

BUILDING A YOUTH-FRIENDLY DOWNTOWN, REGINA

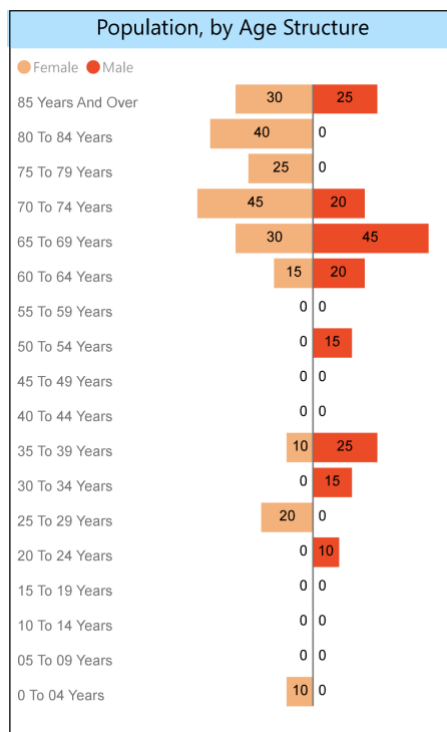


**A Collection of Student Papers
GES 346 Urban Planning, Winter 2025
Dept of Geography & Environmental Studies
University of Regina**

Overview:

Young people's lives are increasingly structured and monitored. Public spaces offer an important site for hanging out and socializing among youth. However, we are seeing a rise in the privatization of public spaces. Moreover, there is a history of exclusion of teenagers in urban spaces (Lieberg, 1995; Valentine, 2004). This effects the presence of young people in urban spaces. What are the rights of youth in urban public spaces? How do youth transform public spaces based on their presence? How can we design spaces/sites that are beneficial for youth?

Youth (alongside seniors) are the most likely demographic to live in downtowns. Yet, in Regina, out of a total population of 430 people living in the downtown neighbourhood, there are 30 youth (all aged between 20-29) (City of Regina Neighbourhood Profiles, 2024). Why are we not seeing more youth living in the downtown? Are we providing the necessary supports and opportunities for their presence?



City of Regina (2024), *Downtown Neighbourhood Age Structure*

Planning Project:

In winter 2025, as part of their coursework, undergraduate students in the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, Urban Planning (GES 346) class at the University of Regina, were tasked with answering the following question: “What would a youth-friendly downtown, Regina look like?”. Youth (aged 15-30

based on Statistics Canada's definition) are often underrepresented in city building and urban planning processes.

Students were asked to consult best practices from other cities that have worked to develop youth friendly spaces, plans and policies to help inform their proposals. Topics included creative play, public safety & support for vulnerable people, urban governance, recreational facility, housing, transit, and active transportation. Students highlighted the need for youth involvement in the planning process in a sustained and active way. They helped to reimagine what the downtown could look like through a youth-friendly lens.

We hosted a public presentation session on April 8, 2025 at the University of Regina and were joined by university members, the public, City of Regina planners, the Downtown BID, the media, and a City Councilor. We hope you enjoy reading a selection of some of the papers completed for this project.



Dr. Vanessa Mathews

Associate Professor & Course Instructor for GES 346: Urban Planning
Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, University of Regina

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Empowering Youth Engagement in Regina's Downtown Community Planning <i>Laura McLeod</i>	1-12
Designing a Youth Friendly Downtown <i>Shalom Okeugo</i>	13-29
Improving Downtown Regina <i>Matthew Schroeder</i>	30-42
Planning Project: Creating a Youth Friendly Downtown <i>Petra Squirra</i>	43-59

© [Laura McLeod, Shalom Okeugo, Matthew Schroeder, Petra Squirra]. This work is the intellectual property of the authors (unless otherwise noted) and is protected by the Copyright Act. Unless a users' right in Canada's Copyright Act covers the particular use, users must not publish, post on a public Internet site, sell, rent, or otherwise distribute this work without the authors' express written permission.

We would like to thank Laura Pfiefer with the City of Regina for her collaboration and support on this project.

Empowering Youth Engagement in Regina's Downtown Community Planning

Laura McLeod

The Regina Downtown has space for youth leadership opportunities within city-council decision-making processes. Although the district is marked by high proportions of privatized commercial areas interlaid with corporate offices, its central location combined with surrounding youth populations would allow it to transform into a space that intentionally fosters leadership, engagement and partnership of young residents. This research outlines processes aiding and creating enthusiastic communities that connect with city-council, to create representative decision-making practices for the downtown and within all of Regina's communities. Despite the 30 youth residents in the Downtown, aged 15 to 30, the surrounding neighbourhoods of Cathedral, Heritage and North Central have sizable youth populations totaling about 4350 residents (City of Regina, 2021a). The Downtown should consider youth participation as vital given the surrounding youth population; however, it remains unclear whether youth concerns are valued by city council, city administration, and Downtown community organizations. Nonetheless, if municipal and community organizations build upon the current participatory practices with the intention of holding space for younger residents it will aid the overall democratized practice and positions of the city that seek better feedback for decisions made by council.

A study by Gerke and Sanyal (2014) dives into the high value of youth participation in urban planning processes, outlining the differentiated experiences from adults whereby youth experiences in the built environment place a greater importance on interactions between a person and place. Detailing challenges of integrating communities, Tach (2014) outlines differences in experience for alternate communities, which reflects the general nature of Regina's Downtown by its stark contrast between age, class and income. Distinguishing the youth participation space, Kudva and Driskell (2009) formulate the structures and organizational practices, as well as

anticipate the abstract concepts and tangible components of participatory planning. Outlining specific tangible aspects of youth participation, Blanchet-Cohen (2006) touches on foundational forms of participation, while Cahill and Hart (2007) criticize some forms of civic engagement noting common limitations and problematic assumptions specifically placed onto youth participation. Realizing the benefits of less structured informal practices to enhance youth cooperation and engagement within local politics and communities, Brandy and Burke (2021), give real world examples from the social impacts of civic engagement. Finally, to tie back into Kudva and Driskell's (2009) work to understand youth participation in adult-led organization, Breitbart and Kepes (2007) speak to the importance of the adult-youth relationship for sustaining meaningful contributions.

It is important to consider the needs and preferences of young populations as these residents are impressionable, forming their major perspectives about the world in this time, with past experiences and understandings of how their voice is valued by the municipality. In outright claiming the value of young populations within the planning process, there is a greater likelihood for these residents to continue to live within these places and to recognize the importance of community participation. An intentional engagement with the community and city can shape connectivity, appreciation, and care for a place. A common tool used to directly engage young populations is a 'walking-reflections' methodology that Gerke and Sanyal (2014) use to determine general themes tied to youth perceptions. The 'walking-reflections' places participants on a planned route, observations are noted, and key questions are asked to guide the study helping to build an understanding of how a place functions for an individual. Findings suggest that youth populations are valuable to planning due to their creativity and capacity to consider ideas which adults have bound to commonly acknowledged constraints (Gerke and Sanyal 2014).

The differentiated insights occur by the variable ways youth perceive the environment, where importance is placed on forms of social interaction, sensory experiences and the transitions between structured zones of function (areas with specific rules or prescribed common understanding of generally acceptable uses of space) (Gerke and Sanyal 2014). Active approaches provide unheard voices with appropriate amounts of visibility and functions with organizations serving as a key mechanism to foster participation of youth or other groups of interest (Kudva and Driskell 2009). Within organizations there should be a range of representative participation tools to see the benefits of participatory planning in the fluid and changing environment of the city (Kudva and Driskell 2009). A vehicle of participation materializes in municipal agencies, schools, and community-based organizations and programs which have sets of norms, values, physical spaces, and organizational structures and additionally are influenced by the interpersonal relations and personal identities creating it (Kudva and Driskell 2009). Although there will always be challenges when integrating community's wants and needs, this should not discourage any one group from becoming involved in community and city-council decisions to further conversations that influence and produce meaningful difference. One common challenge for integrating communities, is the social and organizational features of neighbourhoods. Tach (2014) writes about neighbourhoods that are *organizationally vibrant* but form *micro-segregations of homogeneous pockets* between class and race (2014). Regina's Downtown can be considered *organizationally vibrant* for its provision of services that differentiate it from the greater city with transit routes connecting at this central location, specialized shops and large stocks of governmental institutions and public assets accessible to citizens. But amidst that vibrance there is limited contact between different classes, interactions are negatively perceived, and the area is avoided due to safety concerns. This material and

psychological separation within the neighbourhood forms a disconnect between groups. These separations are characterized through *homogeneous pockets* of interaction and organization but not everyone is included. The separation of lower-income individuals and youth residents leads to deficiencies in participation within civic practices.

The conditions of the participatory processes in democratic decision-making must consider purpose, scale and structures of engagement as markers of the type of participation that is sought. Regina has recently incorporated the *Be Heard* campaign which engages residents with online tools (surveys, forums, Q&A's and polls). However, as the Citizen Satisfaction Survey suggests (City of Regina 2021b), residents place value in direct face-to-face public engagement with city staff. The *Be Heard Regina* public engagement site is one small step in the direction of participatory planning, and with an even smaller portion of the engagement directed at youth, there is importance in reviewing its processes. With few direct opportunities for youth engagement directly from the municipal institution, the City of Regina only partially engages with the values identified in the Community Safety and Well-being (CWSB) plan (2021c). Key components to the CWSB identified as relating to youth engagement are anti-oppression, collaboration, diversity, equity, intersectionality, inclusion and reconciliation; requiring the city to claim and recognize the systems of oppression founded through supremacy and discrimination that produce differential treatment by an ideological domination or institutionally controlled oppression (City of Regina 2021b). The CWSB defines community well-being as “ideal [states] of a sustainable [communities]...where everyone...has a sense of belonging, opportunities to participate... [meet the] needs for...social and cultural expression” and where diversity, equity, intersectionality, inclusion and reconciliation occur regardless of gender, age or race (City of Regina 2021b). From the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey, of the 800 conducted surveys over 12

months, only 44% of respondents had contacted a City of Regina employee for any reason, a 10% increase from the 2018 survey, and although those that did contact city officials were very satisfied and trusting that the city staff are knowledgeable, it notes the lack of overall engagement (City of Regina 2021c). Similarly, about 50% of respondents perceived the city as providing meaningful opportunity for resident participation for inputs in program, service and planning, with again only half of the respondents viewing city staff as easy to reach when required (City of Regina 2021c). The profile of respondents' skews to the older populations, the highest participation going to the 65+ and 34-54 age groups at about 30% each with the 18-34 age group at 20% engagement (City of Regina 2021c).

