still looks like a building ordered out of a catalogue. But at least there's some elements, some details, that are in keeping with what we're trying to achieve. (Interviewee 5, Port Colborne)

Rigidity of design plans is subject to judgment, values, priorities, and direction which are prone to change and evolve over time as the city does.

Interviewees in Portage had similar thoughts on the rigidity of plans as those in precedent cities. Predictability in the development approval process is important because otherwise, "they just make stuff up all the time. To get a building permit or an occupancy permit. You never know. You never know what they'll make up" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). Further, any prescriptive requirements in plans should include a clear rationale: "I think in the planning document, just anytime they say, 'You shall do this,' ask why" (Interviewee 7, Portage la Prairie). However, the question of rigidity and permissiveness comes back to "a situation where you're having a hard time attracting businesses to come downtown and then you put in an additional burden," with potentially negative consequences to downtown vitality (Interviewee 8, Portage la Prairie).

6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the major aggregate themes that arose from my research findings, how they relate to established planning theory, and their implications for implementing urban design plans in small Canadian cities. Interviewees' conceptions of revitalization largely aligned with those of Heritage Canada Foundation (2009) and Robertson (1997), focusing on organizational development, marketing, design, and economic development.

6.1 COMMUNICATION

Interviewees in precedent cities cited communication as a cornerstone of their planning processes. Community and stakeholder engagement were conducted early while creating design plans to determine whether the public would support them, goals for the downtown area, and what specific elements of the built form should be controlled by the design plan. This approach was popularized in the latter half of the twentieth century and is now ingrained in

planning theory as best practice since, when done well, participatory planning processes have real impacts on and benefits for communities rather than being an empty ritual full of false promises (Arnstein, 1969). The public and stakeholders in the business and/or development community can contribute their "genuine spatial needs, perceptions and desires" (Berman, 2017, p. 1), and tacit knowledge to gain power in a participatory planning process (Roggema, 2014). Interviewees cited the same reasons to conduct public engagement as Berman (2017): creating policies that have the broadest appeal, reduce potential conflicts, and ensure the stability of solutions. This is also standard procedure in Portage la Prairie where planning and civic issues are frequently brought before the community to give citizens the opportunity to weigh in. Should the City of Portage la Prairie begin to explore a design plan as part of a downtown revitalization strategy, it is well versed in how best to engage its citizens and stakeholders.

Communication with business owners, property owners, and developers was an ongoing process. Once design plans were implemented, precedent cities continued to check in with these groups to make them aware of the plan if they were not already, to inform them about the process and intent, and to determine if any adjustments needed to be made to the policy. In Portage la Prairie, the Chamber of Commerce meets monthly with City officials; this relationship could serve as the foundation to address concerns with the design plan should they arise.

While design plans may be supported in principle, interviewees in precedent cities met with development applicants to discuss their projects. This allowed staff to explain the specific implications of the design plan on applicants' proposals and steer applicants toward designs that adhered to plan. This type of process is already in place in Portage la Prairie where applicants must go to the Portage Planning District to file for relevant permits, thus giving staff a natural point at which to discuss development proposals. Finally, all of the precedent cities and Portage la Prairie use passive methods to communicate with the public including making documents available online and responding to inquiries for a variety of planning concerns. I

identified a range of communication methods used to implement design plans, all of which are already employed in Portage la Prairie in their planning processes. This indicates that they are well-equipped to inform, educate, and learn from the public should they implement a design plan.

6.2 PLANNING INITIATIVES

Interviewees indicated that on their own, regulations such as design plans are unlikely to stimulate growth or revitalize an area. Instead, plans were often coupled with other initiatives to entice the private sector to develop or redevelop property and contribute to a revitalization effort. Further, design plans do not exist in a vacuum: provincial and municipal legislation, bylaws, policies, other plans, and regulations also shape development.

While provincial governments were implicitly described as a distant or weak force on local development, interviewees acknowledged that local plans had to comply with provincial legislation and policies. This aligns with Kumar's (2002) finding that provincial legislation "dictates which and how many design-related elements could be regulated" (p. 247). A distant provincial influence is not necessarily a negative, since having high-level policies leaves municipalities more latitude on local matters. However, Port Colborne, being part of the Greater Golden Horseshoe region in Ontario must comply with the regional *Places to Grow* regional growth plan. Similarly, British Columbia's Agricultural Land Reserve system is a provincial initiative to protect agricultural land from being converted for urban uses. These two mechanisms limit spatial growth of settlements, direct growth inward, and shape development at the local level, but nothing comparable is currently in place in Manitoba.

