Age-Friendly
Portage la Prairie

Department of City Planning, University of Manitoba
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Cover images (Figures 1-4): Portage la Prairie

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

As the population of Portage la Prairie increases, so does the number of older adults aged 65 and over. Portage's population in the 2011 National Census was 12,996, with older adults making up 17% of the population. This is comparable with the Province of Manitoba, where older adults make up approximately 14% of the population. The number of older adults in Portage is expected to increase dramatically within the next twenty years as the baby boomer population continues to age. This means that Portage, and other communities, should be planned and designed to meet the needs of an ageing population.

Many older adults want the opportunity to age in place in a community that provides healthy and happy lifestyles, as well as comfort and inclusivity. As many older adults have already chosen Portage as their home, there are opportunities to observe age-friendliness and identify improvements that can be made. Design and planning strategies have been suggested that can provide the potential to make Portage la Prairie a better community for an ageing population.

Who we are

In the Fall 2014 academic term, two groups of students in the Master of City Planning program at the University of Manitoba started on a project to assess age-friendless in communities located in Manitoba. Evan Allan, Deepa Chandran, Holly Ervick-Knote, Ashley Kostyniuk and Derek Yau were tasked with examining Portage la Prairie from an age-friendly perspective. Based on observations and community feedback the group identified suggestions to assist Portage with its goal of becoming a more age-friendly and complete community.

Guiding Documents

Two documents provided a basis for the observations and analysis of age-friendliness in Portage la Prairie. These documents included the *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide* (figure 1) published by World Health Organization in 2007, and the A*ge-Friendly Cities Project: Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Canada* (figure 2) published by Centre on Ageing, also in 2007. A brief description of both the documents is given below.
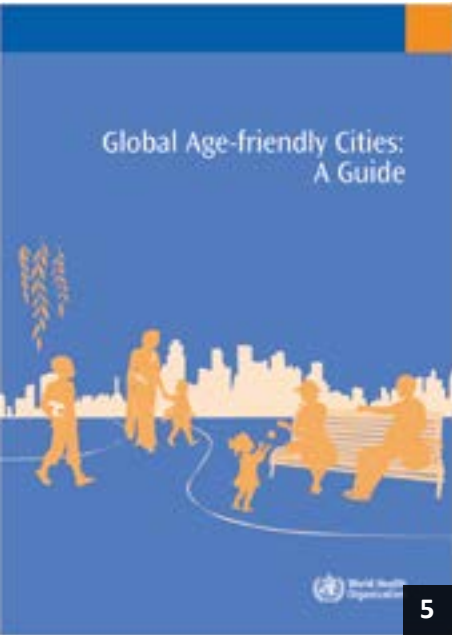
On a global scale, as cities grow, so does their share of residents over the age of 65. The World Health Organization's *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide* (2007) was published to help engage global cities to become more age-friendly. The document is organized into eight specific domains of age-friendliness: buildings and open spaces, transportation, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, community support, and health services. The report concluded that there is an urgent need to develop planning policies and built environments that enable the ageing population to live an active and complete life.

Figure 5: World Health Organization's (2007)

As part of the World Health Organization study on age-friendly cities, research was conducted in 33 cities across the world, with Portage la Prairie serving as one of the research sites. As part of the Age-friendly Cities Project, the University of Manitoba's Centre on Aging focused on Portage for an expanded scope of research. The report offers insights into the condition of age-friendliness Portage and provides recommendations for the future.

Figure 6: Centre on Aging (2007)

Age-Friendly Cities

An age-friendly community is not only good for seniors, but also for the city as a whole. The World Health Organization's *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide* (2007) concludes that there is a need for cities to become age-friendly as the proportion of the global population above 65 years of age continues to rise. Portage la Prairie, which is recognized as an age-friendly community by the World Health Organization, is not an exception to this trend.

Figure 7: Age-Friendly Flower

Age-friendly planning in Portage should involve not only improvements to public infrastructure, buildings, and open space, but also improvements to social programming and housing. Such improvements can make communities more inclusive, accessible, and equitable.

For the purpose of this report, the World Health Organization's eight overlapping domains of age-friendliness (Figure 7) were condensed into four main domains which have been identified to help guide the observations and analysis of Portage la Prairie. They include:

- Social Participation
- Building and Open Spaces
- Transportation
- Housing

"…an age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities."

- Global Age Friendly Cities: A Guide (2007, p.1)

Process

Town Documentation
To build our knowledge about Portage, we made several visits to Portage. During these visits we made direct observations, were given a tour of the city, and attended meetings with HTFC Planning and Design and City representatives to hear about Saskatchewan Avenue redevelopment initiatives. Historical and statistical information was also collected during this process.

Community Presentation
We presented our initial findings, along with some focus areas that we identified as opportunities for improvement on October 28 at Herman Prior Centre. This event was attended by City representatives and community members.

Precedent Research
Based on the feedback received from the Community Presentation, we looked more closely at these focus areas, and studied ideas (or "precedents") for what other cities and towns have done to address similar issues.

Community Consultation
We then presented some of these precedents to community members on November 13 during our Community Consultation. We got feedback on what ideas people were interested in as well as what they were concerned about.

Figure 8: Participatory mapping at Community Consultation, November 13, 2014

Final Presentation
From there, we developed six suggestions for how Portage can become more age-friendly. We presented these in our Final Presentation on December 9. Informal discussions following the presentation enabled an additional round of feedback.

Final Report
This report was compiled following our Final Presentation and presents ideas for Portage la Prairie can become a better place for people to live as they grow older. This report presents the findings from this entire research process.

Figure 9: Final Presentation, December 9, 2014

Vision Statement

Portage la Prairie is a community that values, respects, and supports older adults by encouraging active ageing, ensuring inclusivity, and promoting equity.

Project Goals

1 Create conditions which enable older adults to age in place or age in community

2 Ensure inclusivity and accessibility by providing opportunities for people of all ages and abilities

3 Encourage active ageing by optimizing age-friendly options for both health and social participation.

About Portage la Prairie

History

Figure 10: Saskatchewan Ave., 1906

Figure 11: Portage la Prairie, 1906

Portage la Prairie began as a trading post serving as a crossroads for a booming fur trade and increased expansion to Canada's west. In 1881, the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed and passed directly through the town. Portage became one of the only places in Canada through which both national main lines passed (Figure 10). The rail line supported growth in the area and, in 1907, Portage was officially incorporated as a city. The city continued to grow in the 20th century, becoming a major hub for agriculture and food processing (Figure 11). Today, Portage is the fourth largest city in Manitoba.

Geographic Location


Figure 12: Portage, regional context

Portage la Prairie is located 87 km from Manitoba's largest city, Winnipeg, 126km from the second largest city, Brandon, and is intersected by the Trans-Canada Highway (Figure 12). The city is situated between the Assiniboine River to the south and Lake Manitoba to the north. One of the most distinct features of the city is Crescent Lake, an oxbow left behind by the meandering of the Assiniboine River.

Figure 13: Portage, local context

Surrounded by the Rural Municipality of Portage la Prairie, Portage serves as a major shopping, administrative, educational, recreational, and health centre for several towns in the vicinity (Figure 13). The towns of MacGregor (36 km), Gladstone (63 km), Delta Beach (25 km), Southport (7 km) and Elie (40 km) are all within a short drive.

Demographics and Age Structure

As of the 2011 National Census, Portage la Prairie's population was 12,996, with older adults (those in 65+ age cohorts) making up 17% of that population. Population pyramids from the 2001 and 2011 Census (Figure 14 and 15) show that the baby boomer population is approaching the age 65+ cohort, meaning that the older adult population in Portage will increase significantly over the next 10 to 20 years.
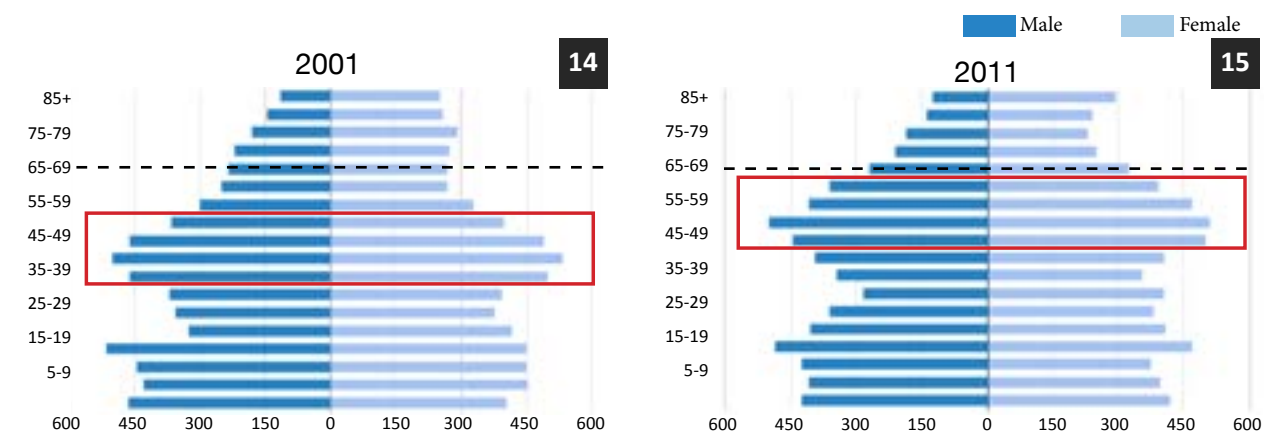
Figures 14 and 15: Population pyramids for Portage showing the baby boomer population in red, 2011 Census, Statistics Canada.

Spatial Distribution

Older adults live all over Portage, however a large concentration of seniors live on the easter edge of the city. There are seven seniors' specific buildings in this area that house roughly 30% of all older adults in Portage (Figure 16). As well, approximately 50% of all older adults in Portage live within 400 metres (about a five minute walk) of Saskatchewan Avenue (Figure 17).

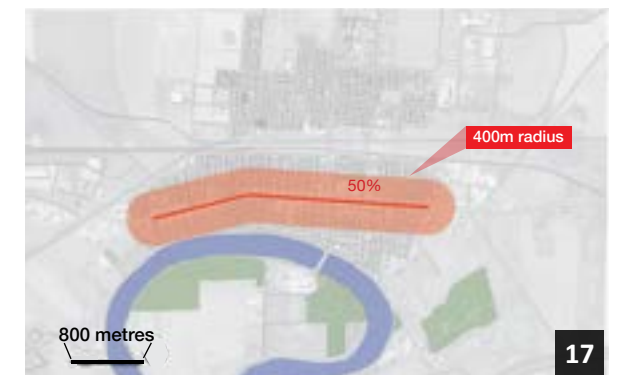Figure 16: The eastern seniors' housing concentration

Figure 17: Concentrations around Saskatchewan Ave.

