

City of Yellowknife Urban Design Initiative

Final draft submitted to City of Yellowknife Committee of Council • June 2010



**SMART
GROWTH
PLAN**



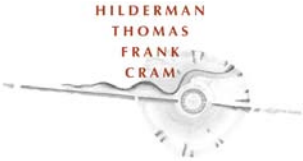
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Executive Summary

The Urban Design Initiative has been initiated by the City of Yellowknife in order to more fully understand, within a larger context of transportation planning and environmental management, how the principles of smart growth may be applied to city-making within a northern setting. Smart growth is broadly based on the principles of economic, environmental and social sustainability, and of relevance to urban design, holds as a key focus the creation of safe, vibrant, meaningful and authentic places.

The Urban Design Initiative is therefore about making great places.

One of the first key tasks within the Urban Design Initiative was to plan and host the four-day DESIGN YELLOWKNIFE design charrette, the cornerstone of the public consultation program. Held in late April 2009, the charrette provided the Project Team with clear direction on guiding principles and concepts relevant to the articulation of redevelopment concepts for each of the four study areas - Old Airport Road, Downtown, Con Mine / Con Camp, and Old Town.

Old Airport Road was collectively envisioned as not only a more attractive gateway to the city, but as a centrepiece for sustainable urban intensification. As a result, the redevelopment vision for the corridor incorporates greater density and diversity of use, with a special emphasis on the creation of open spaces and active transportation networks.

Downtown was reimagined with new housing, new attractions and higher quality urban spaces. The redevelopment vision therefore incorporates mixed use development with an emphasis on a range of housing models, high quality streetscapes, a major downtown gathering area, and new greenspace connections.

The Con Mine / Con Camp area south of Tin Can Hill offers a unique opportunity to position Yellowknife as a leader in innovative and sustainable urban design. The redevelopment vision for this area is therefore based on a green community of transit friendly, walkable neighbourhoods linked to recreational assets, commercial amenities, academic and employment opportunities.

Old Town is recognized as an integral part of Yellowknife's history and a major part of the unique character and personality of the community. The redevelopment vision of this area responds with the careful and incremental redevelopment of key sites and waterfront areas to add additional activity, increase public waterfront access, while at the same time respecting the organic and authentic character of the area.



Another major component of the Urban Design Initiative is the development of an urban design kit-of-parts - components and strategies which can be implemented throughout the community. The urban design kit-of-parts include streetscapes, street furnishings, lighting, landscape, environmental graphic design, architecture and signage. In developing the kit-of-parts the Project Team explored placemaking concepts such as comfort and convenience, activity and vitality, safety, accessibility, winter city design, sustainability and wayfinding

In terms of public art, the Urban Design Initiative advocates for the establishment of a public art committee to oversee the development of a public art policy for the City of Yellowknife. While this is a significant endeavor and arguably beyond the scope of this assignment, the Urban Design Initiative identifies parallel processes and venues that deserve consideration as the process moves forward.

In terms of the historic preservation, The Urban Design Initiative illustrates the potential redevelopment of the Hudson's Bay Warehouse in Old Town to explore the various opportunities and challenges; specifically, appreciating the building in context and understanding its relationship to its urban setting; identifying and incorporating internal features and structural elements into planned building programmes; and appropriately incorporating new technologies to maximize long term building performance.

Implementation Strategies

Implementation strategies have been identified throughout the Urban Design Initiative, and are summarized below. In each case, the City of Yellowknife should direct its energy to short term goals - those activities which can be easily achieved in a relatively short time period and have significant impact on the advancement of urban design and placemaking in the community.

ENGINEERING / DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Short term goal:

- Incorporate a basic standard of streetscaping (hardscaping), street furnishings, lighting and landscaping in City of Yellowknife Engineering Standards, which should become the basis for all public and private projects within the city.



To support this goal:

- Formalize standard plant lists and landscape construction details and specifications. Emphasis should be placed on the use of native trees, shrubs, perennials and groundcovers, as well as the use of locally sourced mulches and planting materials.
- Formalize a standard lighting palette. Emphasis should be placed on the use of luminaires which are energy efficient and limit light pollution.
- Undertake a thorough inventory of existing street furnishings and replacement cycles to understand the implications of furnishing installation and replacement from the perspective of asset management.

