

**Converting Underutilized, Upper-Storey Commercial Space  
to Low or Moderate Income Residential Use:  
Linking Residential Conversion, Heritage Conservation,  
Economic Utilization and Downtown Revitalization  
in  
Prince George, B.C.**

**BY**

**MATTHEW G.S. BALDWIN**

A Practicum

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**MASTER OF CITY PLANNING**

**Department of City Planning  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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COVERTING UNDERUTILIZED, UPPER-STOREY COMMERCIAL SPACE  
TO LOW OR MODERATE INCOME RESIDENTIAL USE:  
LINKING RESIDENTIAL CONVERSION, HERITAGE CONSERVATION,  
ECONOMIC UTILIZATION AND DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION IN  
PRINCE GEORGE, B.C.

BY

MATTHEW G.S. BALDWIN

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF CITY PLANNING

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this practicum is twofold. First, this practicum entails an inventory of underutilized, upper-storey commercial space and an assessment of housing needs in Prince George. This inventory and assessment constitute the "core study" of this practicum, and has been completed in accordance with the terms of reference for Phase 1 of a three-phase project commissioned by the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust (VCHT).

Second, this practicum explores the broader issues related to housing need, heritage conservation, and downtown revitalization. As demand for affordable housing rises, the conversion of commercial buildings to residential use can offer certain benefits to downtown, benefits such as: diversity, vibrancy, improved safety and improved commerce. This practicum attempts to forge the link between these broader issues (residential conversion, heritage conservation, the utilization of land and building resources, and revitalization), in the context of a conventional CBD within a smaller, non-metropolitan Canadian city. This is achieved by focusing on the feasibility of converting underutilized commercial space to residential use, and through an analysis of housing need, land and building underutilization, and core area decline in Prince George, Nelson and New Westminster, BC. This practicum concludes with suggestions for further study, and a brief plan of action, to help create solutions to the problems examined herein.

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This work is for the people of Prince George.

I dedicate it to the memory of my father,

George W. Baldwin, Q.C.,

and to my mother,

Daphne Baldwin

who, together, gave me

their love of history,

and sense of civic responsibility.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

APA	American Planning Association
ASAP	Active Support Against Poverty
BCHMC	British Columbia Housing Management Corporation
BIA	Business Improvement Area
BIZ	Business Improvement Zone
CBD	Central Business District
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation ( <i>formerly</i> Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation)
CPAC	Community Policing Access Centre
CPR	Canadian Pacific Railway
DNWBIS	Downtown New Westminster Business Improvement Society
GTP	Grand Trunk Pacific
HNRP	Housing Needs Research Project
MHR&CS	Ministry of Housing, Recreation and Consumer Services
MMA	Ministry of Municipal Affairs
MMAR&H	Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Housing
NIMBY	Not In My Back Yard
NWRA	New Westminster Redevelopment Act
OCP	Official Community Plan
PCHO	Provincial Commission on Housing Options
PGDSD	Prince George Development Services Department
PGHC	Prince George Housing Committee

RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RSBC	Revised Statutes of British Columbia
SBC	Statutes of British Columbia
SRO	Single Resident Occupancy
TCBA	Town Center Businesses Association
VCHT	Victoria Civic Heritage Trust

## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM AND THE PURPOSE OF THIS PRACTICUM

### 1.1 The Problem and Central Issues

*"Most communities in British Columbia perceive the strong need to create affordable residential accommodation in the downtown area, principally in buildings that are vacant or underutilized. ...*

*Projects in Europe and North America have demonstrated that rehabilitation and conversion of downtown upper storeys to housing, particularly in buildings with heritage character, can generate many benefits*

- *increased housing stock*
- *reduced vacancy rates*
- *support of downtown services and businesses*
- *improved public safety on downtown streets*
- *pressure eased on transportation systems*
- *vibrant and diverse downtown areas*

*In recent years, however, downtown housing conversions have become more difficult to achieve in British Columbia due to the economic impact of increased BC Building Code standards, seismic upgrading requirements, and escalating construction costs" (Victoria Civic Heritage Trust 1995, 1)*

The central problem of this practicum is one of feasibility - whether it is feasible to create low and moderate income housing by converting underutilized upper-storey commercial space in the downtown core of Prince

George, BC. This particular question is addressed in the core study of this practicum, *Moving Up - Phase 1 Inventory and Needs Assessment: Downtown Upper-storey Housing for the City of Prince George*, (hereafter referred to as "Moving Up - Phase 1" or "the core study") which can be found in the **Appendix** to this practicum.

While the question of feasibility forms the basis for this inquiry, the wider problem being addressed here is whether or not residential conversion (the creation of residential units) in a conventional central business district (CBD), such as in Prince George, can contribute to its regeneration and revitalization, while at the same time acting to preserve its physical heritage. The unique characteristics of a city's CBD (the existence of older buildings, underutilized commercial space, observable housing need and limited housing stock) provide the opportunity for an exploration and examination of the idea that issues of economic and physical decline in the CBD may be addressed simultaneously with the social and economic issues of housing need and affordability, and that this approach might yield a general revitalization of the CBD

Two broad sets of issues are to be found at the core of this practicum. The first set involves the social aspects of the city (and, in particular, the CBD), and revolves around the basic realities of housing need, supply and affordability. The second set involves the physical and economic aspects of both the city and the CBD. This includes issues of physical and economic

decline, the viability and profitability of current "downtown" activities (especially retailing), as well as concern for the way in which the decline of the CBD might be reversed, and some form of revitalization achieved.

## 1.2 Statement of Purpose

This practicum serves two purposes. First, this practicum entails an inventory of underutilized, upper-storey commercial space and an assessment of housing needs in Prince George. This inventory and assessment constitutes the core study of this practicum (again, this may be found in the **Appendix**). The core study has been completed in accordance with the terms of reference for Phase 1 of the three-phase project commissioned by the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust (VCHT). The main objectives (as outlined in the VCHT's Terms of Reference) have been to:

1. *evaluate the scope of the problem within the context of community policies regarding affordable downtown housing;*
2. *identify potential low-moderate income rental rates and audiences to determine demand for downtown housing;*
3. *inventory the supply of under-utilized and potentially convertible upper-storey spaces;*
4. *identify the perceived impediments to and opportunities for conversion to residential use;*
5. *identify potential financial mechanisms that could assist in making downtown housing affordable;*

6. *identify potential demonstration projects and community contacts.*

Second, this practicum explores the broader issues related to both housing need and downtown revitalization. It is generally recognized that, with the growth in its population, British Columbia is experiencing a growing demand for affordable housing (British Columbia 1994, 5). It is also recognized that the conversion of commercial buildings to residential use in a commercial downtown setting can generate benefits that affect the community as a whole - benefits such as diversity and vibrancy in the downtown, improved public safety on downtown streets, and improved commerce for downtown businesses (Mulvihill 1996, 434; Robertson 1995, 434). By focusing on whether it is feasible to convert underutilized commercial space to residential use, and through a comparative analysis of the issues of housing need, land and building underutilization and core area decline in the cities of Prince George, Nelson and New Westminster in British Columbia, this practicum attempts to forge the link between residential conversion, heritage conservation, the utilization of land and building resources, and revitalization, in the context of a conventional CBD in the setting of a smaller, non-metropolitan Canadian city. This practicum concludes with suggestions for further study, and a brief plan of action which is designed to build upon the work contained herein.

**CHAPTER 2:  
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CORE STUDY AND  
THE PRINCE GEORGE CONTEXT**

## **2.1 An Introduction to the Core Study**

### **2.1.1 The Victoria Civic Heritage Trust and the Impetus for this Study**

The impetus for the study *-Moving Up - Phase 1*, can be traced through the history of the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust (VCHT). Incorporated as a non-profit society in 1989, VCHT was formed to administer downtown building conservation and interpretation programs for the City of Victoria. Since 1990, the VCHT has operated Victoria's Building Incentive Program, "a matching grant program designed to preserve and revitalize buildings in the downtown core" (VCHT 1995, 2; Kluckner 1991, 41). In 1991 the VCHT provided grant funding, and administered the renovation of a building in Victoria's Chinatown district. The success of this renovation, aimed at creating affordable rental housing for an elderly, low-income, clientele, led the VCHT to begin focusing more of its efforts towards the development of a new, programmed, approach for converting underutilized upper-storey commercial space to housing for individuals and families with low-to-moderate incomes (VCHT 1995, 2).

In 1992, the first of two reports on upper-storey housing was submitted to the VCHT. In his report *Downtown Victoria Heritage Building / Housing*



*Study*, architect Jonathan Yardley focused on three heritage buildings in Victoria's downtown core. These buildings offered both variety of structural type and some degree of convertibility. In the final analysis Yardley found one project that was marginally viable and concluded that the other two would be viable if the right sort of arrangements for government funding could be made (Yardley 1992, 3).

In 1995, the second report was submitted to the VCHT. This report, *Second Floor Space for Downtown*, prepared by City Spaces Consulting Ltd., recommended a number of broad strategies that the VCHT could take with respect to the recycling or conversion of underutilized second storey space. Of the nine strategies offered by City Spaces<sup>1</sup>, the first three appear to be the catalyst for the core study of this practicum. These recommendations (City Spaces 1995, 3) were that:

1. *"the Trust should adopt a broad strategy to obtain the involvement of all three levels of government and the interest of the private sector"*

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<sup>1</sup> The other six strategies proposed by City Spaces Consulting Ltd. (City Spaces 1995) were that the VCHT should: request that the Province set up a municipal-provincial task force to identify ways in which downtown housing can be encouraged; request that the Province consider re-funding the Rental Unit Conversion Loan Program; request that the Province establish a complementary loan program; consider encouraging a public-private partnership commercial-to-residential conversion demonstration project; expand their focus to consider other, non-heritage buildings; and continue to work with the City in any areas which may encourage the conversion of commercial space to residential use.

2. "the Trust should...a) establish the potential for a province-wide program for recycling second-storey space in selected centers throughout BC (e.g. Nelson, Prince George); b) identify the perceived impediments to conversion for residential use in these communities; and c) develop a program for the province to operationalize"

3. "Pending or in the absence of provincial funding for the studies above, the Trust can help make the prospect of downtown residential [conversion] more likely by developing a program to encourage this. This program would aim to heighten awareness of the possibilities and benefits of downtown housing for all the potentially interested parties, such as municipal officials, developers, downtown organizations and, of course, residents"

Acting on the second recommendation offered by City Spaces Consulting Ltd. (above), the VCHT developed terms of reference for phase one of a three phase program - a study of underutilized downtown upper-storey space to be carried out in five separate cities in five different parts of the province. These studies (*Moving Up - Phase 1*) were completed between October 1995 and January 1996 in Campbell River, Nelson, New Westminster, Victoria and Prince George. It is the study of Prince George that forms the core of this practicum (see **Appendix**). The strategy recommended by City Spaces Consulting Ltd. for the VCHT proposed that these five case studies would provide an important first step in demonstrating a need for a province-wide, and provincially-funded, program aimed at the three interrelated objectives:

1. *recycling commercial heritage buildings*

2. *creating low and moderate income housing*
3. *supporting or encouraging the re-population of downtown or core areas.*

### **2.1.2 The Core Study and the Objectives of the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust**

The specific objectives for the study of underutilized, upper-storey space in Prince George (as prescribed by the terms of reference for *Moving Up - Phase 1*) (VCHT 1995) may be found in the Statement of Purpose in the preceding Chapter (see: **Chapter 1, Sec. 1.2**)

Again, there is a strong connection between these objectives and the recommended strategy proposed by City Spaces Consulting Ltd. in their report *Second Floor Space for Downtown* (City Spaces 1995, 3)

By addressing each of the VCHT's six objectives, the core study of this practicum is really several different products. At its root, the *Moving Up - Phase 1* study for Prince George is a broad-based inventory of the current condition of vacant and underutilized upper-storey space in the city. The study, however, is also an analysis of current local conditions and policies with regards to housing (and, in particular, downtown housing) and building conversion in Prince George. Likewise, the core study is also an overview of the housing market in Prince George, its current economic condition and the demand for market and non-market rental housing in Prince George. The

core study also surveys some of the various mechanisms which might assist in bringing onto the market rental housing for low and moderate income individuals and families. Finally, the core study offers a detailed analysis of two buildings in Prince George with potential for commercial-to-residential conversion.

If the VCHT's ultimate objective (as detailed in **Chapter 1, Sec. 1.2**) is to demonstrate a need for province-wide action on a problem-set that includes the issues of creating low and moderate income housing as well as heritage conservation, then the core study of this practicum (which presents information regarding market and non-market housing, underutilized commercial upper-storey space as well as special local or municipal considerations), serves that purpose by providing a picture of this problem-set in the case of Prince George. By melding the findings of the core study of this practicum with the results of the surveys undertaken in Campbell River, Nelson, New Westminster and Victoria, the VCHT will be able to assemble a composite picture of the way in which the concerns of housing and heritage conservation manifest themselves in relation to the issues of downtown redevelopment and revitalization throughout the province.

## 2.2 An Introduction to the City of Prince George

### 2.2.1 The Historic, Geographic and Economic Situation of Prince George

Prince George is situated at the confluence of the Fraser and Nechako rivers, in the midst of the vast montane and sub-alpine forests of the Nechako Lowlands on British Columbia's Interior Plateau (Watts 1970, 89-91; Matthews 1986; Tipper 1971, 10) near the geographic centre of the province. The city is the natural crossroads between the upper Fraser Valley leading to the Yellowhead Pass to the east, the Nechako and Bulkley Valleys leading to the west, and the Pine Pass which leads to the Peace River district to the north (see Figure 2.1, *The Province of British Columbia: Regional Districts* )

Permanent European settlement in the Prince George area dates from the establishment of the North West Company's fur trading post by Simon Fraser in 1807. The settlement of Fort George (as it was then known) changed little for the next one hundred years, with most of the activity being centered on either the fur trade or the extraction of timber resources. By 1909, land speculation, fueled by the expected arrival of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, had taken off in the area. In 1909, the original fur trade settlement which had existed near the Hudson's Bay post and the steamboat landing on the Fraser River, was surveyed and subdivided. In the spring of 1910, these lots were marketed as South Fort George (Runnalls 1946, 95). The reason for the distinct appellation of "South" Fort George had much to do with a second



FIGURE 2.1: THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND REGIONAL DISTRICTS.

(source: BC Government Map 1SR - reproduced with permission of Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Geographic Data BC)

rival townsite which was being developed at the same time, on a site above the Nechako River by land speculator and developer, George Hammond. Although this townsite was commonly known as Central Fort George, Hammond had had legally registered the plan for the townsite as "Fort George" for marketing reasons.<sup>2</sup> By 1914, there were an estimated 3000 permanent residents in Fort George (Central) and South Fort George (Runnalls 1946, 130).

With the arrival of the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) Railway (now Canadian National) in 1914, the fortunes of Fort George (Central) and South Fort George, and the speculative land development that had been supporting their growth and development since about 1909, changed rapidly. It was most likely self-evident to the developers of the GTP that the presence of the railway, or more specifically the location of the railway station, would be the determining factor in the supremacy of any townsite. The GTP must also have known that the land occupied by the Fort George Indian Band (1366 acres situated between the two existing townsites of Fort George (Central) and South Fort George) provided the ideal site for both a townsite and rail yards. With an eye towards creating a land monopoly for itself in a new townsite, while at the same time undermining further land speculation and

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<sup>2</sup> Central Fort George is located west of the Grand Trunk Pacific townsite of Prince George along Central Street. see: Runnalls 1946, 107

development in Fort George (Central) and South Fort George, the GTP acquired the Indian Reserve land, and relocated the Fort George Band to its present site near Shelley, BC.<sup>3</sup> Once the railway had cleared the former Indian Reserve land, laid out its planned townsite in 1914 and established its station, it incorporated this new townsite as the City of Prince George in 1915. Therefore, on the basis this new permanent transportation link and a wealth of natural resources in the region, Prince George was created as a full-fledged city on a site where no permanent settlement had existed previously (see Figure 2.2, *The Three Georges: The City of Prince George at Incorporation - 1915*).

In the first three decades following incorporation, Prince George had difficulty recapturing the kind of optimism and speculative enthusiasm which had marked the decade prior to 1915. Without the kind of economic expansion which had characterized the years prior to the First World War, and then later because of the affects of the Great Depression, the demand for the particular forest products produced at Prince George was limited. Because of the lack of market demand for its products, Prince George experienced a limited amount of growth during these first few decades. Gradually, the city (and its region) became a more important part of the provincial forest

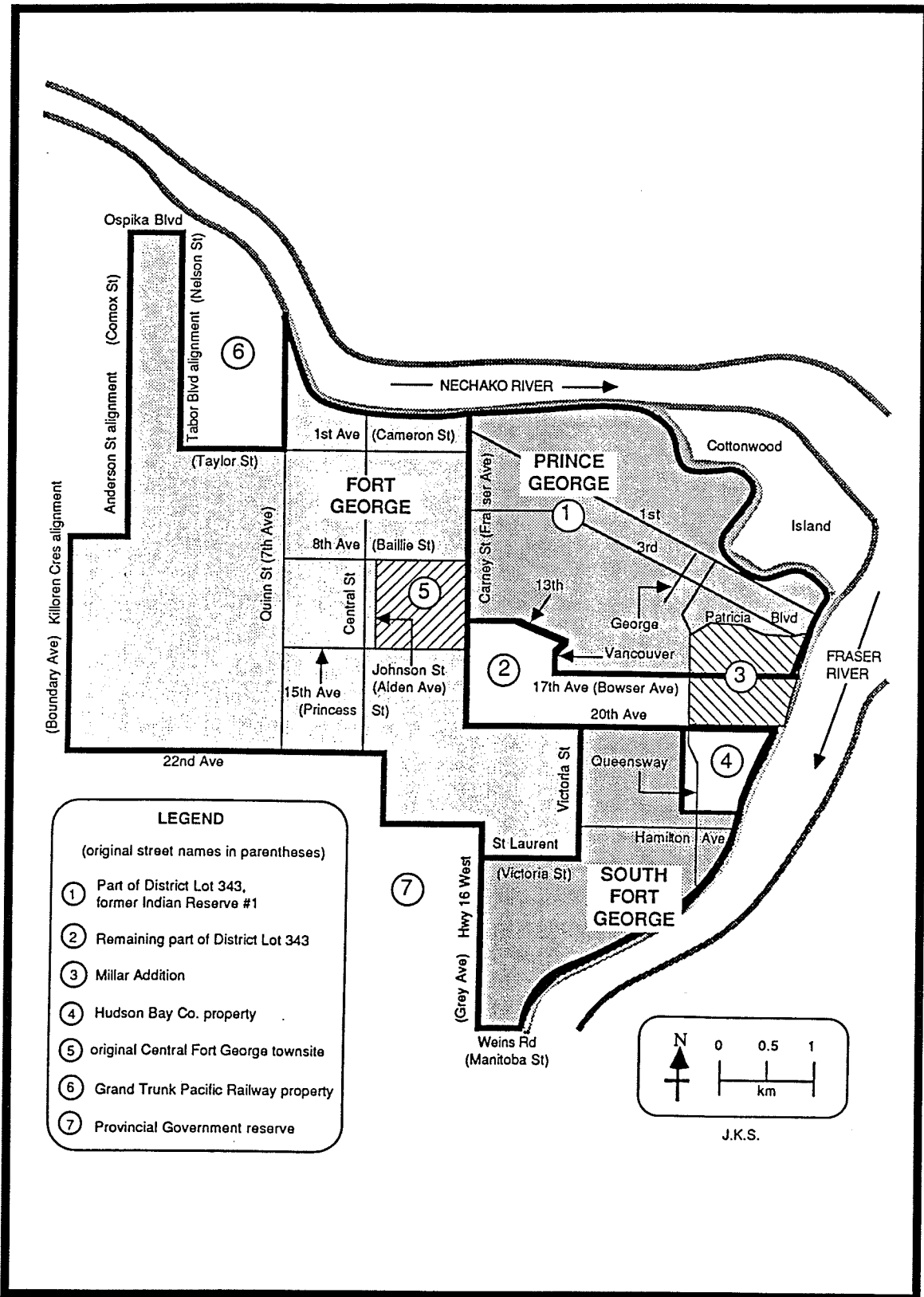
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<sup>3</sup> The native settlement was relocated to a site some six miles northeast of the city, on the Fraser River, across from community of Shelley (Runnalls 1946, 132).



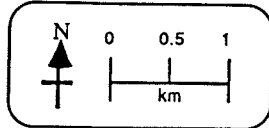
**FIGURE 2.2: THE THREE GEORGES: THE CITY OF PRINCE GEORGE AT INCORPORATION - 1915**

*(courtesy Kent Sedgwick, Development Services Department, City of Prince George)*



**LEGEND**  
(original street names in parentheses)

- ① Part of District Lot 343, former Indian Reserve #1
- ② Remaining part of District Lot 343
- ③ Millar Addition
- ④ Hudson Bay Co. property
- ⑤ original Central Fort George townsite
- ⑥ Grand Trunk Pacific Railway property
- ⑦ Provincial Government reserve



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economy, as it solidified its position as the primary trading centre for north central British Columbia. During this same period, commercial and retail activity coalesced in the GTP townsite (what is now the Prince George CBD). This reflects the fact that the railway had superseded the steamboat as the principal mode of transportation and supply, as well as the reality that the limited, and stable, population of Prince George (prior to the Second World War) was not able maintain three separate commercial and retail areas.<sup>4</sup> As the Depression gave way to the Second World War, and as the demand for wood products increased, Prince George was able to capitalize on the wealth of its forest and agricultural resources and establish a stable industrial base with the development of more permanent sawmill and planer mill operations.

In contrast, the decades following the Second World War were an era of great expansion for Prince George. Growth in the entire forest economy of British Columbia brought diversification to the forest-based industry of Prince George. The construction of two pulp mills and one pulp and paper mill at Prince George during the 1960s sparked an economic boom that lasted until the early 1980s. The general expansion of resource industries in northern British Columbia from the mid-1950s until the mid-1980s (beginning with the

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<sup>4</sup> In some instances, businesses simply re-located to Prince George from either South Fort George or "Central" Fort George to take advantage of Prince George's proximity to the railway. In other instances, as was the case with the London Hotel (see *Appendix: Downtown Survey of Underutilized Spaces Ref. No. 7*), entire businesses, including their buildings, were relocated. Local Prince George historian, and freeman of the City of Prince George, the late Ted Williams, recalled that the London Hotel was brought to its present location on 3rd Avenue, by sled, during the Winter of 1915. (Williams 1995) (Runnalls 1946, 146).

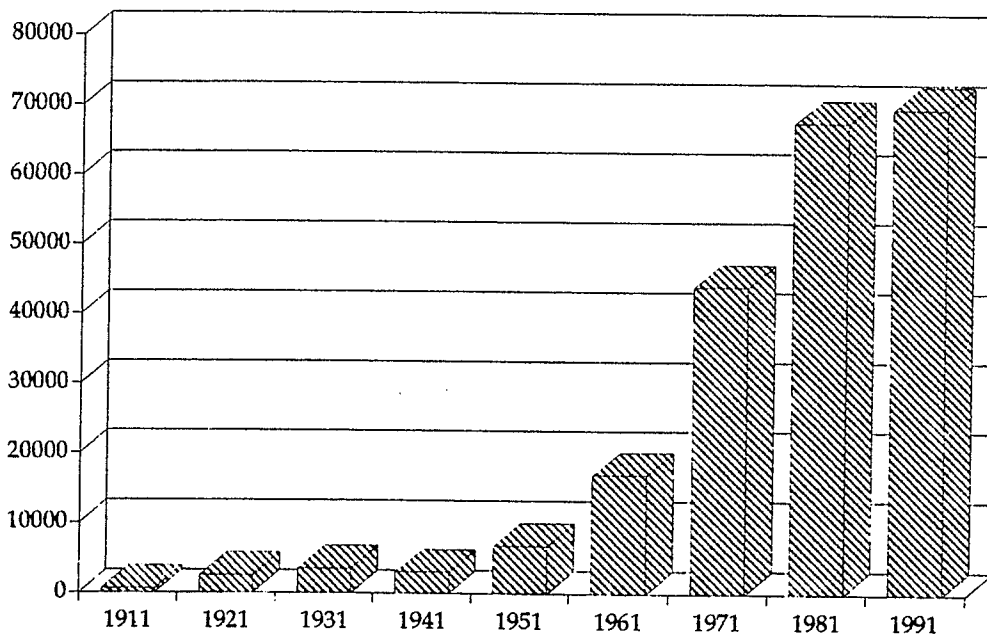
Portage Mountain/W.A.C. Bennett Dam Hydroelectric project, and also including: the Endako Molybdenum mine; Finlay Forest Industries Pulp Mill; Mackenzie Pulp Mill; the District of Mackenzie; the Northeast Coal Project; and the District of Tumbler Ridge) served to further enhance Prince George's role as the trading centre for northern British Columbia. (See Figure 2.3: *Population in the City of Prince George 1921-1991* ).

It seems as though Prince George has always been somewhat beguiled by the overwhelming nature of its forest-based economy, and only recently has it become cognizant of the inherent weakness of an economy based almost totally on one resource. Although Prince George has, from the beginning, sought ways to diversify its economic base and reduce its dependency on the forest economy, the actual task of developing another economic sector, that would even come close to equaling the size and scope of the forest-based sector, has been nearly impossible. It has really only been since the recession of the early 1980s that Prince George, out of necessity, began building on some of its strengths (other than the forest), and developing the notion of the city as a regional "capital" for Northern BC, by making better use of road, rail and air links and seeking greater government service sector employment opportunities. In recent years, growth in Prince George has focused on the expansion of tertiary and quaternary sector opportunities such as the expansion of the College of New Caledonia (now underway) and the development of the University of Northern British

### FIGURE 2.3: POPULATION GROWTH IN PRINCE GEORGE

(source: J. Kent Sedgwick 1985. *Prince George Population Growth* Prince George: Geo Info Services\* ; Statistics Canada. 1992. *Profile of Census Tracts in Kamloops, Kelowna and Prince George, Part A* Ottawa: Science and Technology Canada, Census of Canada. Catalogue number 95-386.

\* "Census data before 1966 does not provide a reliable estimate of the population in the suburbs outside the municipal boundaries. Consequently, figures before 1966 are estimates based upon census data for the City of Prince George added to an estimate from the census figure for the surrounding area, Subdivision A. The figures are intended to reflect the population within the area contained by the present city boundary." - J. Kent Sedgwick 1985. *Prince George Population Growth* Prince George: Geo Info Services, 1)



Columbia (UNBC). It is a popularly held view that UNBC will have as great an impact on the city's future as the pulp mills have had on the city's past.

Prince George is a regional centre for a number of government ministries and services (both provincial and federal), as well as the centre of the Fraser-Fort George Regional District<sup>5</sup> While Prince George still embraces its self-proclaimed title "Western White Spruce Capital of the World", the city now promotes itself as "BC's Northern Capital" (See Figure 2.4, *The Fraser-Fort George Regional District*).

### **2.2.2 The Condition of the Downtown Core of Prince George - A Historical Perspective.**

The downtown core, or central business district, of Prince George retains most of the characteristics of the original townsite plan that was designed and laid out by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway in 1914-15. The GTP plan can be characterized as a conventional grid-iron plan influenced by Roman towns (Parker 1996) and the "City Beautiful" movement,<sup>6</sup> and one

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<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps also noteworthy that the boundaries of School District No. 57 and the Regional Hospital Assessment Area are congruent with the boundary of the Fraser-Fort George Regional District, making the Prince George region one of the few (if not the only) areas in the province with nearly perfectly overlapping administrative boundaries (Parker 1996).

<sup>6</sup> The City Beautiful movement grew out of the architecture and urban designs that Frederic Law Olmstead, John Root and Daniel Burnham employed at Chicago's 1898 World's Columbian Exposition. Burnham's 1908 plan for Chicago is generally considered to contain many of the hallmarks of the City Beautiful movement - diagonal avenues, civic plazas, public buildings, and a series of parks along the lakeshore. (Hodge 1991, 52-56).

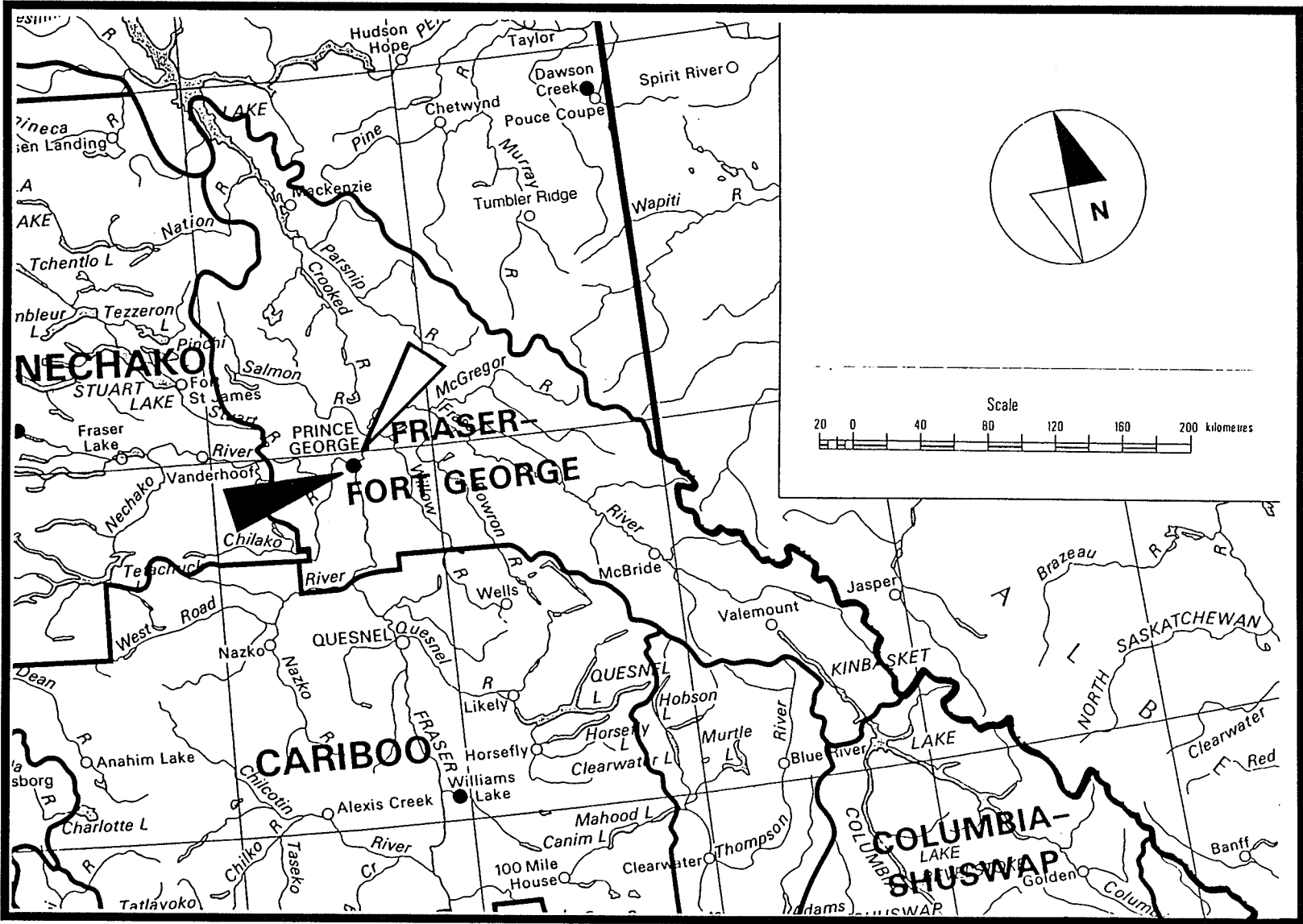


FIGURE 2.4: THE FRASER-FORT GEORGE REGIONAL DISTRICT.  
 (source: BC Government Map 1SR - reproduced with permission of Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Geographic Data BC)

that is not unlike hundreds of others developed by railway companies across North America. The original designers intended that the regular grid of streets should be intersected by radial streets, or "grand avenues", emanating from City Hall, and terminating at the railway station, Duchess Park, and Alfred Circle<sup>7</sup> (City of Prince George 1993, 1). These avenues exist today as George Street, Seventh Avenue and Patricia Boulevard respectively (see Figure 2.5, *The Grand Trunk Pacific Development Co. General Plan for the Development of Prince George, BC* ).

A great deal has changed since 1915 when the townsite was cleared, the streets were surveyed and Prince George was incorporated as a city.<sup>8</sup> Commercial activity which began as a cluster of buildings along George Street between the railway station and City Hall between 1915 and 1920 slowly began moving westward along Second, Third and Fourth Avenues. By the end of the Second World War, the orientation of the business district was as much along 3rd Avenue as it was along George Street (Williams 1995).

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Circle no longer exists. It was situated somewhere near the present location of the parking lot for the Parkwood Mall.

<sup>8</sup> According to Runnalls (1946, 146) "on March 6th, 1915, the Provincial Government granted incorporation to the new City of Prince George, within the bounds of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers on the north and east, Bowser Street on the south and Fraser Street on the west. It was understood that at the first election there would be a plebiscite on the question of the name of the new city". In this manner, Prince George moved from being little more than a loose collection of buildings on a railway townsite, to an incorporated city. Generally, in British Columbia, communities are either unincorporated areas or incorporated cities. The terms hamlet, village and town are only used in the colloquial sense in BC.

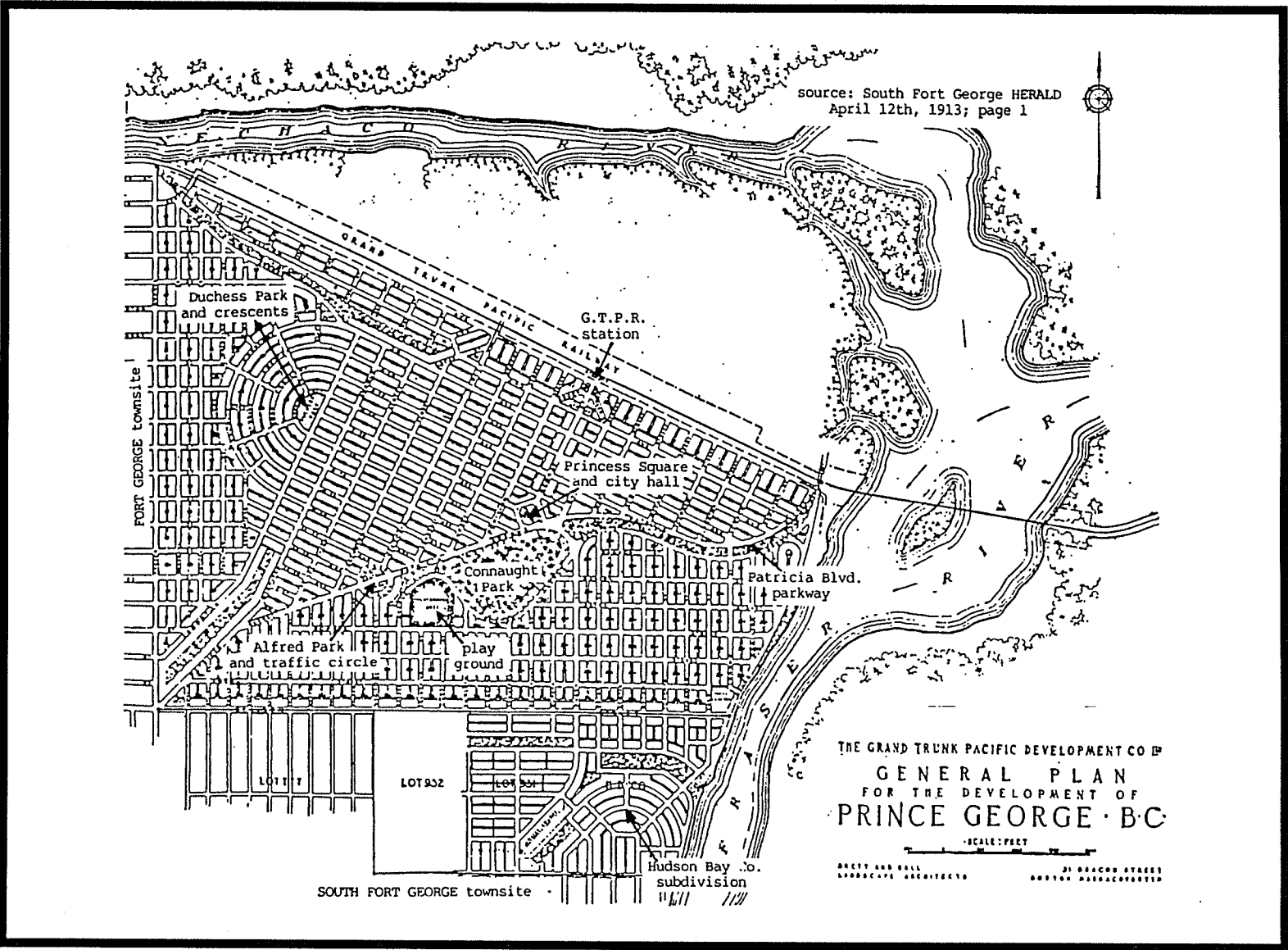


FIGURE 2.5: THE GRAND TRUNK PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT CO. LTD. GENERAL PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCE GEORGE, BC (courtesy Kent Sedgwick, Development Services Department, City of Prince George)

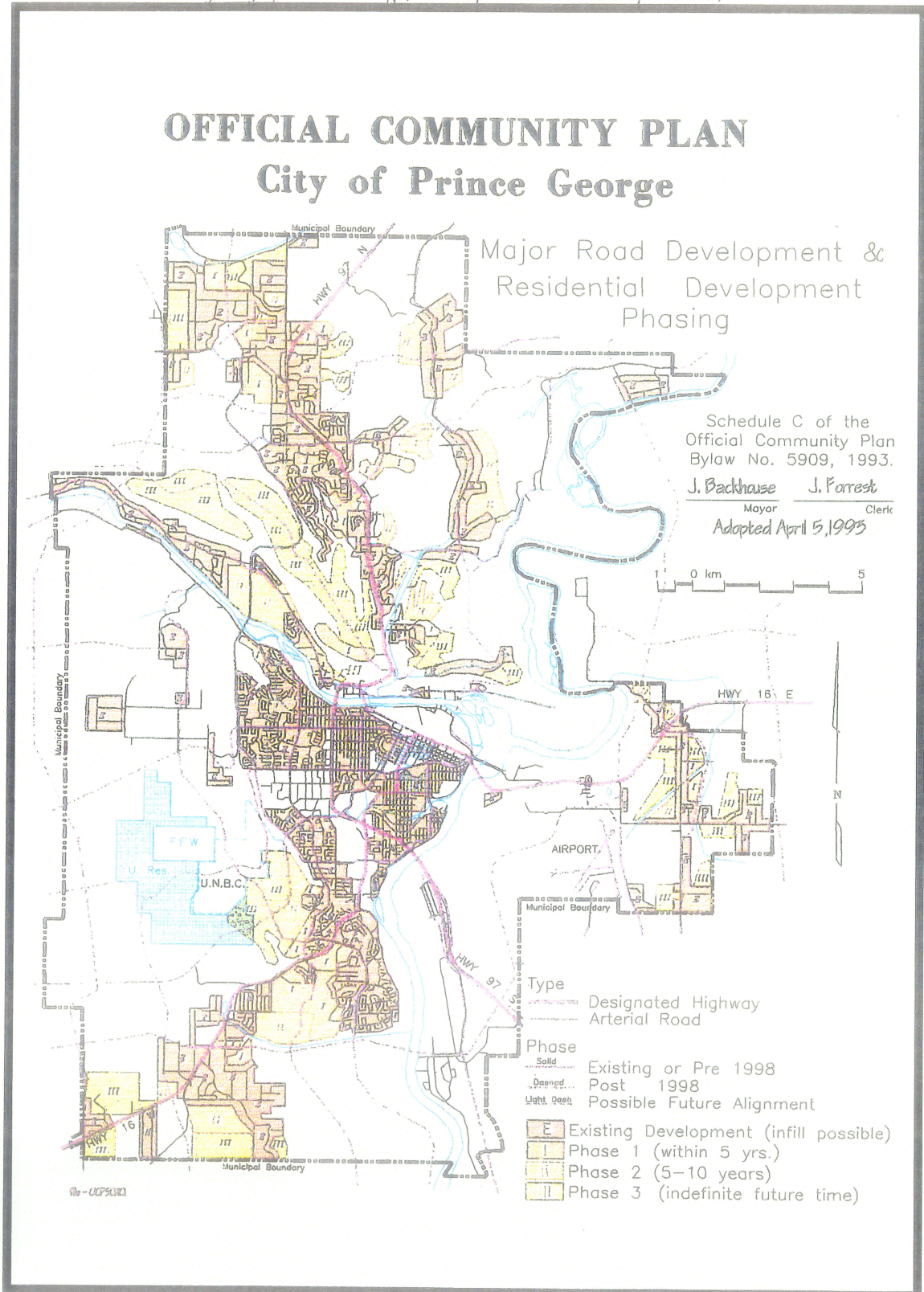


In the post-war period (from the late 1940s to the early 1980s) the forest economy in the Prince George region developed and expanded rapidly. The population of Prince George also expanded rapidly in this period, and residential development moved outward in several different directions from the core. Today, in 1996, the dominant pattern of development in Prince George is the pattern of suburban expansion that began in the 1950s, and was largely facilitated by increased automobile usage. (See Figure 2.6: Official Community Plan - City of Prince George: Major Road Development and Residential Phasing)

With the enormous population growth which Prince George experienced from the mid-1950s through to the late 1970s, the demand for services (commercial, retail, warehousing, and government) far exceeded what the CBD (as originally designed by the GTP) was either capable of supplying, or able to support. The needs of this new, largely suburban, population (one that was closely tied to the use of private automobiles) also illustrated some of the deficiencies of the CBD with respect to its ability to accommodate increased automobile use (this includes the usual problems of parking, traffic congestion and convenience). Perhaps the first sector to recognize the deficiencies of the CBD, and to respond to this new and varied demand for services (again, one which was for the most part based on the accommodation of the private automobile) was the retailing sector. Between 1960 and 1977 five new shopping centres were built in Prince George

FIGURE 2.6: OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN - CITY OF PRINCE GEORGE: MAJOR ROAD DEVELOPMENT & RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PHASING.