As Kudva and Driskell (2009) identified, effective participation requires active approaches in institutions and organizations within a municipality; coopting empowerment of communities within democratic decision-making requires an understanding of the participatory process as a 'spatial practice' including conceptual and tangible operating principles forming the effectiveness of engagement (2009). These dimensions construct the openness or closed-off nature of participation of unheard voices and empowerment of communities with overlapping aspects that alleviate or exacerbate structural issues of power in which democratic processes and public participation materialize (Kudva and Driskell 2009). Building upon practices of formal and informal structures that infuse civic engagement, Blanchet-Cohen (2006) convey the actions that work towards youth engagement from the formal (youth-based councils and community centers) to more informal (enthusiasm-initiated issue specific initiatives and representation of experience by artistic and media-based forms of expression) (2006). Although youth councils aid in informing decision-making with a direct link to city-council, there are many limitations with who is attracted to these positions. As city-governed or institutionalized structure is the typical

functioning of a youth council or commission, it has the capacity to attract a small or niche youth representation (Blanchet-Cohen 2006). One step away from formal structures are youth community centers, bringing engagement by hosting events and volunteering, forming possibilities of reaching wider groups in communities. However, it is important that these spaces do not function as a strict city-like institution that imposes limitations on space usage. Additionally, just as important, these spaces must promote values of participation and socialization for the overall community (Blanchet-Cohen 2006). A form of youth engagement that helps to disseminate information to the broader public is artistic expressions and representations in media, whether that is visual arts, skilled crafts, music, written or performative expression. In allowing shared public media spaces, there are opportunities for identity building and socialization for youth communities bringing awareness to the wider public to the issues and concerns youth face expressed through creative means (Blanchet-Cohen 2006). Shared media spaces, in its multitude of forms from radio to open mics, music events or artist murals, are ‘creative place-making’ tools when directed to youth communities and help to foster inclusion of young people and create new discussions and discourses on what is available and possible for youth (Brandy and Burke 2021). One particularly effective participation practice, issue-specific initiatives, functions well to drive youth participation in city-council. Leaders of issue-specific initiatives are often enthusiastic for change forming passion-based participations and these leaders are willing to initiate steps to make meaningful changes they want to see and can have great influence on peers (Blanchet-Cohen 2006). Expanding on how issue-specific initiatives are effective in creating engagement in city-council, a forum on social impacts created in vibrant neighbourhoods, shows young citizens responsible for organizing community protests as selected to lead civic organizations that aligned to their concerns helping to form social cohesion and

cultural vitality within youth communities (Brady and Burke 2021). Further on how everyday practices shape participation, Kudva and Driskell (2009) note that repositioning the tools used by power holders from specific project-based engagement to the guided program-based engagement has significant implications for how youth engage in participatory planning. Having said that, program-based approaches can provide meaningful and sustained participation, but it is essential that adequate planning and evaluation occur to dissolve barriers and constraints applied to youth. The specific actions and interactions that shape organizations occur through the values, moral judgments, perceived goals and intended outcomes of participatory processes, and require “careful consideration of the deliberate choices that shape organizations” as “participation does not just happen” (Kudva and Driskell 2009). The commitment to facilitating inclusive participatory planning requires critical reflection of the programming and practices that shape participation (Kudva and Driskell 2009). This intentional revaluation is an integral part of planning as organizations and institutions are then able to acknowledge the involvement and inherent exclusion of the spatial practices formulated in participatory planning.

Boundaries that reduce youth engagement in civic discourse are modeled from the dismissive perceptions towards youth and by a lack of awareness for youth rights. The opportunities that youth have to engage in city-council decision making is hindered by paradoxical assumptions imposed on young people which stereotype youth as apathetic and irresponsible. An imposed ideology can limit capacity for youth to participate. Further rejection of ‘youth citizenship’ disregards youth of rights with the claim their status is illegitimate within participatory democratic processes for their non-ownership of property (Cahill and Hart 2007). A municipality that recognizes and promotes the agency of youth, can increase respect received and uplift youth self perceptions, helping them recognize their capacity to undertake responsibility

and become competent members infused within societies and communities. An intergenerational relationship that supports and facilitates youth participation occurs in social policy through municipal foundations and the ability of adults to disseminate information between knowledge bases (Cahill and Hart 2007). It is important to consider the barriers youth face amidst issue identification, typically top-down approaches from council to municipal residents or from adult to adolescent. What persists is a hierarchical pattern of inclusion and an inherent exclusion of ideas and people (Breitbart and Kepes 2007). These common ideologies applied to youth require a shift as the ‘right to partake’ as a resident exists for any person directly or indirectly affected by decision-making practices. The meaningful engagement with youth will consider their standpoints and build upon skills of courage for youth to speak up for their concerns and ideas.

There is no ‘magic’ in the methods and process guides. The magic lies in the people who make participation happen and the human interactions that enlighten us, inspire us, and—in the end—provide the essential and lasting foundation on which better cities can be built. Driskell (2002, 176)

Circling back to conceptual and tangible forces identified by Kudva and Driskell (2009), effectively creating meaningful and sustained youth participation occurs by heavy consideration and grasp on contexts of *normative*, *structural*, *operational*, *physical* and *attitudinal* dimensions. *Normative* refers to specific claims in priorities and normative spaces of participation, something that is articulated by goals, missions and expression of values, otherwise the commitment to participation is a ‘phantom’ expression of values (Kudva and Driskell 2009). *Structural* references the physical and regulated space including but not limited to programming, staffing, budgets, priorities, training, resource allocation and program evaluations. *Operational* aspects go into the everyday practices of the functional dynamics of decision making, referring to the methods of identifying agendas, facilitating meetings, and the overall political dynamics giving weight to inputs of youth participation (Kudva and Driskell 2009). The *physical* aspect speaks to

the actual space and ability for youth to work both independently and collaboratively with adults, most beneficial where there are youth-run spaces as its absence can lead to diminished substance and forms of participation by youth (Kudva and Driskell 2009). *Attitudinal* touches on the least tangible aspect of participatory planning but is also identified as one of the most common barriers to sustained involvement of youth, further referencing the general culture of acceptance, supports and understanding, rooted to the identities and interpersonal relations giving rise to the dynamics of interactions (Kudva and Driskell 2009).

Conceptualizing the adult-youth roles, Breitbart and Kepes (2007) formulate the adult as playing a vital role through supporting, providing resources, and becoming the power broker and coordinator for youth civic-engagement. Adults can support youth through allyship, deserved respect, guiding collaborator, and resource provision from financial and technical support to dissemination of information about decision-making processes (Breitbart and Kepes 2007). Functioning as a power broker, adults provide the sharing of information from various knowledge bases but are also willing to meet the needs of young people. Finally, adults can act as an ultimate coordinator providing the communication and connection among groups, and distribution of resources obtained in combination to oversight and synchronization of projects (Breitbart and Kepes 2007).

In conclusion, the potential for youth leadership and participation in decision-making processes within Regina's Downtown remains underexplored despite the neighbourhoods' proximity to a significant youth population. While there are participatory practices in place, a more intentional and inclusive approach is necessary to ensure youth voices are genuinely valued in shaping this city's future. Engaging young residents in meaningful and sustained ways- through both formal structures like youth councils and informal practices of artistic expression-

can foster a stronger sense of belonging and civic responsibility. Acknowledging and addressing the barriers youth face, such as social exclusion and dismissive perceptions, is crucial for creating a more democratic, inclusive and vibrant community. By embracing youth participation as an integral part of urban planning, Regina can cultivate leadership, engagement and collaboration that not only benefits young residents but also contributes to the broader well-being of the entire city.

References

- Blanchet-Cohen, N. (2006). Young People's Participation in Canadian Municipalities: Claiming Meaningful Space. *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, 57, 71–84.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/45407551>.
- Brady, A. M., & Burke, L. (2021). *Vibrant Neighborhoods Forum: Leveraging Civic Engagement for Social Impact*. German Marshall Fund of the United States.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep28524>.
- Caitlin Cahill, & Roger A. Hart. (2007). Re-Thinking the Boundaries of Civic Participation by Children and Youth in North America. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 17(2), 213–225. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.17.2.0213>
- City of Regina. *Neighbourhood Profiles*. (2021a).
<https://www.regina.ca/aboutregina/maps/neighbourhood-profiles/>
- City of Regina. (2021b). *2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey Report*. Regina Citizen Satisfaction Survey. <https://www.regina.ca/export/sites/Regina.ca/about-regina/regina-historyfacts/.galleries/pdfs/2021-Regina-Citizen-Satisfaction-Survey.pdf>
- City of Regina. (2021c). *CSWB Foundational Commitments*. Community Safety and Well-being. <https://www.regina.ca/export/sites/Regina.ca/about-regina/community-safety-wellbeing/.galleries/pdfs/Foundational-Commitment-CSWB-Plan.pdf>
- Genevieve Gerke, & Nick Sanyal. (2014). Engaging Youth in the Planning Process: Walking Reflections. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 24(3), 201–212.
<https://doi.org/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.24.3.0201>.
- Kudva, N., & Driskell, D. (2009). Creating Space for Participation: The Role of Organizational Practice in Structuring Youth Participation: Journal of the Community Development Society. *Community Development*, 40(4), 367-380.
<https://www.proquest.com/scholarlyjournals/creating-space-participation-role-organizational/docview/1081193898/se-2>.
- Myrna Margulies Breitbart, & Imre Kepes. (2007). The YouthPower Story: How Adults Can Better Support Young People's Sustained Participation in Community-Based Planning. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 17(2), 226–253.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.17.2.0226>.
- Tach, L. M. (2014). Diversity, Inequality, and Microsegregation: Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in a Racially and Economically Diverse Community. *Cityscape*, 16(3), 13–46.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326904>

Designing a Youth Friendly Downtown

Shalom Okeugo

When analysing downtowns, the cultural, social and economic impact on a city is inevitable and anticipated. The *City Centre Core Framework: City of Regina* declares that the downtown is, “The headquarters of our economy, vibrant with activity” and “should act as a constant reminder that one’s heart and home is in Regina” (*City Centre Core Framework*, 2021). With the prior rampant inhabitation of city centers and downtowns in earlier periods, the new polarizing events and developments of modern times reveal a contrast in present-day beliefs and perceptions of downtowns and their magnitude. In the past, during the early stages of a city’s development, the downtown and center were viewed as the most wanted and attractive spaces to live in. These values completely drifted as urban sprawl became more predominant in the 1950-80s. As mentioned by Filon Pierre in *Past, present and future revitalization trends in Canadian mid-size city downtowns*, “there have been considerable differences in how Canadian downtowns evolved over the[se] decades”, the early 1960s allowing for, “the downtowns of large Canadian urban regions (those with a present million-plus population) [to] experience repeated periods of rapid growth” (Filion, 2024). Despite downtown being the heart of a city, and the source of all interweaving avenues and streets which make it up, the change in awareness in regard to its importance serves to showcase the transition of time. When attempting to bring downtown back to its prime, the topic can be tackled and explored through the infusion of creative play, entertainment zones and growth in population.

The category of youth (ages 15-30) captures a range of experiences, beliefs and capabilities which are critical to discussing and understanding this demographic. The *Be Heard* website, run by the City of Regina is an amazing tool for those in city council positions (mostly planners responding, with city council still able to see it), to listen to and hear the opinions and thoughts of everyday citizens. This mode of communication can serve as a way for city council

to gather data reflecting youth ideologies, and information to aid in their revitalization process. Spaces designed for the enjoyment of youth are crucial to incentivize them to come downtown. These spaces typically offer, “drug stores, specialty stores, personal care, convenience, and banking services” (Roth, 2011).

In order to evaluate the dominant images associated with the downtown, a mental mapping exercise was employed with a small sample size of four individuals aged 15-18. It is clear that for those who participated, the Cornwall Centre, seen in Figure 1, 2, & 3, is a constant and main attraction for youth. As 18-year-old Andrea shares, it is “the only reason I go downtown”. Cornwall moreover contains all previously mentioned “establishments” helping to “attract the highest interest” (Roth, 2011). While the small sample of data is inadequate in reflecting the total sentiment felt by a large group such as all youth, it still offers an estimation of what is felt by them.