ZONING BY-LAW

Short term goal:

- Update the By-law as appropriate to reflect ongoing changes to building and site signage.
- Update the By-Law, based on best practice reviews, to enhance landscape requirements on private property.
- Update the By-law with appropriate zoning mechanisms (e.g. overlay zones) to require a basic level of streetscape development in private development , including streetscaping (hardscaping), street furnishings, lighting, landscaping

Long Term Goals:

- Explore form-based and similar zoning strategies which shift emphasis from building uses to building typologies and forms.
- Explore zoning mechanisms (e.g. overlay zones) within areas as Old Town to protect the overall architectural identity and integrity of these unique neighbourhoods.

To support these goals:

- Undertake a detailed analysis of potential districts (e.g. Old Town) in which form-based or overlay zoning mechanisms may be appropriate. Identify geographical boundaries and architectural and urban design character, such as building form and materials, and urban design pattern and texture.



BUILDING BY-LAW

Short term goals:

- Encourage new construction to meet current national standards for energy efficiency.

HERITAGE BY-LAW / HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Short term goals:

- Review and update the existing Heritage By-law to strengthen the toolkit available to preserve architectural resources. In addition to grants and abatements, the City can refund permit fees and work with proponents to find land use and code equivalencies which may facilitate restoration. Additionally, the City may undertake off-site improvements, including infrastructure and streetscaping, which may bolster the viability of projects.
- Review and update the existing Heritage By-law to strengthen the city's appreciation and protection of its own corporate history.

To support this goal:

- Assume a leadership role in a restoration project such as the Hudson's Bay Warehouse, either alone or in support of a private property owner, as both a demonstration project and a means to better understand the complexities of architectural restoration.

ADVANCING OTHER INITIATIVES

Ongoing goals:

- Continue to advance and support the facade improvement program. Explore the development of a design review committee or similar mechanism to assist in the delivery of this program.
- Initiate a community-wide signage plan, including an inventory of existing signs, kiosks and banners, and their respective replacement cycles. Address communication requirements and graphic design standards for gateway, identity / branding, and wayfinding signage. Explore the opportunity to introduce standardized, pre-fabricated sign families.
- Advance the development of a public art policy for Yellowknife. The City should ideally create a position within Planning and Development to establish and manage this committee, which should include representation from the Aurora Arts



Society and other local artists. The first roles of the committee should be to establish a vision, guiding principles and short term / immediate action plan which can form the basis of a public art policy moving forward. Coordinate and partner with other organizations, such as the GNWT, to share resources, knowledge and existing models in the advancement of a public art policy.

- Continue to show leadership in working with local artists to incorporate public art into capital projects such as streetscaping and open space development.

CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

Ongoing goals:

- Continue to partner with Public Works and Engineering to ensure roadway upgrades include streetscape enhancements, including standard palette: hardscape / street furnishings / lighting (/ signage / landscaping.
- Integrate public art. Emphasis should be placed on opportunities for immediate partnerships (e.g. street furnishings, sidewalk stamping).
- Integrate and test new / 'green' technologies; e.g. rainwater gardens.
- Integrate an innovative and creative lighting palette.
- Undertake streetscape and open space development to support district revitalization (e.g. 50 / 50 corner).



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The Urban Design Initiative has been initiated by the City of Yellowknife in order to more fully understand, within a larger context of transportation planning and environmental management, how the principles of smart growth may be applied to city-making within a northern setting.

As a concept, smart growth is based on the principles of economic, environmental and social sustainability, and as such, urban design plays but one part, along with land use planning, economic development, social planning and other endeavors. In particular, urban design offers a tool which if used properly can create the safe, vibrant, meaningful and authentic places which are a cornerstone of smart growth. The Urban Design Initiative is therefore about making great places.

The reality is, however, that great places are rarely made. Great places more typically evolve - often in spite of the best efforts and intentions of planners and designers. Because placemaking is an inevitable by-product of city-making, the Urban Design Initiative offers a best effort in illustrating how time-tested principles of urban design, integrated with current thinking on smart growth and sustainable design, might be appropriately realized within the northern context of Yellowknife.



