

The 2017 Fort Collins

# Downtown Plan

Executive Summary







The Downtown Plan is an inspirational guide for budgets, projects, programs, investments, regulations and other related efforts to keep Downtown vibrant and successful as the vital heart of Fort Collins. It replaces the previous Downtown Plan, which was adopted in 1989 to spur the dramatic turnaround and revitalization that shaped Downtown as it exists today. The City of Fort Collins collaborated with the Downtown Development Authority, the Downtown Business Association and the general public to engage everyone with a stake in Downtown in an open exploration of all issues and opportunities.

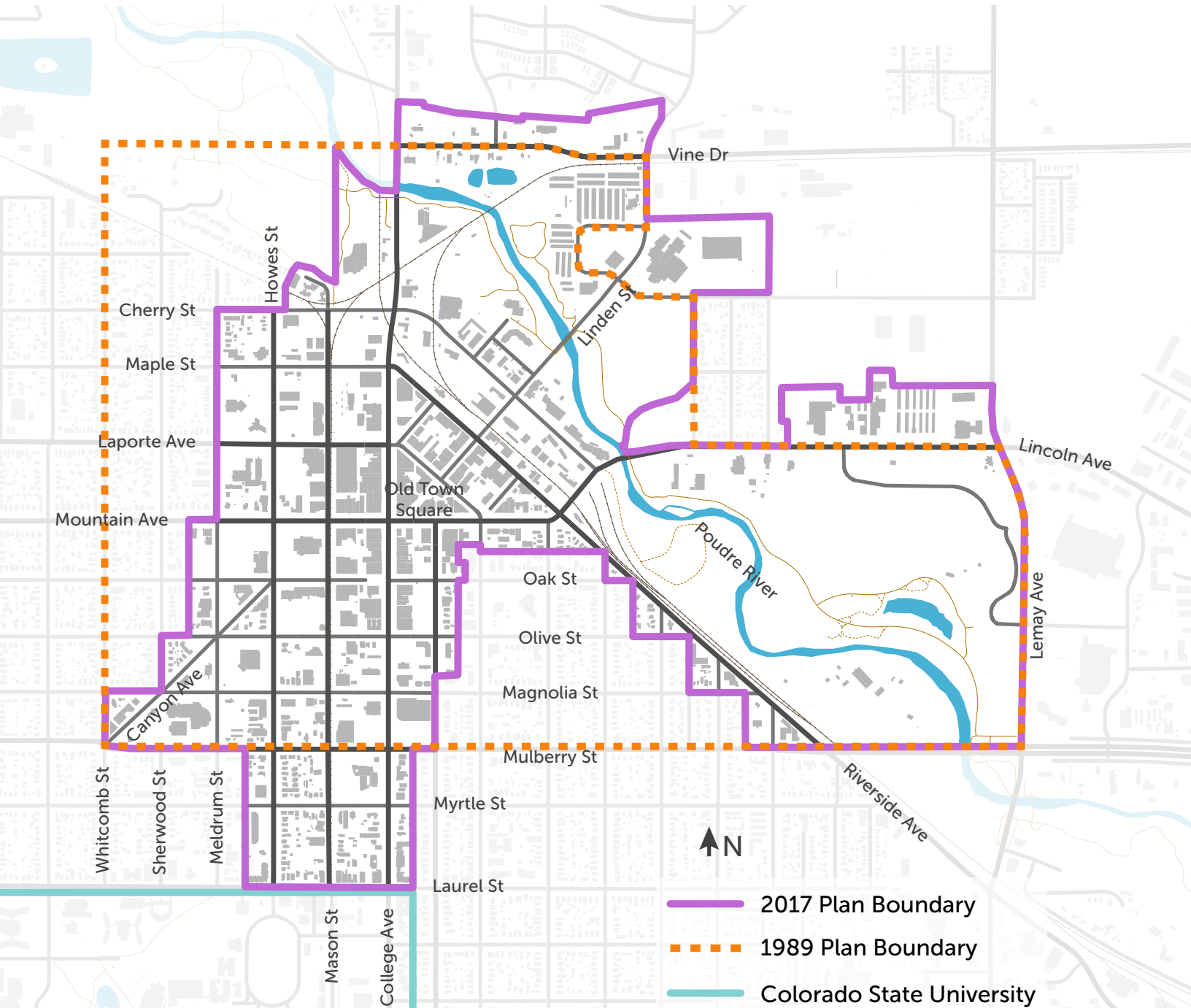
This Plan describes a renewed vision, policy directions for achieving the vision, and action items for the next 5, 10 and in some cases up to 20 years to continue success.

Above all, the vision outlined in this Plan is about vitality. The intent of every principle, policy and action item is to make Downtown a place where people can live fruitfully — to work and be fulfilled; to play and recreate; to meet and reside in community; and to enjoy the beauty and opportunities Downtown offers.