When comparing the use and foot traffic of the Cornwall Centre over the years its diminishment is evident, as less individuals feel the need to go to such places with the rise of online retail. The desertification suffered by downtown Regina is an issue that according to Ehlenz et al (2019) affects multiple downtowns across North America, with one “Houston architect not[ing] that [their] downtown ‘was literally a ghost town after 6 p.m. [10 years ago]’” (Ehlenz et al., 2019). While this is an issue that has been resolved within Houston, the subject is still one that plagues Regina, as less foot traffic has resulted in an increase of abandoned businesses and spaces. To keep the youths downtown, they first have to be attracted and drawn to the city’s center, through ‘sticky spaces’.

Ones surroundings are known to affect mental health, while influencing how someone might perceive the space and its settings (Lindberg, 2025). The implementation of showcased

and displayed art and creativity, while improving overall sentiments, creates sticky spaces that attract youth, giving them something to look forward to. While locations such as “third spaces” (spaces between home and work) are lacking and diminishing in this society, the associated feelings can be embodied and complemented through the infusion of artistic expression. The concept of creative play can be implemented and utilized through various mediums, beautifying one’s location and place of living while revealing an underlying message to those admiring it. The involvement and empowerment of local artists is a positive quality, as it shows and establishes the city’s support for artists. The concept can serve as a tool to empower indigenous art, expression and voices, helping with the ever-learning journey of truth and reconciliation.

Using the existing environment to implement artwork and the appropriate architecture, enhances the surroundings of said region, giving the space a distinct character. Implementing work similar to that in Figure 4, in an available space such as Wascana, a location at the outskirts of downtown, will inevitably result in more foot traffic and appreciation for nature. Figure 4 showcases how art is able to encourage and send a message regarding important aspects such as recycling, its material educating the public on the re-usability and beauty in reconditioned items. In such cases the work can involve the help of citizens as they are able to donate material, causing them to feel more connected when the art is eventually displayed. When animating downtown smaller cost-effective changes can be made, as seen in Figure 5 & 6, both utilizing simple lines to enliven surroundings; these can create a new feel and perception of daily tasks, ultimately improving one’s everyday walk and appreciation of one’s environment. The sundial in Figure 5 utilizes conventional, unnoticed objects such as the pole, and sun to generate a clock, this piece in turn informs younger generations of science and past behaviors and mannerisms of humanity. Similarly, the basketball garbage can in Figure 6, turns the mundane tasks of

discarding items into engaging activities, its appearance entertaining those of all ages, while promoting recycling and physical activity. Utilizing the idea of art installations can serve a similar function, enlivening the area as depicted in Figures 7, 8 and 9. The three images involve the application of larger scaled objects and items that are commonly known. The cherries of Figure 7 can serve as a distinguishing feature of a specific area, which may be used later to identify ones' surroundings. The teacups and several installations in Figures 8 and 9, in addition to invigorating the downtown, may serve as advertising and marketing strategies for businesses, informing passersby of what to expect when entering a building. The various potential presented by such art installation can vivify the downtown in differing ways. Regardless of the varying ranges and modes of art execution, its impact remains powerful and influential. When exploring the infusion of creativity in the city center, the use of art installations and local artists is important to its allure and magnetism. Furthermore, understanding current locations that are relevant to youth is imperative to the creation of spaces and activities the youth lack. In the exploration of what older youths deem enjoyable we are able to consider and look at entertainment zones.

Entertainment zones are defined as “concentrated nightlife districts” at “the margins of downtowns in former commercial and industrial areas, underutilized retail corridors or underdeveloped waterfronts” (Campo & Ryan, 2008). In contrast to the infusion of art, appropriate for all ages, entertainment zones tend to include spaces for older groups, typically incorporating bars, clubs and businesses opening later in the night, with the “small parcels of vacant land that are used for surface parking also play[ing] a contributing role” (Campo & Ryan, 2008). Further developing these zones can foster locations of reference, for locals and outsiders creating a sense of familiarity, helping in the recognition of one's surroundings. Typically, these

spaces are placed in locations where “plans have failed to be implemented, failed to materialize or have just been ignored” (Campo & Ryan, 2008). These areas take advantage of the inanimateness of said locations, to revitalize the area, appealing to younger people. When wanting to improve or increase the number of these zones, the vision and preferences of youth need to be incorporated into the planning process. With these hubs typically situated on the edges of downtown, their implementation in the central downtown area is critical to the improvement of nightlife in the city. The importance of this aspect is due to youths wanting to have a social life and partake in activities like “bar hopping”. The awareness of said events and activities is important to the appropriate and correct development of a youthful downtown. This would mean an enhanced role of urban governance is needed in order to understand the youth perspective. Ultimately the creation and increase of entertainment zones tends to foster the downtowns night life which can be done through the help of youthful input and an improved role of urban governance and community building.

A large aspect of the revitalization projects and their intended outcomes stem from tackling the issue of what repels the youth from downtown. When seeking input from the previously mentioned group consisting of four individuals, issues that continuously came up in relation to the downtown were safety, parking, and not being pedestrian friendly. While increasing the number of police and security might seem like an obvious solution, it often results in no change or the opposite. Saskatoons’ police service “introduced the ARO (alternative response officer) in the downtown area of Saskatoon”, it is resulting in the program “hav[ing] an impact on increas[ed] community contact and reducing administrative and other low-level issues in the community (Hodgkinson & Pringle, 2023). Understanding that the perception of safety is the aspect that needs to be tackled, this can be improved through repopulation. The discussion of

repopulation tends to follow and focus on families and children, who are often anticipated to play a crucial role in the group, and being aware of such occurrences requires the proper amenities to sustain them. In order to attract young families, the implementation of schools, entertainment, third spaces and supermarkets, able to provide an adequate source of nutrition is needed, and ultimately affects the decision about whether to live in an area or not. Additionally, a concern affecting repopulation is the lack in choice and prices in homes. A neighborhood plagued by the similar issue, the residents of the North Central community struggle with affordability of housing, the effects of high cost living in relation to one's income being a restrictive issue that individuals from all classes face. The most popular housing types and ownership titles, as depicted in Figure 10, reveal trends in the downtown area have respectively remained the same over the past few years. To combat this, employing mixed used residential housing might help attract youth that differ in experience, ideologies, and walks of life. Understanding the uniqueness of different groups of people should be met through multiple and diverse housing options and varying locations. This housing might range from condos, apartments, duplexes etc. while maintaining the architectural style of existing buildings, creating a homogenous and harmonious outcome. Canadian provinces such as British Colombia have successfully implemented planning policies that, “push[ed] for additional growth and housing development in the downtown” (Graham, 2023). With the previous mention of early desertification of the downtown, keeping facilities and businesses open for later times into the evening contributes to the sentiment of safety, as individuals don't rush to abandon the area for their urban sprawled neighborhoods. Successful downtowns typically consider the evening as early stages of nightlife, as entertainment zones come to life.

Additionally parking issues and the lack of consideration of pedestrian-friendly locations seem to repel the youth from going downtown. The number of vacant lots, limited parking spaces and strongly enforced parking policies causes a strain on potential city center offerings. These limitations directly impact the crowd circulation and the number of people willing to remain downtown. Recognizing that the soil composition (as associated cost) in Regina may not allow for the creation of underground parking, is significant in tackling the parking issue. The idea of building free above ground parking garages, in a location containing various places of business and entertainment, seems more feasible as it allows for individuals to park freely without the fear of city penalties. With the understanding that individuals might take advantage of such spaces, implementing bylaws and regulations that restrain its abuse is critical. These may mention the inability to park in aboveground parking lots for longer than 4 hours. Though the council recently passed a motion allowing cars to park free downtown after 5pm, the transition of vacant and unnecessary parking lots though the use of high density parkades would create space for residential parking for downtown inhabitants. The previous mentioned topic of cars comes into play as youths such as Anita, a 15-year-old feels as though there are, “too many cars downtown” and that “they’re too fast”. This unsafe feeling stems from the deficiency of pedestrian friendly streets downtown, and ones not overtaken by cars. The characteristic of downtown depicted as being “Livable, walkable, green” (City Centre Core Framework, yr), is observed through the creation of Scarth Street, a space that embodies such values. The pedestrian mall only allows for foot traffic as the city recently reconfirmed the status of the street as a pedestrian-only public space.

Via the BeHeard platform, the city is able to effectively communicate with its residents varying in age, regarding upcoming changes. Users of the platform are able to put forward

recommendations and responses, such as username Superscotty19 who suggested adding a roof to Scarth Street, “like Toronto did with Brookfield Place” as its “SO DEAD 9 months out of the year for no other reason than the weather”. Other users suggested the use of “Unique street light art installation” (username Babcia), and “INCREASING pedestrian only zones” such as Scarth and “not decreasing them” (username BobbGlenn). While being unaware of the ages of participants, it is clear there is a strong desire for positive change showcased by both residents sharing their opinions and the city listening and applying the information and feedback. Ultimately, the perception and view of safety is something that can be created through increased population and pedestrian traffic in the area. This population expansion can be achieved via the implementation of children and family needs, diverse housing options, keeping businesses open longer, utilizing vacant parking spaces better and listening to citizens.

Downtowns are the center of the city and provide a lot of influence to the city as their economic, social and cultural beliefs and values reflect that of the city itself. Downtown Regina’s current depopulation and abandonment results in a loss of identity. Utilizing the concept of revitalization, we are able to combat its desertification, a task that requires a constant conversation between the city and youth. With the goal for youths to remain and live downtown, understanding them is critical as we strive for the creation of a vibrant downtown. This paper demonstrates that this vibrancy can be achieved through the infusion of creative play, entertainment zones, and an increase of population. While many of the previously mentioned aspects require funding and plans to be accepted, informing and communicating with citizens helps them to be a part of the construction and modification of the city and ensures that they know they are heard. Overall, the revitalization of downtown Regina serves to create a space for

youth to remain and live in the core, in turn creating a diverse hub with a multitude of experiences, beliefs and cultures, flourishing with knowledge.

