

## ***Executive Summary***

Urban Systems Ltd, in partnership with Public City Architecture, Three Sixty Collective, and Menic Planning Services, were retained by the City of Thunder Bay to identify and evaluate development options for Victoriaville Centre. The Project Team consists of urban planners, architects and landscape architects, structural and civil engineers, land economists, and retail experts.

The development options that were evaluated included:

- Revitalizing Victoriaville Centre as a retail destination;
- Repurposing Victoriaville Centre to provide community activities rather than retail activity;
- Demolishing the Victoria Avenue component of Victoriaville Centre and redeveloping the remaining portion with new food and retail options; and,
- Demolishing Victoriaville Centre in its entirety in order to re-establish Victoria Avenue and create new public spaces in the Syndicate Avenue right-of-way.

Public engagement included open houses held at Victoriaville Centre in October 2019 and February 2020. The first open house asked citizens for their vision of what downtown Fort William could become. The second open house asked citizens to comment on four redevelopment options. Both engagement events were accompanied by surveys available for citizens to complete either in-person or online. Both in-person and online public engagement events were well-attended and well-utilized, reflecting the high level of public interest in the topic as well as the ease and accessibility of in-person and online events.

The Project Team identified a preferred option based on a combination of quantitative data (for example capital and operating costs) and qualitative data (such as providing the greatest benefit to the downtown community) identified by the City of Thunder Bay. The Project Team developed additional evaluation criteria based on input received through public engagement and as our understanding of the project increased and evolved.



## ***1. Introduction and Background***

The purpose of this report is to provide a recommendation for the future of Victoriaville Centre. The Centre was constructed in 1979 in response to the decline in commercial activity in Fort William Downtown of Thunder Bay. The facility was intended to serve as an indoor downtown pedestrian mall utilizing existing buildings and enclosing or covering portions of Victoria Avenue and Syndicate Avenue. Today, the Victoriaville Centre requires significant capital investment, and the City wishes to explore alternatives and select an option for the Centre's future.

This report looks at what options are possible for a revitalized Victoriaville that are economically sound, programmatically sound, and enjoy broad community support. Four feasible options for the Centre were prepared and analyzed based on public input, stakeholder input, and evaluation criteria to make a decision on the future of Victoriaville Centre.

The report includes:

- A summary of relevant background information and history;
- Best practices research and a literature review of similar facilities and retail trends;
- A summary of stakeholder consultation and public engagement;
- An analysis of four feasible options for Victoriaville Centre ;
- Evaluation criteria used to review each option;
- Evaluation of the options against the defined criteria;
- An estimate of costs for each option;
- A final recommendation addressing the viability and sustainability of the preferred option; and,
- A recommended operational model for the preferred option.

## **PROCESS**

The following tasks were undertaken in preparing the options, recommendation, and report:

- Review of building assessments prepared by the City;
- Review of past studies, plans and initiatives for Victoriaville Centre;
- Review and assessment of community survey data previously obtained by the City;
- High-level review and assessment of Victoriaville structure and infrastructure;
- Interviews and meetings with relevant City staff, members of City Council, Victoriaville Centre users and tenants, the Fort William Business Improvement Association, the Victoriaville Board of Management, Indigenous-led organizations, and other stakeholders;
- Open house to solicit input from the public and stakeholders on the future of Victoriaville;
- Preparation of four feasible options for Victoriaville Centre;
- Open house to present options to the public and stakeholders;
- Analysis and evaluation of options;
- Determination of recommended option; and,
- Review of possible operational models for the recommended option.

## **CONTEXT**

Across North America, the downtown neighbourhoods of communities large and small began to decline in the Post World War II period. Cities became increasingly suburbanized as new homes were built on the edge of town and private automobiles were much more affordable. Retail and employment activities followed residents to the

suburbs, and enclosed suburban shopping malls began to emerge around 1960. From that point forward, municipal governments have worked to re-establish the dominance of their downtowns, with varying degrees of success.

The City of Thunder Bay faced particular challenges in addition to these general trends. The Lakehead communities of Fort William and Port Arthur amalgamated in 1970 to form Thunder Bay, resulting in a city with two central business districts. These two communities were geographically distinct and separated by undeveloped lands known as the Intercity area. Historical competition between Fort William and Port Arthur did not end after amalgamation, as a city that may have struggled to support one central business district was required to support two. Additionally, suburban commercial development was being directed towards the Intercity area. Municipal leaders saw growth in the Intercity as reasonable, rational, and as an opportunity to connect both communities physically and politically.

In the early 1970s, the downtown core of Fort William (focused on Victoria Avenue) was crumbling. During this time, the Province of Ontario established the Downtown Revitalization Program for cities with less than 125,000 residents. Port Arthur had recently revitalized its Downtown and Fort William did not offer a competitive downtown retail environment. The Program was well-timed, as retail was leaving Fort William and relocating to Port Arthur and the Intercity area.

Planning consultant James F. Harris suggested that the main street be enclosed to serve as an indoor pedestrian mall located downtown, similar to a project he had seen in Quebec City. The project involved closing and covering portions of Syndicate Avenue and Victoria Avenue, Fort William's major arterial road. The idea was championed by David Thompson, Director of Planning for the new city. However, the plan was not well thought, not well executed, and was only in a very conceptual form when it was approved by City Hall.

The project, known as Victoriaville Centre, was completed in 1979. It was anchored by Chapples Department Store, in operation since 1913. Unfortunately, business was declining even before the project opened due to the impeded flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic that began during construction. Already impacted by this decline in

business, Chapples closed after a serious fire in 1981 only months after Victoriaville Centre opened.

## **VICTORIANVILLE CENTRE**

Victoriaville Centre has struggled since it opened and has consistently run an operating deficit. The Centre has multiple vacancies and many retail spaces have been converted to quasi-public uses, such as government office uses or health and social service uses. The mall has been owned by the City of Thunder Bay since its inception and is managed by the Victoriaville Board of Management, as outlined in *By-law 359-1982*. The Board of Management is comprised of five members, including one member from City Council, one tenant, one abutting property owner, and two citizen appointees.

Victoriaville Centre has been losing money for many years. Internal projections suggest that the Centre will continue to lose money at an escalating rate – from a \$473,045 operating loss in 2019 to an estimated \$824,000 operating loss projected for 2025. Total losses over a ten-year period are estimated by the City at approximately \$9.3 million. In 2017, a City of Thunder Bay report indicated that, only 11 of 17 units are occupied while six units are vacant. These units do not include abutting private property.

In addition, deferred capital expenditures are required in the order of \$1.84 million (2013) to replace skylights that have leaked almost since Victoriaville Centre's construction, and to update commercial ventilation units in the food court to comply with fire standards. None of these capital expenditures are likely to enhance the Centre's marketability and user experience, reduce retail vacancies, or minimize operating losses.

## **RECENT HISTORY**

Significant internal research, as well as stakeholder and community engagement were undertaken in 2016 by the City of Thunder Bay regarding the possible demolition of Victoriaville Centre. Public engagement included 36 stakeholder interviews with

property owners, tenants, members of the Board of Management, and the Victoria Avenue Business Improvement Association; a community information session attended by approximately 150 people; and a questionnaire (online and in-person) completed by 1,280 respondents.

- Generally speaking, the results of the survey indicated that:
- 89% of respondents did not feel that Victoriaville Centre has improved the downtown South Core;
- 88% of respondents did not feel that Victoriaville Centre provides good value for money, given the ongoing operating loss;
- 81% of respondents agree that the cost to demolish Victoriaville Centre and reopen Victoria Avenue is justified based on a +/- 10 year payback period;
- Victoriaville Centre does not provide sufficient public benefit relative to its operating deficit; and,
- Construction of Victoriaville Centre has actually hastened the decline of the South Core rather than improved it.

In June 2019, the City issued a Request for Proposals to explore and evaluate alternatives and to select an option for the Centre's future. We recognize the project objectives as originally outlined in the Request for Proposals, namely that the project/recommendations:

- Be achievable in the short- to medium-term;
- Be cost effective;
- Be environmentally, economically, and culturally sustainable;
- Represent good value for money invested;
- Result in positive economic and social impact;
- Benefit the downtown and by extension the entire Thunder Bay community;
- Balance the needs of business, residents, and the general public; and,

- Be based upon sound urban planning, community development, and retail development principles.



## ***2. Infrastructure Overview***

Prior to the construction of Victoriaville Centre, it was acknowledged that there would be limited access to the underground infrastructure that provided services to the neighbouring buildings. In 1979, new underground infrastructure was installed along Victoria and Syndicate Avenues. At this time, the storm system was separated from the sanitary system.

### **STORMWATER SERVICING**

Victoriaville Centre covers two blocks along both Victoria Avenue East and Syndicate Avenue North. The storm lines seem to be operating as they did prior to construction of the mall. There was a connection between the storm and sanitary line that ran south on Syndicate Avenue. This interconnection was removed when the infrastructure was updated in 1979. The storm system for this area drains to the east along Victoria Avenue. The storm system accepts flows from the west and north outside the boundaries of the Mall. Based on conversations with City of Thunder Bay engineering staff, there are no service connections to the storm sewers from the adjacent buildings. There are a few buildings that seem to have stormwater discharges to the ground level, but most do not. This would suggest that most of the roof drains discharge to the sanitary system. The roof structure between buildings does have roof drains for stormwater which are typically routed down the structural columns which support the structure. It is unclear where these drain to, but it is expected that they would connect to the storm system. Should Victoriaville Centre be demolished, roof drains would no longer be connected to the sanitary system. Further investigation is needed to determine whether or not existing storm sewers can accommodate this additional demand.

### **SANITARY SERVICING**

The sanitary sewer has been disconnected from the storm system. The original sanitary line servicing this area was constructed in 1909 and directed flow south on Syndicate Avenue. This pipe still conveys some sanitary flows to the system further south. The pipes within the Centre were reconstructed in 1979 and the majority of the buildings adjacent to the Centre are now serviced by a new sanitary sewer which accepts outside flows from the west and discharges to the east along Victoria Avenue. There are two sewer lines extending to the north and south along Syndicate Avenue but only far enough to provide service to buildings adjacent to Victoriaville Centre.

## **WATER SERVICING**

The watermain through the Centre was updated in 1979 along with the other deep infrastructure. By 1998, the City had identified two areas of the ductile iron watermain with leaks which required repairs. In 2001, the City made the decision to abandon the existing ductile iron watermain that ran underground through the Centre. The alley to the north of the mall was being redeveloped into Justice Avenue and a 12" PVC watermain was routed through the right-of-way connecting the Victoria Avenue watermain on either side of the mall. At the north and south entrances to the mall, the buried watermain was brought above the ground in heated maintenance rooms. From there, the watermain was routed through the roof structure along Syndicate Avenue to maintain circulation through the water distribution system. Services for individual buildings were also transferred to the overhead line running north-south, or to the new watermain running along Justice Avenue.

In addition to the watermain running north-south along Syndicate Avenue, there is another pressure pipe suspended through the roof system which provides sprinklered fire suppression for the mall structure itself. Through further discussion with City staff, we understand that there have been leaks in the overhead pipes since approximately 2001, which have been replaced or repaired as needed.

## **GRADING AND SURFACE WORKS**

The existing ground surface in the Centre is ceramic tile (circa 2003), likely supported by a poured concrete floor structure. Multiple layers of ceramic tile exist. There are several kiosks in the middle of the right-of-way and a sunken courtyard (Victoriaville Green) at the intersection of Victoria Avenue and Syndicate Avenue. The food court has a large mezzanine, along with two staircases, which extend into the intersection.

Notable features exist outside of Victoriaville Centre proper. North of Victoriaville, there is a small landscaped park within the right-of-way immediately south of Justice Avenue. To the south, the street right-of-way has been functioning essentially as a private drive and loading area, and includes the entrance ramp structure for the parking structure. Note that the entrance ramp to the parking structure is not included within the scope of this report.

Finally, we have been made aware through subsequent discussions with City representatives of a number of conditions that were not apparent in the materials originally provided. They are not significant and can be addressed in future detailed design exercises (if necessary).

These conditions include:

- The presence of portions of the Chapples Building foundation encroach into the public right-of-way; and,
- Column foundation posts remain at sidewalk grade level along Victoria Avenue between Brodie Street and May Street due to previous use as pedestrian canopy infrastructure.

