

6/6

DISCUSSION PAPER

URBAN STRUCTURE

Yarmouth Planning Review





This report was prepared by UPLAND Planning + Design Studio for the Town of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia.

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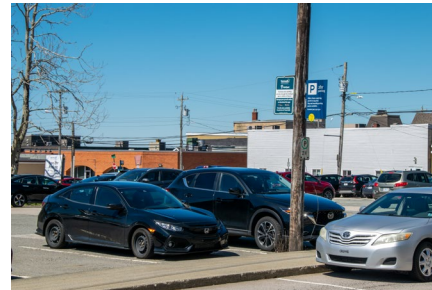
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Introduction

Our town is a physical embodiment of our shared history and of who we are as a community today. The structure and arrangement of roads, utilities, public spaces, and buildings has evolved over generations. The way we shape that structure today and in the years to come represents our priorities and our opportunities.

The Municipal Planning Strategy, Land Use By-law, and Subdivision By-law are the key policy tools for shaping the physical form of our community. As we work towards updating those documents, a thoughtful examination and discussion of how and where growth and development should happen is essential to ensuring these planning tools are as effective as they can be.

This discussion paper is the sixth in a series of six which provide context for the Town of Yarmouth and lay the foundation for the Town's Municipal Planning Strategy, Land Use By-law, and Subdivision By-law. They provide essential information for thoughtful input. This paper builds on the previous reports and discussions and looks at some of the existing physical and policy features that provide structure to the Town, and discusses potential options for shaping the structure of Yarmouth in the future.



01

KEY URBAN STRUCTURE INFORMATION

What existing physical and policy
characteristics are shaping
Yarmouth?

Landscape

The map below shows the topography of Yarmouth along with the location of major wetlands.

