

AGENDA ITEM REPORT



Title: Downtown ARP Project Update - Spencer Croil, Director of Corporate & Strategic Initiatives
Report Type: Information Update
Report Author: Spencer Croil
Meeting: Committee of the Whole - 26 Jan 2026
Department: Admin
Reviewed by Supervisor/Peer: Kalen Hastings, CAO

TOPICS:

OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of this report is to provide a brief update to Council for the Downtown ARP project.

ANALYSIS:

The Downtown ARP project kicked-off last summer, with an initial survey that was open for the month of July.

Since the presentation of survey results at the September 2, 2025 COTW meeting, project activities have included:

Applying for the Northern and Regional Economic Development (NRED) grant

This grant would become a part of the funding required to undertake technical and other studies in support of the ARP, with a focus on the John Davidson property and surrounding area. Specifically, funding would be used to have a Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) completed, along with a

RFQ's for the above-noted work were collected over the Fall of 2025, and made up a portion of the information required for the grant application.

All of the work captured in the NRED application would be beneficial to the ARP process. However, if we are unsuccessful in obtaining grant funding, the scope of work can be reduced to include just the TIA, if Council wishes to have a portion of the proposed operating budget for the project to be conditional upon whether the grant funding is awarded. This can be further discussed at the upcoming Operating Budget meetings in February.

We expect to hear back on the NRED grant application sometime in March.

Engagement Planning

Live engagement activities have been paused since mid-September, due to other matters taking priority last fall.

Over the last part of December and first half of January, a fulsome survey report has been prepared, along with other forward-looking planning for actions tied to Phase 2 of the Project Engagement Strategy.

Upcoming engagement opportunities include:

- A brief media release highlighting the next phase of engagement and project work
- Project update mailouts for all property owners in and adjacent to the project study area
- Outreach to area community groups and organizations
- A Project engagement table at Community Fest

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

Although engagement activities were paused over the Fall of 2025, as of now it is anticipated that the project can still conclude by the Fall of 2026.

The attached results summary from the Summer 2025 survey have provided valuable insight for the future of the downtown. Highlights of respondent feedback include:

Where Coaldale's downtown is already meeting expectations

- Strong small-town atmosphere and character.
- Attractive beautification, streetscaping, and overall cleanliness.
- Walkable, convenient layout that is easy to navigate.
- Popular civic square and community gathering space.
- Presence of local businesses that support a unique identity.

Coaldale's downtown already excels in atmosphere, walkability, local charm, and public space.

Opportunities to add or enhance elements

- Increase downtown vibrancy through more events, activities, and regular programming.
- Expand variety of shops, cafés, patios, and family-friendly dining options.
- Add more beautification features and green spaces for comfort and appeal.
- Improve infrastructure such as sidewalks, roads, and traffic flow to ease movement.
- Introduce more evening and entertainment options to extend activity beyond daytime.

Adding more vibrancy, business variety, improved infrastructure, and evening activity would align it more closely with the most loved downtowns across the region.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

As noted in the Project Charter that was presented at the July 7, 2025 COTW meeting, funding will be required for the TIA and other related work. Based on quotations, the required and recommended work is anticipated to be almost exactly \$60,000, with the NRED grant anticipated to cover half, if awarded.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:

Public Participation

Ongoing, and guided by the project's Engagement Strategy.

DECISION OPTIONS:

N/A

RECOMMENDATION:

N/A

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN:



1. Public Safety



2. Recreation



3. Service Excellence



4. Community Growth & Economic Prosperity



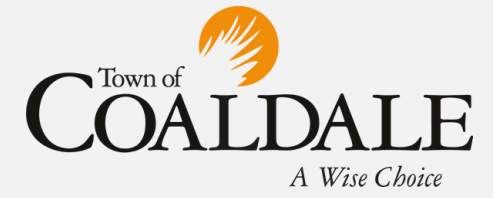
5. Relationships



6. Community Experience

ATTACHMENTS:

[Phase 1 Engagement Summary - Downtown ARP](#)



