

Part 1 Introduction

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1.0 A Plan for the Heart of Our City

1.1 Introduction

It is a rare and exciting opportunity to define a vision and then to align and guide efforts to bring that vision to fruition. The process of thinking strategically about Downtown Lethbridge began many years before this Master Plan and will continue well after. The process of great city-building is iterative, an on-going endeavour that evolves, improving on ideas and building on successes.

The Heart of Our City Master Plan is but one milestone in a series that will mark the course for what will be no less than a transformation of Downtown. It is, however, a distinctly powerful milestone. The scope of the Master Plan, and the magnitude of its potential, has the capacity to profoundly impact Downtown, if not the entire City of Lethbridge.

Although it represents a convergence of ideas and studies over the years along with new strategies, it is most valuable because it clearly articulates a long-term vision that will guide decision-making in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Relative to past studies and initiatives that addressed specific Downtown issues, areas or land uses, this Master Plan can have a greater impact because it ties all these discrete elements together and aligns them to ensure the broader and longer term objectives are consistently being met. The vision represented in the Master Plan can also resonate more decisively with the public and inspire investors, because it clearly articulates the rationale and intended outcomes for the future look and feel of Downtown.



The High Level Bridge



Downtown Shopfronts



Downtown's river valley frontage

1.0 A Plan for the Heart of Our City



Downtown Business Revitalization Zone offices



Pedestrian-oriented retail core



Strong regional civic centre

1.2 Downtown Planning in Context

The historic downtown can best reveal the authentic spirit of a town or city. It is in the downtown that the vestiges of a community’s historic roots can be found, and where the defining image that makes a place special and memorable is captured in the distinct block patterns, roads, buildings and landmarks.

It is recognizing the value of the discovery and protection of these characteristics that is at the heart of the movement to rediscover and revitalize downtowns across North America. This resurgence is not just about enhancing civic identity and pride, although these objectives are valuable in and of themselves, it is also very much about a community’s economic development and prowess.

Healthy downtowns facilitate vibrant cultural activities and industries, attract tourists, incubate local independent businesses, accommodate a variety of lifestyle choices and make efficient use of municipal services and infrastructure. These attributes are unique to downtowns because downtowns have the necessary density of people, mix of uses, variety of activities, pedestrian charm, built quality and sense of place that enable this vitality.

Downtown Lethbridge has all the hallmarks to become a success, including:

- a proud and distinct history that remains evident in its built character, broad streets, and in Galt Gardens, its iconic central park;
- its proximity to one of the largest natural urban greenspaces in North America;
- its strong identity and role as a pre-eminent regional shopping destination;

- a healthy and important employment node where one in four Lethbridge residents work;
- a rich and diverse arts and culture community that is recognized both regionally and nationally;
- a regional centre in Southern Alberta for innovative business and research in agriculture and green energy;
- an expanding University and College;
- its role as a regional civic centre and destination; and,
- room for growth in its Downtown.

However, as with many similarly scaled cities, the historic function of the downtown as the primary retail and employment centre has diminished. This decline over many years has to an extent adversely impacted the area’s aesthetic quality, urban vitality and perceived image. Fortunately, Downtown Lethbridge’s treasured assets remain intact and it is well positioned to seize upon emerging opportunities to revitalize and transform its image.

The Heart of Our City Master Plan has been prepared to guide the future development pattern and the “look and feel” of Downtown Lethbridge, while encouraging public and private investment and community involvement in its renewal. The Plan looks comprehensively at the historic, symbolic and functional heart of Lethbridge and considers its position and importance within the City as a whole. This holistic perspective lent to establishing a Vision Statement and supporting principles derived through broad-based community participation. Most importantly, the primary objective of the Plan is to provide a clear direction and implementation strategy that will help Downtown grow into the Vision articulated by Lethbridge residents and stakeholders.