(Courtesy City of Prince George, Development Services Department)





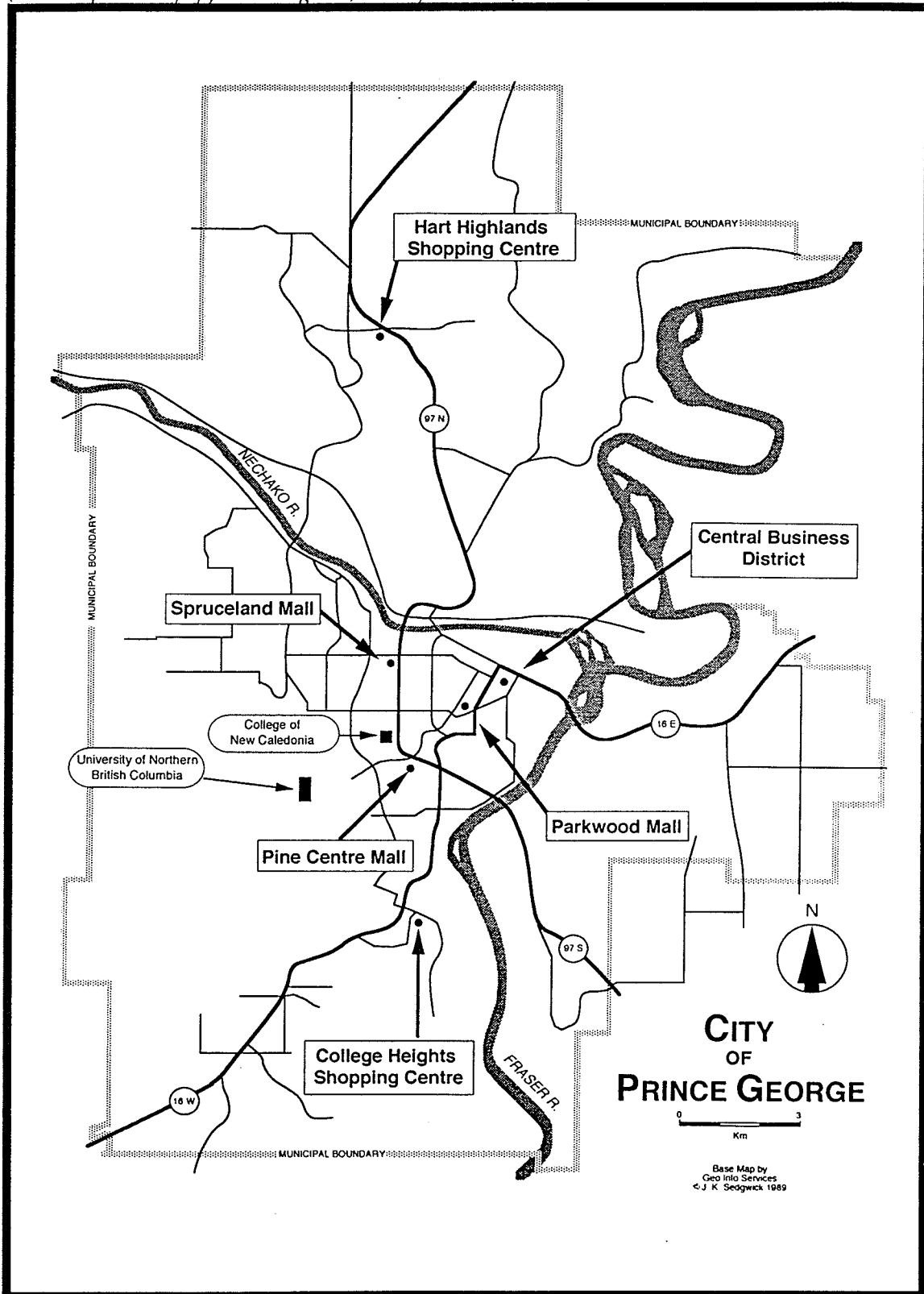
(Spruceland 1960; Parkwood 1965; Hart Highlands 1971-1973; Pine Centre 1975 and College Heights 1977). All were situated along major arterial routes, and all were situated outside of the downtown core amidst suburban residential development (see Figure 2.7: Location of Regional Shopping Centres and Post-Secondary Institutions, City of Prince George)<sup>9</sup>. By the time the last of these malls (Pine Centre) opened in 1975, the combined total retail floor space of the four suburban malls equaled forty-seven percent of the total retail space for the city as a whole. In addition to being able to claim almost half of the total retail space in the city by 1975, these four suburban malls together could claim a retail floorspace that was almost twelve percent greater than the total retail floorspace in the CBD, excluding Parkwood Mall (Regional Development Commission 1974, 9). Within the fifteen year period beginning in 1960, the development of suburban retail space shifted the focus of retailing activity in Prince George away from the CBD, and towards its present pattern of being suburban-based, situated along arterial routes and accommodating automobile-based clientele.

It is unlikely that the CBD will ever regain the retail primacy that was lost to the collection of suburban shopping malls. However, the CBD, and in particular the future of retail activity in the CBD, is still a topic for a great deal

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<sup>9</sup> Since the Parkwood Mall opened in 1965, the CBD has gradually expanded southward, to the point where Parkwood is now adjacent to the CBD, and considered to be part of downtown.

**FIGURE 2.7: LOCATION OF REGIONAL SHOPPING CENTRES AND POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS, CITY OF PRINCE GEORGE**  
(Base-Map courtesy of J.Kent Sedgwick, Geo Info Services, © 1989)

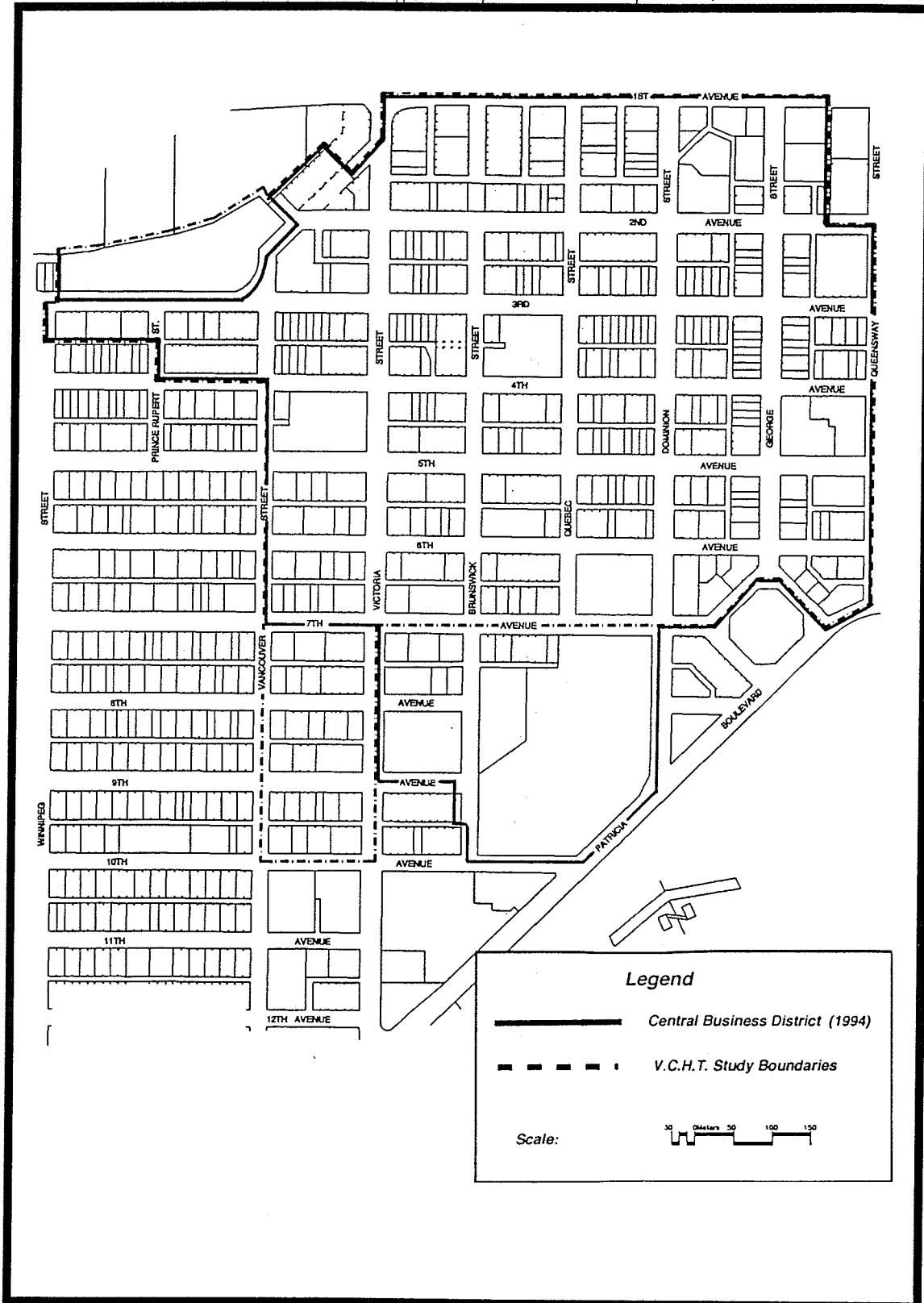


of debate and concern. Whether or not the CBD will be able to re-invent itself and create, or present, a real alternative to the kinds of retail shopping found in suburban malls (thereby regaining a level of retail vitality that will sustain the CBD) remains to be seen.

In spite of the outward expansion and suburban development which shifted the demographic and retailing centre of Prince George away from its historic centre, the CBD is still considered to be the centre of the city (see Figure 2.8: Prince George Central Business District - C-1 Commercial Zone and VCHT Study Area Boundary). This is most probably for reasons of its office-commercial, government services and hospitality (hotels, nightclubs, recreational and restaurants) functions. Although the zoning bylaws have never explicitly excluded residential use from the its C-1 (Central Business District) zone, the trend in the land market in the city has always been towards increased land use specialization, rather than mixing. As a result of this trend, the downtown core was perceived as, and therefore became, a "commercial-only" business core. During the period of Prince George's greatest growth (the 1960s and 70s), when all of the office towers were constructed in the downtown core, and when the commercial downtown began to coalesce into its present form, it was competition in the market for commercial land, and this notion of a commercial downtown, which had the greatest negative effect on residential use in the CBD. During this period, residential uses were squeezed out by competing commercial uses to such an

FIGURE 2.8: PRINCE GEORGE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT - C-1 COMMERCIAL ZONE AND VCHT STUDY AREA BOUNDARY.

(Courtesy City of Prince George, Development Services Department)



extent that the CBD is now left with only a very small residential component.<sup>10</sup>

Given that an estimated sixty-one percent of families in Prince George can afford to buy a new home, and an estimated seventy-six percent of families can afford to buy a resale home, it is perhaps a credit to the developers and marketers of the suburban developments of the 1960s and 1970s that only the most economically disadvantaged residents of the city are unable to find adequate housing in Prince George (HNRP 1993, 4:6). This higher-than-average rate of affordability for home ownership in Prince George is one likely reason why the CBD has been abandoned as a residential area. Unlike some Canadian cities (Winnipeg being a notable example) where affordable accommodation (whether in the form of private or rental property) is often synonymous with older, inner city areas, the CBD in Prince George offers an area that is practically devoid of true residential properties (excluding the single residential occupancy hotels). There are few compelling reasons to live in the CBD, and as affordable accommodation can be found throughout Prince George, anyone who wishes to live outside the CBD can, and usually does. This aspect of affordability in Prince George is being further supported by new suburban (and even exurban) development (an increase in

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<sup>10</sup> According to 1991 Census figures, 255 individuals, or approximately 0.37% of the total population of Prince George, resided within census tract 012. Census tract 012 is roughly congruent with the boundaries of the CBD.



the supply of market housing). These new developments are having a stabilizing and sometimes even diminishing effect on the prices of homes in the older suburban neighbourhoods.

The core study of this practicum (see **Appendix**) surveyed downtown Prince George in terms of buildings with “commercial-to-residential” conversion potential. A total of eleven residential properties, representing some 157 units, were identified in the CBD<sup>11</sup> (see Table 1 and Figure 2.9: Residential Use, by Location and Number of Units, in Downtown Prince George).

**Table 2.1: Residential Use in the C-1 Zone (the CBD) by Type**

<u>Unit Type</u>	<u>Number of Properties</u>	<u>Number of Units</u>
Single Family Residence	1	1
Proprietor Apartments <sup>12</sup>	2	2
Multiple Family Apartments	3	28
Single Resident Occupancy (SRO) Hotels	5	128

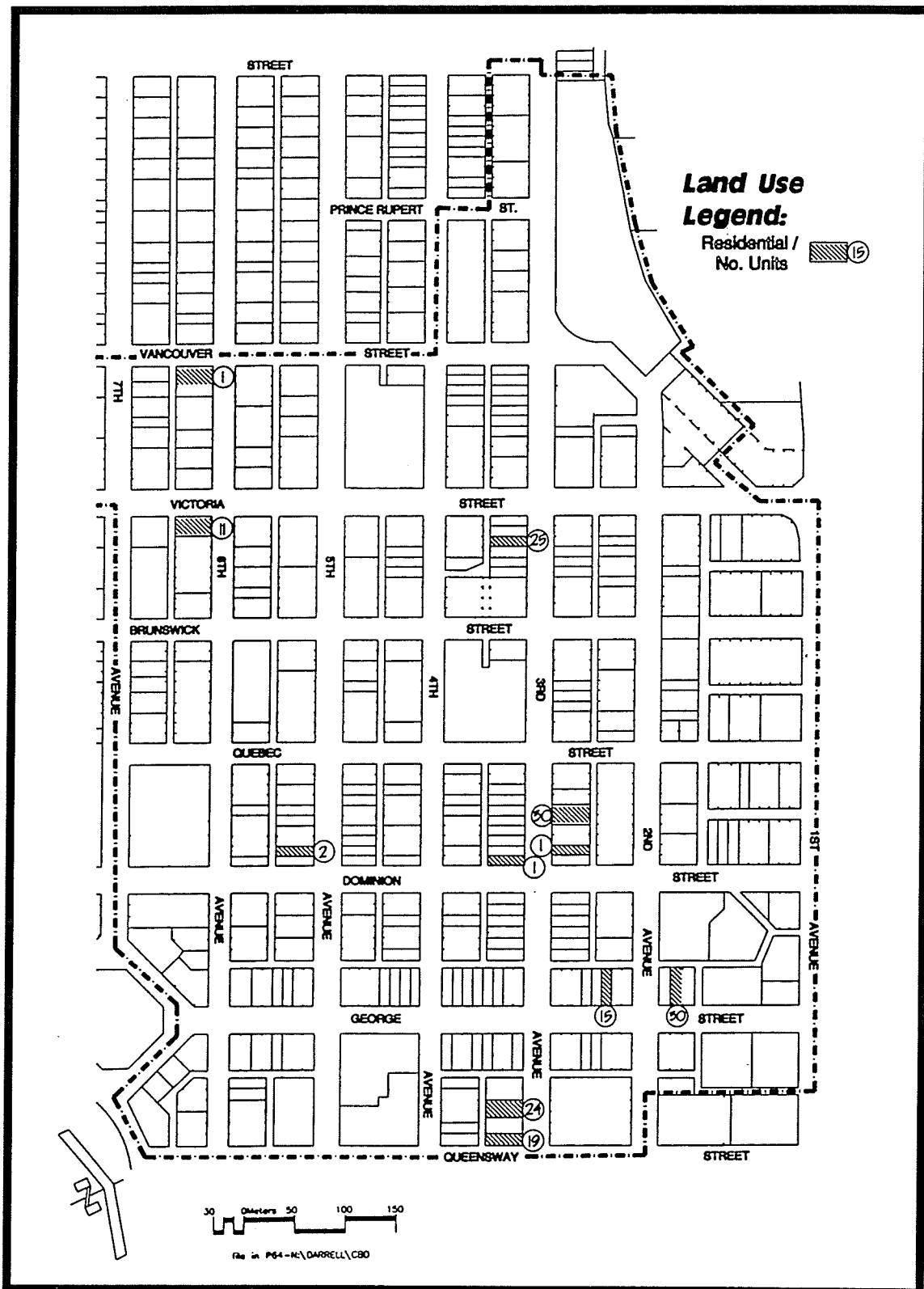
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<sup>11</sup> These figures do not include the Women’s Resource Centre Shelter or the Native Friendship Centre Shelter located on Quebec St.

<sup>12</sup> These units are second floor residential apartments occupied by the proprietors of commercial businesses on site.

FIGURE 2.9: RESIDENTIAL USE, BY LOCATION AND NUMBER OF UNITS, IN DOWNTOWN PRINCE GEORGE.

(Courtesy City of Prince George, Development Services Department)



### 2.2.3. The Future of the Downtown Core of Prince George

There are many challenges which the CBD will likely face in the future. While downtown Prince George is still, arguably, the "central" business district for the city and its region, the position which this area once held, as the only significant commercial, retail, warehousing, hospitality and government services precinct for the city, no longer applies. As already indicated, the dispersal of retail activity to suburban centres has had, and will continue to have a significant affect on the ability of downtown retail activity to sustain itself. Judging from the poor physical state of some commercial buildings and retail operations in the CBD, it would seem as though retailing has been in a state of decline for some time. The physical and structural deterioration of some buildings in the CBD also leads to the conclusion that a certain lack of confidence, or a lack of demand, exists in the market for downtown space (particularly retail space), constituting a possible impediment to more investment, or re-investment, in downtown business. A possible explanation for the deterioration of certain downtown businesses may be that the present state of the retail market in the CBD does not generate sufficient revenues (after operating costs are deducted) to allow for capital re-investment, or it may be considered that re-investment would not generate sufficient new trade (revenue) to allow for both a return on that investment, and the necessary counterbalance to property value and/or tax increases which might be incurred. On the other hand, there are some retailers who

seem to be thriving in the CBD.<sup>13</sup> These businesses apparently have found possibilities in (or steered their business towards) market niches which are not being served in the suburban malls. In these instances, these retailers have had no difficulty in justifying an investment or re-investment in building or business improvements. Therefore, as far as the overall vitality of retailing in the CBD is concerned, the idea that downtown might be able to re-capture what has been lost to the suburban malls, or re-create a retail area that is directly competitive and has parity with the suburban malls (in terms of scale and variety), seems highly unlikely. The likelihood of reducing the disparity between downtown and suburban shopping is also being diminished by recent trends towards multi-national, "big box" or warehouse-style retailing operations located away from the CBD.<sup>14</sup> It seems that if downtown wishes to maintain a viable retailing sector, it will have offer an tangible alternative to both suburban shopping malls and "big box" retail operations.

Notwithstanding the somewhat grim picture of retailing in downtown Prince George, there is every reason to believe that the city will maintain its position as the primary trading centre in north-central British Columbia. It is

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<sup>13</sup> e.g. small, niche-market, retail operations such as Black's Furs, the Bagel Street Cafe, and Ultra Sports appear to be thriving in the CBD. These businesses each represent a type of retailing that is not to be found in the suburban shopping centres.

also highly likely that office and commercial sector employment (including services such as banks and financial institutions, financial and legal services, as well as government and government services), which are largely concentrated in the CBD, will continue to thrive, despite the recent out-flow of some government service jobs (such as BC Social Services). As the office-commercial sector thrives in the CBD, the opportunities, again, for small, niche-market retail operations (which provide the antithesis to "big box", or warehouse-retail shopping) also increase. Of particular interest to this study is the notion that, if the office and commercial sector thrives and niche retailing opportunities increase in the CBD, and if emerging demographic and social trends (such as: an aging population, growth in the number of dwellings being maintained [Miron 1993, 81-83; Van Diepen 1993, 55], intra-urban migration for the purpose of meeting changing housing needs [Moore and Rosenberg 1993, 136-137], a growing resistance to commuting, and increased demand for multiple-family (particularly condominium style) housing near central places, shopping or service amenities) are realized, then the desirability of, or demand for, housing in or near downtown Prince George (close to employment, services and shopping) may increase as well.

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<sup>14</sup> "Big box" retailing is a fairly recent phenomena in Prince George with the opening of Price-Costco in 1992, and The Real Canadian Superstore in 1995. It still remains to be seen what long-term impact this type of retail operation will have on the vitality of retailing in the CBD.

Although the future of Prince George's downtown core, and its ultimate success or failure, will likely continue to be determined, for the most part, by market trends that transcend the boundaries of Prince George, it is possible to identify certain aspects of the CBD, at the present time (1996), which are also likely to be important determinants of its future. For the most part, these pertain to the way in which the CBD presents itself, and the way in which it is perceived and used by the public. Although it is difficult (and beyond the scope of this paper) to quantify these aspects of the CBD, the way in which the CBD presents itself, is perceived and utilized can be measured, to a certain extent, in its vibrancy and its vitality.

Vibrancy (in terms of urban areas) can be equated with the way in which an area presents a multitude, and variety, of sensory stimulation within a small area. This could also be termed the "hustle and bustle", or "busyness" of a place. It is, however, what makes an area exciting, and it is often that sense of excitement which generates more activity which, in turn, generates more excitement, or greater vibrancy. Pedestrian activity is often a good indicator of vibrancy, as this is usually the first stimulus that we receive as we form our perceptions of vibrancy. In the case of Prince George's CBD, where retailing activity has been diminished, the concentration of sensory stimulation (shops, offices, street and sidewalk activity), and the perception of busyness (pedestrian activity), have also been diminished. The result seems to be that downtown Prince George is losing, or has lost, whatever ability it

may once have had to present itself as a vibrant place. Incidences of crime and violence in the CBD (particularly at night) serve to reinforce the perception that downtown Prince George is not pedestrian-friendly, and the growing perception that the CBD is unsafe. Whether this is fair, or not, is not quite as important as the way in which these perceptions further diminish pedestrian and retail activity which, in turn, affects vibrancy, crime, violence, the perception of safety.

Vitality can be equated with the way in which a particular area (in this case the CBD) offers an environment which is able to continue to support and sustain its economic activities. This can be likened to the overall, economic, "health" of a particular urban area. In the case of downtown Prince George, vibrancy (or the lack thereof) seems to be an important factor in the area's vitality. Retailing, it seems, requires variety, competition and concentrated activity (Whyte 1988, 321-322) in order to remain vital and profitable. In downtown Prince George, each of these aspects of the retail landscape has been diminished to such an extent, that the CBD's continued vitality, (with respect to retail activity) must be questioned. Similarly, vibrancy and safety in the CBD may be having an impact on the hospitality industry (hotels, nightclubs, restaurants etc.). As these elements (which are vital to sustaining the hotels, bars and restaurants) diminish, people's interest in hospitality-based businesses, and the city's ability to attract tourism and convention

business, also diminishes. Again, this calls into question the CBD's ability to remain vital and profitable.

The problems of the CBD with respect to vibrancy, vitality, pedestrian activity, evening activities, crime, violence and safety are not going unnoticed in Prince George. There have been, at various times, suggested solutions that have spanned the spectrum from increased lighting and street furniture, to comprehensive re-development. Regardless of what is ultimately decided upon as a "solution" for downtown Prince George, any plan of action must give careful consideration to the way(s) in which those aspects of the CBD which diminish vibrancy and retard vitality may be mitigated. Improving the vibrancy of the CBD, and increasing its vitality would seem to be critical first steps in a real, and lasting, revitalization. In conjunction with this, it would seem that any increase in the residential population of the CBD might serve to improve vibrancy and increase vitality by increasing both the number of people in the area (a move towards vibrancy, and a greater perception of safety) and the number of people who would have a stake in seeing the incidence of social problems and crime lowered, as well as helping to establish a more permanent, and immediate, customer base for downtown businesses.

Whether the idea of increasing the residential population of the CBD becomes a reality, or not, the issue of housing need in the CBD will likely



remain as a major issue of concern. For years, the CBD has served as something of a repository for low-income wage earners, individuals facing problems associated with substance abuse, those on social assistance, individuals living on low, fixed, health or disability pensions, and those who are simply homeless. More recently, this group has been expanded to include homeless youth (HNRP 1993, 2:2). The City recognizes that many of these individuals are in immediate need of housing, or more particularly some form of housing that is affordable, and outside of the vagaries of the normal housing market (Prince George 1996a). This is what is termed "non-market housing".

The increasing demand for non-market housing in Prince George may be linked to changes, over the past eight years, to the normal rental housing market. Two mutually exclusive events, the opening of UNBC and the demolition of the Canada and MacDonald Hotels,<sup>15</sup> have had a particular effect on both the supply of, and demand for, rental market housing and, consequentially, the demand for non-market housing. While the opening of UNBC has changed the dynamic of rental market accommodation across the whole city, the effects of closing the Canada and MacDonald hotels (SRO units) has been more immediate to the dynamic of the housing market in the

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<sup>15</sup> These two hotels, situated in the CBD on George Street, were both of a Single Resident Occupancy (SRO) type. An estimated 40 residents were displaced when these two hotels were demolished in 1991 to make way for the new Provincial Building and Courthouse. (HNRP 1993, 4:10)

CBD. Since 1988, Prince George has seen the vacancy rate, for market rental accommodation in the city as a whole, drop from over six percent to just over two percent (HNRP 1993, 4:8), with the vacancy rate for some types of apartments being, at times, less than one percent (CMHC. 1995, 13) (see Table A1.3: Vacancy Rates by Zone - Prince George - October 1994 to April 1995: Privately Owned Rental Structures, Three Units and Over in the **Appendix: Moving Up - Phase 1**) This increase in demand and decrease in supply has also caused an increase in rents (HNRP 1993, 4:9), and this situation has altered the level of affordability for both low and moderate income earners (HNRP 1993, 4:9) as well as driven some low income renters out of the normal rental market. In short, it seems as though the city, as a whole, has a demonstrable need for an increased supply of low-income or non-market housing, and it would appear that at least some of the demand for this sort of housing exists (on account of displacements) in the CBD.

Bearing in mind that the problems of the CBD will not be solved with just a few alterations to a plan, or the redevelopment of a few buildings, the idea of converting underutilized upper-storey commercial space to low-income rental accommodation does offer the opportunity to try to solve, in one step, two of the more recognizable deficiencies of the CBD, namely the lack of a residential population, and an under-supply of affordable, or "non-market", housing.

#### 2.2.4. Connecting Prince George with the Other Four Study Cities

At first glance, it may seem difficult to find a connection between Prince George, Campbell River, Nelson, New Westminster, and Victoria (see Figure 2.10: *The Five Cities of the VCHT Study* ), except that they are all governed by the same provincial policies regarding land use planning and housing. Considering that one of the VCHT's objectives was "to establish the potential for a province-wide program for recycling second-storey space", it is necessary to evaluate whether a study of these five cities produces a reasonable initial survey of the potential for commercial-to-residential conversion across urban British Columbia.



FIGURE 2.10: THE FIVE CITIES OF THE V.C.H.T. STUDY.  
 (source: BC Government Map 1SR - reproduced with permission of Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Geographic Data BC)

**Table 2.2: Population and Population Growth in the Five VCHT Study Cities**

	Population (1991)	Population (1986)	% Change	Regional Population (1991)	Regional Population (1986)	% Change
<b><u>Campbell River</u></b> Incorporated: 1947 Area: 11,874 ha* Regional District: Comox Strathcona	21,175	16,990	+24.6	82,729	71,145	+16.3
<b><u>Nelson</u></b> Incorporated: 1897 Area: 655 ha** Regional District: Central Kootenay	8,760	8,110	+8.0	51,073	49,110	+4.0
<b><u>New Westminster</u></b> Incorporated: 1860 Area: 1,538 ha Regional District: Greater Vancouver	43,585	39,970	+9.0	1,542,774	1,126,150	+21.8
<b><u>Prince George</u></b> Incorporated: 1915 Area: 31,572 ha Regional District: Fraser-Fort George	69,653	67,620	+3.0	90,739	89,335	+1.6
<b><u>Victoria</u></b> Incorporated: 1862 Area: 1,878 ha Regional District: Capital	71,228	66,305	+7.4	299,550	264,615	+13.2

(Source: *Statistics Canada, Census of Canada 1986 and 1991.*

\* Between 1986 and 1991, the District Municipality of Campbell River expanded by 47 ha.

\*\* Between 1986 and 1991, the City of Nelson expanded by 4 ha.)

The following analysis of the basic economic and geographic histories of Campbell River, Nelson, New Westminster and Victoria, (along with the historic, geographic and economic analysis of Prince George which has already been offered) will support the contention that the five cities in which the VCHT undertook its study of underutilized upper-storey space represent a reasonable initial survey of conditions across British Columbia.

With a population of approximately 21,000 in 1991, **Campbell River** is a product of the post-war expansion and diversification of forest and natural resource industries. As Vancouver Island's fourth largest city, Campbell River is an important shopping and service centre, and is considered to be the administrative center for the North Island region. The city is also a testament to the kind of growth and development which British Columbia has enjoyed in recent years as a result of its appeal as a sports (particularly fishing), tourist and retirement destination. In the past thirty years the popularity of coastal British Columbia as a recreational destination, and the profitability of the forest economy in the region, have converged to elevate what was once a small logging and fishing community to a position of primacy among communities on Vancouver Island's north coast (Hartford, Michael 1993, 11).

Like Prince George, Campbell River is a fairly new city, and somewhat dominated by post-war, automobile-centered development.<sup>16</sup>

**Nelson** is one of the oldest cities in BC's interior. With a population of almost 10,000 in 1996, the city is the administrative center of the Central Kootenay Regional District of the southern interior. The settlement of Nelson began in 1887 when mineral deposits were first discovered just south of the present-day City of Nelson (Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 17). In 1895, with mining and smelting forming a strong industrial base, and road and rail transportation giving the community a strategic location, the City of Nelson was incorporated. By the time the mining boom had faded (ca. 1910) the city was already established as an important supply and distribution center in the region, and the regional divisional point for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR),<sup>17</sup> with direct rail connection to the United States. As growth and development in Nelson had leveled off before the First World War, many of the city's original buildings (constructed between 1895 and 1914) have not experienced re-development pressure and have been preserved intact (Gayton 1996, 5). It was also largely on account of the existence of this heritage resource that Nelson was selected, through the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, to be the beneficiary of a number of programs aimed at preserving or enhancing

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<sup>16</sup> It should also, perhaps, be noted that the VCHT settled on Campbell River as the fifth city for their *Moving Up - Phase 1* study after complications arose with both Ladysmith and Qualicum Beach.

heritage structures, while at the same time revitalizing the commercial downtown (Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 5). These include: the BC Heritage Trust's Heritage Area Revitalization Program, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs' Downtown Revitalization Program and Heritage Canada's Main Street Program (Gayton 1996, 5). In recent years Nelson has experienced some growth pressures as a spin-off of property value and population increases in the Okanagan Valley. For the purposes of the VCHT study, Nelson offers a commercial core with a high degree of heritage, but significant geographical limitations (the amount of developable land in Nelson is limited by the fact that the city is bounded by the west arm of Kootenay Lake to the north and steep mountainous terrain to the south). All of this is within a community which is experiencing both a growing population as well as a growing need for affordable housing.

Based on the natural port of the Fraser River estuary, and incorporated in 1860, **New Westminster** is one of the original European settlements on the west coast of Canada (Ormsby 1958, 176). The importance of New Westminster in the colonial period is underscored by its service as the capital of the Colony of British Columbia from 1858-1868. The decision to establish Victoria as the colonial capital of British Columbia (after the amalgamation of the two colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia) in 1868 (Ormsby

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<sup>17</sup> "The Canadian Pacific Railway made Nelson its regional divisional point in 1900" (Gayton 1996, 5)



1958,225), and the decision to place the terminus of the CPR on Burrard Inlet (now Vancouver) (Ormsby 1958, 296), did a great deal to undermine New Westminster's future importance and development. Today, New Westminster is often considered just another suburban community within a Greater Vancouver metropolitan region with a population of almost 1.7 million. In spite of this inauspicious situation, New Westminster has managed to maintain some of the character of its historic past, and some part of its earlier role as an administrative center. In light of the incredible growth experienced in the lower mainland in the past ten years, New Westminster stands as a good example of the way in which new non-industrial development can be woven into an urban fabric that is both historic and industrial.

Established in 1843 by the Hudson's Bay Company, **Victoria** has always been an important seaport, naval base, supply depot, and administrative center. Victoria served as the capital of the Colony of Vancouver Island (1858-1868), the capital of the Colony of British Columbia (1868-1871) and has been the capital of the Province of British Columbia since 1871. Although surpassed by Vancouver (in much the same manner, and for the same reasons as New Westminster was) as the primary commercial and port city in the province, the city has remained viable through its administrative function and, more recently, its attractiveness as a tourist destination. While the slower pace of commercial activity and growth (as compared with

Vancouver) may have allowed Victoria to strike a balance between preserving heritage structures (which are the basis of its character and its attractiveness to tourists) and accommodating new development, population growth and a restricted land base raise concerns over the manner in which Victoria will be able to maintain this balance in the future. Obviously, Victoria was included as one of the five study cities because it was the impetus for the entire process of studying the potential for converting underutilized upper-storey space to residential use. Victoria, however, is suited to a study of this sort as it is able to present, within its downtown core, examples of heritage buildings that have diminished in their appeal as commercial properties. As well, Victoria, like most BC municipalities, has not been able to escape the growing problems of social and housing need in recent years.

In many ways, the situation in, and the history of, Prince George are a stark contrast to the other four study cities. It is, perhaps, for this reason that Prince George was included in the *Moving Up* study. It should be kept in mind that one of the VCHT's objectives (in undertaking the *Moving Up* study) was to assemble evidence of the need for a province-wide program to address housing need, heritage conservation and commercial-to-residential conversion. As one of the five largest cities in BC, and one which represents the kind of northern winter climate which much of BC contends with, the choice of Prince George (as a study city) and the problem-set of housing need

and underutilized commercial space in Prince George, complements the findings in the other four cities.

From these brief synopses, it is fairly evident that the five cities selected by the VCHT for their *Moving Up - Phase 1* study have some similarities as well as some significant differences. While each city is attempting to deal with the kind of growth pressures that many of British Columbia's urban centres have been experiencing for the past ten years, growth has created a unique set of pressures in each city. Each city has either addressed, or failed to effectively address, the issues stemming from growth in slightly different ways.

In addition to the pressure created by an expanding economy and population growth through in-migration, each of the five study cities also has to deal with some physical, or topographical, limitations which further exacerbate the pressures associated with growth. These limitations can be categorized as: the ocean and mountains in Campbell River, the Fraser River estuary and metropolitan Vancouver in New Westminster, the west arm of Kootenay Lake and mountainous terrain in Nelson, the ocean in Victoria, and the rivers, escarpments, Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and prevailing winds (carrying pulp mill emissions) in Prince George.

It should also be noted here that the risk of seismic activity is a factor which separates the five study cities into roughly two camps. The VCHT

asked that seismic risk be considered in the assessment portion of the *Moving Up* study, and the core study of this practicum found that Prince George is considered to be within a low seismic risk zone (see **Appendix, Sec. 2.1.7**), and that upgrading to an earthquake resistance standard is not a consideration in Prince George. A similar finding was presented in the VCHT study completed for Nelson (Gayton 1996, 21). Conversely, the VCHT study completed for New Westminster reported that the lower mainland of British Columbia (where New Westminster is situated) is considered to be a high risk earthquake zone. The VCHT study for New Westminster estimated that structural and seismic upgrading would likely be the largest single cost associated the redevelopment or conversion of any building. Without delving into technical specifics of seismic activity, it should also be noted that the Association of Professional Engineers of British Columbia made an assessment of probable seismic activity for British Columbia which determined that Vancouver Island is at greater risk than the lower mainland for seismic activity (Association of Professional Engineers of the Province of British Columbia 1988, 9). Therefore, it must be assumed that seismic upgrading in Victoria and Campbell River is at least as serious a consideration as in New Westminster, if not greater.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Despite the untold hours that are spent collecting geotechnical data, monitoring seismic activity and researching seismological methodology, the actual task of predicting earthquakes often comes down to estimate. While the best estimate of seismic risk in British Columbia is that the entire province is prone to seismic activity, it is most often, and most reasonably, estimated that the hazards of seismic activity are

*Continued*

While every city in this study offers a different history and pattern of development, one of the similarities is that each city offers an example of a community with a well-defined commercial core (although this may be less well-defined in Campbell River on account of its younger age). It is the commercial core in each of these cities which provides the environment for the kind of structure that is at the same time significant enough to be greater than one storey, old enough to have heritage potential, and old enough to be no longer totally viable in its present commercial use.

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considerably greater in the coastal regions of the province. Notwithstanding the conventional wisdom of this estimate, and the findings as presented in the VCHT studies for Nelson and Prince George, it should be noted that recent research into a 1986 earthquake that was centered some 50km northeast of Prince George, and measuring 5.4 on the Richter Scale, suggests that the conventional assessment of "low seismic risk" for the interior region of British Columbia may need to be re-examined in light of a new understanding of the way in which seismic activity in the Foreland Fold and Thrust Belt (which runs through British Columbia east of the Rocky Mountain Trench) might occur (Rogers, Cassidy, and Ellis 1990, 1144-1161). See also: Association of Professional Engineers of the Province of British Columbia. 1988.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1. Introduction

The literature review which follows is intended to provide an overview of both the research to date on the subjects discussed within this practicum, as well as the way in which these subjects relate to the core study completed for Prince George (see **Appendix**). This review attempts to build on the findings of the core study and draw together evidence that will support the contention that the broader objectives of special housing supply, heritage conservation and downtown revitalization can somehow be connected, and perhaps addressed simultaneously, through the conversion of underutilized upper-storey space.

The literature which informs this practicum flows from three broad streams. The first stream is the body of literature which concerns and attempts to address the nearly universal social problem of housing need and housing affordability. The second stream is the body of literature which addresses the problems and issues of the decline and revitalization of the downtown core areas of urban centres. The third stream concerns the conservation and preservation of heritage in the built environment and, in particular, theories concerning the adaptive re-use of old buildings.

In recent years there has been an increasing overlap between these three streams of theory. It is now not unusual to find proposals which attempt to take a broad-based approach to urban social and physical issues, and fashion solutions that consider housing need, downtown revitalization and heritage preservation simultaneously. The study proposed by the VCHT (the Prince George case forming the core study of this practicum) is one example of a proposal which attempts to link the need for affordable housing with heritage conservation. This practicum is an attempt to take the VCHT study a step further by trying to determine the link that might exist between the production of affordable housing, heritage conservation, and downtown revitalization. To that end, each of these streams of literature will be reviewed independently in the following sections of this chapter, and then evidence will be given of the ways in which these streams might flow together.

### **3.2. Housing**

This section overviews the terms, issues and theories relating to the development of housing (mainly non-market), and the ways in which they relate to the subject of this practicum and its objectives.

### 3.2.1. Housing Affordability

According to the (British Columbia) Provincial Commission on Housing Options (PCHO) (1992, 8):

*“‘Affordable’ means annual housing costs (rent or mortgage + taxes) which do not exceed 30% of a household’s gross annual income. (This definition makes the assumption that home ownership costs include a down payment of 10%, mortgage principal and interest amortized over 25 years and taxes.)”*

In most cases, the term “affordable”, in reference to housing, tends to be quantified at this figure of 30% of gross income (Fallis 1990, 52; Downs 1992, 174). Creating housing that is affordable, therefore, should simply be the task of creating housing in which the cost to the consumer is ultimately less than 30% of their total household income. In reality, however, the problem is not quite so simple. Because we operate within a relatively free market, housing affordability becomes a function of a whole range of inputs which can impact both income levels and housing prices in any given market. Improving the affordability of housing can include measures such as: increasing the stock of housing and the stock of “appropriately zoned and serviced land” for housing (decreased costs through increased supply) (PCHO 1992, 17); increasing household income; decreasing the costs associated with the creation of new housing (including the cost of borrowing money); and reducing housing occupancy costs - whether through the subsidization of rents, allowing increases in densities, or subsidizing land costs (Downs 1992, 176). As



Anthony Downs (1992, 174) describes it, ensuring affordability means "creating more new units that are affordable, and it means making a bigger share of existing housing affordable to more people".

### **3.2.2. Households of Low and Moderate Income**

The Report of the PCHO (1992, 17) defines "households of low and moderate income" as "those who have incomes which are 80% or less than the average household income for the urban area they live in".

The Prince George Housing Needs Research Project (HNRP) (1993, 4:6) reported that "Prince George residents have higher than average family and household incomes than either the provincial or national averages as-a-whole" Although definitive data have not been tabulated, this seems to suggest that, for Prince George, the term "low and moderate income" encompasses a greater range of incomes than in other parts of the province, or Canada.

### **3.2.3. Affordable Housing**

The PCHO defines "affordable housing" as being any form of housing (whether built by private, public or non-profit sectors) which "would have a market price or rent that would be affordable to households of low and moderate income" (PCHO 1992, 8).

The HNRP found that although average incomes in Prince George were higher than the provincial average (according to 1991 census figures), over 17% of all families and individuals who rent housing in Prince George pay more than 30% of their gross income for that housing. Although this figure is lower than the 22.6% of families who paid more than 30% of their gross income for housing in 1981, this still translates into 1321 of the 7730 rental households in the city that are living in unaffordable conditions (HNRP 1993, 4:6-8).