Because of Downtown’s history, the area is already infused with activity and investment. This Plan will ensure Downtown remains a place where meaningful business and a healthy, diverse community are commonplace, comfortable and sustainable. Such a place takes on a dynamism of its own. Where this is already realized, the Plan explains how to preserve success. Where obstacles to vitality exist, the Plan offers guidance on a path forward.

# Downtown Plan Area

The Downtown Plan encompasses more than the historic core of "Old Town." The Plan boundary incorporates areas planned and zoned for commercial activities, stretching from Vine Drive south to the Colorado State University campus and from Canyon Avenue eastward to Lemay Avenue. The boundary has evolved since the 1989 Downtown Plan to include additional commercial areas, to correspond to zoning boundaries, to exclude residential areas and to reduce overlap with the Old Town Neighborhoods Plan.



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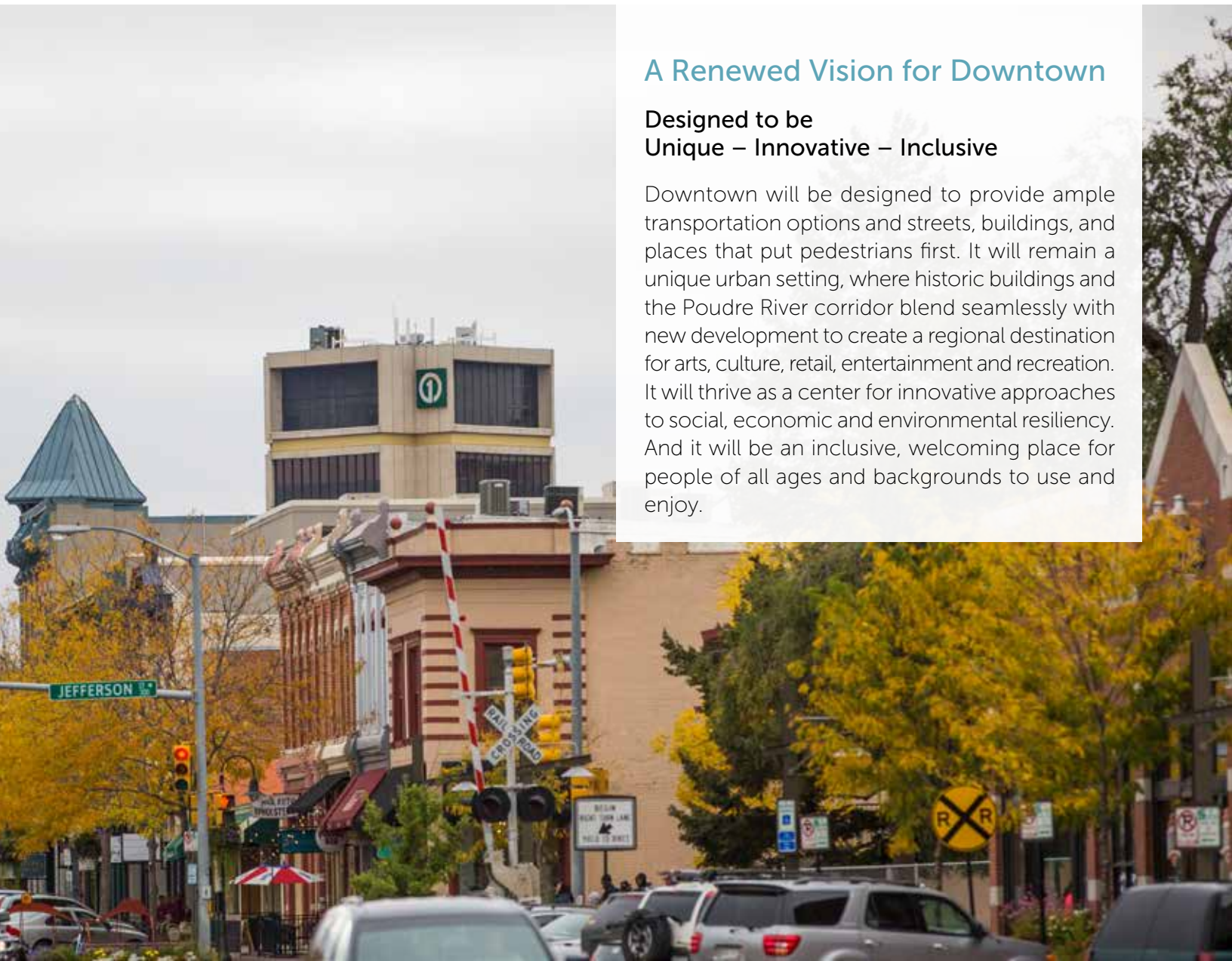
The cornerstone of Downtown’s incredible revitalization has been, and will continue to be, the intentional efforts of Downtown property owners, business owners, City leaders, and dedicated citizens. Thousands of people shared their dreams for the future of Downtown, and the renewed vision presented in this Plan reflects a community conversation about how we want to guide the next stages of Downtown’s success.