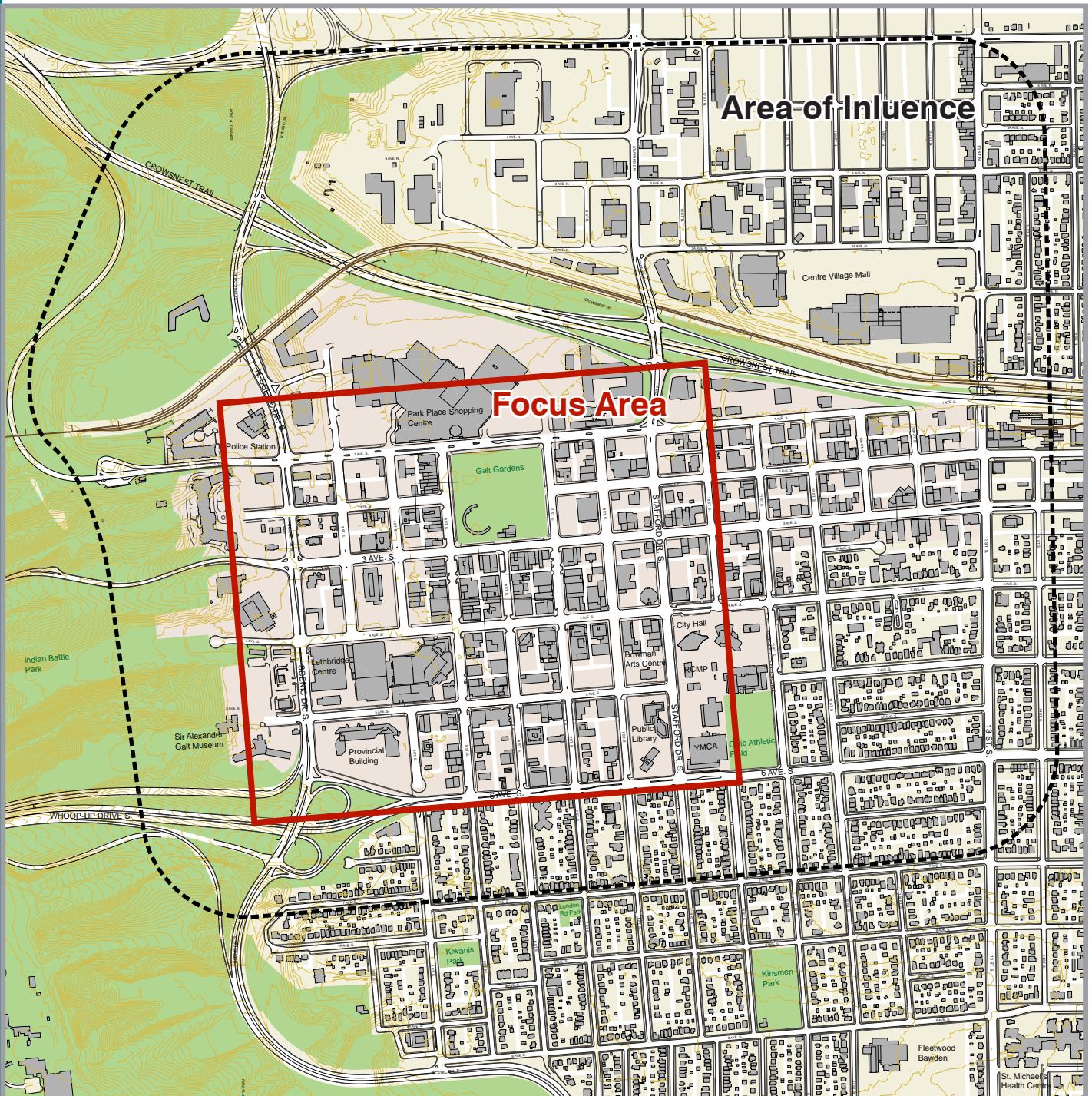
Iconic cultural institutions



Distinct and well-preserved historic identity



Adaptive re-use of heritage buildings



Heart of Our City Master Plan Study Area: Downtown Focus Area & Area of Influence

