

Downtown Cobourg Master Plan



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Executive Summary

The Downtown Master Plan provides detailed and strategic direction for the revitalization of Downtown Cobourg by building on the overarching policies outlined in the existing Official Plan and a number of other strategies and economic development initiatives developed for the Downtown over the years. The Master Plan contains a downtown strategy, urban design guidelines, and implementation tools to assist the Town in guiding new development, investment and community building initiatives in Downtown Cobourg for the next 10 to 20 years.

The Master Plan responds to the distinctive Downtown Cobourg context and the needs of existing and future citizens. The Plan addresses key challenges and opportunities to ensure that future change can be effectively managed to positively contribute to the health, beauty and vitality of the Downtown. The Master Plan is a strategic document that will be used by the Town, local residents and businesses as a tool to communicate the vision, goals, and direction to the public, external agencies, and investors. The Master Plan is consistent with the intent of the provisions of the Official Plan, providing more details regarding the built form, public realm and development parameters consistent with the distinctive Downtown characteristics and community aspirations. In doing so, the Master Plan provides greater certainty and clarity about the future development of the Downtown.

This Master Plan also includes the Cobourg Downtown Vitalization Toolbox, a development manual summarizing relevant policies, development permit and approval processes, financial incentives, as well as appropriate municipal contacts and links to important documents and application forms. The Master Plan is an essential tool to guide and implement development, infrastructure and public realm improvements and to promote Downtown revitalization and economic development.

This document:

- Creates a detailed framework to guide planning and development decisions in a manner that is compatible with the local context and respectful of the broad community interests.
- Builds on the community's existing unique assets and opportunities.
- Responds to unique circumstances and contemporary realities facing Cobourg.
- Creates opportunities to increase the diversity of housing types within the Downtown, attractive to seniors, families, and a wide range of household types.
- Creates opportunities to increase economic development opportunities within the Downtown through encouraging mixed use infill development and other redevelopment opportunities.
- Establishes design guidelines and strategies specific to character areas that will inform the design details of site specific development applications.
- Describes opportunities for public realm and infrastructure improvements.
- Provides a range of implementation strategies to help encourage and promote development.

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Part 1 BACKGROUND AND VISION

Introduction and
Background

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1.1 Introduction

The Town of Cobourg is no stranger to change. The Town has progressed through a number of different development periods that have positively impacted the town as a whole. New residential development, business growth, a new hospital, recreation and cultural centres, and new civic offices have helped to enhance the sense of community in Cobourg.

A Commitment to Downtown Vitalization

Downtown Cobourg has been one of the key focus areas in the evolution of the town. A number of civic projects such as the Waterfront redevelopment, the Marina, Rotary Waterfront Park, Victoria Square, road infrastructure and general downtown beautification provide the underpinnings for a high quality public realm and healthy community. These projects have attracted a number of high quality residential developments, and building improvements. However, there is more work to be done in achieving the full potential of Downtown Cobourg.

Downtown is a key priority for Town Council. Implementing the Downtown Master Plan will help to bring forward the ambition for making the Downtown a vibrant and successful place for all, as outlined in the [Downtown Vitalization Action Plan](#), which was recently approved by Council. The Master Plan project presents one of the various strategic elements outlined in the Action Plan, which focuses on revitalizing Downtown Cobourg, and identifies actions for vitalization and economic development in the Downtown.

The Master Plan and Community Improvement Plan

The Master Plan has an overarching goal to set a clear vision and strategy for built form, open space, and development. To achieve a healthy outcome, economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability must be inherent in the growth of Downtown Cobourg.

This Master Plan is being developed with a corresponding Community Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP provides financial incentives and

programs to encourage revitalization and support private and public realm improvements in the Downtown. Appendix A includes the [Cobourg Downtown Vitalization Toolbox](#), which is a one-stop development toolbox, that includes a summary of the CIP as well as other helpful information related to Downtown revitalization.