Municipal plans and bylaws are an obvious method to shape local development, design, and revitalization efforts. Across all the cities examined, Development Plans (or their provincial equivalent) and zoning bylaws are required by the provincial government. They are not effective on the basis on their existence, but rather if their content has merit, has political support, and is actually administered. The same can be said for Secondary Plans (or

Community Improvement Plans as they are known in Ontario) which connected the design plans to social, economic, and physical goals. Due to their comprehensive scope and suite of financial incentives, interviewees found them to be effective means to shape downtown development. Portage la Prairie currently lacks a comprehensive strategy and instead has a patchwork of policies and bylaws related to its downtown. For instance, one interviewee discussed how a bylaw banning sidewalk patios downtown was created because Council perceived patios to be unpopular among patrons due to semi-truck traffic on Saskatchewan Avenue. A more comprehensive view might recognize the opportunity to grow downtown businesses by permitting patios, and therefore patronage, and make downtown more walkable by diverting more semi-truck traffic to the bypass.

As mentioned above, financial incentives were used in Kenora and Port Colborne to accomplish a variety of goals such as increasing residential units downtown and improving façades. These incentives were provided based on a set of criteria (i.e., design guidelines) and tied to larger goals in their community improvement plans. In both cases, the City budgeted a set amount each year for such projects and would match funds, up to a per-determined cap, up to 50% of costs. Interviewees considered the façade improvements made possible by financial incentives as one of the most successful pieces of the design plans because they improved the physical conditions in the public realm. Portage la Prairie offers a similar program in partnership with the provincial government, where each government matches up to 25% of costs, resulting in the same cost-split to business or property owners as in precedent cities. However, Portage la Prairie budgets less funding ($10,000 compared to approximately $200,000 in Kenora) and, in the absence of design guidelines, distributes the money without any comprehensive design criteria.

Branding and marketing were used in Prince Rupert to reinforce an existing place-identity. By infusing the brand or place-identity into their design plan, the City was able to build support for them among citizens and merchants alike. While Portage la Prairie recently launched a new tourism brand in conjunction with Travel Manitoba, *Island on the Prairies*,

the brand is for the city-major and not specific to downtown. Still, this brand is already being used by PRED to attract more investment to the City and could be integrated with downtown-specific initiatives in the future.

Reports and studies were used by staff in precedent cities to learn best practices, gather local data, monitor economic returns, and report how municipal funds were spent. Precedent studies informed interviewees about how to gather local data to measure downtown vitality, which in turn contributed to a more targeted revitalization approach. Monitoring and reporting results are important, but often neglected part of planning, that demonstrate if planning initiatives are working and whether adjustments need to be made. In Portage la Prairie, a recent study was conducted in partnership with the University of Manitoba around downtown parking inventory.

Interviewees in precedent cities discussed how City-led public realm improvements, guided by an urban design plan, could demonstrate the municipality's commitment to downtown revitalization to the public. These improvements took a variety of forms from renovating or creating major public gathering spaces and parks to streetscaping to smaller details like street signage. These improvements were often done as part of a comprehensive downtown revitalization plan or secondary plan and adhered to design guidelines penned specifically for public projects. These improvements were framed as the municipality leading by example: if Cities expect the private sector to improve their properties, they should do the same with public property. Interviewees indicated that while many public realm improvements are welcomed by the community, streetscaping can be contentious, especially when making changes to parking inventory, adding active transportation infrastructure, and converting tradition intersections to roundabouts. Within the past fifteen years in Portage la Prairie, a public performance space was introduced but was later abandoned and a streetscaping project was partially implemented. Another streetscaping plan was drafted more recently but has yet to be built. This demonstrates some recognition that public space is important to downtown vitality, but projects such as these are often pushed aside to address more pressing needs like

water treatment facility upgrades.