Survey Results

Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan

SUMMER 2025 PROJECT START-UP SURVEY

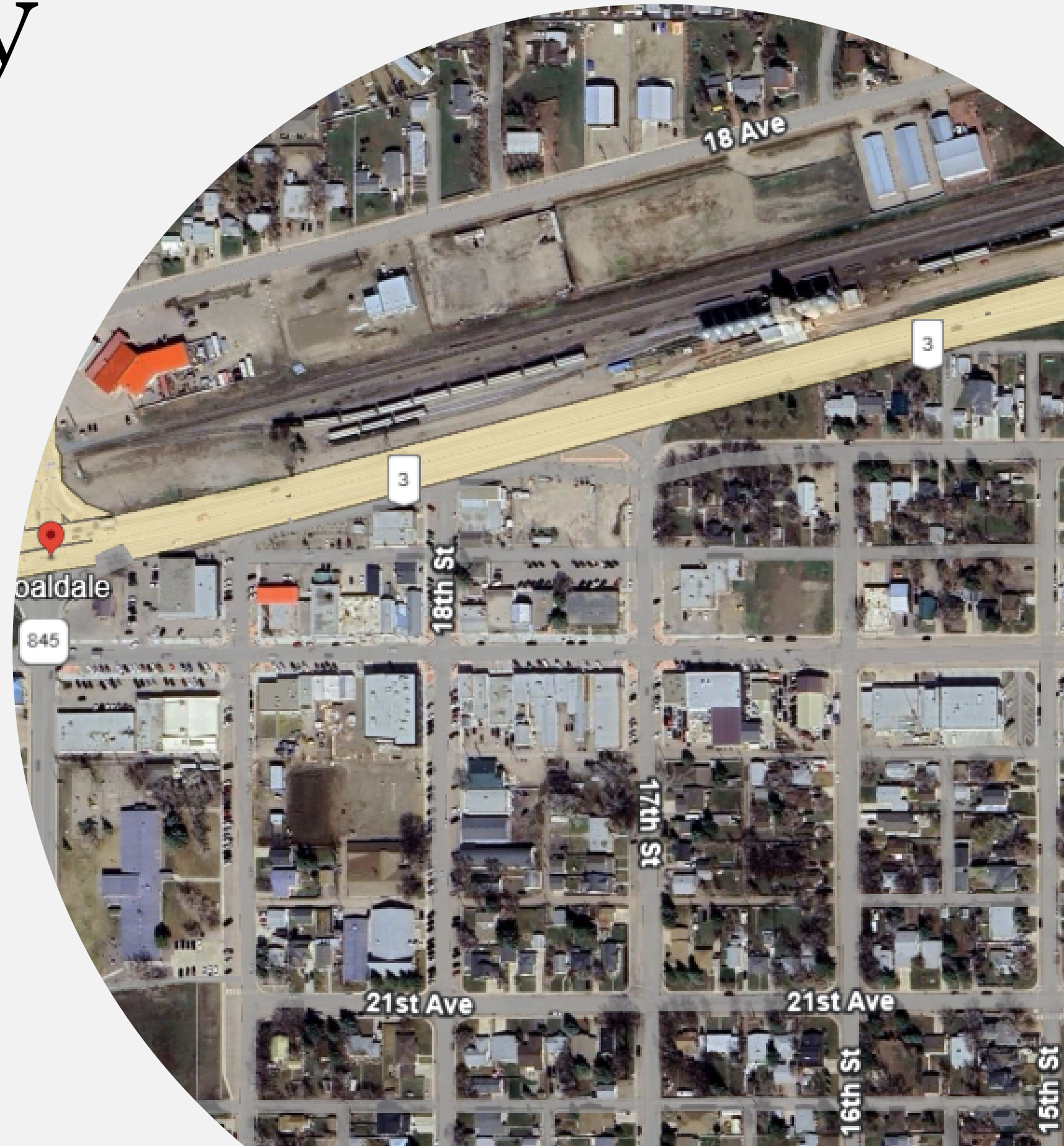
Purpose of the Survey

GUIDING THE FUTURE OF THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITY

The downtown Area redevelopment Plan (ARP) survey was the first step in the process of building a plan for our downtown's future.

Our downtown has benefitted from significant investment over the past ten years, including a focus on core infrastructure, public realm, and civic and commercial development.