Figure 18: Automobile-centric intersection, Portage la Prairie

Age-Friendly Portage la Prairie: Context

Portage la Prairie has many elements that contribute to it being a good place for people to grow older. It is a city, but has a small town character. Portage is making many advances in becoming an age-friendly city. The Herman Prior Centre and Glesby Centre offer a variety of activities, events, and opportunities for social engagement; the PCU Centre, Island Park and the Crescent Lake shared-use path provide opportunities for leisure; and Portage Service for Seniors offers programming and other services that help many older adults continue to live in Portage as they age. (For a comprehensive list of services and amenities in Portage, see Appendix III).

However, Portage still faces many challenges in becoming a place where people of all ages and abilities can live while maintaining a high quality of life. The lack of affordable and reliable transportation options, the current isolated location of seniors' housing, the poor quality or lack of sidewalks and active transportation infrastructure, and the current streetscape and lack of street life in downtown Portage are all challenges for the city. These areas present great opportunities and potential for improvement in Portage.

How This Section is Organized

This section evaluates Portage's age-friendliness in four areas: Social inclusion, transportation, buildings and open spaces, and housing. Under each topic, we highlight some of the key issues raised in the *Age-Friendly Cities Project: Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Canada* (2007) and in our community consultation. As well, we look at Portage today, highlighting existing strengths and challenges, and explore some ideas and precedents from other cities and towns that could help Portage become more age-friendly.

Social Inclusion

Portage la Prairie has a strong social support system. The wide range of community programs and support groups offered in the city provide opportunities for the creation of social ties between older adults. The Herman Prior Centre, Portage Service for Seniors, the Portage la Prairie Regional Library, the Age-Friendly Portage la Prairie, and Age-Friendly Manitoba are assets, offering a range of social and volunteer activities in the city.

"You know, people know one another, it's not a big city. And this is it, when you know one another you help one another."

- Seniors Focus Group,
Age-Friendly Cities Project:
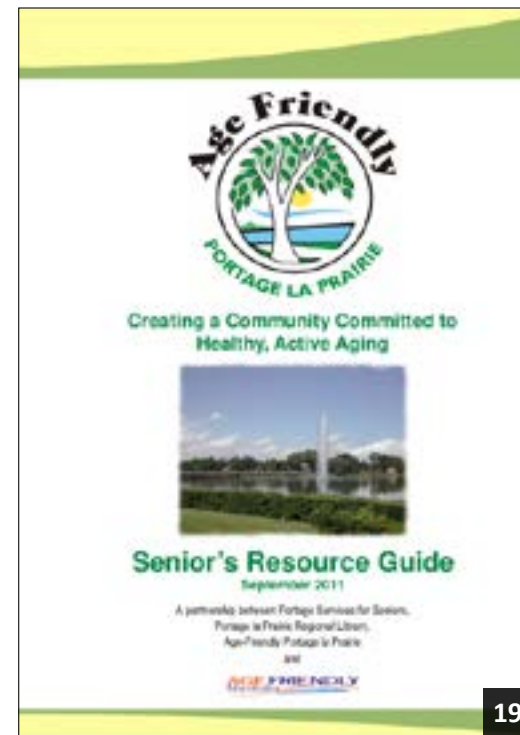Portage la Prairie Manitoba, Canada (2007)

Existing

Figure 19: Age-Friendly Portage la Praire: Senior's Resource Guide, April 2014

Age-Friendly Cities Project: Portage la Prairie, Winnipeg, Manitoba (2007)

- Despite many positive comments regarding the existing social infrastructure and wide variety of intergenerational and affordable activities, barriers to access to social participation, including the loss of one's social support system and the lack of transportation to and from existing activities were identified
- Existing provisions for social infrastructure should be maintained or strengthened

Community Consultation Feedback

- Participants had mostly positive things to say about the existing opportunities for social activities
- Attending events can be challenging for seniors who do not have access to a private automobile

Figure 20: Friday afternoon dance, Herman Prior Centre; Figure 21: PCU Centre, located in Island Park; Figure 22: The William Glesby Centre

Strengths

- There is an existing range of community services and activities available
- Strong efforts are made to provide options for intergenerational activities
- The small size of Portage is an asset for building strong social networks

Challenges

- There are barriers to accessing existing community services and activities due to the lack of public transportation options and walkability, and the fact that current seniors' housing (located on the eastern edge of town) is not within walking distance of community services and activities
- There is a lack of clear communication about social events and activities to older adults
- Current volunteers in Portage are not formally recognized for their efforts

Transportation

The various forms of transportation that exist in Portage la Prairie today play an integral role in how the city is shaped and how its citizens move around. The majority of residents currently get around by private automobile while some use the shuttle and Handi-van (Figure 23) to meet their transportation needs. Portage Service for Seniors has a volunteer driver program which is a popular transportation option for seniors. Approximately 400 seniors are registered under this service, with approximately 25 volunteer drivers.

Existing
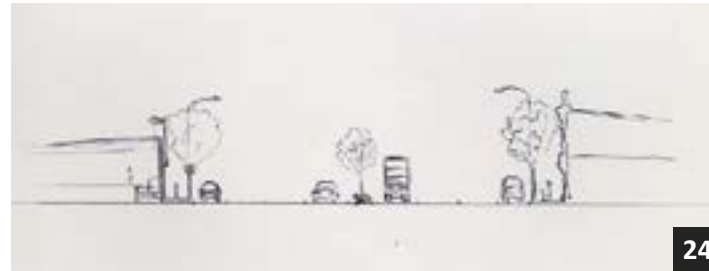

Figure 23: Portage la Prairie Handi-van

Figure 24: Streetscape of Saskatchewan Avenue

Figure 25: Railway tracks act as a barrier between the downtown and north end

Age-Friendly Cities Project: Portage la Prairie, Winnipeg, Manitoba (2007)

- Sidewalks and walking paths should be constructed for people with mobility issues
- Affordable evening transportation options should be considered, and the cost of Handivan service should be reduced during the evening
- Greater flexibility should be built into transportation services

Community Consultation Feedback

- There was a strong preference for high-quality pedestrian and cycling infrastructure throughout the city
- A core area active transportation loop was identified as priority infrastructure that would be used by older adults in all seasons
- There was a preference for a public bus transportation system over carpooling or carsharing
- There was interest in a taxi reimbursement program and an enhanced taxi-pass program

Strengths

- Portage's street grid system and the small overall size of the city lend well to cycling, walking, and public bus transportation
- The Crescent Lake shared use path is well-used by pedestrians and cyclists
- Wider arterial streets are able to support active transportation infrastructure (e.g. bike lanes) (Figures 26 and 28)

Challenges

- There is a lack of existing on-street active transportation infrastructure
- Many residential areas currently have no sidewalks (Figure 30)
- Where there are sidewalks, many are in poor condition and are difficult to navigate for older adults or people with mobility issues
- Existing north-south pedestrian and cycling connections between downtown and Island Park, and downtown and the north end, are inadequate (Figure 25)
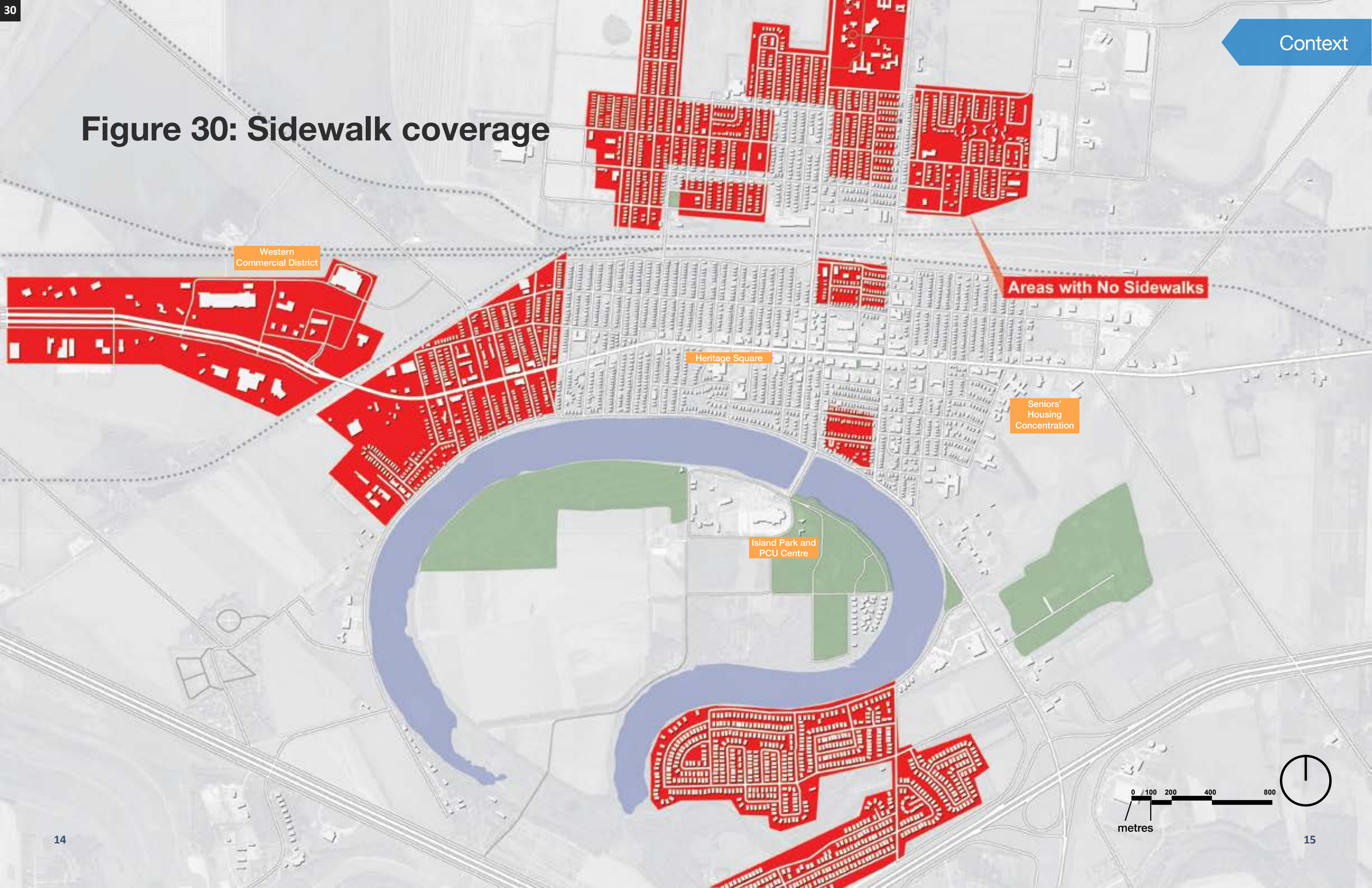
Ideas

Figure 26 and 27: Active transportation networks; Figure 28: York University Shuttle (transit option for smaller communities); Figure 29: Traffic calmed streets and bike boulevards discourage fast moving traffic

Figure 30: Sidewalk coverage

Western Commercial District

Areas with No Sidewalks

Heritage Square

Seniors' Housing Concentration

Island Park and PCU Centre

0 100 200   400   800

metres

Buildings and Open Spaces

The consideration of well-maintained and aesthetically pleasing buildings and open spaces is important for Portage la Prairie. Buildings and open spaces influence the accessibility and ease in which older adults attend social activities and experience their surroundings. Inaccessible built environments pose a challenge for older adults choosing to age-in-place or in-community. A connected, accessible, and overall high-quality built environment strengthens the social fabric of a city.