6.3 ENDOGENOUS CAPITAL

The endogenous capital of a place are the keys to success for any revitalization effort. While communication can be taught, and planning initiatives outsourced, endogenous capital is the foundation upon which revitalization happens. The Community Economic Development (CED) model is used in rural contexts where change must be driven by and sustainable for the local populations. This corresponds with findings from Agarwal et al. (2009) who describe five types of capital – economic, social, cultural, physical, and human – that rural communities can leverage to grow economically. Interviewees touched on these five types of capital, but also discussed a sixth, development pressure, which also contributes to the successful implementation of design plans.

Interviewees discussed how the economic capital of businesses, developers, and the municipality must be sturdy enough to absorb the additional costs associated with design plans. For businesses and developers, additional costs are induced by plans that required more expensive materials and finishes. Municipalities, meanwhile, incur additional costs when they provide financial incentives, hire or train staff to review development applications and implement design plans, and make public realm improvements. Portage la Prairie's downtown is home to a high concentration of local independent retailers who, according to interviewees, are doing well, even expanding in some cases. However, in the past, façade upgrades and necessary renovations have increased property taxes to unsustainable levels. Further, the downtown strip competes with the city's west end for retailers, and additional costs in the downtown due to design controls may sway retailers to locate in the west end instead, weakening the downtown. The City must be cognizant of how design plans might put more strain on its own resources as well. Implementing design plans invariably increases work load for planning staff who must review applications for compliance and evaluate their effectiveness. This is further complicated in Portage la Prairie because the Portage Planning

District provides all the City's planning services, so any work load changes might strain the relationship if not handled correctly. Further, City resources have failed to fully implement public realm improvements in the past and economic capital was likely a major consideration in those decisions. Still, interviewees are optimistic that recent investment in the community can stimulate the economy which would make both public and private sector financial contributions more feasible.

Interviewees in precedent cities discussed how engaged citizens, beautification groups, and business associations played important roles in downtown revitalization. The City relied on their involvement to build support among, to gather opinions from, and to inform multiple publics. Cities used existing social structures like business associations to communicate more efficiently with business owners, both to inform them and to learn their perspectives. Cities also coordinated with social structures like beautification groups who painted buildings and murals to beautify downtown while still adhering to design goals. Portage la Prairie is home to many such social structures. The Chamber of Commerce meets regularly with City officials to discuss issues and share information. The local active transportation group and parks committee are focused on bettering the urban form by advocating for more bicycle infrastructure and improved parks, respectively. While interviewees noticed that many citizens were not all that engaged in civic issues, they recognized that this is probably the case in most cities and people show up for important matters. Should Portage la Prairie implement a design plan, it could coordinate with established social groups and engaged citizens to advance their shared interests.

Cultural capital in precedent cities included unique architecture, heritage, views, and place identity. These assets were necessarily unique to each locality, and therefore presented opportunities to be celebrated and enhanced according to local values. For instance, interviewees in Prince Rupert emphasized the importance of views over heritage and their design guidelines were penned accordingly, ensuring harbour views were protected as the downtown developed. In Kenora, however, interviewees emphasized heritage and identity

rather than views. In Portage la Prairie, interviewees noted some heritage assets and a cluster of cultural institutions – a performing arts space, an art gallery, a movie theatre, and the library – in the downtown. Though interviewees did not think that downtown Portage la Prairie had a distinct place identity, these cultural assets could form the foundation of a new vision for the area.

Jane Jacobs' (1961) conception of a well-functioning neighbourhood included mixing a variety of uses in a concentrated area along short blocks to increase interactions and opportunities to explore the area. Interviewees in precedent cities echoed these sentiments, discussing how a downtown had good physical capital if it had a mix of residential, retail, services, public space, food stores, and restaurants organized into buildings with narrow frontages. This physical arrangement of urban form was thought to bring different people downtown for different reasons at all times of day, keeping the area busy round the clock. Downtown Portage la Prairie already has many of these attributes including a variety of land uses – retail, services, restaurants, and food stores – organized on a grid street network. While interviewees mused whether the abundance of services came at the cost of fewer retail spaces, they still recognized that the elongated form of downtown meant it is more reachable to the adjacent residential areas of the city. Lastly, the physical dimensions of Saskatchewan Avenue were notes as both an opportunity and barrier for revitalization. The right-of-way is wide, which would accommodate wide sidewalks and bike lanes alongside adequate vehicle lanes, but also means the street might never feel intimate or quaint like other small city main streets. Portage la Prairie has a unique collection of physical assets that put it in a strong position to revitalize the built form of its downtown.