The vision celebrates previous efforts, and emphasizes the importance of continuing the careful, intentional approach that has guided Downtown’s development since the 1989 Downtown Plan. The community clearly wants Downtown to remain a successful, vibrant place. There is room for improvement, however, and community members also want to see policies, programs, and actions that have been developed to address the specific issues and challenges facing our Downtown.

## A Renewed Vision for Downtown

### Designed to be Unique – Innovative – Inclusive

Downtown will be designed to provide ample transportation options and streets, buildings, and places that put pedestrians first. It will remain a unique urban setting, where historic buildings and the Poudre River corridor blend seamlessly with new development to create a regional destination for arts, culture, retail, entertainment and recreation. It will thrive as a center for innovative approaches to social, economic and environmental resiliency. And it will be an inclusive, welcoming place for people of all ages and backgrounds to use and enjoy.



## What will it take to achieve the community’s vision for Downtown?

### Put Pedestrians First

Regardless of their mode of travel –car, bike, longboard, bus, on foot, or using a mobility device – everyone who comes Downtown is a pedestrian when they arrive. Downtown is already one of the most pedestrian-oriented places in our entire community. However, the experience of walking around Downtown is not always as enjoyable or safe as it could be. The policies in this Plan aim to put pedestrians first in all parts of Downtown. More transportation options, safer crossings, more pleasant streetscapes and public spaces and buildings designed to feel comfortable at the pedestrian scale are all emphasized throughout the plan.

### Preserve and Enhance Downtown’s Sense of Place

Residents and visitors alike cherish Downtown in part because of its historic buildings, exciting arts and culture scene and unique resources like the Poudre River. As Downtown’s activity extends beyond the historic core area, the buildings, culture and resources that make Downtown special must be preserved and enhanced. Downtown Fort Collins should remain a place with a unique identity. The policies in this Plan provide direction about the desired future character for all of Downtown’s character subdistricts, as well as guidance that ensures a balance of recreation and preservation of the Poudre River Corridor.

### Encourage Innovation and Economic Vitality

Downtown’s economy is strong and vibrant. The economic revitalization of Downtown over the last several decades has been transformative for the entire community. However, there are challenges that need to be addressed to ensure Downtown’s

continued economic health. Rising costs have impacted Downtown’s affordability for both residents and business owners. This Plan encourages additional housing and more varied housing types Downtown to provide more options for residents. It also encourages small-format retail spaces and support for small and local businesses. Vehicle parking is another issue that is explored in depth in this Plan. Providing parking is expensive – one space in a parking garage can cost up to \$35,000 to build. Policies in this Plan will guide our decisions about parking in the future. Careful data collection and monitoring, appropriate requirements for private development that still allow for good design and quality materials, and encouraging public-private partnerships for additional parking structures are examples of policy recommendations included in the Plan.

### Balance the Needs of All Users

Downtown is everyone’s neighborhood. As the level of activity and number of people Downtown continues to grow, balancing the needs of all users will be an important element of achieving a unique, innovative, inclusive Downtown. People use Downtown in a myriad of ways – business owners and employees sell their goods and services, visitors shop and explore, people visit breweries, restaurants and bars, and residents attend to their daily tasks. All people have a right to be in public space, including people who are experiencing homelessness. All people should also feel safe Downtown at any time of day or night. While it is difficult to achieve a perfect balance, the policies in this Plan strive to create an atmosphere of respect, support, and understanding among all of Downtown’s users while also ensuring adequate resources for ongoing management and maintenance.

## Plan Development

The policies and action items in the Downtown Plan were developed over five phases, each with its own purpose and objectives:

- 1 Issues Identification** – To kick off the Downtown Plan and explore key issues, the first phase of the planning process asked community members to describe what they love about the Downtown area and what could be improved. One-on-one stakeholder interviews, open houses, text message questionnaires, a First Friday event and booths at other community events helped reach a broad cross-section of Downtown residents, business owners, visitors and employees.
- 2 A Renewed Vision** - Phase 2 culminated in a renewed vision for Downtown. At festivals, through online questionnaires, at farmers’ markets and at public meetings, community members shared their ideas about the future of Downtown. Walking tours of the character subdistricts explored how different parts of Downtown might look, feel and develop over time.
- 3 Choices & Strategies** - The third planning phase asked difficult questions about which choices and strategies could best achieve the renewed vision for Downtown. A series of open houses and workshops facilitated in-depth community conversations about the benefits and trade-offs of key strategies to address parking, Climate Action Plan implementation, building compatibility and more. An online questionnaire and a multi-day character subdistrict charrette provided additional guidance for the implementation of the Downtown Plan.
- 4 Document Development** – In the draft phase, members of the six working groups provided their expertise to refine the overall direction of the Plan, draft content and review draft policies and action items. A roundtable of all working group members provided an opportunity for collaboration across topic areas as policies and action items were being developed.
- 5 Implementation & Plan Adoption** – Prior to adoption by City Council, the public reviewed the draft Downtown Plan at two open houses and a series of informal “coffee hours” in convenient locations around Downtown. The draft Plan was also available online for a 6 week public comment period. The Plan was refined to reflect comments received from the community and from City Boards and Commissions, who offered recommendations to City Council prior to plan adoption.