1.2 Objectives

The Downtown Master Plan and CIP is a collaborative effort and partnership between the project team, the Town, the Downtown Coalition Advisory Committee, and other stakeholders. The Master Plan is the culmination of a consultative planning process and sets out a broad, long-term vision for the Downtown and guidelines for both private development and public investment. Equally important, it also identifies strategic directions to be pursued over the next 20 years, including key private and public initiatives.

The Master Plan solidifies the Vision for the Downtown as defined in the Vitalization Action Plan. This Master Plan will be used as a tool to help develop, guide and implement future development projects and public realm improvements across Downtown Cobourg. The Master Plan is also intended to be an economic development and business attraction toolbox which can be used by the Municipality to promote and market the Downtown and to elicit interest by developers, business and other investors.

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1.3 Plan Structure

This document includes the following:

1. **Part 1- Background and Vision:** Introduces the study and provides a background review, analysis, and the Vision for Downtown.
2. **Part 2- Guidelines for Future Development:** Provides general design guidelines, implementation recommendations and sequencing of Action Items.
3. **Appendix A - The Cobourg Downtown Vitalization Toolbox:** Includes a summary of relevant documents, policies, municipal contacts and provides a “one-stop shop” resource related to Downtown development.
4. **Appendix B - Glossary of Terms:** Contains a glossary of key terms to assist with the implementation and interpretation of the Master Plan.

1.4 The Master Plan Process

The Downtown Vitalization Action Plan project commenced in 2012 with a series of surveys, conversations, and meetings led by the Downtown Vitalization Task Force and Town staff with local stakeholders. The purpose of the discussions was to engage the community about their desires, interests, and criticisms of the Downtown and to discuss the issues and opportunities. The Task

Force reported back with a number of priorities for moving forward with downtown vitalization including; the creation of a Downtown Master Plan; a Heritage Master Plan; 3D Model; Engineering Survey; Virtual Tour; Feasibility Study; and Development Financing.

The Master Plan process unfolded through the following stages of work.

Stage 1 (June 2015 - July 2015) included a review and compilation of relevant background documents, studies, and policies. In addition, a Design Workshop was held in June 2015, which engaged stakeholders in discussions about the Downtown and in a design exercise and incentives discussion

Stage 2 (August 2015 - October 2015) included development of a demonstration plan; standards development; 3D visualizations; and draft incentive programs.

Stage 3 (October 2015 - February 2016) included preparation of the Draft and Final Master Plan report and Community Improvement Plan, as well as a number of public meetings.