Interviewees described human capital as the capacity and expertise of the planning, business, and development professionals who interact with design plans the most. When these professionals have more capacity and expertise, they are better equipped to manage challenging or complicated development proposals. Interviewees noted that low human capital can be an issue in smaller communities because planning and development offices are small.

Further, professionals may be less familiar with design plans since they are more common in major cities. However, human capital can be enhanced through professional development and incremental change. These sentiments were echoed by interviewees in Portage la Prairie where planning and development staff are well versed in existing policy but would naturally have to adjust if a new design plan was introduced.

Development pressure is highly influential in the implementation of design plans because without it, the City has little leverage to shape development. When there is more demand to develop downtown, more investors are willing to make concessions and adhere to design plans because potential benefits outweigh the added costs. However, interviewees noted that demand was often low for new development and most projects were redevelopments or upgrades to existing properties. In these situations, Cities employed a variety of planning initiatives to stimulate development under the assumption that investment begets investment. In Portage la Prairie, interviewees are optimistic that recent industrial investments totaling $1 billion will do just that. They have already seen more retail and residential speculation and are confident this will translate into more development throughout the city, including downtown. Interviewees were also hopeful that reaching a population level of 15,000-17,000 people would mark a tipping point that would attract more business. Only time will tell if recent industrial investment will indeed spark spill-off retail and residential development throughout the city, but it also marks an opportunity for Portage la Prairie to make a concentrated planning effort to capitalize on development potential.

6.4 DESIGN PLAN QUALITIES

The final factor affecting the implementation of design plans is a quality of the plans themselves: rigidity or permissiveness. Interviewees noted that planning staff were sensitive to the economic capacity of businesses and developers and thus conceded design standards if it meant securing development. Flexible or loose plans were thought to be more appealing to developers because they could negotiate designs with lower costs. In markets

where development pressure was low, planning staff did not want to be perceived as anti-development for the sake of good design. Interviewees in Portage la Prairie echoed these concerns, discussing the possibility of scaring businesses away from the downtown to the west end or out of Portage la Prairie entirely due to additional costs and regulatory hurdles associated with design plans. Interviewees involved in development, however, noted that predictability in the approval process is also important. Thus, design plans should strike a clear balance of rigidity and flexibility.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

7.1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

My first research question was: What factors contribute to the effective implementation of urban design plans in small Canadian cities looking to revitalize their downtowns? I found seventeen factors that contributed to the effective implementation of urban design plans in the small Canadian cities I examined. I organized these factors into four themes as follows:

THEME 1: COMMUNICATION	• Community Engagement • Stakeholder Meetings • Applicant Meetings • Passive Methods

THEME 2: PLANNING INITIATIVES	• Provincial Legislation & Partnerships • Municipal Plans • Financial Incentives • Place Branding & Marketing • Reports & Studies • Public Realm Improvements
THEME 3: ENDOGENOUS CAPITAL	• Economic Capital • Social Capital • Cultural Capital • Physical Capital • Human Capital • Development Pressure
THEME 4: DESIGN PLAN QUALITIES	• Rigid or permissive

Of the four themes, endogenous capital may be the most foundational to successful implementation of design plans. The factors in this theme are essentially the socio-economic context of a city. More capital – whether economic, social, or any of the rest – were tied to better outcomes for the urban design plans, likely because there was a stronger foundation to build off. For example, where a city has plentiful economic capital, businesses, developers, and the municipality have more resources to pay for inevitable costs incurred by improving the public realm to adhere to the plan. Similarly, with a strong sense of culture in the downtown, including place identity, heritage, views, and public spaces, came community pride and a desire

to enhance the area. More development, investment, and growth in a city was thought to beget more development, investment, and growth, creating competition. With more development pressure and competition, municipalities are in a stronger negotiating position with developers and businesses to shape projects to align with design goals. Though these factors may be foundational, they are also elusive and difficult to control with policy.