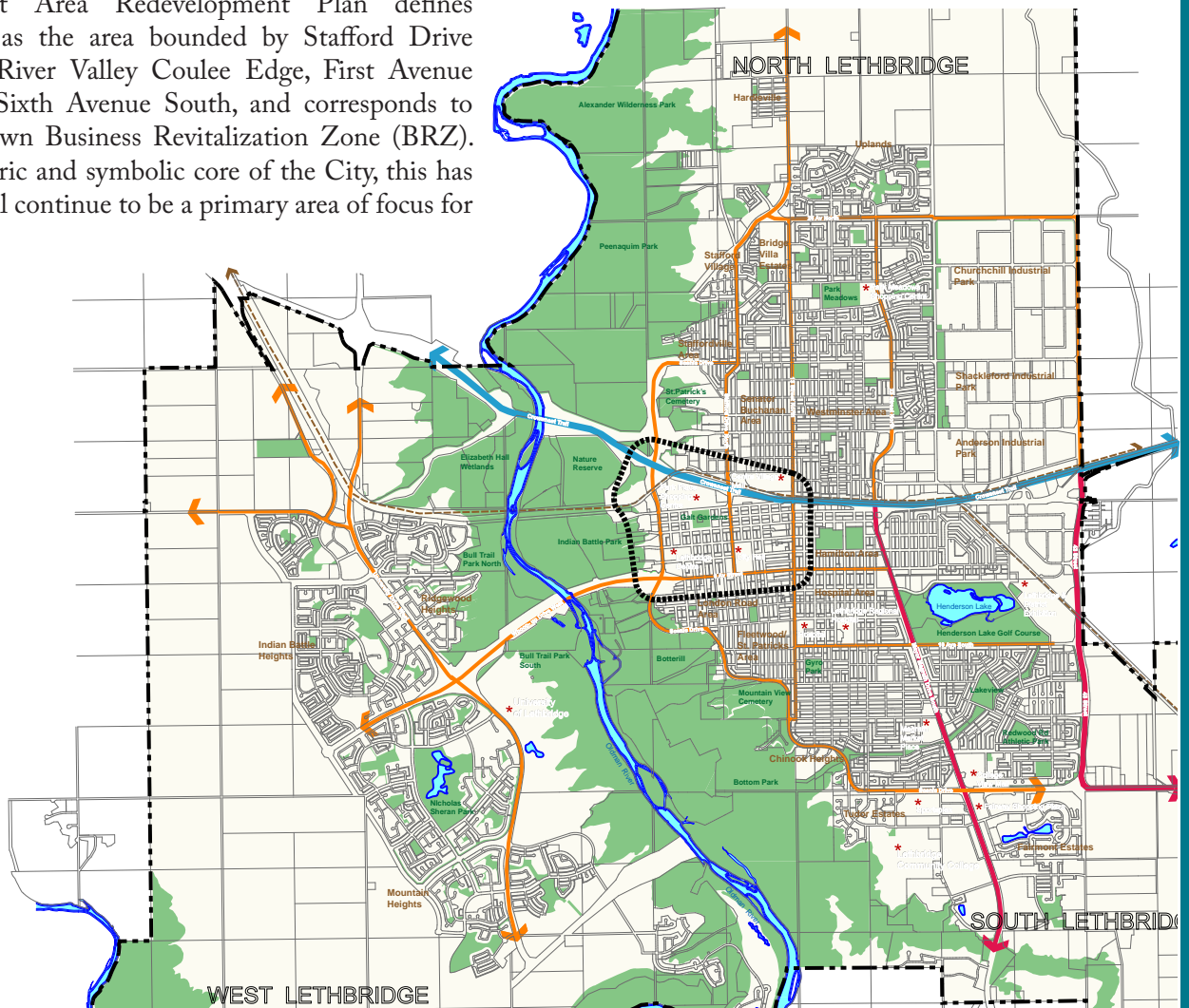
1.3 Defining the Downtown Area of Influence

Downtown Lethbridge has traditionally been associated with a concentration of civic, business and retail uses that form an important regional centre to both Southwestern Alberta as well as to surrounding Provinces and several northern U.S. States.

The current Area Redevelopment Plan defines Downtown as the area bounded by Stafford Drive South, the River Valley Coulee Edge, First Avenue South and Sixth Avenue South, and corresponds to the Downtown Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ). As the historic and symbolic core of the City, this has been and will continue to be a primary area of focus for

improvements and initiatives. However, although the primary focus is on the core, the physical area subject to the Master Plan extends to include a far larger area of influence. In doing so, the Plan can ensure the integration of Downtown with its surroundings as change occurs over the long-term.

For the purposes of the Master Plan, the study area for Downtown corresponds to an 'Area of Influence' that is indicated in the dashed boundary lines on all subsequent plans.



