

HIGH RIVER

A community portrait prepared by
Active Neighbourhoods Canada.



Active Neighbourhoods Canada

How can the design of our communities contribute to public health, well-being and safety? Respond to traffic congestion? Stimulate the economy? Work towards the overall sustainability of our city?

These are questions that inspired the development of Active Neighbourhoods Canada, a collaboration between Sustainable Calgary, the Montreal Urban Ecology Centre and the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation. Funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada's "Healthy Weights" program, Active Neighbourhoods supports walking, cycling and vibrant streets. Our philosophy is that people will walk more if they have destinations nearby to go to,

and great pathways – safe, accessible, beautiful – to get there with.

Sustainable Calgary is working alongside 4 communities in Calgary and Alberta over 4 years, with High River as our fourth community. We help neighbourhoods identify strengths and weaknesses in their neighbourhoods, explore design solutions with professionals, and work towards the implementation of at least one design change within 2 years. These experiences are shared with professionals, decision-makers and community organizations over the course of the project to contribute to best practices in participatory planning and sustainable urban design.

Active Neighbourhoods in High River

Active Neighbourhoods has been partnering with Our High River and Alberta Health Services (AHS) since June 2016 to find out the good, the bad, and the "meh" of High River's public spaces. Engaged in this project are local residents, representatives from the Town of High River, local businesses, Family and Community Support Services, and Spinal Cord Injury Alberta.

We gathered information from High River residents in a number of ways: we collaborated on a community event led by the AHS WalkABLE program and hosted by Our High River's monthly Community Café; we drew on the brand new High River Vital Signs report; and we shared findings at a bimonthly meeting of local experts, who provided additional insight on needs, priorities and possibilities for High River's public infrastructure.

Spinal Cord Injury Alberta became involved in December, sharing invaluable observations on the

built environment from the perspective of sight, hearing and mobility impairments. In March, we presented our findings back to community members, who identified gaps in our assessment and gave additional recommendations for improving High River's pedestrian spaces.

This Community Portrait aims to distill the information we collected, and provide a snapshot of High River – what does it look like, physically and socially? How do residents feel about walking, biking and hanging out in their community? What changes would they like to see?

This information feeds into the 2017 Urban Design Invitational, where designers and decision-makers develop a series of "design schemes" for High River and evaluate their feasibility. Design schemes go back to residents for feedback at the Design Selection Kiosk.