The remaining themes, communication, planning, and qualities, may be more easily controlled and are not a prerequisite for revitalization. For example, communication amongst stakeholder groups can be improved with concentrated effort, new procedures, and relationship building. New planning initiatives to complement the design plan can be drafted in-house or contracted out to an experienced firm. Specific qualities of the design plan, like rigidity, can be established after stakeholder engagement and incrementally adjusted over time as the plan is implemented. That is not to say these factors are necessarily straightforward or without significant effort, but they are more tangible and may be easier to administer.

7.1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

My second research question was: What barriers and opportunities present themselves should Portage la Prairie implement an urban design plan? As discussed above, strong, established endogenous capital is required to serve as a foundation for revitalization. Interviewees in Portage la Prairie thought the established grid network, arrangement of land uses, and pedestrian environment contributed to a wealth of physical capital downtown. Similarly, social groups and structures like the Chamber of Commerce, an active transportation group, and a parks committee were actively engaged in urban issues in Portage la Prairie, contributing to a wealth of social capital. Interviewees were optimistic that, after decades of flat growth, recent industrial investment would stimulate Portage la Prairie's economy and spur more development downtown, but only time will tell if this ends up being the case. Interviewees were split on how much human and cultural capital Portage la Prairie had. While some thought the city had good expertise throughout the business, development, and planning

professions, others were more hesitant and thought it might come with time. Finally, while many interviewees were unenthusiastic about existing culture in downtown Portage la Prairie, others saw potential to create a cultural district near the Glesby Centre, movie theatre, and library. Even with some misgivings around cultural and human capital, Portage la Prairie appears to have a relatively strong foundation of endogenous capital upon which to revitalize its downtown.

Portage la Prairie also has a wealth of experience with stakeholder communication and planning initiatives. Communication in particular was consistently praised by interviewees as being effective and positive, contributing to strong relationships among the City, the Portage Planning District, the business community, and the development community. Further, all of the factors in the planning initiatives theme have been undertaken in Portage la Prairie, whether by the City, the Portage Planning District, Portage Regional Economic Development, or in partnership with the Province of Manitoba, in recent years. Though these initiatives were not necessarily in the name of downtown revitalization, they demonstrate an opportunity to learn from past experience should Portage la Prairie move forward with a comprehensive revitalization plan.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section responds to the research findings, discussion, and answers to the research questions by making recommendations to Portage la Prairie specifically and small Canadian cities more generally.

1. Determine whether downtown revitalization is desirable for the public, business community, and politicians. Given recent investment and its potential to significantly change the city as a result, now is the time to plan ahead to shape that change. Though Portage la Prairie began and abandoned a downtown streetscape plan a few years ago, the conversation and mentality around development in the city may be different now. Further, this plan was not necessarily comprehensive in nature whereas a more robust

plan might also include elements like economic goals, social goals, transportation strategies, design guidelines, and financial incentives.

2. Study how to reduce truck traffic by examining other cities along the Trans-Canada Highway as precedents. Loud and disruptive truck traffic was cited as a deterrent for people to linger along Saskatchewan Avenue storefronts. By examining possible economic and social outcomes of reducing said traffic, the City can use design and policy to shape solutions best suited for Portage la Prairie.
3. Create secondary plan(s) for different geographic and topic areas such as downtown, parks and recreation, transportation, and culture. In Kenora and Port Colborne, these types of plans were used to achieve a variety of economic and social goals, using a variety of tools to shape development accordingly.
4. Consider how downtown identity should either be distinct from or integrated with the *Island on the Prairies* branding. Since this brand is relatively new, effective, and popular, it may be advantageous to lean into a related downtown brand rather than creating a separate competing one. This may also translate to spatial changes such as enhancing a physical linkage from downtown to the waterfront or attracting more commercial development between Saskatchewan Avenue and Crescent Lake.
5. Consider expanding financial incentive program both by allocating more money, but also by introducing more funding streams besides façade improvements such as downtown residential intensification. Financial incentives should be tied to specific, clear, predictable design criteria or guidelines to ensure development is in line with overall goals and municipal monies are well spent. Such incentives should be well-marketed, given interviewees involved in economic development and development were not aware of existing programs. Finally, the City should report how these monies are spent and the return on investment.