## **STRUCTURAL**

The existing mall is unique because the through roads of Victoria Avenue East and Syndicate Avenue South were closed off to traffic and covered with an enclosed roof structure. Existing businesses and retailers of the street corners were encompassed into the footprint of the mall. The roof structure is constructed with bottom chord bearing hollow structural steel roof trusses that span in each direction and are transferring the

vertical roof loads to W columns. The W columns are supported on piers and pile cap foundations below. The entire roof structure is loading onto new foundations and only tied to the existing adjacent buildings for lateral support. The floor construction of the enclosed mall was composed of a slab on grade with the only exception being center court area, which was founded on footings and structural stair concrete slabs. The mezzanine is constructed with steel decking with concrete topping supported by open web steel joists that span to W beams and W columns found on pad and pier foundations. No major signs of movement or shifting have been observed in the structure, but there is minor cracking the in drywall finishes. The mezzanine and the entrances all appear to be functioning as intended with little to no signs of deterioration.

Very little signs of deterioration have been observed, but there are some areas of moisture infiltration from the roof structure. There are currently buckets on the floor to catch water that is infiltrating the roof structure. There is evidence of moisture staining and infiltration on the existing roof structure, but it appears as though the damages that may have occurred are minor and not of structural concern at this point in time. The leaking is likely due to the curtain wall and skylight being at the end of its useful life span. While the leaking does not appear to have caused major structural concerns for the time being, it will continually worsen over time which could have a structural impact in the years to come if it is not regularly maintained. The exterior walls of the mall are primarily made up of the private buildings that are covered by the roof structure. The exterior walls along Victoria Avenue East and Syndicate Avenue South are not load bearing from the roof structure above and are only tied to the roof laterally. The existing entrances around the building appear to be functioning as intended with minor signs of deterioration to the concrete slabs and doors.

The entire building, including roof structure, is independent of the adjacent buildings and tearing it down would not have an impact structurally on the adjacent buildings.

However, it would be assumed the adjacent buildings would need to be reviewed for their building envelopes and conformance to code. The roof structure of the mall does appear to be supporting the water lines as well as mechanical equipment which would also need to be reviewed and relocated.

The removal of the existing “skins” along Victoria Avenue and leaving a portion of the structure is a possibility, keeping some of the existing columns and hollow structural steel trusses that span to the columns. There would not be any major impact to keeping some of the existing structure. The columns would be assumed to be free standing much like they are now. However, the connection at the base of the columns would need to be reviewed for any potential induced bending moment due to lateral wind pressure and suction. A new wall would need to be constructed that would effectively close off the mall at the end of Syndicate Avenue. The structure that is to remain exposed will need to be protected from the elements by means of cladding/flushing, possible galvanizing of exposed steel, or insulation in locations that are heated.

### ***3. Market, Retail, and Downtown Revitalization Trends Analysis***

#### **MARKET ASSESSMENT**

A market assessment was undertaken to determine the viability of Victoriaville Centre as a retail destination (Appendix A). The viability analysis included the following considerations:

- Uber Media data analysis;
- Trade Area Rationalization and Delineation;
- Trade Area Analysis (Population, Employment and Demographics);
- Competitive Retail Centre Assessment; and,
- Commercial Demand Analysis.

Analysing the data available through Uber Media (which anonymously collects data obtained via cell phone 'pings') offers an interesting snapshot of current visitation to Victoriaville Centre. Over a two-year period, the Uber Media data sample included 3,444 unique visitors and 12,476 total visits to Victoriaville Centre that were analysed as part of this study. This sample size is substantial enough to validate our assumptions.

Data obtained via Uber Media also indicates that the highest level of activity can be found at the food court and at the east and west entrances. Conversely, the activity level of the parkade is low. The highest level of activity found during the two-year evaluation period corresponds to the former location of Newfie's Pub, located close to the mall's east entrance.

The second consideration, Trade Area Rationalization and Delineation, identifies the appropriate retail trade area of Victoriaville Centre. It takes into account:

- The extent and proximity of nearby residential populations;
- The extent and proximity of nearby daytime employment nodes;

- Local and regional access characteristics (including the nature of the local road and transit networks);
- The nature (number, scale, quality, and relative location) of competing retail centres;
- The existence of psychological barriers (such as bodies of water, rail crossings, etc.); and,
- The demographic composition of residents, and their spending patterns.
- The Population Analysis identified the following conclusions:
  - The total estimated Trade Area Population in 2019 is approximately 42,387, down slightly from the 2014 population of 42,940;
  - Based on these trends, the projected 2024 Trade Area Population will continue to decline to approximately 42,176 residents; and,
  - Of this population, roughly 7,660 residents can be considered to be part of the Primary Trade Area.

The Employment Analysis, focused on the daytime working population within a 5 minute (400m) and 10-minute (800m) walk noted the following:

- There are roughly 2,180 daytime workers with a usual place of work within 400m;
- There are an additional 1,570 daytime workers beyond 400m but within 800m; and,
- In total, the Primary Trade Area represents a daytime working population estimate at 4,150 regular workers, or 5,000 workers including those who work from home or work outside of a traditional fixed workplace.
- Income levels, along with cost of living considerations, are a primary determinant of the resident population's available disposable income. These considerations can help a retail manager assess the optimal tenant mix for a given shopping centre. Based on 2019 data, we can conclude that:

- Household incomes in the Primary Trade Area are modest and represent approximately two-thirds of the Ontario average; and,
- Household incomes in the Secondary Trade Area are somewhat higher, representing roughly 80-90% of the Ontario average.
- Other conclusions identified in the Trade Area Analysis include:
  - The population in the Primary and Secondary trade areas are more likely to live in one- to two-person households, less likely to own their home, and are more likely to live in an apartment than a house when compared with the City as a whole; and,
  - The housing stock within the Primary and Secondary trade areas is older than Thunder Bay as a whole.

This analysis examined the retail market and distribution of retail locations to get a sense of Victoriaville's competitiveness and what retail opportunities may exist. It was noted that five of the nine retail centres are located within the Intercity area. All five retail centres in the Intercity have been built or renovated since 2004. Shopping centres in the south core have not seen significant reinvestment since they were originally constructed. This finding is significant, in that older shopping centres are less likely to attract newer, chain retailers and the destination retail shopping patterns in Thunder Bay are - and will continue to be - heavily oriented to the Intercity area.

## **RETAIL TRENDS**

While the Market Inventory provides an overview of the nature of the Thunder Bay retail market, the following conclusions reflect the opinions of our retail advisors and land economists regarding retail trends relevant to Thunder Bay and Canadian retail in general.

- We are in the midst of a major retail disruption. Online retail sales growth continues to shift business away from bricks and mortar stores and towards online stores. However, online stores do require a bricks and mortar presence to



be successful in an omni channel environment. Consumers are shifting purchases away from those shopping centres that compete primarily on price and selection. Generally, in North America, there is a shift in visitation and purchases away from malls and power centres.

- Given current economic challenges, as well as Thunder Bay's socio-economic characteristics of an aging population with moderate to low household income, there are minimal prospects for a shopping-focused mall redevelopment particularly given the strong propensity for retail developers and property owners to reinvest in the strongest commercial assets in their respective portfolios.
- Retail has now become an integrated part of people's lives. Retail used to be more of a linear function of research, looking, buying, enjoying, and disposing. Now, people live their lives in a more integrated function with other activities such as work, socializing, recreation, learning, etc. To survive, retail has had to adapt to incorporate a range of more community- and experience-driven elements and features. For consumers, it is much less about acquiring goods as it is about creating active memories. The design of the spaces needs to frame these moments in people's lives.
- Victoriaville can re-integrate the urban nature of the street and connect with other nearby elements. It was noted that there are a number of recreation facilities nearby. This presents opportunities to create those community-building and experience driven aspects. It is these types of community-building and experience-oriented activity generators that help draw people and create the needed customer journeys that create a successful redevelopment. Victoriaville needs to create a new way forward and not be hampered by the scale and orientation of the existing infrastructure and mall mentality.
- The other way to compete is by being convenience-driven – to drive retail demand based on growing the density of local residential, office worker, student, or arts and culture type visitors.

- This may be a longer-term strategy, given the negative population growth and low office worker component nearby.
- While main streets are being rediscovered, it has been through their role as either convenience, community building, or experience-driven attributes (not necessarily mutually exclusive). This has followed several years of trends related to increased localization, significant changes to the food industry (e.g., vegan, gluten free, organic, locally sourced, grown on-site, food trucks, etc.), and other factors related to sustainability and environmental sensitivity (e.g., sharing economy, circular economy, as well as the subscription economy).
- These changes and the proposed redevelopment of Victoriaville Centre provide opportunities to re-imagine the spaces in new ways. The high percentage of local area residents who are renters and who have smaller households help to bolster the demand for some unique food alternatives in the area.
- Safety is always a prime consideration especially to anything retail-related. Ensuring that visitors can enjoy a safe environment is a universal truth that must be addressed at every stage of this redevelopment project.

## **THE FAILURE OF DOWNTOWN SHOPPING MALLS AS A TOOL FOR REVITALIZATION**

Enclosed shopping centres have a long history in Canada. The first is generally considered to be the Park Royal Shopping Centre, which opened in 1950 in West Vancouver, British Columbia. The second, Polo Park Mall in Winnipeg, Manitoba, opened some time later in 1963 when a roof was added to the original structure built four years earlier. Both remain in operation today.

As shopping malls became more common in suburban neighbourhoods across Canada, downtown retail sales declined. Downtown activity in mid-sized Canadian cities generally decreased after 1960 in every sense as new development (office, retail, multifamily residential) tended to be constructed in fast-

growing suburban neighbourhoods. Many cities encouraged the development of enclosed shopping centres downtown (including a generous supply of parking) as a strategy to address ongoing decline and to attract retail dollars and activity back downtown. Despite how new downtown shopping malls tended to offer a broad program of activities (often including movie theatres, housing, and cultural spaces), downtown shopping centres could not compete with suburban shopping centres that benefitted from their close proximity to wealthy, fast-growing residential neighbourhoods.

The economic failure of downtown shopping malls in Canada, particularly in mid-sized cities, is well-documented. In 2006, urban planners and academics Pierre Filion and Karen Hammond examined this trend in an article in *Plan Canada*. They noted that of 12 malls examined in Ontario, 9 were initiated and partially funded by the public sector – not because there was a strong business case for the development, but because they were seen as a viable strategy to revitalize the greater downtown community.

Downtown malls were attempting to compete with suburban malls for the same market, with disappointing results in all but the largest Ontario markets (Toronto and Ottawa). A competing vision was emerging – conserving heritage resources, building pedestrian-friendly infrastructure including streets and plazas, and focusing on niche retail markets. However this vision was more difficult to implement and seen to carry more risk. It also relegated downtown retail to a niche rather than mainstream function. While this vision was considered risky at the time, today this strategy is considered a best practice and an appropriate strategy for most small- to mid-sized Canadian cities.

Two malls were built with provincial support (the Ontario Downtown Renewal Program) in Thunder Bay – Keskus Mall in Port Arthur and Victoriaville Centre in Fort William. Although they were not part of Filion and Hammond's research, the lessons learned in their study are relevant to the Thunder Bay experience.

Anecdotally, we have heard from citizens of Thunder Bay and read in media articles that Victoriaville Centre hastened the decline of the downtown south core. This theory is supported by relevant local research undertaken by Lorch and Smith in 1993. In the case of nearby Keskus Mall they noted that:

- The 'Fortress Effect' is real, and that a 'significant proportion' of shoppers visiting the downtown north core mall visited the north mall only and did not explore nearby streets;
- Of those whose primary destination was the mall and ventured outside the mall, most stayed nearby and generally on adjacent streets; and,
- Those who initially came downtown to visit a location outside of the mall more often than not eventually ended up in the mall. As well, regardless of their original destination, visitors downtown tended to spend their dollars in the mall rather than on adjacent streets.

It is fair to say that a newly-constructed downtown shopping centre becomes a destination unto itself. Customers who visit the mall tend not to visit nearby businesses, and those who do visit nearby businesses often end up spending their dollars in the mall. Although both retail environments can exist side by side, they do so relatively independently. In this case study, constructing a new downtown shopping mall did not stimulate activity for adjacent retailers. It is reasonable therefore to conclude that establishing Victoriaville Centre did not increase business for retailers on nearby streets, and may actually have contributed to their decline.

## **DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION THEORY**

A substantial body of literature was produced between 1990 and 2010, as interest in revitalization surged following a period of significant decline and stagnation in downtowns across North America. These studies are particularly relevant today as they have influenced urban development for decades, and their effectiveness can be evaluated. Typically this literature offers a number of strategies or guidelines for agencies to pursue.