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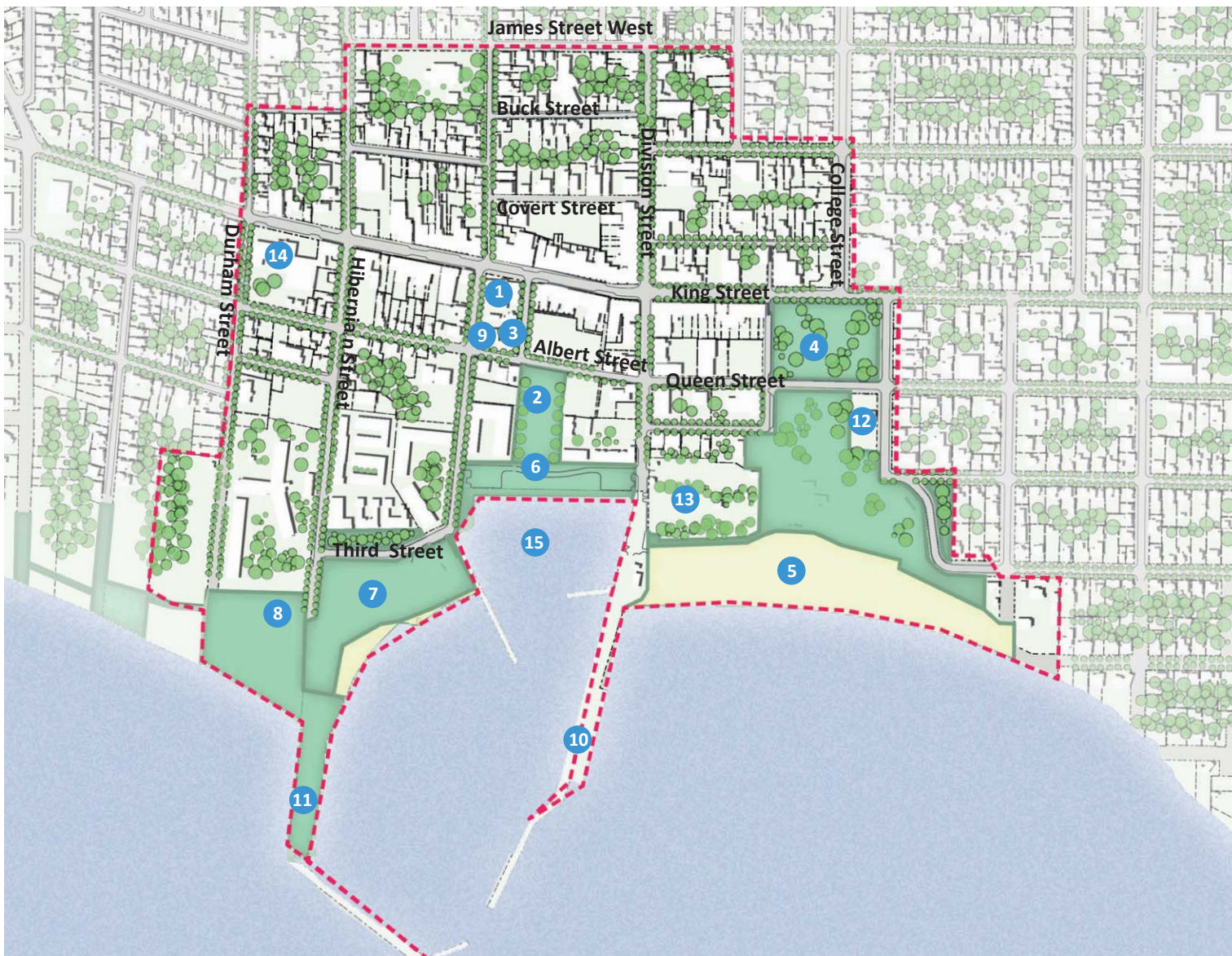
1.5 The Study Area

The Study Area is identified below. It includes the entire Downtown core bound by Durham Street to the west, College Street to the east, and James Street West to the north. Along its southern edge, the Study Area includes the beautiful Cobourg Waterfront and Marina.

Key features of the Study Area include:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1 Victoria Hall | 4 Victoria Park |
| 2 Rotary Park | 5 Cobourg Beach |
| 3 Victoria Square | 6 The Esplanade |
| | 7 The Marina and Yacht Club |
| | 8 Nature Park |
| | 9 The Market |
| | 10 Eastern Pier |
| | 11 West Headland |
| | 12 Lawn Bowling Club |
| | 13 Trailer Park |
| | 14 Cobourg District Collegiate Institute West |
| | 15 Cobourg Marina |

Downtown Cobourg Master Plan Study Area



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1.6 What We Heard

The Downtown Vision and CIP Workshop was held in Cobourg at Victoria Hall on June 23, 2015. The Downtown Vision Workshop kicked-off the project with stakeholders to review existing conditions, present opportunities and a fresh eyes analysis, and to report on best practices. The second half of the event included a CIP workshop, which included a presentation on community improvement plans and precedent examples as they relate to Cobourg.

Over the course of the afternoon, participants from the Town, the Downtown Coalition Advisory Committee, property owners, business owners, the Friends of Downtown, the Downtown Business Improvement Area and other interested parties converged to explore opportunities for the long-term success of Downtown Cobourg. The objectives of this event included: introducing the consultants and the study process, providing an opportunity for input and feedback, engaging stakeholders in defining the principles, 'big moves' and confirming a Vision to guide the development of the area for the future. This section summarizes the outcomes of the Workshop.



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Workshop Summary

During the workshop participants were asked to engage in a two-part activity. Part 1 included discussing the Principles and the Vision developed as part of the Downtown Vitalization Action Plan. Sample questions included: How is Downtown characterized? How do people live in the Downtown? What makes the Downtown unique? What is it known for? Part 2 encouraged participants to come up with some ideas about potential 'Big Moves' for the Downtown.