Existing

Figure 31: Seating on Crescent Lake mixed-use path

Figure 32: Residential street with no sidewalks

Figure 33: Saskatchewan Avenue pavers are not good for wheelchairs

Strengths

- Existing public and open spaces, like Island Park and Crescent Lake, are assets for leisure activities (Figure 31)
- The shared use path, currently in the early stages of implementation, would provide much needed pedestrian and cycling infrastructure

Challenges

- There is a lack of sidewalks in many areas of the city (Figure 30 and 32)
- Many existing sidewalks are in poor condition (Figure 33)
- Existing streetscaping and aesthetic appeal of Saskatchewan Avenue does not create an inviting pedestrian space
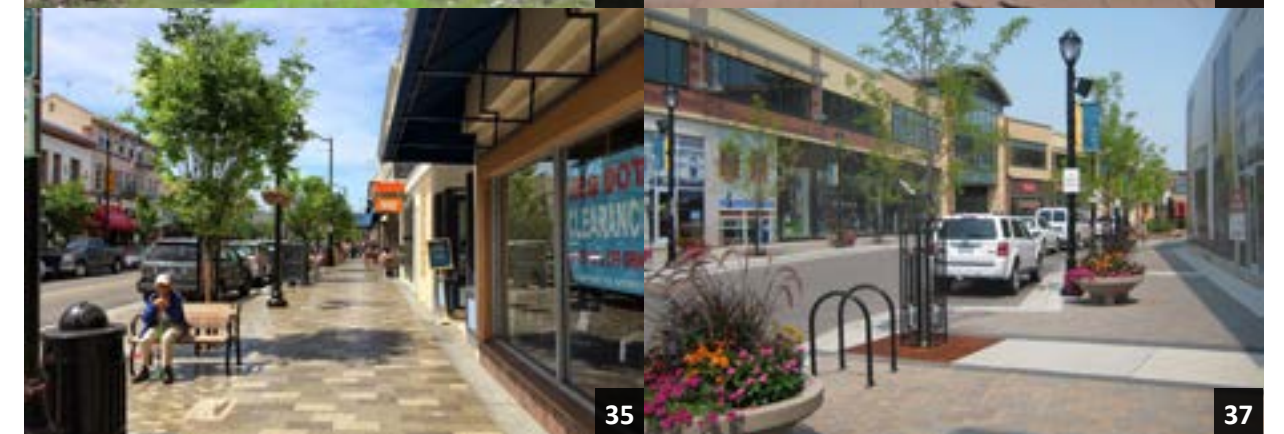
Ideas

Figure 34: Signage can improve wayfinding for pedestrians; Figure 35, 36 and 37: Streetscaping can help to create a more enjoyable experience for pedestrians

Age-Friendly Cities Project: Portage la Prairie, Winnipeg, Manitoba (2007)

- Sidewalks that are non-existent or in a state of disrepair make travel by foot difficult
- The conditions of existing sidewalks act as barrier to building accessibility for those with limited mobility
- Many find the new shared use path is difficult to access by foot or bicycle

Community Consultation Feedback

- Participants mapped where they walked in Portage and where they would like to see pedestrian routes developed
- They also discussed street level infrastructure and amenities that appealed to them and where they could be implemented in the city

Housing

The ageing population of Portage la Prairie represents a diverse and growing group with different preferences, service needs and lifestyle choices. Many people prefer to remain in their homes if possible. Providing transportation options and opportunities for home modification are key elements in creating the conditions for seniors to age-in-place. For those who relocate, it is important to provide options with varying levels of care.

Finally, the location of seniors' housing is crucial. Housing located near services and amenities can allow older adults who do not drive to retain more independence while promoting active ageing.

> "Where should seniors live? Everywhere."
>
> - Jane Jacobs

Age-Friendly Cities Project: Portage la Prairie, Winnipeg, Manitoba (2007)

- There are limited housing options to meet the diverse needs of seniors
- There is a need for more assisted living
- The location of new housing should be carefully considered

Community Consultation Feedback

- Participants were interested in:
    - cohousing
    - co-op housing
    - secondary suites
    - incorporating a mixture of ages, tenures and incomes
- Participants mapped where they would like to see seniors' housing developed

Existing

Figure 38: Senior specific housing

Figure 39: Existing residential development

Figure 40: Rotary Club

Strengths

- An inventory of housing options in Portage la Prairie has been developed and can be found in the *Portage la Prairie Senior's Resource Guide* (See Appendix)
- Seniors' housing options include:

    - Life Leases
    - Independent living
    - Personal care homes
    - Subsidized housing
    - Options with congregate meals and activities

Challenges

- There are currently no assisted living options in Portage la Prairie
- Most of the seniors' housing is located on the eastern periphery of the city, isolated from services amenities, gathering places, shopping, and leisure (Figure 47)
- There is a lack of affordable housing options for low-income seniors
- There are long wait lists (two to three years) for seniors' housing
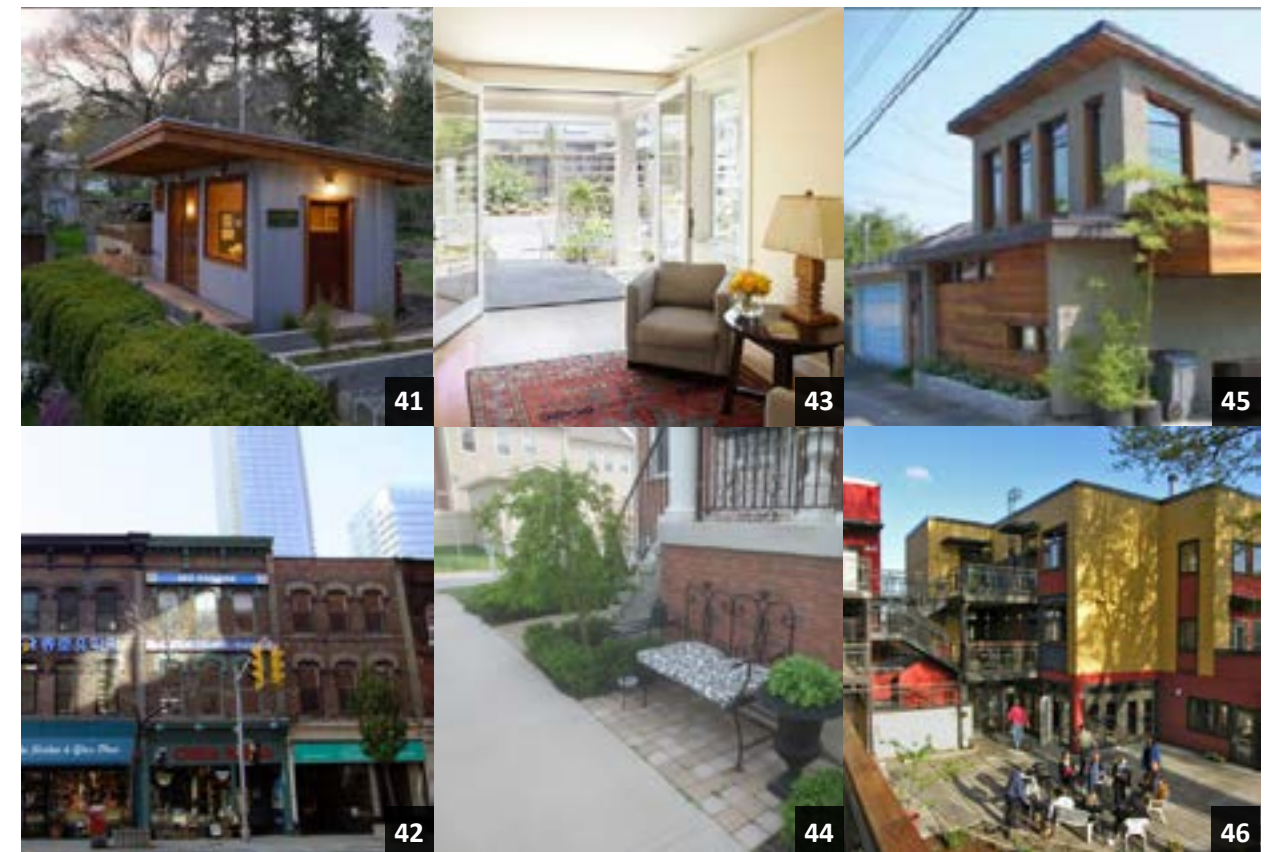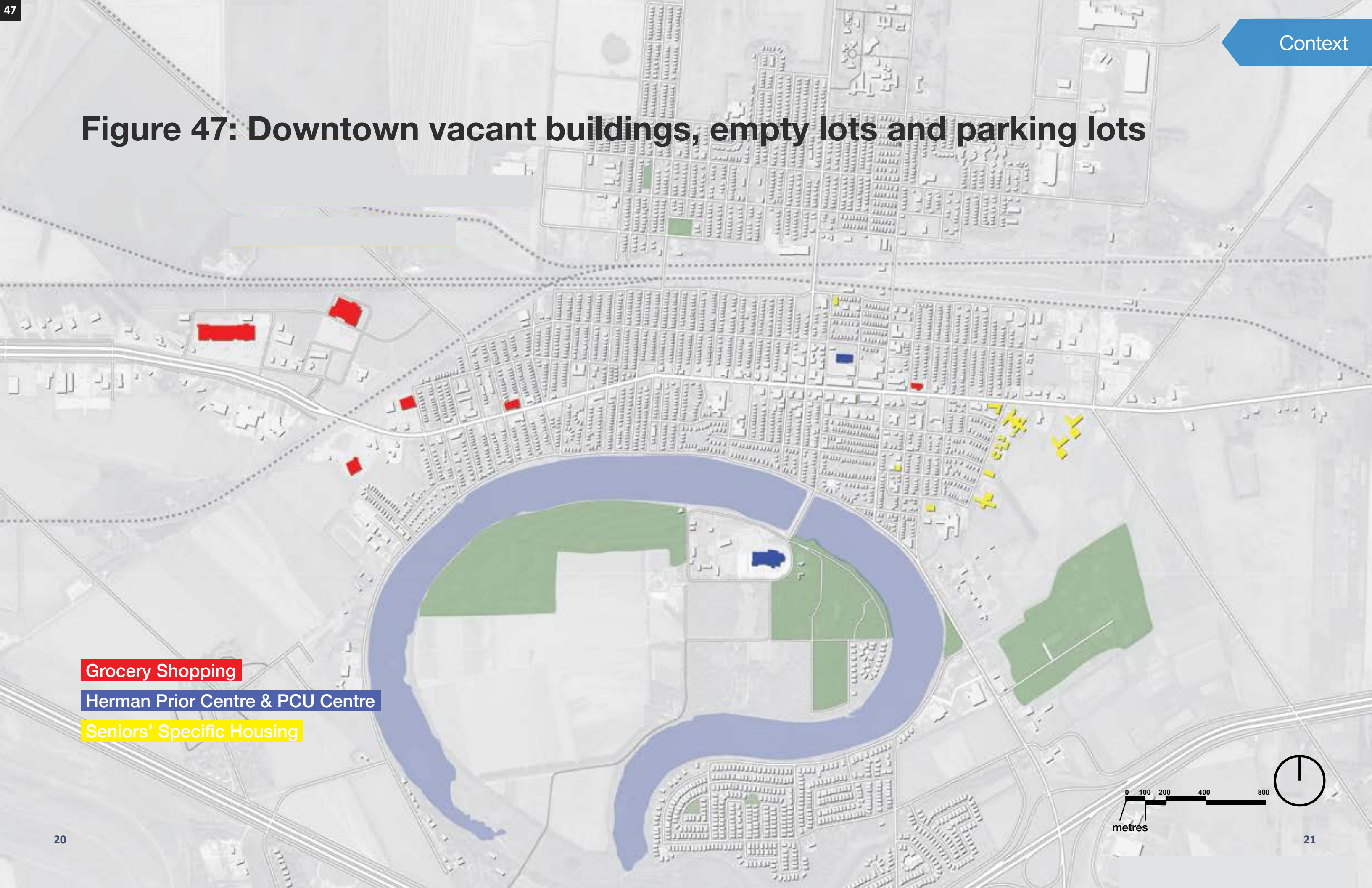
Ideas