The HNRP also reported that "based on annual incomes solely, it was estimated that about 61% of families could afford to purchase a new home and about 76% could afford to buy a resale home" (HNRP 1993, 4:6). The HNRP noted that home ownership affordability dropped dramatically for individuals - "With an average individual income of \$28,800, only about 31% could afford to purchase a resale home" (HNRP 1993, 4:6). Furthermore, the HNRP estimated that a 10% downpayment represented a considerable obstacle for low-to-moderate income households wishing to move from a rental housing to a home-ownership situation (HNRP 1993, 4:6). It remains to be seen, as figures from the 1996 Census are made available, whether the overall picture of housing affordability in Prince George has improved in the past five years.

### 3.2.4. Housing Need

Although this study could not find a widely accepted definition of "housing need", the simple definition would have to be that it represents the total number of individuals, families or households who are either: living in conditions which are sub-standard (from a health and safety perspective); facing serious issues of affordability with respect to their housing; and/or surviving without any form of housing (homeless).

### 3.2.5. Private Sector Housing

Private sector, or normal market, housing may be defined as housing that is developed for profit by developers, contractors or development companies. Although private sector housing is based on a profit motive, and controlled by the mechanisms of supply and demand, both the federal government and the Government of British Columbia have pursued various programs, since the end of the Second World War, which have sought to increase overall home-ownership by influencing the affordability of private market housing.<sup>19</sup> Through recent changes to the Municipal Act (such as density bonusing and comprehensive development zoning - see the section

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<sup>19</sup> The federal government enacted the National Housing Act in 1944 and established the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (now Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) in 1945. The Province of British Columbia adopted the Provincial Home Owner Grant Act in 1957, and the British Columbia Housing Act in 1960. The latter was "enacted to clarify the provincial role in participating with CMHC within the provisions of the National Housing Act" (PCHO 1992, 104; Mishra 1990, 103-104)

to follow, **Sec. 3.2.10, on The Role of Senior Levels of Government in Affordable Housing**, (British Columbia 1995a)) private sector developers are beginning to develop affordable housing as either a component of normal market housing developments, or under the terms of development agreements for other developments.

### **3.2.6. Public Sector Housing**

Public sector housing may be defined as housing (typically rental) that is developed and managed by government, or housing which is acquired, and then managed by government. Since 1967, the provision and management of public sector housing in BC has been the responsibility of the British Columbia Housing Management Corporation (BCHMC), which was created to interact with the federal government as regards public housing (PCHO 1992, 104). The BCHMC manages many residential buildings throughout the province, including several in Prince George. Since the late 1970s, the provincial government has receded from being directly involved in the creation of new, public sector, housing but remains involved in the housing market through the delivery of inter-governmental social housing programs (PCHO 1992, 105).

### 3.2.7. Non-Market, Non-Profit or Third Sector Housing

The terms non-market, non-profit and third sector, when applied to housing, generally refer to variations on the same basic theme - housing that is subsidized and developed by non-profit societies (usually in conjunction with the public sector) and delivered at a cost to the consumer that is considerably below the normal market rate. Langley Keyes (1990, 166) describes the production of third-sector housing as being:

*"made up of community development corporations, other non-profit housing service and production organizations, and the support entities that provide technical assistance and financing to them"*

Keyes (1990, 166-167) goes on to suggest that this form of housing

*"represents the wave of the future in terms of low income units - the only way to 'decommodify' housing for poor people."*

A paper prepared by the City of Prince George Development Services Department (PGDSD) and the Prince George Housing Committee (PGHC) entitled: "Non-Market Housing Options Discussion Paper" (Prince George 1996a, 2), defines non-market housing as:

*"the provision of housing units by the public sector or a society, for specific residents with limited income, age or health qualifications, unlike market housing which is freely sold or rented to any person."*

In addition to this definition of non-market housing for Prince George, the report to the Prince George City Council by the PGDSD and the PGHC on the 6th of February, 1996 (Prince George 1996a, 2), notes that:

*"In the existing Official Community Plan and Zoning Bylaw there are a variety of terms used to describe non-market housing such as 'social housing, community residential facilities, special needs housing,' among others. These terms require clarification to identify the specific types of residents who should qualify for non-market housing units."*

Examples of third-sector housing in Canada (and in Prince George) include developments such as: shelters run by the Salvation Army; housing developed by seniors' housing societies; or housing developed by the Elizabeth Fry Society. Again, the report made by the PGDSD and PGHC (Prince George 1996a, 4) suggests that there is a sizable demand for non-market housing in Prince George, and that "the greatest demand for non-market housing is in the downtown and the 'Bowl area' of the city".<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "The Bowl" is a term commonly applied to an area around the centre of Prince George, roughly 6-7 km in diameter, and some 120-150m lower than the surrounding hills of the Nechako Plateau (glacio-lacustrine deposits [Clibbon and Hamelin 1970, 62]). The bowl area is incised by the Nechako and Fraser Rivers, and their confluence is located in its northeast corner. The Bowl's geomorphologic origin is primarily glacial, as well as a result of glacial-fluvial activity. More specifically, "the bowl" is a remnant of a "pro-glacial" lake (Holland 1964, 111) which formed as cordilleran glaciation (which covered most of what is now British Columbia) receded towards the Omineca valley (northwest) during the Pleistocene era.

### 3.2.8. Land Banking

The process of land banking is typically one in which a public entity (usually either a municipal or provincial government) assembles a collection of land properties, ostensibly for the purpose of maintaining a public sector presence in the land development market. As a consequence, land banking can also have an affect on the public presence in the housing market. Recognizing this, the provincial government revised the Municipal Act of British Columbia (in 1994) to allow local governments to lease or sell municipal land below market values (again, see the section to follow, **Sec.3.2.10 on The Role of the Senior Levels of Government in Affordable Housing**) (British Columbia 1995a). The proviso is that the land must be leased or sold to non-profit organizations, and that the land may not be used for private gain (British Columbia 1995a, Sec. 536.1[1]). A prime example of the way in which this amendment to the Municipal Act can be operationalized, may be found in the recent long-term lease agreement that was reached between the City of Prince George and the Elizabeth Fry Society for a parcel of municipally-owned land near the corner of 15th Avenue and Irwin Street, in Prince George.<sup>21</sup> The Elizabeth Fry Society (a non-profit society), in conjunction with the BCHMC and Legend Properties (a private land developer based in Kelowna), are now (1996) in the process of

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<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, this particular property is situated outside of the Prince George CBD, and therefore does

developing a multiple-family residential building that will be a mix of market and non-market housing.

The criticism leveled at public land banking is that it can interfere in the free market, and adversely affect the profitability of land markets for private investors. The reality is that it can have a leveling effect on the land market, and serve to curb land speculation, both of which are to the benefit of the consumer. The idea of land banking was employed on a fairly large scale, (mainly for single-family tract housing development in suburban areas) in Prince George from the early 1960s until the mid-1980s. At the beginning of Prince George's period of greatest growth, in the early 1960s, large parcels of crown land adjacent to the city were handed over to the City by the Provincial Government.<sup>22</sup> The result of this arrangement has been that many of the residential subdivisions in Prince George, with the notable exception of College Heights (developed by the Roman Catholic Diocese), were developed, serviced, and marketed by the City of Prince George. The scale to which the public sector was involved in the land market in Prince George served to stabilize natural market forces, and prevent wild speculation and enormous increases in land prices.

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not offer an example of how selling municipal land below market value can serve to revitalize the CBD.

<sup>22</sup> This arrangement whereby the Municipal Government became the developer of Crown land was, at the time (in the early 1960s) considered somewhat unorthodox, or at least unique. This arrangement, however, could not have come about without the co-operation of the Provincial Government and (then) Minister of Lands and MLA for Prince George, the Hon. Ray Williston.



In today's cities, the use of land banks or vacant land inventories (e.g. tax recovery land/properties) may provide one of the best solutions to the problems of the growing demand for non-market housing. Where there is a demand for housing that is likely to remain unmet by the usual private, or for-profit, housing market, the availability of a pool of public land that could be allotted to non-profit housing providers (under the new terms of the Municipal Act), could provide the cost saving that would allow some non-market housing developments to proceed.

### **3.2.9. The Role of Local Government in Affordable Housing**

As there are a great number of conditions which can determine affordable housing, it is important to recognize, first, that municipal governments and their planning departments can have only a limited impact on the more macro-economic issues that relate to housing affordability (e.g. monetary policy, job creation, interest rates, sales and income taxes, or inflation) (Downs 1992, 177; Carter and McAfee 1990, 228-229). In spite of this, there are many conditions of housing affordability which municipal governments can impact. For the most part, these tend to be found on the supply side of housing affordability issues (e.g. land use regulation, subdivision control, zoning bylaws and, to a limited extent, property taxation) (Carter and McAfee 1990, 229). Notwithstanding these traditional demarcations, opportunities exist (as senior levels of government reorganize what they consider to be their responsibilities and powers with respect to

social welfare, housing and urban development policy) for municipalities to exercise greater influence, involvement and (perhaps) eventual authority in the realm of housing (Carter and McAfee 1990, 232).

The strategy which the City of Prince George is employing with respect to affordable housing (and housing affordability) is outlined in the aforementioned report to council: *Non-Market Housing Report and Recommendations* (Prince George 1996a). The particular details of this report may be found in **Chapter 4, Sec. 4.4.3** of this practicum. In short, the recommendations of the *Non-Market Housing Report* propose a wide spectrum of changes to the Official Community Plan (OCP) and the Zoning Bylaw which would attempt to support or facilitate the development of non-market housing by private or third-sector developers.

### **3.2.10. The Role of the Senior Levels of Government in Affordable Housing**

The basis of the City of Prince George's proposed strategy for non-market housing (the *Non-Market Housing Report* ) lies in recent changes made to the BC Municipal Act. To some extent these Municipal Act amendments represent an opportunity, granted by the provincial government, for increased local involvement in, and authority over, the process of planning for, and creating, affordable housing (British Columbia 1995b, 3:1). In brief, these amendments include:

- *Density Bonusing: The Municipal Act now permits local governments to "increase the allowable density on a site in return for the provision of affordable housing, special needs housing or amenities" (British Columbia 1995a, Sec.963.1 [1] and [2])*
- *Comprehensive Development Zoning: The Municipal Act now allows municipal governments to implement comprehensive development zoning which "provides local governments with the flexibility and authority to negotiate with developers about large, complex, multi-use sites and customize zoning regulations to arrive at mutually satisfactory solutions" (British Columbia 1995a, Sec.963)*
- *Housing Agreements: The Municipal Act now allows local governments "to enter into housing agreements to secure a supply of affordable housing" (British Columbia. 1995b, 3:1). The terms of these agreements can pertain to: the form of tenure; who may occupy the units; the administration and management of housing units; and rental rates. (British Columbia 1995a, Sec.963.2 [2] )*
- *Standards of Maintenance Bylaws: "Local government can now enact standards of maintenance bylaws to address to address the condition of a residential unit occupied by a tenant. (British Columbia 1995b, 3:1)*
- *Leasing or Selling Land Below Market Value: Local government now has the authority to lease or sell municipal land below market value provided the land is leased or sold to non-profit organizations and not for private gain" (British Columbia 1995b, 3:2).*

Together, these five initiatives give some indication that the Province of British Columbia wishes to endow local government with the tools that would allow them to explore opportunities for the creation of affordable

housing or address their affordable housing issues. Understanding why the Province of British Columbia has adopted this approach is beyond the scope of this paper, but it may be important to note that these initiatives constitute (in part) the Province of British Columbia's response to the federal government's almost complete withdrawal from direct involvement in affordable housing programs. As the federal government has historically been the leader in developing housing policy, and funding the development of non-market housing, its withdrawal from housing programs represents a void which must be filled by the provincial government, working in concert with local government (BC Housing 1994, 6). While this re-ordering of priorities is having a very real impact on the delivery of housing policy and the development of affordable housing, it does afford government (both local and provincial) the opportunity to innovate, and explore new options. The changes to the Municipal Act (as outlined above) represent this kind of innovation.

### **3.3 Core Area Decline, Reurbanization and Revitalization**

This section is intended to give an overview of the terms, issues and theories relating to urban core areas, their decline, reurbanization and revitalization (for the most part since the Second World War), as well as the ways in which these subjects relate to the subject of this practicum and its objectives.

### 3.3.1. Core Area Decline

The decline of the downtown, or commercial core areas, of North American cities is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the 1950s the downtown areas of most cities were truly the "central" business districts (Hodge 1991, 66). A great deal has changed however in the urban landscape since the end of the Second World War. Although much of this is beyond the scope of this practicum, it is important to illuminate some aspects of core area decline, in an attempt to illustrate the ways in which this process has manifested itself in the case of Prince George's CBD.

In the first decade following the Second World War, practically every city in North America underwent a complete metamorphosis. The engine of this change was multi-dimensional. The end of the war brought prosperity, and as wartime production was re-tooled for domestic uses, primary and secondary industries expanded. This growth translated into employment, which meant wages, which meant that people had money to purchase durable goods and housing (which, in turn, led to more employment and more wages). As nine years of economic depression and six years of war had all but eliminated the development of new housing, the volume of demand for housing in the post-war period was also a reflection of suppressed demand dating back to the early 1930s (Frieden and Sagalyn 1991, 11). In Canada, post-war prosperity and the expansion of urban populations were accompanied by rural depopulation (in-migration from rural areas to cities), in-migration

from abroad, and a large increase in the birth rate (now known as the "baby-boom") (Hodge 1991, 63).

In Canada, and the United States, the demand for housing resulting from this post-war prosperity and urban population growth was, for the most part, met through the widespread application of a form of urban residential development that was low density, largely affordable, relatively spacious (for the consumer), and facilitated by the rising use of the private automobile. This was suburbia (Frieden and Sagalyn 1991, 11; Hodge 1991, 63-68).

The point at which all of this post-war suburban residential development began to seriously impinge upon the city's traditional downtown core (the CBD) is the point when suburbia departed from being a strictly residential enclave and evolved to become an area of both residential and commercial (albeit primarily retail) development. As Witold Rybczynski (1992, 103) points out, although the idea of the suburban shopping center can be traced back to a "grouping of stores interspersed with parking lots", developed on the outskirts of Kansas City, Missouri in 1908, it was their increasingly widespread application, or integration, into suburban development during the 1960s and 70s which most seriously effected the decline of many downtowns. In trying to understand the history of retail development in Canada, Ken Jones suggests that:

*"the intra-urban retail system has undergone at least three transformations in the last sixty years. These eras are termed the pre-automobile city era, the automobile city era, and the specialized era"* (Jones 1991, 382).

According to Jones (1991, 382-383), retail activity in Canada, prior to 1950, was dominated by the central business district. This pattern can be attributed to a combination of transportation systems and urban form. Prior to 1950 private automobile ownership was low, residential development tended to be limited by systems of public transportation and, consequently, people would travel (by bus or streetcar) to a central place to shop (the CBD).

As private automobile use became more prevalent in the 1950s, convenient, and automobile-oriented (something that the CBD was never designed to be) shopping centres began to be integrated into residential developments. Jones refers to this as the "*consequent*" development strategy. Later, in the 1960s, suburban retail development started to take, as Jones suggests, a "*simultaneous*" approach, whereby "the shopping center and the housing stock were built at the same time, and the shopping centre was viewed as the centre of the 'planned' community" (Jones 1991, 384).

In the "*specialized*" era, the traditional retailing centres (i.e., the CBD) become gentrified, and emerge as specialty shopping centres, offering alternatives to the corporate shopping of the suburban malls (Jones 1991, 390-

391). This last stage has not, as yet (1996), manifested itself in Prince George to any significant extent.

Frieden and Sagalyn (1991, 12) identify the same trends (the rise of private automobiles, decline in the use of public transportation and, above all, the development of suburban shopping centres) as contributors to core area decline in the United States.

Jamieson, in speaking of the situation in Canadian cities, suggests that:

*“Neighbourhood or regional shopping centres replaced the downtown core as the heart of the community, and lack of community facilities, amenities and affordable housing meant that downtowns were no longer suitable for family life” (Jamieson 1994, 78)*

As the history of suburban retail development in Prince George and its impact on the CBD, has already been discussed (see: **Chapter 2, Sec. 2.2.2**), there is no great need for any further exploration of that subject here. The exception, however, would be to note that the majority of development in Prince George is of the post 1950s, private-automobile-centered, and typically suburban variety. The retail landscape (the CBD) that was overwhelmed by suburban and regional shopping centres in the 1960s and 70s was one that was



only designed to serve a few thousand people.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, it may be argued that Prince George had a less highly developed CBD in the “pre-automobile era”, and that this may be affecting both its current state of decline, as well as influencing efforts aimed at its revitalization.

### 3.3.2. Re-urbanization

One of the obvious theoretical counterbalances to the problem of core area decline at the hands of suburban expansion is the idea of reurbanization. Reurbanization, or the process of directing growth inwards towards the existing urban fabric of a city (Lewinberg 1993, 10), has particular relevance to the work of this practicum, as one of the overarching goals has been to determine whether it is feasible to create low and moderate income housing in underutilized downtown spaces.

In an attempt to define the term reurbanization, L.S. Bourne found the first reference in the works of Dutch scholars Klaassen, Paelinck and van den Berg, on the processes of urban development. In those cases, reurbanization had been used to refer to:

*“the fourth and most recent stage in a step-like evolutionary model of the form and dynamic of urban development in capitalist societies”* (Bourne 1993, 7)

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<sup>23</sup> The population of Prince George in 1961 was 13,877. The population, within what is now the boundary of Prince George is estimated to have been about 17,000 (Sedgwick 1985, 1)

In this urban evolutionary model (the Dutch model), as presented by Bourne, the growth and development of cities can be traced from the initial stage of *centralization (or urbanization)* where the core area is developed and defined, through stages of urban dispersal (*suburbanization*), inner-city and suburban decline (*disurbanization or exurbanization*), through to the final stage - *reurbanization*. Again, according to Bourne's interpretation of the Dutch model, this last stage of urban evolution is based (in theory) on three factors:

- *economic restructuring*
- *revised housing preferences and lifestyle choices*
- *government initiatives in improving community-based services and urban amenities.*

In an attempt to show how reurbanization manifests itself in the Canadian context, Bourne applies the Dutch model to the experience of

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Canada's larger urban centres in recent years.<sup>24</sup> Bourne suggests that, for the most part, the Dutch model was similar to the Canadian experience, although it was not necessarily economic restructuring or revised lifestyle choices which brought about reurbanization here. Instead, Bourne sees "a fortuitous coincidence of demographic changes, a boom in downtown office building construction, investment in public infrastructure and new housing starts in or adjacent to the central core areas" as the main determinants of reurbanization. Furthermore, Bourne suggests that the accommodation of a growing population (in Canada's larger cities) through the redevelopment of "former industrial, port or railway 'grey-field' sites" with social housing and condominiums was a major reason for urban repopulation through the 1980s. Bourne suggests that similar processes of repopulation have occurred in Glasgow and London (the Docklands) when vacant or underused sites were made available for development through public-private partnership (Bourne 1993, 8).

The obvious connection that all of this has to the current situation in Prince George is that a real opportunity exists for Prince George to effect some sort of reurbanization, or core area repopulation, by capitalizing on the potential of the city's supply of underutilized or vacant space (within the

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<sup>24</sup> It should be noted here that, as is often the case in planning literature, there seems to be no body of literature that is devoted to the way in which these processes of urban development occur in smaller cities in non-metropolitan settings. However, in this case the basic concepts for reurbanization are transferable

downtown core) for market and non-market housing. This includes more than just the underutilized or vacant upper-storey space that has been identified in the core study of this practicum. It also includes what David Ley suggests is the underlying force in downtown revitalization - giving people as many good reasons as possible to be downtown (Ley 1996).

### 3.3.3. Downtown Revitalization

*“there has been a gradual movement to improve the downtown environment through the provision of convention centres, performing arts halls, public spaces, and urban design. Festivals, cultural and social events, and special programming re-animate downtown areas and contribute to their rebounding vitality”* (Jamieson 1994, 78).

There is really no mystery as to what revitalization means, when applied to the city - the mystery, it seems, occurs in determining how best to achieve it. Walter Jamieson defines downtown revitalization (above) as a “rebounding vitality”. The Province of British Columbia’s Downtown Revitalization Programme suggests that “a vibrant, prosperous downtown is a necessary part of a healthy community” and speaks of “the need for a revitalization programme to revive deteriorating commercial areas.” (British Columbia 1987, 8). Gregory Serrao suggests that the objective of revitalization might be “exciting round-the-clock downtowns” (Serrao 1991, 256). Whatever

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(with some consideration for obvious differences) to smaller centres such as Prince George.

definition one settles on, the literature on downtown revitalization seems to revolve around two basic themes:

1. *that the revitalization of central business districts is necessary to mitigate the impact of suburban retail development and reverse the processes that have moved downtowns towards physical and functional decline* (Curtis 1995, 11; Miller 1995, 3-5; Jamieson 1994, 78).
2. *that housing, in a variety of forms, can serve as an agent of revitalization, and that housing should be a goal for cities seeking revitalization of their core areas* (Serrao 1991, 255-257; Paré 1993, 93-94; Mulvihill 1996, 96).

The first theme, that revitalization should serve to reverse the decline of core areas, or mitigate the trends of suburban retail development (see the preceding section on core area decline), is based on the premise that revitalization should be both physical and economic in nature. According to the Province of British Columbia's Downtown Revitalization Programme, the objectives of physical revitalization should be to: "improve the municipal physical infrastructure and...stimulate private property improvements". Economic revitalization then, involves not only an increase in the vitality of the CBD but also an "increase in the economic viability of downtown and...aid to merchants in marketing and promotion." (British Columbia 1987, 8). In both instances, the mechanics of downtown revitalization are both public and private in nature. This reflects the fact that downtown (or the CBD) has a function, in every city, that extends beyond just the interests of its merchants and landowners who do business there. Richard Wagner (et. al)

contend that "improving central business districts is important for a variety of reasons...downtowns represent a tremendous investment in time and money; their businesses and industries generate much of America's [and Canada's] capital" and, moreover, that "a community's downtown reflects its heritage and its people" (Wagner, Miller and Wright 1989, 6).

The second theme of revitalization, that housing in a variety of forms can serve as an agent of revitalization, is based on the premise that if more people populate the downtown, there will be more people demanding commercial and retail services in the area, and more human activity throughout the day and night to deter criminal activity. This has been discussed in the preceding chapter (see **Chapter 2, Sec. 2.2.3**) as the "vibrancy" of the CBD. Again, it is Ley's thesis that the underlying force of revitalization lies in giving people as many good reasons as possible to be downtown (Ley, 1996).

David Mulvihill suggests that:

*"demographic and social trends that favor the development of downtown housing...include increasing numbers of young professionals and empty nest households, a renewed interest in urban lifestyles and historic architecture, and a growing white-collar workforce downtown"* (Mulvihill 1996,96).

In spite of these wider social trends, Mulvihill cautions that "downtowns must be livable if they are to attract residents", and cites "diverse

housing types, the ready existence of services, attractive public spaces, efficient public transit, and a concentration of cultural and entertainment facilities” as just some of the elements that make for livability in downtown (Mulvihill 1996,96).

The other obvious drawback to utilizing housing as an agent for downtown revitalization is the cost of developing downtown land (Serrao 1991, 257; Mulvihill 1996, 96), and the cost of redeveloping older buildings, especially where upgrading to modern building codes is involved or, in the case of coastal British Columbia, upgrading to modern seismic standards (Curtis 1995, 11; New Westminster 1996, 69). This economic aspect of downtown, the feasibility of converting existing buildings to residential use, was the major focus of the VCHT study, the core study of this practicum (see **Appendix**).

In review, and to bring the issue of revitalization back to the situation in Prince George (and the findings of the core study of this practicum), the findings of this literature review with respect to revitalization can be summarized as follows:

- *Downtown revitalization is a necessary wider community pursuit, as it supports the physical and economic well-being of a socially and economically important part of the city.*

- *Human activity is the greatest generator and indicator of revitalization.*
- *Housing, in a variety of forms, tenures, and prices, can be an important agent of downtown revitalization.*
- *To be successful, the revitalization of downtown through the development of housing requires a wide range of supporting elements (such as services, amenities, transit etc.) - many of which are deficient or lacking in downtown Prince George.*
- *And the successful revitalization of downtown through the development of housing requires some means of overcoming the high costs associated with land assembly and/or the conversion and upgrading of older buildings.*

Notwithstanding, the basic findings of the core study of this practicum still hold true, namely that the development of low-moderate income housing in underutilized, upper-storey commercial space in Prince George is feasible (see **Appendix, Sec. 6**).

### **3.4. Heritage in the Built Environment**

#### **3.4.1. Preservation and Conservation**

The Heritage Conservation Branch of the Province of British Columbia suggests that the present-day heritage conservation movement has its roots in two different schools of thought concerning heritage: preservation and conservation (Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 10).



According to the Heritage Conservation Branch, historic preservation can be traced back to the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. when Roman Emperors would issue decrees to protect architectural monuments. Latterly though, from about the mid-1800s, western industrial countries such as Britain, France, the United States and (more recently) Canada, began to recognize the importance of some historic buildings, monuments, sites, and even buildings associated with historic figures. In 1919, Canada established the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, "to designate persons, places and events significant to our national history". The ultimate result of this was a string of historic sites across Canada which include places such as Fort St. James (BC), Fort Edmonton (Alberta), Lower Fort Garry (Manitoba), Old Fort Henry (Ontario) and Fortress Louisbourg (Nova Scotia). Each of these historic sites has been restored, preserves the past, and gives an interpretation of history to visitors (Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 10).

Conversely, conservation (as a school of thought) has both a shorter history and broader focus than historic preservation. The rise of heritage conservation can be traced to the latter part of the 19th century, when the architectural and aesthetic qualities of buildings (as opposed to simply the historic qualities) were given increased consideration when determining heritage status. From this new and wider interpretation, or appreciation, of what constitutes heritage in the built environment, many western industrial countries enacted legislation which limited a property owner's rights to the

use and enjoyment of their property on the basis that their property possessed architectural, aesthetic, historic, or even educational qualities of cultural significance. While this limitation of property rights may seem radical, heritage conservation (of this type) seems to have flourished in Canada and, perhaps, mostly on the basis of the idea that significant heritage structures could be maintained and kept in use within the urban fabric without having to preserve them in a museum-like state (Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 11-15).

Another aspect of heritage conservation, which seems to have contributed to its success, is the "blanket" manner in which it can often be applied. Thus entire urban districts are designated, or zoned, as heritage areas and within that designation property owners are (usually) not allowed to either radically alter or demolish their buildings without the approval of some sort of adjudicating body. In Canada, the best example of this sort of application of widespread conservation is, perhaps, the Gastown district of Vancouver, which was designated as a historic district in 1971 (Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 11). Other notable Canadian conservation projects include: Downtown Nelson, BC; Market Square (Victoria); the Forks Market and Johnson Terminal (Winnipeg); the Exchange District (Winnipeg); and Old Montréal, Quebec.

### 3.4.2. Adaptive Re-use:

In short, adaptive re-use is the process of converting, or adapting, buildings from one type of use to another (Robertson 1995, 432). Its success, both financially and as an effort in preserving architectural heritage, owes largely to the fact that it is a process which can change the economic attributes of buildings. Buildings which have exceeded their effective life-span in one economic use, can find new life through adaptive re-use. Over the past twenty years, adaptive re-use has come to be one of the most widely applied tools for preserving heritage in the built environment, and for revitalizing historic areas.

It seems as though buildings that are well-suited to adaptive re-use always fall into at least one of two categories. Either they are structures of some historic or architectural merit, or they are buildings in which the design no longer serves the original purpose. Kent A. Robertson (Director of the Local and Urban Affairs Program at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota) suggests that:

*"as a redevelopment tool, historic preservation takes advantage of the facts that most downtowns have an abundance of the architecturally distinctive old buildings that many people are attracted by, and that these buildings are underused. Adaptive re-use...is widely relied on to preserve downtown buildings or even an entire district"* (Robertson 1995, 432).

In many cases, adaptive re-use projects have involved the conversion of architecturally distinctive, but economically surplus commercial buildings to revitalized downtown retail shopping facilities. The strategy of utilizing the adaptive re-use of distinctive older buildings for the purpose of downtown revitalization and, in particular, a revitalization of retailing, has resulted in the development of what Robertson terms "festival marketplaces" or "special historic districts" in downtown areas. Some notable examples of commercial-to-retail adaptive re-use, and these kinds of "festival marketplaces", include: Faneuil Hall in Boston (Robertson 1995, 432; Frieden and Sagalyn 1994, 107-112), Granville Island in Vancouver, and the Forks Market in Winnipeg. Some examples of "special historic districts" include: Gastown and Yaletown in Vancouver; and The Exchange District in Winnipeg.

The other side of adaptive re-use is the conversion of commercial space to residential use. William G. Rosenberg (in describing the conversion of four office towers in downtown Detroit to residential apartments in 1980) suggests that the adaptive re-use of structurally sound buildings "made obsolete by new downtown office construction" was an important component in rehabilitating Detroit's downtown core by creating an urban residential neighbourhood (Rosenberg 1981, 437). Some notable examples of other commercial-to-residential adaptive re-use projects include: recent conversions of former warehouse space to artists studio loft apartments in the

Yaletown and Gastown districts of Vancouver (Vancouver 1989) and the conversion of the Ashdown Warehouse to condominiums in the Exchange District of Winnipeg.

It should be noted that, while many of these adaptive re-use projects have involved the conversion of entire buildings, the creation of mixed-use development can result from the partial conversion of buildings in conjunction with the revitalization of existing commercial uses.

It would seem that one of the driving forces behind the adaptive re-use of older downtown buildings is the fact that the heritage and architecture of these buildings offers a uniqueness that new, or suburban developments have, as yet, been unable to match. If adaptive re-use is successful, then the unique qualities of the building are transferred to the new use. Robertson (1995, 432) suggests that adaptive re-use projects have tended to differ from traditional developments in five regards: they include an unusual mix of local specialty shops; they lack major anchor stores; there is a strong emphasis on entertainment and food; they stress important historic or architectural themes; and their target market is often affluent, well-educated, young professionals.

In the specific context of the case study of Prince George, applying the theories of adaptive re-use and heritage conservation offers some significant, but not insurmountable, difficulties. The most notable of these lies with the

present (1996) state of the building stock in Prince George, and in particular the building stock in the downtown core. For a myriad of economic and social reasons, the development of Prince George, to date, has not yielded many buildings which could be characterized as having either architectural, cultural, or historic significance (see **Appendix, Sec. 4.1.**). Although many buildings in downtown Prince George have exhausted their commercial viability, their construction and social significance are not of a sufficiently high quality to warrant conservation on the basis of heritage alone - especially considering that the term "heritage" can only really be applied when these buildings are considered relative to other buildings in the city. Nonetheless, while it may be true that Prince George lacks the kind of heritage required for the sort of adaptive re-use project that is typically a financial success, it is no less true that the kinds of development which have typically evolved from applied adaptive re-use (developments such as Granville Island or the Ashdown Apartments) are lacking in the Prince George milieu. It would seem that any sort of redevelopment of older buildings (provided that it is undertaken at a scale appropriate for the Prince George market), which incorporates the five elements of successful adaptive re-use which Robertson has suggested, in addition to the kind of residential use which Rosenberg has outlined, would be both a unique addition to the city, as well as an important element in the revitalization of downtown Prince George.

**CHAPTER 4:  
COMPARABLE CASES:  
COMPARING NELSON AND NEW WESTMINSTER  
WITH PRINCE GEORGE**

**4.1. Identification of Client Interests and Comparable Cases**

**4.1.1. The Clients - The Victoria Civic Heritage Trust and the City of Prince George.**

As already discussed in **Chapter 2, Sec. 2.1.1**, the impetus for this practicum, and its core study, came from the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust. The core study (see **Appendix**) was part of a five-community assessment of affordable housing in BC, including inventories of upper-storey commercial space that had at least some potential for both conversion to residential use and heritage conservation. On the basis of its role in outlining and funding the first phase/five community study, the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust is considered to be the “secondary client” for this practicum.

While the core study of this practicum was commissioned by the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust, this entire practicum would not have been possible without the support and direction that was given by the City of Prince George and, in particular, its Development Services Department and its Housing Committee. Although the work carried out in the core study satisfied what the VCHT had envisioned as the first phase of a three-phase study (one that might ultimately lead to an upper-storey conversion

demonstration project)(Victoria Civic Heritage Trust 1995, 2), the core study also provides a useful compilation of information for the City of Prince George in its ongoing work of planning, development approval and downtown revitalization. It is for these reasons that the City of Prince George is considered to be the "primary client" for this practicum.

#### **4.1.2. Local, Provincial and Federal Governments and/or Their Agencies Operating within Prince George.**

There are number of key individuals, committees, organizations and agencies, as well as government departments and ministries, which have informed the work of this practicum. These include informants that are local to Prince George, and actively involved in the issues of the City and its CBD, as well as sources detached from the situation in Prince George, which offer information that is more abstract, but no less objective or useful.

Some of the key sources of information local to Prince George include: the City of Prince George Development Services Department; the City of Prince George Housing Committee; Mr. Fergus Foley, P.Eng. (who completed the cost estimate for upgrading identified underutilized space in Prince George) (see **Appendix, Sec. 3.2**); discussions with property owners in the CBD; the Prince George Region Development Corporation; the British Columbia Assessment Authority (Prince George office); the Market Analysis Department of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. (Prince George office);



the Prince George Housing Needs Research Project Final Report; and the City of Prince George Official Community Plan.

Some of the key sources of information that are external to Prince George include: the Provincial Commission on Housing Options (PCHO); the Province of British Columbia's Downtown Revitalization Program; and *Building Strong Communities - Affordable Housing and Local Government*, British Columbia Ministry of Housing, Recreation and Consumer Services (British Columbia 1994).

#### **4.1.3. Key Informants Associated with Comparable Precedents Elsewhere.**

As the cities of Nelson and New Westminster were also selected by the VCHT to take part in the study: *Moving Up, Phase 1- An Inventory and Needs Assessment: Downtown Upper-storey Housing*, they have been selected as the primary comparable precedents for this practicum. This practicum will consider the findings of the *Moving Up* studies completed for Nelson and New Westminster, in the hope that they might illustrate some of the ways in which upper-storey commercial-to-residential conversions affect housing need, downtown revitalization and historic preservation in situations that are different and, perhaps, more advanced (in terms of having

already implemented revitalization and conservation programmes) than the situation in Prince George.<sup>25</sup>

In Nelson, the study commissioned by the VCHT was undertaken and completed by Judy Gayton (Gayton 1996), a planning consultant in Nelson. Her report will hereafter be referred to as the Nelson Study.

In New Westminster, the study commissioned by the VCHT was undertaken by The New Westminster Planning Department and the Downtown New Westminster Business Improvement Society (DNWBIS) and will hereafter be referred to as the New Westminster Study (New Westminster 1996).

These two studies, complements to the core study of this practicum, form the bulk of the material presented in **Sec. 4.2 and 4.3** of this chapter. In both cases (in Nelson and New Westminster), the local researchers were able to illustrate a need for more "affordable" housing in their communities, as well as identify a number of commercial buildings with upper storeys that were suitable for residential conversion.

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<sup>25</sup> Nelson and New Westminster were chosen simply because the *Moving Up* studies for those two cities were the first two that became available. Campbell River and Victoria could equally have served as comparable precedents.

In addition to the commonality of having been chosen for study by the VCHT, the decision to take a more detailed look at the findings of the Nelson and New Westminster studies also stems from the opportunity offered to evaluate the whole concept of commercial-to-residential conversion as it might occur within, or as a component part of, two very different approaches to downtown revitalization. In Nelson, downtown revitalization followed an approach of heritage conservation and main street revitalization, while New Westminster opted for the more comprehensive "development corporation/business improvement area" approach (British Columbia 1989). Both of these models for downtown revitalization are umbrellas under which the specific objectives of the VCHT studies have had to fit. This practicum will illustrate what each of these approaches involves in the appropriate sections to follow, with a view to also assessing the applicability or relevance of each 'model' in Prince George.

## **4.2. The Context of a Comparable Precedent - Nelson, BC**

### **4.2.1. The Feasibility of Converting Upper-Storey Commercial Space to Residential Use in Nelson.**

The three elements which seem to determine feasibility in the conversion of upper-storey commercial space to residential use, are: a solid demand for housing; a supply of upper-storey commercial space which is suitable for conversion; and a reasonable cost of conversion (which in turn relates to the design, construction and general condition of the building). In

Nelson, each of these elements seems to be working, in combination, in favour of successful commercial-to-residential conversion.

In terms of the demand for housing, the Nelson Study was able to report that residential vacancy rates in Nelson have fallen from a high of 20% during the recent recession to a current low of 1.9%, and that "the demand for affordable housing is substantial and growing"(Gayton 1996, 24, 31, 45). As is also the case in Prince George, increasing demand for rental housing may be attributable to both improvement in the local economy and increasing immigration since the 1991 census (Gayton 1996, 24). The supply of, and demand for, affordable housing may also be linked to the cost of new housing, and the rate at which it is developed. In recent years, the development of new housing in Nelson has been restricted by a limited land base, difficult terrain for construction and servicing, and high construction costs (\$100-\$110 per square foot)(Gayton 1996, 24-25). In short, the overall market for rental housing in Nelson, and the affordability of that market, is being determined by the simple forces of supply and demand - in this case it is a limited increase in supply and a considerable increase in demand, leading to increased rents and decreased affordability. The Nelson Study identifies four main groups as the primary market for affordable housing: low income seniors, low income youth, hard to house adults, and students. It appears as though the issue in Nelson is not only that individuals in each of these groups are under-served with respect to housing, but also that the number of individuals who fall

within these particular groups, and who are in housing need, is not diminishing (Gayton 1996, 27-29).

In terms of a supply of upper-storey commercial space that is suitable for conversion, the Nelson Study found seventeen properties across all of downtown Nelson that had vacant or underutilized upper storeys (Gayton 1996, 45). Of these, four were chosen for further, and more detailed study. In addition to the suitability of these buildings for conversion, the Nelson Study found that municipal policies (in particular the City's Official Community Plan) do not hinder, but rather encourage housing in the downtown (Gayton 1996, 13).

The Nelson Study also included some consideration to the future demand for upper-storey residential versus upper-storey commercial use. The findings, in this respect, were varied. The Nelson Study reported increases in the number of home-based businesses, it also reported an increased demand for space in what were termed "full-service business centres".<sup>26</sup> The conclusions that were drawn from this were that:

*"underutilized or vacant upper-storey space in some of Nelson's smaller downtown buildings is...unlikely in the near future to produce a good return for building owners if marketed only as office space" (Gayton 1996, 46-47).*

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<sup>26</sup> These are defined as commercial offices with some shared secretarial and support functions such as: mail and answering services, photocopy, fax and bookkeeping. (Gayton 1996, 46)

It seems as though this limited commercial potential improves (at least to some extent) the suitability of some of the underutilized upper-storey spaces for conversion to residential use or, perhaps, potential for conversion to home-based business space.

In terms of costs, the Nelson Study found that the cost of conversion varied among the buildings that were surveyed. These differences reflected both differences in building design as well as the general state of repair of each building. Nonetheless, in each of the four buildings that the Nelson Study analyzed in greater detail, the estimated cost of conversion and operating costs were within a price-per-unit range which the resulting normal market rents could absorb (Gayton 1996, 45, 54-55).

The general conclusion which can be drawn from the Nelson Study is that the conversion of underutilized upper-storey commercial space to residential use is feasible, since all of the conditions which support feasibility exist in Nelson at the present time. Again, these conditions are: a reasonable demand for housing (and affordable housing); a supply of upper-storey commercial space which is suitable for conversion; and a reasonable cost of conversion.

#### 4.2.2. The Impetus for Downtown Revitalization in Nelson

Beginning in the late 1970s, and carrying on through the early 1990s, Nelson has been something of a model city for heritage and downtown revitalization programs. The impetus, therefore, for revitalization in downtown Nelson has come from three somewhat diverse sources: the City of Nelson Heritage Conservation Program (in conjunction with the British Columbia Heritage Conservation Branch)(Gayton 1996, 17; Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 5), the BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs Downtown Revitalization Programme (British Columbia 1987, 8; Stewart 1985, 75) and the Heritage Canada Foundation Main Street Program (1981-1984) (Stewart 1985, 83). The Heritage Conservation Branch cited the concentration of heritage resources in Nelson, the size of the city (a population less than 10,000) and "the general socio-economic problems common to many communities with significant quantities of heritage resources" (Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 5) as determining factors in their decision to select Nelson as a pilot project for comprehensive urban heritage conservation planning. The Heritage Canada Foundation offered much the same rationale for including Nelson in its Main Street program, with the added consideration that Nelson's central business district had been adversely affected by the development of a nearby shopping mall (Stewart 1985, 83).

#### 4.2.3. Key Elements of Downtown Revitalization in Nelson.

The first concerted effort to revitalize downtown Nelson was the work of the Heritage Conservation Branch. In 1977, Nelson was selected by the Branch to be a pilot project for comprehensive urban heritage conservation planning in British Columbia (Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 5). The results of this project may be found in the Branch report, *Nelson: A Proposal for Urban Heritage Conservation..* While the aims and objectives of this pilot project were intended to benefit the City of Nelson as a whole, the impact of comprehensive urban heritage conservation planning on downtown Nelson, (on account of the concentration of heritage structures found there) was to be significant, although somewhat varied.

