

Decoding Neighbourhoods: The Land Use Bylaw Renewal Project

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Purpose

The Land Use Bylaw (LUB) Renewal project is a multi-year initiative by the Planning Department at the City of Lethbridge to review and redesign the LUB.

This project is part of a series of "Decoding" papers designed to help the public understand how the LUB impacts them. This project decodes:

- Residential zoning
- LUB impact on housing affordability
- Designing sustainable and healthy communities
- Best practices in other Canadian municipalities

Overview of the LUB

The LUB regulates residential areas through:

- restrictions on allowable housing types,
- the sizing of buildings and other permitted structures,
- home occupations,
- parcel size,
- density,
- and parking.

The LUB cannot, however, restrict who can buy or develop, and it cannot plan for future developments.

History

The City of Lethbridge acknowledges that this place has been home since time immemorial to the Siksikaitisipi, the Blackfoot Peoples. In a Western development context, neighbourhoods have evolved:

- 19th-century housing was centred around the downtown core
- 20th-century neighbourhoods were auto-centric and revolved around euclidean zoning
- 21st-century development has shifted to more holistic, "complete neighbourhoods"

Acknowledgements

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The Case for Densification

The vast majority of land in Lethbridge is zoned for low-density residential areas. As our population grows, higher-density zoning can positively impact our health, sense of community and connectivity, access to services and transit, and costs.

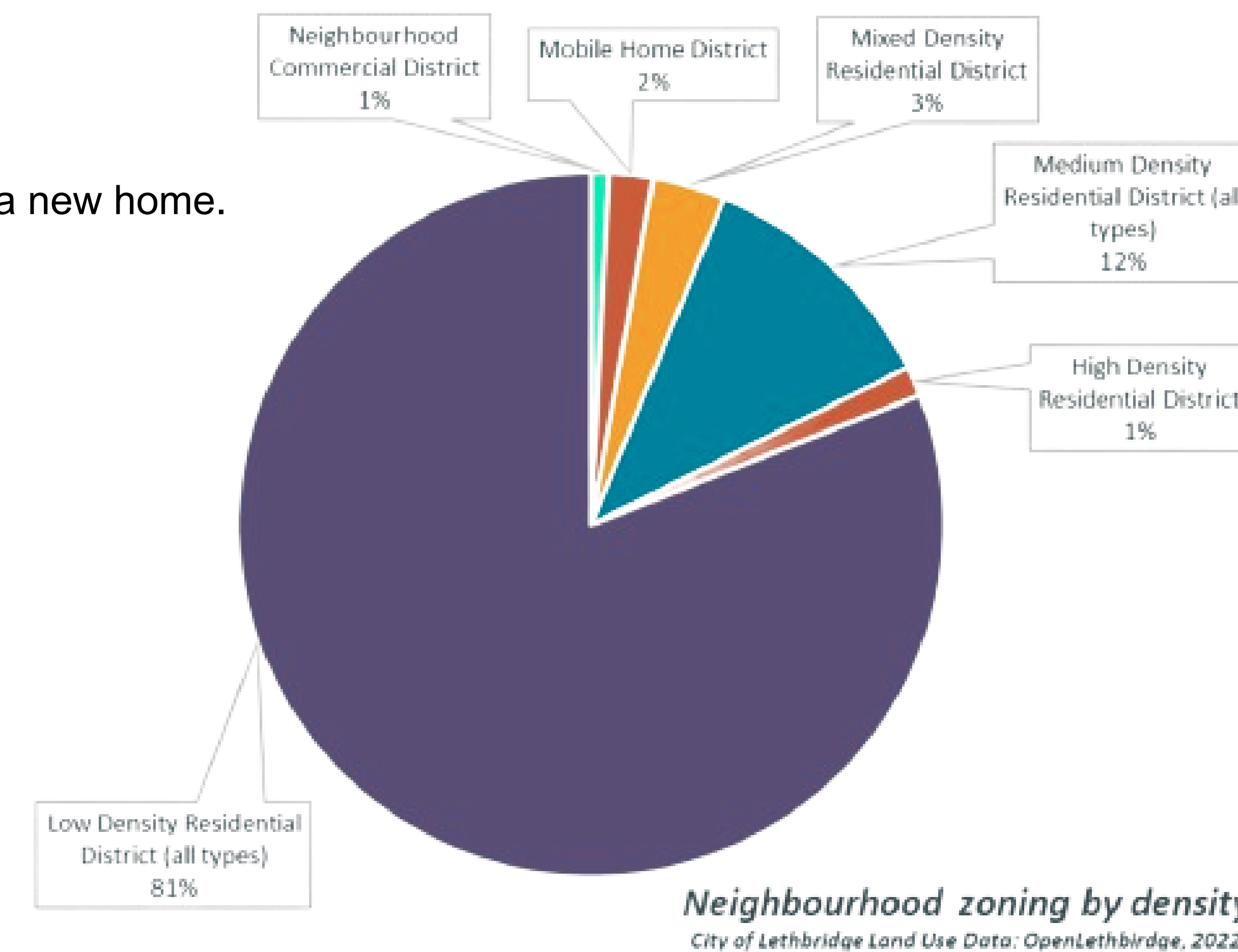
Beyond housing prices, residential density and efficient land use can impact other affordability factors in Lethbridge. This includes:

- heating and electricity bills,
- property taxes,
- water usage,
- and other environmental impacts.