Figure 41, 43 and 45: Secondary suites; Figure 42: Mixed-use development; Figure 44: Street-oriented housing with public furniture; Figure 46: Intergenerational housing

Figure 47: Downtown vacant buildings, empty lots and parking lots

Grocery Shopping

Herman Prior Centre & PCU Centre

Seniors' Specific Housing

0 100 200   400   800

metres

Figure 48: Main street redevelopment in Burlingame, CA. The redevelopment resulted in dining, entertainment and retail locating in the area.

Age-Friendly Portage la Prairie: Suggestions for Improvement

Through the initial documentation and community consultation in Portage la Prairie, areas of strength as well as areas requiring improvement were identified. The use of precedent research was key in illustrating examples of strategies that could potentially be implemented in the city. The four age-friendly domains of social participation, buildings and open spaces, transportation, and housing were explored in detail to establish best practices and find successfully implemented precedents in other communities.

This information was used to develop several age-friendly strategies and ideas that seek to build upon existing strengths and address challenges. The options presented in the next section of this report represent the culmination of these ideas. Six areas of focus were identified including: Saskatchewan Avenue, Inclusive Streetscaping, Heritage Square, Public Transportation, Active Transit Networks, and Housing Integration. Each area of focus contains many strategies that outline possibilities for Portage and are arranged into short, medium, and long-term time lines of possible implementation.

Figure 49: Context Map

Western
Commercial District

Seniors' Housing
Concentration

Island Park and
PCU Centre

Map Legend

Area of focus for current Saskatchewan Avenue streetscaping

Proposed Inclusive Streetscaping

Heritage Square

Proposed Public Transport Network

Proposed Active Transit Network

Housing Integration Opportunities

0   100   200   400   800

metres
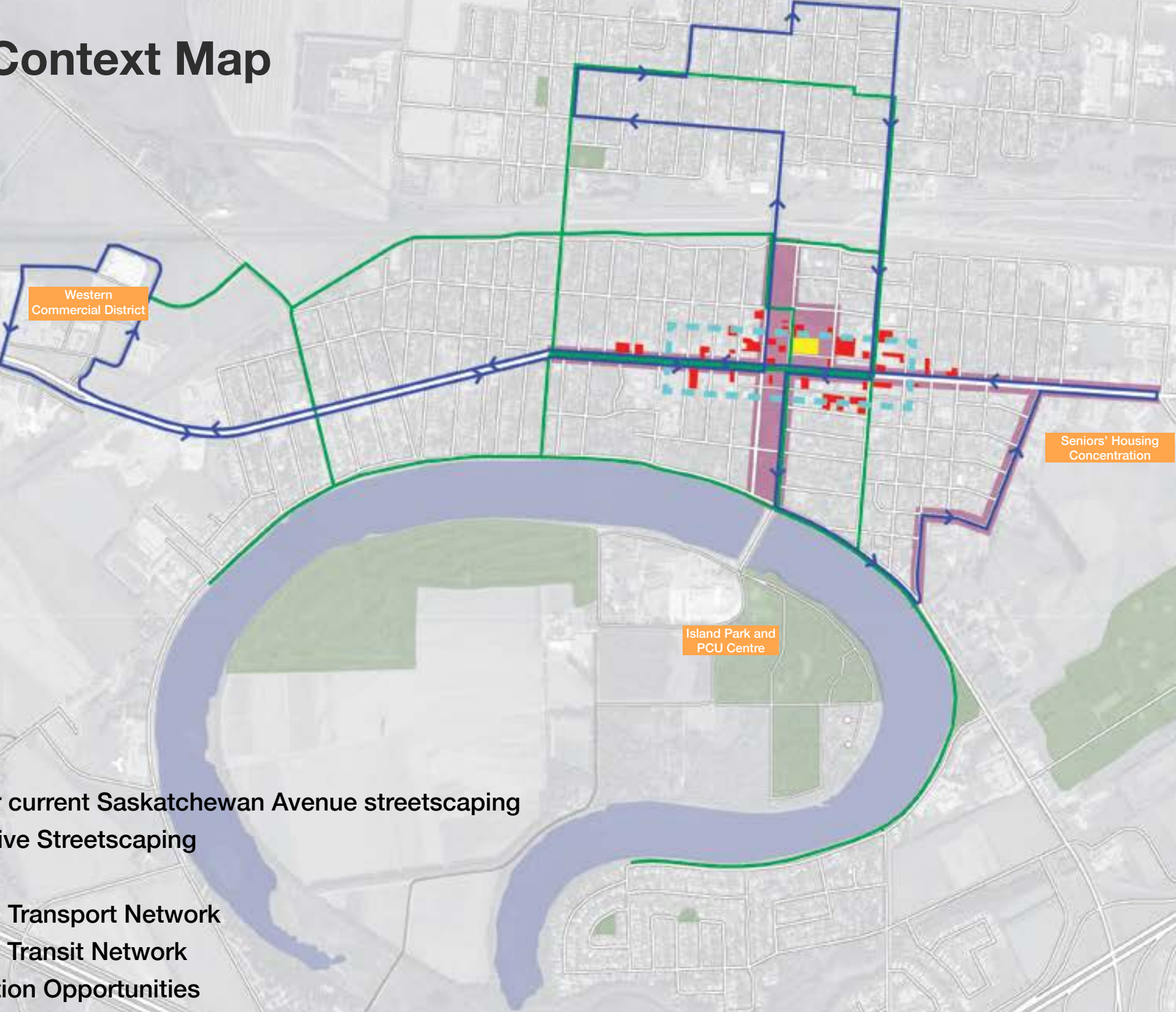
Saskatchewan Avenue

Why It's Important

In September 2014, HTFC Planning & Design and MMM Group Ltd. were hired by the City of Portage la Prairie to develop a plan for the streetscaping of Saskatchewan Avenue. The scope of this ongoing work includes focus group meetings with key stakeholders, preparation of conceptual designs, potential cost estimates, and implementation strategies. This project will address street level infrastructure and amenities, such as road width, intersection types, landscaping, public art, and active transportation between the intersections of 4th Street West and 5th Street East.

Saskatchewan Avenue was identified as a main area of focus for possible age-friendly implementation. As planning has already begun on Saskatchewan Avenue's streetscaping, our short-term strategies highlight several aspects from the current schematic designs that can contribute to a more age-friendly street.

The group also identified the existence of many empty lots and open spaces directly on, or around Saskatchewan Avenue, that could be potential locations for future infill development. Encouraging future development in the area is key to creating a welcoming, vibrant, and walkable downtown core.

Strategies for Improvement

Short-Term Strategies

Table-top intersections (Figure 50) involve the raising of entire road sections to the level of the surrounding sidewalk, removing street curbs. They are used as a traffic calming measure and can improve the pedestrian experience. Bump-outs, or curb extensions, extend sidewalks into the intersection, reducing the crossing distance between curbs and increasing visibility of pedestrians crossing the street.

50

Protected bike lanes (Figure 51) on either side of Saskatchewan Avenue can promote safe, accessible, and viable active transportation options. The addition of these lanes can also serve as the base of a more comprehensive active transport network.

51

Rehabilitation of Saskatchewan Avenue's back lanes into greenways (Figure 52) can help create a more enjoyable pedestrian experience that provides access to major businesses and amenities the Saskatchewan Avenue. These areas can be improved through inclusion of safe crossings, streetscaping, bike lanes, and lighting.

Long-Term Strategies

Figure 53 shows potential sites for redevelopment and infill surrounding Saskatchewan Avenue. Existing buildings are shown in white, empty lots and vacant buildings in red. For comparison, the local Walmart shopping centre is approximately 125,000 ft^2, whereas the areas highlighted in this image total approximately 135,000 ft^2 of ground level space (this number would increase if buildings have more than one storey).