Objectives, Process and Outcomes

In undertaking this initiative, the City of Yellowknife is exploring multiple scales and timeframes of placemaking within the four study areas of Old Airport Road, Downtown, Con Mine and Old Town - establishing long term, high level visions for each of the study areas, identifying short to medium term projects which could act as catalysts for broader redevelopment, and preparing plans and guidelines for the public realm which can be implemented in a more immediate timeframe.

This report kicks off with a description of the intensive, four-day planning and design charrette which articulated guiding principles and provided the community an opportunity to explore redevelopment within the four study areas. Part 3 shows how to create great places within the Yellowknife context, how branding and placemaking are one and the same, and how these expressions of place can be articulated through 'community canvases'. Parts 4 through 7 focus on the revitalization of the four study areas as reflection of the guiding principles identified through the planning and design charrette. At this scale, individual catalyst projects are identified and the application of placemaking principles will begin to become clear to the reader. Part 8 focuses on a detailed exploration of components and strategies that make up a great place. As the name suggests, the 'kit-of-parts' are examples of interchangeable components and strategies that could be implemented throughout the community. Parts 9 and 10 focus on public art and historic preservation, and most significantly, the underlying processes the community needs to consider in moving forward on these important issues.

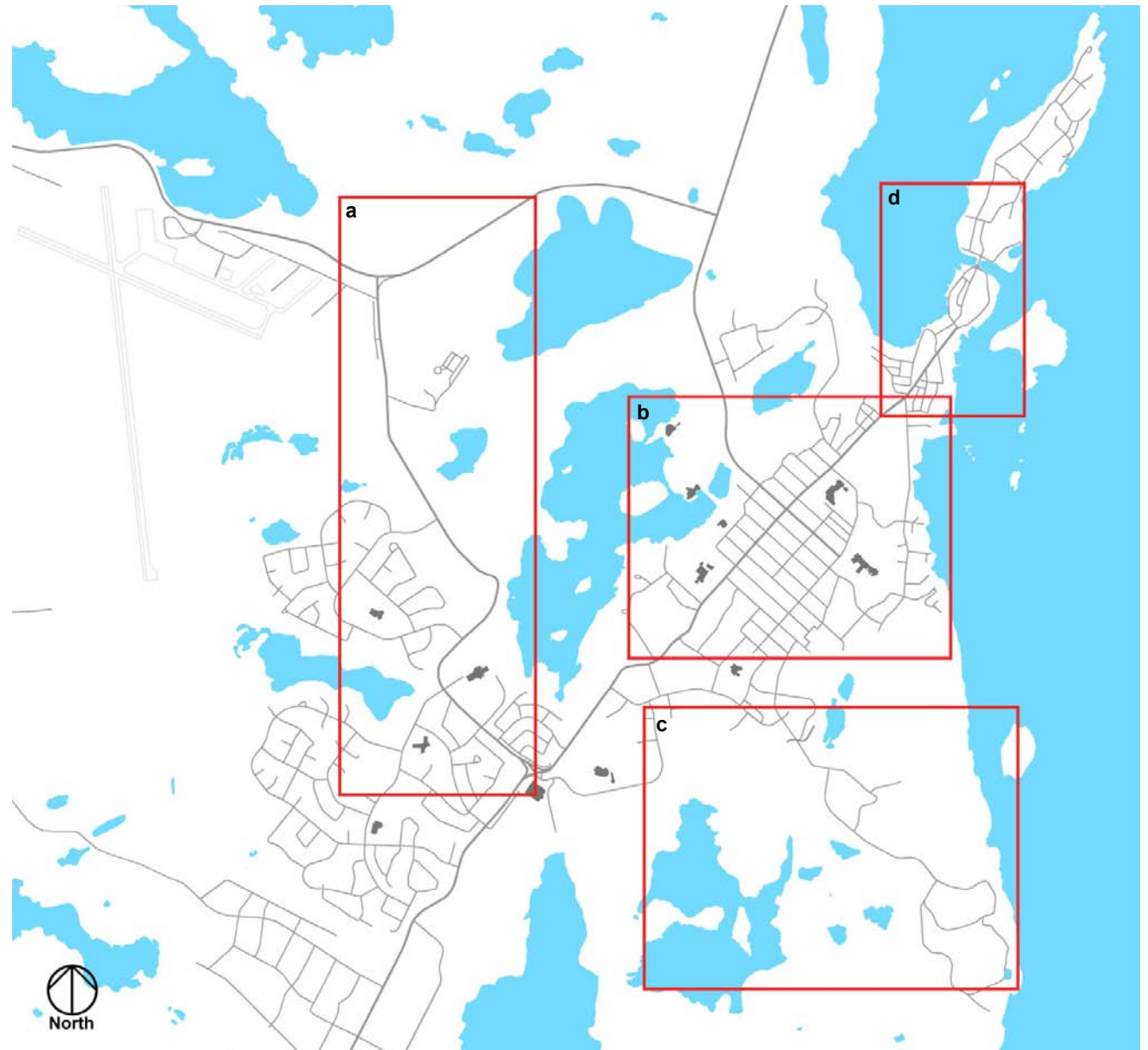
In each area of the report, consideration is given to implementation strategies available to the City of Yellowknife and its partners. Likewise, budget-level costs are provided for those capital projects which can be undertaken directly by the City.