Some of the objectives of the Heritage Conservation Branch (1981, 6-7) that were met in the pilot project included:

1. *to develop a system that would identify and evaluate heritage resources in Nelson.*
2. *to identify existing and potential heritage conservation districts within Nelson.*
3. *to develop a framework which would integrate heritage resources, as an asset to future growth and development, into other planning endeavours.*
4. *and to present an initial strategy for the conservation of heritage resources in Nelson.*



Once the groundwork of identifying heritage resources and establishing the framework for conservation and comprehensive planning in Nelson had been completed, the work of restoring, redeveloping and enhancing the actual physical heritage resources could begin. The second key element, therefore, in the revitalization of downtown Nelson, was the effort made by the Provincial Government, through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs' Downtown Revitalization Programme. This program was intended to respond to the physical and economic deterioration which was occurring, at the time, in the downtown cores of cities throughout British Columbia. Specifically, the program was designed to:

*"enhance the existing downtowns of municipalities by promoting, through financial incentives, the investment of municipal and private funds in physical improvements, marketing and promotion schemes through merchant associations, and the creation of a comprehensive long-range plan for the future of downtown" (British Columbia 1987, 8).*

According to John Stewart (Director of the Heritage Canada Foundation's Main Street program from 1980-1984) this translated into:

*"a start-up grant of \$5,000 to any municipality or recognized group wanting to undertake initial promotion and discussion of downtown improvement. A loan of up to \$10,000 to assist with the costs of design advice. [And] If work proceeds, grants of up to 20 per cent, to a maximum of two hundred dollars per metre ... for façade improvements within specified areas" (Stewart 1985, 75).*

The third key element in the revitalization of downtown Nelson was the Heritage Canada Foundation's Main Street program. The Foundation was formed in 1973 with a twelve-million-dollar endowment from the federal government, and was designed to be an independent national charity that would advocate for the preservation and conservation of historic buildings that had not yet been declared official historic sites (Dalibard 1985, 60). In searching for a model through which this particular task of heritage preservation could be successfully approached, the Heritage Canada Foundation began to look favourably upon a variety of "Main Street" programs which had been employed in Britain (Halifax, Glasgow and Chester) and the United States (Hot Springs, SD; Madison, IN; and Galesburg, IL) (Dalibard 1985, 59-60). The Heritage Canada Foundation found that the success of the programs in Britain and the United States could be attributed to the way in which historic conservation was linked to revitalization. Rather than relying on cosmetic efforts to preserve heritage in the built environment, "Main Street" programs sought to change the environment in which heritage buildings existed (most often the downtown core). To accomplish their mission, "Main Street" programs in Britain and the United States not only sought to accentuate the unique architectural and heritage qualities of their main streets, but also to enact a system of management for the entire area - one that would have similarities to the kind of overall marketing and management found in shopping centres. A later, more widespread "Main Street" program (initiated by the [U.S.] National Trust for

Historic Preservation and its National Main Street Center in Washington, DC) found that most of the participating communities were able to achieve a general economic revitalization of their downtown through building rehabilitation, vacancy reduction, increased tourism and renewed community pride in local heritage (Dalibard 1985, 59-60).

By 1978, the Heritage Canada Foundation was ready to launch a Canadian "Main Street" program (Dalibard 1985, 60). Seven communities across Canada were chosen, with Nelson being the sole British Columbia case. The Main Street program (which began in 1981) fitted in well with the Government of British Columbia's Downtown Revitalization Program in Nelson (which began in 1980) (Stewart 1985, 75). Where the provincial program provided the start-up funds and financial incentives to property owners for façade improvements (the funding which facilitated the actual physical restoration of the heritage buildings), the Heritage Canada Foundation Main Street program sought to establish the ongoing management structure that would bring the processes of historic preservation together with economic and social revitalization on Main Street. The objectives of the Main Street program, therefore, can be summed up as the desire to see communities capitalize on their history and heritage structures, to preserve this heritage in the built environment and turn these existing assets of uniqueness and heritage into an engine for economic and social revitalization (Stewart 1985, 80).

As a result of these two (heritage conservation and downtown revitalization) programs, Nelson has achieved a downtown that is rich with well-preserved, late-Victorian architecture (Heritage Conservation Branch 1981, 5-6), as well as a downtown which still functions (as originally intended) as a commercial and retail centre for the city, with room for residential use as well.

To maintain the re-development and heritage conservation efforts begun in the 1980s, Nelson's entire downtown core is now designated as a Development Permit Area in the City's Official Community Plan. As such, any exterior building alterations in the downtown require a development permit, and all developments or re-developments must meet design and colour guidelines as set out by the Community Heritage Commission (Gayton 1996, 8). Although these policies do not directly help or hinder the conversion of underutilized upper-storey space to residential use, they may have a positive affect on the way the downtown is perceived, which may, in turn, stimulate interest in downtown residential use. The Nelson Study reported that some of the strengths of Nelson's downtown were that: "it contains a diverse cross-section of shops, businesses, services, and housing; it is clean, safe, attractive and pedestrian-oriented"; and "the policies included in the Downtown Area Plan of the Official Community Plan are aimed at maintaining the health of its retail function and ensuring a mix of uses in the downtown, to keep it lively both day and night" (Gayton 1996, 7). It should

also be noted, however, that an older residential area of Nelson (one which also includes a significant number of heritage homes) is located in close proximity to the downtown core, and that the health of this neighbourhood may also be a contributing factor in the vitality of the downtown (MacKenzie 1996).

#### **4.2.4. Linking Upper-Storey Conversion to Downtown Revitalization in Nelson**

The conversion of underutilized upper-storey commercial space to residential use aids the ongoing efforts of downtown revitalization in Nelson on two counts. First, the demand for small, downtown, upper-storey, independent offices (of the kind which the Nelson Study considered as vacant or underutilized, and therefore suited to residential conversion) is shrinking in Nelson, with the rise of home-based offices and full service business centres. This means that (as concluded in the Nelson Study) if these upper-storey commercial spaces remain in commercial-only use, they will likely remain underutilized or vacant. That underutilization would then have a negative effect on the vitality of the downtown which could (if allowed to continue unchecked) damage the vitality of downtown, over the longer-term. On the other hand, the trend towards home-based businesses (which the Nelson Study noted) might also be signaling a rising interest in 'business-based homes', that is, housing that is situated at or near one's place of employment and centre of activity. This may relate more to service, rather

than retail sector businesses, where a convenient and central location may be more important than a highly visible, ground-level location. Presumably, these particular elements of activity and convenience coincide in the centre of the city - downtown.

Second, additional housing in the downtown core would assist in meeting the objectives of Nelson's Official Community Plan , inasmuch as housing would support the retail function of the downtown area as well as ensure its vibrancy during non-business, evening and weekend hours.

#### **4.3. The Context of a Comparable Precedent - New Westminster, BC**

##### **4.3.1. The Feasibility of Converting Upper-Storey Commercial Space to Residential Use in New Westminster.**

Again, it seems to be the union of three conditions - a demand for housing, a supply of underutilized upper-storey space, and a reasonable cost of conversion - which determines whether upper-storey, commercial-to-residential conversion is feasible. In the case of New Westminster, these three conditions do not currently exist together. The New Westminster Study concluded that high land costs in the Vancouver region would make the creation of affordable housing through commercial-to-residential conversion, at best, problematic, and, at worst, prohibitive (New Westminster 1996, 69). Nevertheless, by illustrating the unique set of issues that are particular to commercial-to-residential conversion in a metropolitan setting

(one that is experiencing growth in both population and property values) the situation in New Westminster (especially in terms of the comprehensive development approach taken there) and the findings of the New Westminster Study provide a useful comparison to the situation in Prince George, and the findings of this practicum's core study.

In terms of the demand, or need, for affordable housing, the New Westminster Study (1996, 65) suggests that the problem in that city is not necessarily simply a question of supply, but also a question of options within that supply. The picture of the housing market in New Westminster, as presented in the New Westminster Study, is so completely different from that which may be found in Nelson or Prince George, that this merits some consideration here. Some of the highlights of the New Westminster housing market, as presented by the New Westminster Study (1996, 13-15) include:

- *a housing market that is 61% rented rather than owned;*
- *rental rates that are (on average) 13% lower than neighbouring communities in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (G.V.R.D.);*
- *higher than average (for the G.V.R.D.) percentage of households experiencing affordability problems;*
- *an average income which is \$4,550 lower than the G.V.R.D. average;*

- *a City Health Department estimate that: "approximately 5 to 15% of rental units have some health-related problems (e.g. insect infestation) and these are sub-standard vis-à-vis the Health Act or Housing Bylaw";*

The New Westminster Study reported that, of the city's renting households, forty-two percent (twenty-six percent of all households) were experiencing problems of affordability. By dividing this figure according to household income, the New Westminster Study found that thirty-six percent of renting households in the low-to-median income bracket (\$20,000-\$26,132) were experiencing problems of affordability. As well, eighty-six percent of renting households in the low income bracket (less than \$20,000) were experiencing problems of affordability. Combined, these figures indicate that half of the city's total rental households (30.5% of the total number of all households) fall below New Westminster's median income;<sup>27</sup> and of that number, seventy-four percent are experiencing problems of affordability. This means that nearly eighty-seven percent of the total number of households experiencing problems of affordability in New Westminster fall below the median income level (New Westminster 1996, 17).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Based on the figure given in the New Westminster study that 61% of all housing in New Westminster is rented rather than owned (New Westminster 1996, 13)

<sup>28</sup> Based on 74% of 30.5% (22.57) divided into 26%.



The New Westminster Study, like Nelson (and, to a lesser degree Prince George), had little difficulty in identifying a supply of underutilized upper-storey space that would be suitable for conversion to residential use. Moreover, the New Westminster Study determined that the city experiences something of a glut of this sort of building. From a preliminary list of 141 buildings which suited the criteria for underutilized upper-storey space, further evaluation and a process of elimination allowed the New Westminster Study to narrow its focus to just eleven properties which had real potential for residential conversion. Of these eleven, four were hotels that have "historically been used as hotels or single room occupancies" and seven were commercial buildings (New Westminster 1996, 19-25).

Regardless of the obvious demand for more affordable housing options in New Westminster, or the obvious supply of buildings with residential or conversion potential, the current situation in New Westminster with respect to the cost of conversion (the cost of land, labour, materials etc.) does not make the commercial-to-residential conversion of upper-storey space a reasonable proposition (New Westminster 1996, 12). Nevertheless, the New Westminster Study does offer some suggestions on ways in which these barriers might be overcome and (despite the fact that the situation is different and more conducive to upper-storey conversion) these suggested strategies are equally applicable in Nelson or Prince George.

The first of these strategies would be to reduce the cost of construction by eliminating some of the decorative expenses (paint, carpeting etc.) which can be left to the tenant or owner. The New Westminster study (1996, 12) notes that this strategy was employed in some loft-style apartments in Vancouver. The second strategy would be to provide parking trade-offs, or reduce parking requirements (New Westminster 1996, 12). Not having to provide as much parking, or perhaps any parking, would serve to reduce the re-development or conversion costs of most projects. The third strategy would be to use donated land from housing societies or other non-profit groups. Finally, the New Westminster Study (1996, 68-69) suggests that there are a number of financial mechanisms which could make commercial-to-residential conversion of underutilized upper-storey space more viable. These include:

- *parking relaxations (as mentioned);*
- *building code relaxations (particularly with respect to seismic upgrading);*
- *direct financial contributions (including grants from government, foundations and non-profit societies);*
- *tax exemptions, or shelters;*
- *mortgage or loan guarantees (from CMHC);*
- *low interest loans;*

- *cooperative, or joint, ventures between various non-profit groups;*
- *"in kind" services with local construction and trade companies or unions;*
- *zoning or density increases in return for upgrades to heritage facades, seismic upgrade or the provision of a public amenity;*
- *a fluctuating mortgage which would start low, and increase over time;*

#### **4.3.2. The Impetus for Downtown Revitalization in New Westminster.**

It seems that, unlike Nelson, the impetus for downtown revitalization in New Westminster came largely from within. Upon recognizing that the retailing core (Columbia St.) and city centre of New Westminster were decaying, the city committed itself to a long-range strategy of redevelopment (Ley 1996). One of the first tasks in this strategy was the establishment of a crown corporation (in 1979) to oversee revitalization and redevelopment through the provisions of the *New Westminster Redevelopment Act* (NWRA), 1979 (NWRA 1979). The NWRA 1979 and the subsequent *New Westminster Redevelopment Act, 1989* (NWRA 1989), therefore, are at the core of the redevelopment process in New Westminster, as these two statutes allowed the public sector to have a significant and proactive role in infrastructure, general redevelopment and revitalization (Ley 1996).

#### 4.3.3. Key Elements of Downtown Revitalization in New Westminster.

One of the more significant elements of downtown revitalization in New Westminster is the legislated power contained within the NWRA 1989. Broadly, this act is a set of measures which direct redevelopment in New Westminster by allowing the city to:

- *enter into development agreements with land owners for specific works and services (either on-site or off-site) (NWRA 1989, Sec. 2[1]).*
- *acquire and dispose of land "for the purposes of achieving the objectives of the official community plan or for the purposes of the improvement or rehabilitation of areas within the development area that, in the opinion of the council of the city have become or are tending to become blighted or substandard" (NWRA 1989, Sec. 3[1]).*
- *require developers to obtain a special development permit, which binds their development to the terms of that permit, and may include a design review, as well as a security (by the developer) for on and off-site works, landscaping and services "in a form and quantity satisfactory to the city" (NWRA 1989, Sec. 4, 4[5], 4[2][b], 4[2][a][ii]).*
- *"impose development cost charges on a person who obtains a special development permit under section 4 for construction on the land covered by the permit" (NWRA 1989, Sec. 5[2][b]).*
- *impose parking facilities charges on landowners within the development area (NWRA 1989, Sec.6).*

The investment of public money and the development of public infrastructure in New Westminster (largely undertaken during the 1980s) has been another key element of revitalization. This is also seen as one of the more tangible elements of revitalization. Projects such as the new courthouse (1981), the new and expanded campus for Douglas College (1982) and the Skytrain Light Rapid Transit (1986), have all had an impact on downtown New Westminster by increasing activity in the area (Ley 1996).

Although current conditions do not support commercial-to-residential conversion of underutilized upper-storey space in New Westminster, the community and the City of New Westminster appear to be supportive of residential use in the downtown area, and aware that housing has been, and will continue to be an important element of downtown revitalization efforts (New Westminster 1996, 3). In a lecture given in Prince George on Downtowns and Downtown Revitalization, Dr. David Ley (Professor of Urban Geography at the University of British Columbia) noted that the redevelopment of New Westminster's formerly industrial waterfront, into a higher density residential area for some 7000 people, has been one of the crowning achievements in the ongoing effort to bring more vitality into New Westminster (Ley 1996).

While making note of the key elements in New Westminster's downtown revitalization, it is also interesting to note that the private sector,

and retailing in particular, has been a relatively minor element in that revitalization and redevelopment effort. Although the merchants and commercial interests in New Westminster have joined together to form a business improvement society (the DNWBIS) fashioned on the Business Improvement Area (BIA)/Business Improvement Zone (BIZ) model (a model that has been employed with some success in many Canadian cities including Toronto, Calgary, Winnipeg and even Prince George) (Jamieson 1994, 75), the commercial aspects of downtown New Westminster have not been the main focus of revitalization efforts. In fact, as Dr. Ley suggested, the private sector in New Westminster was not particularly instrumental in initiating revitalization. Public funds were largely responsible for "priming the pump" and, in the end, the result was still one in which retailing and commercial activities located downtown were revived through an increase in peripheral activities such as the courthouse and the community college (Ley 1996).

#### **4.3.4. Linking Upper-Storey Conversion to Downtown Revitalization in New Westminster**

The conditions in New Westminster at the present time do not support the conversion of underutilized, upper-storey commercial space to residential use. Notwithstanding, New Westminster has both a good supply of upper-storey commercial space which would be suitable for residential use, as well as a demonstrable need for more affordable housing options. If the

high costs associated with converting underutilized upper-storey space (and in particular the high costs associated with seismic upgrading) can somehow be overcome (and this barrier to upper-storey residential conversion is then removed), then it might be possible to more fully ascertain the extent to which upper-storey residential use might serve as a contributor to downtown revitalization in New Westminster. As something of a footnote to this idea of linking upper-storey residential conversion with downtown revitalization, and the barriers that are presented in the case of New Westminster, some upper-storey warehouse space in the Gastown district of Vancouver was successfully converted to residential use through the 1970s and early 80s. Although the economic conditions of the time were much different, and the scale of the projects were (perhaps) greater, projects such as 550 Beatty Street and 41 Alexander Street in Vancouver (Cory Cunningham Architect Ltd. et. al. 1991, 9-13), could serve New Westminster as examples of both the marketability of converted upper-storey space, as well as its affect on the surrounding commercial neighbourhood.

#### **4.4. The Prince George Context**

An analysis of the feasibility of converting underutilized upper-storey space from commercial to residential use in Prince George may be found in the core study (**Appendix**) of the practicum, as well as in the chapter that follows: **Chapter 5: Core Study Findings**.

#### 4.4.1. Traditional Approaches to Addressing the Need for Downtown Revitalization in Prince George

Chapter 2 of this practicum has already laid out some of the factors that have contributed to the decline of the CBD or downtown core, of Prince George over the past three decades. This section will give a brief account of the way in which the need for downtown revitalization has historically been perceived in Prince George, and examine some of the ways in which Prince George has attempted to address that need.

Almost as soon as the flight of retailing to the suburbs (in the 1960s and 1970s) was apparent, Prince George began to recognize that it needed a way to mitigate the negative effect that this would have on the traditional retailing activities of the CBD. A report, prepared by the Regional Development Commission and the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George in 1974, suggested a multi-faceted approach to the problems of change and decline as they were occurring in the core area at that time. This report's recommendations (Regional Development Commission 1974, 2) included:

- *developing a policy for commercial development that would retain 60% of total retail space in the downtown, at least until the city reaches a population of 100,000.*
- *developing location and design guidelines for high rise office construction that would help avoid wind tunneling, and promote complementary urban activities such as shops and restaurants.*



- *giving greater consideration to the needs of downtown employees, especially with respect to leisure space, upgraded transit, and an improved pedestrian network within the downtown core.*

Although the extent to which the recommendations of the Regional Development Commission's report were vigorously advocated or adopted cannot be accurately determined, it seems fairly evident, from today's perspective, that these recommendations did not even come close to being translated into meaningful plans or policy.

Also, while the report of the Regional Development Commission did make an inventory of hotels and motels in the CBD (including single resident occupancy hotels) (Regional Development Commission 1974, 45-46), there was no mention given to residential use in the CBD. This is likely a reflection of the fact that there was little or no residential use in the CBD at that time (1974). Conversely, this lack of concern for housing in the CBD may reflect either a period in which affordable housing was not as much of an issue in Prince George (as a great amount of housing was being built in the suburbs) or a prevailing attitude that the CBD should be allowed to develop as a "commercial-only" precinct.

The next opportunity that we have to examine Prince George's past, and assess the steps that have been taken towards addressing the need for downtown revitalization, is with the information contained in the four

volume Central Business District Study completed by the City of Prince George, Department of City Planning (et. al.) in 1980 (Prince George 1980a).

The greatest difference between the Regional Development Commission's 1974 study and the City's 1980 study is that the latter had to deal with the realities of suburban retail development (which occurred through the 1970s) and its effect on the CBD (Prince George 1980a, 6). Like the 1974 report, the City's 1980 report presents an optimistic view of the CBD's future role in the city, but still advocates the position that an expanded retail function is the key to downtown revitalization and redevelopment (Prince George 1980a, 14).

Although the City's 1980 study took the view that retailing should be the primary means of achieving downtown revitalization, the study gives some indication that residential use, and mixed commercial/residential uses were increasingly being considered as possible strategies for downtown revitalization. The 1980 study's recommendations pertaining to office development in the CBD suggests that:

*"the City should investigate bonusing and related provisions in order to encourage mixed uses and public amenities in future office development"* (Prince George 1980a, 17)

The findings and recommendations of the City's 1980 study, with respect to residential development in the CBD, are of particular interest to the

work carried out for the VCHT in the core study of this practicum. The 1980 Study reported that "Prince George's downtown environment is presently unattractive for residential development" and that, "according to the Prince George Population Survey and Housing Analysis (February 1979), 515 people live in the Central Business District" (Prince George 1980a, 20; Prince George 1979b).<sup>29</sup> The 1980 study's analysis of residential use in the CBD recognized that:

*"There are many advantages to having a strong residential presence in downtown Prince George. CBD housing reduces pressure on adjacent suburban land, and highways, and lowers transportation costs. Services are in place, and residential uses complement other CBD activities rather than driving them out. Downtown residents add diversity and a 24 hour presence to downtown life (Prince George 1980a, 21).*

The City's 1980 study also reported that:

*"downtown Prince George cannot currently be described as providing a desirable residential setting for tenants or developers" (Prince George 1980a, 21).*

It appears that the City has been able to do very little to reverse the negative image of the CBD as a residential setting, since the 1980 CBD study was published. This remains the case, despite the fact that the City has, for the most part, acted upon the three main recommendations made in the 1980

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<sup>29</sup> This compares with the figure of 255 derived from the 1991 Census figures.

study with respect to residential development. These recommendations included: to make provisions in the zoning bylaw permitting multiple residential and mixed residential/commercial land uses in the CBD;<sup>30</sup> to safeguard against the encroachment of commercial uses into adjacent residential areas (the Vancouver-Winnipeg Street corridor, and the Millar Addition) (Prince George 1979a, 2, Sec. 2.2); and to update and implement an overall plan for the Vancouver-Winnipeg Street corridor (Prince George 1980a, 21). Many of these same ideas are contained within the policies of Prince George's first OCP (Prince George 1979a). The fact, that while the policies to support downtown residential development have been implemented, yet downtown residential development has (as yet) not become popular, suggests that more could be done to make downtown residential development, and downtown living, more appealing. There is a great opportunity, in Prince George, for the local government to move beyond its traditional policy-setting role, and actively pursue a residential transformation of the downtown core in concert with private interests. Likewise, there is the opportunity for planners to take the theory of core-area residential development and translate it into a workable reality.

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<sup>30</sup> This is now contained within the *Official Community Plan - City of Prince George* Sec. 8.5.4 and Sec.10-26.3 (5) of the *Zoning Bylaw No. 3482 (1980)*.

The City's first OCP set out a number of goals for the commercial development of Prince George which were based upon creating:

*"an environment for commercial development which will preserve and enhance the vitality of the Central Business District (CBD) as the main centre of the community for business, finance, retail trade, services, recreation and entertainment"* (Prince George 1979a, 20)

With respect to housing in the CBD, the policy of the 1979 OCP was that:

*"Mixed commercial and residential development should be provided for and encouraged within the CBD with a view to broadening and enriching the range of core area activity and ensuring the long-term viability of the City centre as a 'people place', and not simply the focus of commerce and government"* (Prince George 1979a, 20-21).

Sadly, it seems that the City has had some difficulty in translating these OCP policies into reality. Bearing in mind that the OCP is intended to serve more as a guide to development, rather than a blueprint, it is still regrettable that the economic conditions of the decade preceding the development of the 1979 OCP were so radically different from the economic conditions of the decade which followed its publication. There is, perhaps, a distinct possibility that the goals and policies of the 1979 OCP could have been successfully met, had the economy of the 1980s been different.

The beginning of the 1980s saw Prince George become mired in a prolonged economic recession that would last throughout the remainder of the decade. This recession stemmed from a global economic downturn that was heightened, in Prince George, by decreased demand for forest products and increased costs associated with resource extraction in that sector. In this period, while other cities such as Nelson, New Westminster and Winnipeg were the beneficiaries of government urban revitalization and renewal grants, very little public money was invested in Prince George. Prince George did receive some funds, through the provincial government's Downtown Revitalization Programme, for streetscaping and beautification along George Street.

The first major, post-recession, opportunities for downtown revitalization in Prince George came in 1990-91. The first was the siting of the new University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), and the second was a proposal for a multi-purpose arts facility to be known as Discovery Place. On both counts, the City, senior levels of government, and decision-making bodies (in the case of UNBC) failed to seize an opportunity to use public infrastructure as a mechanism for leveraging downtown revitalization (in a manner similar to what was employed in New Westminster). In the end, the University of Northern BC was built on a parcel of land that had been set aside as a university reserve in the late 1950s - a site that is located well outside of the developed area of the city. The plan for Discovery Place, which

was to be a multi-purpose civic centre, art gallery and concert hall situated in downtown Prince George near the Coliseum, the Four Seasons Pool and the Public Library, was halted when a municipal referendum which would have increased taxes to pay for the City's one-third share of the cost of that development (the other two thirds being shared equally by the two senior levels of government) was defeated. Despite these two setbacks, Prince George has progressed with the development of some public infrastructure in the downtown core. A multi-purpose Civic Centre (smaller, and without the Art Gallery and Concert Hall features of the Discovery Place plan) was developed in 1994 (on the site originally planned for Discovery Place), and a fundraising campaign is now underway (1996) for a new Public Art Gallery in the same area. A new, \$22.5 million Provincial Courthouse (slated for completion in the fall of 1996), located at the corner of Third Avenue and George Street on land acquired by the City, is expected to revitalize one of the most deteriorated sections of the CBD. The new Courthouse will most likely serve as an anchor on the northeast corner of the CBD and add some diversity to its immediate surroundings. Even before its completion, the new Courthouse was lauded for having replaced two questionable beer parlour/SRO Hotels.<sup>31</sup> The new Courthouse also (and this is partly because of its size, in relation to surrounding buildings) creates a foreshortening effect

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<sup>31</sup> The Canada and the MacDonald Hotels were removed to make way for the new Courthouse. The Canada (pre-World War Two construction) was vacant and derelict, having suffered from a fire, by the time it was

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for Third Avenue between Victoria and George St. (only four blocks) which serves to pull the lower end of the CBD closer to the office-commercial node that is centered on the intersection of Third Ave. and Victoria Street.

#### **4.4.2. Traditional Approaches to Addressing Housing Need in Prince George**

Prince George was fortunate to have had an effective program of land management, and residential lot development in place during the city's period of extreme growth (1961-1981). For the most part, this land management scheme, supplemented by certain one-time efforts to lobby the senior levels of government for assistance in developing affordable rental accommodation, represents Prince George's historical approach to addressing housing need. Although this practicum has already touched on the idea of the City as land developer in the section on Land Banking in **Chapter 3**, this is a significant aspect of Prince George's history, and bears some greater consideration here.

The City's approach to growth in the 1960s and 70s (and, consequently the approach to housing and housing need) was based on a concept of the City acting as a major developer and provider of residential building lots. Working in conjunction with the provincial government (which supplied large parcels of Crown land adjacent to the City) Prince George was able to

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demolished. The MacDonald Hotel (prefabricated construction dating from circa 1973) was disassembled,

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keep abreast of its growth, attempt to ensure that the continuous supply of new housing would not be interrupted, and have a stabilizing effect on residential building lot prices. During this period (1960-1980), the overwhelming concern in housing was for a supply of fully-serviced, single-family residential building lots that could keep pace with the growing population and growing demand. Often, as a result of the scale of demand for building lots, the City would find that its subdivisions would be fully subscribed as soon as they were subdivided and serviced (Christensen 1989, 116).

The suburban subdivision, or neighbourhood model, that the City of Prince George adopted as its primary design for residential land use, was based on ideas that Clarence Perry had applied in the 1920s for residential development based on a neighbourhood unit (Hodge 1991, 58). Each neighbourhood, or subdivision was based on an elementary school at, or near, its center. Designing residential development on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis allowed the City to incorporate a number of housing options within each neighbourhood. Wherever possible, the City attempted to develop each subdivision with a variety of densities, or a mix of single, two-family and multiple family (often low-rise) residential development. In some subdivisions, by taking advantage of natural features and varying the

size of lots, the City was able to generate a variety of densities and socioeconomic characteristics (Prince George 1979a, 11-12).

Population growth in Prince George was stalled by the recession that began in 1981. Development practically came to standstill. Over the course of this recession (approximately 1981-1988) the City retreated from its role as land developer. Today (1996), when the population of Prince George is again growing, the City is again involved in the development of residential subdivisions. The difference now is that the City is not as involved as it once was as a primary developer of building lots, and instead relies on private land developers to bring fully-serviced residential building lots onto the market. Since the end of the recession, the rate of residential development has fluctuated. New residential development, having reached the lowest part of its slump in 1986, began a gradual rise in 1987 (Strickland 1996, 21). This trend peaked in 1993, a year in which the City issued permits for a total of 601 units (Prince George 1996b, 1) and has been decreasing, gradually, for the last two years. A recent forecast made by the CMHC suggests that total housing starts in Prince George will reach 330 units this year (1996). This figure can be compared with the figure, given by the City, for "residential permits issued" in 1995. In 1995, the City issued residential permits for 436 units. Of these, just over half of the units were single family detached homes, 13.5% were

mobile home units, 4.6% were two-family home units, and 30% were multiple-family units<sup>32</sup> (Prince George 1996b, 1).

#### **4.4.3. Recent Policies and Programs Specific to Downtown Revitalization and Housing in Prince George**

Recent initiatives specific to housing and downtown revitalization in Prince George include, most obviously, the widely debated downtown revitalization initiative developed for the City, and presented in 1993-94. This initiative called for aesthetic improvements along Third Avenue that primarily involved streetscaping, widening of sidewalks, the removal of canopies which cover the sidewalks along Third Avenue, and a re-alignment of on-street parking. Funding for this revitalization proposal was to come from a frontage tax levied on properties along Third Avenue. The redevelopment plan, and the special tax levy were put before the Third Avenue property owners in a special referendum where it was defeated.<sup>33</sup> The defeat of this City proposal for downtown revitalization marked a watershed point in the process of revitalization in downtown Prince George. Having attempted, and failed, to implement a comprehensive program of revitalization, the City now awaits a counter-proposal for redevelopment and

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<sup>32</sup> As noted in the City's report, this figure for multiple-family units includes seventy-two units in the UNBC residence (Prince George 1996b, 1).

<sup>33</sup> It was a somewhat contentious issue that only property owners, rather than owners and merchants, were allowed to vote in this referendum.

revitalization from the Town Center Businesses Association (TCBA). In watching the issue of revitalization see-saw, back and forth, from the public sector to the private sector, it seems as though there is a need for some form of public-private partnership, such as the New Westminster Business Improvement Society or the North Portage Development Corporation (Winnipeg) to mobilize the key stakeholders (the City, the merchants, and the property owners) to move the process of revitalization in downtown Prince George forward.

In terms of recent policies and programs specific to housing in Prince George, the City has approved in principle, and is currently in the process of implementing, a set of policies (Prince George 1996a, 3-4) aimed specifically at addressing the need for non-market housing in Prince George. These policies recognize that non-market housing represents a considerable portion of housing need in Prince George, and attempts to ensure that:

- *locational criteria is developed that provides for "the separation of non-market housing projects...to minimize 'ghettoization' in one or two areas"*
- *the supply of non-market housing in existing and new multiple family residential developments is increased, "by offering developers density bonusing opportunities within the zoning district"*
- *new residential developments (subdivisions) are designed with space for non-market housing.*

- *certain City-owned parcels of land be designated for non-market housing.*
- *the conversion of the upper-storey space in existing downtown commercial buildings to non-market residential use; and "mixed residential/commercial developments in the downtown area" are encouraged.* <sup>34</sup>

In addition to the broad changes that the *Non-Market Housing Report* proposes to the policies of the *Official Community Plan*, the report also proposes a number of specific changes to the City's *Zoning Bylaw* with respect to non-market housing. These proposals (Prince George 1996a, 4-6) direct the Development Services Department to:

- *"prepare a definition of senior citizens, clarify the community residential facility and personal care home definitions and identify additional definitions to clarify non-market units which may qualify for bonusing incentives under the Zoning Bylaw"*
- *"amend the text of the C-8 (Commercial Residential) Zoning District to provide commercial and residential bonusing incentives to encourage a non-market housing component in the upper storeys of projects zoned C-8 (Commercial Residential)"*

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<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that the Report and Recommendations on Non-Market Housing in Prince George prepared by the City's Development Services Department was subsequent to the VCHT's proposal to study underutilized upper story space), and drew upon the findings of the *Moving Up* study (see Appendix)

- *“review the potential for including non-market housing and market residential units as permitted uses in other commercial zones in addition to the C-8 [Commercial Residential] zoning”*
- *“review the potential to increase the maximum density permitted in the URM (Multiple-family) Districts when projects include non-market housing units”.*
- *“prepare a revised schedule of parking requirements as an amendment to the Zoning Bylaw to reduce the number of parking spaces required for non-market housing.”*
- *“prepare a discussion paper examining the advantages and disadvantages of including secondary suites as a permitted use in all Zoning Districts which permit single family dwellings.”*

Together, the proposed changes to the *Official Community Plan* and the *Zoning Bylaw* represent a considerable step forward in planning for housing need in Prince George. While the City is not taking a strong proactive role in the housing market (compared with developing and marketing serviced suburban building lots, as it has done in the past) it is taking several important steps to facilitate the development of much needed affordable and non-market housing. Furthermore (and of great interest to the underlying objectives of this practicum) the City has recognized the potential that the CBD holds as a location for housing, by considering the findings of the core study of this practicum and taking steps to facilitate the conversion of underutilized upper-storey commercial space to non-market residential use.

The following chapters will revisit the findings of the core study, and attempt to address what can be done in the case of Prince George (particularly with respect to municipal and provincial support for, and participation in, downtown revitalization through residential development) by setting out a course for further study, and several possible courses for immediate action.

## CHAPTER 5: CORE STUDY FINDINGS

### 5.1. The Economics of Creating Housing in Underutilized Upper-Storey Commercial Space in the CBD

The findings of the core study of this practicum, with regards to the economics of upper-storey conversion, can be roughly divided into three categories - the actual costs of renovation and conversion, the property tax differential, and the general state of the rental market.

The findings of the core study, with respect to some of the actual costs of conversion, may be found in the cost estimate provided by Mr. Fergus Foley, P.Eng. (See Appendix: *Cost Estimate for the Conversion of Buildings from Commercial to Residential Use* ) As might be expected, the core study found that the greatest single cost in the conversion of commercial space to residential use is the cost of upgrading older buildings to the higher fire separation rating that is required by the BC Building Code for residential use.<sup>35</sup> Of the 33 buildings which were inventoried in the core study, two were studied in greater detail by Mr. Foley, because of their conversion potential. In both the Prudente Block (ca. 1948-49) and the Silver Spruce Building (ca. 1953), the cost of fire separation upgrading represented the largest single

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<sup>35</sup> Building Standards Branch 1992, Part 3: Use and Occupancy; Section 3.1.3.6.(1 &2) and Table 3.1.3.A.



expense of the projected total cost of conversion. (See Table 5.1: Cost of Conversion)

**Table 5.1: Cost Estimate for the Conversion of Buildings from Commercial to Residential Use<sup>36</sup>**

	<u>Cost (\$)</u>	<u>Cost as % of Total</u>
<b><u>Prudente Block</u></b>		
Mobilization	10,000	4.9
Upgrade top floor	100,000	49.3
Upgrade main floor	15,000	7.4
Upgrade electrical service	10,000	4.9
New Fire Wall	30,000	14.8
Fire Alarm	3,000	1.5
Professional Services	15,000	7.3
Contingency	20,000	9.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>203,000</b>	
<b><u>Silver Spruce Building</u></b>		
Mobilization	10,000	7.1
Upgrade upper floors	94,000	66.7
Upgrade electrical service	10,000	7.1
Fire Alarm	3,000	2.1
Professional Services	12,000	8.5
Contingency	12,000	8.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>141,000</b>	

Also (as is evident in Figure 5.1), the firewall separation that would be required between the Prudente Block and the adjacent Dale's Tradin' Post represents a significant single cost of conversion. This firewall separation would involve the construction of a cement block or similar barrier between

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<sup>36</sup> See **Appendix: Cost Estimate for the Conversion of Buildings from Commercial to Residential Use.**

the two buildings along the side wall where they currently abut. Again, this is in accordance with the more stringent fire separation regulations required in residential and mixed residential-commercial buildings in the Building Code. In contrast, the Silver Spruce building does not require such a firewall separation, as it is a free-standing building with a set back along its side yard lot lines.

From the findings of Mr. Foley's investigation of the Prudente Block and the Silver Spruce Building, the core study of this practicum determined that the cost of conversion, on a per unit basis, ranged from approximately \$11,750 for a bachelor suite in the Silver Spruce Building, to approximately \$33,800 for a bachelor suite in the Prudente Block. There was also the option of creating two-bedroom apartments in the Silver Spruce Building which would have a per unit cost of approximately \$23,500. It should be noted, however, that these are only the estimated costs for the conversion of these buildings from commercial to residential use, and do not include the cost of acquiring the properties (the buildings and the land).

The second economic consideration that the core study found to be closely associated with the conversion of upper-storey commercial space to residential use is the question of a property tax differential. In British Columbia, all properties are assessed for tax purposes by the BC Assessment Authority, and the assessed value of any commercial property is determined

by a formula which factors in the value of the structure, its use, the profitability of that use, as well as market conditions and rental rates. Properties that are of a mixed-use (i.e.: residential and commercial) are, in effect "split" by the Assessment Authority, with the assessment being determined by the percentage of the floorspace that is residential and the percentage that is commercial. Taxes are then levied on each portion of the building, according to the mill rate for each respective use. The core study of this practicum found that in 1995 the mill rate for residential properties in Prince George was set at \$14.09 per \$1000 of assessed value, which is considerably lower than the mill rate for commercial properties which was set at \$24.54 per \$1000. Through simple calculation, it was possible to determine that a landlord wishing to decrease their tax burden for any particular commercial property, by converting part of that property to residential use, would have to ensure that the assessed value of the resulting residential portion of their building not exceed (approximately) one and three-quarter times the value of the commercial space that it is replacing. As this study focused on older commercial buildings in the downtown core, it is significant that some of these have reached a terminal value (i.e.: the value of the entire property has approached the value of just the land portion of the property). Also, many of these buildings require significant upgrades (see above) in order to meet both fire and building code standards. The ability to restrain renovation costs in order that the resulting residential space is less than one and three-quarter times the value of the commercial space that it has

replaced, therefore, becomes an increasingly difficult proposition. When one considers the actual costs of renovation (as cited above) and the property tax differential, and taking into consideration the fact that many landlords with commercial buildings in the downtown core of Prince George have been facing dwindling rental revenues for many years, it is hardly surprising that there was an expressed reluctance (by some landlords) to make an investment in major capital renovations to their properties. The increased tax burden was cited as one of the reasons for this, despite the possibility that conversion and renovation would lead to increased revenue from rents.

The third economic consideration in the whole question of converting commercial space to residential use in the downtown core of Prince George is that of the general rental market and rental demand. The core study of this practicum found (in the fall of 1995) that although the vacancy rate for commercial space in Prince George is generally higher than the vacancy rate for residential space, most landlords are reluctant to give up on the commercial potential in their buildings. One of the reasons for this resistance seems to be that commercial tenants are seen as more stable, renting for a longer term and requiring less maintenance. The difference in rents between commercial and residential space was also found to be a factor in landlords' reluctance to convert commercial space. Again, although there is a higher rate of vacancies among commercial properties at this time, commercial rents are higher than residential rents and typically start at around \$1 per square

foot per month. A comparison with the few residential apartments which are located in the downtown suggests that commercial space converted to residential use would provide landlords with an estimated 10-20% less revenue. An explanation for this apparent incongruity between price (rents) and demand (vacancies) might have something to do with the fact that although vacancy rates are higher among commercial properties, these figures encompass all types of commercial space, when in fact the category of "commercial property" could be broken down into any number of sub-categories such as office-commercial, retail-commercial, or highway-commercial. As well, the stock of commercial properties and the rental rates for those properties, in the city as a whole, are not as great or as varied as the stock and occupancy costs for residential properties. Therefore, with only slight changes in the local economic picture, the vacancies in some particular types of commercial properties could be wiped out.

## **5.2. The Physical Limitations of Upper-Storey Conversion**

Some of the findings of the core study with respect to the structural limitations of upper-storey conversion have already been discussed in the preceding section. For the most part the physical limitations of the structures surveyed relate to the requirements of the building code for higher fire separation standards between commercial and residential uses. However, the core study was also able to draw some conclusions of a more general nature about the physical limitations of upper-storey conversion in Prince George.

One of the objectives of the core study was to identify buildings which might have some heritage characteristics, and thereby find buildings which may be suitable for historic conservation and conversion to residential use. One of the problems that the core study identifies (and this is perhaps not particular to just Prince George) is an overall lack of heritage character in the downtown core. Prince George is a fairly young city, and one which was constructed of the most common building material available - namely wood. As a result, the downtown core of Prince George encompasses a number of buildings whose original architectural design, construction or social significance is not of a sufficiently high quality to warrant preservation on the basis of heritage character. Also, in the period of tremendous economic and demographic expansion which Prince George experienced in the 1960s and 70s, many older or outmoded buildings were either demolished to make room for new development, lost to fire, or completely renovated to serve either increased business or a completely different business. Therefore, one of the physical limitations to any effort to convert commercial space to residential use in Prince George (if that conversion is done with an eye towards heritage conservation) has to be the lack of buildings which exhibit significant heritage characteristics.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> There are, in fact, only two designated heritage buildings in Prince George at the present time (1996). One is the original Prince George Post Office (constructed 1939), now occupied by the Prince George Intersect Society (a youth training organization), and the other is the former BC Liquor Store (constructed 1948),

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Another physical limitation to upper-storey conversions in Prince George is the structural limitations of some of the buildings surveyed in the core study. The core study found that some buildings, and more specifically those built after the mid-1950s, present a particular limitation to conversion in their design and construction. For the most part, these are buildings designed specifically for commercial use and constructed of concrete block. A good example of this is the former J.C. Funland building located at 1153-5th Avenue (see **Appendix**, ref. no. 27). Constructed in 1967 as a retail flooring and carpet showroom with offices above, this building is practically devoid of windows on three sides, but has a nearly all-glass frontage. To the west, the building abuts the Cariboo Restaurant on the second floor, and the buildings are separated by a solid concrete block firewall. This sort of design and construction poses a considerable limitation to conversion, as major structural renovations would be necessary if windows are to be provided in the resulting residential suites. While such structural and design deficiencies (from the perspective of commercial-to-residential conversion) are not absolutely insurmountable, the cost associated with this kind of renovation does make conversion practically prohibitive, if only on the basis of the costs involved. In determining a "convertibility rating" for each of the buildings surveyed, the core study considered limitations such as these, on a building-by-building basis, and then tried to factor in the cost of remediation.