As time goes on, the downtown will continue to grow and change, along with the rest of the community. Having a plan will help to ensure it continues to be the bright, vibrant and inviting place that it is today.



100+

Who responded?

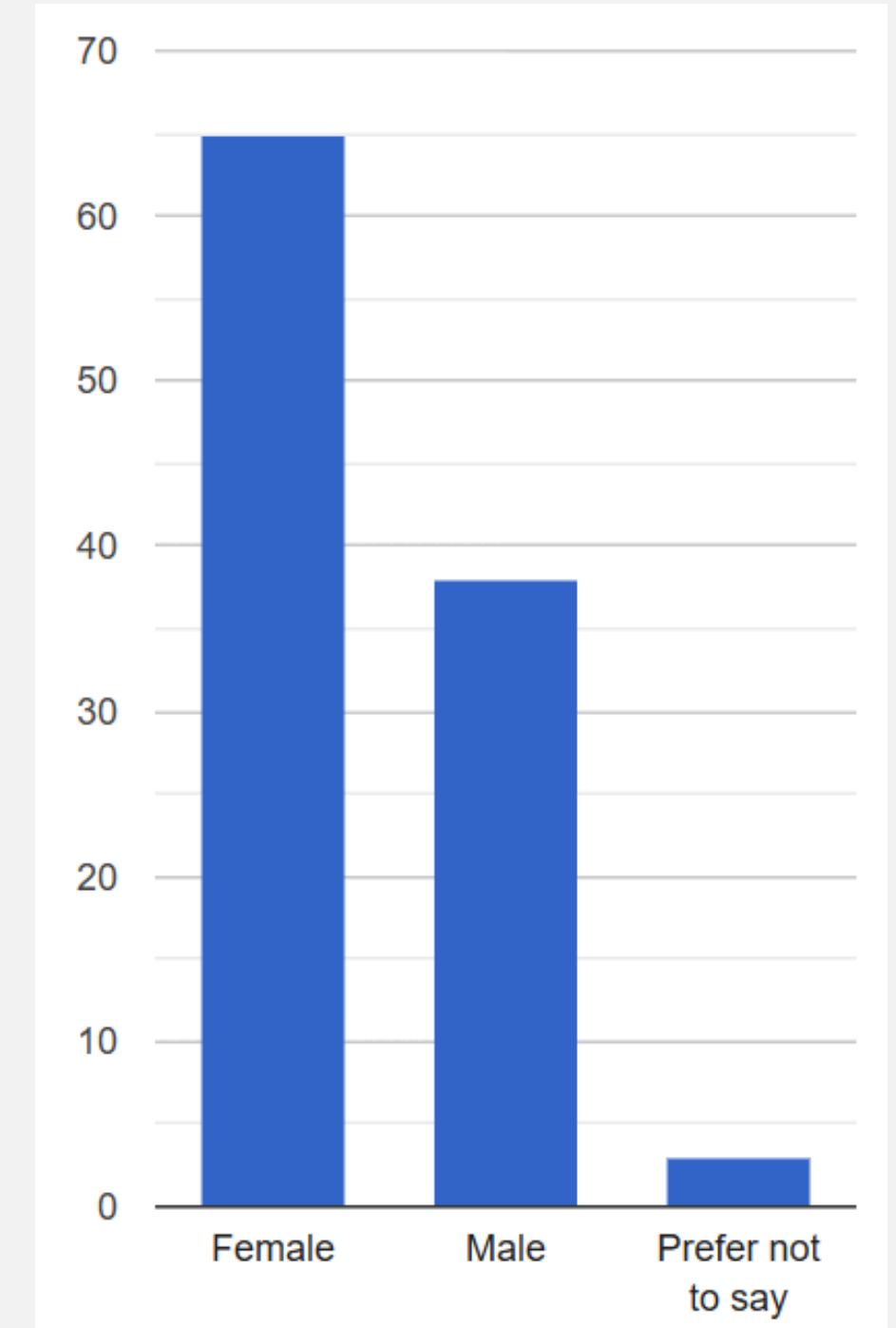
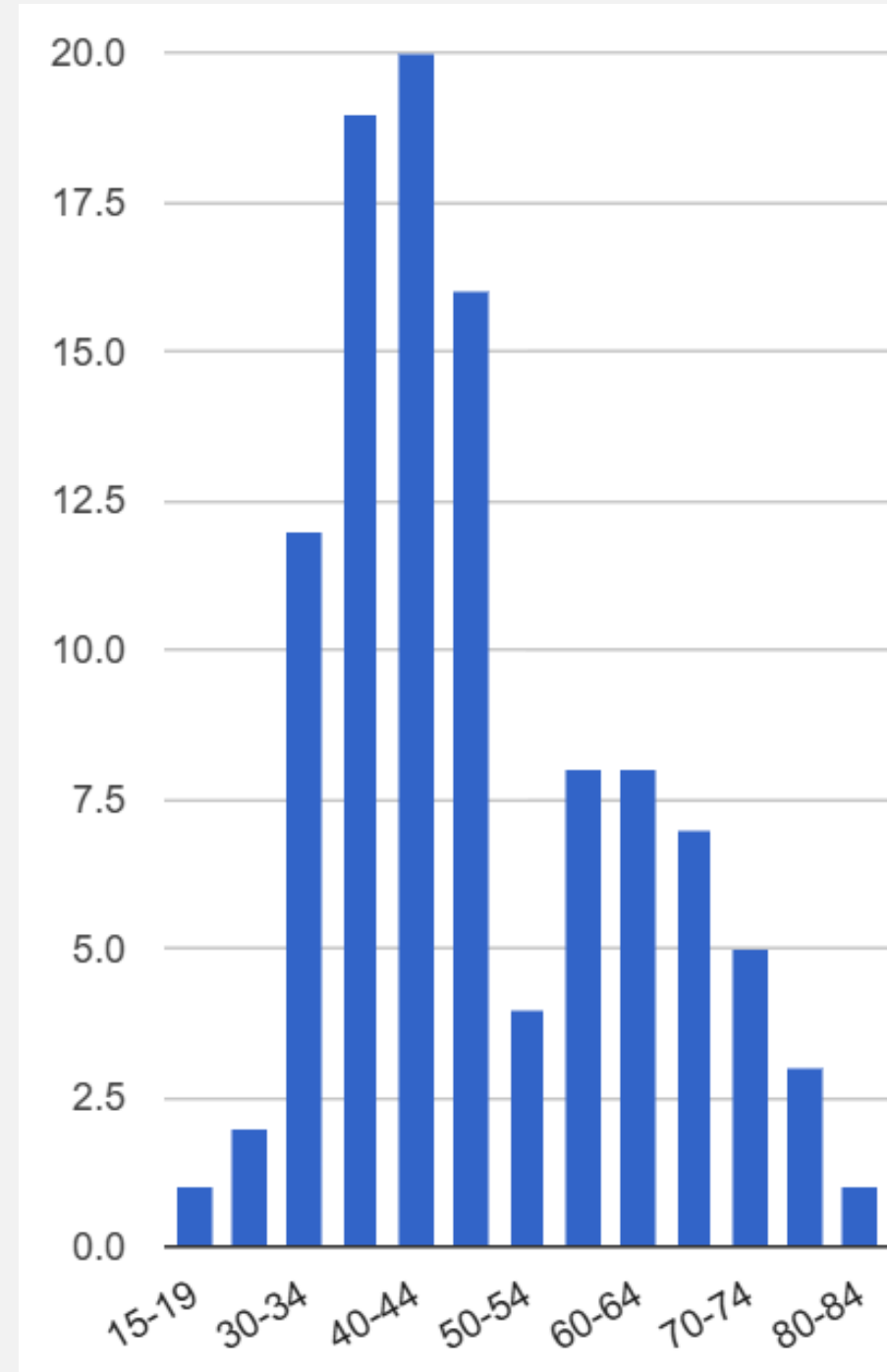
More than one hundred respondents took the time to provide their feedback on our downtown. First and foremost, a great big thank you to those who took time out of your day to share your thoughts with us.

30 to 54

It is important to hear from people of all ages. However, the majority of respondents were between thirty and fifty-four.