Appendix



Figure 1
Name: Anita. O
Age: 15 years old

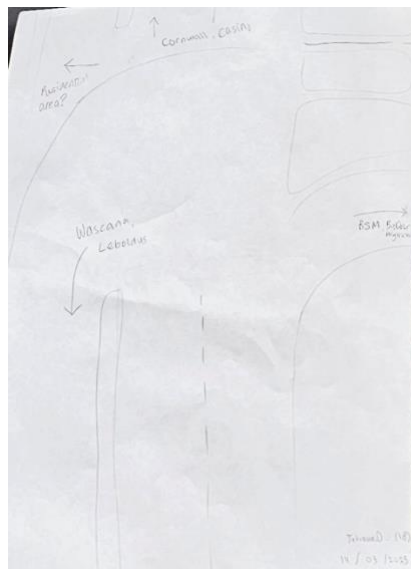


Figure 2
Name: Tatiana. D
Age: 18 years old

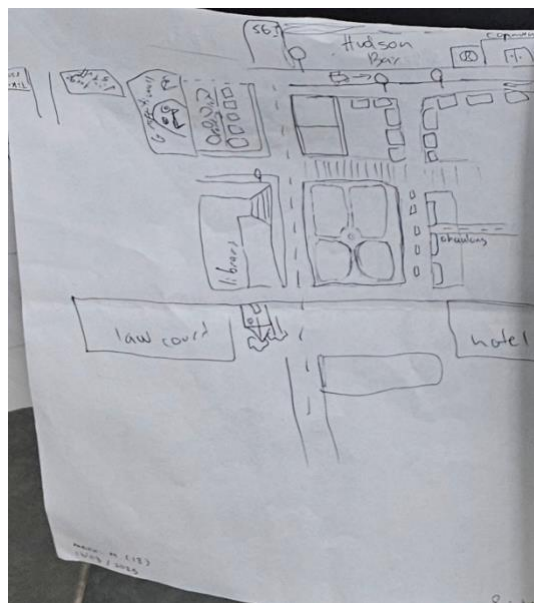


Figure 3
Name: Andrea. M
Age: 18 years old



Figure 4

<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/61/b8/0d/61b80dbf4f0c63f31f5fbacafc179988.jpg>



Figure 5

<https://i.pinimg.com/474x/0c/f5/77/0cf5776a58f7ada68c5de7030b8c44b7.jpg>



Figure 6

https://cdn.prod.www.spiegel.de/images/b38cb973-0001-0004-0000-000000755348_w920_r0.5557291666666667_fpx49.96_fpy33.29.webp



Figure 7

<https://i.pinimg.com/474x/0a/57/00/0a57005278e27478ecb2be9897b14526.jpg>



Figure 8

<https://i.pinimg.com/474x/36/ed/3e/36ed3ef3971e057beec434dbd68de3dd.jpg>



Figure 9

<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/be/d1/bc/bed1bc65ff47f399f15ed8083c844ba4.jpg>

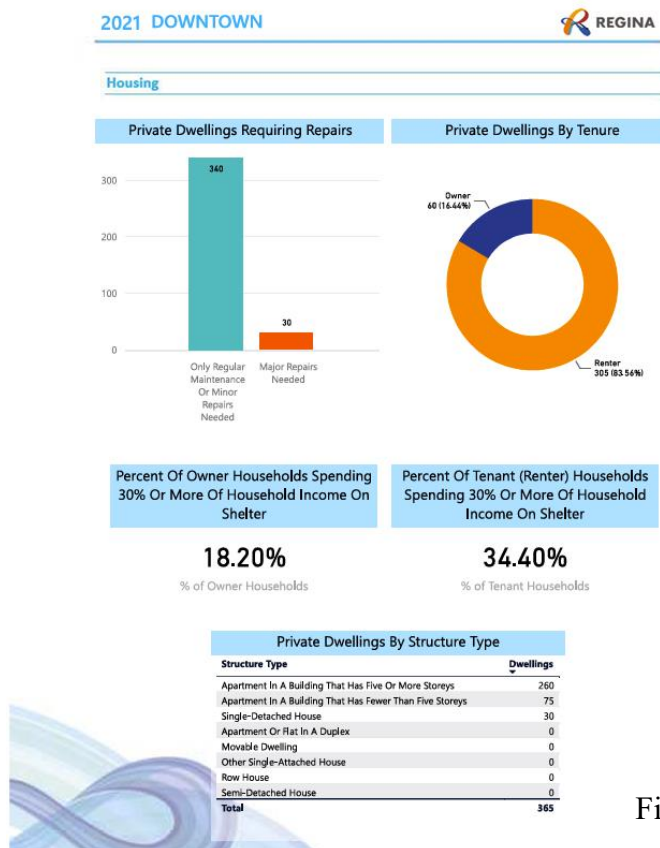


Figure 10

Bibliography

- 2021 Downtown*. (2021). from <https://www.regina.ca/export/sites/Regina.ca/about-regina/neighbourhood-profiles/.galleries/pdfs/downtown.pdf>
- Campo, D., & Ryan, B. D. (2008). The Entertainment Zone: Unplanned Nightlife and the Revitalization of the American Downtown. *Journal of Urban Design*, 18(3), 291–315.
<https://doi-org.libproxy.uregina.ca/10.1080/13574800802319543>
- City Centre Core Framework: City of Regina*. (2021). Retrieved April 5, 2025, from <https://www.regina.ca/export/sites/Regina.ca/business-development/land-property-development/.galleries/pdfs/City-Centre-Core-Framework.pdf>
- Ehlenz, M. M., Pfeiffer, D., & Pearthree, G. (2019). Downtown revitalization in the era of millennials: how developer perceptions of millennial market demands are shaping urban landscapes. *Urban Geography*, 41(1), 79–102.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2019.1647062>
- Filion, P. (2024). Past, present and future revitalization trends in Canadian mid-size city downtowns. *Canadian Geographies/ Géographies Canadiennes*, 68(1), 12–23.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12891>
- Graham, R. (2023). Do young adults want to live downtown? Understanding attitudes in Prince George, BC. *Planning Practice & Research*, 39(3), 417–440. <https://doi-org.libproxy.uregina.ca/10.1080/02697459.2023.2259752>
- Help us shape our downtown*. (n.d.). Be Heard. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from <https://beheard.regina.ca/scarth/brainstormers/help-us-shape-our-downtown>
- Hodgkinson, T., & Pringle, D. (2023). Alternative response officers: investing in policing alternatives and community safety in Saskatoon, Canada. *Policing a Journal of Policy and Practice*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paac109>

Lindberg, S. (2025, February 7). *How Does Your Environment Affect Your Mental Health?: Understanding the environment-mental health connection*. Very Well Mind. Retrieved April 17, 2025, from <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-your-environment-affects-your-mental-health-5093687>

n/a – collage. (n.d.). Pinterest.

<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/be/d1/bc/bed1bc65ff47f399f15ed8083c844ba4.jpg>

n/a. (n.d.-b). Spiegel. https://cdn.prod.www.spiegel.de/images/b38cb973-0001-0004-0000-000000755348_w920_r0.5557291666666667_fpx49.96_fpy33.29.webp

n/a - sundial. (n.d.). Pinterest.

<https://i.pinimg.com/474x/0c/f5/77/0cf5776a58f7ada68c5de7030b8c44b7.jpg>

n/a cherry. (n.d.). Pinterest.

<https://i.pinimg.com/474x/0a/57/00/0a57005278e27478ecb2be9897b14526.jpg>

n/a- recycling. (n.d.). Pinterest.

<https://i.pinimg.com/474x/61/b8/0d/61b80dbf4f0c63f31f5fbaefc179988.jpg>

n/a- tea cup. (n.d.). Pinterest.

<https://i.pinimg.com/474x/36/ed/3e/36ed3ef3971e057beec434dbd68de3dd.jpg>

n/a- trash can. (n.d.). Pinterest.

<https://i.pinimg.com/474x/93/9b/79/939b79f30afb5a9118d9b76b5566a505.jpg>

Roth, K. J., K. (2011). Rural downtown revitalization strategies for university and community collaboration. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 76(3). Retrieved April 5, 2025, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A272806629/ITOF?u=ureginalib&sid=bookmark-ITOF&xid=ad8370fe>

Improving Downtown Regina

Matthew Schroeder

The population of downtown Regina is declining. It decreased 36.3% from 675 in 2016 to 430 in 2021 (City of Regina, 2023). This follows a trend of population decrease from 820 in 2011 (City of Regina, 2022). This trend is likely to continue into the 2026 census unless something is done to reverse it. More people need to be encouraged to spend time and to live downtown, not just work there. Within the demographics of downtown, the average age is 62 and a half (City of Regina, 2023). Downtowns are traditionally filled with workers, many of whom are part of the youth, but this is not the case in Regina anymore. Youth are defined as anyone aged 15 to 30 by Statistics Canada. Many young people work downtown but do not choose to live there. This is partly due to safety. After 7:00 pm, it looks like a ghost town, making people feel uneasy. The issue of decline is by no means exclusive to Regina. Cities all over North America are experiencing this issue at differing degrees. If one looks up plans for revitalizing downtown spaces, articles from cities in almost every state and province appear. The COVID-19 pandemic hit downtowns hard, with many people opting to work from home rather than work and spend money downtown. With the decline, there is an increase in available space that can be transformed to be more desirable and attract young people. These spaces could be more catered to youth, such as recreational facilities, bars, or social clubs. Downtown real estate, on average, consists of 71% office space, so the decline could be devastating (Leong et al., 2023: 1). However, unused office spaces can be transitioned to apartments or used for cultural and recreational uses. In order to make downtown Regina desirable for youth, we need to make it safer; we need spaces that young people feel comfortable occupying, whether they are in public or private.

More greenspace would improve the look of downtown. A concrete jungle is not desirable. More greenspace is a good idea for a number of reasons. Studies show a positive correlation between greenspace and positive mental health in youth. They show an improvement in mood, emotional resilience, self-determination, and an increase in happiness. The studies also showed a lower risk of developing psychiatric disorders (Sprague et al. 2022: 663).

Additionally, the Environmental Youth Alliance says: “Access to parks and greenspace are considered to be a key condition for the social and mental health of children” (McNulty, 2005: 74). It is clear that greenspace benefits young people and should be included in any plans to attract them to downtown.

Victoria Park receives quite a bit of traffic and is one of downtown’s better-looking areas. If you look at the areas of the city that are expanding and attracting people to live there, such as Harbour Landing or the Greens, you can see a lot of green space and walking paths as well as parks and fields for recreation. This is far easier to achieve when no infrastructure is already inhibiting the space. The space in downtown is more limited, so having spare fields and bike paths is harder to implement. They could increase building setbacks from the property line on newly built structures to make room for a small green space for flowers, shrubbery, or small trees. There could perhaps be a small tax incentive for doing so because we want to encourage developers to help beautify the cityscape. Any unused space, no matter how small, could be converted to greenspace. Even something like a small garden would do wonders in making downtown prettier.

Safety is a defining factor in an area’s livability. If I do not feel comfortable walking around my neighbourhood at night, I would choose to live elsewhere. Even if it was further away from my place of work and recreation, I would choose the safer option. The Regina Community Crime Map was created by the Regina Police Service to visualize where crime occurs in Regina.

Downtown is not the most unsafe area of the city, but many crimes have happened there within the last ninety days. These include instances of theft, assault, mischief, break and enter, theft from cars, and operating vehicles while intoxicated (Regina Community Crime Map) (Figure 1). Something needs to be done to make people feel safer. This will make the area far more enticing to everyone. One thing that makes downtown feel unsafe is how empty it is. After 6:00 or 7:00 pm, when everyone has gone home from their work in the offices, it feels deserted. Most of the businesses close at the same time, some due to safety concerns. Fresh Carnival is a restaurant near Victoria Park; they have had to close two hours earlier due to safety concerns and say that the businesses near them have done the same (Reynoldson, 2023). An area feels safer with more people around. There are more people to help or call the police if a crime occurs, but the increased presence may prevent the crime from happening at all. The problem is that people do not want to go there because they feel unsafe, but they feel unsafe because there are no people there. So either we attract more people to downtown in order to make it feel safer and further attract people to downtown, or we first make it safe so that people feel comfortable walking around. The downtown area is small and is in close proximity to the Regina Police Station. It is in a unique position to be able to increase safety through the use of foot patrols. If police are present and can be seen walking around and engaging with the community, people will feel safer, and it will deter criminals from acting.