Gentle slopes are ideal for community development since they enable stormwater drainage and can make sewer and water infrastructure cheaper.



Utilities

The location and capacity of utilities—particularly central sewer and water—has a large effect on the developability of lands. Extending services can be expensive, so areas close to existing services are often attractive locations. However, spare capacity must be sufficient to accommodate planned density.

Potable Water

The Town of Yarmouth utilizes the Lake George Reservoir as its primary water source. In 1891, the Town purchased control of Lake George for the purpose of water distribution to residents. The lake itself is located in the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth over 20 kilometers from the Town and is protected by both a provincial Watershed Protected Area Designation and protective zoning in the District of Yarmouth planning documents. As indicated on the map on page 9, water mains are located on most existing roads within the Town. The system also services the neighbouring communities of Hebron and Dayton.

Waste Water

The Yarmouth Wastewater Treatment Plant serves not only the Town of Yarmouth, but also communities such as Arcadia, Dayton, and Hebron. This system utilizes gravity sewers, pumping stations, force mains, and manholes to transport waste water across the region. As shown on the map on page 10, the Town is well-serviced with access to waste water pipes.

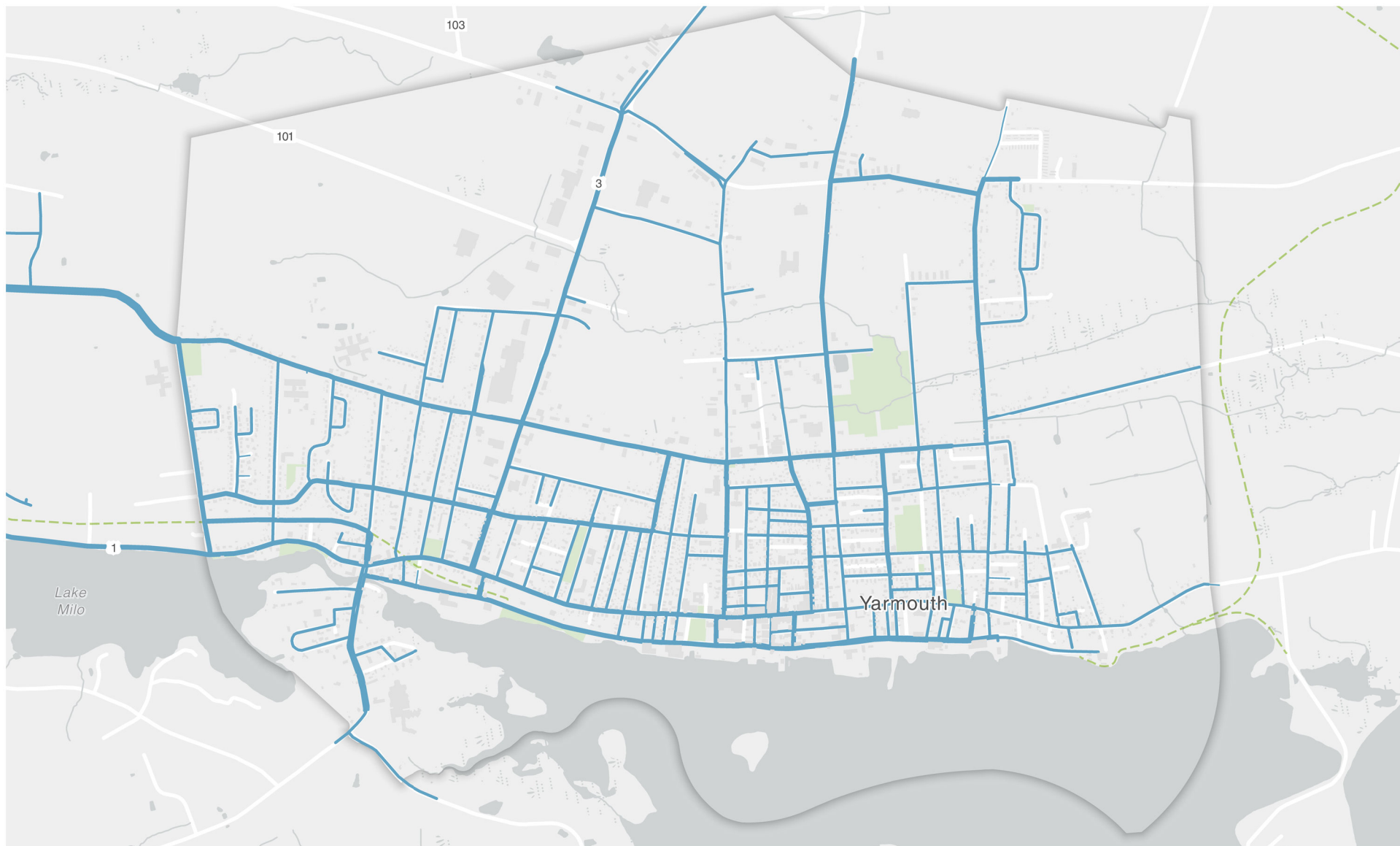
Upgrades to the plant are expected to begin in the near future. The location of the plant has become threatened by potential flooding, as viewed in the Flood Risk and Sea Level Map. Being located along the harbour, in a flood prone area, presents both infrastructure and environmental concern.

