

# Land Use Bylaw Renewal: The Downtown Parking Issue

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## Background

The Land Use Bylaw's minimum off-street parking requirements create limitations that can deter new development in Lethbridge's downtown. A key goal of the LUB Renewal Project is to address these issues and allow the flexibility for downtown to be a walkable, vibrant and people-oriented community.

## Relevant Plans

- ❖ Municipal Development Plan
- ❖ Public Realm and Transportation Study (PRATS)
- ❖ Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan (DARP)
- ❖ Efficient Land Use Strategy
- ❖ Transportation Master Plan
- ❖ Cycling Master Plan

## Overview

Lethbridge's off-street parking requirements are the result of a period of population and economic growth after WWII. This period saw the rise of car use and the subsequent need for planners to plan around car use.

The result was that downtown was neglected by some people in favour of other commercial nodes like Mayor Magrath Drive for its perceived ability to provide more convenient off-street parking.

## References

- 1 Engel, Jerome S., Jasmina Berbegal-Mirabent, and Josep M. Piqué. "The renaissance of the city as a cluster of innovation." *Cogent Business & Management* 5, no. 1 (2018): 1532777.
- 2 Evans, Joel R. "Retailing in perspective: the past is a prologue to the future." *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 21, no. 1 (2011): 1-31.
- 3 City of Lethbridge. "Heart of Our City Master Plan." (2012).

## Impacts

The strategy by previous planners to prioritize off-street parking provision has led to a large amount of off-street parking spaces that are not fully utilized even during peak busy hours – leading to a sense of placelessness.

This speaks to the larger need for more community-oriented planning as opposed to planning around cars.

- ❖ Minimum parking requirements deter new development (as well as redevelopment) due to a lack of space to accommodate off-street parking, which can push developers and business owners out of downtown.
- ❖ The cost of providing parking is also a burden on small local businesses (who comprise a large part of the Downtown Commercial district). This makes them less competitive with big box stores who have more resources. These costs are also often pushed onto consumers to recover lost income (Evans, 2011).
- ❖ Similar land use types have different definitions despite having similar operations. This creates confusion for planning authorities and applicants alike.