A key centre point to bring people downtown is the Regina Public Library. It has an abundance of services for all ages, including storytelling, access to computers, reading, 3D printing, an art gallery, as well as a movie theatre. But in recent years, this has declined, partially because people do not feel safe there anymore. A new location for the library may improve things. In the Cornwall Centre, the Hudson Bay store takes up a great amount of space and is

closing. Putting the library there would attract people to the mall and bring in people from the mall. Additionally, the Cornwall Centre has its own security, which would help alleviate any feelings of being unsafe. It is a large space that will be unused and is in a perfect spot to bring in more traffic from the mall. The mall is one of the few places downtown where you can still consistently see youth around. Having a space like the library within the mall would see many youth attending. As for what to do with the land that the library currently resides on, it could be used for an apartment building once the need arises. It is located directly next to Victoria Park, which is one of the only green spaces in the downtown area. People living in the building would be able to go on walks, play catch in the park, and host or attend events.

We do not just want young people to visit downtown; we want them to move and build lives there. To do so, we need to think about what types of housing are preferable to them. The downtown neighbourhood profile says that 84.93% of the people living downtown are in single bedroom apartments or at least live alone (City of Regina, 2023). The remaining 15.07% is households with two people (City of Regina, 2023). There are no three or four-bedroom apartments downtown. Many young people live with roommates because it is cheaper to split the cost with one or more people. There is also a social element where young people can befriend and spend time with their roommates. With the vast majority of apartments downtown being only for a single person, this may inhibit youths from being interested in living there. It also goes back to safety, many people particularly women may feel unsafe living alone especially living in a high crime area. To encourage more young people to live downtown, apartments could convert rooms from one bedroom to two bedrooms or more.

What does a vibrant downtown look like? Downtowns are supposed to be an economic, artistic, and cultural hub. There are, of course, still events happening downtown, but not nearly as many as there could be. On Friday nights, one will see more use in the Warehouse District

than downtown. A vibrant downtown has an abundance of events that will draw people there. The farmers market is a great example of this; hundreds of people go downtown to buy local goods. The activity should be focused on youth, so think of bars and music. Regina is a diverse city, and downtown is a great space for people to be enveloped in and learning about other cultures through food, art, and music. It should be unique from the rest of the city: “Downtown’s strength is not homogeneity with everywhere else; the strength of downtown is its differentiation from anywhere else” (Rypkema, 2003: 12). Ideally, a downtown will have things that nowhere else in the city has. Currently, almost everything that can be done downtown can be done in other areas of the city. Victoria Square Park is an underutilized area of downtown. It has nice open spaces and could be a great place for festivals or outdoor concerts. It is unique, and given that it is one of the most centralized parks in the city, it may draw a larger crowd. The nice thing is that once someone is brought downtown, they are likely to see other activities and shops that will either keep them downtown or lead them to come back.

We also need a better way to inform people of events happening within the city. There are events that happen downtown, but many of the people that would go are not aware that they are occurring. City councils are not generally fond of using social media, but they can be a good way to get the word out about events or organizations in the city. Social media is overtly popular with youth, so doing this would help their demographic predominantly. For example, the “r/Regina” community on Reddit has forty-eight thousand members. If the City of Regina had an account, they could post about things happening in the city and better engage with the community. The councilwoman for Ward 5, Sarah Turnbull, has very recently started posting recaps of council updates there to better inform people of the results of council meetings. If the City of Regina

followed her in this, they would be able to reach thousands of people who may not have heard otherwise.

Part of the appeal of living downtown is being able to get where you need to go by walking. One of my friends lives in downtown Toronto, and he is able to get anywhere he needs to without owning a vehicle. He is able to get to the grocery store, the gym, and his University campus by walking and using public transit. This would not be as convenient in Regina. There are no grocery stores located within the boundaries of the downtown area. There are several outside of it, but anyone living downtown would likely need to use a personal vehicle to get there and back. Though, a higher proportion of residents downtown walk and take public transit than compared to the rest of the city: 31.58% of residents walk, 15.79% take public transit, and 52.64% use a vehicle, including driver and passenger (City of Regina, 2023). Compare this to my neighborhood, Arcola East, where 88.06% of people use a personal vehicle primarily (City of Regina, 2023). Downtown is still likely the most walkable and transit-friendly area of the city, but there is a lot of room for improvement. It is interesting that on the survey of the main mode of transportation in downtown Regina that none of the participants used a bike primarily. One could argue that the average age plays a factor in this, but not one person using a bike primarily is odd. This leads me to believe that bikes are not well accommodated downtown. A few simple ways to fix this are installing a few places for people to lock their bikes and making the bike lanes more clear. Lockers where people can store their bikes and feel confident that they will still be there when they get back is another solution. Lots of apartment buildings have spaces like these. If commercial and retail areas had these, it would provide incentives for people to use their bikes. The transit system could be improved. Much of the transit seems to be focused on people from other areas of the city getting in and out of downtown rather than people in downtown being able to travel around (Figure 2). A bus that focuses on travel within downtown would be

more beneficial to the residents. It could also include the Centre Square area to the south if the amount of usage becomes a worry as many residents there work downtown.

Many young people lead an active lifestyle and enjoy going to the gym and playing sports. A new recreational facility would attract more people, particularly young people, to downtown. The perfect location is in the Cornwall Centre in the northeast space. There is plenty of space there and it was once one connected store with two floors which it can be once more. It could have a range of activities like basketball or soccer and include a gym as well. “As much as there is a need for recreation/training space, there is a great need for space to hangout” (Wilson et al, 2014). This is why the mall is an ideal location. Young people going there during the day will be able to socialize and shop together or eat at the food court. The Cornwall Centre is already a major hub in the city for business but it could also be one for recreation. The two would complement each other, with people from the recreation facility going to the Cornwall Centre to shop and the people from the Cornwall Centre checking out the new facility.

Generally, a city's downtown is its most accessible neighborhood (Canadian Urban Institute, 2013: 63). This is mostly the case for Regina, but there is a large inaccessible area to the North separating downtown from the Warehouse District. If someone wanted to go north, they would have to go west to Albert Street or east to Broad Street. This area used to be a Canadian Pacific Rail Yard until 2012 when it was sold to the city. Since then, it has been essentially abandoned and fenced off. An empty and dreary patch of land right in the city's centre. The executive director of the Warehouse District, Leasa Gibbons, said, “There's a reason why we call it the dust bowl, and it is an opportunity to really take hold of a brownfield site and do something amazing with it” (CTV News). The area could be opened up and beautified. It would entice more people to downtown and allow people in the Warehouse District to better access the area. The

current plan looks like primarily residential and green space as well as a civic building that could be used as a festival space (Figure 3) (Urban Strategies). This seems like an excellent idea to increase accessibility and add to the making of a vibrant downtown.

The population of downtown Regina is seeing a trend of decline. This will likely continue at least until the next census in 2026. The age demographics in downtown are concerning, with very few members of the youth choosing to live there despite many working there. Something needs to be done to bring more people to downtown and make a higher proportion of them young people. Safety is a primary issue concerning youth. After a certain point, downtown is almost deserted, with the vast majority of businesses closed. Empty streets are not in the minds of many when they think of what a safe downtown looks like. The solution is to increase cultural activities downtown, particularly in the evening. If more people are downtown, then it will feel safer, and if people feel safer, they are more inclined to come downtown. It can act as a positive feedback loop. Another idea to bring young people downtown is to increase greenspace, which has been shown to have positive effects on their mental health. There needs to be spaces that you feel comfortable occupying. A new library and recreation facility in the Cornwall Centre would draw young people to downtown, especially because many of them already congregate in the mall. It will take years and considerable funds to turn downtown around, but it will be worth it. If the city council wants to revitalise downtown and bring it back to where it was, then we need young people to be a large part of that.