Solid Waste

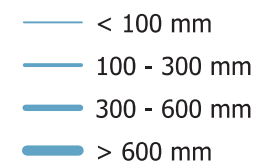
The Yarmouth County Solid Waste Park serves the Municipality of Argyle, Municipality of Yarmouth, and the Town of Yarmouth. Located in South Ohio, it is outside of the Town's boundaries. Here, garbage, recycling, and compost are all disposed of. Residents of the previously mentioned communities are required to sort their waste into three streams prior to pickup. The Park also has a construction and demolition site.¹⁵

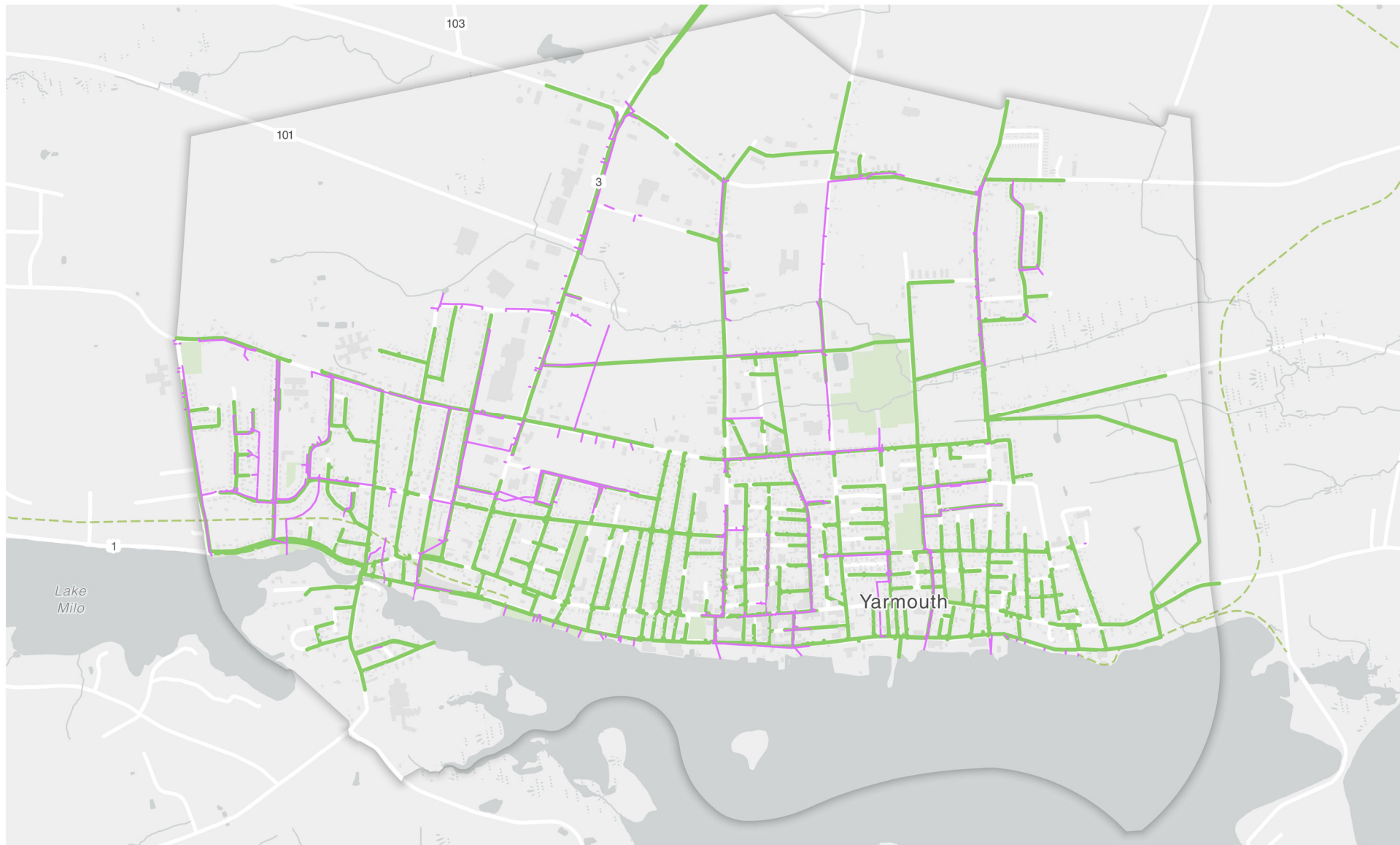
Electricity

Like many communities in Nova Scotia, Yarmouth receives its electricity through the province's largest electric utility company, Nova Scotia Power.



Potable Water Mains Location and Size





Sanitary and Storm Sewer Locations

- Sanitary Sewer
- Storm Sewer

Future Land Use

The existing Municipal Planning Strategy contains a “Future Land Use” map that sets a broad framework for how land was expected to develop in the future. A version of this map is shown on the following page. Each Land Use Designation on the Future Land Use Map has a high-level intent, as follows:

Residential

“It is intended that this designation include both existing built up residential areas and vacant lands which are suitable for future residential development. Areas for future residential development should either be adjacent to existing residential development, or be removed from commercial or industrial uses.”

Central Business District

“The Central Business District (CBD) is that area commonly referred to as “downtown”. As one component in the larger commercial fabric of the Town, downtown has a significant role to play in the general well-being of the entire Town. The CBD designation has had and should continue to have the broadest range of commercial activities.”

General Commercial

“The General Commercial designation with a more limited range of permitted uses serves a broad regional market. The General Commercial designation primarily encompasses commercial developments along Starrs Road.”

Secondary Commercial

“There are two traditional commercial areas on Main Street outside the CBD:

- the intersection of Vancouver Street and Main Street and*
- the intersection of Argyle Street and Main Street.*

These two areas have been included in the Secondary Commercial Generalized Future Land Use Map designation. While new commercial development is permitted in these areas, it is intended that it should remain secondary to both the Central Business District and the General Commercial District.”

Commercial Industrial

“The Commercial Industrial designation was created to address the needs of new businesses which require the integration of retail and manufacturing uses. The types of industrial uses permitted will be limited due to their proximity to other commercial uses.”

Industrial

“It is intended that the widest range of industrial activities will be encouraged to locate in these areas. Marine related industries will be encouraged to locate in the waterfront industrial area.”

