

# VISION AND CONCEPT: WHAT IS MAIN STREET?

## 3.1 Vision for Main Street

In many ways Main Street has more in common with smaller towns and villages than it does with larger urban cores. The linear traffic pattern, lack of civic buildings and the diversity of use and building density contribute to a moderate sense of scale. The street is commonly thought of as a convenient local service and supply centre for northside residents. Although Main Street shares the St. John River with the downtown, it is not really thought of as being “on the river”, despite some of the best riverfront views being from the northside.

The five themes that came out of the public and stakeholder consultations can be summarized as:

1. Pedestrian Priority
2. Improve Aesthetics
3. Go Green and Sustainable
4. Family Services
5. Village Concept

Main Street acts like and feels like a village, so why not build on this character by more clearly identifying its entry points. This will create more clearly defined beginning and end points so area residents and visitors will know when they have reached the Village. In a small city that takes great pride in its quality of life attributes “Village” Main Street is even more appealing as a respite from city life. The notion of a “village” precinct in other major cities has worked well in establishing a unique position in the marketplace. The following vision is recommended for Main Street.



Main Street, with its mix of homes and businesses, is a convenient and comfortable place to live, work and recreate. It has a small town feel with city amenities. On Main Street we value the sense of community we find in the “village” setting which includes all types and stages of families. Our active business district provides services and products to our immediate community and to those beyond.

**The following five guiding principles form the basis of our vision of an urban village:**

- 1. Support the businesses and organizations that shape our sense of community and improve our health and well-being.**
- 2. Create a safe, convenient and comfortable place to live, work and recreate.**
- 3. Encourage healthy lifestyle choices such as active transportation, living close to work and school, and participation in recreational pursuits.**
- 4. Support the arts, culture and diversity to make our community vibrant.**
- 5. Create a view toward sustainability that values natural systems, the rivers, greenery and minimizes the impact on the environment from development.**

### Why the “Urban Village” Theme?

*Main Street can strengthen its identity by celebrating its roots. Originating as a village along the rivers the sense of community still exists today as a loyal neighbourhood and local service area. The “village” term is authentic. Positioning Main Street as a small town village centre differentiates it in the marketplace. “Urban Village” as a theme may be too much of an oxymoron for people to grasp. For the purpose of this plan the term is shortened to “Village, Main Street”. Future branding input may determine a more suitable term and tag line to solidify the image of Main Street.*



## 3.2 Identity

Main Street is currently an in-between place. It is not a downtown and it is not a mall or big-box centre. It is difficult to market something that can't be readily described and Main Street cannot continue to be all things to all people. A more clear focus is required to communicate what Main Street is or should be. What is clear is that Main Street has been built from an automobile centred suburban tool kit with suburban retail form. This position is out of step with the recent trends toward cities looking inward as people flock back to the urban centres. Cities that are not walkable, connected or foster a work environment that contributes to the innovation economy are destined to under achieve.

### Trends Causing Migration to Urban Cores

1. Demographic Living Preferences
  - baby boomers who want to “age in place”, downsizing
  - generation y’s preference for urban convenience over, social desires, less reliance on automobile
2. Economic Shifts
  - the “information era” is transforming how we make money, socialize, research and work
  - highly skilled workers will be key to the innovation economy and they will be attracted to urban centres that foster social and professional engagement and entrepreneurial opportunities
  - retail as an experience not just a transaction
3. Infrastructure Expenses
  - communities can not afford the high costs of infrastructure associated with automobile centered design
  - office space and retail premises will become smaller, with less space per person and more multi-functional
  - energy efficiency will be a standard design principle

#### 4. Driving Reductions

- community and home ownership represent over 50% of income expenses
- generation y’s are not interested in cars, they will choose to live near work, use active transportation

The communities that can adapt to these changing lifestyles will be the ones most likely to thrive. The City of Fredericton has put planning measures in place to encourage mixed-use on Main Street; however, thriving mixed-use is always designed for pedestrians. All planning and development decisions should be based with the pedestrian in mind. If you want to drive up sales, you must engage people to walk. Great walking experiences require greater attention to detail. Traveling at 5 km/h one appreciates their environment in detail, at 50 km/h only massing and contrast are recognized. Sidewalks need to become memorable experiences, teeming with life, activity and expressing an authentic story or sense of place. Clustering facilities to create nodes of activity will boost identity. Businesses that offer an experience or stores that express the product inside from outside (think about selling the product without the aid of signs) will become the beloved businesses, the “generators”. These high tenant value businesses will be locally owned, active, outward facing to the sidewalk and on the ground floor where they can interact with pedestrians.

Main Street is a bit toothy, meaning there are several gaps in the building fabric that make it less than ideal for pedestrians. Equally, problematic is the poor first impression of the architecture. Buildings are telling; they expose the market conditions and vibrance of the street. The bar is set pretty low on Main Street. Main Street is also missing physical cues that the river(s) is near by.

Creating an identity for Main Street will take many years to realize. In the short term branding, signage and good planning principles will set the stage. In the longer term Main Street needs to shift its focus from accommodating traffic to becoming a walkable street with attractive, contemporary architecture fronting the sidewalk.

Using the “Village” concept goes back to the roots of the settlement on the St. John River and sets it apart from the other commercial options - downtown, malls, big-box stores and others. The “Village” notion sets a realistic expectation that is in tune with the scale of development and neighbouring housing stock.