In 1999, Jennifer Moulton prepared a report titled "Ten Steps to a Living Downtown" for the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy. Moulton's work is in response to previous revitalization theory which placed emphasis on publicly sponsored

'megaprojects' including shopping malls, office campuses, and entertainment centres and arenas. Moulton argued that a more successful, sustainable strategy was to focus on building new housing units downtown. Multi-family housing development was already been driven by demographics and a strong economy, and Moulton suggested that downtowns were uniquely positioned to capture this growth. In order for a downtown to position itself effectively, Moulton noted that:

- The physical environment must be of a character and quality that people will want to live there – namely, pursue physical improvements and ensure a safe environment; and
- Downtown residences must offer an investment motive for home ownership. Although rental units are important, and initial housing activity is often driven by renters, investment considerations are also important. There must be the perception that there is value in the real estate market, and that the overall market trend is positive. The goal should be to develop an investment-quality residential neighbourhood.

Moulton, writing primarily with regard to her understanding of the revitalization of downtown Denver, identified ten steps that municipal governments can pursue in order to achieve a "Living Downtown." They include:

1. Housing must be Downtown's Political and Business Priority. Business owners, governments, and residents must all agree on housing as a priority. As Moulton notes, "ambiguous or conflicting agendas will at best dilute efforts, at worst doom them to failure."
2. Downtown must be legible. A 'legible' neighbourhood is one with "delineated and distinguishable boundaries." This helps to create the concept of neighbourhood – similarity of architecture, landmarks, common street furniture, and thematically consistent signage will all contribute to a sense of neighbourhood. Even a name adds to legibility – think of SoHo, LoDo, TriBeCa, the Annex, etc.
3. Downtowns must be accessible. Moulton is referring to high quality infrastructure, and likens the municipality to a Property Manager. High quality sidewalks,

benches, street trees, gateways to the neighbourhood, transit and active transportation infrastructure, etc. make a neighbourhood more attractive to prospective residents.

4. Downtown must have new and improved regional amenities. Downtowns need a lot of people to be efficient, to be competitive economically, and to have active street life. If regional amenities (e.g., cultural facilities, sporting facilities, or educational institutions) are located downtown, they will attract visitors who may become residents after being exposed to the habitability of a neighbourhood.
5. Downtown must be clean and safe. It almost goes without saying, but a downtown must be cleaner and safer than suburban neighbourhoods in order to overcome existing negative stereotypes.
6. Downtown must preserve and reuse old buildings. Moulton argues that old buildings “create the skeleton for affordable residential development in centre cities.” They are generally available at an economical price and can be converted to new uses. As well, the preserved historic character becomes another distinguishing characteristic when compared to typical suburban development.
7. Downtown regulations must be streamlined and support residential growth. Typical zoning by-laws (of the time) continue to emphasize the separation of land uses, making mixed use and residential projects administratively challenging. The regulatory environment must be revised to encourage new residential units downtown.
8. City resources should be devoted to housing. Moulton argues that resources (e.g., financial tools, direct investment, advocacy, maintenance, marketing) must be directed towards encouraging the supply of new housing units.
9. The edge of downtown should be surrounded by viable neighbourhoods. Often, neighbourhoods adjacent to downtown have declined due to their proximity to downtown blight. These neighbourhoods must be addressed if downtown is to recover.

10. Downtown is never done. Moulton argues that “a city must not believe that its downtown revitalization momentum is inexhaustible when housing finally arrives.” The housing market is cyclical, and new challenges arise. Maintenance is necessary. Land use conflicts will arise. Gentrification will result in the loss of affordable units. Retail takes time to develop. Public spaces must keep up with residential growth. Amenities must eventually be made available to accommodate families. These are just a few circumstances that must be addressed as downtown evolves. Downtown is never done, and maintenance must be ongoing.

Christopher B. Leinberger is a Washington DC-based real estate developer, professor, speaker and author who has been active in the downtown revitalization field for many years. In 2004, his essay, “The Shape of Downtown: What America’s downtowns need is walkable urbanity,” appeared in *Urban Land* magazine. Leinberger was named one of the 100 most influential urbanists of all time in a 2017 Planetizen poll. It is reasonable to say that his opinions are extremely well regarded, and his writings are based on decades of experience.

Leinberger writes that “the most important feature of a downtown is walkable urbanity, the quality that gives a downtown a competitive edge over suburban locales.” Walkable urbanity describes the limits a person is willing to walk before pursuing another type of transport, and our limit is typically about 1500 feet. What can happen within these 1500 feet is important. People want to “engage in an interesting streetscape experience and to people-watch along the way. It is the sights and sounds of the city that entice pedestrians to walk the many blocks of a downtown. It may even make them forget they are unintentionally getting some exercise.” Since this was written it is worth noting that walkability is becoming an even more critical factor, both in addressing climate change and in encouraging the obvious health benefits associated with an active rather than sedentary lifestyle.

Walkable urbanity is the quality that drives North American tourists to visit the historic cities of Europe. It is the quality that encourages visitation to unique neighbourhoods in North American cities, rather than cookie-cutter suburbs. It is even why tourists will pay

significant prices to visit faux downtown locations like Disneyland. Walkable urbanity is reflected today in private open air shopping centres that attempt to recreate the character of historic downtowns, but in a private rather than public context. The quality can best be defined through a complex mix of uses (including shops, grocery stores, housing, etc.) all brought close to the sidewalk for ease of interaction with the pedestrian, and defined by interesting and varied styles of architecture. Walkable urbanity is in stark contrast with the conformity and uniformity, and auto-oriented character, of typical suburban neighbourhoods.

Based on Leinberger's experience in over 50 American downtowns, 12 steps have been identified as being "essential to the revitalization of a downtown." The 12 steps are:

1. Memory and vision. Before a downtown can be revitalized, it must be determined whether or not the intention to do so in the community exists. Do people have memories of what downtown once was? Do they feel emotion towards that vision, to the extent that emotion will drive action? Emotion and vision must be encouraged and leveraged in order to build momentum and support for the downtown revitalization process.
2. Strategic planning and management. Downtown is typically a community's largest mixed-use neighbourhood, and that is an asset. This asset needs to be managed, much as a smaller suburban shopping mall needs to be managed. A strategy, along with a supporting implementation plan and an organization to carry it out is required. The strategy should be based on market research, not by planning theory or political pressure.
3. Determining the appropriate public sector roles. Leinberger notes that successful revitalization strategies are generally carried out by private/public partnerships, not public/private partnerships. While the public sector often initiates the process, it must be led by the private sector because it is ultimately private sector resources that will need to be invested if the revitalization is to be successful.
4. Making the right things easy. Make sure zoning and building code issues are addressed early in the process. Ensure that mixed-use development and



heritage redevelopments do not face unreasonable or counter-productive bureaucratic processes.

5. Business improvement districts (BID) and other nonprofits. “Establishing a BID is crucial to the revitalization of a downtown.” To a certain extent the BID becomes the government of downtown, and “the provider of services the city government cannot provide.” That can include anything from additional maintenance to programming and marketing.

6. Creating a catalytic development company. This is a critical component of the revitalization process. Leinberger writes that,

Most conventional suburban developers do not have the experience investors, bankers, or inclination to come downtown. They perceive the market risk as being too high and do not relish being pioneers. Downtowns have overcome this problem by establishing a catalytic developer – an organization that develops the initial projects that consumer and market research shows have potential market demand but that also involve above-market risk. It is the equivalent of pushing the fast-forward button, with the catalytic development firm demonstrating to the rest of the development community and investors that downtown development can make economic sense.

The roles a catalytic development company can play include assembling land, developing land, joint venturing with developers, bridging the gap between what conventional financing can offer and what is needed, and engaging in complete building development.

7. Urban entertainment. According to Leinberger, walkable urbanity starts with urban entertainment – venues and retail space that are in walking distance of one another. This can include large scale venues like arenas, but also includes theatres, restaurants, nightclubs, specialty retail, and outdoor performance venues. These are often a precondition for residential development.
8. Rental housing. “Urban pioneers” tend to be younger and have often grown up in the suburbs, without the negative impression of downtown that their parents may

have. Urban pioneers are often students, artists, the LGBTQ community, hipsters, and others looking to co-locate with a specific community that may not be large in numbers. While Moulton argues that housing must have an investment motive, the investment can also be on the part of the developer not just the resident. Renters are often the first to move downtown, because investment considerations are less critical for them.

9. For-sale housing. According to Leinberger, the for-sale market tends to appear after the entertainment and rental housing markets have emerged. It can be argued that this process is not necessarily as linear as Leinberger suggests, generally speaking the motivation to invest in a downtown residential unit does rely on a certain degree of market stability.
10. Affordability strategy. As the gentrification process occurs, it is important to ensure that affordable housing remains (or is part of the process), partly because everyone deserves a place to live, but also because the diversity that affordable housing provides is also a major attraction of downtown.
11. Local-serving retail strategy. Leinberger notes that the biggest complaint that new downtown residents have is the lack of retail services in the market, providing basic requirements like groceries and drugstores. Local-serving retail always follows residential development, often with a significant time lag. Particular attention should be paid in stimulating local-serving retail to serve the local residential market.
12. Office employment strategy. One factor that drives the location of office development is apparently 'where the boss lives.' As suitable housing gets built downtown, business owners will follow, and they will often want to live close to home. Since Leinberger wrote this article 15 years ago, the office market continues to grow downtown, but it can be argued that the decision is driven more by employee preferences than by owner preferences. Younger employees prefer the diverse environment of a downtown community and are more likely to commute using public transit than older employees. Younger employees also more likely to live downtown and walk to work.

To a certain extent the project team supports the acknowledgement of an office employment strategy, but it is a less critical factor than others. It may also be more relevant in small- to medium-sized cities such as Thunder Bay. In large urban communities like Vancouver and Toronto we see that residential development is driving growth, to the extent that it may be squeezing out office development downtown to a certain extent. The phenomenon of ‘reverse commuting,’ where residents live downtown and commute to a job in the suburbs, is also growing.

However, what can be concluded is that the advantage of a downtown is in its walkability and its diversity – the diversity of land uses that support a diverse population, diverse employment opportunities, living opportunities, and a range of recreational opportunities. It is the diversity of downtown that supports community resilience and the opportunity to react quickly to changing demands and ways of living. While planners spend significant efforts on diversifying suburban communities into truly mixed-use neighbourhoods in order to increase resiliency – often facing significant public opposition – the advantage of downtowns is that they already have this infrastructure in place.

## **DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION CASE STUDIES**

### FIRSTONTARIO PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE | St. Catharines, Ontario

St. Catharines is located in the Niagara region of Ontario and is home to roughly 130,000 residents. The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre is a cultural complex located in downtown St. Catharines. The project is a partnership between the City of St. Catharines and Brock University. It is roughly 95,000 square feet in size and includes four separate venues: a 775-seat concert hall, 300-seat recital hall, 210-seat dance/theatre venue, and 187-seat film house.

The project is adjacent to Brock University’s Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts. A key consideration of the project was the opportunity to regenerate downtown St. Catharines.

## CULTURAL HUB AND FARMERS MARKET | Niagara Falls, Ontario

In June 2019, City Council approved a \$12.3 million plan to construct the Niagara Falls Cultural Hub & Farmers' Market. The project was identified in Council's 2015-2018 Strategic Priorities which included "a commitment to building and promoting a vibrant, sustainable city that supports an active, connected and creative community." The Strategic Priorities identified both the "revitalization of the Niagara Falls Farmers' Market, and fostering culture as a key contributors to attracting and retaining talent, providing quality of life and supporting creative businesses."

The project is intended to act as a hub for the community's cultural cluster, located in the historic Main & Ferry district. The Cultural Hub and Market will be located on the current site of the Sylvia Place Market, adjacent to the Niagara Falls History Museum. It will be "a dynamic creative space dedicated to arts, cultural engagement, and market activity with additional publicly accessible space for community gatherings." The strategic plan notes that the area "has the potential to become the cultural and social heart of our community."

## SPRINGER MARKET SQUARE | Kingston, Ontario

Kingston, Ontario is a community of roughly 125,000 residents located in Eastern Ontario. Located adjacent to City Hall, Springer Market Square has been active for over 200 years. It is considered to be one of the foremost urban open spaces of its kind in Canada.

The site is heavily programmed which is a critical component of its success. In 2016, the site hosted 27,000 people for the free public broadcast of the final The Tragically Hip concert.