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now occupied by the Prince George Multicultural Society. Both buildings are single-storey and formerly

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### 5.3. The Conditions Under Which the Conversion of Upper-Storey Commercial Space to Residential Use Could be Successful

Although the core study of this practicum reported that the opportunities for the conversion of upper-storey space from commercial to residential use were much less apparent than the impediments, the opportunity does exist for some success with these sorts of conversions. The core study reported that the opportunities for residential conversion will likely be linked to a continued high demand (as evidenced by low vacancy rates) for rental market, special-needs and non-market housing. Added to this, in the specific context of downtown upper-storey space, is the rate of commercial vacancy. This vacancy rate will likely be determined by a combination of general economic prosperity and the rate at which new commercial space is developed and brought onto the market. If the commercial vacancy rate rises, or the supply of newer, better-equipped or more strategically-located commercial space increases, the demand for the kind of commercial space being offered in some of the outmoded buildings considered in the core study survey may evaporate. Although this might be an unfortunate situation for the landlord who wishes to maintain a commercial rental property, these conditions do provide the opportunity for residential use (with its typically lower per square foot rents) to compete for space in the downtown core.

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owned by senior levels of government. It should also be noted that, in terms of heritage, only the art deco

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Having considered some of the wider economic conditions which could lead to the successful conversion of upper-storey commercial space to residential use, it is appropriate to explore some of the more specific mechanisms which could precipitate similar activity. The core study of this practicum was able to report to the VCHT that the solution to the problem of achieving residential use in underutilized commercial upper-storey space is a function of innovation. As the problems associated with this sort of conversion are largely economic, any proposals for residential conversion must be able to demonstrate a thorough consideration and mitigation of the financial risks associated with conversion. If a proposal is able to show that it has addressed and reduced the risks and uncertainties associated with conversion, then an appropriate building and landowner/partner may emerge. One solution proposed by the core study was the establishment of a co-operation agreement between property owners and non-profit housing societies. If these societies could share in the costs of conversion, shoulder the risks of finding tenants, guarantee an income stream for the property owner, as well as relieve the owner of some of the burden of management, then the risks associated with commercial-to-residential conversion would be greatly diminished.

#### 5.4. Conclusions from the Core Study

As the core study of this practicum was designed to encompass both an inventory of downtown upper-storey space and a needs assessment for housing in Prince George, the conclusions from the core study are both conclusions about the general condition of Prince George as well as the specific condition of thirty-three downtown structures which fit the particular criteria for this study. Both sets of conclusions will be presented here in turn.

First, to understand the general conditions in Prince George which either support or detract from efforts to create residential use in upper-storey commercial space, the core study of this practicum focused on local policies and bylaws. The findings of the core study were that there are at present no local policies that would specifically restrict or detract from any bona fide effort to create housing in underutilized upper-storey space. The Official Community Plan (OCP) is specifically supportive of initiatives which would bring mixed-use residential developments to the downtown core (Prince George 1993, 27, Sec. 7.4.4) and the local zoning bylaw permits a variety of multiple-family residential uses in the C-1 zone (the CBD) (Prince George 1995, 98-100, Sec. 10.26). The only specific restriction with regards to multiple-family residential use in the downtown core is that "Local Multiple-Family" residential use (defined as a building with fewer than 6 residential units) "shall not be located on the first storey unless it is situated to the rear of another permitted use in the C-1 District" (Prince George 1995, 100, Sec.

10.26.3[5g]). The OCP is designed in this way to encourage and maintain a commercial streetscape in the CBD. This caveat regarding “Local Multiple-Family” residential use does preclude the development of residential units on upper storeys, nor the development of residential units at ground-level provided they are located behind another type of permitted use on the frontage. A combination of ground-level and second storey residential use would also be permissible under the “Local Multiple-Family” use in the C-1 (CBD) zone, provided (again) that it was situated behind another type of use on the frontage.

While the core study found that there are no municipal policies at the present time which either directly support or impede the development of affordable housing, there is reason to believe that City Council is preparing to set new policies, or amend the OCP and Zoning Bylaw, to shift the City to a more active role in supporting affordable housing initiatives.

The core study also concluded that a certain degree of NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) exists among property owners and business tenants in the downtown core. For a variety of reasons, the development of non-market housing, or housing aimed at low and moderate income families, in the downtown core, makes some people uneasy. There is already a general perception that downtown is unsafe, and that the social problems (or perhaps the concentration of individuals in need of social services) within the core

area are having a negative impact on pedestrian and retail activity. Any development of non-market housing in the downtown core that would be aimed specifically at supporting individuals in the greatest need of social services is viewed, by some, as a further concentration of social problems in downtown. On the other hand, the downtown core is already the greatest provider of services aimed at helping those in the greatest need. It appears that, NIMBYism notwithstanding, the need to address social problems (including housing need) in the places where they exist (namely the downtown core) has to take precedence over whatever negative externalities might arise, when determining whether a non-market housing development is appropriate in the downtown core. The core study of this practicum was able to determine that some real opportunity exists for the conversion of underutilized upper-storey commercial space to residential use in Prince George. It should also be recognized that some real need for more, adequate housing also exists among those already living downtown.

By making a thorough survey of downtown Prince George (the CBD or C-1 zone), the core study of this practicum found thirty-three buildings (out of a total of approximately 250 in the CBD) of varying structure, design, use, and condition which fit the criteria for possible conversion (as determined by the VCHT). For the most part, the criteria for inclusion in this survey was simply that a building have a second storey, and that it be underutilized. As a result, a number of buildings were included in the survey which have upper storeys

that are presently being used, albeit to a limited extent.<sup>38</sup> In such cases it is often the primary use of the building (principally by the building owner, or the ground floor tenant) which is determining the use, or under-use, of the upper floors. For this reason, the "suitability for conversion" rating which was given to each of the buildings surveyed takes into consideration the likelihood (or perhaps, unlikelihood) that the primary use of the building would either change, or be compatible with the development of housing on the upper floors.

The survey of downtown buildings contained within the core study of this practicum did manage to identify six buildings, out of the thirty-three surveyed, with real, or at least better-than-average, potential for upper-storey commercial-to-residential conversion. It was the opinion of the local project researcher, the local project coordinator and the Housing Committee of the City of Prince George, that the Silver Spruce Building and the Prudente Block offered the greatest potential for conversion, and therefore warranted the more detailed analysis that was carried out by Mr. Foley.

In short, the core study of this practicum provided an assessment of the conditions in Prince George with respect to housing and housing

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<sup>38</sup> e.g. The Croft Hotel (see **Appendix: Downtown Survey or Underutilized Spaces**, ref. no. 33) has rooms on the second floor. However, when this building was being surveyed and an inquiry was made about room rental rates, the study was informed that rooms were not rented. It appears that the rooms have

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affordability, based on an inventory of buildings with underutilized upper-storey commercial space in the downtown core. The study found that the need for non-market housing in Prince George is growing as the demand for market rental housing, and the incidence of individuals in need of social assistance, increases. The study also found that there are a limited number of buildings in the downtown core of Prince George which would be well-suited to upper-storey residential conversion. However, although the potential for conversion exists in a limited way, it does nevertheless exist, and a successful conversion project need only bring together the right elements of building, management (or ownership arrangement) and capital.

The conclusion, which follows, is an attempt to translate all of the findings of the core study into a detailed plan for further study and specific action.

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become so secondary to the beer parlour as the source of business, that this establishment operates as a hotel in name only.

**CHAPTER 6:  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:  
A REFLECTIVE SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE,  
INFORMATION FROM COMPARABLE PRECEDENTS  
AND CORE STUDY FINDINGS**

**6.1. Analysis of the Core Study (A postmortem)**

What follows is a synopsis of the objectives of the core study of this practicum, and the methods through which these objectives were met. Subsequent to this is a brief analysis of some possible directions for further study, which is intended to illustrate the way in which the core study results may be further utilized or expanded upon.

**6.1.1. The Objectives, Methodology and Conclusions of the Core Study**

The core study of this practicum was completed in January of 1996, in accordance with the terms of reference provided by the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust (VCHT). The main objectives of the core study (Victoria Civic Heritage Trust, 1995) have been set out earlier (see **Chapter 1, Sec. 1.2**). Each of these objectives were met, through the work of preparing the core study of this practicum. The product, submitted to the VCHT as the report: *Moving Up - Phase 1* (see **Appendix**), substantiates this.

The broad survey and analysis methodology employed in completing the core study, involved a variety of specific tasks. First (in accordance with



the terms of the VCHT's proposal) a comprehensive inventory of upper-storey space in Prince George's CBD was compiled. From that, a special inventory of underutilized upper-storey space (see **Appendix: Downtown Survey of Underutilized Spaces** ) was derived. Second, an analysis of local policies, conditions, and issues relating to downtown housing was made (again, in accordance with the VCHT's terms of reference). Third, an analysis was made of the various economic indices defining affordability in the Prince George housing market, and of the current state of the local rental market. Within this analysis of affordability and the rental housing market, a summary of potential rental audiences for downtown upper-storey residential units was prepared. Finally, and with direction from the City of Prince George Housing Committee, two (out of a total of thirty-three) buildings in the special inventory were singled out for an in-depth cost analysis. This cost estimate was prepared by Mr. Fergus Foley, a professional engineer with experience in the adaptive re-use of older buildings.

Ultimately, the results of all of the research for the core study were that: a certain number of underutilized upper-storey commercial spaces exist in downtown Prince George; there are no real local impediments to the development of upper-storey residential units in the central business district in Prince George; there is growing demand for low and moderate income housing in Prince George, and some of that demand exists in the downtown area; and the conversion of some of these spaces from commercial to

residential use is feasible, provided that some cost-sharing arrangement can be reached between the housing developers and the property owners.

### **6.1.2. Directions for Further Study**

The core study of this practicum represents a compilation of a considerable amount of data. In and of itself, these data should be useful to both the City of Prince George and any agencies (governmental and non-governmental) with interests in the development of affordable housing in Prince George. The inventory of underutilized, upper-storey space is the first such comprehensive inventory in Prince George's CBD, referencing their age, size, construction details, development history, history of use, and current use. Although much of this inventory is historical data and unlikely to change, the first step for any future work in this realm would be to give some consideration to periodically revisiting the work of the core study and updating this inventory, as well as revisiting and updating the analysis of local conditions and housing market statistics.

Although the findings of the core study quickly found their way into a set of municipal policy recommendations for non-market housing in Prince George (Prince George 1996a, 4), there needs to be some greater consideration, here, of the way in which the core study can now be used (as was originally intended by the VCHT) as the basis of the proposed second and third phases of the *Moving Up* project.

Phase two of the *Moving Up* project (as proposed by the VCHT) is titled "Education and Advocacy". According to the report prepared for the VCHT by City Spaces Consulting Ltd. this is intended to include a

*"program to heighten awareness of the possibilities and benefits of downtown housing for all the potentially interested parties, such as municipal officials, developers, downtown organizations and, of course, residents" (City Spaces 1995, 3).*

More specifically, the VCHT initially intended to provide funding to the five study cities "to sponsor local activities to promote and advocate the concept of affordable downtown living as a means of public education". The thinking was that activities such as an "Affordable Downtown Living Day" would promote the concept of downtown living, heighten awareness, and "test the viability of the concept" with interested parties (renters, community groups, property owners, developers, and government) (VCHT 1995, 12).

As the implementation of Phase Two is pending further funding approval from BCHMC (VCHT 1995, 2), one possible direction for further study at the local level in Prince George would be to investigate ways in which a similar program of education about downtown housing/living could be developed and implemented.

Phase Three of the *Moving Up* study is titled "Analysis and Program Development". According to the report prepared for the VCHT by City Spaces

Consulting, this phase would entail a multi-faceted program which would include lobbying for a province-wide program to consider commercial-to-residential conversion. A major component of this phase would be:

*"encouraging a demonstration project downtown, drawing on CMHC's public and private partnerships"*  
(City Spaces 1995, 4).

The VCHT envisions (VCHT 1995, 13) that this phase will synthesize the data collected in the first two phases and explore the potential for developing community program approaches for tasks such as:

- *identifying potential financial mechanisms specific to each community's particular situation.*
- *exploring the feasibility of public/private partnerships in the conversion of underutilized commercial space.*
- *investigating existing mechanisms, programs and approaches which could be utilized (e.g., CMHC mortgage guarantees, Rental Unit Conversion program).*
- *identifying potential conversion projects which could be used to document the viability of commercial-to-residential conversion as well as provide a demonstration project for public education.*
- *identifying agents or groups that could implement a program at the local level.*

Again, implementation of this phase is pending further funding from the BCHMC, and although this grant is (at the moment) uncertain, one

possible direction for further study would be to investigate the ways in which a demonstration project - one which involves the conversion of underutilized, upper-storey commercial space to residential use (and perhaps, non-market housing developed by a public and third-sector partnership) - could be useful to Prince George. As well, some consideration could be given to the way in which such a demonstration project could be developed and implemented.

As of the time of this practicum's publication, the VCHT had not submitted a proposal for funding for phases two and three of the *Moving Up* study. The VCHT was, however, planning to make this proposal in the very near future (November 1996) (Umland 1996). Regardless of how VCHT proceeds (if it proceeds at all) with the second and third phases of the *Moving Up* project, there is every reason to believe that the findings of the core study of this practicum will provide a solid basis for further work in this realm in Prince George.

Subsequent sections of this paper will focus on the way in which this practicum and the core study may be further utilized, or provide the basis for further study.

## 6.2. Analysis of the Practicum (A reflection)

By building on the basic findings of the core study - that it is feasible to convert select underutilized, or vacant, upper-storey commercial space in Prince George to residential use - this practicum has attempted to show that residential conversions (or the adaptive re-use of older buildings) can be an important tool for simultaneously addressing housing need, physical and economic decline, and the preservation (or conservation) of heritage resources in a city's downtown core.

The value of this kind of study appears to lie in its multidimensional approach. In the past, downtown revitalization has tended to rely on attempts to create a renaissance of retail activity through aesthetic, or streetscape improvements. Likewise, meeting housing need has tended to rely on ways to effect the development of new, affordable units, or provide better forms of subsidization to those unable to compete for market housing. This practicum has attempted to bring these two objectives (revitalization and housing need) together into the same frame, while also considering heritage conservation. Thus, this practicum represents an integrated exposition of the current conditions and trends in: downtown decline and revitalization, housing need and affordability, and heritage conservation, in the case of a smaller, non-metropolitan Canadian City. The larger objective of this practicum has been to present enough evidence, through a thorough examination of relevant literature, and an analysis of data provided from

comparable cases (for the most part Nelson and New Westminster), to support the contention that the problems of housing need, downtown revitalization, and historic conservation can be linked, and may be successfully addressed through a multi-dimensional program of action, in which the conversion of underutilized, upper-storey commercial space to residential use can be a component part.

Recognizing some of the limitations of the Prince George case (most notably the absence of real heritage value in the built environment, but also the broad spatial pattern of commercial and retail land use) makes the task of linking downtown revitalization, housing need, and heritage conservation here more challenging. The different situations found within each of the five study cities illustrates quite clearly that the basic elements necessary for successful commercial-to-residential conversion vary greatly according to geographic and historic context. For example, where Nelson is fortunate to have an abundance of heritage buildings, and a demonstrable need for housing, developing a successful adaptive reuse project, or even a program, is, perhaps, not as much of a challenge as it would be in Prince George.

Attempting to forge the connection between downtown revitalization, housing need and affordability, and heritage conservation has added value in the way in which that connection can provide additional anchor points for each of these separate objectives. For example, a development project that is

designed to serve both a revitalization and historic conservation objective, while at the same time creating more affordable housing, has a wider scope, and a broader basis upon which its ultimate success or failure may be judged. Conversely, a project that only serves one dimension, or attempts to only address one objective, can only, ultimately, be judged on whether or not it succeeds in meeting that one objective. By undertaking this examination of the relationship between the creation of affordable housing, downtown revitalization and heritage conservation, this practicum has tried to present both the feasibility and the desirability of this multi-dimensional approach in the hope that this idea might gain wider acceptance, or be put into practice more frequently.

Because of the way in which this practicum revolves around the specific issues presented in the case of Prince George, some consideration was given to the broader forces which are shaping these issues. While this practicum's learnings may not be readily transferable to every other situation, a conscious attempt has been made to try to make this practicum as applicable as possible to other cities (at least in a North American context), or other cities which share similar effects of core area decline (presumably, also at the hand of retail dispersal to suburban locations), as well as increased housing need and decreased affordability.



Finally, it should be recognized that this practicum represents, for the most part, a snapshot of the current (1996) situation in Prince George, and an analysis of the historic events which have led to this situation. As mentioned in the preceding section, the information given in this practicum should be periodically revisited and updated as some of it may change as the city develops and changes. It is important, mostly for anyone who might be interested in using this practicum as a basis for developing housing in the downtown core in the future, that the findings of this practicum be re-tested to determine whether or not they remain valid.

### **6.3. A Proposal for Further Study and Action**

As alluded to in **Sec. 6.1.2.** there are many directions in which further study in the realm of addressing the problem-set of downtown revitalization, housing need and heritage conservation could proceed, and many ways in which this practicum and the core study could be utilized as a basis for either more study, or a specific program of action.

As the VCHT's plans for phases two, and three, of the *Moving Up* project appear to be uncertain (or at least, for the moment -September 1996-on hold), and as the core study was never intended to result in a firm set of related recommendations to the City of Prince George (as distinct from the VCHT), there is, nevertheless an interest from the practicum perspective in generating an informed set of appropriate suggestions if not outright

recommendations. Therefore, this section presents, in brief, a proposal for a "next phase" of action research, one that is independent of either the possible future directions envisioned by the VCHT (phase two, or three of *Moving Up*), or the current plans of the City of Prince George. This proposed program is intended to highlight all of the areas of concern which should be considered as logical elements of any future responses to this practicum's particular problem-set.

The first step in a 'next phase' of study would be to undertake more strategic data collection, in at least two key areas. Despite the clear direction provided by the VCHT in the terms of reference for *Moving Up- Phase 1*, there is still a need for more data concerning:

- *Comparable precedents. This would involve: gathering more information on similar problems in similar sized cities (e.g. Kamloops, Vernon, Nanaimo); also, identifying how other cities have coped with the problem-set encompassing downtown revitalization, housing need and heritage in the built environment.*
- *Updating the Housing Needs Research Project (1993). This would allow for comparisons between the new core study data and the findings of the 1993 study, and assist in determining what are the current needs for housing (and specifically downtown housing in all its possible manifestations).*

The second step in this next phase would be to try to determine, more precisely, what the real options are for meeting housing need in the CBD, and attempting to approach downtown revitalization in (large) part through

residential development. This would likely incorporate many of the same ideas which the VCHT has proposed for phase two of the *Moving Up* study, and might specifically include: educating groups and individuals who may have an interest in non-market, downtown housing; educating groups or individuals, who may be considered as stakeholders in the CBD, about the merit of, and possibilities for, housing in the CBD; as well as generally advocating the merit of downtown housing, both as a way of meeting housing need and as a vehicle for revitalization. In this respect, the term "housing" should also be expanded to include privately developed, market housing. As the *Moving Up - Phase 1* study focused almost entirely on non-market (or low and moderate income) housing, there is room for an analysis of residential development in the CBD that encompasses a broader range of housing types aimed at the full spectrum of household income levels.

The third step in the suggested program would be to attempt a thorough inventory of underutilized *public land* in the CBD, with an eye towards developing a strategy which might allow the city to become more proactive in both the development of public land and in the provision of housing in the CBD. The VCHT's terms of reference limited the core study to a consideration of underutilized, upper-storey space. This has a fairly limited scope (as the core study determined) in a city such as Prince George. More comprehensive consideration could now be given to vacant lots, buildings with underutilized ground-level space, as well as underutilized air rights (the

unused or vacant space above many of the single-storey buildings in Prince George's CBD). The City has already taken some important first steps towards capitalizing on recent changes to the Municipal Act (see **Chapter 3, Sec. 3.2.10.**), and future initiatives should be directed towards ways in which this emerging expanded role for municipal government can be directed towards the particular problems of the CBD.

As a logical extension of the third step (above), the fourth step in this suggested program would entail re-visiting the idea of comprehensive redevelopment (as presented in the case of the NWRA) with an eye towards determining how a comprehensive CBD redevelopment plan could be developed and implemented in Prince George. If comprehensive redevelopment were able to bring the combined resources of local and provincial government to bear on the problems of downtown Prince George, while incorporating the interests of private capital into a redevelopment plan through some form of a public-private partnership (one that was widely subscribed to), the rewards could, potentially, be quite significant. Through the course of undertaking the core study, it was mentioned, on several occasions, that one of the real stumbling blocks to revitalization in downtown Prince George (and a key factor in the prolonged physical decline of many of the buildings downtown) is the number of commercial properties held by absentee landlords. Exploring the idea of a public-private redevelopment, or revitalization, partnership for downtown Prince George could investigate this

claim more thoroughly, and either prove or dispel this theory while at the same time seeking ways to mitigate private capital's concerns regarding revitalization, and to mobilize all landlords -resident or absentee- behind a new vision for a 'central district' that would be for more than just 'business'.

The next phase of activity could be directed specifically towards developing an appropriate strategic plan, and such a long-term vision, for the redevelopment of Prince George's CBD. Again, this could well draw upon New Westminster's experience with the NWRA and public infrastructure development, as well as Nelson's experience with heritage conservation, and the National Main Street program. Thus, Prince George could give some consideration to: the role of public infrastructure development, the need for increased public realm activity (vibrancy), the possibility of increased residential development (including type, location, tenure and price), and the manner in which public and private interests can be simultaneously addressed and met through some form of partnership. Again, this would have to be a plan that was appropriate to, as well as derived from an informed appreciation of the particular problems of a declining conventional CBD, as is the case for Prince George. Ultimately, such a plan could serve as a model for other smaller, non-metropolitan cities, in much the same manner that Nelson and New Westminster have served as models of downtown revitalization for this practicum.

It would seem that the successful implementation of this suggested program requires a form of public-private partnership or coalition or collaboration which, currently, does not exist in Prince George. It also seems fairly obvious that some greater consideration needs to be given to the way in which commercial-to-residential conversions, and/or the creation of new affordable housing units, might be managed in conjunction with the objectives of: heritage conservation, land and building utilization, and downtown revitalization. Although it would be natural to assume that the City of Prince George and the TCBA would want to partner in a concerted downtown revitalization effort, it would appear, from the state of the discussion on downtown revitalization (where the City and the TCBA appear to be at odds on many issues), that the wider community of Prince George would benefit from having a separate board, or commission, to approach, in a unified manner, all of the issues related to the revitalization of the CBD. Provided it was designed as a collaboration of broadly-based interests (serving the public-at-large, local and provincial government, regional interests, downtown merchants, downtown office-commercial businesses, landowners, residents, service organizations, and social agencies), a free-standing Downtown Revitalization Commission could serve Prince George well.

#### **6.4. General Summary and Conclusions**

Although there are a number of general conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of this practicum, and its core study, the most important of

these is that, while feasibility has been determined in the case of the convertibility of some underutilized, upper-storey space to residential use in Prince George, there are a number of larger interconnected issues which must be considered before this somewhat narrow approach (in the Prince George context) is generally applied as a means of developing affordable housing, or effecting a modicum of downtown revitalization.

This practicum has considered several aspects of urban planning and development that relate directly to the issue of creating affordable housing in downtown Prince George, including: the boom-plateau history of development in Prince George; factors which have contributed to the physical and economic decline of the CBD; the history of predominantly suburban residential development in Prince George, and the current increasingly acute situation with regards to housing need; the feasibility of converting underutilized, upper-storey commercial downtown space for affordable housing; the somewhat onerous pre-conditions for the redevelopment of historic commercial buildings to residential units; and the emerging role of various levels of government in the processes of housing, heritage conservation and downtown revitalization. In short, this investigation can be summarized as both a narrow feasibility study of the particular issue of developing affordable housing through commercial-to-residential conversion in downtown Prince George, and as a broad examination of the issues pertaining to downtowns, their economic and physical deterioration, and possible revitalization, in conjunction with a desire to both conserve heritage

and meet the community's needs for housing - and, more importantly, affordable housing. This practicum offers the suggestion (and some support for that suggestion) that the revitalization (and re-invention) of the 'central business district' as something broader and more diverse, is critical for the continued social and economic well-being of whole cities. At a minimum, the development of housing in the CBD (and in particular affordable housing, and housing developed through the conversion and conservation of historic buildings) represents a real opportunity to kick-start that revitalization.



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<sup>39</sup> This list of References gives a complete citation of all works cited in the text of this practicum. A second list of References, specific to works cited in the core study, follows the text of the Appendix. A Bibliography of other works which have helped to form background knowledge of the subjects of this practicum follows this list of References.

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APPENDIX

MOVING UP - PHASE 1  
INVENTORY AND NEED ASSESSMENT:  
DOWNTOWN UPPER STOREY HOUSING  
FOR THE  
CITY OF PRINCE GEORGE

Directed by:

The Department of Development Services  
and the Housing Committee  
of the  
City of Prince George

Prepared by:

Matthew Baldwin  
*Graduate Student*  
Department of City Planning  
University of Manitoba

for:

The Victoria Civic Heritage Trust

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Prince George is a community of approximately 75,000 people, situated near the geographic centre of British Columbia. As the primary trading centre for north central BC, Prince George promotes itself as "BC's Northern Capital". Prince George is the centre of the Fraser-Fort George Regional District, and serves as a regional centre for a number of Government ministries and services, both provincial and federal.

Like many Canadian cities Prince George was founded and thrived on the wealth of the region's natural resources. However, Prince George has not rested just on the industrial base of its sawmills and pulp mills. Instead, the city has sought to build upon its strengths as a regional capital, diversify its economic base, build on its road, rail and air linkages, and loosen its dependency on the forest economy. Recent growth in Prince George has been focused on the development of tertiary and quaternary sector opportunities such as the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), and it is now a popular view that this new university will have as great an impact on the city's future as the pulp mills had upon the growth of the city and this region in the past.

The downtown core, or Central Business District of Prince George, is a conventional gridiron plan that was designed and laid out by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway in 1914-15. It is a plan not unlike hundreds of other cities and towns developed by railways across North America, with the

exception that the original designers of Prince George intended that George Street, 7th Avenue, and Patricia Boulevard should be "grand avenues" emanating from the City Hall and terminating at the railway station, Duchess Park, and Alfred Circle respectively. A great deal has changed since 1915 when the townsite was cleared, the streets were laid out and the City was incorporated. The original business district which had been clustered along George Street between the Railway Station and City Hall between 1915 and 1920 slowly began moving westward along Second, Third and Fourth Avenues. At the end of World War II, the orientation of the business district was as much along 3rd Avenue as it was along George Street. In the postwar period, from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, the forest economy in the Prince George region developed and expanded rapidly. The city also grew rapidly in this period, and grew outward in several different directions from the core. Suburban expansion, facilitated by increased automobile usage, emerged as the dominant pattern of development in Prince George, and as a result (mostly for reasons of convenience, and the requirement of space for parking) four retail malls, built along arterial routes in the suburbs, challenged and eroded the retail primacy of the Central Business District. Although the C.B.D. is still considered the centre of the city, suburban expansion has shifted the demographic centre of the city. The downtown core, it seems, has been abandoned by anyone who can afford to live elsewhere.

The C.B.D. today faces many challenges. One opinion holds that downtown Prince George is in state of serious physical and economic decline,

and that either this deterioration is destined to continue, or that no course of action is likely to turn things around. This point of view suggests that what little retailing is left in the C.B.D. will soon relocate beyond the C.B.D. or be overwhelmed by new, national "big box" retailing operations located on the periphery, or along main arterial routes<sup>1</sup>. This view of downtown is often allied with the belief that the C.B.D. is simply unsafe and that crime and violence are on the increase. The negativity of these points of view often lead to the conclusion that any re-development of downtown is futile before the social problems are solved. Fortunately, as often is the case, opinions such as these do not adequately explain the true nature of downtown, nor do they suggest what role the C.B.D. might have in the future of this city. As there is every reason to believe that Prince George will maintain its position as the primary trading centre in north-central British Columbia, there is every reason to believe that the office and commercial sector employment (e.g.: banks and financial institutions, financial and legal services, and government services), which are concentrated mostly in the C.B.D., will continue to thrive. As office-commercial activity thrives in the C.B.D. so does the opportunity for small, niche-market retail operations which provide the antithesis to "big box" retail shopping. Above all, if the office and commercial sector thrives and niche retailing opportunities increase in the C.B.D., and if emerging demographic and social trends are correct, the desirability of, or

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<sup>1</sup> Big box retailing is a fairly recent phenomena in Prince George with the opening of Costco in 1992 and the opening of The Real Canadian Superstore in November of 1995. It remains to be seen what long-term

demand for, housing in or near downtown Prince George is likely to increase significantly.

For the immediate future, the needs of the downtown core seem to revolve around two issues. First, the C.B.D. lacks an overall vibrancy, in the sense that the area (as a whole) is underused and at certain times of the day, or week, even deserted. This has a direct impact on retail activity, and a less obvious impact on evening activities in the C.B.D. - which in turn have an impact on crime. The suggested solutions to this problem have spanned the spectrum from increased lighting and street furniture, to comprehensive re-development. It would appear that any increase in the residential population of the C.B.D. would serve to boost the overall vibrancy of the area and increase the number of people who would have a stake in lowering the incidence of social problems and crime. The second issue is one of housing need. For years, the C.B.D. has been something of a repository for low-income wage earners, those on social assistance, individuals living on low, fixed health or disability pensions and those who are simply homeless, particularly youths. The City recognizes that these individuals are in immediate need of housing, or more particularly some form of subsidized housing which falls below the levels of the normal housing market. This is what is termed "non-market housing". The normal rental housing market adds to the difficulty of this situation. In the last few years, and in particular since the opening of

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impact this type of retailing operation will have on the vitality of retailing in the C.B.D.

UNBC, housing in the normal rental market has been operating with vacancy rates consistently below 2%, and at times below 1%. Increased demand has led to increased prices, and this situation has driven some low income renters out of the normal rental market, and has altered the level of affordability for both low and moderate income earners. In short, Prince George needs to increase its supply of low-income or non-market housing, and it would appear that at least some of this demand exists in the core area.

Bearing in mind that the problems of the C.B.D. will not be solved with just a few alterations to a plan or the redevelopment of a few buildings, the idea of converting underutilized upper storey commercial space to low-income rental accommodations does offer the opportunity to try to solve, in one step, two of the more recognizable deficiencies of the C.B.D., namely a lack of a residential population, and an under-supply of affordable or non-market housing.

## 2. LOCAL CONDITIONS

### 2.1. Local Policies and Bylaws

#### 2.1.1. Official Community Plan Policies

It is the goal of the City of Prince George's Official Community Plan (OCP) "to encourage sufficient variety of housing types so that all residents of the city have satisfactory affordable accommodation and a choice of residential life style" (Prince George 1993, 26 [Sec. 7.2]).

The policies of the OCP, with respect to housing, address a broad spectrum of concerns from design aesthetics and compatibility to the siting for group homes and shelters and the encouragement of social housing for the economically disadvantaged (Prince George 1993, 27 [Sec. 7.4]). Of interest to this study in particular, are two general policies of the OCP. The first is that:

*"the City will encourage innovative subdivision and site layout for single and multiple-family development including such approaches as...apartments in mixed-use developments and the C.B.D."* (Prince George 1993, 27 [Sec. 7.4.4]).

and the second is that:

*"the City will support residential use in the C.B.D. including vertical mixed-use development. Zoning Bylaw amendments to encourage such use will be supported"* (Prince George 1993, 36 [Sec. 8.5.4]).

Between these two policies, one finds, in general, a sense that the OCP does not pose any sort of a restriction or an impediment to the broader objectives of this study.

### 2.1.2. Local Zoning Bylaws

The geographic limits of this study correspond to the boundaries of the C-1 (Central Business District) zone in downtown Prince George. The C-1 zone permits the following residential uses: Boarding or Rooming Houses (more than 3 units); Multiple-Family (greater than 6 units); and Local Multiple-Family (fewer than 6 units).

Local Multiple-Family residential use within the C-1 zone is limited by subsection 10-26.3(5) which reads:

*"A local multiple-family dwelling unit shall not be located on the first storey unless it is situated to the rear of another permitted use in the C-1 district. Notwithstanding this, an entrance to a local multiple family dwelling unit is permitted along the first storey street frontage."*

It should be recognized that the C.B.D. is flanked to the west and to the southeast by two of the city's original residential neighbourhoods, dating from before 1920. The first (situated west Vancouver Street) is known as "the Crescents" and the other (situated east of Queensway Ave. and south of Patricia Boulevard) is known as "the Millar Addition". In the Crescents the housing stock is a mixture of single-family homes and duplexes with a few medium density multiple-family buildings and a high density multiple-



family building. The Millar Addition is solely single family residential. Between each of these residential areas and the C.B.D. there is something of a zone of transition. The area bounded by Winnipeg Street and Vancouver Street (the Winnipeg-Vancouver Street corridor) acts as a buffer between downtown and the Crescents. The area bounded by Queensway Avenue (south of Patricia Boulevard) and Ingledew Street (the Queensway strip) acts as a buffer for the Millar Addition. Because of the close proximity of these two neighbourhoods to downtown (both are within walking distance) OCP policy supports the further development of multiple-family buildings (both high and low rise) in the transitional areas (the Winnipeg-Vancouver Street corridor and the Queensway strip). It should be noted, however, that OCP policy suggests that high-density multiple-family buildings be interspersed with medium-density multiple-family buildings in the Winnipeg-Vancouver Street area, and that proposals for conversion of houses to multiple residential or commercial residential use be considered in this area as well.

In addition to recognizing the general character of these two residential areas on the periphery of downtown, it should also be noted that a number of motels situated along Queensway Ave. (the Queensway strip) have been recently transformed to single resident occupancy, or apartment-type rooms. It is thought that this occurred partly because of rising demand for, and the diminished supply of, this kind of accommodation and partly because of a diminished commercial appeal for motels in this location when compared to newer motels located on major arterial routes leading into the city.

Nevertheless, this seems to indicate that the demand for this sort of accommodation is now being served beyond the usual limits of the C.B.D., and perhaps more importantly that this demand is not being adequately served.

The City, and OCP policy, recognize that the Central Business District is an important part of the city that helps to shape the city's role as the economic, social and cultural centre for the region. As such, it is OCP policy (Prince George 1993, 27 [Sec. 8.5.1]) that the City continue to recognize that aspect of the C.B.D. *"by promoting administrative, financial, specialty retail, entertainment and cultural land uses downtown"*. Notwithstanding the primary functions of the C.B.D., OCP policy also wishes to emphasize multi-storey, mixed-use development in the C.B.D. The vision for the downtown core of Prince George would seem to be one of a place where it would be possible for people to work, shop, recreate and live within the C.B.D.

### **2.1.3. Policies Regarding Affordable Housing**

The City of Prince George and its Housing Committee have given a great deal of consideration in recent months to housing need and the provision of non-market housing (see: HNRP 1993). While there are no municipal policies at the present time which either directly support or impede the development of affordable housing there is reason to believe that City Council is preparing to set new policies, or amend the OCP and Zoning Bylaw to allow the City to take a more active role in the realm of housing. It

is likely that the City would give consideration to any proposals for non-market housing or market housing aimed at low-income groups.

**2.1.4. Public safety policies or special municipal requirements for, or restrictions on, downtown housing.**

While there are no specific public safety policies relating to housing in the C.B.D. (other than those contained within the Zoning Bylaw and the BC Building code) it is the general policy of the OCP that:

*"emphasis will be put upon access and safety for pedestrians, both entering the C.B.D. and within it. Lanes should be considered as potential pedestrian routes and emphasis should be placed on making them more attractive" (Prince George 1993, 37 [Sec. 8.5.10]).*

In addition to the main detachment of the RCMP being located in the C.B.D., the City, businesses, and citizens have recently banded together to support the development of a Community Policing Access Centre at 1323 - 5th Ave. Since its inception the CPAC office, and the services it provides (especially increased foot and bicycle patrols), has been seen to have had a positive impact on the downtown area.

While there are no special municipal requirements aimed at downtown housing, it is City policy that apartment buildings with three or more units are required to obtain a city business license. The current fee for a business license for an multiple-family building with three or more units is \$100/year.

**2.1.5. Local requirements or relaxations (parking, density bonuses, tax exemptions, etc.) with respect to encouraging downtown upper storey housing.**

While there are no local requirements or relaxations which specifically discourage or encourage downtown upper storey housing, there are special provisions with respect to parking in the downtown area which might provide some encouragement. Under Sec. 29.6 (1a) of the Zoning Bylaw, buildings within the C-1 zoning district are allowed 100% site coverage, and are not required to provide parking. Sec. 29.6 (1b) of the same bylaw states that:

*"off-street parking spaces required or provided for...residential uses in the C-1 district may be located on another site, but shall be within 60.0m of the development or building they are intended to serve."*

On-site parking spaces are permitted in the C-1 district (in accordance with regulations found in Sec. 29 of the zoning bylaw) and it is both likely and desirable that any commercial-residential building would be able to have two or three parking spots situated off a lane behind the building. The original townsite plan provided lanes for every block in the C.B.D.

With respect to tax exemptions, the City currently offers no exemptions for landlords wishing to convert commercial space to residential use. The City does however offer tax exemptions to non-profit groups, such as Churches and housing societies. These exemptions are handled annually by Council on a case by case basis, and are by no means automatic.

As for the difference in property taxes between commercial and residential properties, the BC Assessment Authority considers the profitability of rental units when determining their assessed value for tax purposes. At the present time the demand for commercial space in Prince George is considerably higher than for residential space. Reflecting this, rents, per square foot, for commercial space are also higher (depending upon the age and condition of the building). In 1995, the mill rate for residential properties in Prince George was set at 14.09 per '000, which is considerably lower than the mill rate for commercial properties which was set at 24.54 per '000. Buildings of mixed-use are taxed according to their separate commercial and residential value by the respective mill rate for those uses. Therefore, a landlord, wishing to decrease his or her property tax bill by converting a commercial building to mixed-use (residential and commercial), would have to ensure that the assessed value of the resulting residential portion of the building does not exceed (approximately) 1.75x the value of the commercial space that it is replacing, in order to incur a reduced tax bill.<sup>2</sup>

#### **2.1.6. Other local issues related to downtown housing.**

While there are no other local policy or bylaw issues relating to housing in the downtown core, one must caution that the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) Syndrome exists, and is, to a certain degree, entrenched in the

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<sup>2</sup> This is based solely on the mill rate figures for 1995, and offered only as a suggestion of the range of difference that exists between commercial and residential use and their respective tax levy in the C.B.D.

downtown. NIMBYism manifests itself in a variety of ways in downtown, and the situation in Prince George is probably not too different from any other Canadian city. From time to time commercial landowners and retailers have voiced their concern that the social problems of the downtown are having a negative effect on pedestrian traffic and retailing, and that increased social housing downtown would only serve to concentrate these problems. This sort of misjudgment of the real issues associated with life downtown often results in a resistance or reluctance to provide any amenities (such as public washrooms, greenspaces or even park benches) which might be seen to attract or support vagrancy or crime. On the other hand, it does not appear that many of these same retailers and landowners have taken steps towards ensuring that their buildings or properties are part of a non-threatening or "defensible" environment. In fairness, it is probably difficult for many of those individuals who utilize the downtown core on a regular, but part-time (nine to five), basis to understand the complexity of the social problems that exist there 24 hours a day. Social problems do exist in downtown, and NIMBYism does exist among those people with a real vested interest in downtown. Both are manageable with the right approach, the right sort of education and financial support.

### 2.1.7. Seismic Risk Factors

Prince George is considered to be a low seismic risk zone. Building, or upgrading, to an earthquake resistance standard, is not a consideration in the Prince George area.

Lending institutions do not require building owners in Prince George to carry any additional insurance to cover loss resulting from seismic activity. At present, the insurance rate for commercial and multiple-family residential buildings in Prince George is between 55 and 60% of that for Richmond/Delta. For the most part, this difference represents the difference in risk of damage from seismic activity. Also, building owners who do carry earthquake risk insurance, are required to pay a deductible equal to 5% of the total loss, whereas the deductible for building owners in Richmond/Delta is assessed at 10% of the loss.<sup>3</sup>

The primary concern in the upgrading of older buildings in Prince George is in bringing the building up to current building and fire codes for residential use.

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<sup>3</sup> For comparison only. These figures are courtesy of Sedgwick Ltd. (Prince George) and reflect a standard policy with the Guardian Insurance Co.

## **2.2. Housing Affordability**

### **2.2.1. Local "Affordability"**

While there are a number of factors which determine affordability in the Prince George housing market, it should first be realized that any discussion of housing in Prince George has to take a holistic consideration of the housing market. Prince George is simply not big enough (demographically or geographically) to allow analysis of one part of the city in isolation from what is happening in other areas of the city. Even development projects on the periphery of the city have an impact on market values and developments at the core. Therefore, to determine the factors which might improve affordability downtown is also to determine factors which are applicable in nearly every other part of the city as well.