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53

Inclusive Streetscaping

Why It's Important

Including inclusive streetscaping in public and open spaces results in enjoyable areas for people of all ages and levels of mobility. Streetscaping aids in improving the built environment, thus improving walkability, active transportation networks, public transport routes and connectivity to the concentration of seniors' specific housing located in eastern Portage la Prairie. Streetscaping elements also enhance the safety of cities by encouraging use of public and open spaces throughout the day and evening.

Strategies for Improvement

As previously noted, HTFC Planning & Design identified an area in Portage la Prairie requiring streetscape improvements in the short-term - specifically a stretch of Saskatchewan Avenue within the downtown strip. Other areas in the city have been recognized by this report that are also need of improvement as seen on (Figure 58). These priority areas connect Saskatchewan Avenue to north Portage, the seniors' specific housing concentration, and Island Park. There is an overall lack of quality streetscaping amenities in the priority areas as they exist now creating barriers to accessibility of public and open spaces. The following strategies for improvement suggest how an existing street could be redeveloped over time.

Short-Term Strategies

Options for Seating

Benches act as resting places and areas for socializing, and should be implemented in regular intervals along sidewalks. They should have more than two armrests to aid those with limited mobility in the action of sitting down and standing up (Figure 55).

Urban Landscaping

Planters and tree canopies are both aesthetically pleasing and functional streetscaping elements. They can be used as barriers to separate the sidewalk from vehicle traffic and as places for informal seating. (Figure 56).
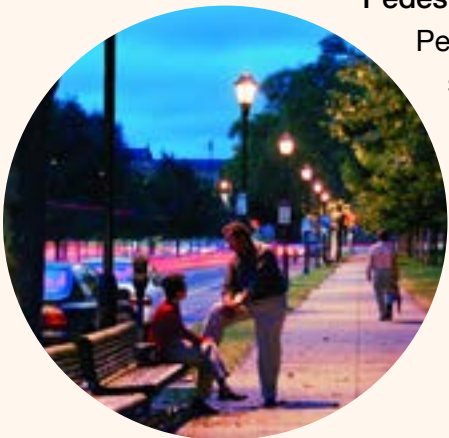
Pedestrian Scale Lighting

Pedestrian scale lighting should be implemented regularly along sidewalks and shared use networks. Lighting amenities, specifically at pedestrian scale, improve the visibility and safety of public and open spaces during the evening (Figure 56).

Long-Term Strategies

Multi-Modal Island Park Bridge

The Island Park Bridge, as it exists now, prioritizes vehicle traffic and is uninviting for pedestrians and cyclists. Investing in a new bridge with room for multiple forms of transportation and streetscaping elements can better connect Island Park to the rest of the city. Pedestrian scale lighting and urban landscaping amenities located on the proposed bridge could be considered (Figure 57).
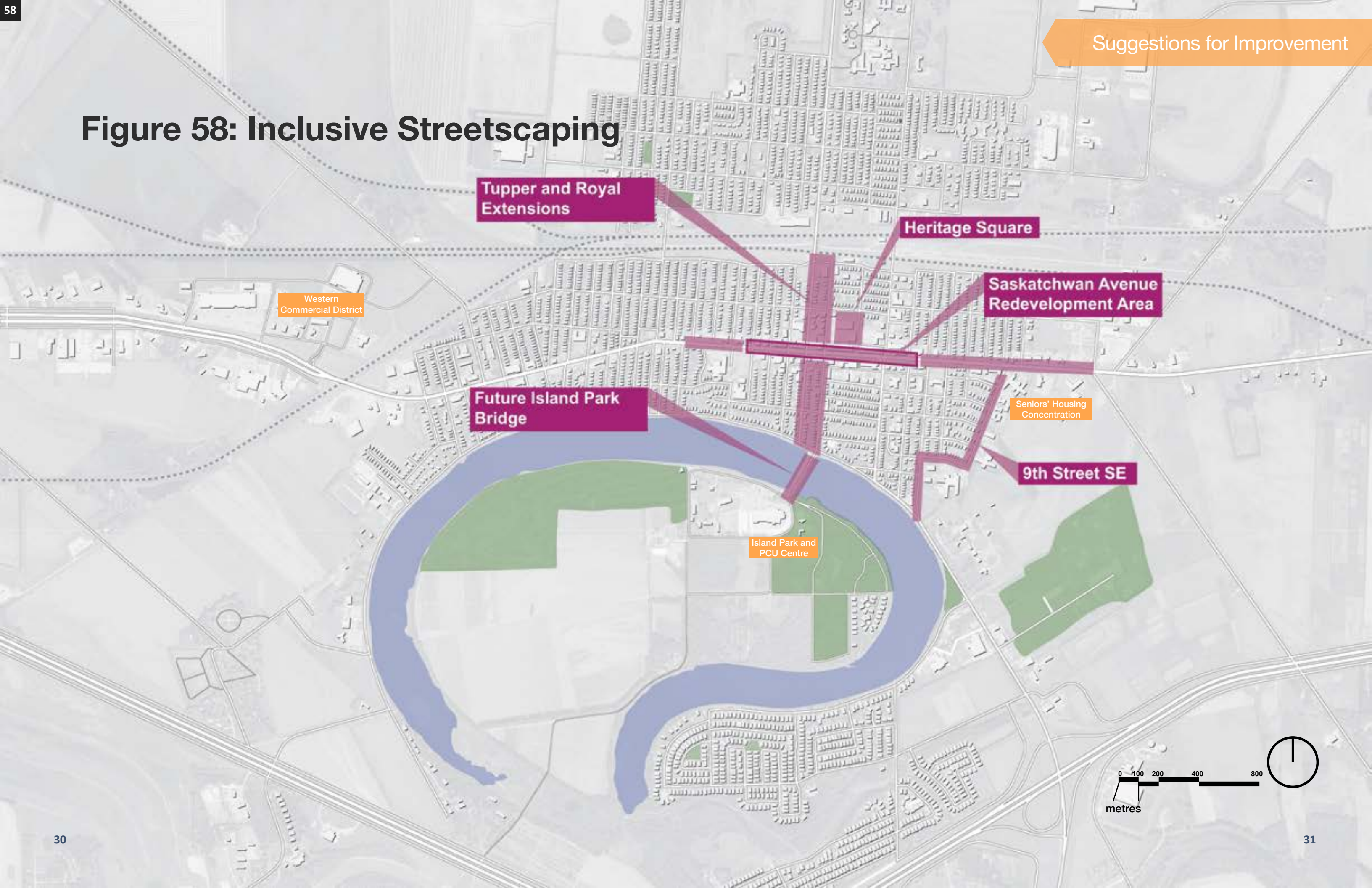

Public Toilet Facilities

Well lit, properly secured, and durable public toilet facilities can be built in public and open spaces. In the long-term, Island Park could be considered as an area for the investment of public toilets facilities. All public toilets should be wheelchair accessible.

Figure 58: Inclusive Streetscaping

Tupper and Royal Extensions

Heritage Square

Western Commercial District

Saskatchwan Avenue Redevelopment Area

Future Island Park Bridge

Seniors' Housing Concentration

9th Street SE

Island Park and PCU Centre

0 100 200 400 800

metres

Heritage Square

Why It's Important

Heritage Square is located at the centre of Portage la Prairie on Royal Road North. Many services are located nearby; the surrounding area is a major hub for activity, especially for older adults. The square itself is currently a well used parking lot.

Due to its central location, size, and proximity to services and amenties, Heritage Square has been identified as an area of focus. Heritage Square has the potential to be an important public space, while still maintaining its function as a parking lot. Strategies to introduce alternative uses into the space are presented below. While parking is an important aspect of the square, these strategies are focused on creating a more pedestrian friendly space that can accomodate social and cultural events in a central location.

Opportunities for infill development in close proximity to Heritage Square and Royal Road are identified below (Figures 59 and 60). Residential development in this area is crucial in supporting a more vibrant downtown. Coupled with current Saskatchewan Avenue streetscaping efforts, a centrally located pedestrian and civic space would help to develop downtown Portage as a destination for residents and visitors.

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Strategies for Improvement

Short-Term Strategies

Relocation of social and cultural events
By using Heritage Square as an event space throughout the year, significant attention and activity could be drawn to the downtown Portage area. The relocation of the farmers' market, for example, could be a simple solution that promotes activity downtown (Figure 61).

Long-Term Strategies

Traffic calming measures on Royal Road
Traffic calming including speed bumps, raised pedestrian crossings, or a chicane (s-bend) (Figure 62) can serve to slow traffic and make crossing Royal Road a much easier task.

61
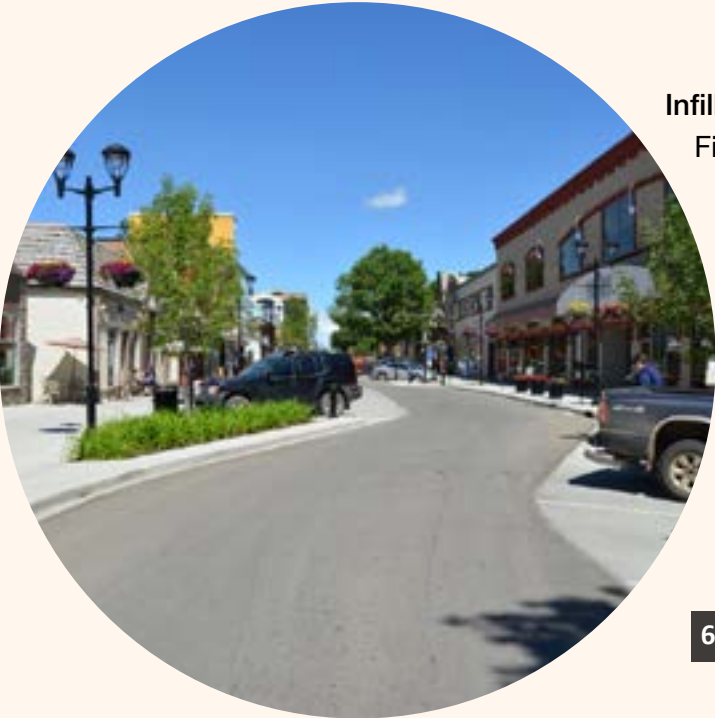
Infill development
Figures 59 shows Heritage Square as it exists today, and Figure 50 shows potential sites for infill development. Infill development is a crucial component in creating a more dense, vibrant, and active neighbourhood. Locating infill around Heritage Square would help to transform the area into an important public space that could be used by all members of the community, and would serve as a new focal point of Portage's downtown.

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Public Transport

Why It's Important

The availability of transportation facilities plays an important role in the overall wellbeing of individuals. The transportation options currently available in Portage la Prairie are limited. This poses serious constraints on the mobility needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and those who do not have access to an automobile.