61% female

Slightly more women than men responded to the survey.



Community Connection

94%

Coaldale residents

100 of 106 respondents are Coaldale residents. It is important to hear from visitors and potential investors, and we will ensure there are targeted opportunities to engage those groups. However, we value the voices of our community and appreciate the strong Coaldale representation in the survey results.

A LOVE FOR EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

72% of respondents said they visit downtown primarily to attend the variety of **events and activities** going on throughout the year.

ERRANDS AND SHOPPING

just shy of **80% of respondents shops or runs errands** downtown on a regular basis, with the most common reasons being:

- Activities and Events
- Banking and insurance
- Meals (eat in or takeout)
- Groceries
- Library
- Medical

FREQUENT FLYERS

61% of respondents visit our downtown 2-4 times a week, while 30% head downtown 5+ times. Less than 10% of respondents rarely come downtown.

Study Area

TOO BIG, TOO SMALL, OR JUST RIGHT?



69.5% of respondents suggested the area is 'just right' and could become the plan area. 20% indicated the plan area should be larger, while 10.5% were of the opinion that the area was too large, and should be reduced.

Feedback that the area is too large focused on the idea that residential will be pushed out or owners will be pressured to sell.

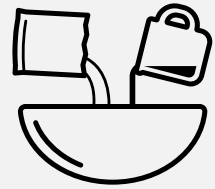
Those who wished the area to be larger focused on including other commercial areas such as the commercial hub to the west, and concern about broader factors such as traffic flows.

The study area will remain as-is for now. A few helpful points to consider include:

- Planning work often considers lands surrounding a specified area, so the ARP work will take into account the broader transportation network, and other surrounding development.
- Residential areas in and near a downtown are a healthy part of a thriving core. Established residential areas in the ARP area will not be pushed out and owners will not be pressured to sell. For some parts of the ARP area, if a residential owner wishes to explore transitioning their property to another suitable type of development, an ARP can provide guidance.

An ideal downtown...

WE ASKED RESPONDENTS TO DESCRIBE THEIR IDEAL DOWNTOWN



Key ingredients

Respondents shared ideas across eight key topic areas.

These topics are important on their own, but combined, create a potent recipe for a beautiful, functional, and thriving downtown.

Safety & Comfort

- A safe, welcoming environment for all ages.
- Slower traffic speeds and improved visibility at crossings.
- Clean, well maintained roads / intersections.

Aesthetic & Design

- Beautiful landscaping, treed streets, and nature.
- Vintage modern look with thoughtful planning for long-term growth.
- Functional yet inviting design that supports both business and lifestyle.

Parking & Infrastructure

- Ample free parking and possibly a multi-level parking structure for future growth.
- Better access from highways and reduced heavy truck traffic downtown.

Shopping & Dining Variety

- Local businesses prioritized over big chains.
- A mix of retail, grocery, specialty shops, and professional services.
- Restaurants and cafes (including family friendly and sit down options).
- Unique offerings like gift shops, bookstores, candy shops, microbreweries.
- Enough variety so residents can shop locally instead of going to Lethbridge.

Accessibility & Ease of Use

- Easy access by car and foot, with ample parking.
- Walkable design with safe pedestrian areas.
- Accessible for people with mobility issues/disabilities.
- Improved traffic flow, better signage, and solutions for congestion (especially train crossings and commercial truck traffic).

Vibrancy & Atmosphere

- A community hub that feels lively and inviting.
- Small town charm with character and color, preserving older structures.
- Public art, seasonal decorations; flowers in summer, lights in winter, and music/events like block parties.
- Green spaces, native floral landscaping, and benches for gathering.

Future Growth & Planning

- Expansion of the core business district to allow more commercial development.
- Maintain cost effectiveness and inclusivity for all income levels.
- Consider mixed use spaces (retail + housing) for sustainability.

Community & Social Spaces

- Places for people to gather, such as patios, parks, and small green spaces.
- Community activities and events for all ages.
- Spaces that encourage foot traffic and social interaction.

I Coaldale's Downtown

Respondents were asked to share what they **love most** about our downtown

Small Town Atmosphere

- Friendly, welcoming vibe and sense of community.
- Bumping into people you know and enjoying local character.
- Quaint, cozy feel that reflects the experiences and ideals of small town living.