The starting point for any discussion of housing affordability in the Prince George housing market is to consider the issue of supply. In the past five years, ever increasing demands for housing and a near total lack of new private rental market construction have merged to create a falling vacancy rate and increased prices. Without delving into the condition of the national or provincial economies, it should be noted that current economic conditions do not seem to support the development of new private rental market housing in Prince George. Some of the economic factors which are prominent in this economic equation are: the developer's cost of borrowing; the return on investment; the cost of materials and labour and the cost of



construction in general. The cost of land is also a factor, but is perhaps less of a factor in Prince George than in other places.

As the municipal government appears to have no special requirements which would particularly discourage or encourage the development of rental market housing, it is difficult to factor the municipal government into an equation for increased housing affordability. That said, the City has played an important role in the development and supply of residential lots in Prince George, and there may be opportunities for the City to expand its role in the land market, particularly in downtown. The establishment of a downtown land-banking policy, to acquire and assemble land at the core, could be one such initiative. However, although many buildings downtown are vacant or are underutilized, the opportunities for acquisition by the City are dependent on whether the costs are acceptable to taxpayers. While it has been suggested that the size of individual downtown lots does not allow for economies of scale which would support a successful re-development project, assembling and amalgamating underutilized lots, and then marketing the resulting blocks would have to be shown to be beneficial to all taxpayers, and not simply for the benefit of developers or the City.

While the municipal requirements for any rental market developments, as set in the Zoning Bylaw, are not particularly onerous, it must also be remembered that many of the City's current policies with regards to the development of residential uses downtown are quite recent. It

remains to be seen whether recent shifts in policy towards allowing mixed use residential/commercial developments will be picked up by the private developers and will result in new mixed-use developments. It would seem to make sense that a mixed use development in the context of a small market such as Prince George, would provide developers or landlords with some measure of insulation from uneven fluctuations in the markets for office, retail or residential space.

Apart from the framework for the development of residential housing provided by the City, and the economic conditions which rule the private development market, the only other option for increasing the stock of rental market and non-market housing appears to be through third-party providers such as churches, social organizations or housing societies. Organizations wishing to develop either market or non-market housing (of any variety of tenure systems) would require both the political, and most likely, financial support of all three levels of government. The City should continue to take the lead in supporting organizations wishing to develop housing, and should encourage the senior levels of government to do likewise.

It should also be noted that the development of third-party, or social housing is not the only solution to the question of housing affordability. The City needs to support and maintain a healthy private rental market. Although the demand for rental housing is currently quite high, if the supply of rental housing is suddenly upset by a sizable increase of non-market

housing, or the local economy is suddenly upset by another recession, then the private market would suffer. Even if rental vacancy rates reached levels of 5% or more, there are no guarantees that the market would correct itself and allow for a decrease in rental prices. It is quite likely that prices would actually increase as landlords face lower revenues without a similar decrease in expenses. Renters might also be subjected to rental limitations or minimum leases.

The final report of the Housing Needs Research Project (HNRP) (completed in December 1993) notes that affordability is likely to be the product of concern, innovation and community involvement in the issue of meeting housing need. The report suggest that:

*"With virtually no capital funding from the federal government and with only stable funding from the Province, many good projects will go un-funded. Addressing housing issues in Prince George - as everywhere - means focusing more attention on the private market, seeking more support from other 'pockets' such as employees' associations, local capital, and other innovative approaches. While there are examples of innovation from around the province that provide helpful models, the most successful projects/programs in Prince George will be the ones that emerge from the community" (HNRP 1993, 1:4).*

## 2.2.2. Potential Rental Audiences

The report of the Housing Needs Research Project also noted that:

*Although residents of Prince George have among the highest average family and individual incomes in British Columbia and relatively affordable housing, many residents are unable to find adequate, affordable housing (HNRP 1993, 1:3).*

While this report estimated that 61% of families in Prince George could afford to purchase a new home and 76% could afford to buy a resale home, it also recognized that households of low to moderate income had great difficulty in saving enough money for a downpayment on a house after their basic needs (food, rent, utilities, clothing and transportation) were met.<sup>4</sup> The report also noted that although incomes are generally higher in Prince George than in many cities in British Columbia there are many families whose income falls below the range of the private rental market. The Housing Needs Research Project estimated that 5% of all families and 40% of all individuals could not afford the average rent of a small apartment. Figures from the 1991 Census show that 17% of all families and individuals in Prince George pay more than 30% of their gross income on housing, while the provincial average is 13.6% (HNRP 1993, 4:1-10).

In the downtown core, the problems of affordability are compounded by a higher incidence of low income. While the findings of the Housing

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<sup>4</sup> The Housing Needs Research Project based this assessment on a 10% downpayment. Since then, CMHC has lowered the level for minimum down payments to 5%.

Needs Research Project and the figures for average and median income suggest that it is possible for the majority of the residents of Prince George to find affordable housing, 1991 census figures with respect to low income indicate that the downtown area of Prince George has an incidence of low income which is over three times that of the city as a whole. As for the composition of total income within the downtown (census tract 012) employment income is 30% lower than the city as a whole, government transfer payments are almost double, and the level of income from other sources (i.e. disability pensions) as a percentage of all income in this same area is over five times that of the city as a whole.

What follows is a limited list of potential rental audiences for converted, upper storey housing. This list tries to identify groups which exhibit an unfulfilled, and often chronic need for housing, particularly housing that falls below market rents. In many cases these groups are not represented by the statistical information of the census, partly because of the way in which census figures are based on declared income and partly because of the transient or temporary nature of their housing needs. This list attempts to illustrate the nature of each group's need, the degree to which their unmet need can be considered chronic or endemic, and the suitability of downtown housing to fulfill their housing need.

It should be noted that a survey carried out by the Housing Needs Research Project (1993) found that of 466 respondents, 166 respondents (or

40%) found that they identified themselves with more than one group (HNRP 1993, 3:4) (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Groups having the most difficulty in finding affordable, adequate housing**  
(source: HNRP 1993, 3:4)

	Number	Percent
Other (including 162 multiple responses)	166	40 %
Single Persons with low income	63	15 %
Seniors with fixed Incomes	43	10 %
People with physical disabilities	32	8 %
Elderly people in declining health	27	8 %
Single men with low incomes	21	5 %
Students	15	4 %
People with drug or alcohol dependencies	7	2 %
Teen Mothers	10	2 %
Two Parent families with low incomes	7	2 %
Street kids	7	2 %
People with chronic mental disabilities	7	2 %
Women leaving abusive situations at home	5	1 %

### **Students:**

As a result of the opening of UNBC, and increased enrollment at the College of New Caledonia (CNC), the increase in the number of students looking for housing is having a serious impact on the rental housing market in Prince George. The survey undertaken by the Housing Needs Research Project found that students represented 4% of those who had the most difficulty in finding affordable, adequate housing (HNRP 1993, 3:4). However, neither the College of New Caledonia nor the University of Northern British

Columbia are in close proximity to the downtown core. Although both institutions are well served by public transit, and both offer a great deal of student parking, the distance (3.9 km between CNC and downtown; 10.3 km between UNBC and downtown) to downtown is cited by housing administrators at CNC and UNBC as the main reason why students would most likely not choose to live downtown.

In addition to the inconveniences posed by the distance between CNC, UNBC and downtown, there are several other aspects of downtown living which are considered unappealing to the average student. These include: a deficiency in shopping (especially grocery) amenities; issues of personal safety (especially at night); noise from nightclubs and bars downtown; and the inadequacy of the local transit system late at night (most routes are not served after 10:30 P.M.).

#### **Low Income Families / Single Parent Families:**

The report of the Housing Needs Research Project recognized that low income and single parent families represent a group with urgent, unmet housing need in Prince George. The survey undertaken by the Housing Needs Research Project found that single parents with low incomes represented 15% of those who had the most difficulty in finding affordable, adequate housing (HNRP 1993, 3:4). There is no reason to believe that this situation has improved at all in the two years since this report was published.

The Housing Needs Research Project supports the observation that although the private market for rental housing is experiencing decreasing vacancy rates and increasing rental prices, these conditions have not yet made the construction of new rental units in the private market feasible. As a result of this continuing undersupply, the working poor - especially families dependent on only one income - are being pushed out of the normal rental market and into the realm of non-market housing. These basic economic problems are compounded by problems of discrimination against single parent families and large families.

It is notable that one of the strategies proposed by the Housing Needs Research Project for meeting the needs of low income and single parent families was the acquisition and conversion of existing structures as an alternative to the construction of a completely new project. It is, however, a topic of debate whether the downtown core would be a suitable place for single parent families, especially households led by single mothers. Basic issues of safety (especially at night) as well as the limitations of service amenities are often cited as reasons why families might have difficulty adapting to living downtown.

**Youth:**

The Housing Needs Research Project survey found that youths represented 2% of those who had the most difficulty in finding affordable, adequate housing (HNRP 1993, 3:4). The report also suggested that this figure



was growing. Again, there is no reason to believe that the situation has improved since 1993.

The situation in Prince George with respect to youth, and their growing need for housing is not too different than in most Canadian cities, with the exception that employment opportunities, (especially at the entry-level and in the service sector) are perhaps more limited here than in larger cities. The constraints of the local employment market, and usually low income levels, often put youths into the category of "non-market" rental need. The problems of finding rental accommodation at the bottom of the price scale, without references, or with the appearance (at least from the landlord's perspective) of an unstable rental history often puts youths into the category of "hard to house".

Again, downtown Prince George presents issues of safety and a lack of service amenities to anyone considering living there, and as a group, youth would be no different. Where housing in the downtown might be of a particular benefit to youth is in terms of centrality. Proximity to educational facilities (in particular, high school and continuing education) and social services should be considered one of the advantages of downtown living.

#### **Seniors:**

Although fewer people are leaving Prince George when they retire, the city has a proportionately lower percentage of seniors than cities on Vancouver Island, the lower mainland or in the Okanagan. In addition to

this, Prince George has a good record of supporting and providing housing for its seniors. The current problem for seniors housing in Prince George appears to be related to a lack of choice in housing type, tenancy and price. The survey undertaken by the Housing Needs Research Project found that seniors with fixed incomes and elderly people in declining health represented 18% of those who had the most difficulty in finding affordable, adequate housing (HNRP 1993, 3:4). However, the report of the Housing Needs Research Project also suggests that until the seniors population becomes more dominant and the overall demand for different housing choice increases, that the situation is unlikely to change a great deal.

The issues of safety and service amenities, when coupled with the limited projected demand for seniors housings, leads to the conclusion that seniors cannot be considered a viable rental audience for the kind of housing which could be created from underutilized upper storey space downtown. It is quite possible to imagine that seniors could someday be an integral part of a residential community downtown. However, it is likely that seniors housing would then be constructed in a manner which takes into consideration the choices which seniors are presently looking for. For instance, it has been suggested that a "life-lease" seniors housing project, perhaps in conjunction with a retail, medical or recreational complex downtown could be highly successful.

**Individuals with Disabilities:**

There are an ever-increasing number of individuals with either physical or mental disabilities in Prince George who find their housing situation to be inadequate. The survey of the Housing Needs Research Project found that individuals with either physical or mental disabilities represented 10% of those who had the most difficulty in finding affordable, adequate housing (HNRP 1993, 3:4). Most often the inadequacies of the rental market relate to issues of accessibility and/or the private market's reluctance to make the renovations necessary to support people with disabilities. There are no real incentives for builders to construct units designed with the disabled person in mind, and as a result few are built. Although housing downtown would offer no particular advantage or disadvantage to persons with disabilities, upper storey housing does offer the problem of accessibility to those with physical disabilities. The same issues of personal safety in downtown would still apply, and the lack of service amenities would only, perhaps, be mitigated by the availability of accessible public transit. If accessible housing could be constructed in existing, underutilized structures downtown, then individuals with disabilities could be considered as a potential rental audience.

**Live / Work Arrangements:**

As previously noted, the OCP supports the development of residential units above, or at the rear of, commercial establishments downtown.

Therefore, as the development of residential accommodations on site for proprietors of commercial businesses has already been undertaken in several instances it would appear that this sort of housing is viable in the downtown. The problems, however, largely relate to the issues of tenancy versus ownership, and the suitability of the building for mixed commercial-residential use. As smaller niche-market retailing operations become more popular downtown, and the number of independent offices downtown rises, there may be an increased demand for housing units situated in closer proximity to one's place of employment. Like all things, it may take time for this trend to manifest itself in Prince George, but recent developments of multi-family and strata type residential buildings near the core suggest that this may not be that far away.

#### **Homeless Adults:**

The Housing Needs Research Project reported in 1993 that there is:

*"a continuing concern for middle aged and older people living on, or close to, the streets downtown. Some live in hotels, rooming houses and motels in downtown Prince George; others share or find sleeping accommodation in homes near downtown. These individuals have very little choice in the housing market. They are usually on income assistance, or receiving a small disability pension and very often have health problems stemming from chronic alcohol abuse" (HNRP 1993, 1:10)*

While there are a variety of identifiable groups in need of housing in Prince George, and opportunity to fill some of that need in the downtown area, it would seem to be prudent to first look at addressing the housing needs

of those individuals already living downtown. Typically, however, individuals who fall into this category often fall well within the realm of non-market housing and are, as well, often classified as "hard to house". Even though these individuals may live in private market accommodations, these units are at the bottom of the price range, and often of a sub-standard residential condition (most are converted hotel rooms with shared facilities).

Housing for individuals in the situation of homelessness is a recognized need in Prince George, and several agencies are studying both the creation of housing as well as a support network for the homeless and destitute.

When all of the possible audiences for housing converted from underutilized upper storey space are considered, it seems as though it is the homeless or destitute that have the fewest opportunities elsewhere. Considering that this group is already adapted to problems inherent in living downtown, and is in the most immediate housing need, it is this group which should be considered the most appropriate audience for any new rental housing downtown.

### **2.3. Local Rental Market Conditions**

#### **2.3.1. Affordable Rental Rates**

This study focuses on tract 012 of the Prince George Census Area. Tract 012 is an area bounded by 1st Ave. to the north, Queensway Ave. to the east,

Patricia Blvd. and 17th Ave to the south, and parts of Winnipeg and Vancouver Streets to the west. Census tract 012 is almost identical to the boundaries of this study, with the exception that this tract takes in a little more of the commercial area to the southwest of downtown. As enumeration area census data was not available, and as the housing and income information relating to census tract 012 is not likely to be too different than for the study area, census tract 012 and the study area were considered equal for the purposes of this study.

**Table 2: Individual and Household Income: 1991 - Prince George Census Tract 012 and Prince George Census Area (source: Statistics Canada Cat. 95-387 Selected Characteristics for Census Tracts, 1991 Census)**

	Tract 012	CA
<b><u>Males &gt;15 with income</u></b>		
Average Income	\$20,426	\$33,504
Median Income	\$10,771	\$32,361
<b><u>Females &gt;15 with income</u></b>		
Average Income	\$26,111	\$16,599
Median Income	\$16,033	\$13,227
<b><u>Household Income</u></b>		
Average Income	\$40,736	\$49,059
Median Income	\$21,379	\$45,904

According to the figures presented in Table 2 the level of "affordability" for the average household, with income, within census tract 012 (based on the formula that housing costs should not exceed 30% of one's gross income) is

approximately \$1018 per month. Likewise, the level of "affordability" for single males with income would be \$510 and for females with income the figure would be \$653. However, the figures for median income levels reveal that, for half of all downtown households with income, the "affordability" level would be \$534 or less. For half of all the females with income, the "affordability" level would be only \$400 and for males this figure drops to \$269. These figures support the findings of the Housing Needs Research Project, but it should also be noted that these calculations are based on income statistics recorded in the 1991 Census. while the figures for Rental Rates (given in Table 3) are current.

The information provided in Table 3 and Table 4 supports the findings of the Housing Needs Research Project's final report, in that it illustrates two key points in the rental housing market picture in Prince George.<sup>5</sup> The first is that rates for almost every type of rental accommodation in Prince George is rising. The second is that the vacancy rates for almost every type of rental accommodation in Prince George is extremely low, when compared to rates over the past ten years. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (C.M.H.C.) forecasts that several factors will remain in place over the next year which will sustain these conditions of low rental vacancy and rising rental prices. These factors include a modest population growth;

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<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that CMHC figures probably only take into consideration private-market apartments in the downtown area and do not factor in the single resident occupancy hotels (SROs). The Bowl Area referred to in the CMHC statistics (Table 2 and 3) is not synonymous with the downtown core,

employment growth; increases in the student population; low levels of investment in the development of new rental housing units; and mortgage rate levels which might impede first time home-buyers. In total, C.M.H.C. forecasts that the Prince George rental market will remain undersupplied through 1996 (CMHC 1995, 12).

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and instead refers to that area of the city that is within about a 6 km radius of downtown, or approximately 60% of the city as a whole.



**Table 3: Average Rental Rates by Zone - Prince George - April 1994 to April 1995: Privately Owned Structures , Three Units and Over (source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 1995, 13)**

	Bachelor			1 Bedroom			2 Bedroom			3+ Bedroom		
	Apr94	Apr95	% chg	Apr94	Apr95	% chg	Apr94	Apr95	% chg	Apr94	Apr95	% chg
<b>Prince George</b>												
Apartments	\$414	\$422	1.9 %	\$474	\$489	3.2%	\$547	\$575	5.1%	\$573	\$618	7.9%
Rowhouses	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$419	\$447	6.7%	\$566	\$566	0.0%	\$613	\$640	4.4%
Overall	\$414	\$421	1.7 %	\$473	\$489	3.4%	\$2	\$1	4.6%	\$589	\$628	6.6%
<b>Bowl Area Only</b>												
Apartments	\$432	\$446	3.2 %	\$475	\$489	3.2%	\$524	\$553	5.5%	\$579	\$613	5.9%
Rowhouses	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$425	\$450	5.9%	\$551	\$531	-3.6%	\$568	\$630	10.9%
Overall	\$430	\$444	3.3 %	\$472	\$488	3.4%	\$528	\$551	4.4%	\$572	\$624	9.1%

**Table 4: Vacancy Rates By Zone - Prince George - October 1994 to April 1995:  
Privately Owned Rental Structures, Three Units and Over (source: Canada  
Mortgage and Housing Corporation 1995, 13)**

	Bachelor		1 Bedroom		2 Bedroom		3+ Bedroom		TOTAL	
	Oct.94	Apr.95	Oct.94	Apr.95	Oct.94	Apr.95	Oct.94	Apr.95	Oct.94	Apr.95
<b>Prince George</b>										
Apartments	1.5	1.1	2.6	2.6	1.4	0.5	0.9	1.9	1.7	1.4
Rowhouses	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7	3.7	0.8	16.8	8.5	11.5	6.5
Overall	1.5	1.1	2.6	2.7	1.5	0.5	5.9	4.9	2.6	2.1
<b>Bowl Area Only</b>										
Apartments	2.0	1.3	3.3	1.2	1.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.7
Rowhouses	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	3.1	0.0	25.2	21.9	15.8	13.5
Overall	2.0	1.3	3.2	1.4	1.5	0.2	16.7	14.6	4.0	2.5

### 2.3.2. Availability of Services

While downtown Prince George still serves as a commercial centre for the city, particularly with respect to office-commercial, government administration and financial activity, retail activity in Prince George has slowly moved away from downtown, and concentrated around the suburban shopping centres. Of the retail services that have departed from downtown, it is grocery shopping that has had the most significant impact on the residents of downtown and its neighbouring residential areas.

The following is a listing, by type, of the services available in the C.B.D. which might serve to support downtown housing. The numbers preceding each business or service correspond to the map: **Fig. 3: Availability of Services.**

#### *Groceries*

1. *Willy's Deli and Market - Limited selection; convenience shopping; deli counter with prepared foods for eat-in or take-out.*
2. *Pat's News - Convenience store, limited selection.*
3. *Peoples Drug Mart - Limited selection of packaged foods.*
4. *K-Mart - Limited selection of canned and packaged foods.*
5. *Black Forest Deli - Wide selection of deli meats and cheeses; limited selection of canned and packaged foods, mostly imported European specialty items; limited selection of prepared foods for eat-in or take-out.*
6. *Select Delicatessen - Wide selection of deli meats and cheeses; limited selection of canned and packaged foods, mostly European specialty items.*

7. *Pastry Chef Bakery - Full range bakery.*

### ***Pharmacies***

3. *Peoples Drug Mart*
8. *Medicine Centre Pharmacy*

### ***Hardware and Household Items***

9. *The Northern Hardware and Furniture Co.*
10. *McInnis Lighting and Paint*

### ***Banking and Financial Services***

11. *Hong Kong Bank of Canada (Bank of BC)*
12. *Canada Trust*
13. *Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce*
14. *Scotiabank and Trust*
15. *Toronto-Dominion Bank*
16. *Royal Bank of Canada*
17. *Prince George Savings Credit Union*
18. *Bank of Montreal*
19. *Royal Bank of Canada*

### ***Medical Care***

20. *Dr. J. Bosdet (Optometry), Dr. M. Dennis (Optometry), Dr. J. Louie (Optometry)*
21. *Dr. J. Frye (Psychiatry); Dr. R. Hobbs (Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery).*
22. *Dr. G. Deagle (Family Practice); Dr. R. Aoyama (Dentistry)*
23. *Sportsmed North: Dr. J. Ames (Sports Medicine Physician), T. Bell (Physiotherapy), J. Fayer (Physiotherapy), B. Farrance (Orthotics).*

24. *Dr. P. Lo (Optometry) and Dr. D. Chow (Optometry)*
25. *Dr. F. Bosman (Family Practice), Dr. J.B. Burg (General Practice), Dr. R. Geddes (Family Practice)*
26. *Dr. J.A. Killoh (Eye Physician and Surgeon)*
27. *Central Interior Native Health Centre*
28. *Ministry of Health: Adult Forensic Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic.*
29. *Dr. D. Kjørven (Dentistry), Dr. A. Muirhead (Dentistry)*
30. *Dr. C. Rickards (Dentistry)*
31. *Drs. D.A. Waller and D.E. Waller (Dentistry)*
32. *Dr. J. Cochrane (Orthodontistry)*

Since the early 1980s there have been no major grocery stores situated downtown.<sup>6</sup> There are also no plans, in the foreseeable future, for the development of any major grocery stores in the C.B.D. For downtown residents, the closest major grocery store is either the Overwaitea Store at 17th Ave. and Spruce St. (roughly 1.2 km from downtown) or the Overwaitea Store at the Spruceland Mall (about 2.5 km or a 20 minute return bus trip from downtown.<sup>7</sup>

Also since the early 1980s, and with the advent of pharmacies in grocery and department stores and the increased drawing power of national

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6 Safeway, Overwaitea, Extra Foods, and the Real Canadian Superstore all have stores in Prince George, but not in the C.B.D.

7 Based on a trip from the Downtown (4th Ave. and Brunswick Street) transit terminus to the Spruceland terminus. See: Prince George Transit System 1995. *Prince George Rider's Guide - October 1995* Prince George: Prince George Transit System

chain pharmacies (located in the shopping centres), downtown has slowly lost a number of its small independent pharmacies. Prince George has been able to maintain two full dispensing pharmacies in the C.B.D.<sup>8</sup>

While the C.B.D. may be under-served with respect to many types of retail or commercial services, it is more than adequately served by banks and financial institutions.

The downtown area is also quite well served by the medical professions. The Prince George Regional Hospital and the Northern Interior Health Unit are located on the immediate periphery of the C.B.D. at 15th Ave. and Edmonton Street. The Victoria Medical Building (which offers the services of almost every medical specialty, a dispensing pharmacy as well as medical laboratories and radiology) is also on the periphery of downtown, at 17th Ave. and Victoria Street. And the Phoenix Medical Building (which also offers the same range of medical services as the Victoria Medical Building) is situated near the hospital at 10th Ave. and Alward Street.

School District No.57 offers public education from K-12 at King George V Elementary School and Duchess Park Secondary School. Both schools are situated just west of Winnipeg Street at 7th Ave. and both are within easy walking distance of downtown. Students attending grades K-7 may choose to attend Ron Brent Elementary School (also public) located at 17th Ave. and

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<sup>8</sup> As an addendum to this report, it should be noted that as of January 5th, 1996, one of the pharmacies (the Medicine Centre) had gone out of business. As well, one of the general medical practitioners had relocated

Pine Street. School District No.57 also offers continuing education classes at 440 Brunswick St.

The Prince George Public Library is located downtown, at 8th Ave. and Dominion Street, in a public amenities precinct which includes the library, the Prince George Civic Centre, the Four Seasons Pool and the Prince George Coliseum. Plans are underway for the construction of a new Art Gallery in this same area.

There are several recreation facilities and parks located within a short distance of downtown. King George V Elementary School and Ron Brent Elementary School both offer children's playgrounds. The Connaught Youth Centre (located next to Ron Brent Elementary) has a gymnasium, softball diamond, a soccer pitch and a track as well as a variety of youth programs. Duchess Park Secondary also has a large general purpose field. Connaught Hill Park, situated immediately south of Patricia Boulevard and City Hall is a one-of-a-kind recreation spot which offers a panoramic view of the city in summer and tobogganing in the winter. Nearby Fort George Park offers a full range of children's playground equipment, a concert bandstand for summer events and picnicking areas. The Fraser Fort George Regional Museum is located at Fort George Park, and the Prince George Folkfest is held in the park every summer. Fort George Park is also the halfway point on the Heritage Trails system. The Heritage Trail is an almost continuous set of trails,

maintained in a natural state, which follow the portion of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers which pass through the city.

Downtown Prince George serves as a terminus for the Prince George Transit System. Regularly scheduled buses travel in several directions from the core, and service all of the major shopping centres, all three pulp mills, the College of New Caledonia and the University of Northern British Columbia. It typically takes 10 minutes by bus from downtown to the College of New Caledonia, and a further 18 minutes to the University of Northern BC (28 minutes in total, one way). Currently, there is not a direct bus route between the University and downtown. Riders are able to make the transfer to the University Bus at either the College, Spruceland Mall or the Pine Centre Mall, each of which is served directly from downtown. The present rate for an adult fare is \$1.25, or \$44.00 monthly. The present rate for a student or senior fare is \$1.00, or \$32 monthly.



### 3. INVENTORY OF UNDERUTILIZED UPPER STOREYS

#### 3.1. Identification of Underutilized Spaces

In undertaking this survey of underutilized upper storey space in Prince George, the term "underutilized" was considered as broadly as possible. In addition, the details of all the single-resident occupancy hotels and multiple unit apartment buildings in the downtown area have been included in this survey to complete the picture of residential land use in the core area.

In total, thirty three buildings within the study boundary fit the necessary requirements for inclusion in this survey. The location of these buildings may be found in the section to follow: **Maps and Indices: Fig. 2: Vacant or Underutilized.** The detailed summary of findings, including a picture of each building may be found in the section to follow: **Downtown Survey of Underutilized Spaces.**

The Downtown Survey of Underutilized Spaces identified thirty-three buildings within the study area which fit the criteria for the study - that they represent buildings with vacant or underutilized upper-storey space, potential residential capacity, and/or heritage characteristics. Of these thirty three buildings, six were found to have better than average potential for conversion from commercial to residential use (on the upper storey). These six buildings include:

*The Silver Spruce Building* (31)  
*The Prudente Building* (13)

*Topper's Cleaners* (28)  
*Zellers* (9)  
*The Caine Building* (5)  
*Zombie's Pizza* (30)

*Numbers in brackets are reference numbers for  
(Core Study) Appendix A: Fig.2: Vacant or  
Underutilized*

It was the opinion of the local project researcher, the local project coordinator and the Housing Committee that the Silver Spruce Building (see **Maps and Indices: Figure 2, Reference no.31**) and the Prudente Block (see **Maps and Indices: Figure 2, Reference no.13**) offered the greatest potential for conversion, and therefore warranted a more detailed analysis.

The Silver Spruce Building was selected because its original use had been residential, and because conversion back to residential would seem to offer the fewest difficulties.

The Prudente Block was chosen because of its architectural character and its open plan construction. Although the upper floor was recently leased to a dance school, this space has been underutilized for many years. It may be interesting to note that the current tenants have living quarters on the upper storey in conjunction with their dance school. The Prudente Block offers a good representation of what some of the typical problems associated with conversion might be.

### 3.2. Cost Estimate

Mr. Fergus Foley, P.Eng. was asked to prepare and submit a more detailed examination of the Silver Spruce Building and the Prudente Block. His findings may be found in the section to follow: **Cost Estimate for the Conversion of Buildings from Commercial to Residential Use.**

The findings of Mr. Foley's report may be summarized as follows. While the Silver Spruce Building would require a lower overall investment in order to convert the building back to its original residential use, the building would probably only allow for the creation of four 2-bedroom apartments. The cost per unit in the Silver Spruce Building is estimated to be \$35,250, or \$48.82 per square foot. For the Prudente Block, where the existing structure would allow for the creation of 6 residential units (bachelor apartments), the cost per unit for conversion is estimated to be \$33,833 or \$75.18. The difference between these two estimates reflects the cost of the additional fire separation required in the Prudente Block. It should also be noted that conversion of the upper storey of the Prudente Block would create a disturbance to the retail operations below. This would not be a concern with the Silver Spruce Building as the building is completely vacant.

## **4. IMPEDIMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### **4.1. Impediments**

Although this survey did find several buildings with a potential for conversion, there are many factors which limit the overall convertibility of most buildings from commercial to residential use in downtown Prince George. Some of these impediments include:

#### **Upgrading to meet Residential Building Codes**

Almost all of the buildings surveyed would not meet fire separation codes for mixed residential and commercial use. Some of the buildings surveyed would be nearly impossible to upgrade, and others would present difficulties where the construction of fire separation between structures (to a residential code) is concerned. Some buildings surveyed could be upgraded, but the conversion process would seriously upset businesses on the ground level during the period of renovation.

#### **Commercial Rents v. Residential Rents**

Although the vacancy rate for commercial space is generally higher, at the moment, than the residential vacancy rate, most landlords are reluctant to give up the commercial potential of their buildings. One of the main reasons for this resistance would be that commercial tenants are seen as being more stable, renting for a longer term, and requiring less maintenance.

Despite the discrepancy between the demand for commercial and residential units, the price for commercial rents in downtown Prince George typically start at around \$1 per square foot per month.<sup>9</sup> A comparison with the few residential apartments which are located in the downtown suggests that commercial space, converted to residential use, would typically provide landlords with 10-20% less revenue.

#### **Lack of Heritage Character:**

Although many of the buildings surveyed for this study have outlasted their commercial viability, their original architectural design and construction or social significance are not of a sufficiently high quality to warrant preservation on the basis of heritage character alone. It would seem that most landlords with these outmoded buildings are looking toward the day when the property values for the land underneath their buildings will be sufficiently high to warrant demolition and redevelopment.

#### **Structural or Construction Limitations**

Some of the buildings surveyed for this study, more specifically those built after the mid-1950s, present a particular limitation to conversion. For the most part these are buildings of a concrete block construction, which typically have few or no windows on the upper storey, or conversely have

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<sup>9</sup> This study found commercial rents to be highly subjective, and could fluctuate according to the terms of the lease, the duration of the lease, and the requirements of the tenant. Generally, however, the asking price was found to be \$1 per square foot per month.

windows along all of one wall. A good example is the J.C. Funland building (see **Downtown Survey of Underutilized Spaces**).

#### **4.2. Opportunities**

The opportunities for the conversion of buildings from commercial to residential use are much less apparent than the impediments in the downtown core. For the foreseeable future, the opportunities for residential construction or conversion will be tied to the high demand (low vacancy rates) for rental market, special needs (accessible, or tailored to a specific user group) and non-market (low-cost) housing. As already discussed, construction aimed at meeting these demands will be tempered by economic conditions, government involvement, and the overall ability of the developer to create housing that is affordable.

## **5. POTENTIAL FINANCIAL MECHANISMS**

There are a limited number of mechanisms available which could assist in making downtown upper storey housing viable. In most cases, and for political reasons, these mechanisms differ slightly between groups wishing to develop non-market housing and private developers. Typically, these mechanisms include:

### **Comprehensive Development Zoning**

This type of zoning provides local government with the flexibility to negotiate with developers and customize zoning regulations to suit specific projects and achieve a greater degree of affordable housing and site amenities in projects.

### **Housing Agreements**

These agreements are entered into by the developer and the local government, are registered, and can serve to secure a supply of affordable housing for specified residents.

### **Standards of Maintenance Bylaws**

Local government may choose to adopt standards of maintenance bylaws to address the deteriorating condition of many buildings in the downtown area, and help to improve the condition of rental market housing downtown.

### **Leasing/Selling Municipal Land Below Market Value**

The City has the option to assemble and bank land, and then to turn that land over to groups or individuals wishing to develop housing. This mechanism for lowering land costs is one which is open to both private and non-market developers, however to qualify, private developers would likely have to demonstrate that their projects were affordable.

One of the recommendations of the Housing Needs Research Project Final Report (1993) was that the city initiate long term leases for land at specific sites in the city at 75% of market value for the development of non-market housing. At the present time, one group - Active Support Against Poverty (ASAP) - is looking into developing one of the City's lots in the downtown area for an emergency shelter. Over the long term, this sort of land leasing arrangement for affordable housing will require the addition of more land. It is uncertain whether the City is specifically interested in seeking additional land for this purpose.

### **Waiving Municipal Land Development Fees**

It has been the City's experience that many non-profit housing societies and non-market housing groups do not have the money to pay for off-site servicing costs, development fees, cost charges, permit fees, connection fees etc. at the time of initial approval and construction of their projects. Often these groups make a request to Council to have these development charges waived. The City is aware of the potential for inequality if non-market



housing societies or groups are treated differently than private developers in providing non-market housing, and of the burden on taxpayers if development expenses are waived. Therefore, Council is considering amendments to its various bylaws which would allow the City to grant deferments for development fees for non-market housing projects by either non-profit societies and private developers. Cost deferments could be granted for either a set period of time, or until the development reaches an agreed upon rate of occupancy.

## 6. COMMUNITY DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

### 6.1. Feasible Buildings for Conversion

After an exhaustive search for every building in the downtown core which might fit the study criteria and offer possibilities for residential use in vacant or underutilized upper storey space, 33 examples of such buildings were found. Further investigation found about half a dozen buildings which offered better than average conversion potential, and two buildings which offer some real potential for conversion. These two buildings were used for the cost estimate of conversion (see: **Cost Estimate for the Conversion of Buildings from Commercial to Residential Use**).

In the final analysis, there are several aspects of the Prince George market that would affect the feasibility of a residential conversion, and which could offer difficulties to any residential conversion demonstration project. Notwithstanding, these elements are for the most part overt and may be remedied or mitigated with the right sort of redevelopment initiative and, as always, the right degree of financial and political support.

For the most part, the difficulties of the Prince George market in this respect comes down to a case of inertia. As already discussed, although there is a discrepancy between both residential and commercial rents and the demand for residential and commercial units, this discrepancy is perhaps not significant enough (from the landowner's perspective) to warrant the conversion of a building from commercial to residential use. This problem

may be compounded by the fact that while demand for residential space is higher, the supply of good commercial space is also limited and, at least in the foreseeable future, landowners are fairly optimistic about the opportunities for finding commercial tenants. As well, landowners seem to hold the opinion that buildings with commercial leases require less day to day management than those with residential leases.

Solutions to these problems are to be found through innovation. The uncertainty of both the commercial and the residential markets in Prince George requires that any proposals for residential conversion must be able to demonstrate a thorough consideration and mitigation of the risks associated with conversion. If a proposal is able to show that it has addressed and reduced the risks and uncertainties associated with conversion, then a landowner with a building suitable for conversion may soon emerge. One possible solution to this problem might be the establishment of co-operation agreements between landowners and non-profit housing societies. If these societies could share in the costs of conversion, guarantee tenancy (an income stream) for the landowner, and relieve the landowner of at least some of the burden of management then the risks and uncertainties are greatly diminished for the landowner.

## 6.2. Possible Future Contacts:

The following is a list of some of the individuals, committees, organizations or groups involved in the provision of non-market housing in Prince George.