Smart Growth in Yellowknife : A History

The Urban Design Initiative is one of a series exercises undertaken by the City of Yellowknife as part of its Smart Growth Development Plan. The Plan was initiated by the City in 2007, and began with a community-wide public engagement process - 7500 questionnaires were distributed to residents and business owners, approximately 150 individuals took part in focus group sessions. The results of this engagement are contained in the **Smart Growth Development Plan: City-Wide Questionnaire Results** and the **Smart Growth Focus Groups Facilitation Final Report** (both May 2008). In summary, the process revealed the following issues, opportunities and priorities:

- Revitalizing Old Town, Downtown and Old Airport Road.
- Promoting downtown as gathering place with a range of uses and indoor and outdoor spaces.





The Urban Design Initiative focuses on four primary study areas: Old Airport Road (a), Downtown (b), Con Mine / Con Camp (c) and Old Town (d).



ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES AND PRIORITIES / continued

- Creating a community which celebrates culture and heritage, is walkable and safe, incorporates winter city design, features mixed uses, and respects the natural environment.
- Encouraging waterfront development and access in Old Town.
- Addressing parking needs in Downtown.
- Encouraging alternate modes of transportation, including active transportation and transit.
- Improving the transportation network.
- Developing revitalization 'anchors', such as a marina, artists' cooperative, convention centre or central plaza.
- Revisiting / expanding the current Yellowknife brand to capitalize on northern / aboriginal arts and culture.
- Improving wayfinding for key community attractions.
- Attracting more investment to the community.
- Developing additional industrial park opportunities.
- Reclaiming abandoned gold mines.
- Increasing housing affordability and choice, and encouraging reinvestment in existing housing stock.
- Developing a public space to celebrate northern / aboriginal art and culture and host year-round events.
- Encouraging culturally-based businesses linked to tourism.
- Encouraging festivals / events which celebrate culture.
- Strengthening the library as primary community focus.
- Developing a youth drop-in centre.
- Renaming streets in Downtown to celebrate aboriginal heritage.
- Establishing a pesticide use by-law.
- Encouraging energy efficiency and water management and conservation strategies.
- Preserving undeveloped lands and open space.
- Continuing to explore geothermal energy options.

MetroQuest

Subsequent to the City's public engagement process, MetroQuest was retained in 2008 to design and deliver a community engagement process focused more specifically on the evaluation of long range growth scenarios for community. In a number of workshop sessions, members of the public and key stakeholder groups were able to, through wireless handsets,



evaluate various priorities and policies broadly related to land use, transportation and environment. Key issues and opportunities noted during this process include:

- Creating compact, walkable, mixed use development, with good access to greenspace.
- Revitalizing underdeveloped sites.
- Ensuring a 'northern' feel to development.
- Increasing housing choices.
- Promoting alternative modes of transportation, including active transportation and transit.
- Expanding the roadway network, in particular to accommodate industrial traffic.
- Plan development to support transit.
- Emphasizing energy and water conservation, improved waste management, and greenhouse gas reduction.