Below is a summary of the Part 1 discussion:

Principles to apply to Downtown Cobourg

- An attractive and friendly environment.
- Promote active lifestyles, recreation, and cycling.
- Reinforce the downtown as a cultural destination.
- Create a 'Cobourg' identity through high quality urban design and planning.
- Enhance and promote the unique characteristics of the special character areas in the Downtown.
- Reinforce a cohesive palette of urban design materials, paving, and wayfinding.
- Encourage intensification that provides a range of uses that fits with the existing context and heritage character.

- Improve physical and visual connections to the East end businesses.
- Provide more programming in parks and open spaces.
- Encourage a four-season destination.

How is Downtown characterized?

- Downtown is the historic heart and cultural center of Cobourg and the larger region.
- Downtown is a walkable, pedestrian-scaled environment with high quality open spaces and natural areas.
- Downtown is bustling. The sidewalks are well used but at times can feel a bit congested. There are multiple users on the sidewalks including pedestrians, scooters and cyclists as well as patio activities that spill out into the sidewalk.
- Some buildings façades could be improved.

What makes Downtown unique?

- Rich in heritage, parks, and open space.
- The beach and waterfront are key amenities.
- The East Pier provides an opportunity for a public use.
- Victoria Hall.
- Vistas into Downtown.
- Trailer park is a unique element.
- A walkable, pedestrian environment.
- Rink / Fountain.



Part 2 encouraged participants to come up with some ideas about potential 'Big Moves' for the Downtown, and to help guide the development of a physical vision plan. Below are summaries from the discussion that transpired.

Long List of Ideas for Downtown Cobourg

- Redevelop the trailer park. Uses could include: Hotel, Conference Centre, Spa etc., functioning as a 4 season tourism generator.
- Revitalize the Eastern Pier so it can become a tourist amenity and a destination for local residents, and linear park on the waterfront.
- Revisit and complete the Victoria Square Plan, finish/revitalize the parking lot. Intensification, public use four season permanent farmers market / Christmas Market.
- Revitalizing Rotary Park, making it more inviting with better public realm. Add more pedestrian used facilities and programming.
- Use a consistent palette of materials in the public realm. Seamless connectivity between the Waterfront and the Downtown.
- Upgrade rear façades on both the north and south sides of King Street.
- Enhance the northern parking lot behind the storefronts on King Street and provide more landscaping, trees, sidewalks, and seating.
- The Cobourg District Collegiate Institute West site could be re-purposed to include a community use or mixed use development.
- Develop the Cobourg Yacht Club building into a public restaurant. Retain some private facilities for CYC members.
- Attract new businesses and owners to the Downtown.
- Encourage local commercial amenity uses such as a grocery store, butcher, produce market, and extend the farmers market operating hours
- Support live work opportunities. Increase residential living downtown. Encourage ground floor residential where commercial tenants haven't moved in.
- Invest in a free Downtown Internet (public WiFi).
- Introduce a HWY 401 sign to direct travelers to Downtown Cobourg.
- Intensify land uses and enhanced streetscapes at the nodes (East/West).
- Revitalize the Park Theatre as an anchor (store / other use).
- Draw people from the Waterfront to visit and use the core Downtown area. Strengthen north-south linkages to the Beach and open up Second Street for enhanced connectivity.
- Encourage longer store and service hours for an enhanced night life and a lively downtown vibe.
- Provide year-round amenities such as cafés/ restaurants, and tourist-based destinations on the waterfront.
- Provide for sports tourism events.
- Locate a post-secondary institution in Cobourg for youth retention and job creation.
- Provide a year round light show on Victoria Hall.
- Additional large-scale events and music programming.

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Interactive Handouts

During the event, participants were provided with handouts that included a range of precedent images and ideas regarding downtowns, and were encouraged to identify the most desirable images that resonated with them.

Handout Question

What do you think about public spaces and streets in the Downtown?