*Active Support Against Poverty (ASAP)*  
300, 1268 - 7th Ave.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 3L2

*AimHi-Prince George  
Association for Community Living*  
201 - 1268 5th Ave.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 3L2

*Alzheimer Society*  
Box 2864, Station B  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 4T7

*BC Housing Management Corporation*  
1539 - 11th Ave.  
Prince George, BC  
V2N 3S6

*BC Paraplegic Assoc.*  
777 Kinsmen Place  
Prince George, BC  
V2M 6Y7

*Brain Injured Group*  
Box 1775  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 4V7

*Hart Pioneer Society*  
6986 Hart Highway  
Prince George, BC  
V2K 3AS

*Ministry of Health*  
1444 Edmonton St.  
Prince George, BC  
V2M 6W5

*Ministry of Social Services*  
707 - 299 Victoria St.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 5B8

*Multiple Sclerosis Society*  
490 Quebec St.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 5N5

*Native Friendship Centre*  
144 George St.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 1P9

*Northern Assoc. of Injured Workers*  
490 Quebec St.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 5N5

*Para-Med Services*  
203 - 556 North Nechako Rd.  
Prince George, BC  
V2K 1A1

*Phoenix Transition Society*  
1770 - 11th Ave.  
Prince George, BC  
V2M 3S8

*Prince George Activator Soc.*  
770 - 2nd Ave.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 3A3

*PG Aids Society*  
1371 - 4th Ave.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 3J6

*PG Child Development Centre*  
1687 Strathcona Ave.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 4E7

*PG Metis Housing Society*  
201 - 2414 Queensway St.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 2R4

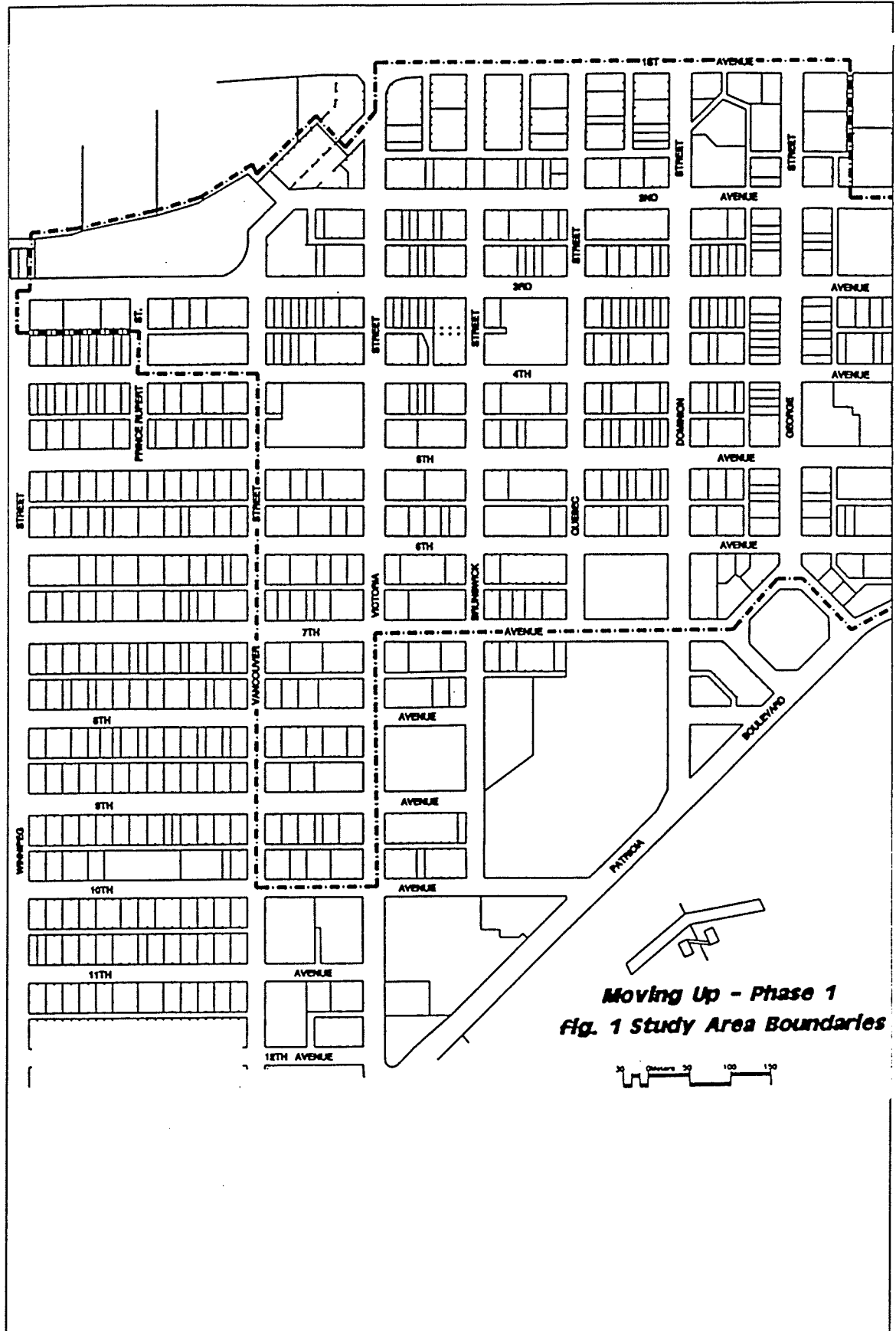
*PG Regional Community Care Soc.*  
240 - 1552 S. Lyon St.  
Prince George, BC  
V2N 1T2

*Receiving Home Society*  
1777 Yew St.  
Prince George, BC  
V2M 3S8

*The Salvation Army*  
835 - 3rd Ave.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 3C7

*Youth Housing Registry*  
1306 - 7th Ave.  
Prince George, BC  
V2L 3P1

## 7. MAPS AND INDICES

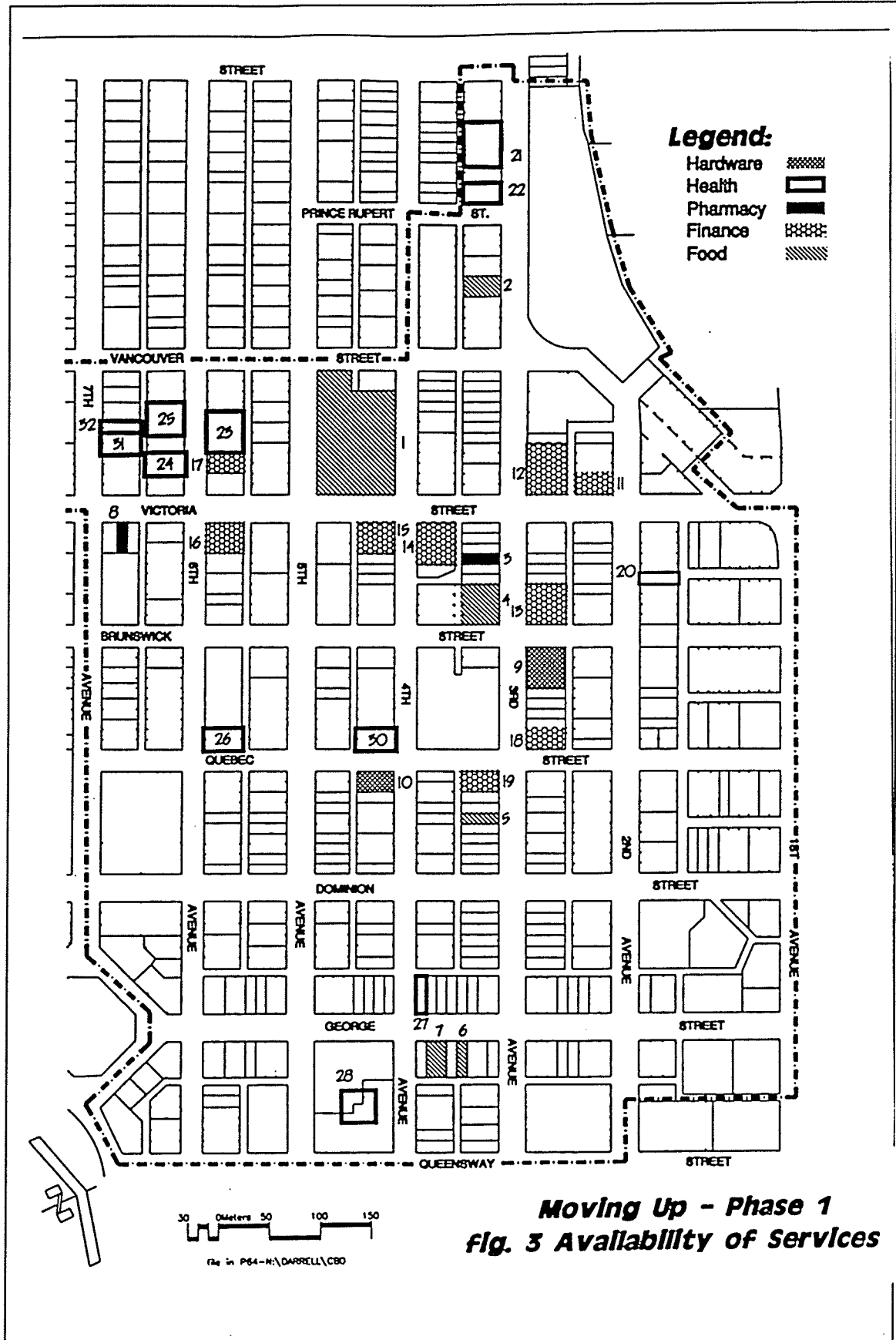




**INDEX TO FIG. 2: UNDERUTILIZED SPACES**

1. National Hotel
2. Winterland Ski
3. Bi-Rite Furniture
4. Prince George Bakery
5. Caine Building
6. Executive Business Centre
7. London Hotel
8. W.D. West
9. Zellers
10. Columbus Hotel
11. Royal Cleaners
12. Gundy's News
13. Prudente Block
14. Spruce City Resale
15. Mr. John's School of Hairdressing
16. SP Industries
17. Assman Block
18. Baycrest Apartments
19. Spruce Capital Hotel
20. Central Hotel
21. Premier Hotel
22. (Former) City Second Hand
23. Fichtner Footwear
24. Shasta Holdings/Nick's Place
25. Vahlas Holdings
26. Villa Roma
27. JC Funland
28. Topper's Cleaners
29. Mosquito Books
30. Zombie's Pizza
31. Silver Spruce Building
32. Crestwood Apartments
33. Croft Hotel





### INDEX TO FIG. 3: AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES

1. Willy's Deli and Market
2. Pat's News
3. Peoples Drug Mart
4. K-Mart
5. Black Forest Deli
6. Select Delicatessen
7. Pastry Chef Bakery
8. Medicine Centre Pharmacy
9. The Northern Hardware and Furniture Co.
10. McInnis Lighting and Paint
11. Hong Kong Bank of Canada (Bank of BC)
12. Canada Trust
13. Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
14. Scotiabank and Trust
15. Toronto-Dominion Bank
16. Royal Bank of Canada
17. Prince George Savings Credit Union
18. Bank of Montreal
19. Royal Bank of Canada
20. Dr. J. Bosdet (Optometry),  
Dr. M. Dennis (Optometry),  
Dr. J. Louie (Optometry)
21. Dr. J. Frye (Psychiatry);  
Dr. R. Hobbs  
(Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery).
22. Dr. G. Deagle (Family Practice);  
Dr. R. Aoyama (Dentistry)
23. Sportsmed North:  
Dr. J. Ames (Sports Medicine Physician),  
T. Bell (Physiotherapy),  
J. Fayer (Physiotherapy),  
B. Farrance (Orthotics).
24. Dr. P. Lo (Optometry),  
Dr. D. Chow (Optometry)
25. Dr. F. Bosman (Family Practice),  
Dr. J.B. Burg (General Practice),  
Dr. R. Geddes (Family Practice)
26. Dr. J.A. Killoh (Eye Physician and Surgeon)
27. Central Interior Native Health Centre
28. Ministry of Health: Adult Forensic Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic.
29. Dr. D. Kjorven (Dentistry),  
Dr. A. Muirhead (Dentistry)\*
30. Dr. C. Rickards (Dentistry)
31. Dr. D.A. Waller, (Dentistry)  
Dr. D.E. Waller (Dentistry)
32. Dr. J. Cochrane (Orthodontistry)

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\* For reasons of size, scale and clarity, Fig. 3: Availability of Services. does not include the part of the study area south of 7th Ave. The offices of Drs. Kjorven and Muirhead (Ref. No. 29; located on 8th Ave., between Victoria St. and Vancouver St.) are not represented in Fig. 3.

**8. COST ESTIMATE FOR THE CONVERSION OF BUILDINGS FROM COMMERCIAL TO  
RESIDENTIAL USE**



207-1527 3RD AVENUE, PRINCE GEORGE, B.C.  
PHONE (604) 562-9345 V2L 3G3  
FAX (604) 563-4878

Planning Department  
City of Prince George  
1100 Patricia Blvd.  
Prince George, B.C.  
V2L 3V9

Jan. 8, 1996

Attention: Mathew Baldwin  
Kent Sedgwick

Dear Sirs,

**RE: DOWNTOWN PRINCE GEORGE, UPPER STOREY  
HOUSING STUDY**

As requested by you I, accompanied by Mathew Baldwin, visited two sites in the downtown core of Prince George. These sites are two existing commercial buildings that have potential for conversion of under utilized space on the upper floor for residential use. Mathew had identified these after noting each multi-storey building in the downtown core. He had further decided that the greatest demand in the core is for bachelor or single bedroom units for single people or couples. It was felt that these converted units would probably not be family orientated.

**BUILDING SITE #1: PRUDENTE BLOCK**  
1205 Third Ave at Dominion St.

This building is a two storey over basement building. The upper storey contains a dance studio and apartment. The main floor has a restaurant and a shoe repair store. The basement has a dance studio, storage and mechanical space. The building has a flat roof which was recently renewed. The walls are wood framed with stucco siding. There are two stair wells. One goes to Third Ave. at the front of the building and the second discharges onto Dominion Street.

The major items to upgrade in the building would be the electrical service, the installation of a firewall on the property line and the installation of an extra layer of gyproc on the lower floor ceiling and walls to increase the fire separation from a 1 hour to a 2 hour fire rating, due to 'A' and 'E' occupancies on the main floor and the proposed 'C' occupancy on the top floor.

I would suggest that the upper floor could be converted to about 6 bachelor units of approximately 450 square feet each.

I would suggest the following prices for the conversion:

1) Mobilization	10, 000
Upgrade top floor	100, 000
Upgrade main floor	15, 000
Upgrade electrical service	10, 000
New firewall	30, 000
Fire alarm	3, 000
Professional services	15, 000
Contingency	<u>20, 000</u>
	<b>\$203,000</b>

**BUILDING SITE #2:** 1448 Sixth Ave., Prince George, B.C.

The original building was a 2 1/2 storey wood frame building approximately 38'-0" x 38'-0" (1444 sq. ft.). In 1975 the building was extensively renovated and a 31'-0" x 14'-0" (434 sq. ft.) extension on the main floor was added. The building was fitted with a mansard roof at this time, but this was later removed and the exterior walls were then stuccoed. The building was originally a 6 unit apartment which means that conversion back to apartments is feasible.

The easiest conversion would be back to two - two bedroom apartments on each floor. However 4 bachelor units would probably be more appropriate for the current market conditions. I am assuming both upper floors will be converted. The main problems would be reintroducing more plumbing into the building and rehabilitating both the interior stairway and the exterior stairway at the rear. As the building is not very sound proof I would suggest inserting a layer of gyproc and soundbar on each floor.

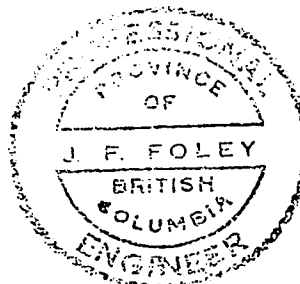
I would suggest the following prices for the conversion:

2) Mobilization	10, 000
Upgrade upper floors	94, 000
Upgrade electrical service	10, 000
Fire alarm	3, 000
Professional services	12, 000
Contingency	<u>12, 000</u>
	<b>\$141,000</b>

I trust the above is what you require. If you have any further inquiries or questions please do not hesitate to call me.

Yours Truly,  
ACCESS ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS LTD.

*Fergus Foley P.Eng.*  
Fergus Foley, P.Eng.

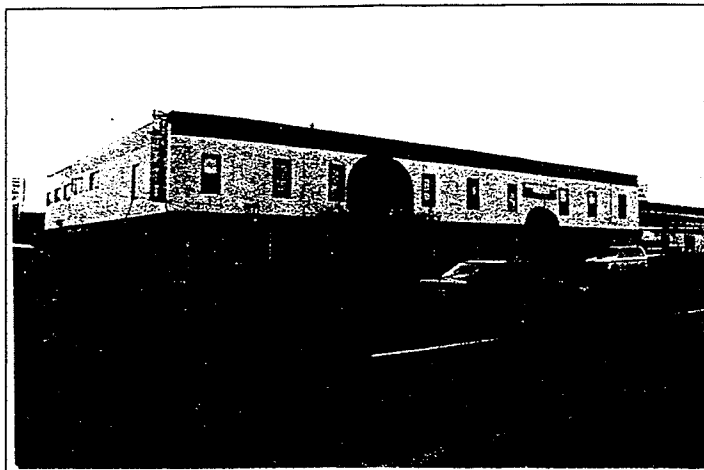


## 9. DOWNTOWN SURVEY OF UNDERUTILIZED SPACES

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 1



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> National Hotel	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-332-529
<b>Street Address:</b> 1201 1st Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 2Y7	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00413-000/3
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 1-3; Block 21; D/L:343; Pl:1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> A Thun Holdings Ltd. and Thunderstruck Holdings
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 913,500	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1201 1st Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 2Y7

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Hotel
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> c. 1922-1923 National Hotel	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b>
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Willis W. Riley
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Barbershop, Restaurant, Pub, Hotel Lobby on 2nd - Rooms	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b>
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> External fire escape

### Design and Condition

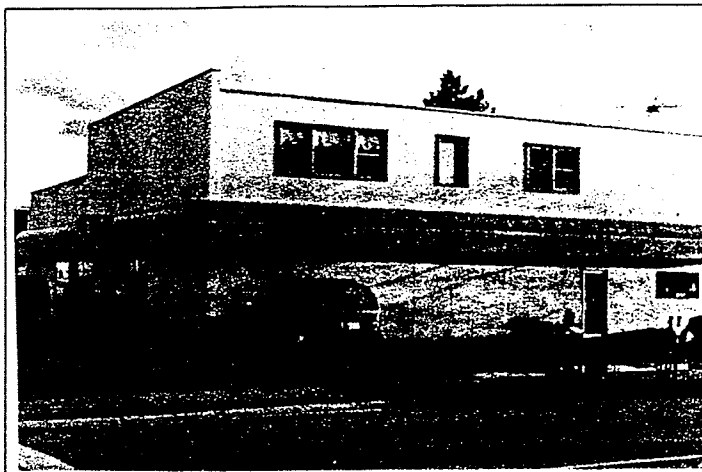
<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Wood (upper) and brick vener (lower)	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Rooms off of central hallway	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 33.6 m (1st Ave); 27.5 m (Dominion St.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 550 sq. m	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 4 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** This building was renovated and added on to in the mid-1970s and renovated again in the mid- late 1980s

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 2



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Winterland Ski	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 006-257-780
<b>Street Address:</b> 1191 1st Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 2Y6	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-0453-00/3
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 13-15; Block 22; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> National Ski Experts
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 235,400	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1191 1st Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 2Y6

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1956 Retail Commercial	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 1
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 1 (partial 2nd)	<b>Original Owner:</b> Harold Hatch Rush Transfer Ltd.
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Retail 2nd - Store offices	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase from Dominion St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> see above

### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry
<b>Cladding:</b> none	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 23 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 250 sq. m	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 4 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:



## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 3



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Bi-Rite Furniture	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-535-977
<b>Street Address:</b> 200-230 Victoria St. Prince George, BC V2L 2J4	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00944-00/7
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 1-2; Block 46; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Powar Holdings
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 616,000	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1497 Freeman St. Prince George, BC V2M 5T8

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail and Office Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1965 Eaton's Furniture and Catalog Store Gov't of BC Land Registry Office	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 2
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> T. Eaton Ltd. (?)
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Retail Furniture Main - Land Surveyor's Office 2nd - Retail Furniture 2nd - Storage	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off Victoria St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> External staircase onto parking lot

### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple concrete block of no particular style.	<b>Structural Material:</b> Steel columns; glulam beams; wood floors; load-bearing masonry walls.
<b>Cladding:</b> Some stucco and metal sheathing on upper portion.	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan with internal partitions	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 36.8 m (Victoria St.); 18.4 m (2nd Ave.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 540 sq. m	<b>General Condition:</b> good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 3 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 4



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Prince George Bakery	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-495-983
<b>Street Address:</b> 1341-75 2nd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3B4	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00925-000/6
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 4-7; Block 45; D/L 343; Pl.1268 & Pcl A of Lot 5 & 6 (27704M & 27705M)	<b>Current Owner:</b> Prince George Bakery Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 425,000	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1375 2nd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3B4

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Commercial (Vacant)
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> pre 1942 * Retail Bakery	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 0
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 1 1/2; partial 2nd	<b>Original Owner:</b> Wm. Allen Prince George Bakery Ltd.
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Vacant	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> see above

### Design and Condition

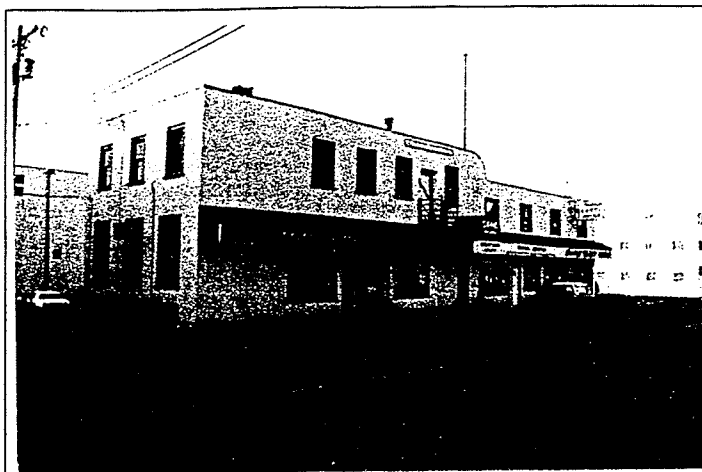
<b>Design:</b> Amalgamated buildings and additions. Industrial purpose.	<b>Structural Material:</b> Concrete block; some brick; some wood frame and masonry
<b>Cladding:</b> Brick veneer (front); unclad (rear)	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Amalgamated rooms and buildings	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 36.8 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 5 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \* This building is an amalgamation of buildings, additions and renovations developed over many years to meet the needs of one particular business - a commercial/retail bakery.

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 5



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Caine Building	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-483-390
<b>Street Address:</b> 1313 2nd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 1W3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00933-000/8
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 10; Block 45; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Caine, Robt. G. et. al.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$198,000	<b>Owner Address:</b> c/o: 11-245 Quebec St. Prince George, BC V2L 1W3

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail and Office Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1919 as Bank of Montreal* 1955 as Caine Building 3 Retail shops on main 14 Offices on 2nd floor	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 4
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Bank of Montreal / Caine Lumber Co. Ltd.
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Beauty Salon Main - Women's Resource Centre Main - Goldsmith, Jeweller 2nd - Mortgage Financing Business	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b>
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off Quebec St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Steel fire escape onto Quebec St.

### Design and Condition

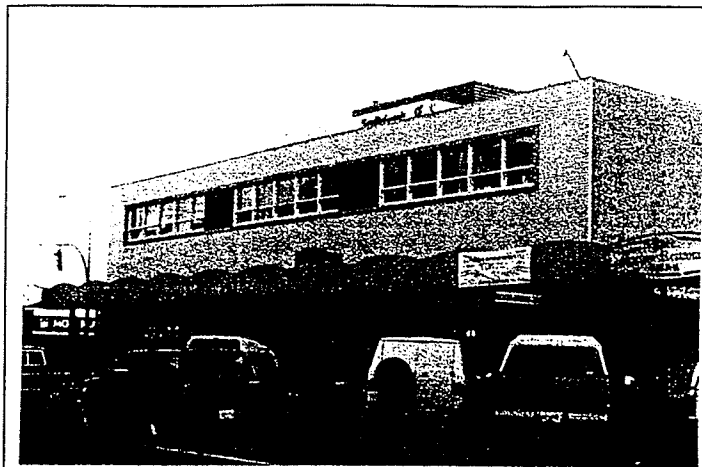
<b>Design:</b> 1950s simple wood modern	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough cast stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> -14 separate offices off of central hallway on upper storey.	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m (2nd Ave.); 33.6 m (Quebec St.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 260 sq. m	<b>General Condition:</b> Fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 6 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \* The core of this building is the original Bank of Montreal building (built 1919). The old bank was sold, and moved 1/2 block north and substantially added to, and renovated in 1951.

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 6



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Executive Business Center	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 013-015-575
<b>Street Address:</b> 1511-1527 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3G3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02879-000/3
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 7; Block 130; D/L 343; P1.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Seven Holdings Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 283,300	<b>Owner Address:</b> 852 Seymour St. Vancouver, BC V6B 3L6

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail and Office Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1958 F.W. Woolworth Building Retail on main floor Commercial Offices on 2nd	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 8
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> F.W. Woolworth Co. Ltd.
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Retail 2nd - Office Commercial	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b>
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off 3rd Ave.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase onto Victoria St.

### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Steel frame, non-load bearing masonry
<b>Cladding:</b> Brick Veneer/Rough Cast Stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan with partitions	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m (3rd Ave)/33.6 m (Victoria St.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 270 sq. m	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 2 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 7



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> London Hotel	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 012-648-761
<b>Street Address:</b> 1479 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3G1	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-2899-000/3
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 3; Block 131; D/L 363; Plan 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Gabrielle, Warren E. and Gabrielle, D'arcy A.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$158,100	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1479 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3G1

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Residential Apartments
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> c. 1915* Hotel	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 25 units (full occupancy)
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Charles Gabriele, Nick Gabriele
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Retail; Hotel Lobby 2nd - Rooms	<b>Heritage Status:</b> Potential
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase through lobby
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> External wooden staircase

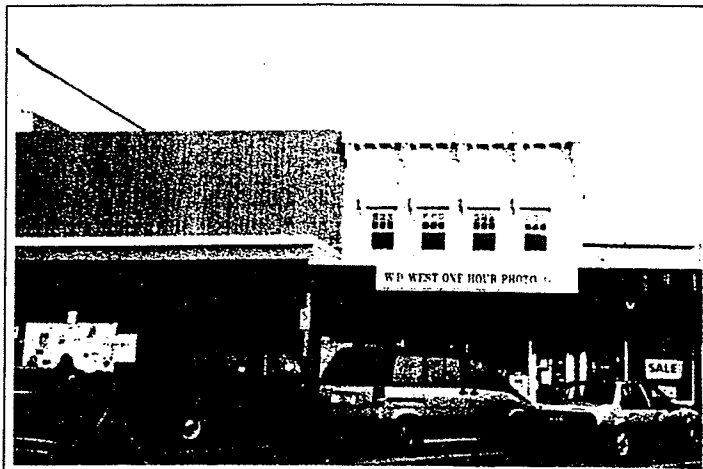
### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple wood frame	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Wood	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> unknown	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> poor
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 3 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \* This building was moved from the townsite of Central Fort George to its present location in about 1915. It was most likely constructed prior to 1915.

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 8

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> WD West	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-480-498
<b>Street Address:</b> 1364 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E9	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00939-000/2
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 16; Block 45; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> 437670 BC Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 113,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1386 Hemlock St. Prince George, BC V2C-1H6

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1923 Pitman Music*	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 1
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Wm. J. Pitman
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Photography shop 2nd - Photography studio	<b>Heritage Status:</b> Potential
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Wooden fire escape to laneway

**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> Simple wood frame, false front	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Wood	<b>Roof Type:</b> Patent asphalt
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 92 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 1 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \*This building was added to in 1958 and renovated and significantly improved within the last ten years.

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 9



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Zellers	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 013-018-230
<b>Street Address:</b> 1303 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E8	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02922-000/9
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot A; Block 132; D/L 343; P1.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Zellers Inc. c/o: Hudson's Bay Co. Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 3,000,000	<b>Owner Address:</b> 401 Bay St. Ste. 600 Toronto, ONT M5H 2Y4

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial (Vacant)
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> Stage 1: 1956 Stage 2: 1959 Stage 3: 1966 Hudson's Bay Retail Store (Basement, Main and 2nd Floors)	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 0
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2 with full basement	<b>Original Owner:</b> Hudson's Bay Co. Ltd. 401 Bay St. Ste. 600
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Vacant	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a*
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircases
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircases

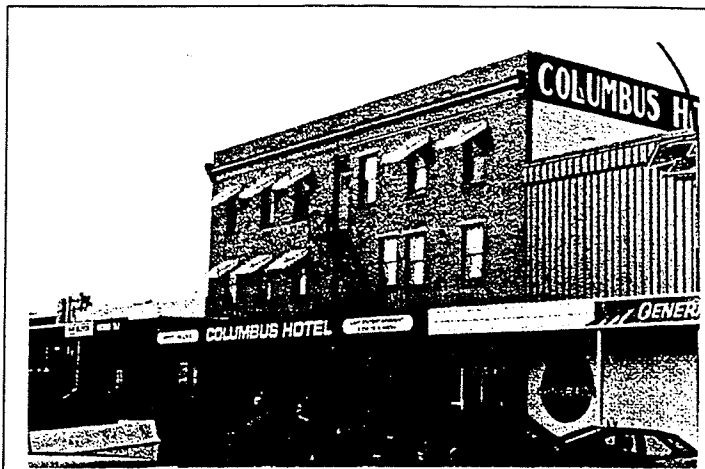
### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> 3 stages of building amalgamated to form one simple block.	<b>Structural Material:</b> Stage 1: Steel frame, wood floors Stage 2: Steel and masonry Stage 3: Reinforced Concrete
<b>Cladding:</b> Brick and Tile Veneer	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 74 m (3rd Ave.); 33.6 m (Quebec St.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 6680 sq. m / 72,000 sq. ft.	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 6 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \* This building has been for sale for the last year. Finding a buyer interested in the whole building seems to be a problem.

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 10

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Columbus Hotel	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-486-691
<b>Street Address:</b> 1250 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E7	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00915-000/6
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 15-16; Block 44; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Columbus Hotel (1991) Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 770,400	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1250 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E7

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Hotel
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1922-27 Columbia */ Columbus Hotel	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 30 units
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 3	<b>Original Owner:</b> Louis Zimmaro
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Beer Parlour, Hotel Lobby - 2nd - Rooms 3rd - Rooms	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> \$475/mo.
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase through lobby
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> 3 Steel fire escapes (1 front; 2 rear)

**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry
<b>Cladding:</b> Brick Veneer (front); part. vinyl clad (rear)	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Individual rooms off central hall	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 18.4 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> Fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 5 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other: \* 1938 Fire Underwriter's Map listed this building as the Columbia Hotel.



## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 11



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Royal Cleaners	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-481-796
<b>Street Address:</b> 1222 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E7	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00912-000/9
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 12; Block 44; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Wilchek, P.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 157,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1222 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E7

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial/Residential
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1934 Dry Cleaning Business	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 1
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Kasmer Wilchek
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Dry Cleaner (plant on-site) 2nd - Proprietor's residence	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase through business
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> see above

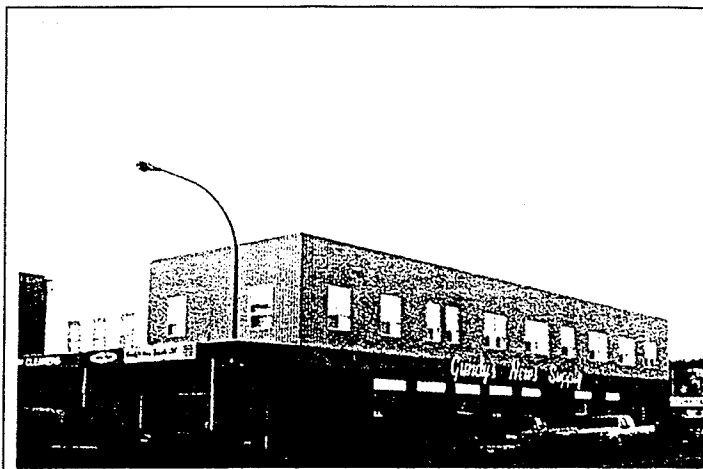
### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame and masonry
<b>Cladding:</b> Brick veneer	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> n/a	<b>General Condition:</b> Fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 1 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 12

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Gundy's News	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-495-843
<b>Street Address:</b> 1210 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E7	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00911-000/0
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 11; Block 44; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Streckenbach, Harry and Streckenbach, Doris
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 296,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1210 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E7

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> pre 1949 K.O Andeson Building Bank of Nova Scotia (Main) Law Offices and Medical Clinic (2nd)	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 2
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Karl Anderson
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Gundy's News, Magazines and Books 2nd - Maximus Photo Studios	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase from 3rd Ave.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase to Dominion St.

**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Brick veneer and corrugated steel siding	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 92 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 270 sq. m	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 5 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 13



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Prudente Block	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 012-023-284
<b>Street Address:</b> 1205 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 1T6	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02949-000/2
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 10; Block 133; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Patym Holdings (Paul Tyntsichin)
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 186,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> 335 Dominion St. Prince George, BC V2L 1T6

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1948-49 Office Commercial and retail block	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 3
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Giuseppe Prudente
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main (front) - Cafe/Restaurant Main (side) - Shoe repair shop 2nd - Dance Studio and Residential Suite	<b>Heritage Status:</b> Potential
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> (upper floor) \$1500/mo for 3300 sq ft.
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal Staircase from 3rd Ave. and Dominion St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> See above

### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple modern block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Steel and Wood Joists
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough cast stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m (3rd Ave.); 33.6 m (Dominion St.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 306 sq. m / 3300 sq. ft. on upper floor	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 8 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 14

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Spruce City Resale	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 015-974-511
<b>Street Address:</b> 1245-47 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E6	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02946-000/5
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 7; Block 133; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Lamoureux, R.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 103,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> 4080 Prudente Rd. Prince George, BC V1H 1B6

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1924 The Shearer Building Retail on Main Masonic Lodge on 2nd	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 1
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Fred J. Shearer F.J. Shearer Ltd.
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Retail Second hand 2nd - storage	<b>Heritage Status:</b> Potential
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off 3rd Ave.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> see above

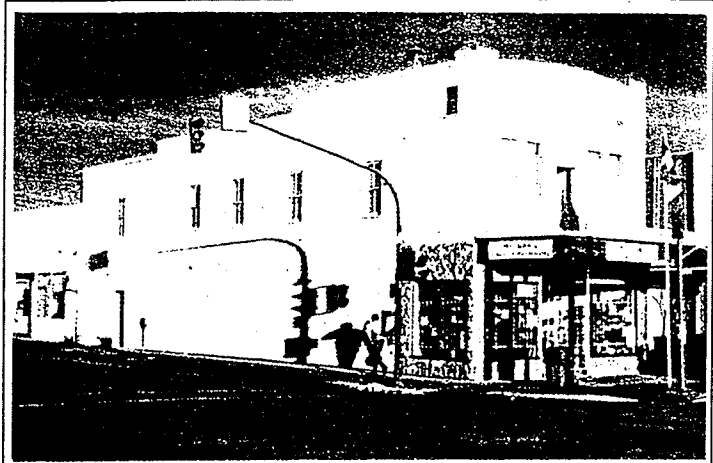
**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> False front style	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Wood Clapboard	<b>Roof Type:</b> Patent asphalt
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 92m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 250 sq. m	<b>General Condition:</b> fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 4 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 15

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Mr. John's School of Hairdressing	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-481-788
<b>Street Address:</b> 1190 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E5	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00894-000/8
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 14; Block 43; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Mr. John's School of Hairdressing
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 182,500	<b>Owner Address:</b> 614- 1488 4th Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 4Y2

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail and Office Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> c. 1915 or earlier Home Furnishers Hardware Co. Retail Hardware and Furniture. Commercial Offices (2nd)	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 3
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Unknown. Perhaps: Jake Leith, Prop. Home Furnishers Hardware
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Hairdressing School Main - Cafe 2nd - Christian Life Centre/Church	<b>Heritage Status:</b> Potential
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Interla staircase from Dominion St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> see above

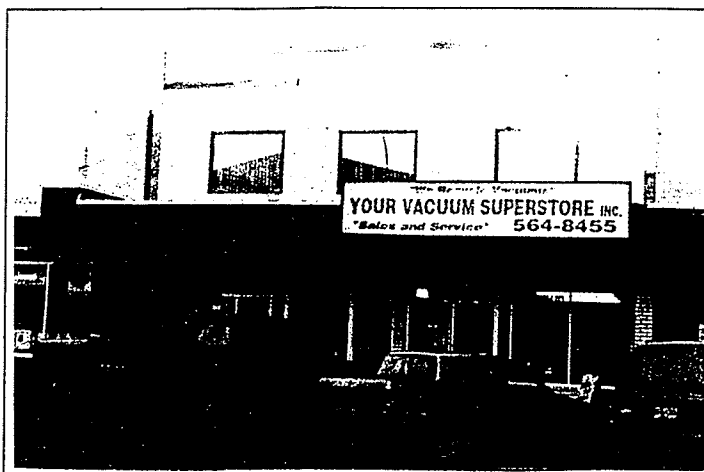
**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough cast stucco (front); wood siding (rear and east wall, upper storey)	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Partitioned	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m (3rd Ave.); 33.6 m (Dominion St.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> Fair - Upgraded 1994
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 4 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 16

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> SP Industries	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-481-761
<b>Street Address:</b> 1150-54 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E5	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00891-000/1
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 11; Block 43; D/L:343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Uppal, R et. al.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 209,100	<b>Owner Address:</b> 3824 Grace Cres. Prince George, BC V2N 4N5

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1976 Edelweis Ski Haus	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 3
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Edelwies Ski Haus Ltd.
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Tailor Shop Main - Retail Vacuum Sales 2nd - SP industries	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off 3rd Ave.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase onto laneway

**Design and Condition**

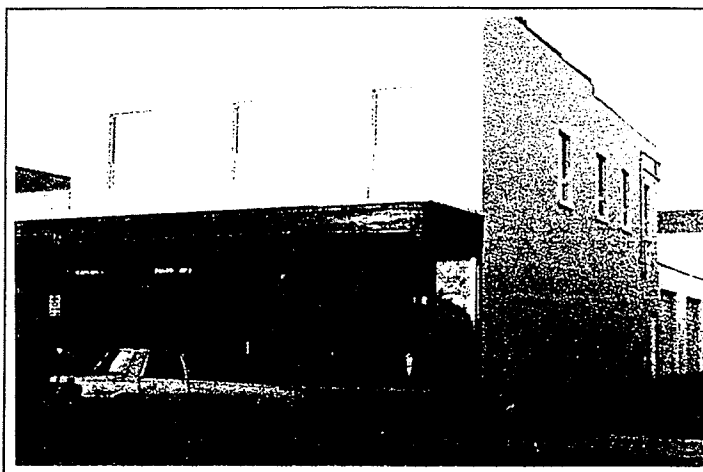
<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry, gluelam beams
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough clad stucco (front only)	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b>	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 300 sq. m	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 5 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 17



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Assman Block	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 004-645-243
<b>Street Address:</b> 1130-34 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E5	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00889-000/3
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 9; Block 43; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Black Forest Food and Deli Inc.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 117,900	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1261 3rd. Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E6

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> Pre 1920 Retail Market on Main 5 Commercial offices on 2nd	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> None
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> John Assman Sr.
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Vacant 2nd - Under renovation	<b>Heritage Status:</b> Potential
	<b>Rental Rates:</b>
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off 3rd Ave.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> see above

### Design and Condition

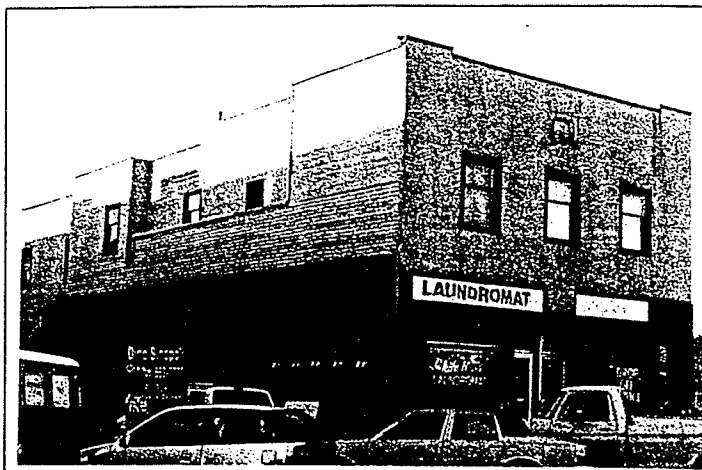
<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry, brick and wood frame, wood floors
<b>Cladding:</b> Brick, metal sheathing	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 232 sq. m / 2500 sq. ft. on 2nd floor	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 3 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** This building was extensively renovated both internally and externally in 1995 because of fire damage incurred in 1991.

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 18



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Baycrest Apartments	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-483-781
<b>Street Address:</b> 231-233 George St. Prince George, BC V2L 1R1	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00883-000/9
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 3; Block 43; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Strocen Investors Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 234,900	<b>Owner Address:</b> General Delivery Coombs, BC V0R 1M0

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Single Resident Occupancy Hotel
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> pre 1920 Apartment Rooms*	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 15 (full occupancy)
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Unknown. Perhaps: Louis Ostanek
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Laundromat 2nd - Residential Apartments	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b>
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off George St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Steel fire escape onto laneway

### Design and Condition

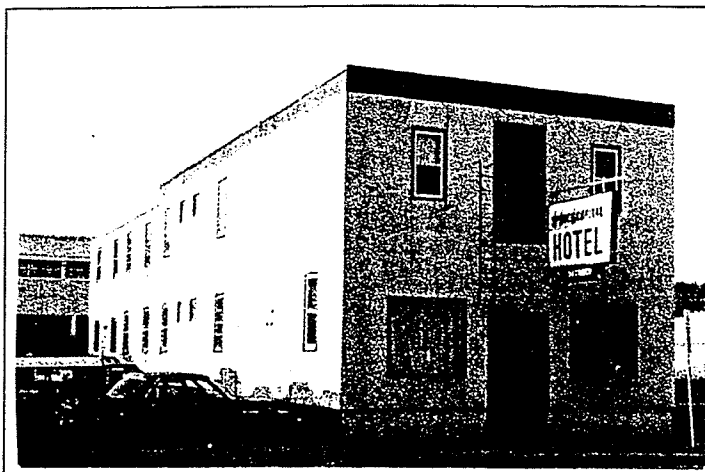
<b>Design:</b> Simple Block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Wood siding on front; rough cast stucco on rear	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> 14 Apartments on 2 floors	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> Unknown	<b>General Condition:</b> Fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 5 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \*Local historians and residents confirm that the building has always been occupied as apartments.



**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 19

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Spruce Capital Hotel	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-437-924 Lot 4: 009-437-941
<b>Street Address:</b> 171 George St. Prince George, BC V2L 1P8	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-00459-000/7
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 4-5; Block 23; D/L: 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Clements Holdings Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 368,000	<b>Owner Address:</b> 177 King Drive Prince George, BC V2M 4V7

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Single Resident Occupancy Hotel
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> pre 1920 Retail and Office Commercial	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 30 (full occupancy)
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Joshua N. Keller*
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Residential Hotel 2nd - Residential Hotel	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> Unavailable
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase

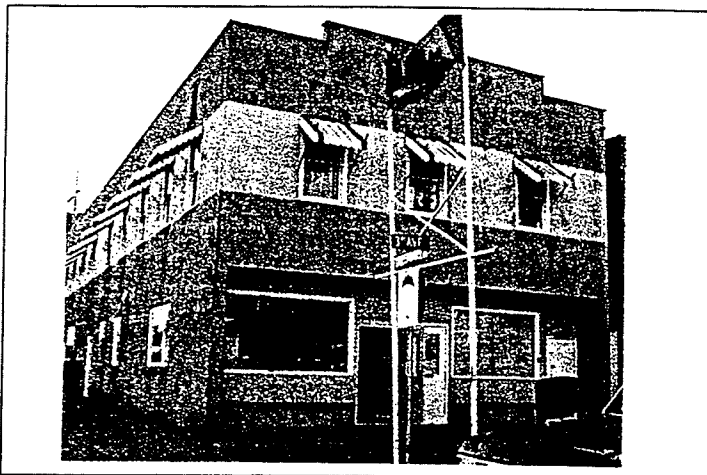
**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry
<b>Cladding:</b> Rouch Cast Stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Rooms off central hallway	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 4 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \*The origins of this structure date to the beginning of Prince George.