Beautification & Streetscape

- Flowers in summer, lights in winter, and greenery/trees making the area inviting.
- Appreciation for lamp posts, antique style street lights, and clock adding character.
- Positive feedback on recent beautification efforts and revitalization projects.

Civic Square & Community Spaces

- Civic Plaza as a central gathering space for events, gatherings and activities.
- Outdoor rink and community events like Winter and Summer Fest.
- Patios and outdoor seating areas.

Walkability & Convenience

- Ability to park once and walk to groceries, bakery, bank, library, coffee shop, skating rink.
- Compact layout with everything close by.
- Easy access for events and activities.

Character & History

- Interest in older buildings and historical plaques.
- Enjoyment of unique style and preservation of heritage elements.

Local Businesses

- Love for local shops like McLennan's, bakeries, and the pet store.
- Appreciation for a variety of services and stores within walking distance.
- Desire to keep businesses thriving in the downtown core.

Cleanliness & Safety

- Downtown is seen as clean, safe, and well maintained.
- Pride in the town's effort to keep the area beautiful and enjoyable.



I ❤️ Other Downtowns, too!

Respondents were asked to share some of their 'other' favourite downtowns, and why.

Why other downtowns?

Respondents were asked to share other downtowns they love help provide context for the features of a downtown that are consistently appealing.

For instance, many of the aspects of Coaldale's downtown that respondents love, are similar in the other downtowns that have been referenced.

Respondents shared 28 other downtowns they enjoy, and why.

Common themes of other favourite downtowns

- Walkability, Easy Movement & Low Traffic
- Vibrant Events & Regular Programming
- Unique Local Shops & Small Businesses
- Attractive Dining, Cafés & Patios
- Beauty, Landscaping & Nature Integration
- Strong Sense of Community & Social Life
- Cultural Character, Arts & Heritage
- Good Mix of Shops, Food & Recreation
- Overall Atmosphere: Warm, Interesting & Worth Visiting

Alberta

- Banff
- Blairmore
- Canmore
- Claresholm
- Cochrane
- Coleman
- Fort Macleod
- Lethbridge
- Medicine Hat
- Nanton
- Okotoks
- Picture Butte
- Pincher Creek
- Raymond
- St. Albert
- Sterling
- Stony Plain
- Taber
- Wainwright

British Columbia

- Creston
- Fernie
- Invermere
- Kimberley (Platzl)
- Nelson
- Victoria

Other Provinces & U.S.

- Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia
- Barrie, Ontario
- Laurel, Mississippi
- Whitefish, Montana



Missing ingredients

Respondents were asked questions such as

“What would make you want to visit downtown more often?”

“What other types of establishments would you like to see downtown?”

“What new/expanded types of spaces, services or events would you like to see downtown?”

Respondents want more

- variety, vibrancy, and convenience.
- Strong desire for local, unique businesses and family-friendly dining.
- Events and social spaces are key to making downtown a destination.
- Infrastructure improvements (roads, sidewalks, traffic flow) are critical.
- Beautification and green spaces enhance appeal.
- Evening activity and entertainment options would increase visits.

Improved Infrastructure

Better traffic flow and signage.
Improved sidewalks (currently uneven).
Easier access from north side and address heavy trucks.

Beautification & Gathering Spaces

Green spaces, trees, and outdoor seating areas.
Benches and patios for social interaction.
Encourage businesses to beautify storefronts.

Extended Hours

Shops open later in the evening to encourage more activity.

Entertainment

Movie theater or entertainment venue.
Spaces for music and cultural activities.

More Dining Options

Sit-down family restaurants (not fast food or bars).
Patios and rooftop dining for socializing.
Non-chain eateries, coffee shops, and craft breweries.

Greater Variety of Shops

Unique local businesses (boutiques, salons, bookstores).
Clothing stores and specialty retail.
Dollar store and more grocery options.
Reduce industrial/automotive businesses in the core.

Events & Activities

Farmers markets, open-air markets, and seasonal festivals.
Live music, buskers, and community events.
Activities for families and kids, not just weekends.
Civic Square regular programming (concerts, food trucks).