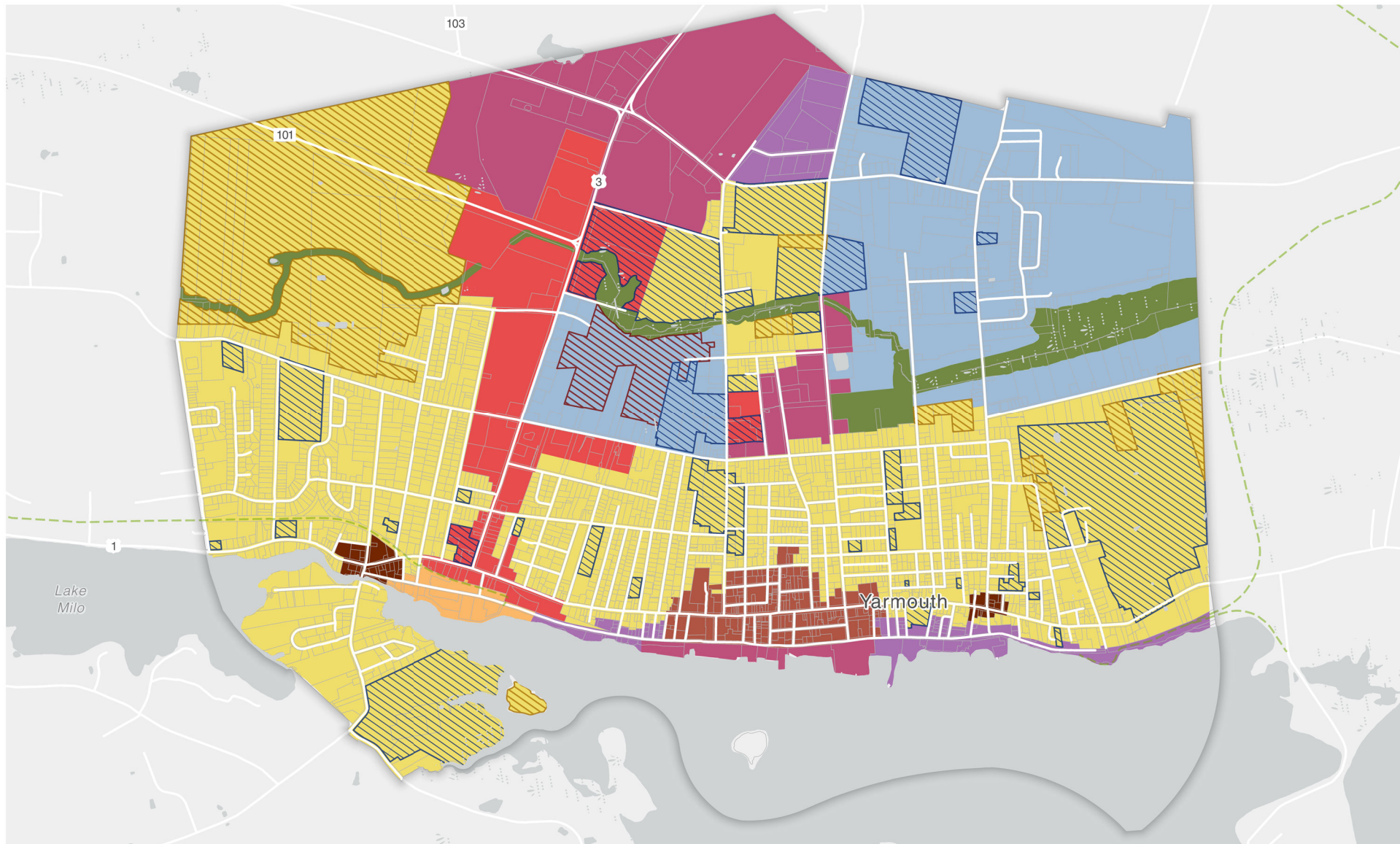
Mixed Use

“Council intends to support the redevelopment of the upper end of Water Street for mixed use development.”

Comprehensive Development

These large areas are typically unserviced, so a more comprehensive approach is required for development to establish a thoughtful approach to new infrastructure.

This broad framework is made more specific through the Zoning Map in the Land Use By-law. The Institutional Zone is not specific to any designation, so is identified on the map on the following page. Holding zones are also of special interest due to their development potential and are also identified.



Existing Future Land Use and Select Zoning (in hatching)



Intensification Potential

The current Land Use By-law establishes maximum main building heights. In most zones the maximum height is 10.67 metres, or approximately 3 storeys. The High Density Residential (R-3) Zone permits 13.72 metres, or approximately 4 storeys, and the Downtown Commercial (C-1) Zone allows 15.24 metres, or approximately 5 storeys, with design controls that require setbacks on the upper floors. The map on the following page illustrates areas where there is capacity within the existing height limits to build upwards.

In most areas of Town there is also currently the ability for intensification that does not reach upwards. There is no lot coverage maximum except in the Architecturally-Sensitive Area, where building footprints are limited to 50% of the lot area.