Population and Dwellings

Population

Total Population
12,920
High River

3,645,260
Alberta

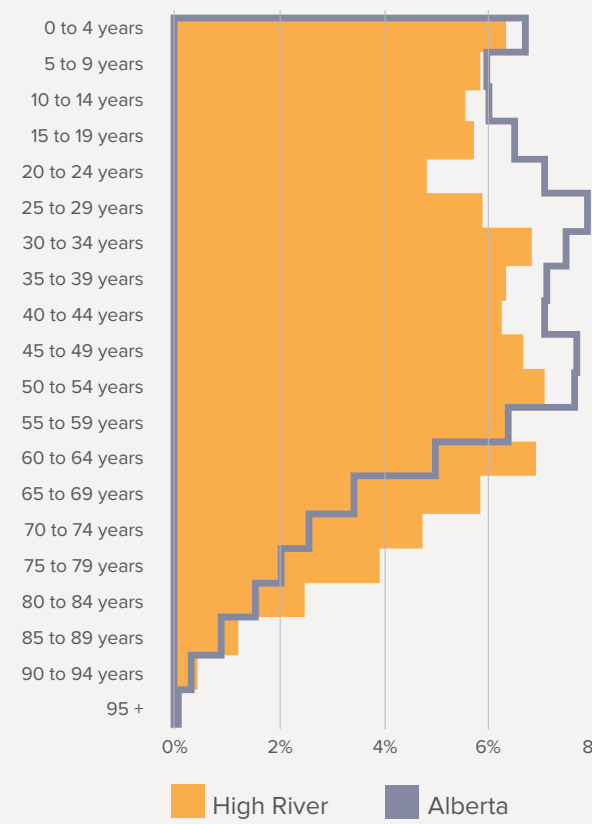
Median Age
41.8
High River

36.5
Alberta

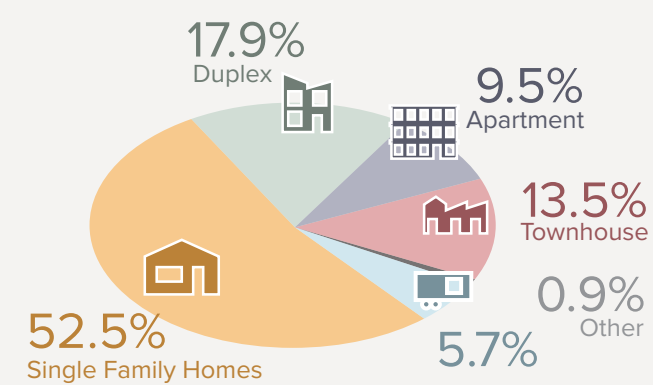
Percent on low incomes
8.5%
High River

8.2%
Alberta

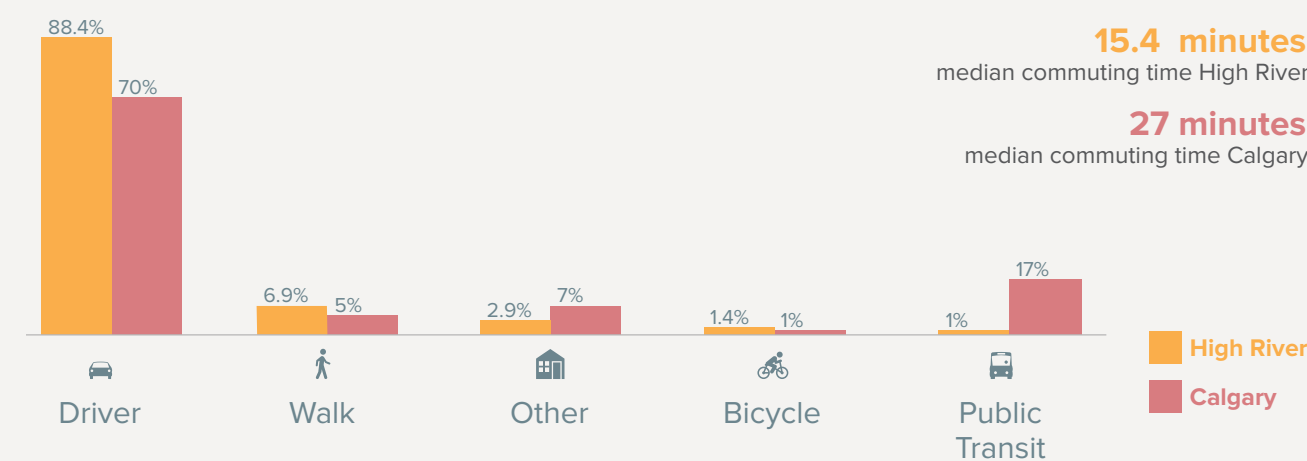
Age Distribution



Housing



Mode of Transport



15.4 minutes
median commuting time High River.

27 minutes
median commuting time Calgary.

Activity Surveys

Vital Signs Data

The following data is drawn from the Vital Signs Survey carried out in High River in 2015.

57%
work in High River.

60%
said they or someone in their family would use public transit if it was available.

5,207
in-town Handi-bus trips.

483
Out-of-town Handi-bus trips.

10
Traffic-related injuries 2014-2015

6
Traffic-related injuries 2015-2016

55%
55% agree or strongly agree that they participate in healthy activities in High River (Sports, Recreation, Leisure, etc.)

#1 citizen priority to **improve livability**
Increase transportation options including public transit



#1 way to improve **quality of life for seniors**
Increase access to transportation



#1 way to improve **quality of life for youth and young families**
Increase social, recreation, and arts opportunities



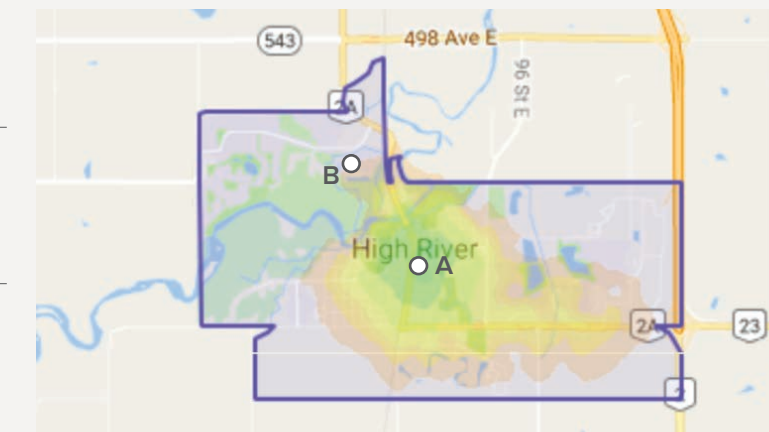
Walkscore

According to walkscore.com, Marlborough has the following scores:

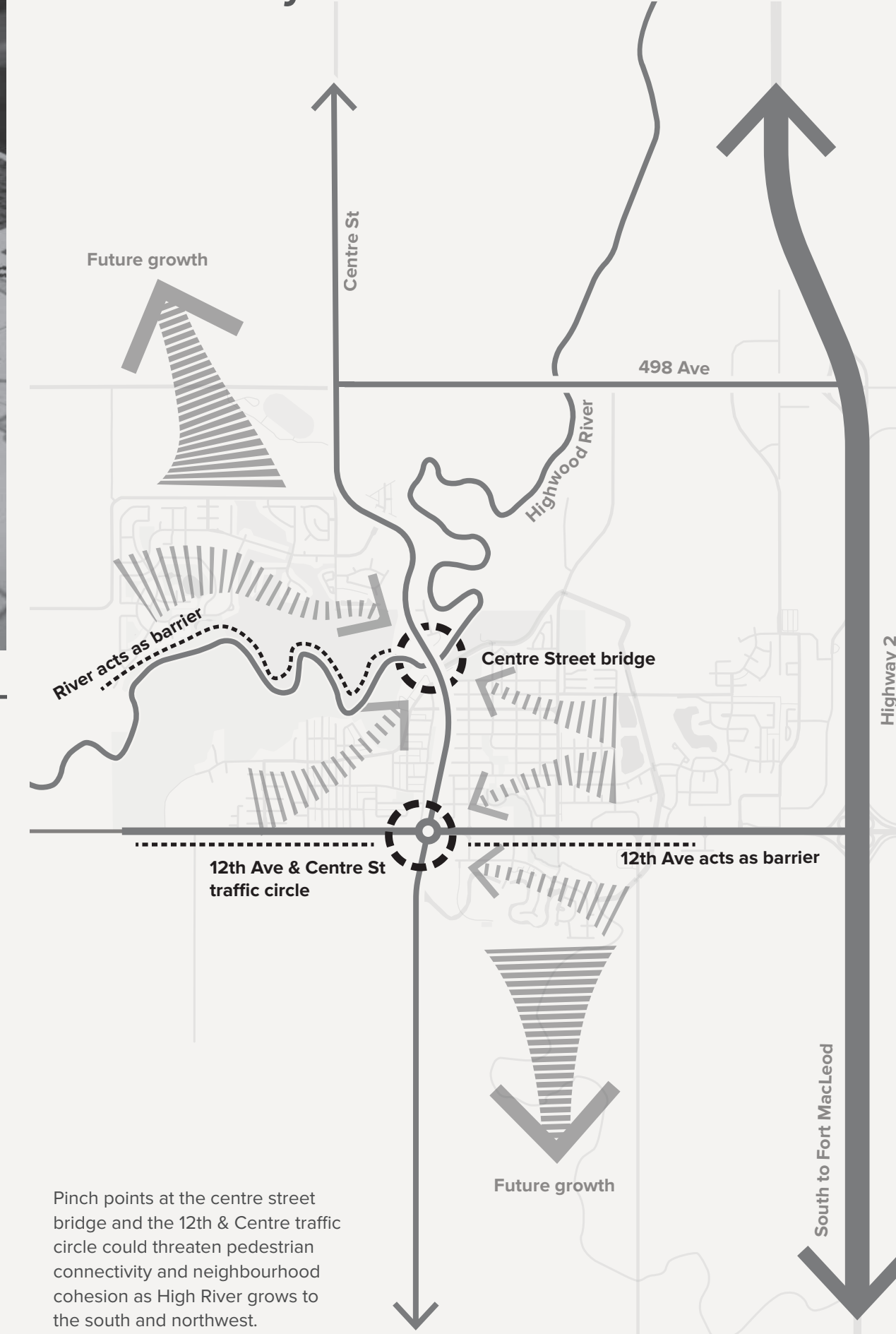
Location A
78
Walkability

Location B
5
Walkability

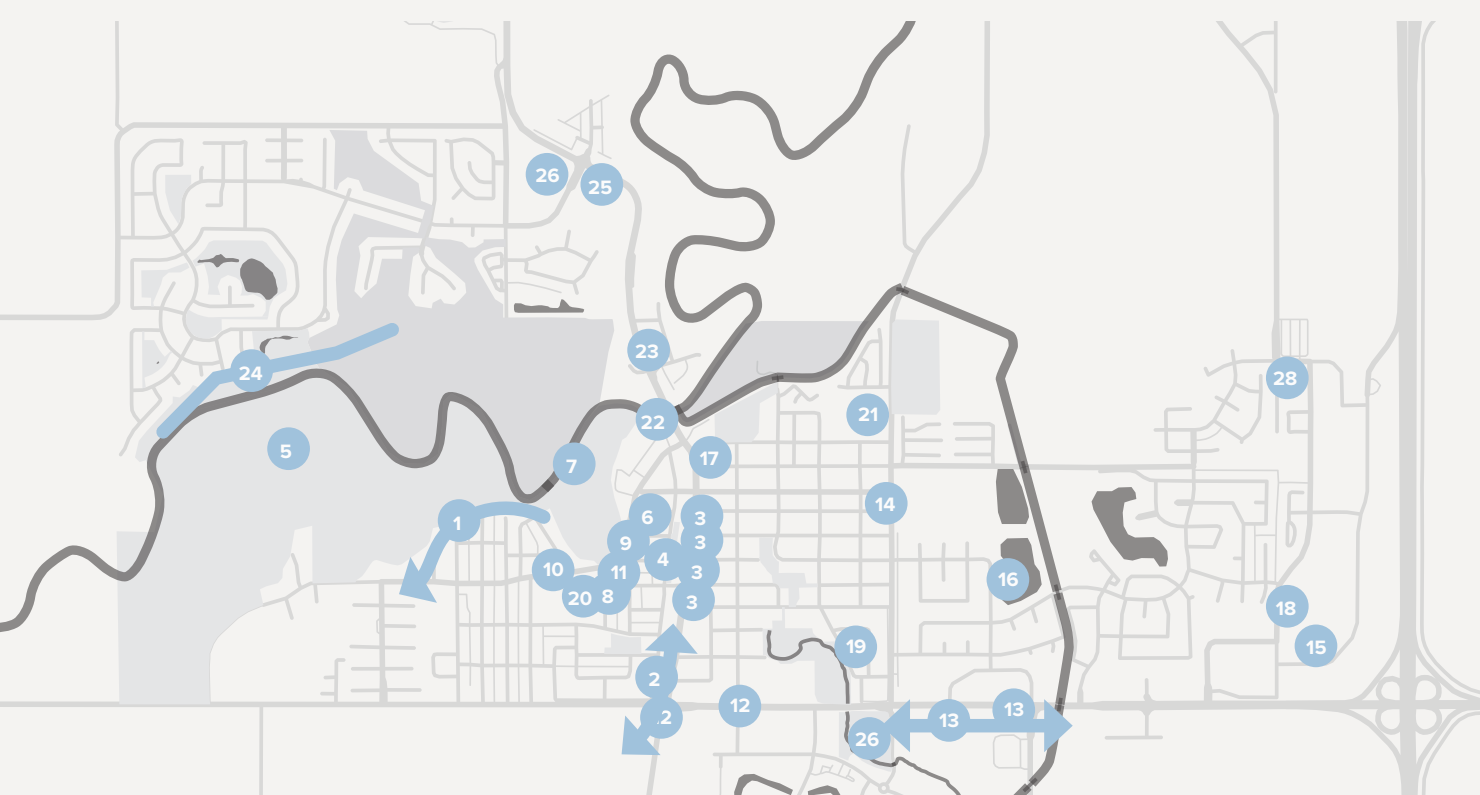
Town Overall
39
Walkability



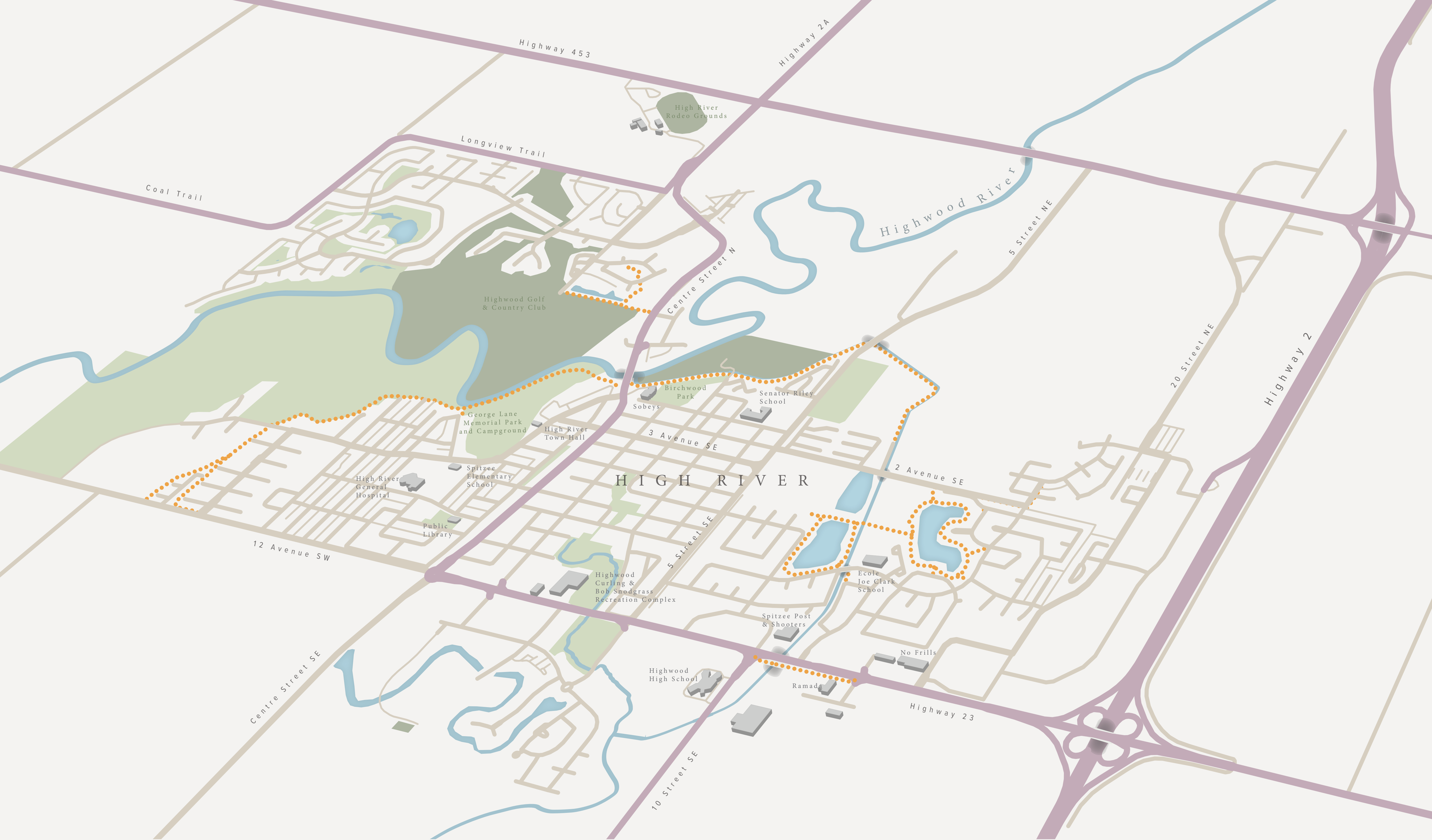
Connectivity Across Barriers



Hotspots



- Continue paving Happy Trails; consider larger signage along trails in future.
- Missing sidewalk; decreases access to Library.
- Improve pedestrian access across Centre St and 1 St SW.
- Make parking lot more accessible for all users.
- Great place to waste an entire day! Increase access with unpaved paths.
- More street events please! Parking is confusing. Potential to transform to pedestrian only?
- Great place to waste an entire day. Can lighting be improved along the river?
- Alley access is good.
- Improvements to mews/ laneways would add to downtown vibrancy.
- Missing alleyway connections.
- Pedestrian safety has improved here.
- Challenging for pedestrians.
- Gap in sidewalk, and access from Highwood High School needed across 12 Ave SE.
- Fast moving vehicles; challenging intersection to cross.
- Missing sidewalk
- Great green space!
- Connect Happy Trails across intersection and to Sobey's; pedestrian buttons not working?
- Walking destination.
- Missing sidewalk.
- Focus on pedestrian safety here.
- Sidewalk ends with no link to trailer park.
- Widen centre street bridge; prioritize pedestrian access and enjoyment.
- Potential as park and festival space, with proximity to downtown and campground; opportunity for trails along Highwood River.
- Create pedestrian access between Highwood Village / Vista Mirage and Beachwood Estates / McLaughlin Meadows.
- Improve link to Happy Trails and add lighting on trail.
- Walking destination.
- Community garden in green space.
- Major opportunity for pedestrian improvements near high-density and senior's housing.