6. Enhance and grow Portage la Prairie's cultural district near the William Glesby Centre. This area already has performing arts, a movie theatre, an art gallery, a library, and restaurants. By protecting and enhancing these assets, the district could contribute to downtown identity, attract area residents, and draw tourists.

7.3 ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

First and foremost, this study assumes that the design plan, rather than some other policy or factor, implemented in precedent cities had a positive causal effect on their revitalization efforts. This is not to say that design plans are the only contributing factor, but rather that they did indeed contribute. Cities are an ever-changing mix of culture, policy, design, politics, and economics, so it is nearly impossible to definitively conclude that a single planning initiative is solely responsible for a specific outcome in the built environment. However, interviewees in precedent cities pointed to a variety of projects that, in their professional opinions, would not have taken place or would have looked different had the design plan not been implemented.

The study was limited in scope to only three precedent cities to ensure a manageable workload. Cities not included in the study have probably had different experiences with design plans and would report different factors affecting their implementation. Though the small sample size was a necessity, it was also limited by which cities agreed to participate. For example, examining three cities with markedly different growth rates could have provided more insights into the tension between design and development in small cities.

Finally, this study was limited to study only the implementation of design plans and not the qualities of the design plans themselves. Though interviewees touched on one quality, rigidity, there are most likely a suite of other qualities that would affect implementation such as clarity, authenticity, and appropriateness. Rather, the study mainly focused on factors external to the design plans.

7.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Planners have a wide range of tools they can use to shape development in cities. Though this study focused on design plans, interviewees discussed how they used them in coordination with secondary plans, financial incentives, branding, negotiation, engagement, and public realm improvements. This indicates that design plans are not a sure-fire tool to revitalize a downtown but can be an important component of a larger scheme. It is also important to consider the local context before moving forward with a plan since not all tools, including design plans, are appropriate in all situations. As one interviewee said, additional regulation will not stimulate the economy, so design plans might only worsen the situation in a flat or depressed market. Further, planners need to consider impacts policy has on other stakeholders. For example, though all the precedent cities had in-house planning staff, Portage la Prairie relies on a regional planning office. Any new initiative the City implements could add to the work load of the partner organization, so decisions must be made together.

7.5 DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Research on small Canadian cities is sparse, so any research that advances understanding of these settlements would be a meaningful contribution to the field. Additionally, few studies focus on the implementation of design plans in cities of any size. Further research could include studies similar to this one that compare cities of different sizes, political contexts, growth rates, or remoteness. Further research could focus on how qualities of design plans, such as rigidity or clarity, affect their implementation. Studies like these would not only widen the breadth of factors that affect implementation, but also the depth, or how each affects implementation.

7.6 FINAL THOUGHTS

Design plans can be an effective tool to shape development in small Canadian cities and contribute to a comprehensive downtown revitalization initiative. However, regulation does not stimulate development. Rather, the city must have a wealth of endogenous capital – economic, social, cultural, physical, human, and development – before considering such schemes. With a strong foundation of these assets, cities are in a stronger negotiating position to attract and shape development. Without a strong foundation, development will likely locate elsewhere – somewhere with fewer regulations and incurred costs. Portage la Prairie is well-positioned to leverage recent industrial development to strengthen the entire city but must plan thoughtfully to make the most of the opportunity.

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APPENDIX I: PHASE 1 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The purpose of the interview is to further understand why decision makers in precedent cities chose their specific revitalization scheme as opposed to other options. Interview questions are listed below:

1. What is your professional background?
2. How have you been involved with or used your city's urban design guidelines?
3. Besides design guidelines, what planning programs, projects, and policies does the municipality use to shape development?
4. How do specific provincial policies shape local development?
5. How do the design guidelines work in practice?
6. What are some specific results or projects that can be attributed to the design guidelines?
7. What groups have supported the design guidelines?
8. What groups have opposed the design guidelines?
9. What has been the most successful part of the design guidelines in practice?
10. What has been the least successful part of the design guidelines in practice?
11. How might you improve the implementation of the design guidelines?

APPENDIX II: DISCUSSION PAPER

My research is split in two phases. In the first phase, I examined how urban design guidelines have been implemented in three small Canadian cities. In the second phase, I will apply this research to my study site in Portage la Prairie to explore potential opportunities and barriers should urban design guidelines be implemented.