The Square is bounded on three sides by commercial and institutional properties dating from the early 19th century, located on an historic grid of streets. The Kingston Public Market, which runs every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (April-November) is the oldest market in Ontario. Events supplement the Market and include:

- Free Public Skating (artificially chilled rink, from around December 1 to around March 15 annually);
- New Year's Eve activities & fireworks;
- Winter Festival;
- Kingston Unplugged – Free Earth Hour off-grid concerts;
- Kingston Public Market – every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday in April to November;
- Toronto Raptors' games – outdoor free viewing;
- Kingston Antique Market – every Sunday in June to October;
- Rock in the Square (free outdoor concert) ;
- Canada Day celebrations;
- Fort Flash – Fort Henry Guard “flash mob”, every Wednesday in June, July and August;
- Kingston Buskers Rendezvous
- Movies in the Square (free) each Thursday evening, June to September;
- Big Band Fridays (free) each Friday in June, July, and August;
- Chef Cooking Demos (free) each Saturday morning in July and August;
- Limestone City Blues Festival;
- Kingston Santa Claus Parade and Annual Tree lighting w/Santa & The Mayor;  
and,
- Santa in the Square and free horse-drawn wagon rides, each Saturday in December.

To accommodate these events, the Market Area offers a public fountain, performance spaces, bistro tables and umbrellas, free Wi-Fi, accessible washrooms, skate change

facilities, and other amenities. The entire Market area and adjacent streets have been appropriately landscaped with street furniture. The resulting economic activity has encouraged the establishment of coffee shops, art galleries, specialty shops, restaurants and patios as well as two banks and City of Kingston municipal offices.

### OLD QUEBEC STREET MALL | Guelph, Ontario

Guelph is a city of roughly 135,000 residents located in southwestern Ontario. While Old Quebec Street Mall opened in 2003, it was originally constructed in 1984 as the Eaton Centre. The building was purchased by the City in 1999 after Eaton's closed permanently.

Although it is a modern building, the architecture is 'historic' in character and marketing literature focuses on a typical downtown multi-tenant streetscape as opposed to a more conventional shopping mall with internal streets. The mall is adjacent to the Sleeman Centre, a hockey arena constructed in 2000 that was constructed on part of the Eaton Centre site.

Old Quebec Street Mall offers approximately 15 shops, as well as offices and medical services. It is now privately owned and operated. Marketing material suggests that its key feature is that it is able to replicate a traditional downtown street as opposed to looking and feeling like a conventional shopping mall.

### DOWNTOWN PLAN | Moncton, New Brunswick

In December 2017, the City of Moncton approved the *Downtown Core Community Improvement Plan*, a comprehensive plan that addresses future development opportunities covering approximately 120 acres over a 20- to 30-year horizon. The plan reflected City Council's desire to "capitalize on the urban core's under-utilized lands for economic growth and continued prosperity." The lands are generally used for surface parking, and are located between Moncton's Main Street and Riverfront Park.

Although the plan is primarily a land use document, there are aspirational goals including the development of 1,300 housing units downtown. Currently, Moncton's downtown has approximately 250 housing units and a population of less than 400.

In addition, the City will acquire lands to facilitate the construction of three new streets. These streets will create a number of new development parcels (primarily mixed-use) that is intended to "boost population by fostering redevelopment of surface parking lots."

A \$100 million arena and Hyatt hotel was nearing completion at approximately the same time the downtown plan was being finalized.

## **THE FUTURE OF DOWNTOWN MALLS**

The failure of downtown shopping centres is well-documented. Downtown shopping centres were popular solutions because they were relatively easy to implement and could be achieved in a relatively short time period. The reality is that every revitalization strategy is unique to the local context, is multi-faceted, and requires a long-term vision and strategy to achieve.

There are generally two strategies for dealing with downtown shopping centres. First of all, if the shopping centre is located in a smaller community, the retail component typically struggles and retail spaces are converted for office or public sector uses (e.g., government, education, or health). This strategy was evident as early as 2006 in the Plan Canada article "The Failure of Shopping Malls as a Tool of Downtown Revitalization in Mid-Size Urban Areas." Shopping centres are not a redevelopment strategy so much as a 'band aid' solution, as the resulting project is typically not financially viable and does not contribute to the revitalization of the community.

The second strategy addresses shopping centres as a retail experience both in downtowns and suburban neighbourhoods. While shopping centres are typically considered to be single use (retail/service) developments, shopping centres in all contexts are evolving to become mixed-use communities unto themselves. The shopping centre functions less as a destination, attracting visitors from throughout the

community, and attempts to build its own mixed-use community with the shopping centre as the nucleus. The mixed-use community is typically driven by high density urban housing and quality public spaces, and relies on transit and walkability rather than on parking. Shopping centres which are currently in transition to the 'nucleus' model include:

#### SQUARE ONE | Mississauga, Ontario

1.67 million square metres of offices, apartments and shops will be developed adjacent to Square One. Roughly 35,000 new residents over 53 hectares will provide a built-in market for the shopping centre. The project is driven by strong residential demand in Toronto, and construction of the planned Hurontario Light Rail Transit system. The City, Sheridan College, and Ryerson University are also building a business innovation hub in downtown Mississauga near Square One.

(<https://business.financialpost.com/real-estate/property-post/oxford-and-aimco-target-mississauga-to-develop-largest-mixed-use-downtown-development-in-canada>)

#### HAMILTON CITY CENTRE MALL | Hamilton, Ontario

Built in 1990 for \$70 million, it was sold in 2019 for \$60 million. The intent is to demolish the mall in stages and build five residential and commercial towers with a value of \$700 million.

(<https://www.thespec.com/news-story/9666196-hamilton-city-centre-sale-pending-700-million-condo-complex-planned-for-mall-site/>)

#### METROPOLIS AT METROTOWN | Burnaby, British Columbia

Opened around 1990 and functions as the region's largest shopping destination. The redevelopment affects approximately 38 acres. The project will add high density residential, hotel, and office uses with new infrastructure, public spaces, and amenities. The existing enclosed mall will be replaced by extending the existing public street grid through the site. Buildings will provide street oriented retail with residential uses above.



(<https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/metropolis-at-metrotown-redevelopment-rezoning-process>)

### POLO PARK | Winnipeg, Manitoba

Polo Park was originally built as an outdoor shopping centre reasonably close to downtown Winnipeg. It was enclosed in the 1960s and expanded significantly in the 1980s. As a result of anchor tenants Sears, Eatons, and an adjacent facility constructed for Target, Polo Park intends to redevelop its site to provide roughly a dozen low and medium rise residential properties covering approximately 1/3 of the Polo Park site. Total value of the project is roughly \$1 billion.

(<https://globalnews.ca/news/6899485/winnipeg-councillors-polo-park-vote/>)

### PORTAGE PLACE | Winnipeg, Manitoba

Portage Place opened in 1987 as a private initiative supported by a public community development corporation. It provided retail, parking, recreation/fitness, cinema, IMAX, live theatre, and market and affordable housing. It was built for approximately \$70 million in 1987 and sold for \$23 million in 2019. The intent is to redevelop the structure into street-oriented retail, and add 500 new housing units above.

(<https://globalnews.ca/news/6317255/portage-place-development/>)

What the above shopping centres are attempting to do is to replicate the successful downtown environments of the past. Our challenge and opportunity is to rebuild an authentic neighbourhood, with the same range of uses, on a smaller scale.

## **CONTAINER MARKETS AS A DOWNTOWN RETAIL REVITALIZATION STRATEGY**

A Container Market (or “modular market”) is a new retail trend that is beginning to find traction throughout North America. A Container Market is essentially a pop-up retail/entertainment/community centre that uses shipping containers as its major

structural element. Originally, they tended to be sponsored by public or not-for-profit agencies as a tool of community development. Today, container markets are becoming more commonly owned by private entities and used as a short-term programming solution before a permanent project can be undertaken. The cost to construct and operate is relatively low, and the risk therefore is lower as well. They can be located on public lands and used as an economic development tool, or for-profit, private ventures located on private lands. In both scenarios, these markets are seen as short- to medium-term interventions (generally between two and ten years). A case study in San Jose, California from 2015 notes shipping containers are becoming the solution to stagnant retail environments.

A brief profile of five Container Markets from across Canada, the United States, and Europe demonstrate the various scenarios in which the establishment of a Container Market could benefit downtown Fort William.

Locally-oriented retail activity is a significant component of a healthy downtown. In many downtowns, the retail market is so challenged that potential tenants are not willing to take the risk and move into existing vacant locations. The buildings may need significant upgrades or tenant improvements, and the risk of building costs and relatively high rents are a concern. Many cities have used container markets, with their relatively low overhead, as a catalyst for retail development. A retail strategy for downtown Fort William should be explored, and a container market should be considered in this process.

### STACKT MARKET | Toronto, Ontario

Stackt Market, located in Toronto's King West neighbourhood, was launched in April of 2019 on the site of a former iron-smelting plant. The site, which operated from about 1900 to the late 1980s, is now owned by the City of Toronto and requires significant environmental remediation. The long-term plan for the site includes conversion to parkland. While the City raises the funds required to remediate, Stackt Market is leasing the site for approximately 18 months at a cost of just under \$900,000.

The site is located at 28 Bathurst Street (at Front Street), immediately north of the CN rail line and near Garrison Common Park and the Gardiner Expressway. It is approximately 2.6 acres (100,000 square feet) in size, and houses approximately 120 shipping containers and 12,000 square feet of event space. Stackt Market is open daily from approximately 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Commercial vendors include a mix of independent pop-ups and traditional retailers including Sonos, Indigo, and the Bank of Montreal. The market features 40 hand-picked vendors as well as Belgian Moon, a mobile brewery built inside three shipping containers. Leases range from 2 days to 18 months. Stackt has been described as “one of the coolest new public spaces in one of the fastest growing neighbourhoods” in Toronto. Particular effort has been made to ensure that the Market has the right mix of retailers and services, all complementing each other, and that lease terms encourage a certain amount of turnover so that the site always seems fresh.

One popular tenant is Forme 1 Pavilion, which according to the Globe and Mail, hosts “a rotating lineup of local and international chefs, offering visitors a food-and-drink experience unlike any other.” The designer of the Pavilion notes that “what Stackt has proven is that disused space can be reprogrammed temporarily, feasibly, and in an engaging way.”

The City of Toronto mandates that 15% of space be reserved for community economic development initiatives including community housing, community gardens, a greenhouse, etc. Other amenities include free wifi throughout the site, and a dog-friendly greenspace. The entire concept is portable, and should the lease not be renewed, the Market could relocate to another similar site.

### MARKET 707 | Toronto, Ontario

Market 707 is sponsored by the Scadding Court Community Centre (SCCC), located in the Dundas/Bathurst district of Toronto. Established in response to significant urban renewal and redevelopment projects which brought many new residents into the neighbourhood, the SCCC has a “social/recreational focus and mandate which allowed

people in the neighbourhood to plan and develop their own services and activities.” In response to “community feedback, a desire for broadened local employment opportunities and an emerging redevelopment vision,” SCCC developed an outdoor market adjacent to the community centre along Dundas. Today, Market 707 “uses business and community economic development to animate the streetscape, link the surrounding neighbourhoods, generate jobs and revitalize an underutilized area of the City.”

The Market has grown from two containers to 11, providing incubator spaces for 23 pop-up and permanent businesses. Rents are roughly \$11 to \$24 per day (2017). The market operates five days a week year round and include local meats and cheeses, international foods, bicycle repair, and others. Additional programming is offered in the summer with extended hours, additional vendors, family-focused activities, and live performances.

### DOWNTOWN CONTAINER PARK | Las Vegas, Nevada

The Downtown Container Park is located along historic Fremont Street in downtown Las Vegas. It was established in 2013 and includes 43 repurposed shipping containers and 41 locally manufactured cube structures. When it first opened in 2013, local media referred to it as an ‘outlet mall.’ Today, tenants include roughly 40 restaurants, bars, and shops. Public art from the Burning Man festival is reclaimed and repurposed. Approximately 2,000 people visit daily, and over 5 million have visited since it was established.

Entertainment is a primary activity with many activities taking place at the Lawn at Container Park, a live entertainment venue and event space. It provides a controlled, open air experience with a different vibe than is found at the Fremont Street Experience or The Strip. It is (relatively) family friendly and includes play structures, although minors are not allowed on site after 9 p.m.

The Container Park is sponsored by the Downtown Project, a \$350 million private redevelopment agency sponsored by the owner of Zappos, a major online retailer based

in Las Vegas. The Downtown Project has purchased acres of vacant properties in old Las Vegas, including the former City Hall. It began as a 'few shipping containers on a parking lot' before moving into a permanent facility in 2013. The character is upscale, permanent, and entertainment-oriented, as opposed to the typical retail incubator.

### EAST VILLAGE JUNCTION | Calgary, Alberta

East Village Junction is sponsored by the Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, developers of the East Village neighbourhood. The East Village (sometimes referred to as Calgary's 'first neighbourhood') is a 49 acre site along the Bow River adjacent to the downtown core. Beginning in 2007, CMLC's commitment of approximately \$400m has leveraged \$3b of private investment to date. The East Village neighbourhood will house more than 11,000 residents when complete in 2027.