Making great places is a shared endeavor between those who inhabit and intimately understand a place, and those with the technical skills needed to bring ideas and concepts to life. This shared process is the basis for the comprehensive public consultation program at the heart of the Urban Design Initiative, culminating in a four-day DESIGN YELLOWKNIFE design charrette held in late April 2009. This charette provided the Project Team with clear direction moving forward towards detailed design concepts for each of the four study areas.



Introduction

DESIGN YELLOWKNIFE was a key consultation component of the Smart Growth Plan, providing citizens the opportunity to develop concepts which will have a lasting impact to the future growth and development of Yellowknife. Charrette participants worked in close collaboration with local and national planning and design experts to develop concepts and identify future strategies, which integrate urban design, open space and ecological networks, land use and development density, revitalization opportunities, and transportation, focusing primarily on the four key study areas.

The Charrette involved participation of community residents, individuals from various local interest groups, City of Yellowknife staff, politicians, specialists from various disciplines, and other stakeholders. Along with several presentations intended to provide a baseline understanding of the issues, the study areas, and the broad community goals, groups of participants engaged in discussions and workshop sessions in the examination of potential development directions for Yellowknife in general and the four study areas, Old Town, Downtown, Con Mine / Con Camp and Old Airport Road, in particular.

Guiding Principles

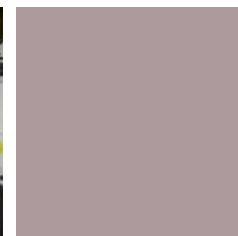
An early key milestone in the DESIGN YELLOWKNIFE process was the identification and discussion of overall guiding principles during the first day session. Guiding principles are critical in establishing a clear direction moving forward within the charrette process towards detailed design concepts for each of the four study areas. The following guiding principles were identified:

HOUSING

- Creating affordable, energy efficient, healthy housing that results in a balance between density and sprawl, and is acceptable to the community.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- Investing in existing building stock.
- Consider heritage preservation in the establishment of planning initiatives.
- Recognizing the role that yellowknife's history, unique architecture, character, etc. plays in tourism and quality of life.
- Establishing design standards which continue existing architectural patterns and foster a sense of neighbourliness.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES / continued

ECOLOGY

- Recognizing that wilderness is integral to Yellowknife's character and should be preserved and appropriately managed.
- Actively promoting the pristine nature of Yellowknife within the community's image or brand.

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

- Working collectively to seek solutions to issues (e.g. homelessness) based on local knowledge and understanding.
- Establishing a safety network for the benefit of those in need.
- Seeking opportunities to engage first nations in collaborative planning and decision making .
- Ensuring buildings and facilities are universally accessible to all, including persons with disabilities.

TRANSPORTATION

- Establishing a transportation system which is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.
- Establishing a range of year-round transportation alternatives which are efficient, convenient, accessible and safe.

QUALITY OF LIFE

- Providing and fostering a range of opportunities in education, recreation and arts and culture.
- Promoting a caring, friendly and sociable community environment.
- Celebrating, respecting and taking pride in diversity.

URBAN DESIGN

- Building new neighbourhoods in a manner that capture the vibrancy and diversity of organic places such as Old Town.
- Encouraging longer store opening hours downtown to encourage residents to stay, shop and play downtown.
- Encouraging additional residential development within the core area, preferably in mixed use developments.
- Creating opportunities for a greater diversity of commercial opportunities in the downtown area.



GREENSPACE

- Ensuring reasonable access to greenspace for all residents.
- Ensuring greenspace is integrated into both new and existing built-up neighbourhoods.
- Providing a range of opportunities for community access and enjoyment of the waterfront.

ENERGY

- Using waste streams as potential viable resources.
- Promoting locally available renewable energy and alternative fuel sources.
- Balancing municipal investment between redevelopment and new development.
- Exploring opportunities for economic diversity that take advantage of intrinsic strengths and opportunities.
- Promoting local food production, marketing and retailing.
- Promoting venues for community exchange.
- Implementing best practice technology for the renewal of infrastructure and facilities.
- Requiring development schemes to meet LEED – ND standards.
- Encouraging development that incorporates ‘full cost accounting’.
- Requiring new buildings and existing building renovations to be constructed / renovated to a higher environmental standard.