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 20

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Central Hotel	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 012-950-467
<b>Street Address:</b> 1009 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02994-000/7
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 15; Block 135; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Stiles, J. Kajan, P
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 269,400	<b>Owner Address:</b> 2593 Abbott Cres. Prince George, BC V2L 2X6

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Single Resident Occupancy Hotel
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> post 1951; pre 1955 Hotel Beauty Salon	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 19 (full occupancy)
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Nels and Agnete Sorenson
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Residential Apartments; Cafe 2nd - Residential Apartments	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b>
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircases
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Steel and wood ladder-type fire escape to laneway

**Design and Condition**

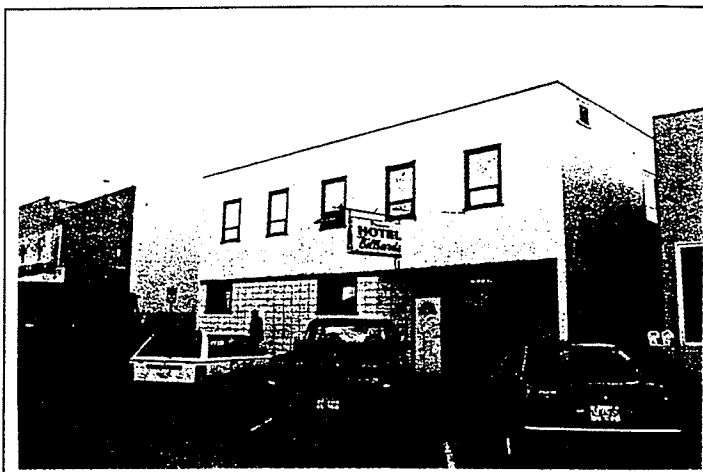
<b>Design:</b> Simple	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough cast stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Apartments off central corridor	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 4 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 21



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Premier Hotel Apartments	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 012-969-125
<b>Street Address:</b> 1045 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02997-000/4
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 18; Block 135; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Pawluk, Stan and Pawluk, Ray
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 269,900	<b>Owner Address:</b> 1045 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E3

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Hotel/ Rooming House
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1955 Premier Hotel	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b>
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Pawluck, Ray
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Billiards Hall, Hotel lobby, rooms 2nd - Rooms	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b>
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> External wooden ladder-type fire escape to laneway

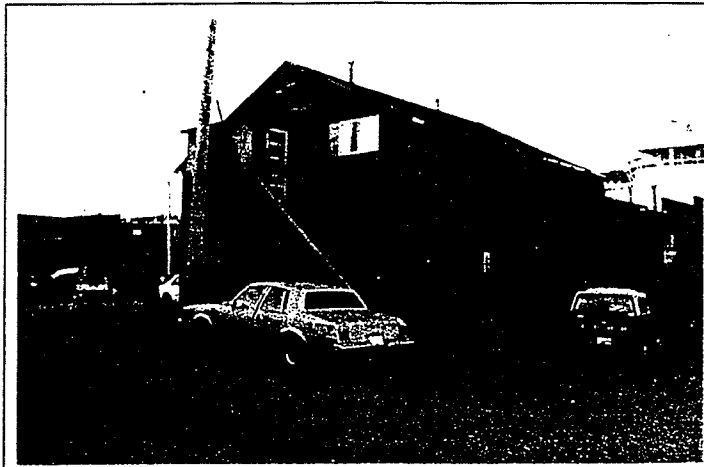
### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonary and frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Masonry and wood (front), rough cast stucco (rear and upper)	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Rooms off of central hall	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 18.4 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> Fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 4 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 22

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> (Former) City Second Hand	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 007-783-957
<b>Street Address:</b> 1057 3rd Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3E3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02998-000/3
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 19-20; Block 135; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Alkema, Harold L.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 136,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> SS #3, Ste.9, Comp.124 Prince George, BC V2N 2S7

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1955 Northwest Produce Co. Ltd. 2 Bedroom Apartment added 2nd floor rear 1957.	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 0
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 1 (partial 2nd)	<b>Original Owner:</b> Eugene Gabriele
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> vacant	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> External wooden staircase
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> See above (also see photo)

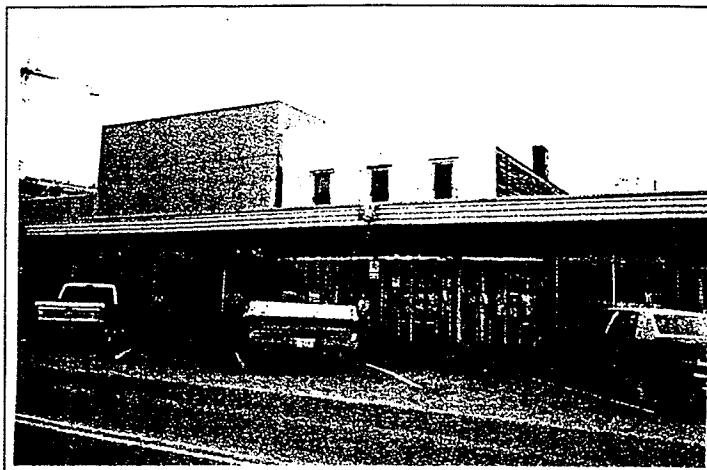
**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> Amalgamated structures. Simple wood construction.	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame, concrete floor.
<b>Cladding:</b> Stucco on front, main. Wood on rear, 2nd.	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel; patent asphalt roll roofing
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan on main. Four room, 2 bedroom apartment on 2nd.	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> Ground: 289 sq. m / 3120 sq. ft. 2nd: 66 sq. m / 710 sq. ft.	<b>General Condition:</b> Poor
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 1 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 23

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Fichtner Footwear	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 008-355-100
<b>Street Address:</b> 356-362 George St. Prince George, BC V2L 1R3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02984-000/7
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 5; Block 135; D/L: 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Berthold Fichtner
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> 225,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> 4147 Gellatly Rd. Westbank, BC V4T 2K2

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1973 Retail	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 2
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Berthold Fichtner
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Retail Shoe Store* and Retail Children's Store 2nd - Retail Shoe Store and storage	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase

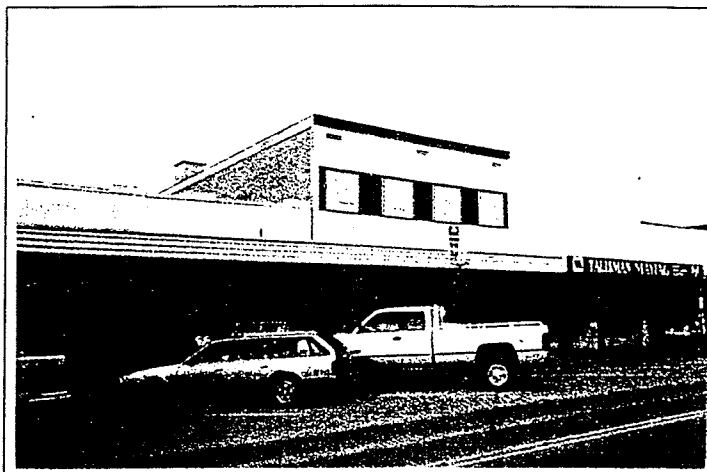
**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry
<b>Cladding:</b> Aluminum siding	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 275 sq. m / 3000 sq. ft.	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 1 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \*As of Dec. 1st 1995, Fichtner Footwear Ltd. was advertising a "Moving Sale"

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 24

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Shasta Holdings/Nick's Place	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 006-885-641
<b>Street Address:</b> 363 George St. Prince George, BC V2L 1R4	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02965-000/6
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 6;Block 134; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Shasta Enterprises Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 264,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> c/o: 1830 Ferndale Rd. Victoria, BC V8N 2Y1

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Commercial (Restaurant)
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1956 Restaurant on Main Offices (Vacant) on 2nd	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 1
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Wayne Chow Shasta Cafe Ltd.
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Restaurant 2nd - Vacant	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> Lease @ \$5/sq. ft. or buy @ \$35/sq. ft.
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off George St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Ladder-type steel fire escape onto laneway

**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry, wood truss
<b>Cladding:</b> Wood siding (upper front);tile (lower front)	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 92 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 275 sq. m	<b>General Condition:</b> fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 3 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 25



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Vahlas Holdings	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 012-996-408
<b>Street Address:</b> 1102 4th Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3J3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02967-000/4
<b>Legal Description:</b> Lot 8; Block 134; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Vahlas Holdings
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 289,000	<b>Owner Address:</b> 140 McDermid Dr. Prince George, BC V2M 4T7

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Medical Clinic / Office Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1975 Cue Pit Billiards	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 2
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Nick Vahlas
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main - Native Health Centre 2nd - Vacant Basement - Gospel Mission	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> \$2500/mo for whole 2nd floor
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase from George St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> see above

### Design and Condition

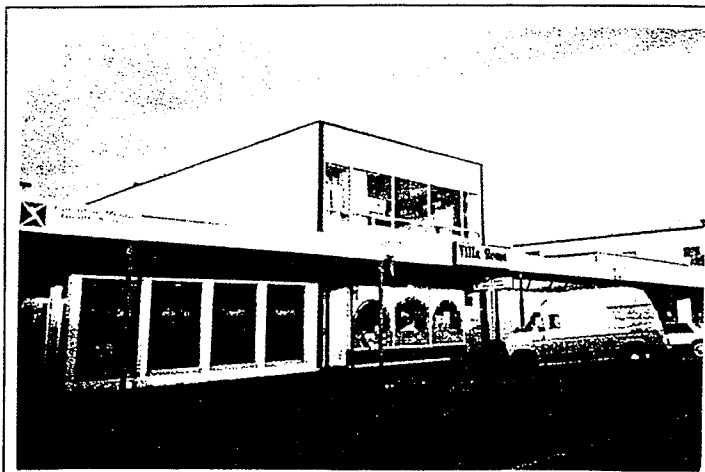
<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough cast stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan (2nd)	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m (George St.); 33.6 m (4th Ave.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 275 sq. m / 3000 sq. ft.	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 2 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 26



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Villa Roma	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 012-980-714
<b>Street Address:</b> 547 George St. Prince George, BC V2L 1R8	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-03611-000/3
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 4; Block 165; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Tower Painting Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 190,000	<b>Owner Address:</b> 824 Heritage Cres. Prince George, BC V2M 6X3

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Commercial (Restaurant)
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1973 North Olympia Pizza on Main Prince George Businessman's Club on 2nd	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 1
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b>
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Restaurant 2nd - Vacant	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b>
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off George St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Steel fire escape into lane

### Design and Condition

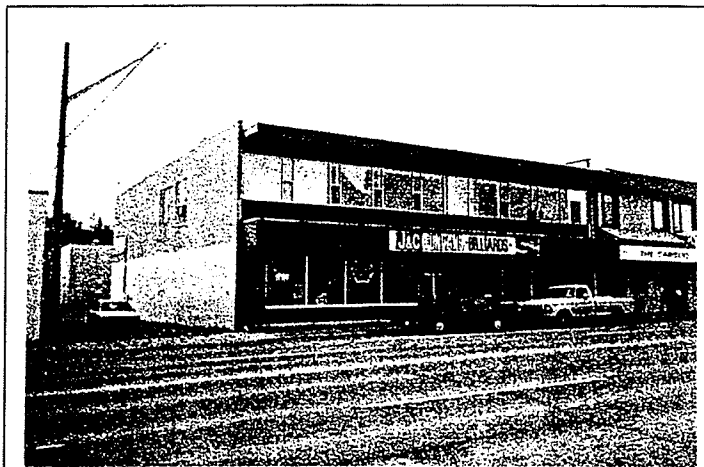
<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry, concrete slab, steel truss
<b>Cladding:</b> None	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 92m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 220 sq. m / 2400 sq. ft. on 2nd.	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 1 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:



**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 27

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> JC Funland	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 009-646-981
<b>Street Address:</b> 1153 5th Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3L1	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-03626-000/8
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 19-20; Block 165; D/L 343; P1.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Mok, Yu S.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$415,000	<b>Owner Address:</b> 103-4509 Azure Ave. Prince George, BC V2M 6R2

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1967 Office and Retail Commercial	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 1
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Erv Parent Co. Ltd. Retail Flooring and Carpets
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Billiards and Video Arcade 2nd - Vacant / Storage	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase from 5th Ave.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase to laneway

**Design and Condition**

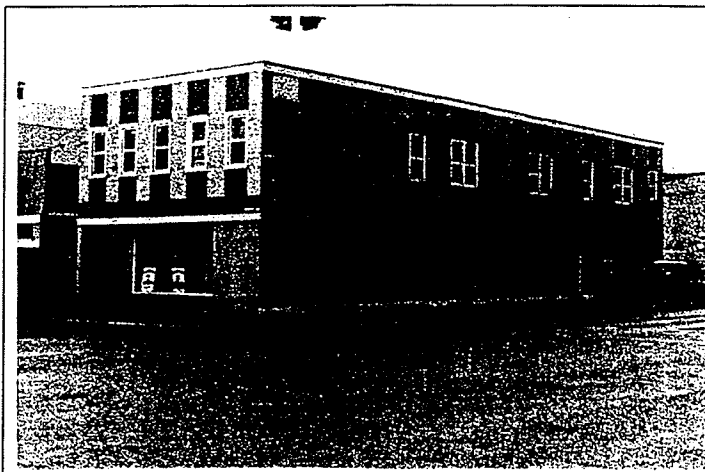
<b>Design:</b> Simple modern	<b>Structural Material:</b> Masonry
<b>Cladding:</b> Wood shiplap (front); plain concrete (sides and rear).	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Open plan; 66' x 80'	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 20 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 400 sq. m / 5200 sq. ft.	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 1 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 28



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Topper's Cleaners	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 012-980-765
<b>Street Address:</b> 1210 5th Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3L2	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-03304-000/3
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 11; Block 151; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Topper's Cleaners (1991) Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 157,300	<b>Owner Address:</b> PO Box 2685 Prince George, BC V2N 4T5

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C-1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail and Office Commercial (Vacant)
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> -MacArthur Medical Clinic Medical Office with Rooms to Rent upstairs and in basement	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 0
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Dr. John G. MacArthur Prince George Clinic
<b>Current Use of Storeys:</b> Main- Vacant* 2 - Vacant	<b>Heritage Status:</b> none
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> Lease @ \$1/sq. ft./mo.
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off 5th Ave.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> see above

### Design and Condition

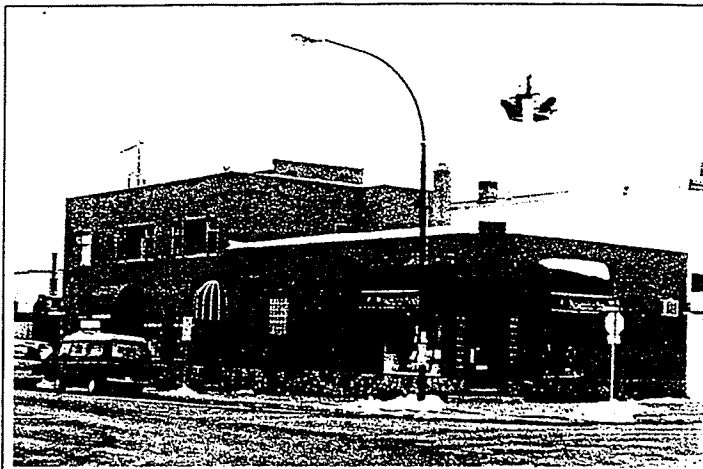
<b>Design:</b> Simple wood construction	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough Cast Stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Rooms off hallway on 2nd.	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 185 sq. m / 2000 sq. ft.	<b>General Condition:</b> good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 6 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \*A dry cleaning plant still exists on the Main floor of this building. The owner is not interested in selling.

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 29



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Mosquito Books	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 004-132-947
<b>Street Address:</b> 533 Dominion St. Prince George, BC V2L 1T7	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-03597-000/8
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 10; Block 164; D/L 343; Plan 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Silver Birch Talisman Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> 189,300	<b>Owner Address:</b> 149 Moffat St. N. Prince George, BC V2M 3G4

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Retail Commercial
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1940 Commercial Retail on Main Proprietor's residence on 2nd	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 4
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2 (rear portion of building only)	<b>Original Owner:</b> Walter Blaufuss Northern Upholstry Ltd.
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Retail bookstore Main - Retail women's clothing Main - Retail used computers 2nd - Retail clothing and accessories	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> \$1000/mo (upper floor)
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase off Dominion St.
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> External wooden fire escape to lane

### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough cast stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> 3 bedroom, open plan (2nd Floor)	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m (5th Ave.); 27.6 m (Dominion St.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 130 sq. m / 1400 sq. ft. on 2nd floor. (fmr. 3 br. apartment)	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 6 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 30



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Zombie's Pizza	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 012-963-330
<b>Street Address:</b> 1215 5th Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3L3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-03596-000/9
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 9; Block 164; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> 423046 BC Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 166,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> 6460 Fraser St. Vancouver, BC V5W 3A4

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Commercial (Restaurant)/ Residential*
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> c.1947 Acme Electric / Lunchbox Deli Apartments on 2nd	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 3
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Stan Latham (Acme Electric)
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Restaurant 2nd - Apartments	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> Apartments: \$550/mo (2br)
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase from 5th Ave
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> External wooden fire escape to lane

### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple wood construction	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough Cast Stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> 2-2br Apartments of approx. 60 sq. m / 650 sq. ft.	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 145 sq. m / 1600 sq. ft.	<b>General Condition:</b> Fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 6 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

**Other:** \* This building is currently up for sale. The asking price is \$250,000.

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 31

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Silver Spruce Building	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 010-547-207
<b>Street Address:</b> 1448 6th Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3N2	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-03561-000/4
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 14-15; Block 162; D/L 343; Pl.1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Schultz, Max and Schultz, Mary
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 299,000	<b>Owner Address:</b> RR 7; Site. 14; Comp.6 Prince George, BC V2N 2J5

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Office Commercial (Vacant)
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> c. 1953 Grasser Apartments Early-mid 1960s - Converted to commercial 1973 - renovation and addition	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 0
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 3	<b>Original Owner:</b> Herb Grasser
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - 5 offices (Vacant) 2nd - 2 offices (Vacant) 3rd - 3 offices (Vacant)	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> \$1/sq. ft./mo.
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Wooden fire escape to lane

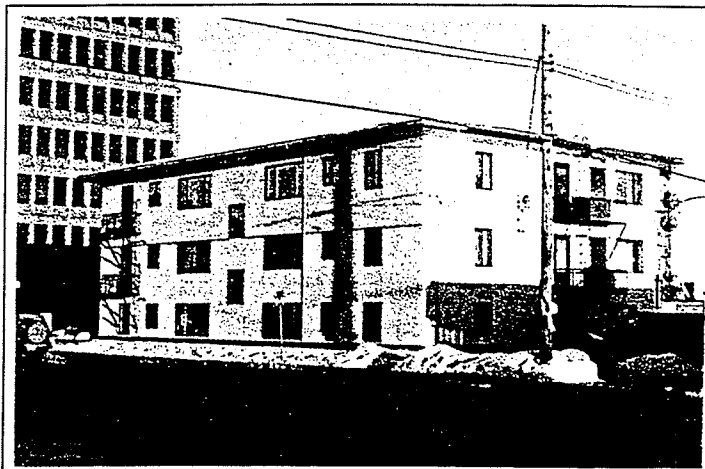
**Design and Condition**

<b>Design:</b> Simple, modern style flat roofed apartment with brick veneered addition (1973).	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Upper floors - rough cast stucco Main - brick veneer	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and Gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> see above; Offices off of central hallway.	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 18.4 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b> 80 sq. m / 900 sq. ft. on upper floors	<b>General Condition:</b> Good
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 8 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

**Moving Up -Phase 1**Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
 Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
 Date(s): November 1995  
 Reference No. 32

**General Building Information**

<b>Name of Building:</b> Crestwood Apartments	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 003-800-806
<b>Street Address:</b> 1499 6th Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3N3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-03751-000/2
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 1-2; Block 173; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> 1499 6th Ave. Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 300,500	<b>Owner Address:</b> 488 McLean St. Quesnel, BC V2J 2P7

**Building Use**

<b>Zoning:</b> C - 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Residential Apartments
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> 1955 Crestwood Apartments	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 11 (full occupancy)
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 3	<b>Original Owner:</b>
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - 3 Apartments 2nd - 4 Apartments 3rd - 4 Apartments	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b> n/a
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> Steel fire escape on east and west sides.

**Design and Condition**

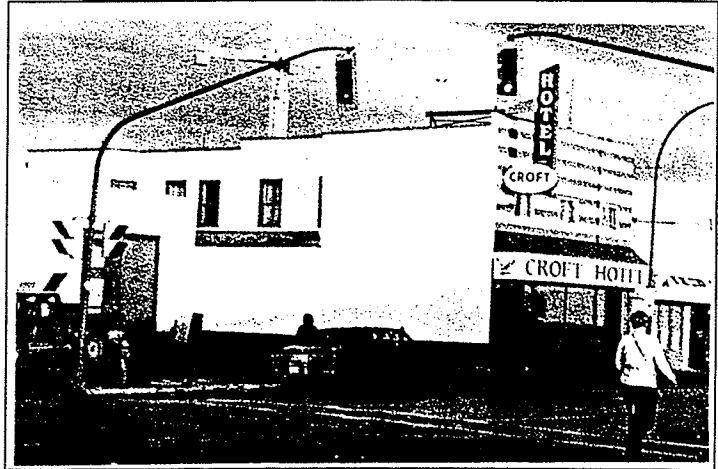
<b>Design:</b> Simple modern flat roofed	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Rough cast stucco	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Apartments off central hallway	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m (6th Ave.); 23 m (Victoria St.)
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> Fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 2 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## Moving Up -Phase 1

Downtown Survey of  
Underutilized Spaces

Community: Prince George, BC  
Person Surveying: Matthew Baldwin  
Date(s): November 1995  
Reference No. 33



### General Building Information

<b>Name of Building:</b> Croft Hotel	<b>Parcel Identifier No.</b> 004-948-637
<b>Street Address:</b> 1168 4th Ave. Prince George, BC V2L 3J3	<b>Roll Number:</b> 00-02971-000/0
<b>Legal Description</b> Lot 12; Block 134; D/L:343; Pl: 1268	<b>Current Owner:</b> Aero Holdings Ltd.
<b>Tax Assessments:</b> \$ 320,700	<b>Owner Address:</b> PO Box 1881 Prince George, BC V2L 5E3

### Building Use

<b>Zoning:</b> C 1	<b>Current Use:</b> Hotel/ Rooming House
<b>Original Date and Use:</b> c. 1920 Corning Hotel	<b>No. of Current Tenants:</b> 0
<b>Number of Storeys:</b> 2	<b>Original Owner:</b> Jack Corning
<b>Current Use of Storeys</b> Main - Beer Parlour, Hotel lobby 2nd - Rooms	<b>Heritage Status:</b> None
	<b>Rental Rates:</b>
	<b>Access to Upper Levels:</b> Internal staircase from lobby
	<b>Egress from Upper Levels:</b> External wooden staircase onto laneway (rear)

### Design and Condition

<b>Design:</b> Simple block	<b>Structural Material:</b> Wood frame
<b>Cladding:</b> Wood clad (front); rough cast stucco (sides and rear).	<b>Roof Type:</b> Tar and gravel
<b>General Floor Layout:</b> Individual rooms on 2nd flr.	<b>Est. Building Frontage:</b> 9.2 m
<b>Est. Area Per Floor:</b>	<b>General Condition:</b> fair
	<b>Suitability for Conversion:</b> 6 (1 = Poor; 10 = Excellent)

Other:

## 10. LOCAL POLICIES



**SECTION 10-26. C-1 (CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT)****10.26.1 INTENT**

The intent of the C-1 District is to identify and delimit the central business district, an area which is intended to accommodate the need and demand for the full range of central commercial activities, including major business, finance, real estate, insurance, government, recreation, entertainment, cultural, tourist and convention functions. All commercial uses, except highway-service and special recreation uses and those activities specially provided for in regional, community or neighbourhood shopping centres or local convenience shopping facilities, shall be encouraged to locate or relocate within the central business district. Mixed commercial and residential development shall also be provided for and encouraged with a view to broadening and enriching the range of core area activity and ensuring the long-term viability of the City centre.

**10-26.2 USES PERMITTED**

Subject to all other provisions of this Bylaw, the following uses only shall be permitted in the C-1 District:

- (1) Car Rental
- (2) Club or Lodge
- (3) Commercial Arcade
- (4) Commercial Auction
- (5) Commercial Exhibition
- (6) Commercial Office
- (7) Commercial Parking Lot or Parkade
- (8) Commercial Recreation
- (9) Commercial Retail
- (10) Commercial Service
- (11) Dwelling, Boarding or Rooming House
- (12) Dwelling, Local Multiple-Family subject to sub-section 10-26.3(5)
- (13) Dwelling, Multiple-Family
- (14) Farmer's Market
- (15) Flea Market
- (16) Funeral Home
- (17) Gasoline Service Station, subject to the provisions of Section 27 of this Bylaw
- (18) Laboratory
- (19) Medical or Dental Office
- (20) Nursery or Greenhouse
- (21) Printing or Publishing
- (22) Public Government
- (23) Public Health and Welfare
- (24) Public Recreation
- (25) Public Utility

- (25) Restaurant
- (26) School, Private
- (27) School, Trade
- (28) Sidewalk Vendor
- (29) Studio, Radio or Television
- (30) Tourist Accommodation
- (31) Transportation Depot

## 10-26.3

## REGULATIONS.

All permitted uses shall be subject to the following regulations:

## (1) SITE REGULATIONS:

- (a) The minimum SITE AREA shall be 135 m<sup>2</sup> (1,453 square feet);
- (b) Notwithstanding subsection (a) above, the minimum SITE AREA for any Multiple Family Dwelling use shall be 1 400 m<sup>2</sup> (15,070 square feet);
- (c) The minimum SITE WIDTH shall be 4.50 m (15 feet).

## (2) BUILDING REGULATIONS:

- (a) The maximum SITE COVERAGE shall be 100%;
- (b) No building shall exceed a HEIGHT of 55.0 m (180 feet).

## (3) YARD AND SETBACK REQUIREMENTS:

- (a) Principal buildings shall not require FRONT, REAR or SIDE YARDS;
- (b) Accessory buildings shall have minimum FRONT, REAR and SIDE YARDS of 1.20 m (4 feet);
- (c) Notwithstanding subsections (a) and (b) above, a minimum SETBACK of 3.00 m (10 feet) shall be provided from any site line which abuts a site in a UR District without the intervention of a highway.

## (4) OFF-STREET PARKING AND LOADING REQUIREMENTS:

Section 29 shall apply.

## (5) OTHER REGULATIONS:

- (a) Every use shall be enclosed entirely within a building except for a Farmers' Market, Flea Market, Gasoline Service Station, Nursery or Greenhouse, Restaurant Use, Sidewalk Vendor and off-street parking and loading facilities;
- (b) A Farmers' Market or Restaurant use only shall be permitted in a motor vehicle registered pursuant to the Motor Vehicle Act subject to the approval of the Medical Health Officer;
- (c) All principal uses shall, wherever possible, be oriented to pedestrian needs and be so located and designed as to encourage pedestrian continuity and avoid vehicular interference with pedestrian movement;
- (d) The maximum SITE AREA of any tenancy or rental area within a Flea Market shall be 40 m<sup>2</sup> (430 square feet);
- (e) No Commercial Arcade use shall be permitted within 400 metres (1,312 feet) of any other Commercial Arcade use.
- (f) See Section 21 for screening and landscaping requirements.
- (g) A local multiple-family dwelling unit shall not be located on the first storey unless it is situated to the rear of another permitted use in the C-1 district. Notwithstanding this, an entrance to a local multiple-family dwelling unit is permitted along the first storey street frontage.

**PART TWO - POLICIES  
RESIDENTIAL**

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## **7.0 RESIDENTIAL**

Satisfactory shelter is a fundamental element of a healthy community. To meet this need, the residents of Prince George require a variety of housing types at different price levels in order for housing to be affordable at all income levels. This variety must include special housing such as temporary shelters and long-term group homes.

It is important to continue to provide more than conventional single-family housing. Prince George has approximately 8% of its housing units in two-family dwellings and 8% in mobile homes, half on lots and half in parks. Multiple-family dwelling units account for 20% of housing. The variety of housing types must also address changes in housing needs caused by social trends such as population aging, demographic shifts and family evolution.

The City is able to influence the provision of suitable accommodation by being active in land development and subdivision design, and through the zoning and building bylaws. It can also participate in housing programs offered by other levels of government and co-operate with non-profit housing societies of various kinds.

It is also important to conserve neighbourhood character. Residents should feel secure that changes to their neighbourhood will be gradual and that the ambience of their residence will be maintained.

### **7.1 RESIDENTIAL DESIGNATIONS**

#### **RU Unserviced**

RU designations indicate residential areas that are intended to remain permanently unserviced by City sanitary sewer. Depending upon lot size and location, suburban service standard including paved road and City water may become available. Minimum lot size pursuant to the Zoning Bylaw is 0.2 ha, subject to sewage disposal approval by the Medical Health Officer.

#### **RL Low density**

RL designations define residential development that will eventually receive City water and sanitary sewer connections. Depending upon lot size, soils and the nature of the neighbourhood, full urban service standard including curb/gutter, underground wiring and storm sewer drainage is required in most instances.

**PART TWO - POLICIES**  
**7.1 RESIDENTIAL**

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Included in the RL designation are single-family houses, both conventional site-built and modular manufactured; single or double-wide manufactured housing (mobile homes) on lots or in mobile home parks; two-family dwellings (duplexes) and community care facilities (group homes). Many small parks (>0.2 ha) are also included.

**RM Medium density**

RM designations include triplex, quadruplex, apartment (walk-up and high-rise), garden apartment and townhouse types of multiple-family structures to a maximum density of 80 units/ha. Full urban service standard is required.

**RH High density**

RH designations include multiple-family residential structures with a density greater than 80 units/ha. Full urban service standard is required.

**7.2 GOAL**

To encourage sufficient variety of housing types so that all residents of the city have satisfactory affordable accommodation and a choice of residential life style.

**7.3 OBJECTIVES**

1. To indicate to residents and developers the kinds of residential land use changes that would be acceptable in neighbourhoods.
2. To consider the character of existing neighbourhoods and nearby residences to be an important element in evaluating development proposals.
3. To encourage innovative housing design and subdivision layout for infill and new development; including alternate means of access and transport, at least within the subdivision.
4. To increase density by multiple-family development in existing neighbourhoods in transition near the downtown, by multiple-family development along arterials accessing the downtown and by infill of existing subdivisions.
5. To locate a variety of conventional and special needs housing in most neighbourhoods of the city with due regard for the locational requirements of the types of housing and consideration of the character of existing residences.

**PART TWO - POLICIES****7.3 RESIDENTIAL**

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6. To ensure that a mix of housing types occur in most neighbourhoods of the city to encourage social mixing and to provide accommodation choices as the population of an area changes demographically due to aging or other factors.

**7.4 GENERAL POLICIES**

1. The City will co-operate with public, private and non-profit agencies to encourage provision of social housing for the economically disadvantaged. Such housing will be located in accordance with regular Plan designations and zoning districts.
2. Special needs housing such as group homes and shelters (community residential facilities-CRF) will generally be acceptable on a scattered basis in most neighbourhoods, providing the character of the facility blends with the surrounding residential character. However, the principle of equal distribution may be offset if the locational needs of the clients of the facility, such as proximity to health or recreation services and amenities, make one neighbourhood more desirable for special needs housing than others.
3. Through the use of the development permit process, design variety and compatibility with adjacent buildings will be encouraged for multiple-family development. Design elements will include massing, rooflines, exterior finish, covered parking and landscaping.
4. The City will encourage innovative subdivision and site layout for single and multiple-family development including such approaches as clustering, bare land strata townhousing, apartments in mixed use developments and the CBD, common greenspace and stepped multiple-family structures to take advantage of topography.

**7.5 RESIDENTIAL DESIGNATION POLICIES****RU Unserviced**

1. Residents in RU designations have chosen a particular residential life style which has drawbacks as well as advantages. Residents should not anticipate that the City will extend sanitary sewer service to RU areas or provide a level of service approaching RL designation because of the inordinate additional costs for public utilities, protection services, road maintenance and waste disposal.

**PART TWO - POLICIES****7.5 RESIDENTIAL**

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2. Development of RU areas should be in accordance with the phasing schedule. Until such time as significant infill has occurred in existing RU subdivisions, extension of the road network for additional RU development should be curtailed.

Nevertheless, some additions could be supported where short road extensions would access amenity sites for RU development adjacent to existing residential areas.

3. The City will encourage innovative subdivision layouts for RU development on sites with particular scenic or topographic character that create an amenity.
4. Although the City does not generally encourage the provision of community water supply systems in RU subdivisions, it will set standards for those systems if they are provided. However, it will not accept responsibility for the operation or maintenance of those systems.

In some locations where RU development is at relatively high density or where innovative subdivision layout is proposed, City water may be made available. City water supply may also be required for RU development where well water may be unpotable due to particular soil or topography conditions that affect subsurface drainage such as downslope from the City's sanitary landfill site.

5. In the layout of RU subdivisions, consideration must be given to the forest fire hazard by adoption of fire protection measures such as the provision of fire breaks and access roads, exit roads, brush and debris maintenance, and special building materials.

**RL Low density**

6. Neighbourhood Plans for new RL areas shall consider all those land uses that contribute to a functioning, identifiable neighbourhood such as a centrally located school site, sufficient CL locations, RM sites, two-family dwelling lots, lots for community residential facilities, recreation and leisure services, mobile home locations and park space.
7. RL development shall be in accordance with Schedule C of the Plan. New development will preferably be contiguous with existing development to constrain sprawl except where separated by permanent greenspace. Discontiguous RL development may be acceptable if market demand is established or a special amenity would be associated with the development.

**PART TWO - POLICIES**  
**7.5 RESIDENTIAL**

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8. Infill development will be supported on existing lots. Subdivision by rezoning of relatively large lots in an existing area will be considered if it does not unduly impact on the character of the neighbourhood.
9. Lots for two-family dwellings (TFDs) should be provided in new subdivisions unless the intent is to create a special character area based upon an amenity or other specified characteristic.

Additional two-family dwellings should be considered in many existing neighbourhoods, although they may not be acceptable in certain areas that have a particularly homogeneous character. Residential areas with existing scattered TFDs or areas in transition of use could be considered for conversion or new TFD development.

10. Two-family dwellings should be located on a scatter-site basis, avoiding the situation where many TFDs are located side-by-side. Preferred sites for two-family dwellings are on the perimeter of homogeneous single-family areas, corner locations, collector or busier streets, relatively large lots and near greenspace. Conversion TFDs should have sufficient space for additional parking.
11. Non-mirror image, semi-detached TFDs with design elements that blend with the surrounding neighbourhood character are preferable. Careful use of colour and exterior cladding can provide variety to mirror-image structures. Covenants governing form should be considered for TFD lots in City-developed subdivisions.
12. In the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans, developers will generally be required to provide zoned sites for community residential facilities on the basis of one site in 100 lots. For subdivisions of 25-100 lots, a zoned CRF lot may be requested depending upon the need for CRFs in the immediate area.  
  
It should be recognized that zoning districts that permit CRFs also include other permitted uses, including single-family dwelling, so lots zoned in advance for CRF use will not necessarily be used as such, although the option for future use will remain.
13. Manufactured housing on lots or in mobile home parks is a significant component of the city's housing stock. This choice in residential life styles should be maintained in new subdivision development.



**PART TWO - POLICIES**  
**7.5 RESIDENTIAL**

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14. Pursuant to the Building Regulations of British Columbia:

Single or double-wide manufactured (mobile) homes certified as conforming to CSA Z240 MH Series-86 will only be allowed in zones with "mobile home" as a permitted use pursuant to the Zoning Bylaw.

Modular manufactured housing certified as conforming to CSA A277 may be located in zones with "dwelling, one-family" as a permitted use pursuant to the Zoning Bylaw.

Log homes are subject to the regulations of the B.C. Building Code and may be located in zones with "dwelling, single-family" as a permitted use pursuant to the Zoning Bylaw.

15. The City will consider amending the Zoning Bylaw to add a zone that is exclusively for mobile manufactured housing subdivisions because residents have expressed concern that there are incompatibilities between mobile homes and conventional homes.
16. New mobile home subdivisions, where possible, should be located contiguous with existing mobile home areas (except for intervening permanent greenspace), in clusters on the periphery of conventional house subdivisions, or where future mobile home subdivisions are indicated on Neighbourhood Plans.
17. New mobile home parks should be located in proximity to mobile home subdivisions; employment areas; near services such as neighbourhood or local shopping centres, schools, leisure services and parks; in isolated areas with particular scenic value or amenity; or on arterial roads in association with tourist travel facilities.

RM Medium density

18. The RM designation will indicate where existing multiple-family dwellings (MFDs) are located and where additional medium density MFD proposals will be considered on a site-specific basis.

**PART TWO - POLICIES**  
**7.5 RESIDENTIAL**

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RM development is preferred near services such as schools, regional and neighbourhood shopping centres, leisure, recreation and health services; public transit; or on the periphery of RL neighbourhoods, particularly at intersections or along arterials. RM sites with amenity may be somewhat distant from the generally required services.

19. The City will encourage high standards of design and layout for multiple-family development through the development permit process. Development permit areas for MFD development will be applied to highly visible sites, strips along arterials, and selected infill sites where development may significantly impact adjacent residents.
20. To accommodate site constraints for RM developments due to lot size, topography, and existing development, and to provide variety, rezonings for new single and two-family dwellings may be supported in RM designations without OCP amendment, providing such development is not unduly impacted by the mass and form of the adjacent MFDs.
21. Churches and medium density MFD development is considered similar in its impact on adjacent properties. Therefore, PI church sites and RM multiple sites are effectively interchangeable and may be rezoned without OCP amendment.

Any changes resulting from interchangeable rezoning will be updated by the City on the Schedule B - Land Use maps on an annual basis.

RH High density

22. RH development will be designated within reasonable walking distance of the downtown, on arterial roads with public transit accessing the downtown or other sites which are particularly suited to such use because of unique physical and locational attributes.
23. RH development in the Vancouver Street-Winnipeg Street area should not be continuous on a block-face but should be interspersed with medium density MFDs or other types of residential development. Therefore, medium density development will be acceptable in the RH designation in this area without requiring an OCP amendment.

**PART TWO - POLICIES**  
**7.5 RESIDENTIAL**

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24. To accommodate site size constraints due to existing development for RM and RH development and to add variety in the Vancouver Street-Winnipeg Street area, proposals for conversion of houses for multiple residential or commercial residential use will be considered. Such conversions are probably transitional in nature and an OCP amendment will not be required.
25. RH proposals should ensure building form, massing and design elements are compatible with adjacent structures. Covered parking is preferred; surface parking should not front on a street. Selected RH sites will be designated as development permit areas.

**PART TWO - POLICIES**  
**8.3 COMMERCIAL**

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5. To work with developers and businesses to create attractive buildings and streetscapes in commercial areas.

#### **8.4 GENERAL POLICIES**

1. To create centres of public activity, emphasis will be placed upon opportunities for a mix of uses, both horizontally and vertically, in association with commercial areas.
2. As growth occurs in the North, Southwest and East sectors, a community centre for each comprised of a mix of land uses focussing on a commercial area will be emphasized.
3. There should be a hierarchy of commercial areas so that some shopping facilities are convenient to residents with minimum travel and others are readily accessible to the regional market.
4. Small-scale and incubator business opportunities will continue to be provided as home occupations in residential areas, permitted and regulated by the Zoning Bylaw. Care must be taken that such businesses have minimal impact on adjacent properties. It is the intent that, as the business grows beyond a family operation, it shall locate to a suitable commercial or industrial area.
5. As an interim use, conversion of residences for small business purposes will be considered in the RH designation between Vancouver Street and Winnipeg Street.
6. Increasing emphasis will be placed upon high standards of design for buildings, landscaping and signage in commercial areas.

#### **8.5 COMMERCIAL DESIGNATION POLICIES**

##### CBD Central Business District

1. The City will continue to recognize the importance of the CBD to the city's economic, social and cultural role by promoting administrative, financial, specialty retail, entertainment and cultural land uses in the downtown.
2. Emphasis in the CBD will be on multi-storey, mixed-use development both vertically and horizontally. Preferred street-level functions are those which encourage high volumes of pedestrian traffic.

**PART TWO - POLICIES**  
**8.5 COMMERCIAL**

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3. The CBD is the preferred location for major commercial office development. Notwithstanding that preference, small offices may be accommodated out of the CBD in other commercial or commercial/industrial zones pursuant to the Zoning Bylaw and in residential conversions in the RH designation between Vancouver Street-Winnipeg Street.
4. The City will support residential use in the CBD including vertical mixed-use development. Zoning Bylaw amendments to encourage such use will be supported. Multiple-family residential development will also be encouraged on the periphery of the CBD within walking distance.
5. Public cultural/leisure facilities in the CBD should contain a commercial component to encourage frequent and more continuous use, particularly during the day.
6. The City is committed to a phased program of downtown revitalization in cooperation with federal and provincial agencies, property owners and major developers. The City will take advantage of funding opportunities for revitalization provided by senior governments.

Revitalization will include refurbishing Third Avenue and George Street, and will use the courthouse plaza and the civic centre complex as nodes for the revitalization program. Once revitalization is implemented, development permit areas for these streets will be designated to ensure revitalization is in accordance with the format and guidelines.

7. In support of revitalization, high standards of building, landscaping and streetscape design will be encouraged by designating the CBD as a development permit area. Design guidelines to create a pleasant pedestrian environment should recognize that Prince George is a "Winter City", but also a summer city where tree planting and greening of the streetscape is needed.
8. In cooperation with the Downtown Parking Commission, the City will develop a strategy for parking in the CBD, including alternatives to parking such as public transit. The Section 674 Specified Area for Parking will be reviewed in relation to the CBD and C-1 zoning district.

**PART TWO - POLICIES**  
**8.5 COMMERCIAL**

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9. In support of a Healthy Community, planning and development of the CBD will include social aspects as well as physical infrastructure. The City will include government and non-governmental agencies in social planning.
10. Emphasis will be put upon access and safety for pedestrians, both entering the CBD and within it. Lanes should be considered as potential pedestrian routes and emphasis should be placed upon making them more attractive.

Imaginative redevelopments including internal passageways to lanes and rear parking areas will be supported.

CRC Regional Centre

11. Pine Centre and Parkwood Mall are designated CRC with approximate maximum gross leasable areas (GLA) of 47,000 m<sup>2</sup> and 40,000 m<sup>2</sup> respectively, the latter including 5600 m<sup>2</sup> of future commercial office development. Expansion may be supported providing parking, traffic congestion and neighbourhood impact are satisfactorily addressed.
12. Additional CRC designations shall have a design minimum of 30,000 m<sup>2</sup> GLA. Such designations shall require demonstration of market demand and a phased development plan.
13. Future CRCs locations will need to carefully relate to the regional, city and neighbourhood street network plan to provide regional access without disrupting the city road network.
14. All future locations of CRCs will be designated as development permit areas.

CN Neighbourhood

15. CNs are intended to serve an area that includes several neighbourhoods, a major part, or even a sector of the city. Uses could include commercial retail and service uses, limited offices including medical, public health and welfare, and public administration functions, restaurants and commercial recreation.
16. Existing shopping centres are designated CN on the Schedule B - Land Use maps if they are intended to serve more than as local convenience facilities for nearby residents.

**PART THREE - DEVELOPMENT PERMITS  
CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT**

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**17.7 CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT PERMIT AREA**

**Category:** (e) Commercial

**Area:** Development Permit Area as shown on Schedule G7.

**Justification:** The central business district is undergoing a revitalization program which will establish some design elements as well as street improvements. The area is designated a development permit area to set some basic principles upon which businesses can participate in the revitalization program and follow the approaches set out in the program.

**Guidelines:** Development permits for this area should apply the following guidelines.

1. Buildings should extend to the front and side property lines to create a continuous streetscape except where a public space as an amenity is provided in the development.
2. Multi-storey development with vertically mixed uses that create high pedestrian traffic at street level is preferred.
3. Street level facades should emphasize glazed entrances and display windows to provide a feeling of interaction between the building and street.
4. When on-site parking is provided, it should be at the rear of the site. A passageway designed as part of the building to connect rear parking to the street frontage is encouraged. The design of parking areas should place emphasis upon landscaping, lighting and security.

## 11. REFERENCES

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