Downtown Master Plan Study Area in the City of Lethbridge

Let's think first about revitalization successes; they are great and good teachers. They don't result from gigantic plans and show-off projects... They build up gradually and authentically from diverse human communities; successful city revitalization builds itself on these community foundations. - Jane Jacobs

2.0 The Planning Process

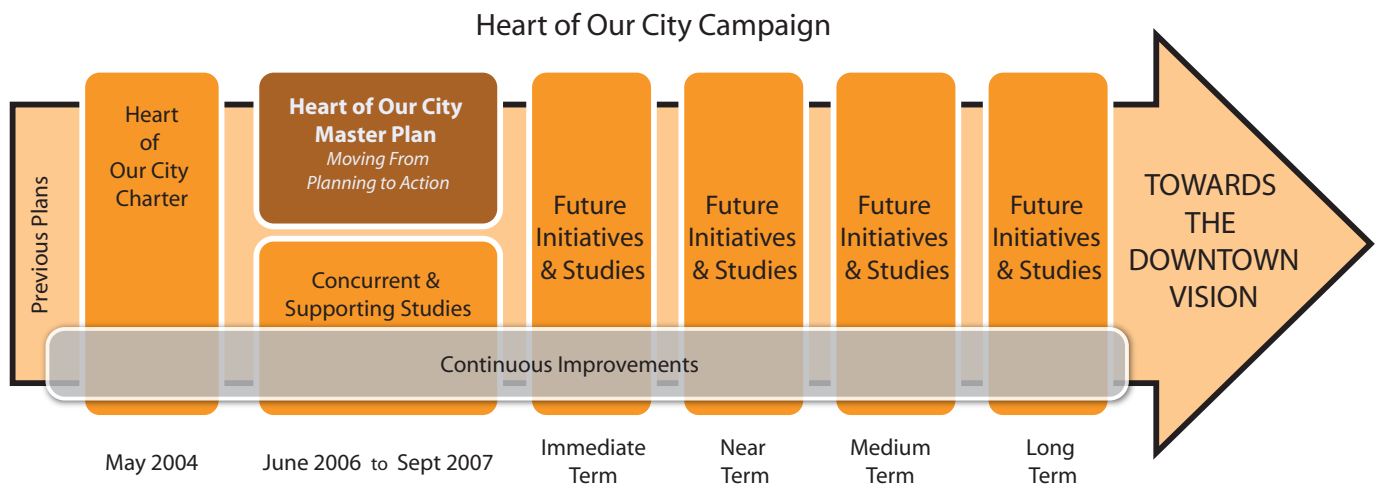
2.1 The Heart of Our City Campaign

The Heart of Our City Campaign is a long-term process that provides a framework for initiatives that work towards the revitalization and growth of Downtown Lethbridge.

In May 2004 the City of Lethbridge sponsored the Heart of the City Conference, a visioning process that resulted in "The Heart of the City Charter." This Charter recognized Downtown as a distinct and unique area that creates sustainable social, cultural and economic benefits, as well as entertainment opportunities, for all people. An accompanying action strategy, "A Framework for Moving from Planning to Action - Creating a Downtown Master Plan," was developed in June 2005. One of the key recommendations of that strategy was the Heart of Our City Master Plan.

In May 2006 the Heart of Our City Master Plan, as part of its background review and analysis phase, sought to integrate the process into the ongoing and wider collective efforts of the Lethbridge community. This was considered to be imperative because the revitalization and growth of Downtown will continue well after this Master Planning process. The Heart of Our City Campaign was identified to describe this revitalization 'movement' in a way that can capture change in the broadest sense and involving all members of this community. The Campaign provides a framework and common purpose for the body of work completed in the past, studies that are currently underway, and those that will necessarily follow.

By positioning the Master Plan and its implementation within the Campaign, it is hoped that it will be easier to set benchmarks or goals at various stages of the Downtown's transformation, coordinate efforts and initiatives, and measure successes.



Milestones and components of the Heart of Our City Campaign

2.0 The Planning Process

Past Milestones in the Heart of Our City Campaign

- Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan (1988)
- CentreSite Urban Design Plan (1988)
- Downtown Lethbridge Streetscape Study (1988)
- Galt Gardens Phase I Plan (1990)
- Downtown “Hard to Serve” Community action plan (1996)
- Co-Design Report on Charettes for Downtown Lethbridge (2000)
- A Master Plan for Galt Gardens (2000)
- Chinatown Streetscape Revitalization: Architectural Guidelines (2000)
- Alberta Main Streets Program (2000)
- Downtown Ad Hoc Committee (2000) - City Hall, Galt Gardens Improvements, New Police Station
- Galt Gardens, Lethbridge, Alberta Phase 2 Planning Project: Conceptual Design Report (2004)
- Re-Tooling Downtown - McGill University 2005
- Framework for Moving From Planning to Action: Creating a Downtown Master Plan Charter (2005)
- Heart of Our City Community Charter (2005)
- Municipal Development Plan (2005)

