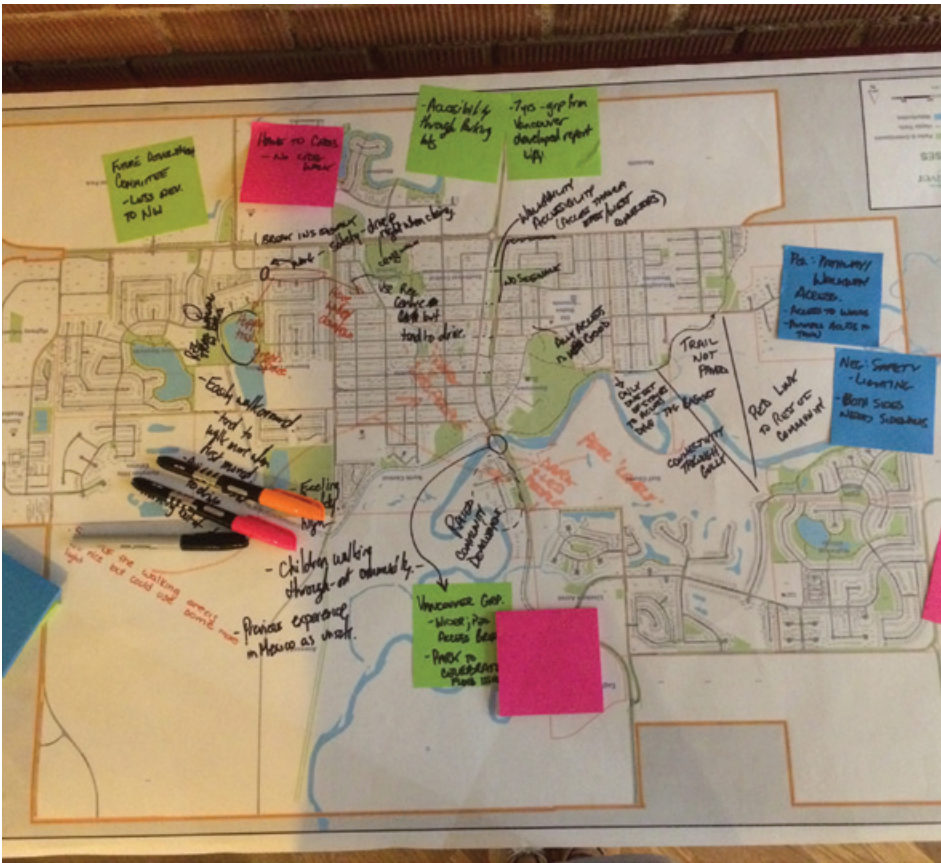




# HIGH RIVER

## Exploring a walkable rural context

The town of High River is a rural community of 13,500, located south of Calgary. With more than half of its residents working in town, High River has a strong local base of employment, while also housing commuters and serving as a hub to local ranches, farms and nearby communities. The town lends itself well to active transportation: small enough that it can be crossed by bike in about 20 minutes, according to residents, and endowed with a network of recreational “Happy Trails.”



## A PROACTIVE MUNICIPALITY

Aware that many people, including farmers from the surrounding area, travel to High River by car, the municipality transformed parts of the downtown into pedestrian-friendly walkways and public spaces, while also building a parking lot one block away from the downtown. Responses have been mixed, and as construction continues, so does the experiment! The municipality has also been proactive in experimenting with roundabouts and rebuilding High River’s beloved Happy Trails.

Active Neighbourhoods followed in Safer Calgary’s footsteps in 2016, partnering with Our High River and Alberta Health Services to engage local residents and develop urban design “schemes” with local professionals. Resident priorities were aimed at tying quality pieces of infrastructure together: closing gaps in walking infrastructure, improving safety in targeted locations, and developing vibrancy and sense of place in the downtown core. Because its decision makers and community are so engaged and committed to tackling the challenges of reconstruction, High River is quickly becoming a leader on walkable rural communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is also worth noting that the positive and proactive approach taken by High River enhances their ability to innovate, experiment and do good work. The municipality’s professionals regularly host interdisciplinary meetings and Community Cafes for residents, helping to keep the local community engaged in the process of building a great community - proof of the community’s perseverance and of the importance of everyone taking an active role.

## A NATURAL DISASTER BECOMES AN OPPORTUNITY

High River was perhaps the hardest hit in the 2013 Alberta floods, and reconstruction is ongoing. Leaders in High River saw an opportunity to be forward-thinking in their approach to reconstruction: to build a downtown that would serve its local residents, attract investment and become a more vibrant regional hub, in part by creating attractive pedestrian spaces.

The Safer Calgary coalition, a project of Sustainable Calgary, was invited to contribute to the visioning process directly following the flood, along with a group of students from NHTV, the Breda University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands). The students proposed a series of projects, several of which were aimed at celebrating and adapting to the river, rather than turning away from it. This is a philosophy shared by many residents.

City plans, such as the 2015-17 Strategic Plan and the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan, now officially prioritize walkable, bicycle-friendly and safe routes for all road users, and the *High River*

*High River has explicitly stated its goal: to become a walkable, bikeable town where all road users are safe, twelve months a year.*

*Vital Signs 2016* identifies this as a resident priority as well. The ultimate goal is to provide transportation choices for local residents, become a vibrant hub for surrounding communities and benefit local businesses.



VIEW THE PORTRAIT HERE:

High River

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