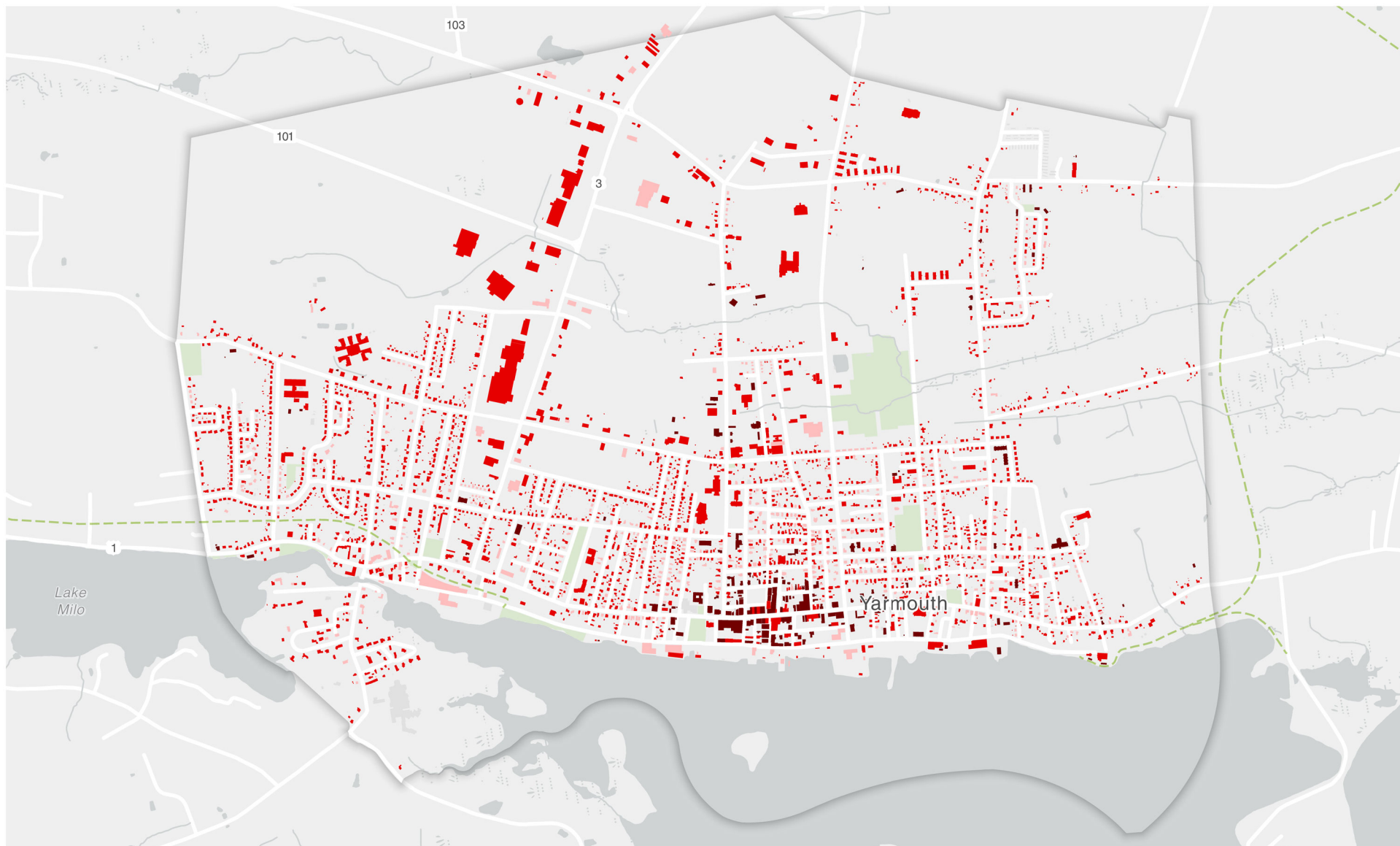
Case Study: “Vision New Minas”

In 2020, the Municipality of Kings and the Village of New Minas undertook a project to create a development framework for almost 1,000 acres of greenfield land that had been made accessible by a new highway interchange. Through public engagement it became clear that many community members wished to encourage reinvestment in the existing community core, and encourage mixed-used development along the existing commercial strip to create a sense of place and a safe environment for pedestrians and other active transportation users. This would utilize existing infrastructure and provide a wider range of housing and services within the established area of the Village.

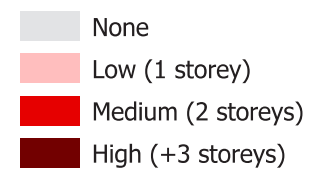
The final development framework still provides options for developing the greenfield lands, but prioritizes investment within the established core area of New Minas. It also relaxes many planning rules in the existing commercial area to encourage intensification. Higher building heights and a mix of land uses are encouraged.

Vision New Minas Guiding Principles:

- A Place for People
- Green Living
- A Regional Destination with a Strong Business Community
- Thoughtful Development and Sustainable Services



Height-based Intensification Potential
(difference between existing height and permitted height)



02

WHAT WE HEARD

A summary of the key outcomes from the other workshops.

Key Outcomes of Previous Discussions

This report follows on the tail of five previous discussion papers and four public workshops covering the following topics:

- Housing
- Economy and Commercial Areas
- Transportation and Recreation
- Culture and Heritage & Environment (Combined Session)

The discussions at the workshops provided a wide range of ideas and opinions for how Yarmouth should develop in the future. Some of the key suggestions and discussions from those workshops that should be considered in establishing the future structure of Yarmouth include:

Housing - What We Heard

Housing Needs and Diversity:

- A range of housing types is needed, including rentals, accessible units, affordable housing, seniors housing, and purpose-built student housing.
- There's a focus on adaptive reuse of existing buildings (e.g., empty hotels, adaptive student housing), with some concern over the affordability of seasonal rentals.
- Larger housing options, like multi-generational homes and affordable condos (especially waterfront), are seen as potential solutions for community growth.

Barriers and Challenges:

- Zoning and Subdivision Bylaws: Restrictions on smaller lots, lack of incentives for for-profit developers, and requirements like sidewalks make new development challenging. The town could support smaller subdivisions or offer loans for infrastructure.
- Infrastructure Issues: The town faces deficiencies in basic infrastructure (sidewalks, streetlights), and developers are hesitant due to unknowns like sewer and water servicing.
- Cost of Development: High costs of land development and the cost of meeting building code requirements are significant barriers.

Target Areas for Development:

- Certain areas, like along transit routes, Starrs Road, and spaces behind local businesses, are identified as suitable for densification.
- Smaller multi-storey buildings (3-4 stories) are proposed for areas like the Vanguard Building site, and other spaces near schools could host student or affordable housing.

