

# Downtown **Public Places Plan**

October 2018 | DRAFT

Edmonton



# 1 INTRODUCTION





## 1.1 EDMONTON'S DOWNTOWN PUBLIC PLACES

Edmonton's Downtown is transforming. New investments, including the refurbished Legislature Grounds, Ice District and LRT Valley Line, are attracting new high density residential and commercial development. This in turn is bringing more people, activity, and energy to the heart of the city. The population of Downtown is expected to more than double by 2030. As this population grows, so does demand for a functional network of downtown public places that provide respite, relief, room to socialize, celebrate, and recharge in the heart of the City.

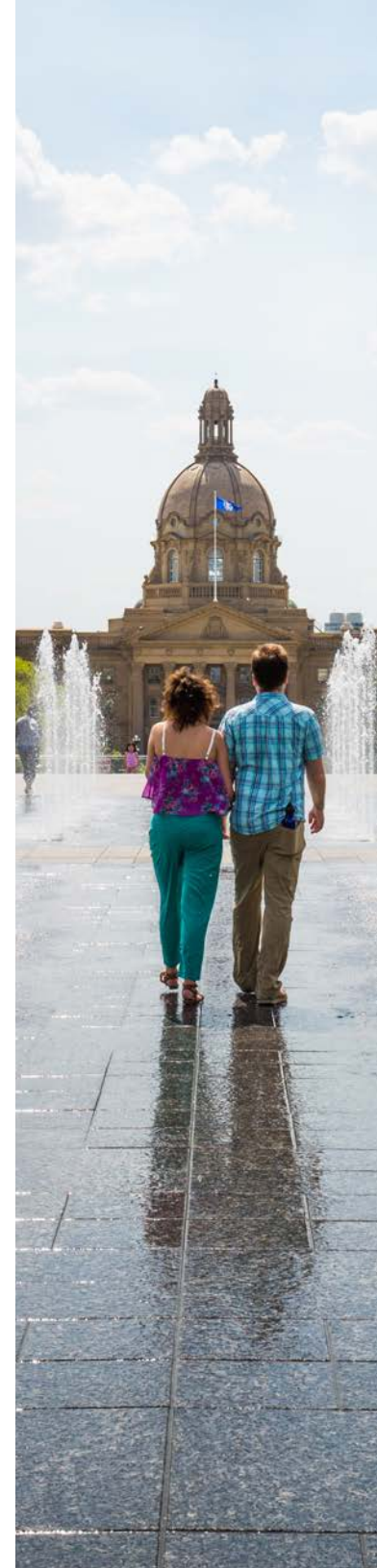
Downtown public places support civic life, cultural expression, economic development, community wellness, and ecology. They are essential spaces for residents and workers as well as for visitors to the City. Despite recent investment and development Downtown, the provision of public places in the core has not increased significantly. In the past, Downtown public place projects have focused on one area at a time instead of examining each place's role in the broader network. This has resulted in spatial and functional gaps in this network. Existing Downtown public places currently offer limited opportunities for wellness functions including recreation, exercise, relaxation, and socialization.

As the public and private sector investment in the Downtown continues, coordination of investment in public places is needed to support existing and new residents, workers and visitors. Investing in the Downtown benefits all Edmontonians. Public-place improvements are necessary to meet the needs of a growing population, to support families, stimulate business and tourism, support employment and help create a vibrant

Downtown. A functional and attractive public-place network will support and enhance the health and vitality of Downtown Edmonton by:

- + Attracting families and talent
- + Growing civic pride and identity
- + Improving public health, safety, and vibrancy
- + Creating opportunities for chance encounters and memorable experiences

*Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy* (2017) and the *Capital City Downtown Plan* (2010) both identified the need to develop the Downtown Public Places Plan. The Plan provides clear direction for the programming, design, development and acquisition of Downtown public places. This direction will inform Council decisions, direct Administration priorities, and guide community partnerships, engagement, and collaboration.





## 1.2 PLAN PURPOSE

The Edmonton Downtown Public Places Plan provides direction for future planning, development, programming, and an acquisition strategy for public places in Edmonton's Downtown. For the purpose of this plan, public places include all outdoor open spaces, including public parks, plazas, and privately owned public spaces. Streets are also considered as part of the Downtown public realm as they connect public places and should be considered as functional components of the network.

The Plan contains:

- + Eight strategic directions and \_ targets for Downtown public places
- + A Vision for Downtown Public Places, with eight Big Moves
- + Place-Based Recommendations
- + Downtown-wide recommendations for all public places

The strategic direction, targets, and recommendations outlined in this Plan were developed with consideration for existing City policy, best practices, public engagement, technical review, and analyses.

## 1.3 PLANNING CONTEXT

The Downtown Public Places Plan supports the vision, guiding principles, and policies of *The Ways Strategic Plans*, *Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy* and the *Capital City Downtown Plan*. The Plan aligns current and future Downtown projects, site-specific strategies, plans, and policies into one coordinated plan for all public places in Downtown.



## The Ways

*The Way Ahead: Edmonton's Strategic Plan*, establishes six 10-year strategic goals to achieve Edmonton's 2040 corporate vision and direct long-term planning. The Downtown Public Places Plan conforms to the vision and strategic goals of *The Ways*, including: Urban Form, Transportation, Environment, Financial and Economy.