All weather bus shelters (Figure 64) can be placed at selected bus stops adjacent to important locations such as the seniors' housing concentration in the east, City Hall, the shopping area in the west, and Portage District General Hospital. It is necessary to ensure a standard level of comfort for all passengers. Thus, it is suggested to provide seating at every bus stop. As well, the provision of transit information should also be available to passengers at bus shelters. Smaller communities, such as Collingwood, Ontario (Figure 65), have successfully implemented conventional transit facilities.

Strategies for Improvement

Phase 1 Route

The phase 1 bus route is a single loop system that could be introduced in Portage la Prairie on a trial basis for a fixed period of time. The route begins at the seniors' housing concentration and covers many important areas and amenities in the city. The route is 15km long and has a service frequency of once every 35 minutes, however, the decision to provide service availability can be made depending on the demand. Over 78% of residential areas in Portage are located within a five minute walk of bus stops along the route (Figure 67).

Phase 2 Route

The Phase 2 bus service in Portage la Prairie has the potential for three separate bus routes and two buses. The route begins at the intersection of Royal Road South and Crescent Road West with a combined (one-side) length of 15km. The frequency of the first bus going in the east – west direction is once every 30 minutes while the frequency of the bus servicing the north – south direction is once every 35-40 minutes. The decision to provide service availability can be made depending on the demand. For phase 2, over 90% of residential areas are located within a five minute walk of bus stops (Figure 68).

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Other Options

Other possibilities can be considered to widen the transportation options available in Portage. An enhanced taxi-pass program (Figure 62) provides cheaper travel options to seniors, those with disabilities, and low-income populations. The holders of taxi-passes are given 40 subsidized tickets per month. This program has been successful in small communities like Peace River, AB and Oakville, ON. The Transportation Reimbursement and Information Program (TRIP) provides free transit options to older adults. Customers recruit the driver – usually a friend or a neighbour – then receive reimbursement from the City for the cost of travel, which is then paid back to the driver. The City manages the TRIP program and provides transportation information to seniors.
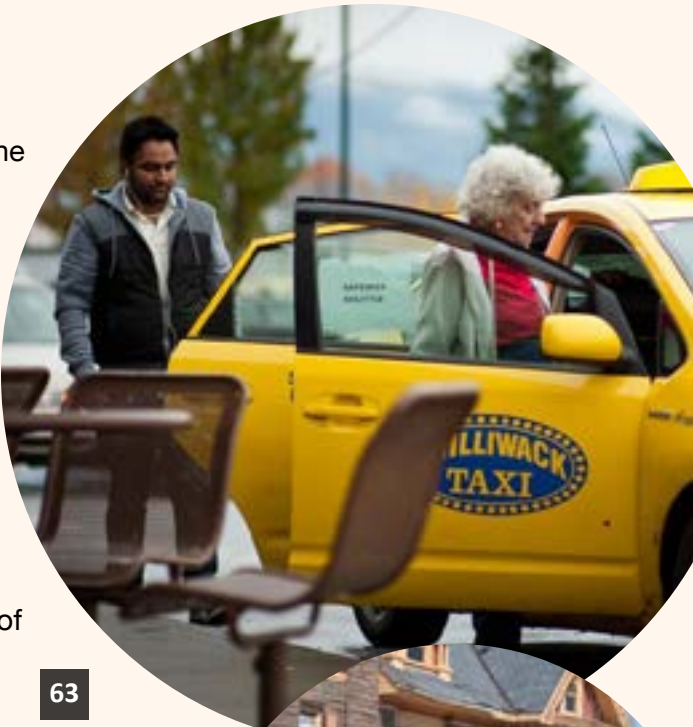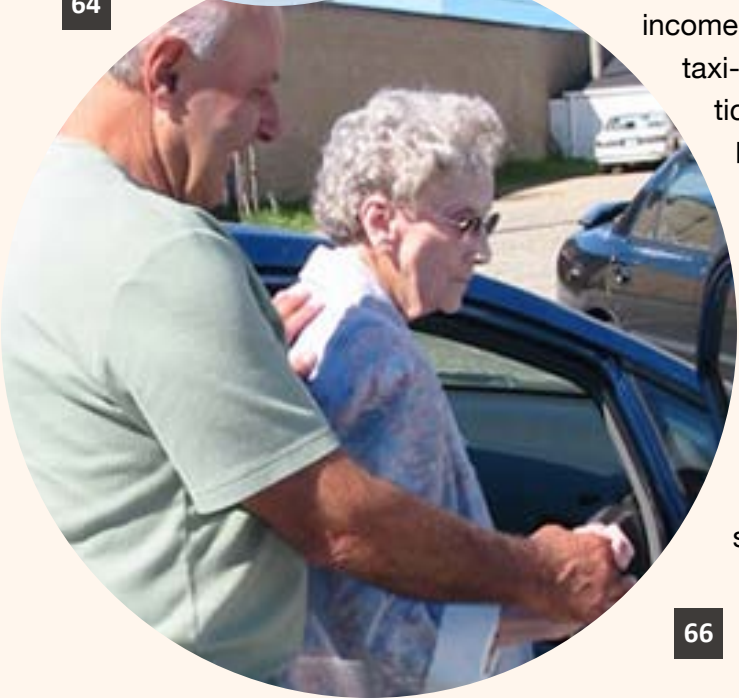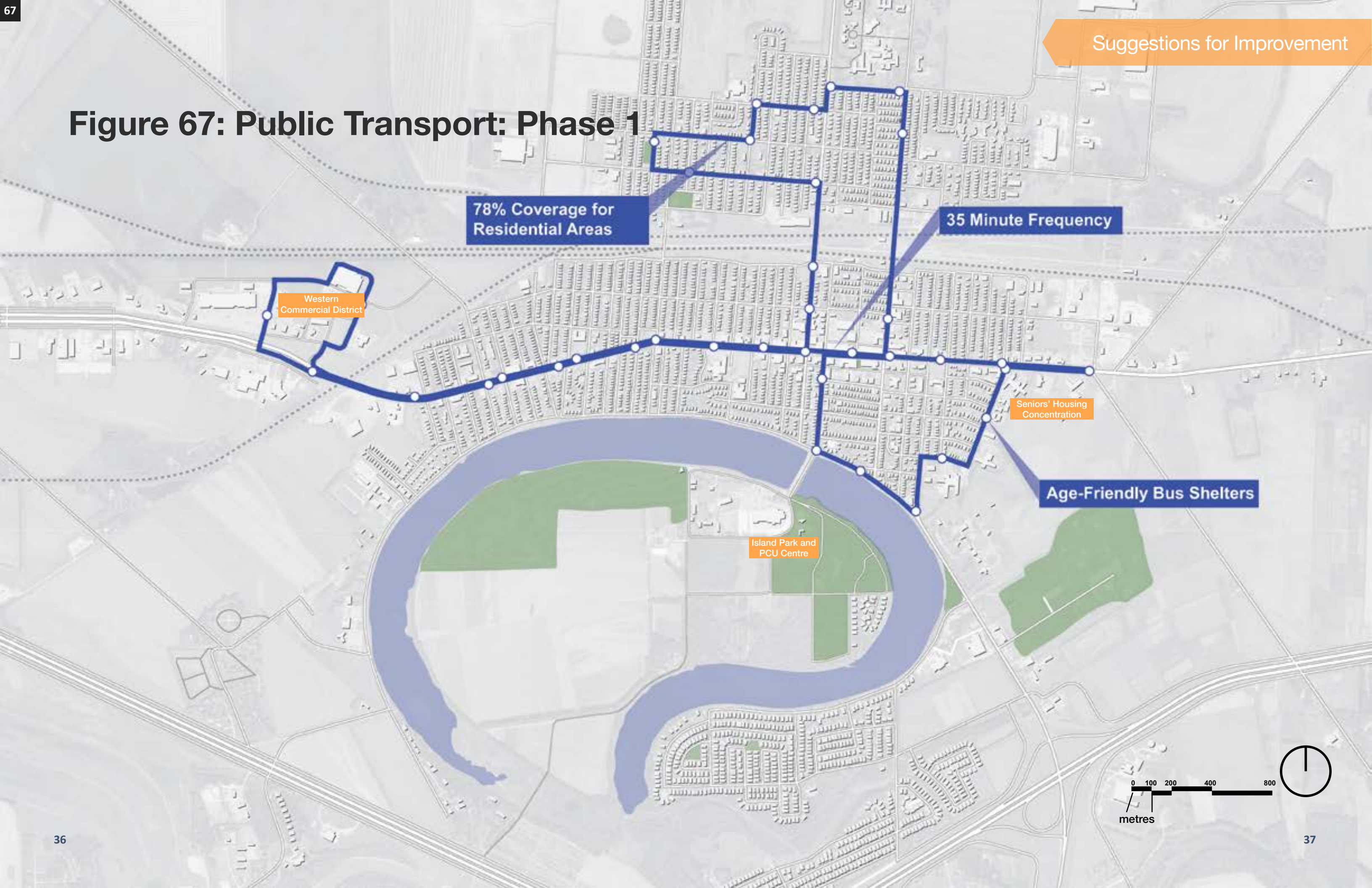
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Figure 67: Public Transport: Phase 1

