

Tomorrow's Chinatown

Area Redevelopment Plan Executive Summary



This executive summary provides an overview of the main sections and themes of the draft Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan (April 2022). The draft ARP document should be referred to for greater detail.

Project Background

From their earliest history, North American Chinatowns, including Calgary's Chinatown, have been deeply tied to the social, political and economic context that made these neighbourhoods necessary. Calgary's Chinatown developed out of structural racism, violence, forced displacement, segregation, and discriminatory labour and immigration laws, which made life very difficult for early Chinese immigrants. Through perseverance, Chinatown developed from a place where new migrants could access basic services and supports, to a vibrant cultural neighbourhood where Chinese people could feel a sense of belonging and establish a "home village" within an often-hostile society.

Today, Calgary's Chinatown is a valued cultural resource, important economic hub, and a city-wide destination for tourism and entertainment. At the same time, it increasingly faces challenges in maintaining its historic identity, culture and neighbourhood institutions. Along with changes brought on by redevelopment, the role of Chinatown is always evolving, with an increasing variety of pan-Asian businesses and cultures. It has a variety of meanings to different generations of Chinese immigrants and people of Chinese descent.

There is a project called Tomorrow's Chinatown, which will create a cultural plan at the same time as a new Area Redevelopment Plan. This is happening through collaboration with the Chinatown community.

Three key things lead to the Tomorrow's Chinatown project:

1. The 1986 Chinatown Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) is outdated. The new plan will be updated to reflect more important policies and the role of community character and culture. For the first time in Calgary, a cultural plan will be created together with the Chinatown community as part of planning policy.
2. The Cultural Plan for Calgary (approved by Council in 2016) provides a guide for using cultural resources to strengthen Calgary's local economy and improve the quality of life for residents. A key recommendation of the Cultural Plan for Calgary was to integrate cultural planning into the way The City works and plans for neighbourhoods.
3. People in the community who are working hard to preserve the unique cultural identity of Chinatown when considering new development proposals. The community's desire to think about Chinatown's future together is important. This community energy and involvement has helped to create the Tomorrow's Chinatown project and a draft of the ARP.



About the Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP)

What is an Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP)?

An area redevelopment plan is a long-range plan that specifies the future vision, objectives and development policies that will help revitalize a community. An ARP provides guidance on what kind of growth makes sense and includes development instructions that can commonly be referred to as new developments are proposed.

Chinatown is located in the north central part of Calgary's Greater Downtown and is one of several mixed-use neighbourhoods that surround the Downtown Core neighbourhood. The updated policy direction in the draft plan refers to the unique history and cultural character of Chinatown, and provides consistency and clear guidelines to developers, community stakeholders and decision-makers. The ARP will provide a long-term vision for how land can be used or rezoned in the future. It will give guidance and direction based on unique local conditions or circumstances. The ARP is meant to be updated periodically as development and change occur but is meant to provide direction for at least the next 30 years. The ARP will also be considered when public improvement projects and programs are planned for the area.

Culture Links

Chinatown's future as a vibrant place to live, visit, work and play, for generations to come is supported jointly by the Chinatown Cultural Plan. Strategic direction for advancing and investing in Chinatown's cultural future is outlined in the Chinatown Cultural Plan — including cultural experiences and programs; spaces, facilities and amenities; and legacy businesses and tourism. Actions from the Chinatown Cultural Plan are highlighted throughout the ARP.



Project Phases

The Tomorrow's Chinatown project has been actively asking the community for their input since early March 2020. This process has been done in three phases.

At the onset of the project, the Tomorrow's Chinatown Advisory Group was established. This was done to ensure The City was well-informed regarding the lived experience and cultural context of Chinatown, through all aspects of the project. The group consists of 25 members with strong ties to Chinatown and Chinese culture. To-date we have met with the citizen-led Advisory Group 15 times in official capacity over the life of the overall Tomorrow's Chinatown program. Meetings have covered Area Redevelopment Plan topics in great detail, including:

- Public Realm activation
- Mobility – walkability, transit, parking and safety
- Connections – Plus 15 bridges, linkages and wayfinding
- Sense of Place
- 3rd Avenue Vibrancy – traffic calming, vibrant street-life through digital signage, string lighting and street mural
- Vision statement and core ideas
- Density and bonusing

We wish to extend our sincere gratitude for all of their time, guidance and contributions.