2.2 Purpose: Moving from Plan to Action

This Master Plan is an important ‘first-step’ in the Heart of Our City Campaign that provides a framework to move from planning to action. The Plan is intended to provide Lethbridge with a long-term physical Vision; to guide public improvements and private investments; and to define strategies that can capitalize on strengths and opportunities to bring the Vision to fruition. To this end, the Master Plan has three key purposes:

- to consolidate and refine previous and current visions, plans and studies;
- to establish a comprehensive and coherent planning framework; and,
- to provide strategic guidance for implementation.



Heart of Our City Campaign: Installation of Bike Racks



Heart of Our City Campaign: Installation of Murals

2.3 Scope: A Comprehensive Plan

The Master Plan is intended to be wide-ranging and comprehensive. From the outset, the Plan has sought to validate the desires of the community, establish priorities, and describe the necessary actions that will ensure a revitalized Downtown. The Plan has also integrated the findings of a number of concurrent studies, including the Transit Strategy and Routing Plan, and Round Street: Building a Better Neighbourhood. At the outset of the study, the project scope sought to achieve a number of outcomes for the Master Plan, including:

- *Land Use Plan*
- *Urban Design Guidelines*
- *Streetscape Plan*
- *Downtown Transportation Plan*
- *Long Range Parking Plan*
- *Implementation Action Plan*
- *Governance Model for Downtown*

Through the Master Plan process these components, among others, have been refined and integrated into the following five parts of the Master Plan document:

- Part 2 - Background Report
- Part 3 - The Vision
- Part 4 - The Guiding Framework
- Part 5- Development Design Guidelines
- Part 6- Implementation Strategies



Downtown is at the City's geographic centre



Kick-off presentation, August 2006



Mayor Tarleck champions Downtown at Forum One, September 2006



Interactive workshop, Forum One

2.4 An Open & Engaging Public Process

The Master Planning process has sought to incorporate the various voices of a wide array of interests into a vision for Downtown, including resident groups, development interests, design professionals, heritage groups, businesses and property owners.

The Master Plan unfolded through 4 phases, over 16 months. As a community driven process, inputs from each successive phase had been integrated into the next. These inputs had been derived from key consultation events where the public was engaged to build upon and advance ideas. To this end, the process focused around the following four major community-oriented events:

The Kick-Off: Study Introduction & Stakeholder Interviews

Held August 21-24, 2006, the Kick-Off was the major public event for the Background Review and Analysis Stage, the first of four Master Plan phases. In this phase, the Consultant Team reviewed background materials, undertook an analysis of the existing conditions of Downtown, and developed the opportunities and constraints analysis in preparation for the next phase of the study process.

Forum One: A Vision & Planning Framework

Held September 25-28, 2006, Forum One comprised a series of key public events that marked the first of three Master Planning Forums. The Forum was an exciting and intensive event that involved the entire Consultant Team, Advisory Committees, stakeholders, and members of the public. It served to facilitate discussion, stimulate debate, and catalyze the generation of constructive ideas. The workshops worked towards generating

a comprehensive plan, demonstration development concepts, and designs for capital improvements - all of which directly contributed to the preparation of the Vision and Guiding Framework for Downtown.

Forum Two: Opportunity Sites

The Three-day Forum took place from January 18-20, 2007. The event provided the consultants with an opportunity to present the Draft Guiding Framework Plans for public feedback. These Plans built on the outcomes of Forum One and form the 'blueprint' for guiding change in Downtown over the long-term. The primary focus of the Forum was a series of design workshops during which participants prepared demonstration concepts for opportunity sites to illustrate the Plan in action. This was also an opportunity to identify implementation issues, challenges and directions.

Forum Three: A Draft Master Plan

Held May 14-16, Public Forum Three was the final Master Planning Forum. At the event, the Consultants presented the Draft Master Plan and Implementation Strategy for public feedback. This presentation included the Principles and Vision established for Downtown at Public Forum One, the highlights of the Opportunity Sites Workshop held during Forum Two, and the work to date on the Implementation Strategies. The Implementation Strategies built on the outcomes of Public Forum Two and provide a comprehensive roadmap for action to guide change in Downtown over the long-term.