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## Community Engagement and Outreach

Perhaps more than any other Fort Collins planning project to date, community input influenced the content of the Downtown Plan. It captures the results of a wide-ranging, 18-month conversation involving thousands of residents, business owners, representatives of various interests and visitors. The issues and priorities

identified in the Plan directly reflect what community members had to say. Engagement techniques included traditional methods such as focus groups and public workshops as well as more innovative grassroots efforts, such as text message surveys and interactive booths at community festivals and events.



## Working Groups

Six working groups, each focused on a topic area, guided the development of the Plan. Members of the working groups represented a cross-section of over 60 Downtown stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, including City, DDA and DBA staff, business owners, residents, subject matter experts, developers and architects, community leaders, representatives from nonprofits and social service agencies, and more. This structure created an integrated dialogue that transcended organizational boundaries.

Contributions from the working groups were an essential component of the Plan. Working group members helped facilitate workshops, ensured all perspectives were represented, provided content, reviewed the policy guidelines and edited the draft Plan document. Each of the working group members invested significant time and energy.

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## Topic Areas

The Downtown Plan is organized into six topic areas:



**Key Considerations:**

- Buildings
- Streetscapes
- Outdoor spaces



**Key Considerations:**

- Getting to/from Downtown
- Parking (bike and vehicle)
- Getting around Downtown
- Communication about all of the above



**Key Considerations:**

- Mix of uses
- Investment in Downtown
- Additional Downtown housing



**Key Considerations:**

- Affordable space
- Coordination and communication
- The 24-hour creative economy



**Key Considerations:**

- The Poudre River corridor
- Climate resiliency and innovation
- Nature in the City
- Utility infrastructure



**Key Considerations:**

- Keeping up with growth - maintenance, management and policing
- Illegal and disruptive behaviors

While this organization is useful in working with related sets of issues, the topic areas are also fundamentally interdependent. Many of the issues addressed by the Downtown Plan should be considered comprehensively and from multiple perspectives, rather than in isolation. Grounded in the broad public input received during the planning process, the principles, policies and action items presented in the Plan provide a framework for dialogue and collaboration around the values and priorities of Downtown’s stakeholders.

The Downtown Plan’s ultimate success relies on the coordinated implementation of strategies and action items across all of the topic areas. For example, a flourishing arts and creative business sector (Arts and Culture) will benefit from organizing functions of Downtown management entities (Management and Maintenance). Thoughtful design of new development (Urban Design) is key to providing access and parking for employees, residents and visitors (Transportation and Parking).



## Planning Terms Defined

A **vision** is an aspirational, future-oriented statement that reflects the community’s priorities and desires for the next 10–20 years. Vision statements provide the overarching direction for the Downtown Plan.

**Principles** are thematic goals that directly support the intent of the vision statement. They set the guidance for more specific policies and action items. For each topic area, there are 3 to 7 principles that support that topic area’s vision.

**Policies** are targeted statements that can be more directly tied to the work of City departments, collaborating agencies, or external groups. Policies provide more detailed direction related to decisions, programs, regulations, and investment in the Downtown area.

Policies then drive a set of **action items**, which are tangible steps that can be taken by one or more parties to help achieve the vision and principles outlined for each topic area.





# Urban Design

## Vision:

Downtown Fort Collins will embrace its rich heritage of design by preserving existing historic structures and creating new buildings of architectural merit. A variety of distinct character subdistricts will be recognizable within the Downtown, each evoking a unique sense of place. Streets, sidewalks and common public spaces will be attractive and comfortable. Transitions between Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as between different character subdistricts, will be seamless. Downtown gateways will provide an inviting sense of arrival.



## Principles:

- **UD 1:** Recognize and promote differences and defining characteristics in the varied character subdistricts that make up the Downtown.
- **UD 2:** Allow taller buildings (over three stories) in appropriate character subdistricts while maximizing compatibility through appropriate design.
- **UD 3:** Promote high-quality building design and materials.
- **UD 4:** Preserve resources that contribute to the historic character and authenticity of Downtown.
- **UD 5:** Continue to develop a framework of attractive streetscapes.
- **UD 6:** Invest in new publicly accessible outdoor gathering spaces and improvements to existing publicly accessible spaces.
- **UD 7:** Provide clear and inviting Downtown Gateways.





# Transportation + Parking

## Vision:

Downtown residents and visitors will enjoy multiple travel choices. More people will be biking, walking and taking public transit to Downtown than ever before. Downtown will be accessible for drivers, and vehicle parking will be available in well-marked parking structures that serve longer-duration parking needs, as well as convenient on-street parking spaces and off-street lots for shorter trips. Bus service to Downtown will be frequent, convenient and comfortable. There will be multiple low-stress (low-speed and low-volume) routes for bicyclists with ample, convenient bicycle parking near destinations, and the sidewalk network will be well-connected and in good condition. Once Downtown, it will be easy for people of all ages and abilities to move about on foot, with a stroller or mobility device, by bus or by bicycle.