Discover

we communicated with the community so we could understand Chinatown's cultural values, the community's vision for future development, and how those two things intersect. We asked Calgarians to discover what people hope for the Chinatown of tomorrow.

Create

we had deeper conversations with the community about what the major opportunities and priorities are that should influence the future planning of Chinatown. In conversations focused on specific topics, we discussed what The ARP should try to achieve with its policy direction

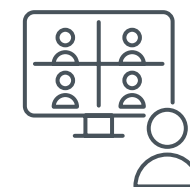
Realize

we put together all that we learned to develop a vision, main ideas, and planning policies to help guide future development in the neighbourhood. The result is the approval of the ARP and the initiation of its implementation.

Sources of Information info the Plans (ARP/Culture Plan)

There have been many sources of information for this unique project that offered different perspectives. They included:

- Contributions made by the Chinatown Advisory Group
- Landowner and industry sessions
- Community and public input
- Chinatown Lunch and Learn sessions
- Three Urban Alliance academic research projects (University of Calgary)
- Chinatown Historical Context Paper
- Calgary Chinatown-Artist-In-Residency
- Technical analysis



6,000+ people visited the calgary.ca/Chinatown webpage

1,200+ surveys completed with **1,300+** individual contributions

Dozens of community events,
virtual events

760+ comments on social media

Vision and core ideas

The hopes, fears and desires expressed by the community through engagement sessions helped create the vision and core ideas of the Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP). They provide guidance for future growth and change in Chinatown and inform the policies found in the ARP.

Vision for Chinatown

Chinatown will continue to be a valued, affordable and attractive residential neighbourhood, with a diverse population living in different kinds of housing options. Its unique neighbourhood character and historical significance will continue to be expressed and preserved through its buildings and structures. Chinatown's vibrant streets and commercial offerings will support a thriving local economy, filled with community and family, and will also enhance individual health and harmony.

Chinatown's Projected Growth

In the coming (three) decades, Chinatown is projected to grow by more than 1,600 units, with the population growing to over 5,000 residents, and it will strive to return to having over 5,000 jobs. The neighbourhood will provide for important cultural and civic amenities that support the local population and create a unique destination for the wider region (Source: Scenario Series Population and Employment Projections, City of Calgary).



Core ideas for Chinatown



Chinatown is an affordable and attractive residential neighbourhood

Chinatown has housing choices that meet community needs. They support daily life with easy access to open space, services and amenities.

- Affordability
- Multigenerational living
- Support daily life



Chinatown's unique neighbourhood character continues to be expressed through its built environment

The buildings, building scale, architecture, signage and art reflect Chinatown's culture.

- Strengthen the edges
- Contextual development
- Cultural reference



Chinatown's vibrant streets and eclectic commercial offerings support a thriving local economy

Chinatown's pedestrian walkways are vibrant. Made better by a high-density residential base, these walkways are lined with a mix of small-scale retail shops and restaurants. A lively economic spirit is a main characteristic of Chinatown that helps residents and welcomes visitors.

- Neighbourhood connections
- Year-round experiences
- Historic commercial character

Core ideas for Chinatown continued



Chinatown's historic significance is preserved

Built heritage sites in Chinatown remain meaningful and accessible. Adjacent growth contributes to the importance of these sites.

- Conservation of heritage
- Historic rhythm of streets



Chinatown supports community, family and individual health and harmony

Chinatown has deeply embedded support networks that are critical for individuals, particularly seniors and immigrants, and their families. Cultural, family and social associations play a key role for forming these networks. Also important is increasing a community sense of belonging. Arts, festivals and events bring people together to celebrate a shared cultural heritage.

- Purposeful community space
- Spaces for celebration
- A healthy climate

Framework for future development

These sections of The Area Redevelopment Plan provide specific policies and guidance for future development in Chinatown. This framework is a tool that helps the community, landowners and The City work together toward positive future development in Chinatown.