Conceptual Design

With the guiding principles clearly articulated, charrette participants were able to advance the planning and design process. Participants organized into groups and worked, with the assistance of the Project Team and other consultants and facilitators, to more fully explore and understand the opportunities and challenges of redevelopment within the four study areas.

At the end of the charrette process, each group presented conceptual diagrams and sketches which illustrated their particular vision for their respective study areas. These diagrams, sketches and notes would play a key role in the identification of redevelopment concepts for each of the four study areas by the Project Team (See Parts 4 - 7).



Making great places is at the heart of the contribution that urban design can make to creating a sustainable community. Though the challenges facing our cities are many and seemingly beyond the scope of architects and planners, urban design creates the public domain in which the civic life of a city and its residents takes place.



Overview

Urban design plays a significant role in making great places, in as much as urban design influences the physical realm (e.g. streetscapes and open spaces) in which the collective life of a community plays out. Arguably, the concept of 'place' is manifested only when people are able and willing to engage in this collective life. To better understand these connections, the following lists some of the best practices related to placemaking, connected to urban design strategies, with particular reference to the northern context of Yellowknife as informed by the DESIGN YELLOWKNIFE charrette process and observations by the Project Team.

ACTIVITY AND VITALITY

Urban design should use time-honored principles to create places which are active and exciting all year round. New and infill development should be planned with increased densities and mixes of uses, including commercial, residential and employment opportunities. Special consideration should be given to the physical design of buildings and how they relate to the streetscape. In terms of open spaces, gathering spaces should be planned which accommodate a range of activities, day and night, and year-round.

COMFORT AND SAFETY

Streets and open spaces should be attractive, comfortable and safe places which attract year-round use. Streetscapes and open spaces should be designed with particular attention to maximizing use in the cold months, through the creation of windbreaks and suncatches. To enhance public safety, open spaces should be designed with consideration of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which combines the integration of basic placemaking principles (e.g. activity generation, informal surveillance) with community-based auditing.

INCLUSIVENESS

Communities must not just meet the basic needs of its residents, but must create a space for all people and their inherent right to belong and express themselves. This critical need extends from the provision of adequate housing choices to the design of inclusive, sociable and accessible open spaces to the creation of venues for community events and programs.

SUSTAINABILITY

The preservation of ecological systems and reintroduction of nature into the urban landscape is of critical importance, not



just to our sense of place but our collective long term survival. The natural landscape is an important part of Yellowknife's character and should be incorporated directly into urban development through creative site planning and building design which is sensitive to topography, is mindful of orientation, and preserves viewsheds. There is also a need to explore green infrastructure (e.g. bioswales, district heating), support local food production (e.g. community gardening) and formalize the selection and use of materials and processes on the basis of energy consumption, ease of transport and recyclability.

A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP AND COMMUNITY PRIDE

People must be involved in the design and maintenance of cities. Meaningful public consultation is key to creating open spaces and amenities which are well used and well loved. Streetscapes and open spaces should be designed with maintenance in mind, incorporating durable and robust materials. People should be encouraged to keep streets and sidewalks clean, and business owners should be encouraged to improve their properties through initiatives such as facade enhancement and parking lot landscaping.

INTEGRATION OF ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Buildings that reflect their geographical space and ecological environment will have long lasting appeal and strengthen their community's identity. Building form should be sensitive to its unique context (such as in Old Town), and building design should consider solar orientation, energy efficiency and the use of locally appropriate construction methods and materials.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

In a sustainable community, the full range of transportation options are accommodated. Active transportation is vital in Yellowknife, and should be encouraged in the design (and redesign) of street networks, open spaces and connections - through such means as on- and off-street trails, greenways and traffic calming. Similarly, transit use should be encouraged through the improvement of stops and facilities, and over the long term, land use planning should be undertaken to support transit. In these examples of Transit Oriented Development (TOD), higher density, mixed use is located within easy walking distance (e.g. 400 m) of transit.

CONNECTIVITY WITHIN A LEGIBLE URBAN FABRIC

Strengthening and expanding the existing pattern of streets and roadways is a critical component of urban design. The existing pattern of streets, districts and destinations should be strengthened through the development of gateways and identity