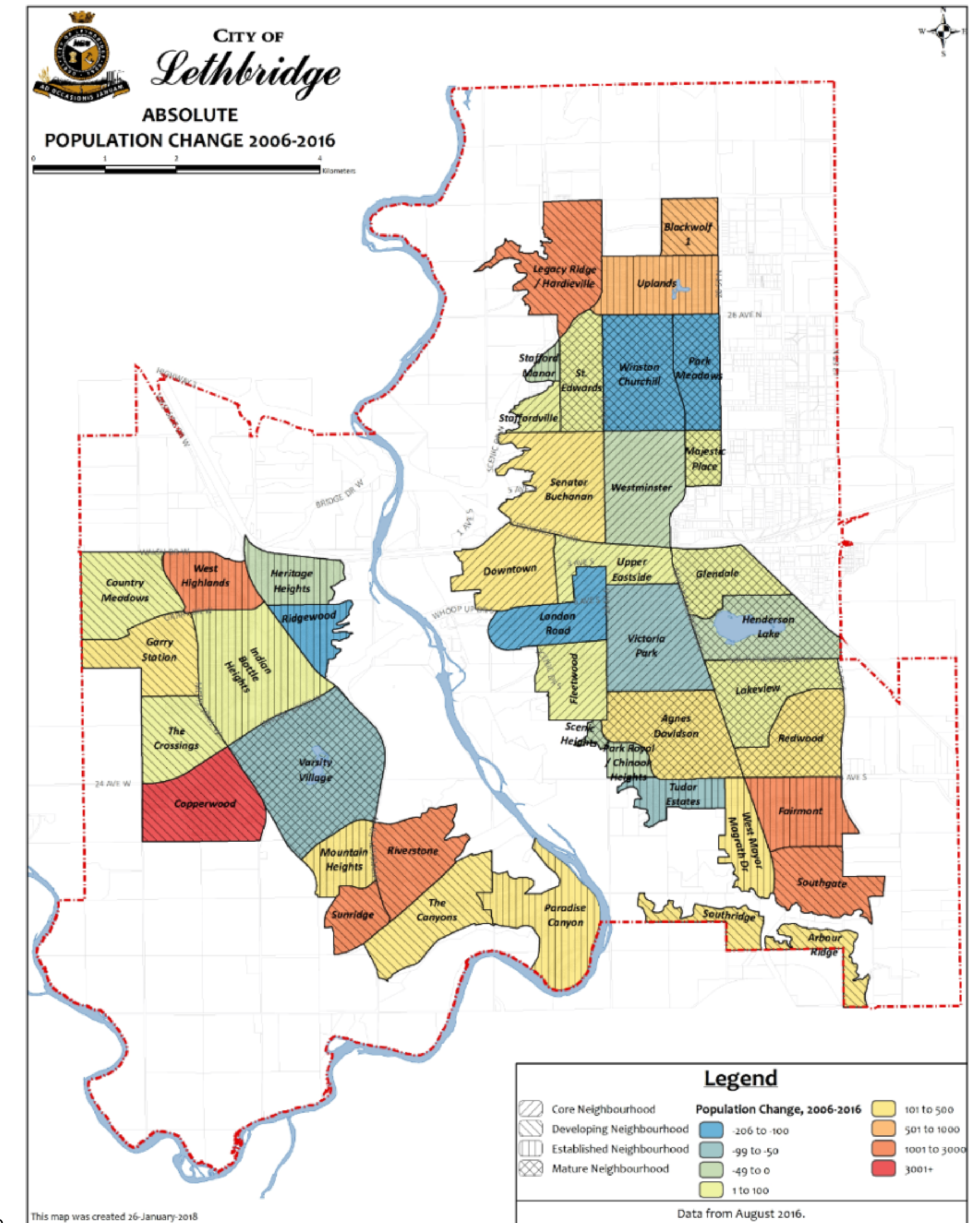
The LUB can also impact the cost of building a new home. It does this through regulations on:

- permits,
- parcel sizes,
- density,
- zoning requirements,
- height restrictions,
- and/or parking requirements

The following LUB-based strategies have also been shown to reduce environmental impacts: encouraging intensification, carbon-neutral mixed-use land redevelopment, nodal development strategies, development charges linked to compact growth, and mid-rise development, among others (FCM, 2019).



Population Change in Lethbridge, Efficient Land Use Strategy. Map 18: Absolute Population Change (2006-2016)



The Case for Complete Neighbourhoods

'Complete neighbourhoods' integrate housing, parks and recreation, essential services, local businesses, and transportation networks. It is a concept that helps us imagine more connected and less automobile-centric communities.

The Crossings in Lethbridge is an example of a 'complete neighbourhood.' Residents have access to education, groceries, parks, a variety of housing and apartment options, and essential services.



Neighbourhood design can also have significant impacts on our health and well-being. As places where we live, work, and play, these spaces are central to our feelings of connectedness, belonging, and community.

Crossings Lethbridge. crossingslethbridge.ca, retrieved Dec. 5, 2023

Next Steps

A review of Canadian municipalities (small, medium, and large) and their land use bylaws found that cities with fewer, more inclusive zoning policies appeared simpler, more accessible, and less bureaucratic.

In Lethbridge, further community outreach, consultation, and engagement will take place in Spring 2024.

Information gathered from these engagement activities and this research project will be used to produce formal recommendations to City Council for the new Land Use Bylaw in 2024.

References

"Sustainable land use practices in Canadian municipalities: A snapshot." Federation of Canadian Municipalities. 2020.

The Young Foundation, 2010, Barton et. al., 2015, in Ige-Elegbede, Janet et. al., "Designing healthier neighbourhoods: a systematic review of the impact of the neighbourhood design on health and wellbeing." Cities and Health, vol. 6, no. 5, 2022, 1004-1019.