Policy guidance in this plan is broken down into the following sections:

Land Use

The Land Use Concept outlines allowable land uses in the neighbourhood and associated policies that are specific to certain locations. It confirms that the area is a residential mixed-use neighbourhood with important connections to the Bow River through parks, open space and natural areas. The ARP envisions Centre Streets S. as a gateway to the neighbourhood.

Density

The Density Concept defines three (3) areas of different density depending on the purpose and character of the area and an area's ability to accommodate higher densities. The aim is to ensure development is viable in Chinatown while preserving the unique character and cultural integrity of the neighbourhood.

Character Areas

Chinatown's look, feel and function are created by the buildings, streets, parks, plazas and other elements valued by the community. This section is designed to promote high-quality buildings and structures that reflect Chinatown's unique heritage, appearance, and culture.



Land use

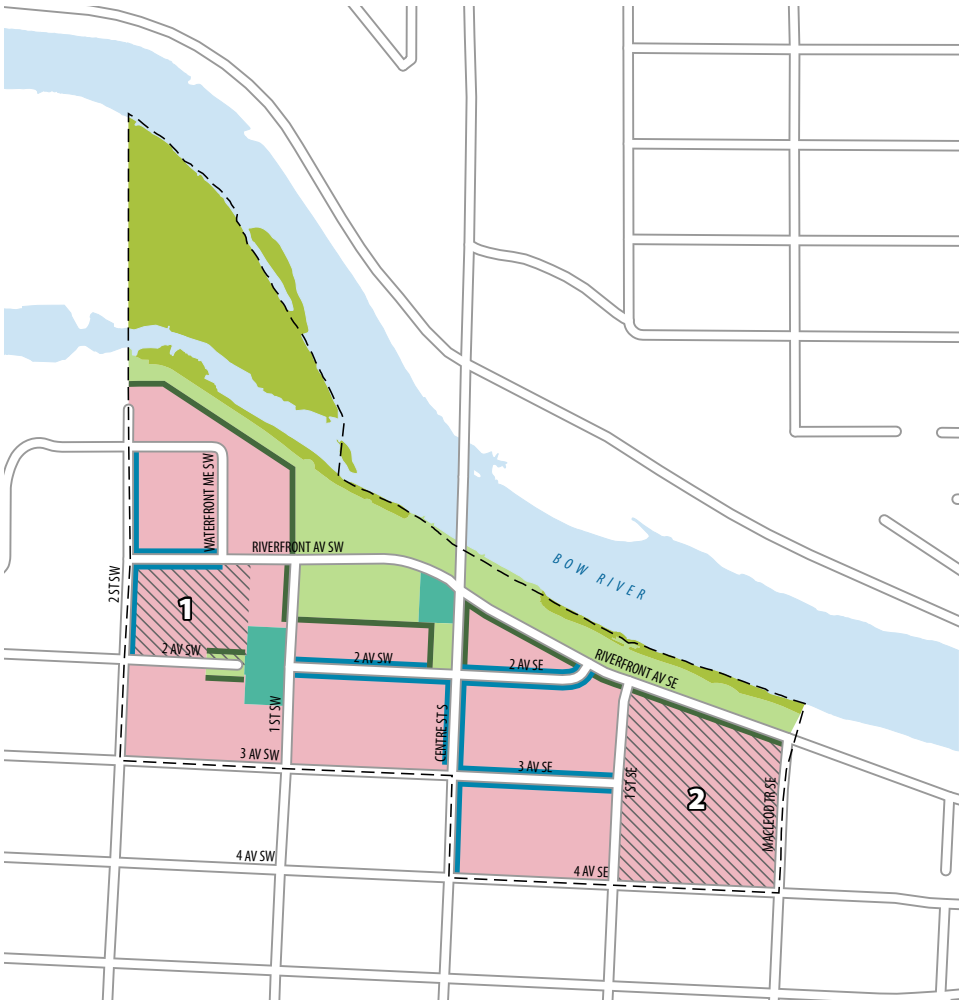
The multiple layers in this map all have polices that apply to their specific area. Together they ensure residential mixed-use development is a priority, while the cultural, economic and social functions of the community are preserved and enhanced.