Comments included:

- Underutilized public spaces. Trailer park is not the best use for such a high profile waterfront site.
- Canada is a winter country. Thought needs to be given to creating outdoor space that works in winter. Comfortable seating, natural wind breaks, sunny spots to enjoy winter as much as summer is desired.
- Downtown is attractive. More consistent and unique materials should be used to identify pedestrian walkways between the Downtown and the Waterfront.

Handout Question

What do you think about buildings, land uses and new development in the Downtown?

Comments included:

- Trailer park is not the highest and best use.
- Enhance the overall park experience through more facilities and programming.
- Encourage mixed-use development intensification that is sensitive to heritage, massing, and the historic streetscape to can help to encourage more people to live Downtown
- Retail streets could incorporate winterized pedestrian facilities to enhance pedestrian comfort during the winter or poor weather conditions.

CIP Workshop Summary

The second half of the workshop focused on the Community Improvement Plan (CIP), which included a presentation and discussion on the relevant incentives for Cobourg. This section summarizes the outcomes.

1) Critical Community Improvement Needs?

- Need to get more people living in the upper stories of buildings. Also important to get some businesses on the upper stories.
- Important to get residential density on vacant lots/sites.
- Improve non-heritage façades to be consistent with the historic character and encourage a diversity of new businesses.

2) Types of Financial Incentives that could work best in Downtown Cobourg?

- Tax Increment Grant (TIG) Program, e.g., see London TIG.
- Grant/loan program for residential intensification on upper stories of existing buildings – should include accessibility, e.g., elevators.
- Façade improvement grant – should include accessibility.
- Urban design study grant.
- Planning and building fee grant/waiver.

3) Other Suggestions for Community Improvement?

- Town provided advisory design services for applicants.
- Reduced commercial tax rate as it is currently too high.



Downtown
Cobourg Today

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2.1 An Evolving Downtown

The Town of Cobourg is a mid-sized community of approximately 20,000 residents but has a relatively large downtown built on the shores of Lake Ontario. Located about 95 kilometers east of Toronto, Cobourg is the County seat in Northumberland County. The town has excellent access along Highway 401, a revitalized waterfront, and a healthy downtown community.

Historically, Cobourg functioned as a regional centre due to its harbour, natural setting, and cultural amenities that attracted tourists, economic development, and residents. In the 19th and early 20th century wealthy Americans came to Cobourg to benefit from its natural setting and cultural offering, and built large summer homes. Some are still part of Downtown Cobourg today. From the early 1900s to 1952 ferry service was provided from Rochester to Cobourg providing cargo and passage for tourists, which helped to attract investment and affluence to the region. As recently as the 1980s the town relied on rail and the harbour to serve industrial sectors, such as iron ore, oil and coal, with storage facilities dominating portions of the waterfront area.

Since the 1980s, Downtown Cobourg and its waterfront has shifted from a busy industrial port, with the Town investing heavily in the Waterfront. In the early 1990s the Town engaged in a large waterfront revitalization project to help fill waterfront lands for redevelopment. This effort was supported by growing real estate demand, increased government spending in community services, and included investments in a high quality public realm and unique residential development.

Most recently, the Town is working to generate increased employment opportunities targeting new economic sectors and industries.

Cobourg Today

As with so many other communities, traditional retail and employment sectors formerly based Downtown have shifted to suburban settings. This shift was largely due to reduced development costs, the availability of larger development parcels, and other logistical conveniences of suburban areas.

However, in light of these shifts, the Town has been able to direct municipal priorities towards making a transformation of Downtown Cobourg. Over the last 10-15 years investment in the Waterfront has increased. Much of this investment has been shared between government and the private sector. This included new parks, public realm and other community facilities and private redevelopment that has attracted interest in Downtown, creating an ideal setting for further growth and investment.

The Town has been a key leader in guiding new public realm improvements including, roadway infrastructure upgrades and beautification in the Downtown/Waterfront area. The Town will continue to lead revitalization by providing development guidance, financial incentives, and through implementing this Master Plan.