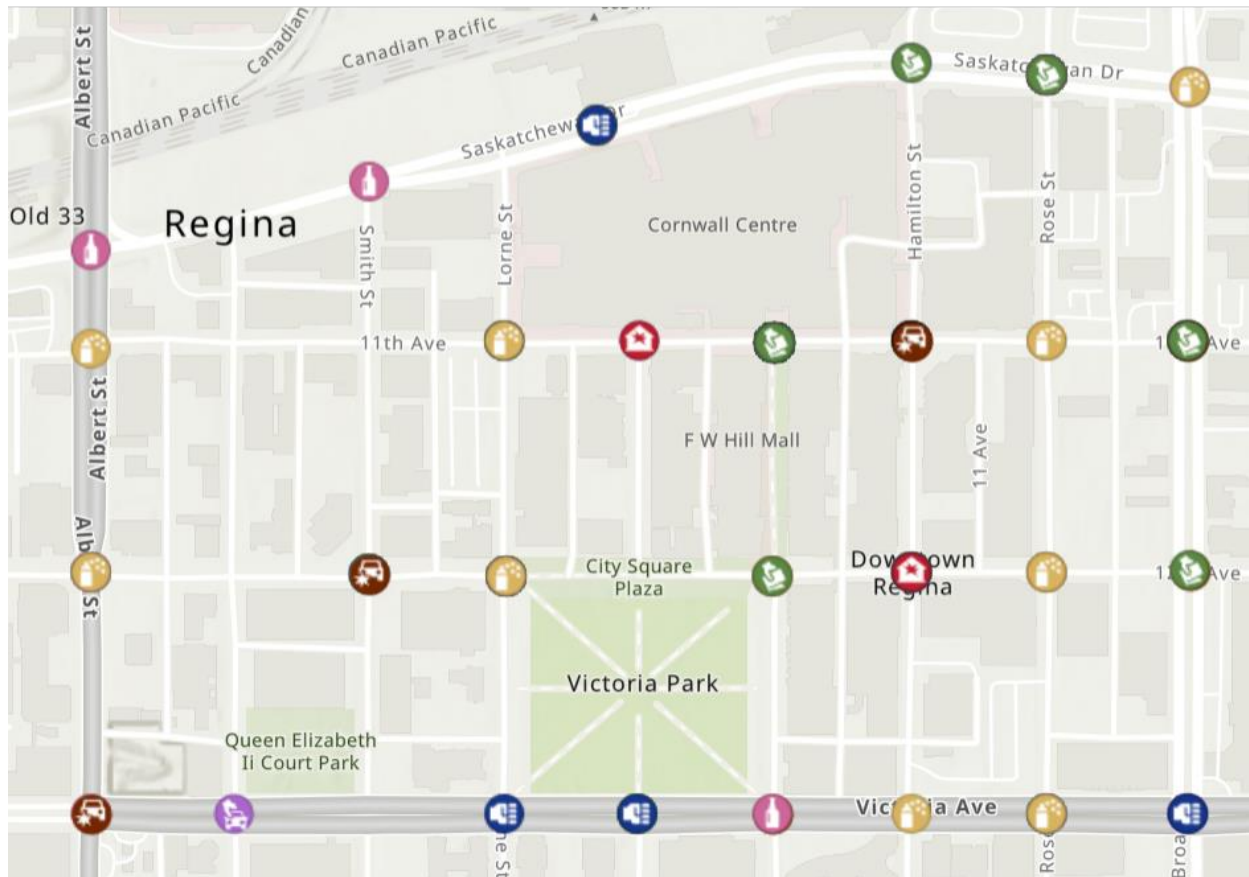


Figure 1 - Regina Crime Map

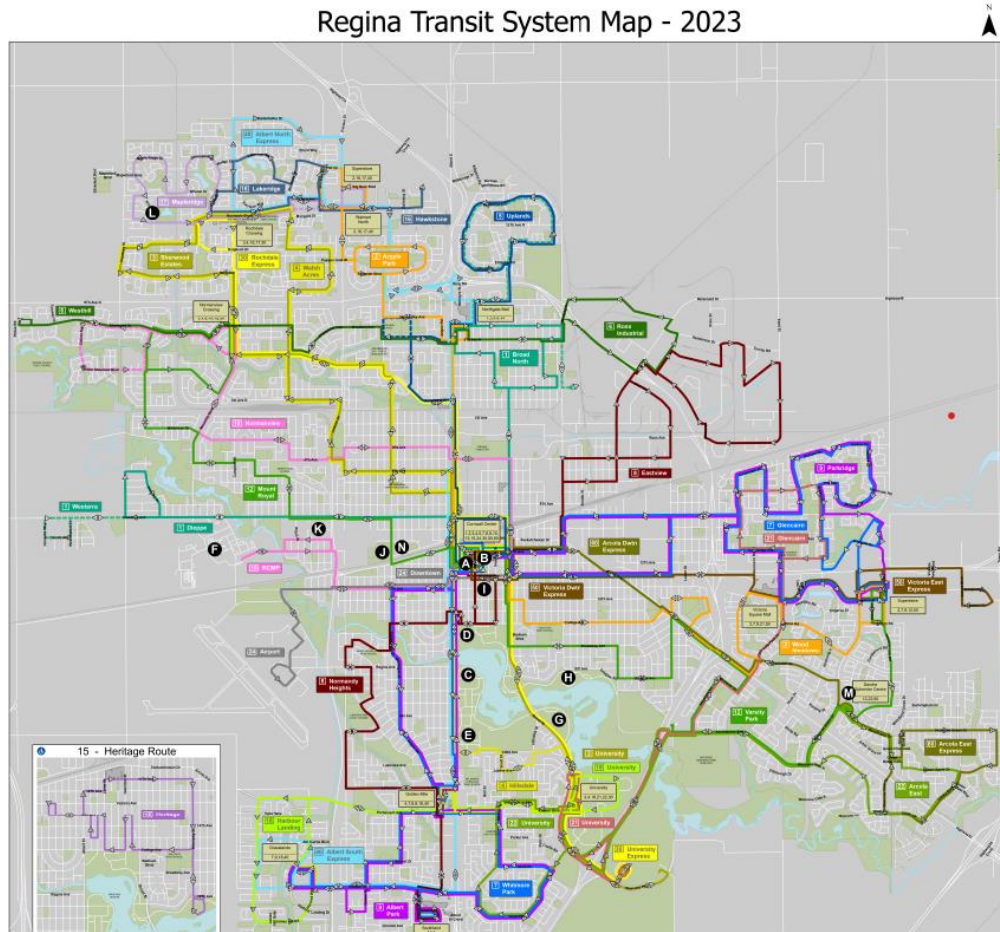


Figure 2 - Regina Transit Map



Figure 3 - Urban Strategies proposal for the railyard

Works Cited

- City of Regina (2022). “Historical Neighbourhood Profile Data 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 - 2011 Data - City of Regina Open Data.” *Historical Neighbourhood Profile Data 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 - 2011 Data - City of Regina Open Data*.
open.regina.ca/dataset/historical-neighbourhood-profile-data-2001-2006-2011-2016/resource/0ad706d0-5ced-4e6e-97d8-1b12108147db
- City of Regina (2023) “Census Dataset 2021 (Updated) Neighbourhood Profiles”
<https://open.regina.ca/dataset/census-dataset-2021-updated-neighborhood-profiles/resource/0a240b8f-8ba8-4bfb-8b8a-61bbeda5c7e3>
- McNulty, L. (2005) *The Youth Friendly City*, March.
www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/local-governments/planning-land-use/wuf_the_youth_friendly_city.pdf
- Canadian Urban Institute., & International Downtown Association. (2013). *Value of Investing in Canadian Downtowns [Volume II]*. Canadian Urban Institute. <https://canadacommons-ca.libproxy.uregina.ca/artifacts/1227119/the-value-of-investing-in-canadian-downtowns/1780190/view/>
- Leong, M., D. Huang, H. Moore, K. Chapple, L. Schmahmann, J. Wang, N. Allavarpu (2023) Can we save the downtown? Examining pandemic recovery trajectories across 62 North American cities, Volume 143, *ScienceDirect*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104588>
- Mantyka, W. (23 Nov, 2024) “City of Regina Plans to Turn Former CP Rail Yard from Gritty to Pretty.” CTV News. www.ctvnews.ca/regina/article/city-of-regina-plans-to-turn-former-cp-rail-yard-from-gritty-to-pretty/
- Reynoldson, T. (14 Jul, 2023) “Downtown Businesses Struggle with Increase in Crime | Regina Leader Post.” *Regina Leader-Post*.
leaderpost.com/news/local-news/downtown-businesses-struggle-with-increase-in-crime
- Rypkema, D. D. (2003). The Importance of Downtown in the 21st Century. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 69(1), 9–15.
<https://doi-org.libproxy.uregina.ca/10.1080/01944360308976290>
- Sprague, N. L., Bancalari, P., Karim, W., & Siddiq, S. (2022). Growing up green: a systematic review of the influence of greenspace on youth development and health outcomes. *Journal of*

Exposure Science & Environmental Epidemiology, 32(5), 660-681.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41370-022-00445-6>

Wilson, R. et al. (2014) *Thinking about Tomorrow's Space Today: Youth Recreational Programming in the Former City of York*. Toronto, Ontario: For Youth Initiative. https://casls-regina.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CASLS_REGINA/1g3evkr/alma9923804156103476

Planning Project: Creating a Youth Friendly Downtown

Petra Squirra

Introduction

Downtown Regina lacks appeal for many people, especially the youth of the city. Many feel that Downtown is unsafe and that there is nothing to do, resulting in many people and businesses choosing to take their money and time elsewhere. The City of Regina's Downtown has a very small percentage of its population composed of youth, since the average age is 62.5 and only 30 out of 430 people living Downtown are youth (City of Regina, 2023). Downtown has also seen a steep decline in its population (-36.30%) over the past 5 years according to the 2021 census (City of Regina, 2023). With the declining population and small number of youth in Downtown the question of "What does a youth friendly downtown look like?" may be difficult to answer directly, but can be assessed through identifying problems and their possible solutions. In order to improve Downtown Regina it is important to identify what its major flaws are and then apply solutions that have worked elsewhere to improve the neighborhood. Recommended steps for improving Downtown are further discussed in this paper focusing on improving public transit use, public transit safety and unique Downtown features that would encourage the use of public transit. This plan includes suggestions firstly to improve safety in Downtown and public transportation, followed by improving the aesthetics of Downtown to make it more attractive for youth to stay there and to plan winter and summer recreational activities.

Safety Concerns in Downtown

When considering who public spaces in Downtown Regina are designed for, it is mostly made for people who work there 9 to 5 and who commute by car, resulting in Downtown not being attractive to youth (Weider, 2022). Through designing this space mostly for people who drive cars it makes it difficult for people who do not have a car or license to access these spaces.

Youths can often not explore on their own and are thus highly dependent on adults for transportation (Gerke & Sanyal, 2014). Many might say that youth should utilize public transport yet many Regina residents who utilize the bus route feel very unsafe taking the bus Downtown. It is not only the people who use public transport that feel unsafe but the bus drivers also feel unsafe. According to a 2025 news article, there has been a 255% increase in either physical or verbal violence on transit since 2019, with incidents being reported of a bus driver being attacked by youths Downtown (Tram, 2025). In addition to unsafe public transit, Downtown is a hotspot for crime according to the Regina Crime map seen in Figure 1.

Improving Safety and Transportation in Downtown Regina

Unsafe public transit is not only a problem in Regina but all across the world. Studies conducted in the UK stated that an extra 10.5% of rail trips would occur if people felt safe in public transport and many car drivers in Los Angeles stated that they would use public transport if it was safe and clean as mentioned by Currie & Delbosc (2013). Currie & Delbosc (2013) stated that “people who experienced or observed crime on public transport were more likely to rate their personal safety as poor or very poor” (p. 3). This has resulted in “fears of darkness, disorderly spaces, and strangers” (Currie & Delbosc, 2013, p. 3) all as physiological triggers. Studies have been conducted in Australia on passengers 18-25 and according to them to improve the feeling of safety in public transport things like security guards, emergency/ panic buttons, better lighting and banning intoxicated passengers can help (Mahmoud & Currie, 2010). These things can make young people feel safer on transport usually because youth travel in the evenings and in locations where personal safety can be at risk (Mahmoud & Currie, 2010). For Regina specifically, introducing heated bus stops with good lighting will help people travel in the

winter, along with having bus stops cleaned often to encourage people to use them. Combining community involvement in safety and safety measures like better lighting and banning intoxicated passengers can improve the safety of Downtown and the way to travel there. If these safety changes cause a steep increase in the use of public transit, Regina Transit may want to increase the number of buses going Downtown along with their frequency.

Since better lighting is associated with people feeling safer on transit, installing dynamic lighting on certain parts of Downtown could be beneficial. A study done by Kang *et al.* (2025) indicated that good lighting can help create a good sense of perceived safety as well as help individuals better navigate potential threats. Dynamic lighting (Figure 2) has been used in many cities as a way to enhance safety because it reduces the chances of unwanted behavior and criminal activities (Studiotech UK Ltd, 2025). Well-lit spaces also encourage people to explore an area and form positive connections to a place, and lighting can also create an inviting environment and highlight architectural features (Studiotech UK Ltd, 2025). Dynamic lighting can also contribute to the authenticity of a place (Studiotech UK Ltd, 2025), which is something that Downtown Regina really lacks. Dynamic lighting can also incorporate energy efficient technologies which can help reduce costs for cities (Studiotech UK Ltd 2025).

Comparing Downtown Regina to Langley Park USA

Downtown is a location of frequent acts of crime and this contributes to many people avoiding the area. In order to improve safety for residents in the area effective steps taken by other cities can be looked at and possibly applied to Regina to improve safety. A study conducted in Langley Park in Maryland USA was a 4 year study which focused on collaborative crime reduction where they tested different activities to see how effective they were at reducing crime

and increasing neighborhood safety (Lung-Amam *et al.* 2024). The program put emphasis on preventing gangs, alcohol awareness, accessible community resources, youth sports, and community walks. These activities helped promote safety. The main goals of the study were to increase social cohesion, improve community police relations and neighborhood revitalization in areas that were considered crime hotspots (Lung-Amam *et al.* 2024). Downtown Regina has many similar struggles to the ones addressed by Lung-Amam *et al.* (2024) and thus many of the techniques used to attempt community improvement can be applied to Downtown Regina in an attempt to increase community safety with less policing while also contributing to an improved sense of community.