Spotlights:

- No new standalone office buildings should be allowed
- Active frontage streets are prioritized to preserve and enhance street activity and the importance of local businesses. The ground floor of buildings in these areas must be commercial uses.
- Developments should be primarily residential with a focus on housing in the neighbourhood:



Variety of housing sizes and styles
Multi-generational living
Affordability



- Legend
- Residential Mixed-Use
 - Parks and Open Space
 - Natural Areas
 - City Civic
 - Comprehensive Planning Sites
 - Active Frontage
 - Open Space Frontage
 - Plan Area Boundary

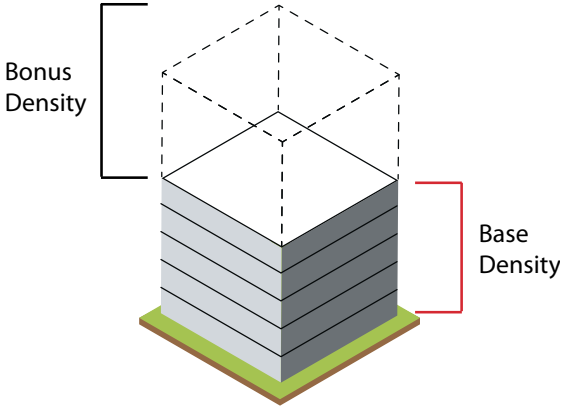
Density

Some of the main considerations in drafting the Density Concept are:

- ensuring sunlight is not blocked to open spaces and natural areas
- ensuring new building heights are compatible and complimentary to their existing surroundings

The base density in the table on page 12 can only be exceeded (up to the indicated maximum) when a development provides a substantial and lasting community benefit. Items that the draft ARP allows to be used to unlock this “bonus” density are:

- provision of affordable housing units
- provision of indoor amenity space for community groups and support services
- heritage designation
- heritage density transfer
- contribution to the Chinatown Improvement Fund (used for public realm improvements)

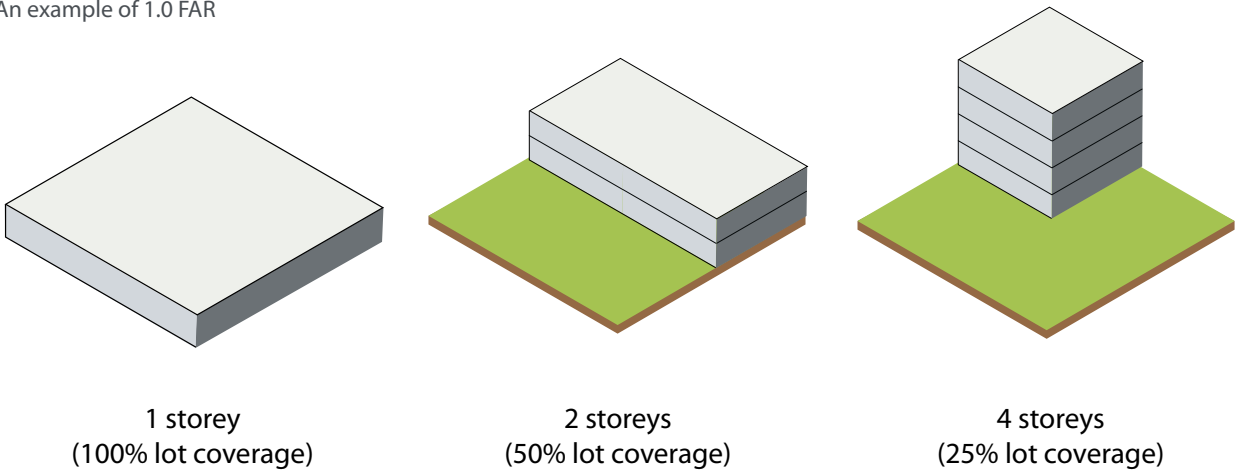


What is Floor Area Ratio (FAR)?