## Principles:

- **TP 1:** Provide safe, convenient, and comfortable travel options to, from and around Downtown for all modes of travel and people of all ages and abilities. Support easy access and focus on biking, walking and riding transit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through longer-term modal shift.
- **TP 2:** Manage on-street and structured parking facilities for all users — including primary employment, ground floor retail, business services and visitors — that adequately balances supply and demand, and provide parking infrastructure to support future growth.
- **TP 3:** Provide timely and informative communications about real-time travel/parking conditions and options.



# Market + Economy

## Vision:

Downtown Fort Collins will be a key economic engine for the region and one of the most distinctive small downtowns in the nation. Downtown will become a diverse employment center where retail, finance, technology startups, government and services thrive. Residents and visitors will experience Downtown as a center for creativity featuring a wide variety of local retail shops, high-quality dining and entertainment options, a unique sense of place, well-preserved history and a strong local business community. A broad range of housing types will be available to meet the needs of diverse age groups, lifestyles, and incomes. Downtown will also be recognized as a center for innovation, where businesses partner with Colorado State University to advance knowledge-based industries.



## Principles:

- **ME 1:** Strengthen Downtown’s business mix by addressing market opportunities in the residential, commercial, retail, industrial, and visitor sectors.
- **ME 2:** Identify and create sustainable funding sources to incentivize desirable development, including unique retail, employment centers, diverse housing types and high-quality design.
- **ME 3:** Encourage new investment in Downtown while continuing to ensure that new development fits into the overall Downtown context.





# Arts + Culture

## Vision:

Downtown Fort Collins will be a regional artistic and cultural hub and a national and global destination for a range of creative and social offerings. Downtown will attract talent, innovation and diversity and create vibrancy, inclusion and economic success. Artists, creative entrepreneurs and arts and culture organizations thrive Downtown with affordable live-work spaces, robust networks and a variety of well-supported venues and resources. Culture should be considered essential to sustainability and incorporated into every decision for Downtown. Active social spaces, unique events and experiences, creative businesses, and state-of-the-art cultural assets will enrich the lives of residents, the economic health of the Downtown area and the experiences of visitors.



## Principles:

- **AC 1:** Develop a creative network for individuals, organizations and creative businesses in Downtown.
- **AC 2:** Support the creation of an Office of Creative Industries as an essential component to achieving the vision.
- **AC 3:** Support arts, culture, and creative enterprises with facilities, promotion, expanded program opportunities, and funding.
- **AC 4:** Sustain and improve affordability and availability of start-up, live, work and live/work spaces for creatives.
- **AC 5:** Explore opportunities to incorporate more art into Downtown properties, businesses, and public spaces.

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# Energy + Environment

## Vision:

Downtown Fort Collins will pursue resource and natural systems conservation measures in all operations and development projects. Downtown will exemplify City-wide climate protection efforts, having incorporated innovative strategies for energy conservation, production, enhanced mobility and resiliency. From any Downtown location, people can easily access the Poudre River, parks and natural areas. The presence of nature should be felt even in Downtown's most urban spaces and is cultivated as an essential amenity. Recreational access to nature will be balanced with the need to preserve and protect natural resources, while stormwater management and utility infrastructure ensure existing and future community needs are met.



## Principles:

- **EE 1:** Celebrate, preserve and enhance the Poudre River Corridor and other unique natural resources.
- **EE 2:** Downtown should lead the way in demonstrating and showcasing technologies, strategies and innovative approaches that advance the City's climate action goals.
- **EE 3:** Incorporate opportunities to find respite and enjoy nature throughout Downtown.
- **EE 4:** Ensure that Downtown utility infrastructure meets the needs of current and future property owners, businesses, residents and visitors.





# Management + Maintenance

## Vision:

Downtown will be safe, clean and inviting for walking, where people of all ages and backgrounds can feel welcome and comfortable. Management, policing, and maintenance of public space will be highly responsive, detail-oriented and innovative in support of commerce, socializing, community gatherings, civic participation and Downtown living. Nightlife remains a key aspect of Downtown's vitality, and its special needs and impacts will be recognized and addressed with responsible, collaborative efforts in the interest of safety and quality of life for the community. Mutual understanding and relationships will continue to develop among all providers of services and affected interests as a key to managing overlapping and sometimes competing interests in the spectrum of 24-hour activities.



## Principles:

- **MM 1:** Manage Downtown's public space to maintain walkability for pedestrians. Inviting people to walk around Downtown with ease and comfort is the primary function of Downtown's sidewalks; various amenities in the sidewalk right-of-way add crucial vitality and enhance the experience but need careful management.
- **MM 2:** Recognize that a sense of safety in a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere is crucial to all other aspects of Downtown's success.
- **MM 3:** Improve understanding of homelessness-related issues among all those affected, and support efforts to address needs.
- **MM 4:** Expand maintenance capacity to keep up with growth and success.
- **MM 5:** Address issues and tradeoffs related to community events and festivals, balancing the number and scale with commerce and everyday local wellbeing.
- **MM 6:** Coordinate overall communications and messaging about Downtown.