The focus of the research is the implementation of urban design guidelines, rather than the design specifications themselves. I examined the following cities:

	PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE	PRINCE RUPERT	KENORA	PORT COLBORNE
Population (2016)	12.949	12,687	10,687	15,037
% Population Change (2011-2016)	2.7%	-3%	-3%	0%
Population Density	1373.5 people/km^2	54.2 people/km^2	796.3 people/km^2	1275.6 people/km^2
Distance From Population Centre	85 km (Winnipeg)	718 km (Prince George)	209 km (Winnipeg)	35 km (St. Catharines)

FINDINGS TO DATE FOR DISCUSSION:

I found 17 factors affecting implementation of urban design guidelines in the precedent cities. I organized in them into four major themes.

COMMUNICATION

Participants from every city mentioned the importance of informing the public, consulting stakeholders, and discussing the implications of urban design guidelines. It was often linked to increased uptake of projects and reduced opposition to the guidelines. Communication methods included:

- Community-wide public engagement when creating the guidelines
- Stakeholder meetings when creating the guidelines
- Individual meetings regarding a specific application
- Passive methods like being available for general inquiries and having guidelines online

PLANNING INITIATIVES

Participants noted that urban design guidelines on their own are unlikely to make much change. They were often coupled with other initiatives including:

- Provincial policies did not have a strong influence, other than regional growth plans
- Municipal plans such as Development Plans and Secondary Plans
- Financial incentives such as grants for building improvements and reduced fees
- Branding and marketing of the district
- Studies including formal studies and informal online research
- Public realm improvements including investment in streetscaping and public parks

ENDOGENOUS CAPITAL

Participants discussed the importance of strengthening existing assets and acknowledging potential limitations including:

- Economics –the strength of the commercial sector and costs to business/property owners
- Social – business associations and general civic engagement
- Culture – place identity, heritage, views, public spaces
- Physical – mix and arrangement of land uses, built form characteristics, pedestrian environment
- Human capacity, expertise, and experience (city-wide) to interpret, review and understand the guidelines
- Development pressure (new builds) and interest in upgrading existing buildings

RIGIDITY

Participants mused about the implications of having more rigid or more permissive guidelines including predictability, costs, cohesive design, and being open to development.

APPENDIX III: PHASE 2 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The purpose of the interview is to understand local perspectives on implementing design guidelines as a revitalization tool in Portage la Prairie. Interview questions are listed below:

1. What is your professional background?
2. How have you been involved with urban design, planning, and/or development in Portage la Prairie?
3. What surprised you about the findings from the precedent cities?
4. What are some strengths and challenges in Portage around communication between the City, the public, the business community, and the development community?
5. What planning initiatives have been deployed in the past to revitalize the site?
6. What should be attempted in the future?
7. What existing local assets could be strengthened with urban design guidelines?
8. How rigid or permissive should urban design guidelines be and why?
9. Do you think the design guidelines are an effective tool for revitalizing the site?

APPENDIX IV: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Faculty of Architecture

Statement of Informed Consent

Research Project:	"The Art of Making Places for People: Urban Design Guidelines for Small Cities' Downtowns"
Principal Investigator:	Michael Blatz, Graduate Student, Master of City Planning, Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba
Research Supervisor:	Supervisor: Richard Milgrom, Head and Associate Professor, Department of City Planning, Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba

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This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Introduction

You are invited to take part in a research study. This consent form, a copy of which you can keep for your records, is intended to ensure you have consented willingly and with all necessary information. It should explain what is involved in the research and what is expected of you as a participant. Please take time to read, understand, and review the consent form and information about the research. If you would like more information, please feel free to ask me (the Principal Investigator).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to advance the field of urban design at the small city scale. My objectives are: to evaluate what factors, including policy, demographics, and socio-economics, contribute to the effective implementation of urban design guidelines; and, to discover opportunities and barriers in the study area (Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Canada) to guide decision making for context specific strategies to revitalize the area. This research project is a requirement of the two-year Master of City Planning program at the University of Manitoba.