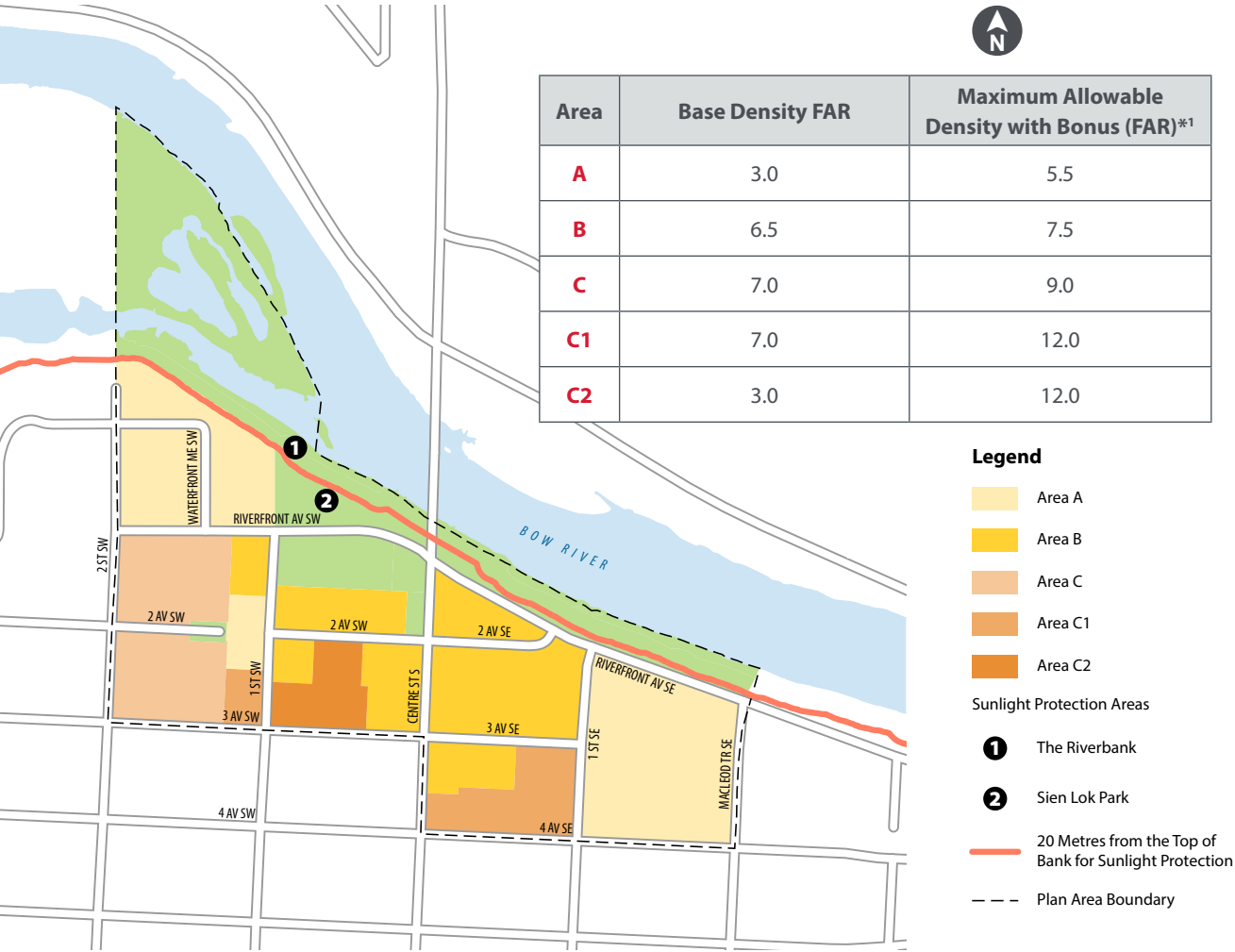
Density in Chinatown is measured by Floor Area Ratio (FAR), which is measured by dividing the building area by the parcel area. For example, if a 700 m2 site has an FAR of 1.0, the building could be one floor at 700 m2 or two floors at 350 m2 each, and so on as long as the total area of all floors does not exceed 700 m2 .

Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

An example of 1.0 FAR



Density continued



* Site constraints and or sunlight protection requirements may prevent maximum allowable density from being achieved.
1 the maximum density listed in the Bonus Schedule maybe exceeded by up to 10 per cent through a transfer of heritage density rights.

Area A

Consists of lands meant to be comprehensively designed with consideration given to the shadowing of important open areas. Primarily residential development with commercial uses at grade creating activity along Riverfront Avenue S.E. will be supported.

Area B

Allows for existing developed areas to be re-developed as medium-profile, higher density mixed-use development that provides residential and non-residential uses. The street level experience is most important, making sure that density and scale both contribute in a positive manner.

Area C (C, C1 and C2)

Applies roughly to the “non-river edges” of Chinatown where high-profile and high-density development contains residential mixed-use development. Stores and businesses, together with open spaces will make the pedestrian experience better and connect to landmarks and cultural destinations.

Character Areas

These areas are important to establishing a consistent urban identity throughout Chinatown. Policies on building scale, massing, as well as cultural motifs are included here. The defined character areas provide guidance for parts of the neighborhood which may have specific challenges. The entire Plan carefully examines the look, feel and function of the neighbourhood. This ensures all new development in Chinatown fits with the character of Chinatown and not of adjacent neighbourhoods. Three (3) Character Areas have been identified, based on Chinatown’s historic development, urban character, growth opportunities and the location of key neighbourhood attributes.

Heritage Core

The Heritage Core prioritizes conservation and enhancement of a small, but highly significant group of heritage resources. Policy focuses on additions, alterations and cultural adaptation based on heritage preservation.



Cultural Core

The Cultural Core focuses on places for gathering and cultural expression that helped define the unique character of Chinatown. Policy focuses on sensitive redevelopment that respects the prevailing scale and parcel pattern.