## Character Subdistricts

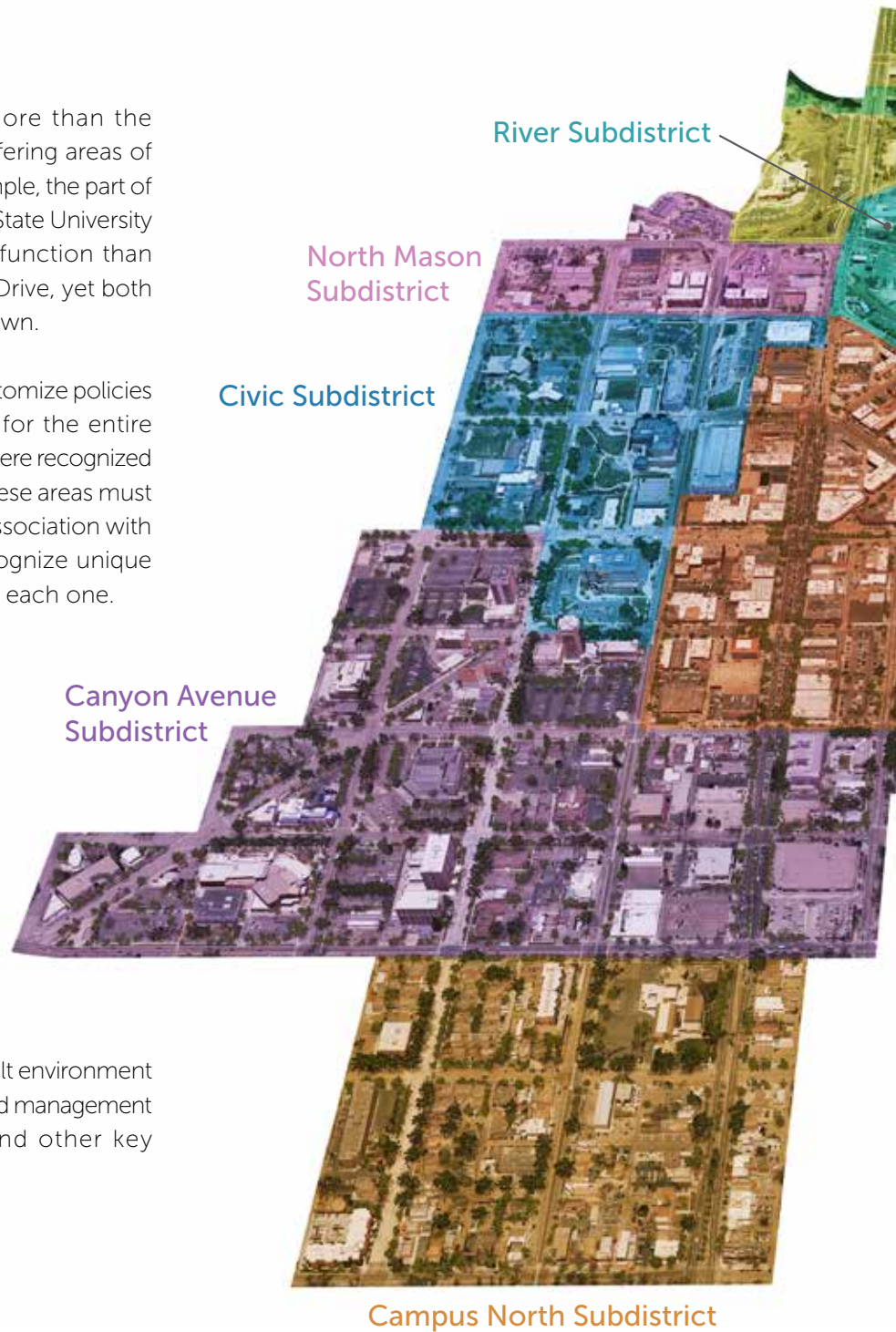
Downtown encompasses much more than the memorable “Old Town” core, with differing areas of varied and complex character. For example, the part of Downtown directly north of Colorado State University has a much different character and function than the area north of the river along Vine Drive, yet both function within the sphere of Downtown.

To acknowledge this complexity, to customize policies and action items and to better plan for the entire Downtown, nine character subdistricts were recognized through the planning process. While these areas must function and transition seamlessly in association with each other, planning should also recognize unique qualities and opportunities that define each one.