Events and Activities

Our downtown is home to many beloved events and activities. Respondents were asked about:

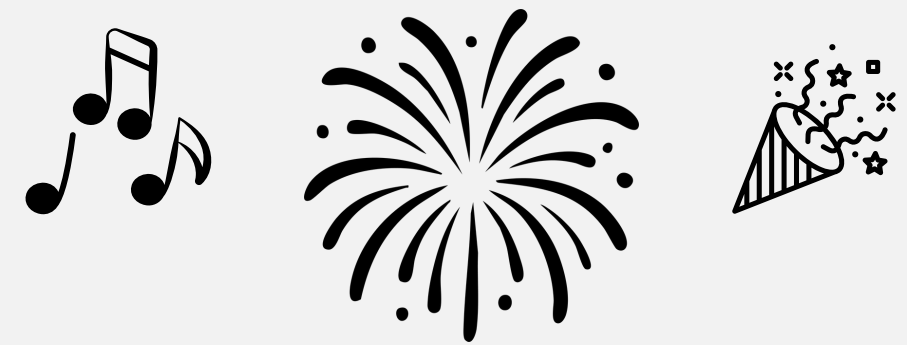
Events and activities they have attended before.

Ideas for activities and events they would like to see added in the future.

Stand-out events

At least 50% of respondents have been to these events recently

- Community Fest
- Winter Fest
- Summer Fest
- Night of Lights
- Canada Day
- Big Equipment Petting Zoo



Respondents want more **MARKETS!**

Feedback was highlighted by a desire for new markets in the civic square area and throughout the year

- (weekly) farmers markets
- Pop-up artisan markets
- Markets in Civic Square
- Night Markets
- Community 'garage sales'
- and generally, activities throughout the year



Property-specific Ideas

We asked for your help with reimagining the John Davidson School Site

With the opening of Prairie Winds and reprogramming of Kate Andrews, the John Davison property has been transitioned to the Town's ownership, and is ready to be reimagined.

Respondents shared many thoughts, ideas and other feedback that will be used to help inform what the property may become.



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- Indoor Recreation & Community Facilities — (≈35–40% of responses)
 - This includes indoor pool, bowling alley, arcade, youth spaces, community gym, etc.
- Parks, Green Space & Gathering Areas — (≈25–30% of responses)
 - Large park, natural playgrounds, water features, amphitheatre, picnic areas.
- Arts, Culture & Creative Spaces — (≈15–20% of responses)
 - Art centre, gallery, studios, theatre, creative learning.
- Housing (Especially Seniors Housing) — (≈10–15% of responses)
 - 55+ housing, multi-family, affordable housing, mixed-use residential.
- Mixed-Use Commercial Development — (≈8–12% of responses)
 - Shops, small business spaces, restaurants, commercial/residential mix.
- Traffic & Road Network Improvements — (≈7–10% of responses)
 - 21 Ave extension, intersection changes, improved flow, added parking.
- Community Services & Public Facilities — (≈5–7% of responses)
 - Community kitchen, seniors centre, service offices, public washrooms.
- Retail-Only or Commercial-Only Development — (≈3–5% of responses)
 - Standalone retail complex, strip mall, business-only redevelopment.
- Minimal Change / Keep As-Is — (≈1–3% of responses)
 - Keep playground only, preserve site with minimal redevelopment.

Next Steps

Let's keep the conversation going!

More opportunities to engage coming up

For those who wish to engage with the project, there will be more opportunities this winter and spring.

Property owners in and adjacent to the study area will be contacted and encouraged to reach out for one-on-one discussions, if they wish.



Study area property owners (February)

Property owners in and adjacent to the study area will be contacted and encouraged to contact the project team for one-on-one discussions, if they wish.

Community Groups, Organizations and Partners (Feb. – March)

Community groups and organizations that call the downtown home, or represent a prominent voice in the downtown, will be contacted to share perspectives on the future of our downtown.

Themed Community Conversations (Feb. – April)

A project booth will be setup at upcoming community events, and focused on themes that are central to the downtown, such as how our public spaces are used, transportation matters, and desired amenities and features