Support for Vulnerable Populations:

- There's a need for dedicated services like addictions support and transition housing for vulnerable groups.
- Creating more accessible and affordable housing will help marginalized groups and those struggling to find housing, particularly newcomers.

Planning Tools and Solutions:

- Incentives: Town incentives, like supporting accessible units or using ADUs (accessory dwelling units), could encourage development.
- Mixed-Use Development: Exploring mixed-use development (combining commercial and residential spaces) is considered a good option.
- Seniors Housing and Aging Population: Proposals include fostering multi-generational homes and providing housing options close to key amenities like schools, healthcare, and transit.

The key themes are addressing the diversity of housing needs, overcoming zoning and development barriers, and ensuring the town supports vulnerable populations with improved infrastructure and services.

Economic Development & Tourism - What We Heard

Downtown Identity & Commercial Uses:

- There's a strong push to maintain a vibrant downtown by blending arts, culture, and tourism, with anchor attractions like the Odeon Theatre and outdoor concerts.
- The need for public infrastructure that welcomes all ages, such as well-designed sidewalks, lighting, and signage, is emphasized.
- Encouraging residential development in commercial areas (like above storefronts) can bring more people downtown, boosting both the vibrancy and investment.

Tourism & Economic Growth:

- Yarmouth can leverage its cultural identity, such as Acadian culture and dark skies, to attract tourists. Events like music week, car shows, and waterfront activities play a key role.
- The waterfront is seen as a critical area for both tourism and working industries, with opportunities for development and a balance between commercial uses and public space.

Barriers to Development:

- Transportation is a major challenge, with a lack of infrastructure and connections to the rest of the province hindering economic growth.
- There is also a need to address vacant buildings and underutilized spaces, with suggestions like vacant building taxes or incentives for revitalization (e.g., brownfield sites like old gas stations).
- High rent costs and zoning restrictions (e.g., due to the airport) also pose barriers to both residential and commercial growth.

Infrastructure & Investment:

- Infrastructure improvements (e.g., paving trail systems, lighting, and water access) could attract more tourism and investment.
- Programs like phased tax agreements, façade improvements, and grants could encourage new businesses, though more promotional efforts are needed to raise awareness of these supports.

Strategic Areas for Development:

- Waterfront areas are identified as key zones for commercial and industrial growth, with an emphasis on balancing working waterfronts with a pleasant public realm.
- The Starrs Road area is seen as a mixed-use zone with potential for residential and commercial development.
- Targeting brownfield redevelopment and making areas “shovel-ready” can help spark commercial investment and retain businesses. The importance of focusing on community connections (e.g., through transportation) is also highlighted.

In essence, Yarmouth’s economic development revolves around balancing tourism, culture, and industry while addressing challenges in infrastructure, zoning, and transportation. Encouraging investment in both commercial and residential spaces, particularly downtown and the waterfront, is a central strategy.

Transportation & Recreation - What We Heard

Transportation Gaps and Needs:

- There are limited regional transportation options, especially to areas like Port Maitland and the Villa. Expanding bus routes to connect more areas, like the seniors’ building, and providing more bus stops would help.
- Safe pedestrian connections to bus stops are needed, as well as bike lanes and EV car chargers downtown to support active transportation.
- The cost of regional transportation is a barrier, and there’s a desire for more cooperation between local areas (e.g., MODY

and the Town) to improve access, especially for seniors and people in institutional care.

Cycling and Pedestrian Infrastructure:

- Bike infrastructure is lacking, and while there’s a plan being updated, there is still a need for more bike lanes, bike parking (e.g., at Shoppers Drug Mart), and better maintenance of existing paths.
- Sidewalks should be added to at least one side of every street, especially in new developments. Streets need higher-quality repairs to ensure longevity and safety for cyclists.
- The rail trail is popular, with interest in paving parts of it, but trail maintenance is essential to keep it safe and usable.

Parking and Traffic Issues:

- Parking downtown is often problematic, particularly near busy areas like Third Cup. There’s a suggestion to look into angled parking or more year-round street parking to accommodate the increasing number of cars per household.
- Parking strategy should address not just availability but how people use space (e.g., blocking sidewalks during snowstorms). More benches and public seating at bus stops would also help make the area more pedestrian-friendly.

Recreation Gaps and Opportunities:

- There’s a demand for expanding the multi-use trail network and increasing greenspace in subdivisions.
- The lack of information about available activities and programs

is a gap—people don't always know what's offered, and a recreation guide or resource guide could help.

- More options for seniors, like pickleball programs and indoor walking trails, are needed. Events like Open Street Sundays could engage the community and promote free outdoor activities.

Planning Tools for Transportation and Recreation:

- Transit-Oriented Development could be used in areas that make sense for residential growth and then extending the service gradually over time.
- Pedestrian Connectivity is essential for building a connected network for both transportation and recreation, especially in terms of linking cycling routes and bus stops.
- Multi-use trail standards should be considered to ensure consistency and safety across the trail network, while bicycle parking requirements should be implemented in more locations to encourage cycling.