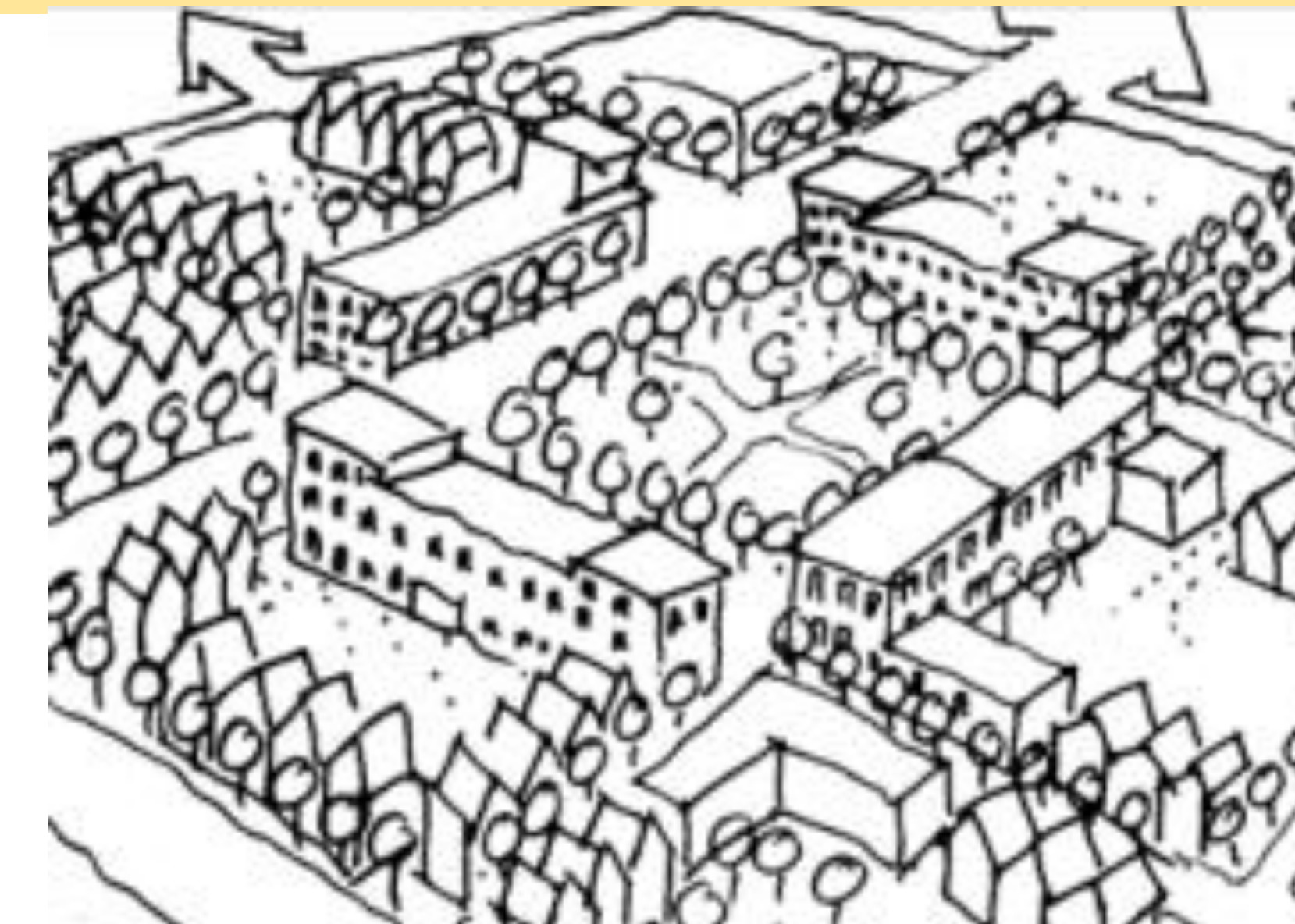
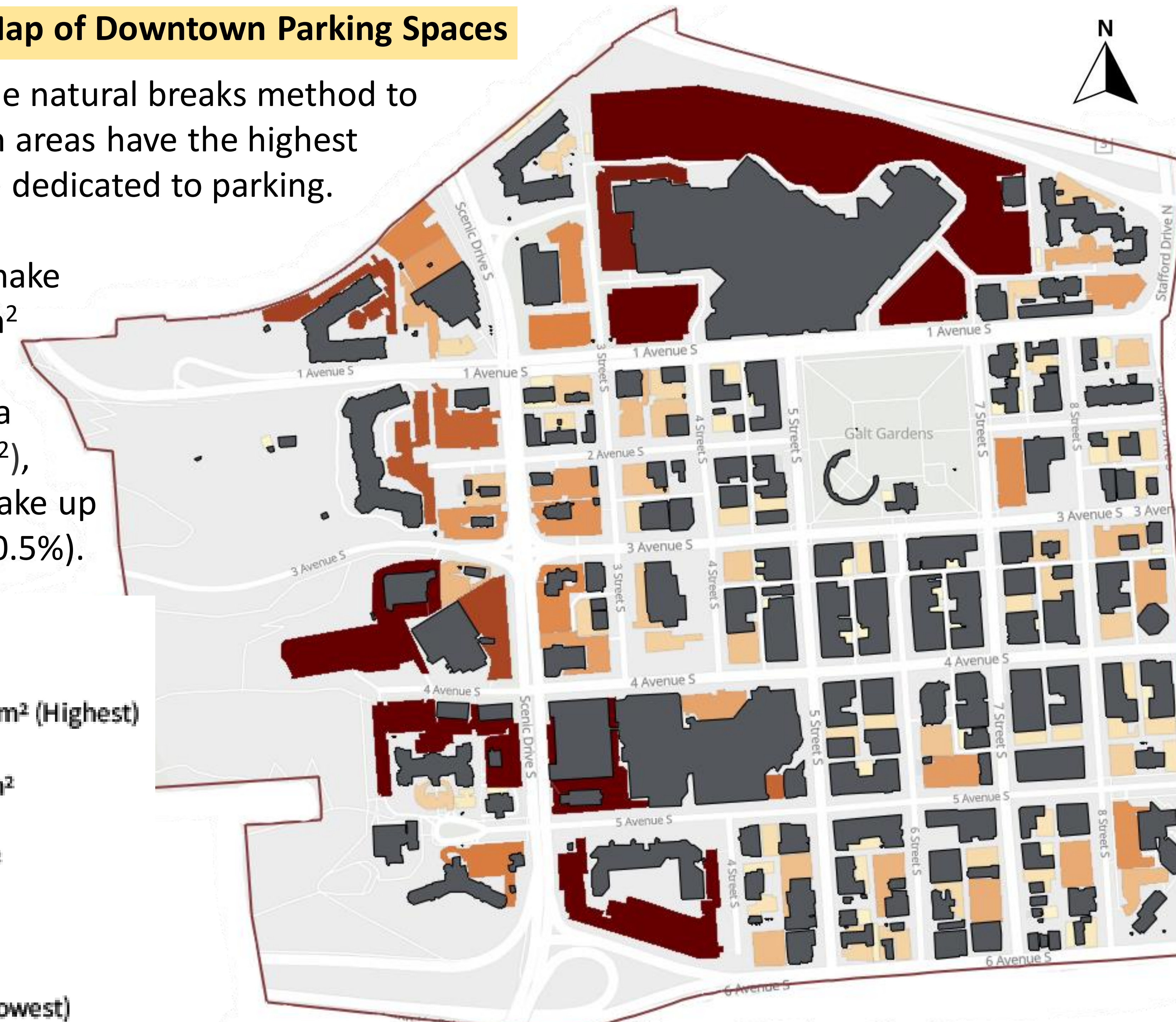
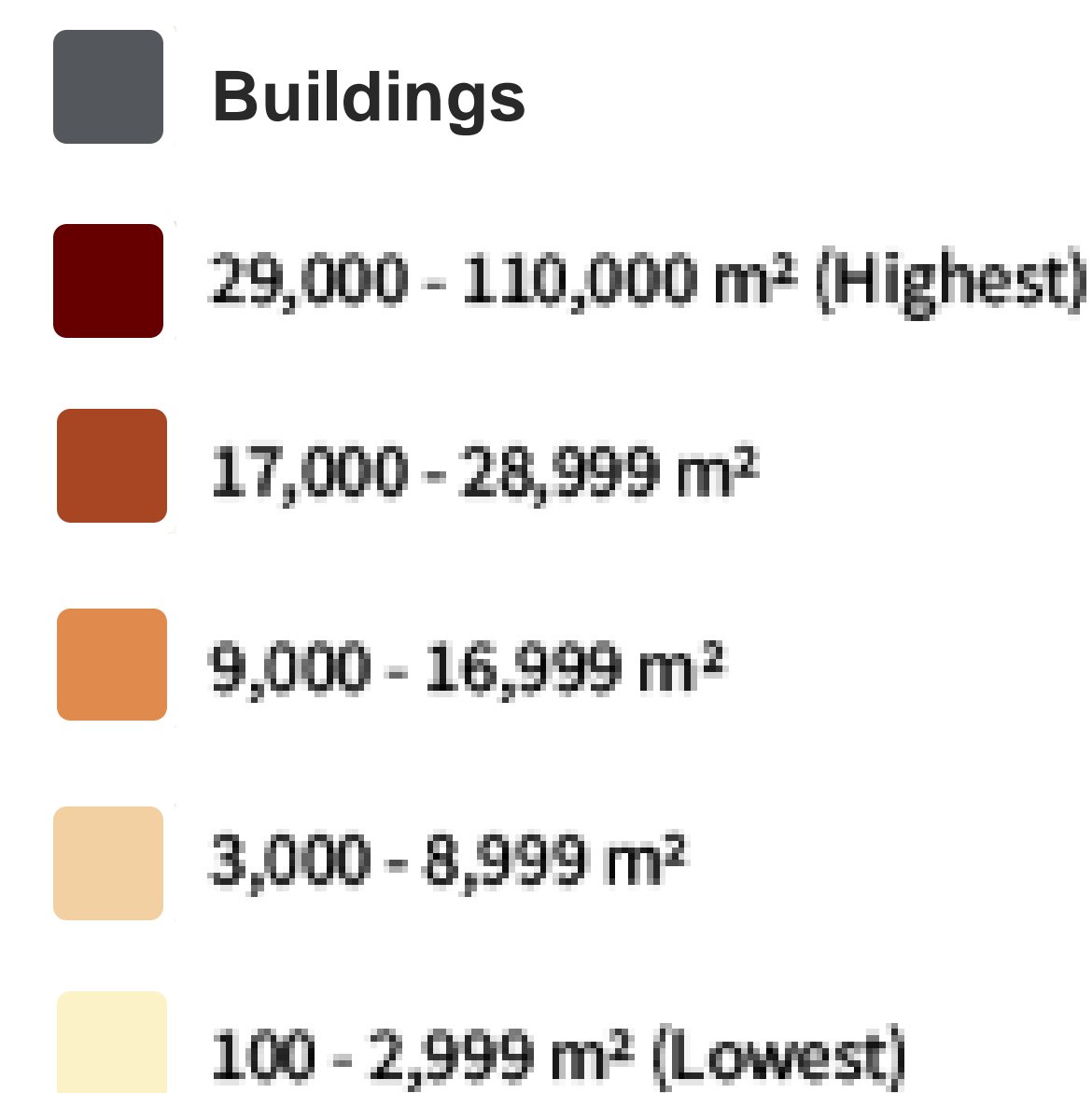