Downtown Subdistricts:

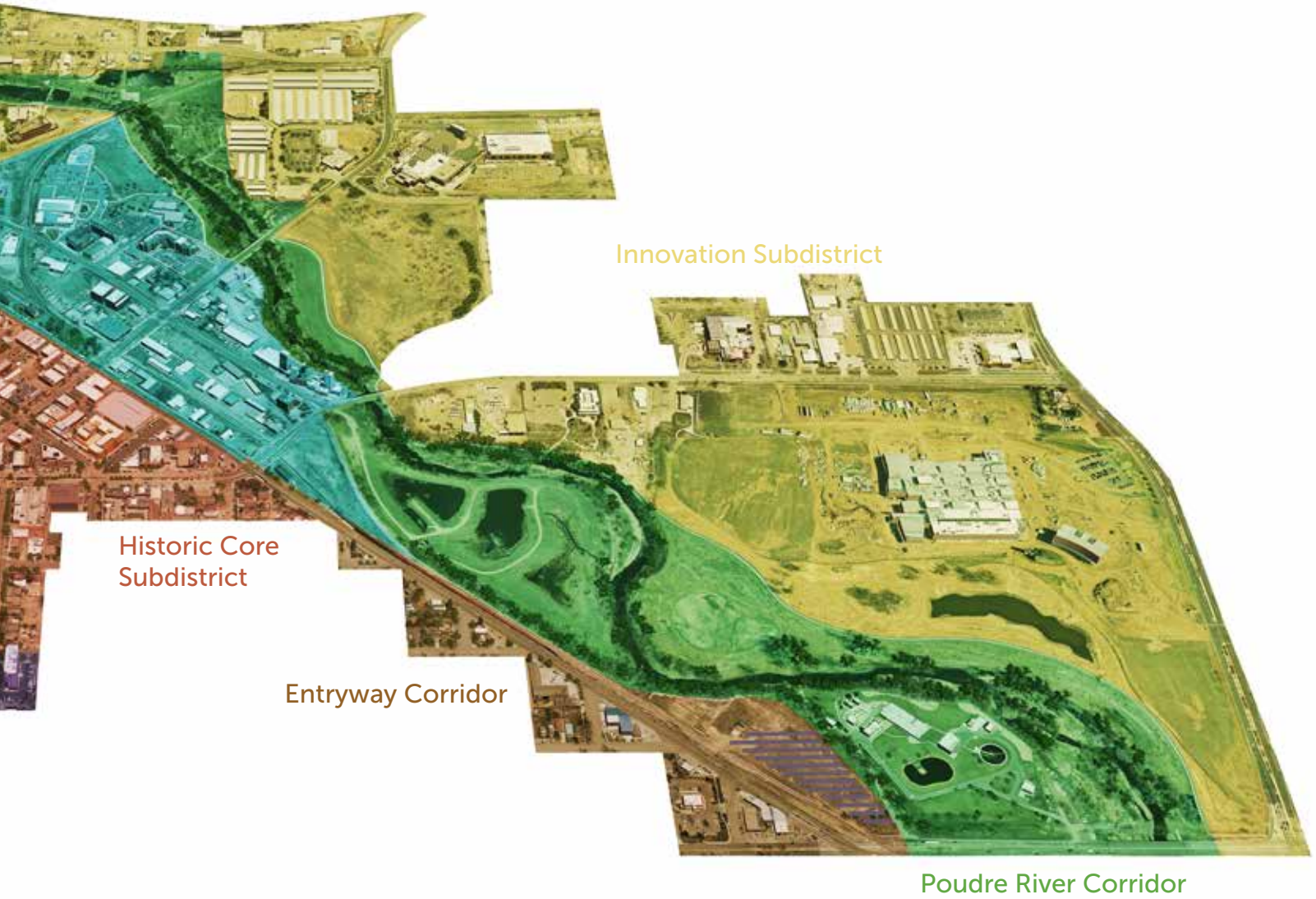
- Innovation Subdistrict
- Poudre River Corridor
- River Subdistrict
- North Mason Subdistrict
- Civic Subdistrict
- Canyon Avenue Subdistrict
- Historic Core Subdistrict
- Campus North Subdistrict
- Entryway Corridor

Subdistricts are defined by land uses, built environment and landscape setting; social, financial and management factors; transportation systems; and other key characteristics.



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Historic Core  
Subdistrict

Innovation Subdistrict

Entryway Corridor

Poudre River Corridor

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## Implementation

The implementation section summarizes key action items necessary to support the principles and policies presented in the topic area sections. Some actions and recommendations are already underway or will immediately follow the adoption of the Plan. Other actions are identified for the short- and intermediate-term, many of which require additional funding or effort by the City, DDA, DBA and other partners. The following four timeframes apply to the action items identified in the Plan.

### Immediate Actions (Within 120 Days of Plan Adoption)

Items identified for initiation or completion concurrently with or immediately following adoption of the Downtown Plan.

### Short-Term Actions (2017-2018)

Items identified for initiation within the current Budgeting for Outcomes (BFO) budget cycle.

### Intermediate Actions (2019-2026)

High-priority items that should be initiated and implemented in alignment with upcoming budget cycles.

### Ongoing Programs & Actions

Items that are already in progress, do not have a specified timeframe, or that require ongoing coordination to implement.