Study procedures

If you participate in this study, you will be asked a series of questions about urban design guidelines, planning policy, development, and main street revitalization. You can refuse to answer any questions and may end the interview at any time. The interview will be recorded using an audio recorder and transcribed. You will have the option to choose to see the transcription prior to the publication of this project. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes to one hour long.

Participant Risks, Benefits & Costs

You will be exposed to minimal risk by participating in this study. Risk will be minimized by removing identifiers such as names and employer information. However, since the research will be conducted in small cities with a small planning and development community, this does not eliminate all risk of being identified. You will have the opportunity to provide feedback throughout the process to make you are comfortable with your comments being public.

You will benefit by contributing to Portage la Prairie and similar small Canadian cities that desire to change their circumstances through urban design. The proposed research will contribute an evaluation of urban design guidelines for the site, a general framework for similar small cities to strengthen their main streets, and further the understanding of urban design principles in the small city context.

Audiotaping & Anonymity

With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. I will refer to you solely by one identifier (position or location) to obfuscate your identity. In every case, I will remove identifiers such as names and employer information from transcripts. You will have the opportunity to review transcripts within five weeks of the interview. Data, including audio files and transcripts, will be stored on a password protected computer to which only the Principle Investigator and Research Supervisor have access. The University of Manitoba auditors may look at the research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. Audio files will be destroyed within a week of being transcribed. All transcripts and data will be destroyed within one year of graduation, but no later than October 2020.

Feedback & Debriefing

I will send you a transcript within five weeks of the completed interview to give you the opportunity to review the data for accuracy and reconsider any statements you wish not to be made public. Please indicate how you would like to receive the transcript on the final page of this consent form. You will have a second opportunity to provide feedback when I send you a draft report, allowing you to see how I intend use your comments and provide feedback.

Dissemination of Results

I will disseminate study findings as a hardcopy in the University of Manitoba Architecture/Fine Arts library, as a publically accessible digital copy on University of Manitoba's thesis database (https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/), and as a presentation at my oral defense. You may choose to receive a digital copy once finalized.

You may choose to receive a brief summary of results, approximately 1 to 3 pages, as the project near completion, no later than July 1, 2020. If you wish to receive the summary, please indicate how you would like to receive it on the final page of this consent form.

Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal from Study

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary. You are able to refuse participation or to withdraw from the research study at any time before the completed project is be submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. To withdraw from the study, contact the Principal Investigator via email (umblatzm@myumanitoba.ca). All data including audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed immediately if you choose to withdraw from the study. If you decide to participate, you have the right to refuse to answer any question or to refuse participation in any activity, at any time.

Statement of Consent

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB).If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or by email at humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

If you agree to each of the following, please place a check mark in the corresponding box:

I have read or it has been read to me the details of this consent form.	Yes ( ) No ( )
My questions have been addressed.	Yes ( ) No ( )
I agree to have the interview audio-recorded and transcribed.	Yes ( ) No ( )
I agree to be contacted by phone or e-mail if further information is required after the interview	Yes ( ) No ( )
I agree to have the findings (which may include quotations) from this project published or presented in a manner that does not reveal my identity.	Yes ( ) No ( )
Do you wish to receive a summary of the findings?	
How do you wish to receive transcripts and the summary?	Surface Mail ( ) Email ( )

I, _____ (print name), agree to participate in this study.

Address: _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX V: PRECEDENT CITY SELECTION

City	Population	% Population Change (2011-16)	Distance from Major City	Plan Date
Portage la Prairie, MB	12.949	3%	85 km	-
Sylvan Lake, AB	14,816	20%	24 km	
Beaumont, AB	17,396	31%	26 km	
Cochrane, AB	25,289	45%	39 km	
Stony Plain, AB	16,271	14%	42 km	
Lacombe, AB	12.442	9%	25 km	
Fort Saskatchewan, AB	23,895	28%	31 km	
Melfort, SK	5,778	7%	175 km	2016
Prince Rupert, BC	12,687	-3%	718 km	2009
Charlottetown, PEI	44,739	8%	165 km	2011
Owen Sound, ON	22,032	-1%	135 km	2015
Pembroke, ON	15,940	-3%	147 km	2016
Brockville, ON	21,854	-2%	85 km	2009
Kenora, ON	10,687	-3%	209 km	2004
Port Colborne, ON	15,037	0%	36 km	2008