78% Coverage for Residential Areas

35 Minute Frequency
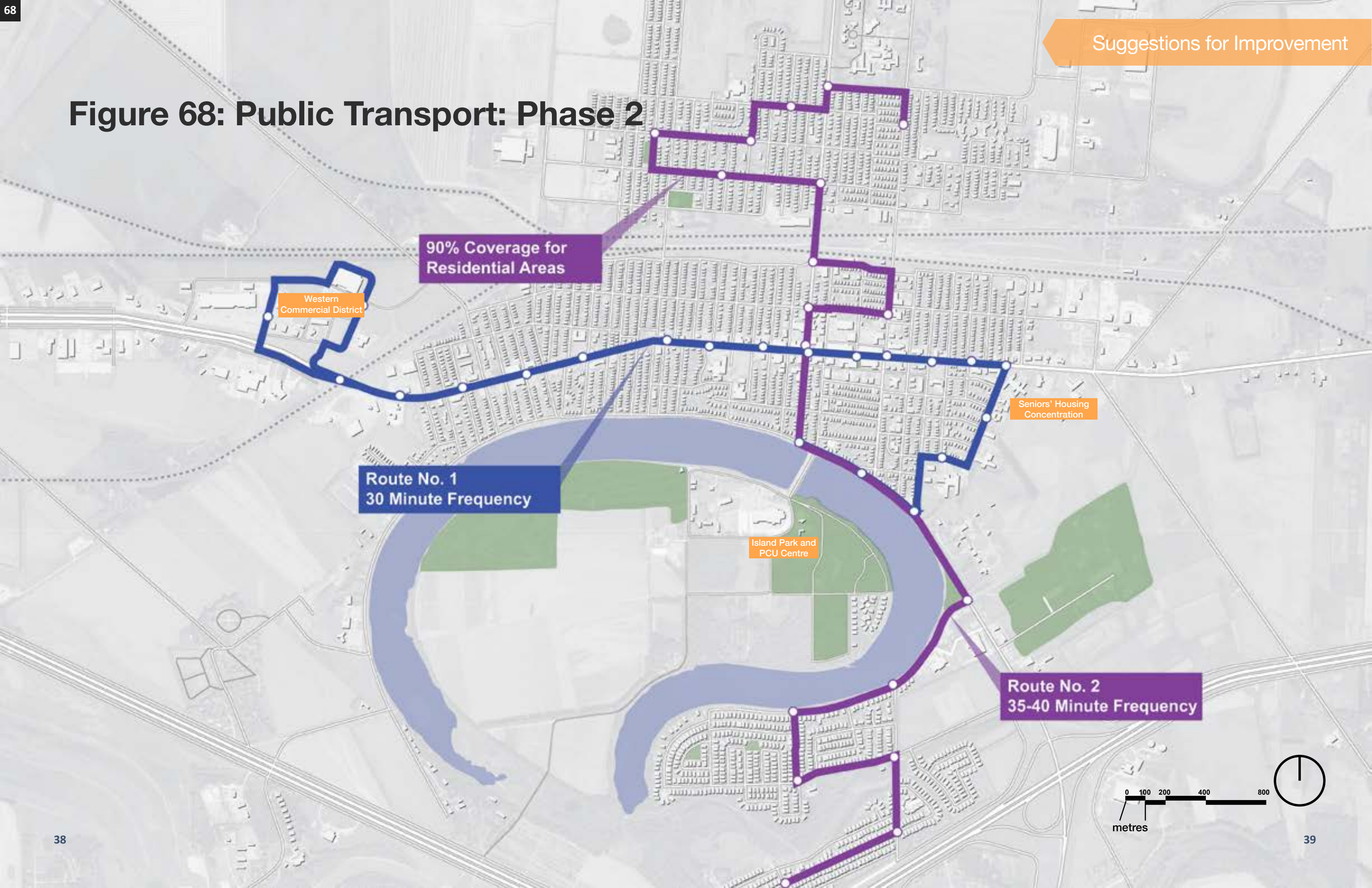
Western Commercial District

Seniors' Housing Concentration

Age-Friendly Bus Shelters

Island Park and PCU Centre

0 100 200   400   800

metres

Figure 68: Public Transport: Phase 2

90% Coverage for
Residential Areas

Western
Commercial District

Route No. 1
30 Minute Frequency

Seniors' Housing
Concentration

Island Park and
PCU Centre

Route No. 2
35-40 Minute Frequency

0 100 200   400   800

metres

Active Transit Network

Why It's Important

By providing safe and comfortable spaces for people to walk and cycle, a comprehensive active transportation network can only strengthen the positive qualities that Portage la Prairie is already known for. Portage's size makes getting around by foot and bicycle relatively easy. Walking and cycling distances between many destinations within the city are manageable and can be done with ease given the city's topography and grid network of streets. With features like traffic-calmed streets and enhanced crosswalks, an active transportation network can give older adults more options to get around town. Whether for recreational or utilitarian purposes, walking and cycling can be a safe, comfortable, convenient, and viable transportation option.

Strategies for Improvement

Short-Term Strategies

A smaller, core area loop is suggested to connect the downtown area with other destinations including Crescent Lake, Island Park, and places of employment in the western commercial district. With the existing high use of the Crescent Lake shared use path, exercise equipment can be installed to promote more physical activity and social interaction.

Exercise stations
Outdoor exercise stations (Figure 69) are popular in cities and towns across western Canada – including Gladstone and Carman, Manitoba – and can be situated along the shared use path north of Crescent Lake. These machines not only provide an opportunity for more impromptu physical activity, but also foster social interaction.

Long-Term Strategies

A larger loop that extends north of the rail lines could be installed, connecting downtown destinations and employment areas with residential neighbourhoods.

Traffic-calmed streets
Traffic calming measures can be implemented along Royal Road and 18th Street for the benefit of both cyclists and pedestrians. Traffic-calming measures may include traffic circles (Figure 70), narrower streets, speed humps, and lower speed limits.

Shared use path
There is an existing shared use path along the northern length of Crescent Lake that is already well-used by pedestrians and cyclists. A suggested shared use path just south of the rail line (Figure 71) can be used by all active modes of transportation for either recreational or utilitarian purposes. For maximum comfort and safety, the shared use path should be lit and cleared regularly during the winter.


Pedestrian crossings
Pedestrian crosswalks at intersections can be enhanced through the use of different materials, like paving stones or concrete (Figure 72). Crosswalks can also be raised to the height of the surrounding sidewalk to make crossing easier for people with mobility issues.

The wider roads of 8th Street and 3rd Street are well suited for buffered bike lanes (Figure 73) and can be implemented by painting thick lines directly onto the pavement. The extra space created by these buffers can provide more room for vehicles to pass and increases visibility of cyclists, creating a safer and more comfortable cycling experience.
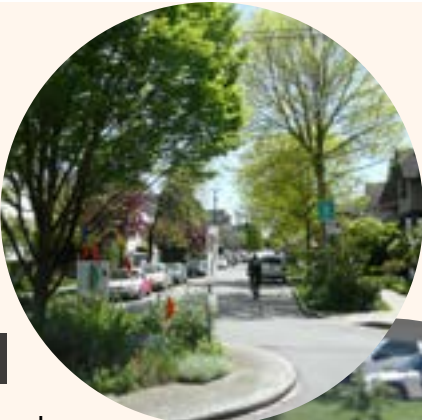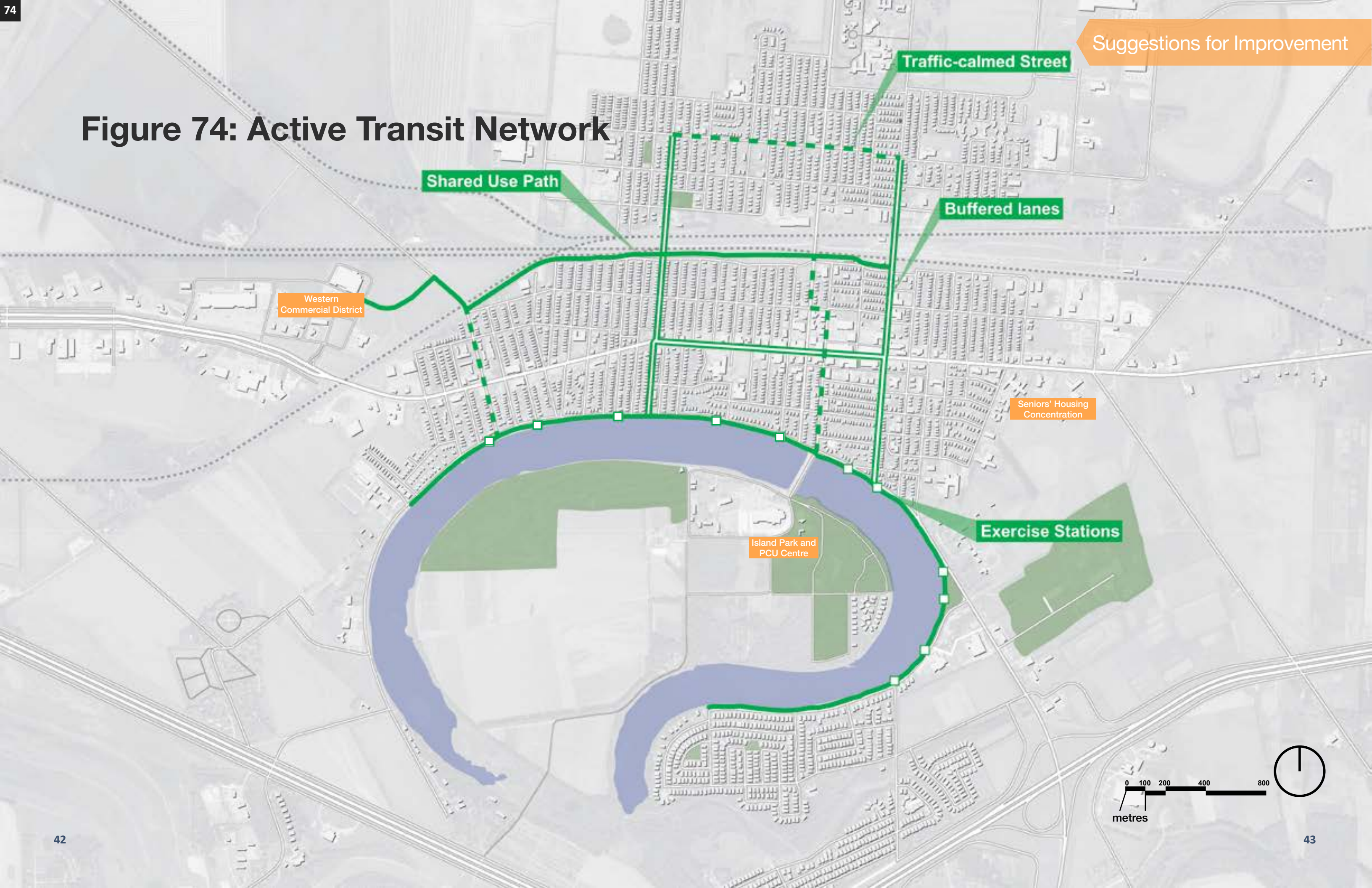

*Suggested strategies presented graphically in Figure 74

Figure 74: Active Transit Network

Traffic-calmed Street

Shared Use Path

Buffered lanes

Western Commercial District

Seniors' Housing Concentration

Exercise Stations

Island Park and PCU Centre

0   100   200   400   800

metres

Housing Integration

Why It's Important

In both the *Age-Friendly Cities Project: Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Canada* (2007) and our community consultation, participants stressed that there is a need for more seniors' housing as there are long waiting lists for existing units. For older adults who do not drive, the location of their home is crucial. Locating seniors' housing in closer proximity to services, amenities and social gathering places can help seniors to retain their independence while promoting active ageing and creating a more walkable community. As well, housing is a key component in downtown revitalization. Residential development in the central core can help to create the human presence needed to support commercial development and vibrant street life.