In 2017, CMLC sponsored the East Village Junction, located on a site previously used for parking. East Village Junction opened with 12 shipping containers housing a variety of local businesses and organizations. In its first year of operation, East Village Junction was open from June to September and attracted more than 50,000 visitors. New programming is intended to attract more visitors for the upcoming season. It is open Fridays from noon to 8 pm, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Sunday, and holiday Mondays.

The character of the East Village Junction is very much a temporary, pop-up installation. The site will ultimately be developed for a higher and better use. In the interim, it provides an animated space and an amenity for residents. The timeline for redevelopment is unclear.

### POP BRIXTON | London UK

"Pop Brixton is a temporary project that has turned disused land into a creative space for local, independent businesses. Come and discover South London's most exciting start-ups working in food, retail, design and social enterprise."

Brixton is a neighbourhood in South London not far from the city centre. Town Council asked the community to suggest ideas for an underutilized parcel of land near the town centre. The community suggested a project that would ultimately become Pop Brixton. The project received Council approval in 2014, and opened in spring 2015 after only six months of construction. The project was intended to be a temporary project, with the lease expiring in 2017. It has since been extended to 2020.

Pop Brixton is sponsored by a company called Make Shift which includes designers, entrepreneurs, and architects. The project houses roughly 50 tenants, and any profits are split equally with the town council. The company is committed to providing a living wage for employees. According to their website, 100% of tenants are independent businesses, 70% are local, 50% are first time entrepreneurs, and 20% of all tenants are a social enterprise. A number of units are subsidized, and every year tenants make a commitment to volunteer 2,500 hours of their time and expertise to schools, individuals, and organizations in the community.

Make Shift's most recent project is Peckham Levels, which converted an underutilized parkade into cultural spaces.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter, our Project Team has undergone a thorough analysis and discussion of:

- Retail trends in Thunder Bay and across North America in general;
- Opportunities and shortcomings of downtown shopping centres in Thunder Bay and beyond;
- General principles and trends in downtown revitalization theory; and,
- Case studies that can influence opportunities for development in downtown Fort William.

What we have learned can be summarized with the following statements:

- The retail market in downtown Fort William is local rather than regional in nature. Rebuilding downtown Fort William as a retail destination will require an ongoing effort.
- While the development of downtown shopping centres was a common revitalization strategy in the 1960s and 1970s, few if any downtown shopping centres have had the desired effect and functioned as a catalyst for new downtown development.
- Successful downtown revitalization strategies provide an alternative to the suburban experience, providing quality pedestrian environments, good transit access, a focus on housing and entertainment, and a variety of small-scale destinations rather than a single attraction.
- Downtown malls are typically only financially viable in the largest metropolitan centres, which provide a suitable density of housing and a larger overall market, and anchor tenants that are able to attract shoppers independently of other retailers.

These lessons, along with input gathered through public engagement exercises, will inform the options developed later in this report.

## ***4. Community Engagement - Phase 1***

In order to gather community input on issues and potential solutions related to the mall, two open house sessions were held at Victoriaville Centre on Tuesday, October 29, 2019. The open houses consisted of a storyboard display and was staffed by the Project Team.

Hard copies of the survey were available for visitors to provide comments at the event. For those unable to attend in person, the same storyboards and information was made available on the City of Thunder Bay's community engagement website, [getinvolvedthunderbay.ca](http://getinvolvedthunderbay.ca). Visitors to the website were able to respond to the survey online.

Approximately 410 individuals actively participated in the engagement process in October 2019. The following table summarized the activities conducted for Phase 1 of the consultation. The storyboards and surveys are included in this report as Appendix B.

### **ACTIVITIES**

Stakeholder Interviews, October 28 – 30, 2019, 8 stakeholder representatives interviewed

Open Houses, October 29, 2019, 10 am – 1 pm & 4 pm – 7 pm, Victoriaville Green, Approximately 100 attendees, 34 attendees signed in, 35 paper surveys completed

Online Survey, October 28 – November 11, 2019, 301 online surveys completed

Project Website, Ongoing, 1,400 people viewed the project website

27 people downloaded open house boards

Newsletter – mytbay, October / November 2019 publication,

We consider the response rate to be high, reflecting the high level of interest in the project among residents of Thunder Bay. The high response rate can also be attributed



to the popular and easy to use [getinvolvedthunderbay.ca](http://getinvolvedthunderbay.ca) website, as well as well-publicized and well-coordinated public events.

As well, we engaged in a series of stakeholder interviews with approximately 15 participants. An additional 4 stakeholders were contacted but either had no opinion or chose not to participate for whatever reason. Stakeholders who participated in our one-on-one discussions included members of City Council, select City staff involved in the provision of social services in the neighbourhood, business organizations including Business Improvement Areas and the Chamber of Commerce, and Indigenous-led organizations. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, we have chosen not to include comments or themes in this report. The discussions however were robust, and informed our evaluation of the four options.

*It is important to note that not all users of Victoriaville Centre or residents of downtown Fort William are captured in the public consultation feedback. There are many barriers to participation in these types of consultation processes that can be challenging to address. The feedback and themes reflect the input of those who were able to participate in the process.*

## **KEY THEMES**

The following key themes emerged from the stakeholder interviews, surveys and open house comments:

### **General Frustrations with Victoriaville**

Many participants expressed frustration with the ongoing discussions surrounding Victoriaville and indicated that the City needs to make a decision and move forward. Existing tenants and adjacent landowners noted that there has been uncertainty for many years about the fate of the mall. Concerns were expressed about unaddressed maintenance issues in Victoriaville that may have been put on hold while a decision is

being made. This ongoing process has made it challenging for businesses and landowners to plan for the future of their business and buildings and creates too much risk for new tenants to lease space in and around the mall. In addition, some participants suggested that the City should not be in the real estate business and it is unfair for the City to compete against private landowners in the area for tenants.

### **Safety and Addressing Social Challenges**

Safety was a predominant theme throughout all feedback received. Participants indicated that there is a strong perception that Victoriaville and the surrounding area is not safe. Many respondents noted that they do not feel comfortable entering Victoriaville due to loitering, violence, crime, and other unsafe/illegal activities that have been documented and witnessed in and around the mall. There were many suggestions for improved and/or more visible security and policing, as well as a need for community safety plans and other strategies to address the root causes of these challenges.

Addressing social challenges in the neighbourhood was a key theme throughout the feedback. Participants noted a need for the City and community to find strategies to overcome these challenges, and some suggested that there may be too many social services concentrated in downtown Fort William and near Victoriaville.

### **Removal of Victoriaville Centre and Restoring Victoria Avenue**

There was very strong support for the removal of Victoriaville Centre from most participants. Many suggested that the mall is not serving a meaningful function anymore, is a significant financial strain on the City, and has been a detriment to the vibrancy of the neighbourhood. However, some stakeholders and participants noted that the removal of the mall is not a 'silver bullet' move and would not guarantee instant renewal of the street or neighbourhood, or instantly solve other challenges in the area.

Most respondents indicated that the street should be restored with the removal of the mall. The suggested benefits for restoring the street included better connectivity for pedestrians and vehicles, improved circulation, traffic flow and access to existing business, and more opportunities for on-street parking.

Many participants suggested opportunities to create new public space to revitalize the area, including more plazas, courtyards, greenspace, improved waterfront access, ornamental fencing, pavers and lighting. There was a strong interest in creating a vibrant pedestrian street with commercial storefronts, and revitalized heritage facades.

### **Community Spaces and Housing**

Participants recognized that there is a need for inclusive multi-generational community spaces and community events. Many noted that Victoriaville Centre is currently functioning as a community gathering space and that many people use the mall as a safe, warm, and comfortable social space, especially in inclement weather. Many participants indicated that the neighbourhood would benefit from a variety of community programming initiatives, recreation, and social opportunities. Some respondents noted that additional events and programming in Victoriaville could attract more visitors, and that family events such as holiday celebrations have been well attended in the past.

In addition to special events, more ongoing programming for seniors, youth, vulnerable populations and the Indigenous community was suggested. Some comments also proposed that these important social functions could be provided efficiently in other existing spaces in the neighbourhood.

A need for more residential development was identified by some participants. Respondents suggested market and non-market multi-family housing could support many vulnerable populations and support commercial activity in the area.

### **Creating a Destination**

Many respondents stated that there are not many reasons to go to downtown Fort William or Victoriaville Centre, especially after work hours. Respondents also stated that Victoriaville predominantly provides civic and social services. It was frequently suggested that there are no major anchors, destinations, or attractions that would encourage people to visit the area, while most commercial activity is concentrated in the Intercity area as well as Port Arthur.

Participants indicated they would be inclined to visit Victoriaville and downtown Fort William more often if there was more commercial activity. Suggestions included specialty retail, restaurants, bistros, and financial services. Other suggestions included post-secondary educational space, and business incubator/start-up spaces with affordable rent provisions.

### **A Plan for Downtown Fort William**

Participants suggested that Victoriaville Centre and downtown Fort William is lacking a unique identity, vibrancy, belonging, and sense of pride. Some suggested that there is a need to embrace the uniqueness and diversity of the neighbourhood and its residents, and to celebrate the history and culture of Fort William. Some respondents suggested the need for a larger plan for all of downtown Fort William that includes areas such as Simpson Street.

Participants were asked to choose a word to describe Victoriaville Centre today. The following word cloud summarizes the most common responses:

[Word Cloud Figure]

Participants were asked to choose a word to describe downtown Fort William today. The following word cloud summarizes the most common responses:

[Word Cloud Figure]

Participants were asked to choose a word to describe what they hope downtown Fort William would look like in 25 years. The following word cloud summarizes the most common responses.

[Word Cloud Figure]

Participants were asked about why they visit the Victoriaville area and what mode of transportation they typically use.

Why do you normally visit Fort William? The most common responses were appointments (27%) and shopping (25%). “Other” responses included: Live in the area;

Own a building in the area; Use the bus terminal; Access City Hall and City services; and Recreation (curling, hockey, soccer).

Why do you normally visit Victoriaville Centre? The most common responses were Other (35%) and Appointments (25%). “Other” responses included: Use the Centre as a cut through, especially in winter; eat lunch; pay bills; and access City services.

How do you normally travel to downtown Fort William? The most common response was Car (73%).

## ***5. Identifying Options***

The Project Terms of Reference require identification, analysis, and evaluation of four feasible redevelopment options. Through our analysis of best practices regarding downtown malls in Canada (and to a lesser extent throughout North America), we identified four potential development opportunities for Victoriaville Centre, namely:

Options 1A & 1B: Revitalize the existing infrastructure through retaining the existing building and either revitalizing the retail component, or repurposing the existing space;

Option 2: Reconfigure the existing infrastructure, reopen Victoria Avenue, and maintain a portion of the existing structure on Syndicate Avenue south of Victoria Avenue; and,

Option 3: Remove the existing infrastructure, reopen Victoria Avenue, and re-energize public spaces on Syndicate Avenue.

Note: The project study area does not include McKellar Mall, the parking structure, or the parking ramp. These components are not within the scope of this project.

### **OPTION 1A: REVITALIZE VICTORIAVILLE CENTRE**

Option 1 involves maintaining and renovating the existing structure. Two potential uses (Options 1A and 1B) are identified for that structure. Option 1A involves renovating the structure, upgrading retail units, and expanding the second floor of the building to establish additional retail space. The goal is to restore Victoriaville Centre's original intended role as a retail destination and community anchor.

### **ADVANTAGES**

- Retains the use of existing infrastructure. Generally speaking, re-using existing infrastructure means reducing the consumption of new resources. This strategy offers environmental benefits. However, the re-use of existing infrastructure (and the nature of the skylights/atrium in particular) is not energy efficient and would be difficult to upgrade.

- Maintains indoor public space. In addition to offering commercial activities centred around the food court, Victoriaville Centre offers an indoor public space. This indoor public space is available for community programming (generally at Victoriaville Green), but is also used by community members for unprogrammed, casual activities. Through our own observations, as well as discussions with community stakeholders, the role Victoriaville Centre offers a safe, secure, public space – particularly for those with limited options – is recognized and acknowledged.
- Supports the continuation of currently operating businesses. There are a number of businesses that currently operate in Victoriaville Centre, providing some revenue to offset operating costs. Although it is highly unlikely, given the broader retail market climate, coupled with local economic challenges, it may be possible to explore more modestly scaled, community-serving uses.
- Supports new, non-market community-oriented uses in existing retail spaces that are not economically viable. Rather than continue to operate existing retail spaces that are currently vacant, it may be desirable to convert these spaces for use by organizations providing a variety of services to the general community.