The Downtown Plan recommends over 250 distinct action items, outlined in easy-to-read tables in section 4 of the plan. Regular monitoring and updates will ensure steady progress toward achieving the community's vision for Downtown.

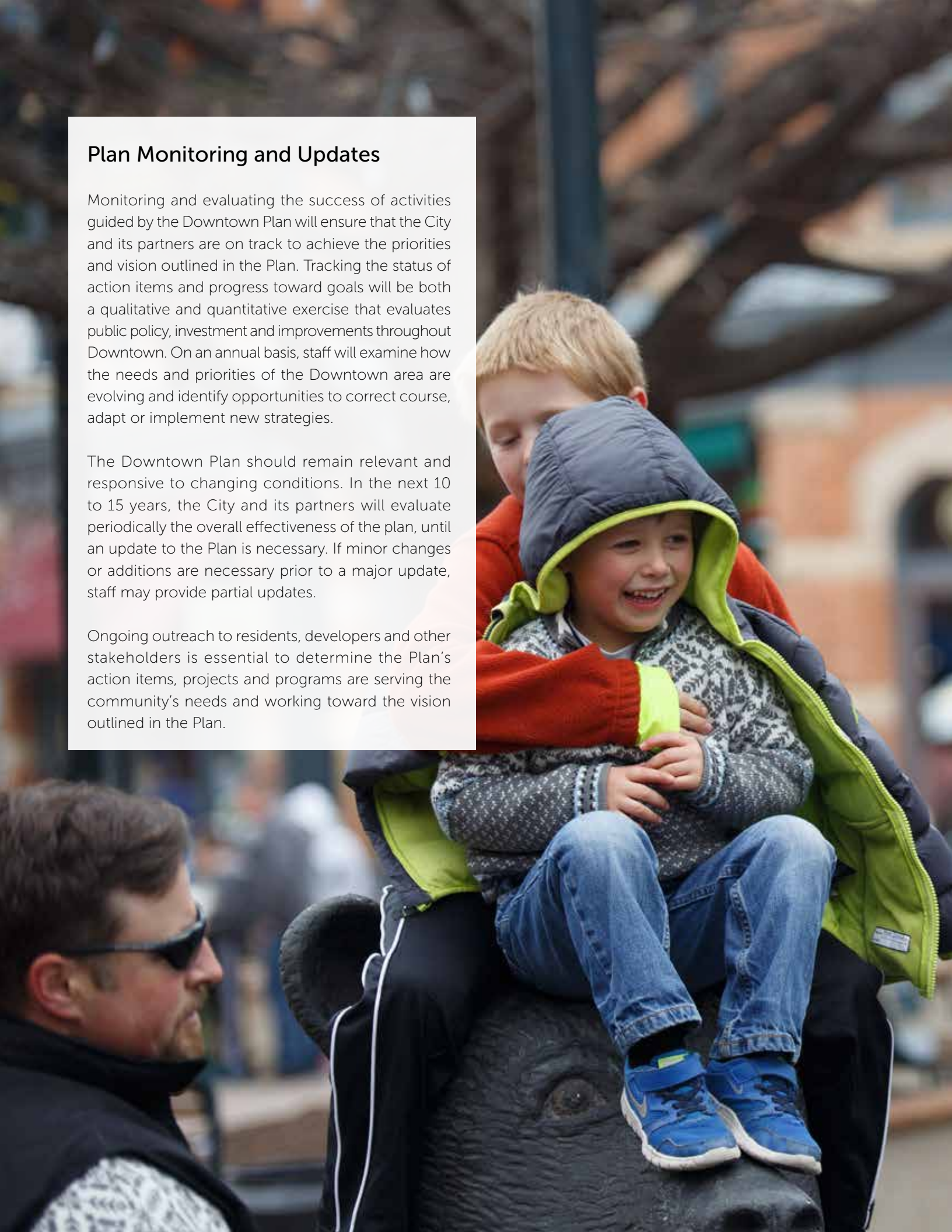


## Plan Monitoring and Updates

Monitoring and evaluating the success of activities guided by the Downtown Plan will ensure that the City and its partners are on track to achieve the priorities and vision outlined in the Plan. Tracking the status of action items and progress toward goals will be both a qualitative and quantitative exercise that evaluates public policy, investment and improvements throughout Downtown. On an annual basis, staff will examine how the needs and priorities of the Downtown area are evolving and identify opportunities to correct course, adapt or implement new strategies.

The Downtown Plan should remain relevant and responsive to changing conditions. In the next 10 to 15 years, the City and its partners will evaluate periodically the overall effectiveness of the plan, until an update to the Plan is necessary. If minor changes or additions are necessary prior to a major update, staff may provide partial updates.

Ongoing outreach to residents, developers and other stakeholders is essential to determine the Plan's action items, projects and programs are serving the community's needs and working toward the vision outlined in the Plan.





The Downtown Plan can be found at:

[www.fcgov.com/downtown](http://www.fcgov.com/downtown)