2.2 Attributes of Downtown Cobourg

Downtown Cobourg has a number features that help to position it for success. A high proportion of heritage resources, many cultural events and facilities, pedestrian-scaled and walkable streets, a high quality waterfront, among other features makes Cobourg an attractive destination for residents and tourists.

Historic Downtown

Downtown Cobourg has a large number of heritage resources that shapes the character of the Downtown. For example, Victoria Hall, a national historic site, is surrounded by historic commercial and residential buildings that define a sense of place unique to Cobourg, and should be part of its evolution.

Recreation and Leisure Destination

Downtown is set off by a pleasant waterfront with a connected array of pedestrian promenades, paths, parks, and marina that provides recreation and leisure opportunities to boaters, cyclists, and users year-round. The Downtown also includes a high proportion of parks and plazas such as Victoria Park, the Market, the Lawn Bowling Club, and Rotary Waterfront Park, which are used by residents and visitors alike.

High Quality Neighbourhoods

The Downtown is supported by historic residential areas and more recent high quality infill development fitting appropriately within the existing historic character of the area. However, more housing is needed to encourage additional residents such as families and youth to live Downtown and to support amenities and local businesses.

Community and Cultural Centre

In addition being a centre for recreation and leisure, the Downtown is a community and cultural hub within the region. It has museums, theaters, galleries, and is an important hub for major regional festivals and events.

Active Retail Streets

Although the Town and stakeholders have identified the need to attract more businesses and employment to Downtown, Cobourg is endowed with great retail streets. The high percentage of heritage commercial buildings along King Street, and Division Street creates a unique retail axis that draws visitors through Downtown and towards the Waterfront. The success of these streets is their pedestrian-scale built form and mix of residential and commercial uses.

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Victoria Hall, Town of Cobourg



Street festival on King Street, Town of Cobourg.



View of Rotary Waterfront Park, Town of Cobourg.

2.3 Physical Analysis and Existing Conditions

To produce a viable master plan it is important to understand the critical physical and policy components of influence. An understanding of these conditions is the starting point for preparing responsive recommendations for how an area should evolve in the future.

The following is an overview of the Downtown's physical components that define both its character and its opportunities. Understanding these elements is the starting point for analysis of the physical form of the area.