Community Walks

Community walks (Figure 3) were implemented by Lung-Amam *et al.* (2024) in order for residents of all ages from children to adults to point out safety concerns like crime hot spots and areas where gang activity is a concern. These community walks offered opportunities for residents and police to build trust and share information on what the community needed. Through community walks they learnt about challenges that people faced through the built environment resulting in community cleanups, creating “a community garden, graffiti removal, murals, and new landscaping and lighting” (Lung-Amam *et al.* 2024, p. 1695). Community walks could be implemented in Downtown to learn directly from residents in the area. Community walks could also incorporate Regina youth that live in other parts of Regina in order for them to point out problems and issues they would like addressed. This would also give Regina Police the opportunity to see which parts of Downtown are particularly a concern to people.

Investing in Community

The paper by Lung-Amam *et al.* (2024) also indicated their involvement of youth in improving the neighborhood. Youth in the area stated that they felt unsafe, lacked activities and were often joining gangs (Lung-Amam *et al.* 2024), which is very similar to some of the concerns for Downtown Regina. Lung-Amam *et al.* (2024) also stated that youth involvement in community building activities were shown to have positive safety impacts on the community. They created a youth soccer league which kept youth active and replaced a crime hotspot and had positive community building impacts. Youth stated that they had an activity to look forward to, and the league was very popular, since they doubled their expected enrolment. (Lung-Amam *et al.* 2024).

Downtown Regina lacks recreational spaces for youth. Recreational space offers youth a budget friendly activity that does not include shopping. This is an important consideration for Downtown since all the current activities for youth involve spending money. These spaces can allow for youth from a range of economic backgrounds to connect to the community and have an affordable activity to do Downtown. The use of these recreational spaces can be utilized by youth (ages 15 to 30) through rec teams or general public use.

Lung-Amam *et al.* (2024) also helped strengthen a community based organization by investing police funds into organizations that helped youths find jobs, prepare for college, engage in health and fitness programs, and establish gang prevention strategies, which participants in the study found helpful. Due to the almost immediate benefits the organization brought to the community it shows the important role of a space like that in a community (Lung-Amam *et al.* 2024). Redirecting funds from policing could be used to help better fund organizations like Regina Street Team who help advance community wellbeing through assisting people

experiencing mental health distress or needing food, water and shelter (Regina Downtown Business Improvement District, 2020) or the Street Culture Project which offers a safe inclusive environment for youth in Regina by helping them develop skills to overcome challenges (Street Culture Project, 2025).

Though the study conducted by Lung-Amam *et al.* (2024) proved that not all their programs worked out as anticipated, they still brought positive changes in the neighborhood compared to doing nothing. The study highlights the importance of neighborhood improvement which also improved connections among residents and community pride, along with a sense of place and community “willingness to work together in the future” (Lung-Amam *et al.* 2024, p. 1702). Lung-Amam *et al.* (2024) also stated that this proved that investing a small portion of police funding to community driven efforts could be a cost effective way of improving public safety and increasing a sense of place and community. In 2024 the City of Regina spent \$115.3 million on policing while many other amenities like community investment only received \$22.8 million (City of Regina, 2025); through diverting some of the police funding to improving community relations and investing in community organizations Downtown could be safer and more attractive to youth.

Including Youth in Planning

A large problem often encountered in city planning is that the people doing the planning often do not live in or use the areas that they are making decisions about. Youth are often affected by this because their needs are not being met since they are often not involved in planning. It has been found that youth relate to places differently than older people and that their relationship to a place changes and grows as they change and grow. Youth form attachments to

places from a young age and carry these connections into adulthood (Gerke & Sanyal, 2014).

Allowing youth to assist in city planning, especially in Downtown, could help people form a positive connection to place. With this being said, if the youth of Regina grow up with the notion that Downtown is not for them there is often no reason for them to interact with it later in life.

Finding a reason for youth to stay Downtown is important.

To incorporate the preferences of youth into the planning process, youth should not only be a part of the planning process but also part of the construction of the new and improved Downtown. This would include encouraging youth to help paint, and build in order to help establish community pride (Derr *et al.* 2016). Some ways in which youth can be included in city planning in Regina include Community Walks, which could be done an established amount of times each year. Additionally, asking youth in schools across the city to state their favorite and least favorite parts of Downtown, as done in a study by Saridar Masri (2018) where school children were asked to mention their favorite and least favorite parts of their city, would identify problematic areas but also identify what youth like. This method of collecting information can be used across the city of Regina in areas where people between the ages of 15 and 30 are concentrated, like at high schools, University of Regina, and Sask Polytechnic.

Youth Staying in Regina After Completing Their Education

Through improving Downtown Regina, youth may be encouraged to stay in the city after completing their education, whether it be high school or post-secondary. Toronto was ranked one of the number 1 cities for youth to work and live according to a report by Youthful cities and RBC in 2023. McNiel (2023) identified 5 reasons why young people move to and stay in Toronto; these reasons include good access to education, diverse communities, good public

transportation, and a resilient economy and entrepreneurial spirit (McNeil, 2023). These are all qualities that can be found in Downtown Regina that can be tapped into in order to keep young adults in the city after graduation. Through improving safety in Downtown and transit while also investing in organizations that help in forming a sense of community in Downtown for youth, the area could be more attractive to youth as a long term place to stay.

A study conducted in Lethbridge stated that students often leave the city due to lack of public safety, few entry level jobs, transportation accessibility and feeling disconnected from the community (Keenan, 2024). More early career opportunities are required, programs to help get work experience locally which means people are more likely to stay (Keenan, 2024). These are all reasons why young adults chose to leave Lethbridge after graduation and it is no doubt similar in Regina. Through improving public transport safety, general community safety and investing for opportunities to form a strong sense of community and belonging in Downtown Regina youth may be encouraged to stay in the city after completing their education.

With so few youth living Downtown, looking at housing preferences may aid in increasing a younger population inhabiting the area. Housing types that would be attractive to youth include high density smaller household sizes in high density neighborhoods. This is due to many young adults living with roommates due to enduring economic hardship making it difficult to afford housing. It has also been found that young adults are more environmentally conscious and thus chose to live in an area where public transit is easily accessible (Moos *et al.* 2019). It is repeatedly supported that youth are attracted to spaces with good public transit for multiple reasons and good public transit is often a key to successfully keeping youth happily in an area.

Spaces and Activities That are Lacking

Downtown Regina is home to a large amount of underutilized land as seen in Figure 4. Many of these spaces could be put to better use in order to make Downtown more attractive to the youth of the city. Current spaces for youth include the Cornwall Centre, Casino, Globe Theatre and some restaurants, yet these are not attractive enough at the moment to encourage youth to stay Downtown, and many of these activities are 19+. Activities that are lacking are activities that do not include having to be 19+ or having to spend a lot of money like going shopping or to bars. As previously mentioned, Downtown can benefit from recreational sports areas that are operating in both the summer and winter. Indicated in Figure 5 are some locations and possible public amenities that youth could benefit from. These can include a dog park, a multifunctional rink/ basketball court that could be used for ice skating in the winter and used as a basketball/tennis court in the summer. Placing a dog park in Downtown Regina may also aid in building a sense of community and encouraging youth to go Downtown. A study done by Koohsari *et al.* (2021) stated that there was a correlation between specifically young adult dog owners and having high social capital scores. Social capital scores indicate the benefits available to people through social connection (Koohsari *et al.* 2021).

In addition to the connection to community that recreational sports played in the study conducted by Lung-Amam *et al.* (2024), having spaces to play recreational sports is very important for people of all ages and especially youth. Recreation and leisure play an important part in the wellbeing of youth because it includes play, engagement with arts and culture, social interaction and physical activity. Recreational activities can help aid social connectedness which decreases social isolation and improves wellbeing (Our Kids Network, 2023).

Conclusion

Through using underutilized land in Downtown Regina more youth friendly spaces like recreational facilities can be established. Additionally, through investing in collaborative crime reduction initiatives and existing community programs that focus on safety and youth wellbeing, Downtown Regina can become an attractive spot for youth to live in and explore. Downtown Regina has a lot of potential to be a great spot for youth to live in. Through incorporating youth in planning and creating youth friendly spaces, Downtown can be a safe and attractive part of Regina for present and future youth of the city.

Appendix

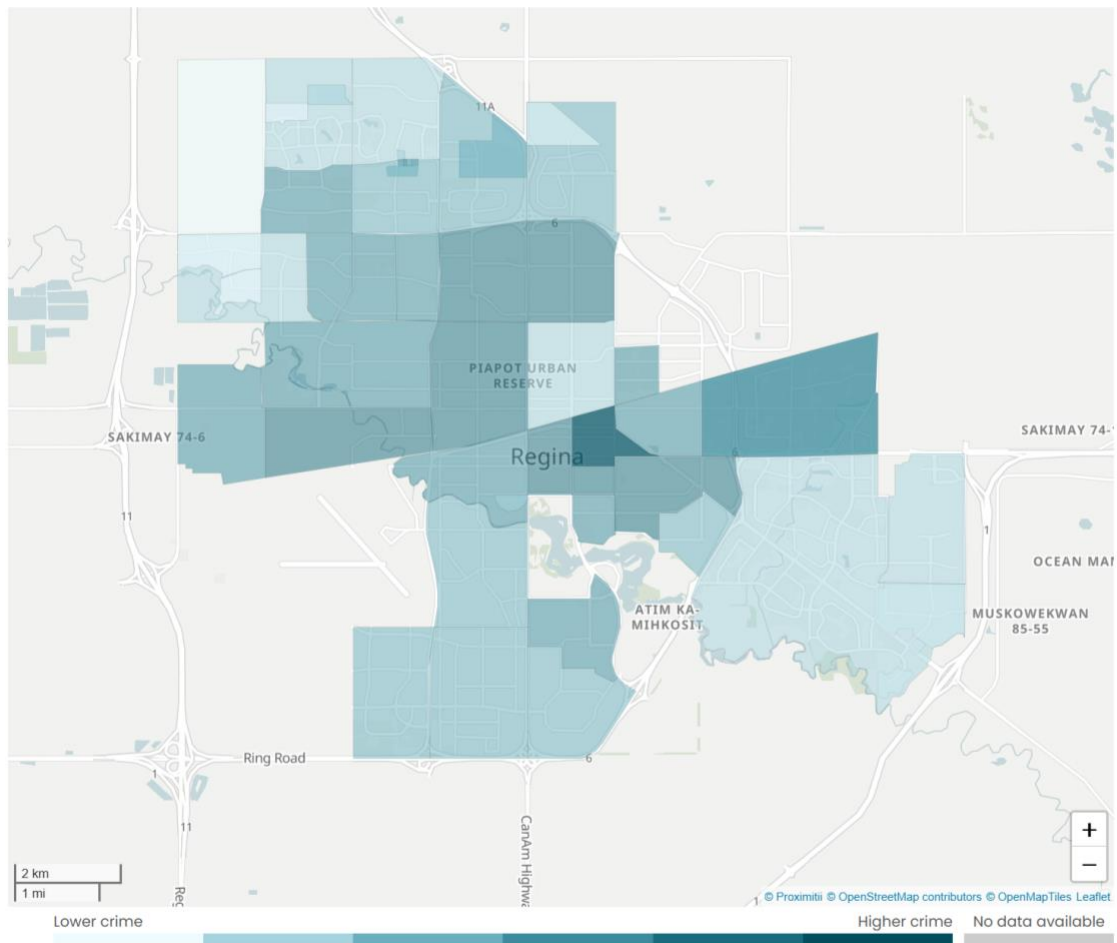


Figure 1: Downtown Regina Crime Map. Image Source: areavibes (2025).