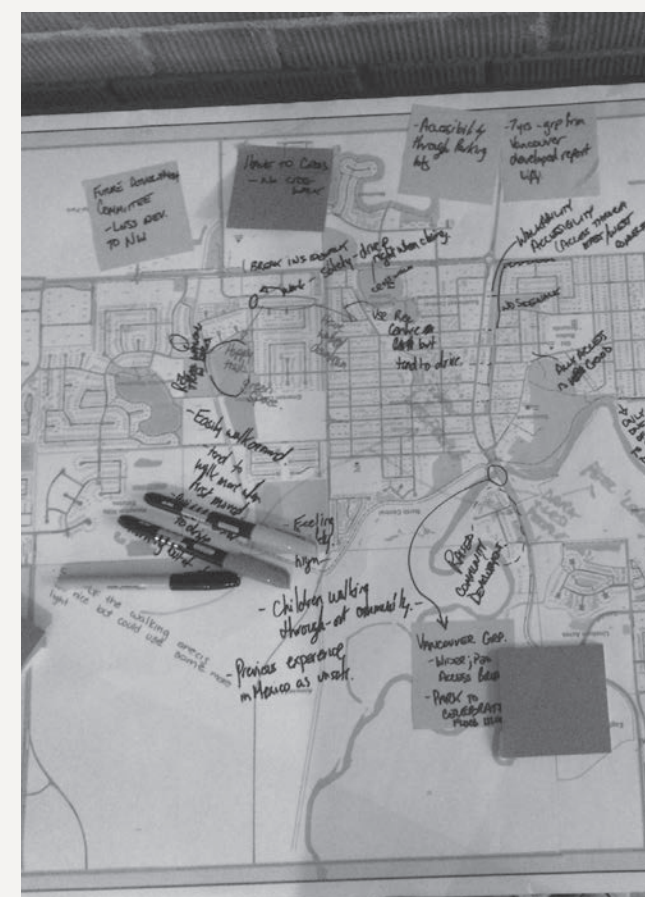


Resident Priorities:

- Continuous Pathways (closing the gaps)
- Access to wooded areas
- Safe crossings
- Accessibility for all users (surface texture)
- Lighting
- Increasing Streetlife /Nightlife
- Linking NW to SW
- Flood-friendly design practices
- Creating fun alleyways

"We need a multi-purpose downtown, especially in a small town — a downtown that can host businesses, a farmers' market, weddings, dances."

"You can bike end-to-end in 20 minutes. We should fill in the gaps in our pathways so the kids have continuous routes across town - or down the street to get slushies!"



Community Overview

High River is a regional hub, a small-town escape from the city, a movie set, and home to 13,584 people. It is an exceptional town of collaborators and volunteers — a long-running tradition, and one that has been reinforced since the 2013 flood.

With more than half of its residents working in town, High River has a strong local base of employment, while also housing commuters, and servicing surrounding ranches and farms.

High River has great "bones" for walking and cycling, with further improvements aimed primarily at tying it all together, including:

- Closing gaps in walking infrastructure
- Improving safety through lighting and eyes on the street
- Bringing the downtown to a "tipping point" as a regional shopping and recreational destination

Based on feedback collected, local residents are invested in closing the gaps in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure across town, and ensuring safe travel

particularly for children and seniors. Priority areas include Hampton Hills, 12th Avenue, Centre Street, northwest-southwest connection, and closing gaps in the Happy Trails.

Residents also expressed a desire for more "date night" options, including more events downtown and in George Lane Memorial Park, and attracting more restaurants and bars. If the downtown has created great bones for walking, residents are now asking how the community can create the "excuse" for spending time there.

Residents wanted to ensure that downtown pedestrian infrastructure is complemented by adequate access for people with mobility challenges and young children. They have suggested, for example, expanding the role of the Handibus, and creating more flexible parking designations for those with additional needs, but lacking wheelchair accessible passes. Many really look forward to the day when construction will be complete in the downtown core!