Visioning workshop, Forum One



Walk and talk tour, Forum One



Downtown concept plan takes form at Forum One workshop

A Master Plan is most effective when it can compel, inspire and bring about the intended outcomes. To do so, it must be rooted in the realm of possibilities, be legible to a broad spectrum of users, and provide clear and concise direction to decision-makers. To be credible, the Master Plan must also be substantiated through technical analysis, be a product of a well documented public engagement process, and define concisely the appropriate tools or mechanisms for implementation.

As an outcome of a comprehensive planning initiative of this magnitude, the Master Plan is an extensive document that is comprised of a number of significant components serving various purposes. However, a key objective of the Master Plan is to ensure a highly accessible and readable document.

For ease of reference and manageability, the Heart of Our City Master Plan has been structured into six main parts, as well as an Executive Summary and Urban Design Glossary.

In addition to having its own cover page, table of contents and page numbering, each of these components also correspond to a distinct colour coding. As a result, these parts have been designed to function as stand-alone documents that can be extracted when necessary. This approach to organizing the Plan helps the user to better navigate the consolidated version of the document, but also permits with relative ease the distribution of any combination of parts tailored to specific interests, audiences or applications.

The six key parts of the Heart of Our City Mater Plan and their corresponding colour coding are as follows:

Part 1: Introduction

The Introduction provides the context for the master planning process, including the purpose and objectives of the Plan as well as an overview of the study process.

Part 2: Background Report

The Background Report provides documentation of the analysis and process that is the basis of the Master Plan. This document summarizes the outcomes of the research, analysis, and consultation that support the Vision contained in the Master Plan and the potential strategies to bring it to fruition.

The Background Report will be useful to trace how decisions were made and how the stakeholders and public were engaged in that decision-making.

Part 3: The Vision

The Vision provides a broad mission for the intended future role, function, character, look and feel of Downtown Lethbridge. It builds on the area's inherent assets and potential strengths to set the overarching intent and objective for the Downtown Master Plan.

The Vision will be an enduring document that will provide a reference and benchmark for periodic planning redirection, future implementation approaches, and expansion of the guidelines as the Downtown grows.

The Vision is comprised of: the Heart of Our City Vision Statement, six Campaign Pillars that reinforce and provide focus for the Heart of Our City Campaign, ten Guiding Principles, and ten Key Visioning Strategies. A Concept Plan was created to illustrate the Heart of Our City Vision. The Vision culminates with the Demonstration Concept Plan, which illustrates the potential long-term build-out of Downtown.

3.0 The Master Plan Structure

Part 4: The Guiding Framework

The Guiding Framework is the long-term physical plan for the Downtown. It presents the intended physical structure that will guide decisions regarding the character of uses, open spaces, and the built form over the long term. The Guiding Framework is in essence a ‘blueprint’ for getting to the Vision and is comprised of three key sections: Districts & Neighbourhoods; Public Realm Framework; and, Built Form Framework.

This document will be most useful for informing planning policies, directing public capital improvements, guiding private investments, and as a reference to assess development applications and future planning initiatives.

Part 5: Development Design Guidelines

The purpose of the Development Design Guidelines is to provide appropriate standards or benchmarks applicable to new Downtown development. The Guidelines are informed by and reinforce the objectives of The Guiding Framework. Although they seek to provide clarity on intended outcomes of the Plan, they also provide flexibility within certain parameters to encourage distinction, variety and creative architectural responses.

The Guidelines are comprised of: comprehensive guidelines for built form in the Central District; guidelines for infilling within historic blocks; guidelines for designing a variety of buildings types applicable across the Downtown area; guidelines for sustainable design; and, site-specific guidelines for special sites that have been given a greater level of consideration.

The Development Design Guidelines seek to provide the municipal development approval process with a reasonable degree of predictability by establishing,

early in the design and planning of new developments, a common understanding of design criteria and development standards among developers, neighbours, and the City.

Part 6: Implementation Strategies

The Implementation Strategies provides the implementation plan and recommended actions. It outlines what the City of Lethbridge must do: the potential projects, programs, policies and strategies necessary to advance the Master Plan. With an emphasis on governance, the planning and regulatory framework, incentives and financial tools, capital improvements, as well as other recommended strategies, this document is tailored to address the current circumstances of Downtown.

The Implementation Strategies will be most useful in guiding the City in defining programs, setting priorities, allocating finances and assessing achievements. Over time, this part of the Master Plan should be revisited and updated to ensure that the strategies remain relevant and current to Downtown and its transformation.