Overall, Yarmouth needs to enhance its transportation infrastructure, pedestrian safety, and recreational offerings while addressing gaps in regional connections, parking, and information availability.

Environment - What We Heard

Planning for Sea Level Rise & Development

- It's crucial to plan for sea level rise, while still allowing regulated development on waterfronts, with lessons from port cities worldwide.

Proactive Adaptation & Mitigation

- Update flooding and sea level rise projects with current data, and establish a reserve fund for mitigation measures
- Establish or update stormwater management regulations for developments over a certain size, including the limiting of impermeable surfaces

Wetlands Protection & Mapping

- Protect wetlands
- Improve mapping of wetlands in the Town
- Ensure mitigation measures, as seen in the Walmart project, to manage stormwater effectively.

Asset Management Strategy

- Consider developing an asset management strategy to support better planning for climate change adaptation and infrastructure resilience.

Culture & Heritage - What We Heard

Cultural Spaces & Events

- Need more cultural spaces (e.g., artist studios, arts centers) and events downtown.
- Repurpose buildings like the former AGNS and promote community-focused programming.
- Build on successful events like Night Markets and Congres Mondiale Acadienne.

Community Engagement & Diversity

- Celebrate Yarmouth's multicultural community and encourage diverse cultural offerings - consider creating a space where people can sell international foods (like a food court) and encourage entrepreneurship.
- Promote Yarmouth as a tourism destination and create an accessible community event calendar.

Waterfront & Mixed-Use Development

- Revitalize waterfront spaces with mixed-use developments (retail, housing, education).
- Capitalize on vacant lands for investment and redevelopment, including opportunities to locate educational facilities focused on marine research on the waterfront (i.e. NSCC and Bedford Institute of Oceanography)

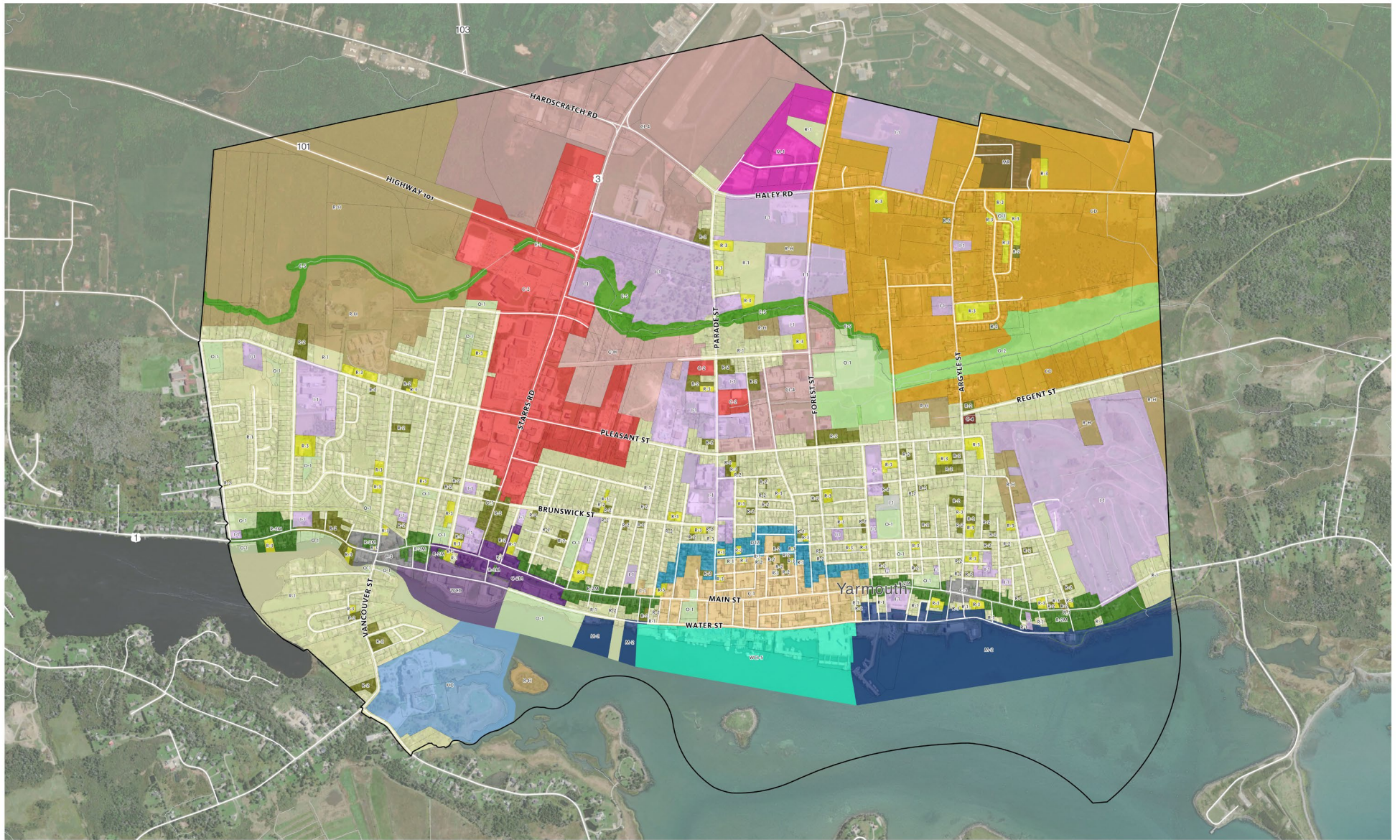
Heritage Preservation & Tourism

- Modernize heritage preservation policies to incentivize investment and cut red tape.
- Use the Visitor Information Centre to highlight maritime history
- Improve wayfinding and consider a larger cooperative effort with adjacent communities.