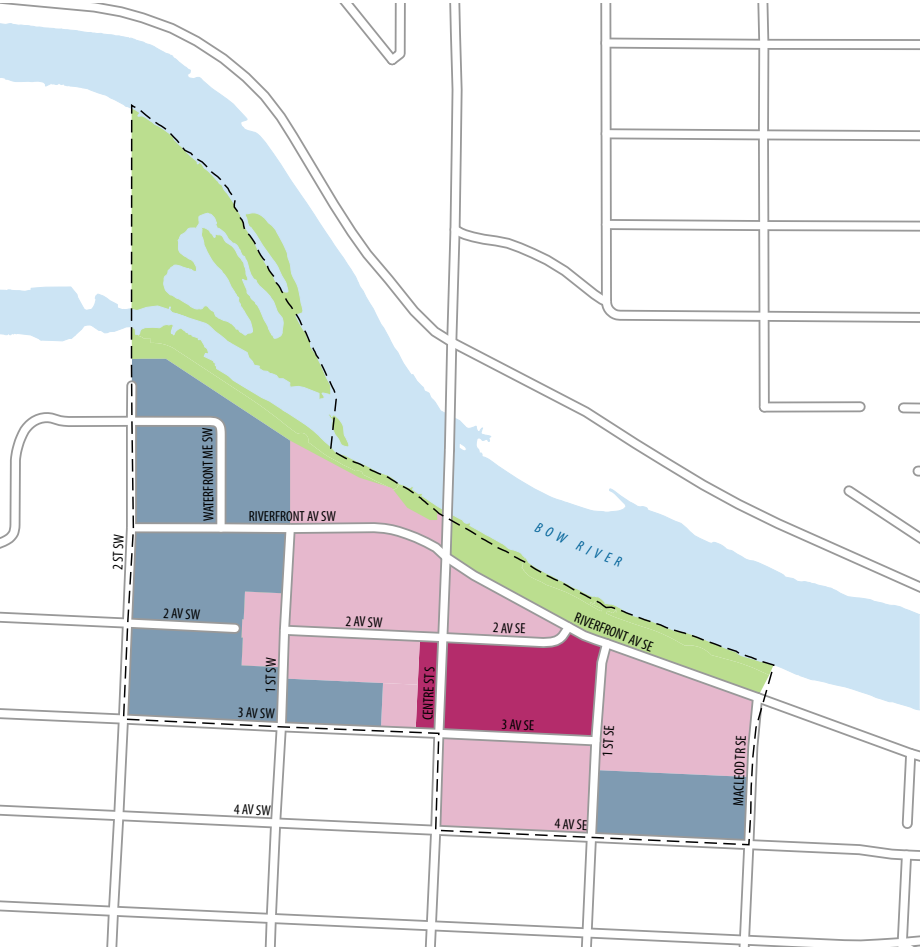


Edge Area

The Edge Area focuses on reinforcing neighborhood character by applying an understanding of the heritage, character and context of Chinatown through contextual new development.



Character Areas continued



- Legend**
- Heritage Core
 - Cultural Core
 - Edge area
 - Plan Area Boundary

Mobility and utility infrastructure

Moving around the city should be safe and convenient for people of all ages, genders, incomes and abilities. Mobility refers to a well-connected network that includes options for walking, bicycling/wheeling, taking transit and using personal vehicles. Recognizing the business needs in Chinatown, the mobility network needs to support localized deliveries and a high level of curbside activity. The Area Redevelopment Plan includes policies that ensure enhanced mobility for all modes.

Parking has been identified through engagement as being of high importance in Chinatown. In order to support improved parking around the neighbourhood, the draft ARP proposes, among other policies:

- 25% of stalls designated for short stay in all parking structures
- Encouragement of innovative parking technologies

Climate risk in Chinatown

Chinatown, like all neighbourhoods in Calgary, will experience impacts of climate change. The City of Calgary has created a climate risk profile for Chinatown to provide a detailed understanding of climate change risks and hazards. This is a crucial consideration for future mobility and infrastructure planning.



Top climate hazards



River flooding

Floods will become more frequent due to climate change



Extreme heat

Climate change will result in more frequent, longer, and intense heat waves



High intensity precipitation

Climate change will result in more intense rain and snow events that can cause floods

Projects – Completed, underway, designed

Park / Plaza Projects

- A Eau Claire Promenade

Streetscape Enhancement

- B Centre Street from Bridge to 4 Avenue S. conceptual design
- C 3 Avenue S. walking and wheeling upgrades

Project and Programs

- D North Central BRT and dedicated transit lanes on Centre Street
- E Future Public Transit System Station at 2 Avenue S.W.
- F Downtown flood barrier and Eau Claire Promenade

Projects – Future

Park / Plaza Projects

- G Sien Lok Park upgrades
- H Centre Street and 2 Avenue S.W. enhance gateway feature and open space
- I 4 Avenue S.E. and Centre Street improve and enhance plaza space and transit stop/station area
- J Enhance the Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre

Streetscape Enhancement

- K Centre Street between 2 and 4 Avenue introduce overhead gateway features
- L Centre Street S. and 4 Avenue S. repurpose parking to increase the public realm and potentially BRT station
- M Centre Street between 2 and 3 Avenue increase and enhance the pedestrian space
- N 1 Street S.W. activation
- O Potential green network upgrades

Project and Programs

- P Heritage Core Alleyway Activation Program
- Develop a consistent furniture palette that incorporates cultural references with ample seating opportunities (all streets in Chinatown).



- Legend
- Green Network
 - Potential Green Network
 - Existing Parks/Plaza
 - Streetscape Enhancement
 - Future Public Transit System

The illustration is for conceptual purpose only.

Public Realm Strategy

Chinatown will continue to evolve over the coming decades. Investment in the public areas and infrastructure will impact the future success of Chinatown as a place where people want to live, visit and set up businesses. The actions outlined in this section provide neighbourhood-wide options to help reach the goals of the Area Redevelopment Plan. These opportunities were identified by stakeholders through public communication throughout the Tomorrow's Chinatown project. To achieve Chinatown's vision and core ideas, there must be sustained action in each of the following areas:

- vibrancy and unique cultural character;
- green and open (amenity) spaces and
- mobility

Some identified potential projects and investments are highlighted in the image above.