Figure 1: Example of a Traditional Development Style (City of Lethbridge, 2012)

## Figure 2: Heat Map of Downtown Parking Spaces

This map uses the natural breaks method to determine which areas have the highest amount of space dedicated to parking.

Parking spaces make up 593,133.46 m<sup>2</sup> (18.6%) of Downtown's area (3,182,222.77 m<sup>2</sup>), while buildings take up 651,268.3 m<sup>2</sup> (20.5%).



## What Does This Mean for Lethbridge's Future?

- ❖ Attractive and vibrant downtowns have the benefit of drawing in a skilled labour force to the city, which in turn increases economic productivity and potential.
- ❖ This is because young professionals are drawn in by the prospect of an urban lifestyle with an array of entertainment, social gathering, and work opportunities (Engel, 2018).
- ❖ In the case of Lethbridge, a city that struggles to retain our large student population who come for post-secondary institutions and leave after graduation, this is an important consideration.
- ❖ Anticipating the needs and consumer demands of current and future demographics is a core consideration for the LUB Renewal project.

## Other Municipal Best Practices

- Economic Competitiveness**  
Reorient the LUB's requirements to ensure that developers and business owners are empowered to stay in the downtown area.
- Housing**  
More housing types should be allowed to meet the demand of younger generations and to encourage adequate residential density to help support local businesses.
- Good Urban Design**  
The new LUB can influence design qualities that promote walkability, aesthetic cohesiveness/character, and sustainability.

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