## **DISADVANTAGES**

- Maintaining Victoriaville Centre in any form will require significant ongoing financial contributions by the City.
- Victoriaville Centre continues to act as an obstacle to pedestrian and vehicular circulation, preventing connectivity between neighbourhoods. Good transportation connectivity is a key planning principle of a vibrant neighbourhood. Retail streets thrive when they are easily accessed by both pedestrians and vehicles. When access is restricted, or obstacles put in place, pedestrian and vehicular circulation is discouraged and activity - both transportation and retail – decreases. Any plan to revitalize or repurpose Victoriaville Centre must consider

the significant negative impact its construction and ongoing operation has had on the immediate retail environment as well as between neighbourhoods.

- Significant capital upgrades are required to repair the existing infrastructure, renovate for existing or potential retail tenants, or renovate to accommodate new uses. The building was originally constructed over 40 years ago and requires significant improvements to function properly as originally intended, to attract new retail, restaurant, or commercial service tenants, or to accommodate new uses. The cost of these upgrades cannot be supported by potential revenues arising from new retail tenants, or from new public uses.
- It is extremely unlikely that Victoriaville Centre could ever attract and sustain commercial tenants for the long term at rental rates required to cover operating costs. Furthermore, the nature of the mall's configuration - and more specifically, lack of traditional anchor space within the City's control - suggests that even if there were market demand for new retail spaces in Victoriaville, there are few if any opportunities to create additional retail space. As the adjacent private properties do not pay rent, only an extremely modest common area fee, there is no opportunity to derive additional revenue from new tenants in privately owned properties.
- Even at full occupancy, and reasonable assumptions of achievable rents in the current configuration, Victoriaville Centre will still experience an operating loss. Unlike a traditional enclosed mall, the adjacent buildings are privately owned, there are no typical retail spaces lining the common areas, and there are no large retail anchor spaces available to attract traffic to and through the mall. While on-site and nearby employment generates traffic, there are few opportunities to capitalize on this market due to the existing design. Significant renovations would be required to create high-quality retail spaces with the exposure to customer traffic that traditional retailers require. There is also no market demand, or physical capacity, to deliver the anchor retail spaces required to make such a commercial property viable. It would also simply not be possible, given Thunder Bay retail market conditions, to raise rental rates high enough to cover the



projected cost of renovating and operating new retail spaces in Victoriaville Centre.

## **OPTION 1B: REPURPOSE VICTORIAVILLE CENTRE**

Option 1B would renovate the existing structure, maintain existing indoor public meeting spaces, and potentially replace existing retail spaces that are not financially viable (i.e., the mezzanine, Victoria Avenue kiosks) with new recreational or other community uses.

### **ADVANTAGES**

- Retains the use of existing infrastructure. Generally speaking, re-using existing infrastructure means reducing the consumption of new resources. This strategy offers environmental benefits. However, the re-use of existing infrastructure (and the nature of the skylights/atrium in particular) is not energy efficient and would be difficult and expensive to upgrade.
- Expands indoor public space. Through our own observations, as well as discussions with community stakeholders, the role Victoriaville Centre offers as safe, secure, public space – particularly for those with limited options – is recognized and acknowledged. This option would provide new recreational community space that may be desirable for current and new users of Victoriaville.
- Supports the continuation of currently operating food court businesses. The current food court businesses could continue to operate in Victoriaville Centre, providing some revenue to offset operating costs.
- Supports new, non-market community-oriented uses in existing retail spaces that are not economically viable. Rather than continue to operate existing retail spaces that are currently vacant, it may be desirable to convert these spaces for use by organizations providing a variety of services to the general community.

## **DISADVANTAGES**

- Maintaining Victoriaville Centre in any form will require significant ongoing financial contributions by the City. Should the decision be made to pursue Option 1B and convert existing underutilized retail spaces to community use spaces generating little to no revenue, it is reasonable to expect similar financial performance as the Centre is currently experiencing. As this is economically unsustainable, this scenario would require significant subsidies to support ongoing operation.
- Victoriaville Centre continues to act as an obstacle to pedestrian and vehicular circulation, preventing connectivity between neighbourhoods. Good transportation connectivity is a key planning principle of a vibrant neighbourhood. Retail streets thrive when they are easily accessed by a variety of modes, including walking, cycling, public transit, and automobile. When access is restricted, or obstacles put in place, pedestrian and vehicular circulation is discouraged and activity - both transportation and retail – decreases. Any plan to revitalize or repurpose Victoriaville Centre must consider the significant negative impact its construction and ongoing operation has had on the immediate retail environment as well as between neighbourhoods.
- Significant capital upgrades are required to support the extent of renovation required to effectively to accommodate new uses. The building was originally constructed over 40 years ago and requires significant improvements to accommodate new uses.

## **OPTION 2: RECONFIGURE VICTORIAVILLE**

Option 2 involves removing the existing structure along the Victoria Avenue right of way, restoring and reopening Victoria Avenue, and renovating the remaining structure located along Syndicate Avenue south of Victoria (roughly the area used today as a food court). The project includes the retention and refinement of a food market or food

court in the renovated portion south of Victoria, along with other public uses in the adjacent public hall.

Option 2 would include new transportation infrastructure and street tree planting along Victoria Avenue, allowing for the re-establishment of pedestrian, vehicular, transit, and active transportation uses. Repairs and renovations would be made to the existing building faces along Victoria Avenue. On the Syndicate Avenue alignment north of Victoria, the existing structure would be removed but the utilities that currently exist servicing the washrooms would be reconfigured to service new kiosk-style public washrooms. Additional kiosks would be provided in this space for commercial or public programming opportunities.

The existing public square on Syndicate Avenue immediately south of Justice Avenue is a generally pleasant public space. Visitation to this space would be enhanced through the addition of new amenities and programmed activities. This programming will not only result in attracting new visitors, but it will also provide additional oversight and enhance safety in the area.

## **ADVANTAGES**

- Reopening Victoria Avenue will result in improved pedestrian and vehicular circulation and enhanced street-oriented retail and commercial opportunities. Improving connectivity and enhancing the pedestrian environment is critical to the long-term viability of retail along Victoria Avenue.
- Indoor public space with a food/market theme would remain to serve the local population who live and work in the neighbourhood. The food/market area offers modest revenue generation opportunities, (and is in fact the current mall area with the highest per sq. ft. revenue generation), which could help offset operating costs. This will allow Victoriaville Mall to continue to provide a basic community service, even if only coffee, grab and go foods, washrooms, and conversation, in a safe and warm environment.

- Public washrooms would be maintained internally south of Victoria Avenue, and externally north of Victoria Avenue, adjacent to the public square.
- Operational costs would be reduced due to the overall reduction in square footage, particularly the elimination of non-revenue generating areas.

## **DISADVANTAGES**

- An ongoing operating subsidy will be required. Operational costs, although reduced, will remain and the Mall will therefore require an ongoing operating subsidy from the City of Thunder Bay. Operating costs will be influenced by the nature of an inefficient building (in terms of energy) as well as ongoing management and security issues.
- There are lost development and neighbourhood revitalization opportunities associated with maintaining this component. To a certain extent, operating a food court or food market at this location maintains the status quo in terms of attracting new visitors to the neighbourhood. A new attraction, such as a container market or other quasi-public initiative, cannot proceed if the existing structure remains.
- Operating cost savings are not sufficient to fund this development option. Compared with complete demolition, operating cost savings are substantially less because a portion of the building remains and will continue to require a subsidy to operate. Therefore, operating cost savings associated with partial demolition are insufficient to fund this option.
- Existing Retail and Community Spaces could be lost. Existing retail and community spaces, including Victoriaville Green, would need to be relocated (if desired) should the facility be deconstructed.

## **OPTION 3: REMOVE VICTORIAVILLE CENTRE**

Option 3 involves completely removing the Victoriaville Centre structure, restoring the facades of the existing buildings (as necessary), and returning Victoria Avenue to pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The purpose of reopening Victoria Avenue would be to provide improved access and circulation to businesses in the immediate neighbourhood. Amenities such as street trees, benches, decorative lighting, and on-street water treatment will provide a pleasant environment that encourages pedestrians to linger. The design of the street would support this purpose, as opposed to moving cars quickly through the neighbourhood (which can be effectively accommodated on other established routes).

Because Syndicate Avenue is not a through street, there is no advantage in returning the street to vehicular use. An opportunity exists to provide new amenities and attractions within the Syndicate right-of-way. The existing public square on Syndicate Avenue north of Victoria Avenue will be re-energized with new uses, complemented by a new public space south of Victoria Avenue. The plazas, which will be further defined and designed through additional community dialogue, will be designed with flexibility in mind. Infrastructure will be installed to support a wide variety of uses so that the spaces can respond to different needs as the neighbourhood transitions and evolves.

## **ADVANTAGES**

- The cost of operating Victoriaville Centre is eliminated. Ongoing operating costs could be used instead to restore, redevelop, operate, and program Victoria and Syndicate Avenues.
- Connectivity is restored. Removing the existing structure is an essential component in improving the pedestrian environment along Victoria Avenue, allowing vehicular traffic, and restoring connectivity between amenities and neighbourhoods. Improving connectivity will benefit the entire downtown neighbourhood.
- Property owners support this option. In 2015, 6 of 8 property owners submitted a letter to the City of Thunder Bay requesting the demolition of Victoriaville Mall

and the reopening of Victoria Avenue. Property owners believe that closing Victoria Avenue negatively impacted visitation to their tenants, and that reopening the street will provide enhanced economic development opportunities. Property owners provide real-world experience that must be considered in the decision.

- The public plazas to be developed within the Syndicate Avenue right of way have the potential to become significant public gathering areas. Infrastructure should be put in place to support programmed community events (e.g., concerts, festivals, etc.) and potentially to support adjacent businesses (e.g., patios, etc). Washrooms for example could be provided in the Amenity Hub. The plazas could support temporary commercial uses such as kiosks or a container market. The plazas will function as a sort of 'town square' on Victoria Avenue, and if programmed successfully can be as busy in winter as they are in summer.

## **DISADVANTAGES**

- Demolition of Victoriaville Centre will result in the loss of indoor public space. The indoor space in Victoriaville Centre is used by many people for many different reasons. Some are patrons of vendors in the food court or other businesses in Victoriaville Centre. Many visit Victoriaville Green to take advantage of the community programming being offered. Some use it to grab a coffee and visit with friends, while others come to warm up and use the public washroom. It provides a warm, safe and secure space for some who may have few alternatives. These uses are legitimate, and need to be addressed as planning for the facility and the neighbourhood as a whole is considered. Service providers in the neighbourhood have been engaged in preliminary discussions regarding this option, and will need to be part of an ongoing dialogue to address the provision of services in the neighbourhood going forward.
- Existing Victoriaville Centre businesses and community services will be displaced. Viable businesses and community services exist within Victoriaville

Centre – some in the food court, and others in the kiosks lining the Victoriaville right of way. Should these businesses and community services be displaced, every effort should be made to find alternate locations for them in the neighbourhood.

- Some operating costs will remain after Victoriaville Centre is demolished. Although relatively minor in comparison to the costs of operating Victoriaville Centre today, there will be costs associated with maintaining Victoria Avenue as a right-of-way (plowing, roadway maintenance, etc). As well, there will be a cost to program and maintain the new public spaces and amenities along the Syndicate Avenue right-of-way. The nature of these costs is beyond the scope of this investigation, and depends on the program envisioned for these new public spaces.
- Demolition of Victoriaville Centre will not guarantee the revitalization of downtown Fort William. What it will do, however – along with a Secondary Plan outlining the long-term vision for the neighbourhood and an Implementation Strategy/Business Plan – is create a framework, both physical and programmatic, for the revitalization process to begin. Revitalizing Victoria Avenue and downtown Fort William is a long-term process, likely taking decades to achieve. This is the first step.
- The actual cost of demolition may change. In 2016, Wickham Consulting prepared a preliminary cost report that outlined the cost to demolish Victoriaville Centre and restore Victoria Avenue as a public thoroughfare. We have reviewed the estimates and believe the work to be sound, but subject to assumptions that may or may not reflect the scope of the project moving forward. As well, it is extremely difficult to estimate the demolition cost of a project so singularly unique and complex. An appropriate contingency is included in the budget, but the actual scope of work cannot be determined until the project is underway. Finally, the estimate is now roughly four years old, and needs to reflect the costs of inflation over that time.