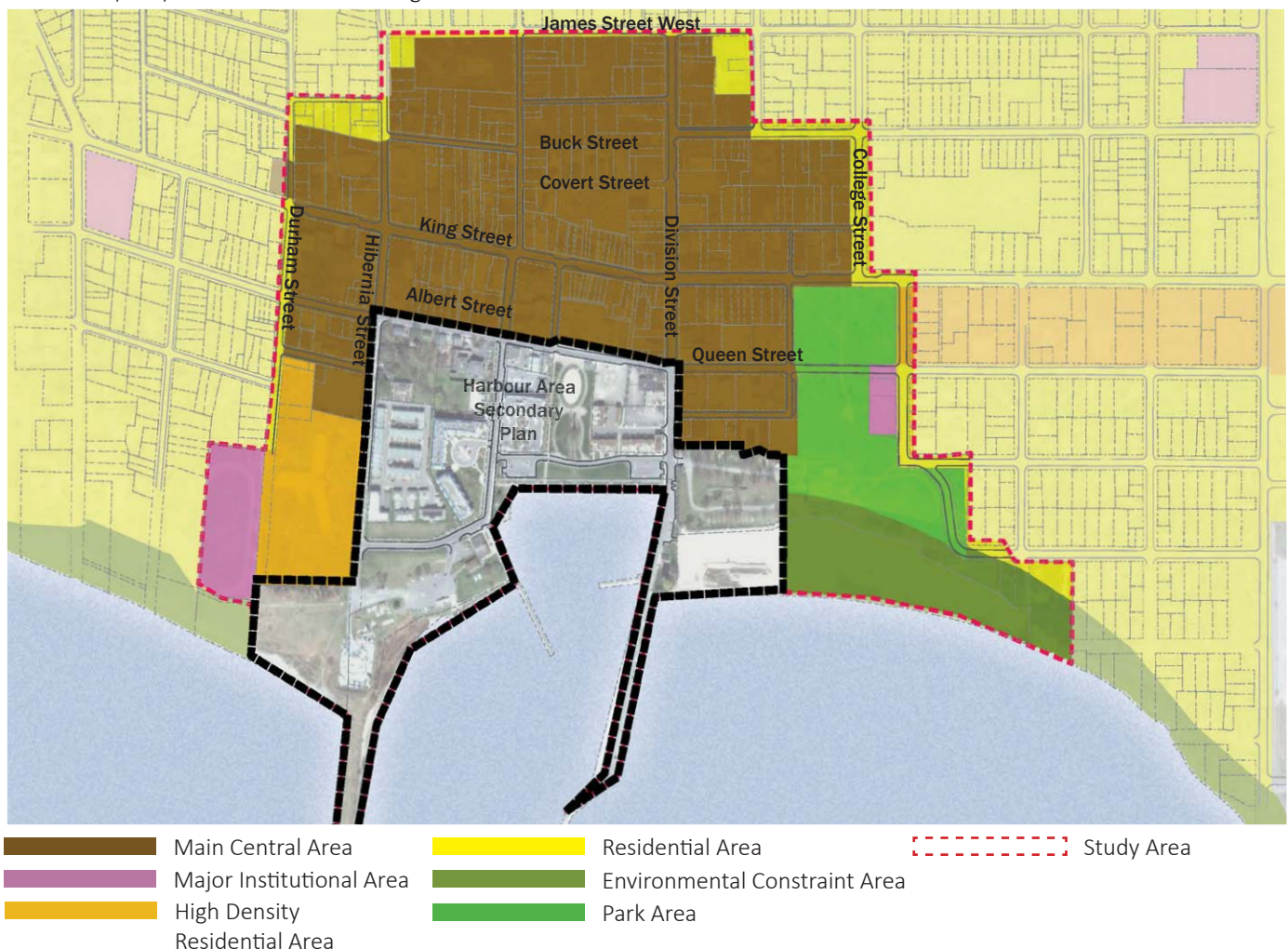
2.3.1 Land Use

Downtown Cobourg is a truly mixed-use destination and encompasses a broad mix of uses, including retail, office, arts and culture, civic, recreation, community and institutional. The edges of the Downtown are dominated by residential uses that knit together the historic core with the surrounding

neighbourhoods, while the retail, institutional and commercial uses are clustered along King Street and Division Street. There is a lower intensity of destination-focused enterprises such as restaurants, tourist, and bed and breakfasts clustered around the general waterfront area.

The Downtown possesses a number of ingredients that make for a successful town centre including a growing mix of residential uses, main street retail, recreation and cultural activities. However, it appears deficient in some key areas such as office spaces, tourist, community, and retail amenities and a more diverse population to help

Land Use Map adapted from the Town of Cobourg Official Plan.



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encourage a successful regeneration Downtown. Jobs, amenities, and residents are some of the key elements that help to create vibrancy. Providing a diversity of people who live, work and play Downtown will help to expand the type of retail, services, and amenities that are viable over the long-term.

In addition to the underlying land uses, the Downtown hosts a number of events, festivals, and markets throughout the year that create a vibrant town centre. However, a larger population of Downtown residents would provide significant benefits, including a more stable downtown, greater localized spending, an expanded tax base and more people on the streets helping to create a 'downtown vibe'.

However, a number of sites are vacant or used for parking, which creates gaps and inconsistencies in this urban fabric.

The Downtown Cobourg Parking Study (2014) found that nearly 2,238 off-street and on-street parking spaces serve the Downtown. This includes approximately 418 on-street and 755 public off-street parking, and 1,065 parking spaces on privately owned land. The Study further concluded that the overall parking supply was sufficient to meet demands. Given existing land availability, some of the properties in the Downtown may offer new development opportunities. However, future development proposals will need to comply with the Town's parking policies to ensure that the parking supply is maintained for all users in the Downtown.

2.3.2 Voids and Parking Lots

Downtown Cobourg has a healthy mix of existing historic built form with some more recent contemporary development along the waterfront.

Municipal and private parking lot locations