Downtown Vibrancy

- Update bylaws to encourage more vibrant uses downtown, such as food and nightlife. Consider re-evaluating the professional services requirements downtown.

- Optimize underused spaces for community and tourism benefits - downtown spaces are occupied by many services that do not serve tourists (law offices, accountants, etc.) making space in the downtown challenging to acquire for more suitable businesses.



Current LUB Zoning

R-1 - Low Density Residential	R-H - Residential Holding	C-2M - General Commercial Main Street	CD - Comprehensive Development	HC - Health Campus	O-1 - Open Space
R-2 - Medium Density Residential	MR - Mixed Residential Development Park	C-3 - Secondary Commercial	CI-4 - Commercial Industrial	I-1 - Institutional	O-2 - Floodplain
R-3 - High Density Residential	C-1 - Downtown Commercial	C-4 - Local Commercial	DTZ - Downtown Transit Zone	M-1 - General Industrial	WCI-5 - Waterfront Commercial Industrial
R-2M - Medium Density Residential Main St	C-2 - General Commercial	C-H - Commercial Holding	E-S - Environmentally Sensitive	M-2 - Waterfront Industrial	WCD - Waterfront Comprehensive Development

03

OPTIONS & DISCUSSION

How should the updated planning documents shape the structure of Yarmouth?

Options to Consider

With the feedback received in the earlier workshops, we now have some framing for our discussion around growth and development in Yarmouth. Below is a summary of the options to consider for each of the workshop themes to guide our exploration of how and where these options could be considered within the Town's boundaries, and how it all fits together to determine the urban structure.

Housing

- Accessory Dwelling Units
- Residential Intensification in Existing Developed Areas
- Exploring Mixed-Use Development
- Revisiting approvals process for requiring site plan approval (3-8 units in most cases) and development agreements (more than 8 units) to permit more units as-of-right in appropriate areas
- Adaptive Reuse

Economic Development

- Permitted uses review -reviewing permitted uses in each commercial zone to ensure that it aligns with the Town's goals and enables a healthy economy
- Mixed use potential for areas like downtown, Starrs Road and the waterfront
- Areas for industrial expansion – current Industrial Park is at capacity

Recreation & Transportation

- Transit-Oriented Development could be used in areas that make sense for residential growth and then extending the service gradually over time.

- There's a demand for expanding the multi-use trail network and increasing greenspace in subdivisions.
- Examine the equity of access for residents for recreational services and think about how new development should consider both transportation and recreation

Environment

- Consider updating Sea Level Rise and Flood Risk mapping
- Consider more fulsome mapping of wetlands within the Town's boundaries
- There are several planning tools that could be explored to consider and manage storm water in development and the Town's infrastructure:
 - Requiring storm water management plans for certain types or sizes of development.
 - Limiting lot coverage (i.e. the percentage of a lot that may be covered by buildings).
 - Limiting the amount of impervious surfaces (e.g. asphalt and concrete) on a lot.

Culture & Heritage

- Consider permitting cultural uses more broadly in the Town
- Consider determining an area suited to be an "arts district" and enable and incentivize these uses in a given area
- Utilize or repurpose existing assets to provide more cultural spaces
- Re-evaluate heritage requirements and relax regulations to encourage investment
- Promote or incentivize heritage designation

Questions to Consider

This report has explored some of the physical and policy factors that shape how Yarmouth develops. It will be used to help inform discussion around how the new Municipal Planning Strategy, Land Use By-law, and Subdivision By-law should be updated to adjust the Town's approach to development and growth. In preparation for those discussions, we encourage you to consider the following questions:

1. Should growth in Yarmouth happen primarily through greenfield development (i.e. in currently-undeveloped areas), through intensification or redevelopment of existing areas, or a combination of both?
2. In which areas should residential, commercial, and industrial growth in Yarmouth be focused? Which areas should remain relatively unchanged?
3. In areas where greenfield development happens, what factors need to be considered to ensure such developments are environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable?
4. In areas where intensification or redevelopment happen, what considerations or controls are necessary to ensure such developments are complementary to existing communities? Does this change in different areas of town?
5. What tools could be used to encourage intensification in appropriate areas?
6. What services and infrastructure are needed to support growth?

UPLAND
Urban Planning + Design Studio

1489 Hollis Street, Level 2
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 3M5
+1 (902) 423 0649
info@uplandstudio.ca

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