Strategies for Improvement

All housing development should consider the following priorities:

- Seniors' housing developments should be located within a five minute walking distance of the central section of Saskatchewan Avenue (Figure 78)

- Vacant buildings and empty lots located on the central section of Saskatchewan Avenue should be targeted for residential development

- Assisted living options (Figure 75) should be developed in Portage as none currently exist

- Multi-unit options that incorporate a mix of ages, tenures and incomes should be encouraged in future housing development

75
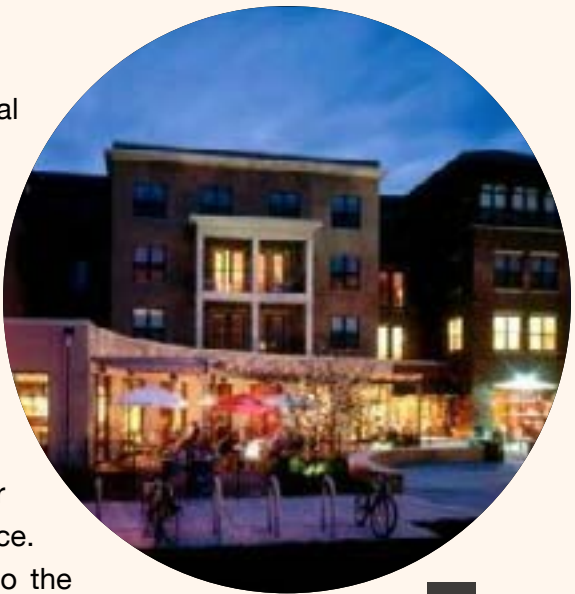
Infill Housing (Figure 76)
Building on empty lots and using vacant buildings for residential development is a good way to increase the total stock of seniors' housing. It is important that accessibility concerns are a priority for this type of development.

Street-Oriented Housing
Street-oriented houses (Figure 77) have decreased setbacks. This type of housing is a good option for seniors who want to live more independently as there is less need for snow clearing and yard maintenance. As well, it can help to bring life to the neighbourhood and contribute to a more human-scale street.

76

77

Supportive Housing/Assisted Living
These options have evolved to fill the gap between independent living and personal care homes. Assisted living and supportive housing provide varying levels of service, including meals, housekeeping, social and recreational opportunities, and additional assistance with personal activities.

Cohousing
Cohousing communities are small resident designed, owned and managed communities. Units are self contained, with private kitchens and bathrooms, but usually have shared spaces such as gathering places for leisure and events, exercise rooms and gardens. The community may hire caregivers if needed, and mutual neighbour support is a key component.

Mixture of Ages, Tenures and Incomes
Not all older adults want to live in senior specific housing. Intergenerational housing can provide an enjoyable living environment for seniors who prefer a more diverse and lively lifestyle. As well, providing affordable suites in new housing developments can help to create more inclusive communities.
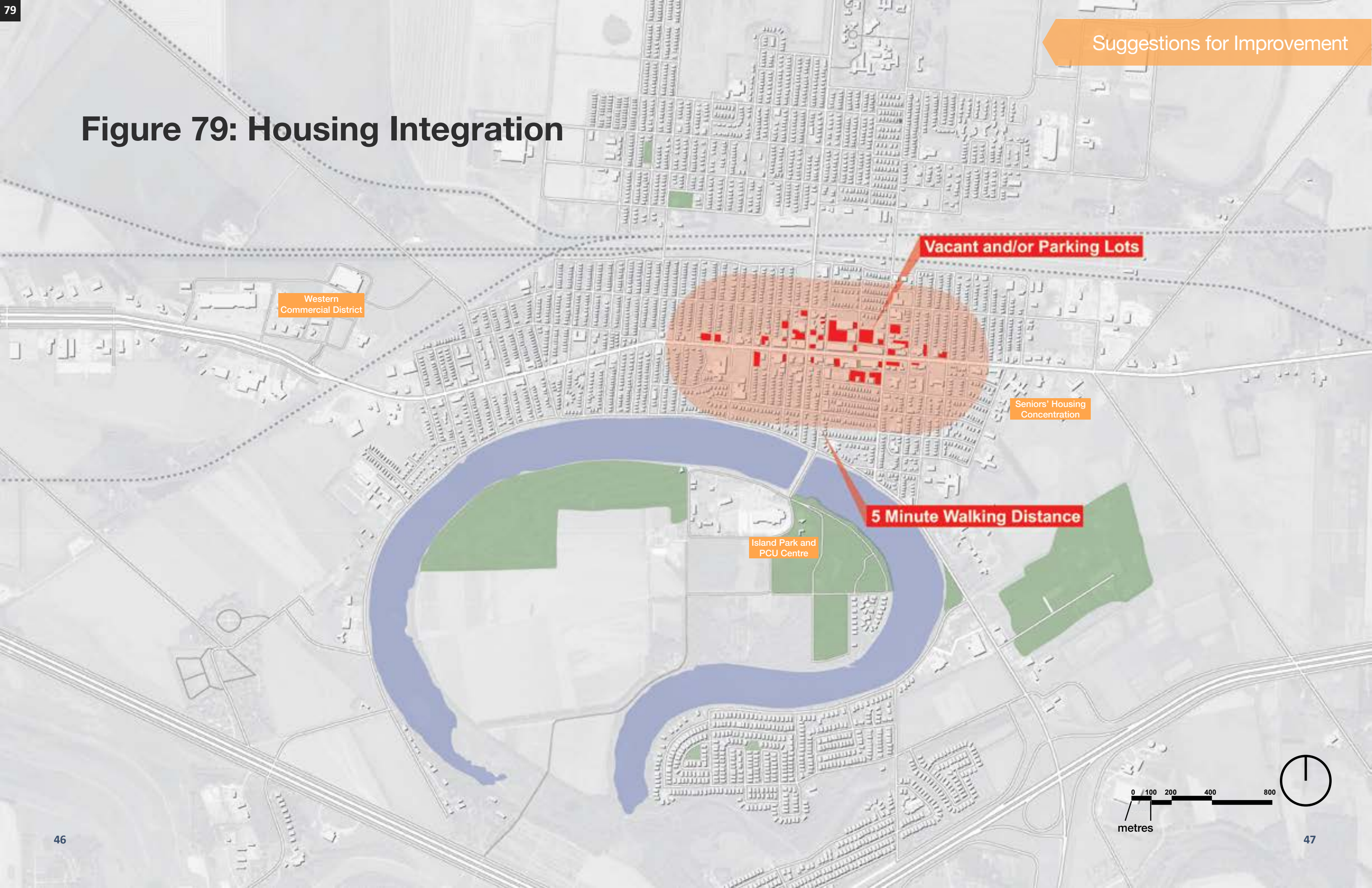
Home Modifications
Modifications to the home environment (Figure 78) can enable older adults to age in place by removing functional barriers. Many modifications can be made to increase accessibility within the home at minor costs.
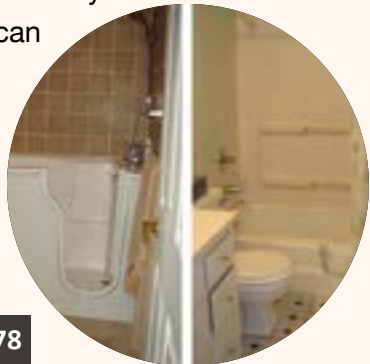
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Figure 79: Housing Integration

Vacant and/or Parking Lots

Western Commercial District

Seniors' Housing Concentration

5 Minute Walking Distance

Island Park and PCU Centre

0 100 200 400 800

metres

Conclusion

Final Presentation: Feedback

The final community presentation was held on December 9, 2014 at the Herman Prior Centre. Attendees included members from the Age-Friendly Cities Advisory Committee and the Potage Service for Seniors, as well as local community members. Attendees participated in discussion and provided feedback.

Attendees agreed that public transit is a priority for the residents of Portage la Prairie. However, concerns over the suggested routes were raised. Attendees felt that transportation options should improve north-south and east-west connections and maintain connections to Koko Platz. It was also mentioned that walking to bus stops, regardless of their frequency and location, might be a challenge for older adults, especially during the winter months.

The suggestion of encouraging residential development downtown, and transforming Heritage Square into a temporary civic space, was well received, though there were concerns over parking. Attendees commented that if parking were to be limited, perhaps a parking structure could be built in the downtown area to accommodate for the loss of existing spaces. Similarly, there were concerns that infill may increase traffic on Saskatchewan Avenue.

One community member suggested that gardening plots, specifically wheelchair accessible plots or raised garden plots, should be considered for seniors' housing developments.

Next Steps

The group is scheduled to present the findings and suggestions within the report to Portage la Prairie's City Council in January 2015. From there, it is our hope that our suggestions for an age-friendly Portage will be considered by Council in relevant future planning decisions.

Final Thoughts

Portage la Prairie is a city that has many age-friendly strengths. From the variety of social programming at the Herman Prior Centre to the beautiful walking trails in Island Park, many older adults are happy to call Portage their home. However, several areas for improvement have been identified, including the transformation of downtown through improvements to Saskatchewan Avenue and Heritage Square, the provision and integration of seniors' housing types and tenures, and the promotion of connectivity across the city via inclusive streetscaping and the implementation of a public and active transportation network.

The suggestions provided in this report endeavour to address issues of age-friendliness in Portage, building on the city's existing strengths. The suggestions are neither exhaustive nor comprehensive, and should be seen as a starting point for further, more detailed plans and discussions.

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79   Map: Evan Allan

Appendix I - List of Services and Amenities

Community Attractions
Fort la Reine Museum Pioneer Village
Herman Prior Centre
Island Park
Mayfair Farms
PCU Centre
Portage la Prairie Regional Library
Splash Island Water Park

Seniors' Housing
Independent Order of Oddfellows
- Odfellows Towers (151 Royal Road North)

Manitoba Housing
- Oaktree Towers (805 Saskatchewan Avenue West)
- Stephens Apartments (149 4th Street Southeast)

Regional Health Authority
- Regency House (164 5th Street Southeast)
- Rotary Park (8-60 9th Street Southeast)

55+ Senior Complexes – Life Lease
- Dalton Grove Estates (851 Saskatchewan Avenue East)
- Windsor Estates (1225 Saskatchewan Avenue East)
- Queen's Court Estates (1201 Saskatchewan Avenue East)

Major Community Events
Concerts in the Park
MB Hydro Power Smart Island of Lights
Portage Ex
Portage Potato Festival

Social Support
Herman Prior Health Care and Support Groups
Herman Prior Senior Centre Meal Program
Meals on Wheels Program
Portage and District Arts Council
Portage Fitness Co-op
Portage Handi-Van
Portage Public Health Services
Portage Services for Seniors