## **PLAZA AND CONTAINER MARKET POSSIBILITIES**

Although the exact design and program of the public plazas is beyond the scope of this study, we are planning and budgeting to ensure that the plazas are flexible and can accommodate a range of uses. To be successful, the public plazas will need to be programmed and well-maintained. They need to offer entertainment, food, places to sit – to see and be seen – and places to shop. They need to be active, and they need to feel secure.

To be successful, resources need to be dedicated to the programming and maintenance of Victoria Avenue and the public plazas. Ideally, a community organization, that is dedicated to the revitalization of downtown Fort William, can take ownership of the space and provided with the resources necessary to ensure its success.

In the final open house, we proposed that a Container Market be established on the Syndicate plaza. A container market has been used successfully in other communities and offers a number of opportunities. First and foremost, they are flexible and are economical to install, operate, and maintain. They can be physically arranged on site in a variety of configurations. They are unique, and to our knowledge no similar Container Market exists between Toronto and Calgary. They offer low cost, low risk, incubator-type spaces that could be used for both commercial and public purposes. They can be used for startup entrepreneurs, who might then grow into more permanent locations in the neighbourhood. Although developing a program for the Syndicate plazas is beyond the scope of this project, we will consider these potential uses (or similar) when developing a draft capital budget for this option.

Container Markets are a proven strategy to incubate new retail development. As evidenced by the extent of vacant commercial units in the neighbourhood, there is currently very little demand for the many vacant retail storefronts along Victoria Avenue or in the immediate neighbourhood. Providing flexible space in the Syndicate Plaza provides an opportunity to attract new visitors to the neighbourhood. Adding new retail space in a Container Market may be seen as competing with existing retail spaces, or adding additional capacity in an over-saturated market. However, a Container Market is a different retail scenario that will complement rather than compete with existing retail



spaces. A Container Market can act as an incubator, supporting small independent businesses until they are able to progress to a more permanent location.

A Container Market:

- Will support a different, and thus complementary, retail typology to what is currently available in the Thunder Bay market.
- Provides low cost space due to the economical nature of retrofitting a container.
- Is carefully curated, much like a traditional shopping centre – each service supports and reinforces one another.
- Requires careful management, maintenance, and programming.
- Ultimately provides a low risk investment for new retail, and potentially, service functions.
- Community-oriented programming and services could be incorporated into the Syndicate Avenue plaza. A Container Market does not have to provide exclusively retail uses. Other services that benefit the community, including libraries, washrooms, and places to warm up can be provided in the Market.

## **CAPITAL AND OPERATING COSTS**

In order to inform the evaluation, a summary of Capital and Operating Costs is provided below for each option. An Opinion of Probable Cost is provided (+/- 25%) for each of the four options.

Option 1A would have the highest renovation cost to develop an upgraded, two-level retail space within the existing building.

Both Options 1B and 2 include renovation costs to convert and/or upgrade portions of the existing structure. Option 2 also includes costs for partial demolition and to reintroduce the Victoria Avenue right-of-way and some public spaces.

Option 3 is the most economical option, even when taking into account the comparatively high costs of demolition and civic infrastructure required to remove the entire structure and reintroduce the Victoria Avenue right-of-way and associated public spaces.

## **CAPITAL COSTS (SUMMARY)**

[Capital Costs Table]

## **ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET ESTIMATES**

In 2018, Victoriaville Centre revenues were approximately \$236,000 and expenditures were \$740,000. The current annual cost to the City to operate Victoriaville Centre is approximately \$504,000. The estimated operating budgets for each option all result in an annual operating cost to the City. Options that include retaining a structure would require significantly more operating expenditures.

[Operating Budget Table]

## **6. Community Engagement - Phase 2**

Two open house sessions were held at Victoriaville Centre on Thursday, February 13, 2020 to gather community input on issues and potential solutions related to the mall. The open house consisted of a storyboard display and was staffed by the Project Team.

Hard copies of the survey were available for visitors to provide comments at the event. For those unable to attend in person, the same storyboards and information was made available on the City of Thunder Bay's community engagement website, [getinvolvedthunderbay.ca](http://getinvolvedthunderbay.ca). Visitors to the website were able to respond to the survey online.

Approximately 220 individuals actively participated in the engagement process in February 2020. The following table summarized the activities conducted for Phase 2 of the consultation. The storyboards and surveys are included in this report as Appendix C.

### **ACTIVITIES**

Stakeholder Interviews, February 12 – 14, 2020, 5 stakeholder representatives interviewed

Open Houses, February 13, 2020, 10 am – 1 pm & 4 pm – 7 pm, Victoriaville Green, Approximately 75 attendees, 35 paper surveys completed

Online Survey, February 13 – March 20, 2020, 113 online surveys completed

Project Website, Ongoing, 384 people viewed the project website

139 people downloaded open house boards

*It is important to note that not all users of Victoriaville Centre or residents of downtown Fort William are captured in the public consultation feedback. There are many barriers to participation in these types of consultation processes that can be challenging to address. The feedback and themes reflect the input of those who were able to participate in the process*

## **SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK**

The following themes emerged from the stakeholder interviews, surveys and open house comments:

### **OPTION 1A**

In general, most respondents were not supportive of maintaining and renovating Victoriaville Centre's existing structure. Some did note that keeping the mall would retain important indoor gathering space in the area. There was support for improving the aesthetics of the existing structure, but many noted the mall would only be successful if tenants could be found to occupy it. Increased retail could also provide for additional employment opportunities and the possibility of retaining existing Victoriaville Centre tenants.

The cost to repair, renovate and operate the mall was the primary concern for respondents who noted the continued financial impact to the City. Many respondents suggested that the City should not be a mall operator. Respondents also suggested that any investments in retail spaces would be competing with other commercial spaces in the Thunder Bay.

Respondents mentioned the existing circulation issues that the mall creates for all modes of transportation, including pedestrians, while some noted the importance of an indoor walking space and cut throughs, especially in the winter.

Many respondents suggested it would be hard to overcome the reputation and negative connotations of the existing mall even with major renovations and improvements. Some respondents questioned the viability of retail in general and in Thunder Bay. These respondents pointed to Intercity as the primary retail destination in the City and a renovated mall would not be able to attract enough tenants and traffic.

Participants also noted that the existing structure is not energy efficient, and that there are many concerns around accessibility and parking which create challenges in

accessing the mall. Some also noted that this option does not address safety concerns and that continued security would be needed for the mall and surrounding spaces.

## **OPTION 1B**

In general, respondents were somewhat supportive of repurposing Victoriaville Centre. Participants noted that it would provide recreational opportunities and promote active living for families, youth, and residents of the area. There was positive feedback towards the inclusion of health and wellbeing, with some respondents noting that it complemented other health and community services being offered in the area and in McKellar wing. There was support for continuing to provide public indoor space, especially youth, seniors, low-income families, and vulnerable populations. It was noted that this option would bolster community gathering space in the area, especially if programming, such as music, art and cultural events, was incorporated.

Many respondents also suggested that repurposing the existing structure may not be the best way to create quality indoor community space. The cost to renovate, maintain and operate the building was a large concern for many participants. The cost to provide programming was acknowledged as a big challenge, and funding from different levels of government may be required.

Respondents also mentioned the existing circulation issues that the building creates for all modes of transportation, including pedestrians, while some noted the importance of an indoor walking space and cut throughs, especially in the winter.

Participants also noted that the existing structure is not energy efficient, and that there would be security challenges and noise conflicts with adjacent buildings, such as the Provincial court. In addition, there were concerns about accessibility and parking for accessing the mall. Some also noted that this option does not address safety concerns and that continued security would be needed for the mall and surrounding spaces.

## **OPTION 2**

Respondents supported reconfiguring Victoriaville Centre primarily because it retains some indoor public space while re-opening Victoria Avenue. It was noted that operating costs could be reduced with a smaller building footprint, and less investment would be required to repair and maintain the existing structure in its entirety. Some respondents were concerned about any ongoing operating costs in addition to the capital costs of demolition and renovation.

Many respondents noted that this would be a significant decrease of indoor public space, which may result in the displacement of many users, including vulnerable populations. At the same time, some respondents suggested that more community-oriented space was needed in the area rather than a commercial food court.

Respondents were supportive of increased circulation for all modes of transportation, while some expressed concern about the loss of indoor pedestrian space, especially in the winter. There was also some concern about increased vehicle traffic on Victoria Avenue. Some respondents suggested the right-of-way should be very pedestrian-oriented, and some were interested in Victoria Avenue being a pedestrian-only space. Some respondents also noted that this option would not necessarily address safety concerns and that continued security may be needed in the area.

This option was also seen favourably for the possibility of retaining existing food court vendors and ensuring there would be food options for adjacent businesses and offices. Respondents also noted there would be opportunities to create a more robust public food hall and market, in addition to food trucks in warmer weather. There was also some concern about the City continuing to be a commercial landlord, which may be in competition with other privately-owned commercial spaces.

### **OPTION 3**

Generally, removing Victoriaville Centre received the strongest support from respondents. Removing Victoriaville Centre entirely and reopening Victoria Avenue was seen as a way to reduce ongoing operations and maintenance costs and create a 'fresh start' for the area. However, many respondents noted that this option would completely

remove indoor public space, which may result in the displacement of many users, including seniors, youth, and vulnerable populations. Victoriaville Centre currently functions as a gathering space and hub for the area, especially during colder months. It was also noted that removing Victorivaille does not address root challenges in the neighbourhood.

Respondents mentioned that there is a need for additional community programming for a variety of users. Some respondents suggested that the City could reinvest the operational savings into community programming in the area, including in existing buildings along Victoria Avenue.

Respondents suggested that re-opening Victoria Avenue could create opportunities for patios and outdoor gather spaces, which may result in re-investment and commercial development, promote the revitalization of downtown Fort William, and celebrate the history of the area. It was also noted that this option does not guarantee the immediate success of the street or area; a return to the “glory days” of Victoria Avenue may not be possible given the market for retail in Thunder Bay. There was also some concern noted about the viability of the Container Market concept, in addition to the industrial aesthetic, which some thought might not be visually appealing. Respondents stated that investing in year-round programming would be required for the proposed public spaces.

Some respondents expressed concern for the impact on existing tenants in Victoriaville who may find it challenging to relocate their businesses. It was noted that there would be limited food options for the community and adjacent offices with the removal of the food court structure.

Some respondents indicated that Victoriaville is a physical barrier in the neighbourhood and that this option could improve circulation for all modes of transportation and create an increased perception of safety. Other respondents stated that this option would not necessarily address safety concerns and that continued security may be needed in the area. There was also some concern expressed about increased vehicle traffic on Victoria Avenue. Some respondents suggested the right-of-way should be very pedestrian-oriented, with some interested in Victoria Avenue being a pedestrian-only space.

## ***7. Evaluation and Recommendation***

In order to recommend a preferred development option to City Council, the Terms of Reference requires the “establishment of and rationale for evaluation criteria.” This evaluation criteria provides context for the recommendation and assists in the decision-making process.

### **DECISION-MAKING MATRIX**

The project team has established a Decision-Making Matrix to evaluate the options for Victoriaville. The matrix includes ten criteria that will be considered and applied to each option. The decision will be based on a qualitative review of the issues conducted by our interdisciplinary team of planners, architects, engineers, landscape architects, and land economics and retail specialists.

The Decision-Making Matrix is based on the Project Objectives as outlined in the Request for Proposals, and modified to reflect the perspectives of the City and Project Team as our understanding of the issues evolved.

The following matrix includes the criteria and a list of measures used during the evaluation.

1. Achievable in the short- to medium-term: Estimated timeline to complete planning and construction
2. Cost-effective to build and maintain: Cost estimate for redevelopment
3. Represents good value for money invested: Capital investment compared to yearly estimated revenues and expenditures; Efficiency and long-term sustainability of infrastructure:
4. Results in a positive economic impact: Opportunities for development and investment in existing downtown assets; Market demand in downtown Fort William and Thunder Bay
5. Supports equitable access to public amenities and services: Community needs in the area as expressed by stakeholders and the public



6. Enhances livability and safety: Opportunities for inclusivity, social interaction, community gathering and celebration; Safety and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles and best practices; Winter City best practices; Environmental sustainability
7. Provides opportunities for all modes of transportation to connect to key destinations: Circulation and connectivity for vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, transit to existing services and amenities in the area
8. Benefits the downtown and, by extension, all of Thunder Bay: Opportunities for new downtown initiatives; Positive impact on existing downtown and city-wide success and initiatives
9. Balance the needs of businesses, residents, and the general public: Public input from the consultation process
10. Based upon sound urban planning, urban design, community development, and retail development principles: Best practices for downtown urban design and development Retail trends and best practices

## **EVALUATION**

Based on the criteria identified in the previous section, our Project Team is prepared to recommend Option 3 – removal of the entire structure and the restoration of Victoria Avenue – as the Preferred Option. The rationale for this decision is based on the Evaluation Criteria as outlined in the previous chapter, and is described below in further detail. All Evaluation Criteria are considered equally.