Figure 2: Dynamic lighting can help improve safety in Downtown. Image Source: Studiotech UK Ltd (2025).



Figure 3: Community walks can be a good opportunity for youth to point out concerns in Downtown. Image Source: Lung-Amam *et al.* (2024).

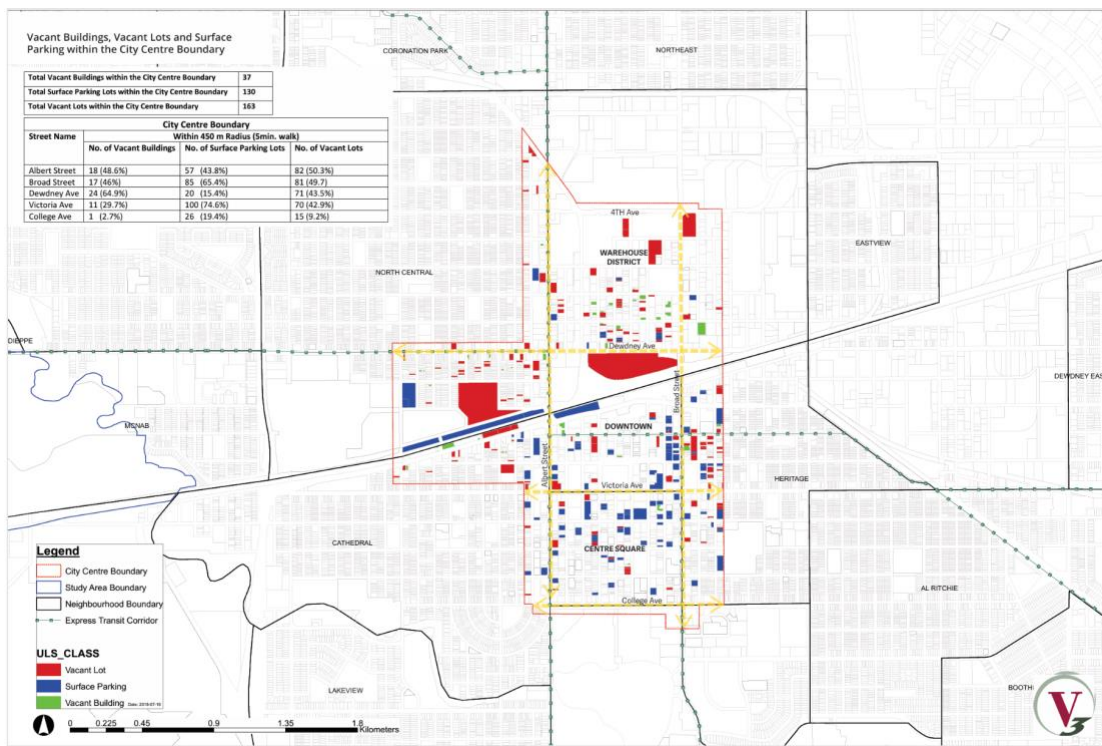


Figure 4: Underutilized land in Downtown can be converted into youth friendly spaces like recreational facilities and dog parks. Image source: City of Regina (2020).

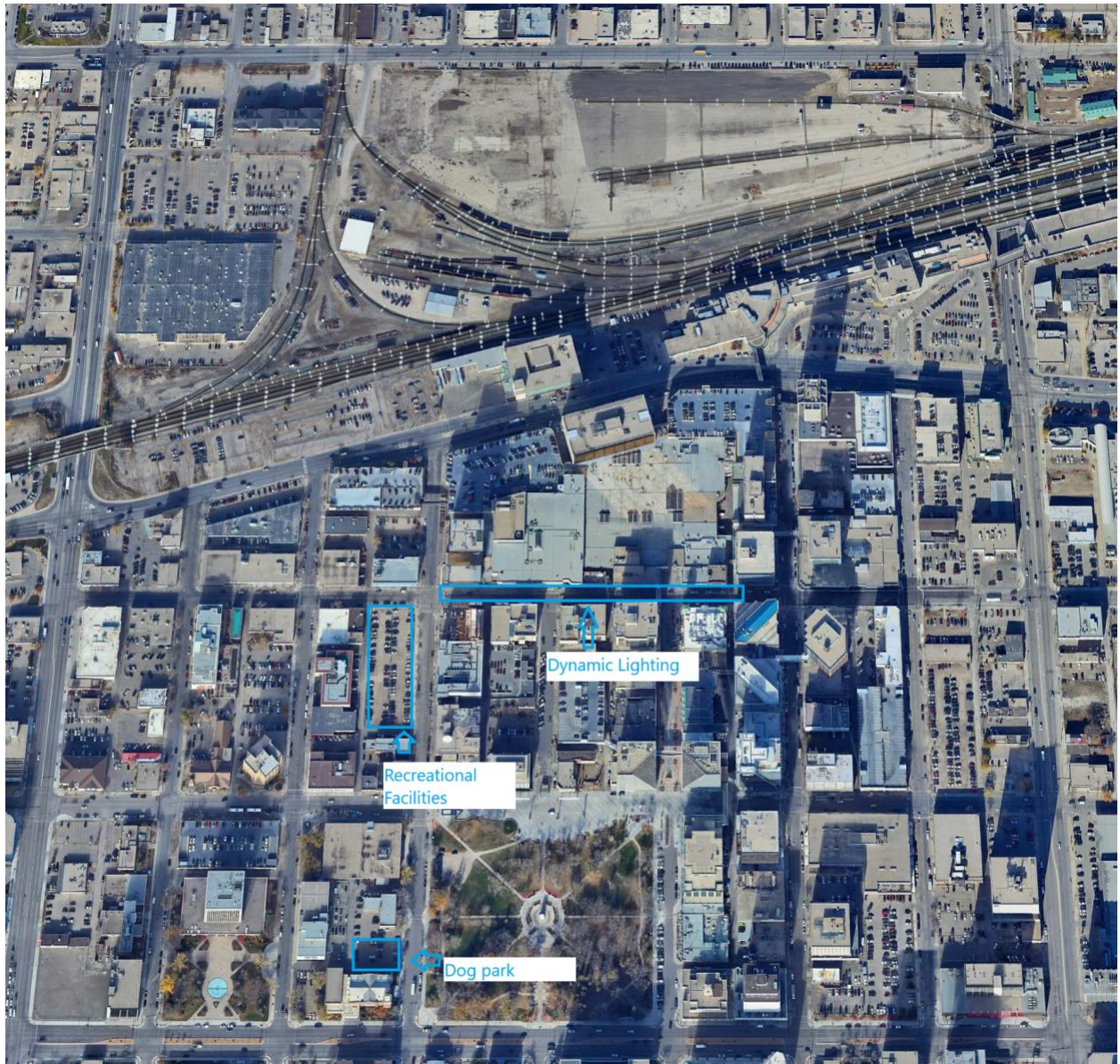


Figure 5: Downtown Regina with proposed updates on areas that have been considered underutilized land by the city. Image Source: Google Earth (2025) modified by author.

Bibliography

- areavibes. (2025). *Regina SK Crime Rates*. <https://www.areavibes.com/regina-sk/crime/>
- City of Regina, 2020. *Vacant Buildings and Parking Lots*. <https://open.regina.ca/dataset/regina-underutilized-land-inventory-map/resource/91e360b8-1f70-45c1-a629-6658052f6beb>
- City of Regina. (2023). *Downtown*. <https://www.regina.ca/about-regina/maps/neighbourhood-profiles/>
- City of Regina. (2025). *2024 Budget Highlights*. <https://www.regina.ca/city-government/budget-finance/budget-highlights/>
- Currie, G., Delbosc, A., & Mahmoud, S. (2013). Factors Influencing Young Peoples' Perceptions of Personal Safety on Public Transport. *Journal of Public Transportation*, 16 (1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.5038/2375-0901.16.1.1>
- Derr, V., Ruppi, H., & Wagner, D. (2016). Honoring Voices, Inspiring Futures: Young People's Engagement in Open Space Planning. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 26 (2), 128–144. <https://doi.org/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.26.2.0128>
- Gerke, G., & Sanyal, N. (2014). Engaging Youth in the Planning Process: Walking Reflections. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 24(3), 201–212. <https://doi.org/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.24.3.0201>
- Kang, H., Sharston, R., Shen, J., & Hayes, R. (2025). When a Stranger Approaches at Night: The Impact of Adaptive Street Lighting on Safety Perception. *Leukos*, 21(2), 141–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15502724.2024.2396340>
- Keenan, Q. (October 25th, 2024). City of Lethbridge and local post-secondaries discuss to keep graduates in the city. *CTV News*. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/calgary/article/city-of-lethbridge-and-local-post-secondaries-discuss-how-to-keep-graduates-in-the-city/>
- Kinman, L.(2023).Unleashing a New Dog Park Strategy in Saanich. Park People. <https://ccpr.parkpeople.ca/2023/stories/unleashing-a-new-dog-park-strategy-in-saanich>
- Koohsari, M. J., Yasunaga, A., Shibata, A., Ishii, K., Miyawaki, R., Araki, K., Nakaya, T., Hanibuchi, T., McCormack, G. R., & Oka, K. (2021). Dog ownership, dog walking, and social capital. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00804-y>
- Lung-Amam, W., Alvarez, N., & Green, R. (2024). We make us safe: Alternatives to policing in a Latin immigrant inner-ring suburb. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, (ahead-of-print), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2022.2130072>

Mahmoud, S., & Currie, G. (2010). The relative priority of personal safety concerns for young people on public transport.

McNeil, J. (June 2nd 2023). 5 Reasons Why Young People Stay in the Toronto Region. *Toronto Global*. <https://torontoglobal.ca/media-center/5-reasons-why-young-people-stay-in-the-toronto-region/>

Moos, M., Fillion, P., Quick, M., & Walter-Joseph, R. (2019). Youthification across the metropolitan system: Intra-urban residential geographies of young adults in North American metropolitan areas. *Cities*, 93, 224–237. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.05.017>

Our Kids Network (2023). Youth Wellbeing and Access to Recreation: Breaking Down Barriers, Fostering Social Connectedness, so all Youth can Thrive. *2021 Halton Youth Impact Survey*. <https://ourkidsnetwork.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/05-Youth-Wellbeing-FINAL.pdf>

Regina Downtown Business Improvement District, (2020). *Regina Street Team*. <https://reginadowntown.ca/reginastreetteam/>

Saridar Masri, S. (2018). Integrating youth in city planning: Developing a participatory tool toward a child-friendly vision of Eastern Wastani – Saida. *Alexandria Engineering Journal*, 57(2), 897–909. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aej.2017.01.023>

Street Culture Project (2025). *Helping Youth Get What They Need to Survive and Thrive Creating Safe Spaces for Youth*. <https://streetcultureproject.ca>

Studiotech UK Ltd. (2025) *Studiotech Insights- 5 Ways Dynamic Lighting Can Improve a Public Realm Space*. <https://studiotech.co.uk/studiotech-insights-5-ways-dynamic-lighting-can-improve-a-public-realm-space/>

Tram, J. (February 10, 2025) Regina bus drivers call for action amid rising violence on transit. *CBC News Regina*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/regina-bus-drive-rising-violence-transit-1.7454110>