### **1. ACHIEVABLE IN THE SHORT- TO MEDIUM-TERM.**

In the short- to medium-term, Option 3 is preferred. The capital costs associated with removing the structure, restoring the street, and establishing plazas on Syndicate Avenue can be financed through cost savings realized by ceasing operations of the mall in its current form. While it is highly desirable to operate public amenities, events, and programs in these new public spaces, these are not essential and not part of the base cost estimates. Options 1 and 2 would both require ongoing operating subsidies as well

as capital contributions towards the building itself, and without immediate funding sources are therefore less likely to be achieved over the short to medium-term.

## **2. COST-EFFECTIVE TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN.**

In terms of overall capital costs, Option 3 (complete demolition and restoration of the street) at approximately \$10.75 million requires less immediate capital to achieve than Options 1A and 1B (\$34.9 million and \$15.4 million) and Option 2 (approximately \$22.5 million).

Options 1A, 1B, and 2 will continue to require operating subsidies due to ongoing operating losses. Because there is no permanent structure associated with Option 3, operating costs include only regular street maintenance and plaza maintenance. While it is highly desirable to operate public amenities, events, and programs in these new public spaces, these are not essential and not part of the base cost estimates.

## **3. REPRESENTS GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY INVESTED.**

The term “good value” is somewhat subjective and reflects both the costs of construction and the costs to operate, relative to each other and relative to the benefit offered. Good value does not necessarily mean profitable – it means considering the benefit relative to cost.

It can be argued that the option that could provide the most community benefit is 1B – converting the existing structure to new community uses including recreation. Option 1A and Option 2 are largely based on maintaining existing retail which has not proven to be successful, at a relatively high capital cost. Option 3 provides a cost-effective option to provide a variety of new uses including retail, recreation, and other opportunities at a relatively low capital cost.

Because of the net benefits offered by removing the existing structure and creating new public plazas, relative to the capital costs required, Option 3 is preferred.

#### **4. RESULTS IN A POSITIVE ECONOMIC IMPACT.**

A positive economic impact is best judged by the new economic opportunities created through the project. Option 1A is not viable over the long term and does not provide a positive economic impact. Option 1B provides a positive community and social benefit but at a significant cost, and relatively low new economic benefit.

Option 2 maintains the status quo in terms of economic activity, but requires a significant subsidy to do so. Option 3, however, provides opportunities for new economic activity through the creation of new retail, entertainment and service spaces. The costs to provide these new spaces are relatively low, and relatively low risk. Option 3 is therefore preferred in terms of positive economic impact.

#### **5. SUPPORTS EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PUBLIC AMENITIES AND SERVICES.**

The existing Victoriaville Centre provides benefits in terms of amenities and services to all citizens of Thunder Bay. Community residents and stakeholders noted that the primary function today is to provide a community space to gather, and for some, to escape the elements in a safe and secure environment.

Option 1B enhances Victoriaville's role as a community gathering space by providing additional recreational and support services. Options 1A and 2 maintain the status quo in terms of public amenities. Option 3 cannot provide a supportive physical environment due to the removal of the existing structure. It could provide similar uses if properly programmed on site. With respect to supporting equitable access to public amenities and services, Option 1B is preferred.

#### **6. ENHANCES LIVEABILITY AND SAFETY.**

When evaluating the various Options against the criteria and measures, there are benefits and constraints associated with each option. In theory, each option provides opportunities for social interaction, community gathering, and celebrations. Option 1 provides this opportunity indoors, Option 3 outdoors, and Option 2 both indoors in the

renovated structure and outdoors in the Syndicate plaza north of Victoria Avenue. When thinking about Winter City best practices however, the trend is to embrace winter and address the climate rather than avoid it. Option 3 provides an advantage in that it provides a contemporary alternative to existing, traditional indoor programmable spaces.

When considering environmental sustainability and climate change, it is important to consider both the materials and energy involved in constructing the original structure, as well as the greenhouse gases associated with the ongoing heating and cooling of the structure. Options 1A and 1B reuse the original structure, although the reuse results in ongoing heating and cooling requirements for a structure that appears to be relatively inefficient in terms of energy consumption. Option 2 removes a portion of the structure but results in decreased energy consumption due to a smaller building footprint. Option 3 does not reuse any of the existing structure, but eliminates the requirements of heating and cooling entirely.

In principle, we consider the proposed open air community space to be more environmentally sustainable than the existing enclosed atrium. We strongly encourage that building materials be recycled and reused during the demolition process.

## **7. PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL MODES OF TRANSPORTATION TO CONNECT TO KEY DESTINATIONS.**

Connectivity, the ability to navigate and move easily and efficiently throughout a neighbourhood, is a key component of a revitalized downtown. Planning and economic development theory suggests that communities, more generally, and retail nodes particularly thrive when offered good access and connectivity between and within neighbourhoods. The construction of Victoriaville Centre was a significant intervention that disrupted established transportation patterns for pedestrians, vehicles, transit, and cyclists.

Anecdotally, we know that many people attribute the decline of retail activity along Victoria Avenue to the fact that Victoriaville restricted access to their storefronts, along

Fort William's main artery, and changed the way people move through the city. Removing the existing structure along the Victoria Avenue right-of-way is critical in constructing the framework that guides the downtown revitalization process. Although Syndicate Avenue is no longer a significant throughway due to the construction of the parking ramp and the Provincial Courthouse, the ability to move pedestrians along Syndicate will benefit the neighbourhood as well.

Re-opening Victoria Avenue to pedestrian and vehicular traffic is perhaps the single most important factor in revitalising downtown Fort William. For that reason Option 1A and 1B are not desirable. Option 2 is a significant improvement, but still restricts access along Syndicate Avenue. Option 3 is preferred because it offers the greatest improvement in connectivity within the downtown community.

## **8. BENEFITS THE DOWNTOWN AND BY EXTENSION THE ENTIRE THUNDER BAY COMMUNITY**

Option 1A cannot benefit the downtown over the long-term because it is not economically viable. Option 1B and Option 2 can provide amenities and services that generally benefit the local community, but would not provide any attraction for visitors outside the immediate neighbourhood or create new economic development opportunities. Option 3 will provide an attraction and sustainable economic development opportunity unique to Fort William, and expand the visitor base beyond the current local draw. For that reason Option 3 is preferred.

## **9. BALANCE THE NEEDS OF BUSINESSES, RESIDENTS, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC.**

In order to make this determination we relied upon the significant consultation we coordinated with business owners, community leaders, and the general public. As mentioned earlier in the report, we received a tremendous public response at both community open houses. Option 3 most closely reflected the comments received across

all groups at the first open house, and received the most positive feedback at the second open house. Although it is not realistic to expect that any particular Option will address every issue and receive unanimous support, we believe that Option 3 enjoys broad support within the community. The Project Team also strongly recommends that steps be taken to address the gaps in service that result from the implementation of Option 3.

#### **10. BE BASED UPON SOUND URBAN PLANNING, URBAN DESIGN, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND RETAIL DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES.**

First and foremost, our recommendation must be grounded in theory, collective experience, and applied knowledge. We carefully assembled our Project Team in order to be able to address all facets of the project. We dedicated our energy towards finding a realistic solution that will benefit the community in the long-term.

We are confident that Option 3 most closely reflects the principles of sustainable urban planning, principles of strong urban design (including the City of Thunder Bay Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines 2012), our experience with community economic development initiatives, and retail development theory. We appreciate the opportunities that Option 3 offers and acknowledge the shortcomings that need to be addressed in a broad, comprehensive community planning strategy.

#### **RECOMMENDED OPERATIONAL MODEL FOR OPTION 3**

A critical component of any downtown revitalization strategy is the operating and management strategy. Building the appropriate physical infrastructure sets the stage for what a neighbourhood can become. But the vision cannot be achieved without an implementation strategy that addresses the operation, programming, and maintenance of the facility. Without such a strategy, the potential success of the project cannot be realized. Just as an indoor shopping mall requires programming and maintenance to run smoothly, so does an outdoor community space.

It is important that resources be dedicated to the operation, maintenance and programming of the space. Operating the facility must be the primary responsibility of a staff person and not be added to existing responsibilities or managed 'off the side of the desk.'

Typically, outdoor community spaces can be operated by four entities, including:

- The municipality, through existing budgets (often Parks and Recreation);
- A private company that owns and manages outdoor shopping centres;
- A public corporation established solely to manage lands dedicated to the corporation (for example Granville Island or The Forks); and,
- A Business Improvement Area, established and funded primarily through a special levy on local business (such as the Waterfront District BIA in Port Arthur, Bloor Street BIA in Toronto, Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, and many others). Toronto for example has over 40,000 businesses in 83 Business Improvement Areas.

We suggest that a Business Improvement Association is the appropriate operational entity, both because of the operational advantages a BIA offers as well as the limitations faced by other models.

Municipal operation is undesirable for a number of reasons. A municipality is often faced with competing demands for resources and conflicting or evolving priorities. Although a staff person could be assigned responsibility for the neighbourhood, it is possible that their efforts could be diluted due to the addition of new responsibilities.

Management of the Victoria Avenue neighbourhood by a private management company is not feasible due to the nature of public vs private space, the multiple uses of the public space, and the lack of a commercial base necessary to support this model.

Establishment of a public corporation is not desirable due to the nature of the site and the relatively high costs of administration. Examples such as Granville Island and The Forks are large physical entities where all the lands, roadways and infrastructure are owned by the public corporation. Public corporations are intended to be self sufficient through the generation of revenue from property. To establish a viable land base

theoretically capable of generating sufficient operating revenue, the redevelopment project would need to expand and add additional revenue generating properties. The additional revenue generated can be used to provide the services necessary to sustain the neighbourhood revitalization process.

A Business Improvement Area (BIA) is the preferred model because it can best utilize the community amenity to provide resources and services to neighbouring businesses and residents. With the BIA having a direct interest in the asset, insuring that managing the asset remains a priority in the long-term will be easier since. The BIA could be responsible for directly providing or coordinating:

- Programming of the asset, including providing entertainment, concerts, festivals, food truck wars, etc. in the public space;
- Managing any leasable space for food trucks, container markets, kiosks, etc.;
- Maintaining the asset, including cleaning, maintenance and minor infrastructure repairs;
- Marketing, communications, and promotional services;
- Site security; and,
- Coordinating resources to at-risk populations.

Should additional control be desired in the public plazas, these spaces could be legally closed and transferred to the BIA. In most cases, private property is managed differently than public property.

In the short term, should an existing BIA be tasked with managing the asset, the BIA may not have the necessary resources to staff this position. Additional resources could be provided by the municipality, the BIA boundaries could be expanded to include the entire downtown community, or the levy could be increased in response to the increased scope of work. Ideally, the solution lies in a combination of all three approaches.



## ***8. Conclusion and Next Steps***

In July 2019, the Project Team was selected to provide advice and direction to the City of Thunder Bay regarding the future of Victoriaville Centre. During that time we have reviewed historical information regarding the decision to construct Victoriaville Centre, gathered data about the retail market in Thunder Bay, performed a high-level condition assessment of relevant buildings and civic infrastructure, examined retail trends and opportunities for downtown revitalization in comparable markets, and engaged the public at a series of open houses.

After analyzing all quantitative and qualitative data, the Project Team unanimously recommends Option 3, Removal of Victoriaville Centre and the Re-Opening of Victoria Avenue, as the preferred strategy.

It is important that the following next steps be considered:

- We strongly recommend working closely with Indigenous communities on the planning, design, and implementation of the selected option going forward.
- We acknowledge that Victoriaville Centre fulfills a civic purpose as a safe and secure meeting place for many, including vulnerable populations, who may have few comparable options nearby. The needs of these populations must be identified and addressed, potentially as part of Option 3 and beyond.
- In the short term, demolition of Victoriaville Centre will result in the loss of a safe, warm space and public washrooms for people in the neighbourhood. Accommodation should be made and partnerships explored to address these needs in the short term. Over the longer term, a needs assessment should be done which identifies service gaps in the neighbourhood and identifies medium-term solutions.
- An operations/business plan that addresses retail and programming opportunities should be pursued for the two proposed public plazas to be located with the Syndicate Avenue right of way.

These items should be addressed concurrently with the implementation of Option 3 to ensure that the project delivers the maximum benefit to all populations. Following adoption of the report by City Council, the Project Team will prepare a Secondary Plan for the study area as an amendment to the City of Thunder Bay Official Plan.