### The Ways Goals:

- + Preserve and Sustain Edmonton's Environment
- + Improve Livability
- + Transform Urban Form
- + Shift Transportation Modes
- + Ensure Financial Sustainability
- + Diversity Economy

## Capital City Downtown Plan

Edmonton's *Capital City Downtown Plan* (CCDP) aims to achieve a vision for Edmonton's Downtown that is sustainable, vibrant, well designed, and accessible. The CCDP recognizes the importance of increasing the amount of land devoted to parks and recreation use in the Downtown to keep up with significant residential growth in the area. The Downtown Public Places Plan aligns with the goals, policies, and directions for assembling a network of parks spaces in Downtown.

## Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy

*Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy* is a comprehensive plan that addresses maintaining, managing, programming, and promoting the sustainable and efficient use of the city's parks and publicly-accessible open spaces throughout the next 30 years of City growth. The Downtown Public Places Plan aligns with the policy statements, recommendations, and proposed implementation projects provided by Breathe for the Core Area.

Breathe also established a framework for describing and assessing the functions of public places within the green network using three overarching themes: Ecology, Celebration, and Wellness. The Downtown Public Places Plan implements these themes in a Downtown specific context, ensuring that the overall public places network to contains functional elements of all three themes.

## Breathe Themes & Functions



### Ecology:

*Supports and enhances the environment by sustaining healthy and resilient ecosystems.*

- + Water Management
- + Biodiversity
- + Waste Management
- + Climate Regulation
- + Risk Mitigation
- + Food Production



### Celebration:

*Connects people to each other and builds a sense of place by providing places for communities to thrive, gather, and celebrate.*

- + Aesthetic Value
- + Public Safety
- + Destination + Tourism
- + Community Building
- + Heritage



### Wellness:

*Promotes healthy living and fosters wellbeing through diverse kinds of recreation, mobility and environments.*

- + Recreation
- + Active Transportation
- + Mental Health + Wellbeing
- + Learn + Play

## 1.4 PLAN AREA + EXISTING PUBLIC PLACES NETWORK

The plan area includes the neighbourhoods of Downtown Edmonton and the Quarters, collectively referred to as Downtown for the purpose of this plan. A 400-metre buffer into adjacent communities was included to understand the surrounding context and consider other public places that are accessible from walking distance of the plan area.

### 1.3.1 Existing Network

The existing Downtown Public Places network is made up of 53.1 hectares of outdoor public places. Approximately 34% of these spaces are owned by the City, and the other 66% are owned by other governments or institutions. With a current population of 21,171 people, the average provision level of public places is 2.5 hectares per 1000 people.

In addition to this publicly owned network, there is an additional 1.3 hectares of privately owned public space throughout Downtown. Privately-owned public space is a space that is accessible to the public but remains privately owned and maintained. These spaces compliment the publicly owned network.

### 1.3.2 Focus Areas

To provide organization for the site-specific recommendations, the plan area is divided into five focus areas, each with its own defining characteristics.

#### West Side

The West Side is located along the western edge of Downtown and includes parts of the Oliver, Queen Mary Park, and Warehouse Campus neighbourhoods. The southern section is

primarily residential and highly walkable, with some commercial-residential uses in converted Warehouses and larger format retail in the northern section. The existing network of primarily small public places serves a high population of residents and students from MacEwan University. Key public spaces in the area include Ezio Faraone Park, the Ribbon of Steel and Railtown Park greenway, and the University Campus Grounds.

#### Central West

Central West encompasses the majority of the Warehouse Campus Neighbourhood which is characterized by an urban mix of old warehouses that are being converted to commercial, residential, and other uses. Within the focus area is 104 Street, an attractive, pedestrian friendly street lined with a diverse array of retail outlets, restaurants and cafés. Though there is a concentration of indoor amenities along Jasper Avenue, 108 Street, and 104 Street, Central West is lacking in outdoor public places that offer family and child friendly programming. The area is also primarily hardscaped and in need of more green spaces, particularly with projected intensification. Central West also hosts important east-west active transportation routes, including the protected bicycle facilities along 105 and 102 Avenues.

#### Central Core

The Central Core contains the heart of Downtown Edmonton's civic and business districts. This focus area includes prominent places including Edmonton's City Hall, the Ice District, and the majority of Downtown's major office towers, many which are connected by an interior pedway network. The area has a

#### Focus Areas:

- + West Side
- + Central West
- + Central Core
- + Quarters
- + Southern Edge

relatively low residential population, but this is expected to change as the next phase of the Ice District and Station Lands Developments bring more residents to the area. The public places network in the Central Core includes spaces like Rice Howard Way and Sir Winston Churchill Square which are more hardscaped celebration spaces. There is a lack of more informal outdoor wellness and green space in the area, particularly between 104 Street and 101 Street. The Central Core also has the largest proportion of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Downtown, particularly along Jasper Avenue and 102 Avenue where several community services are located. The area is not very well connected, due to the large blocks taken up by Rogers Place and the Station Lands.

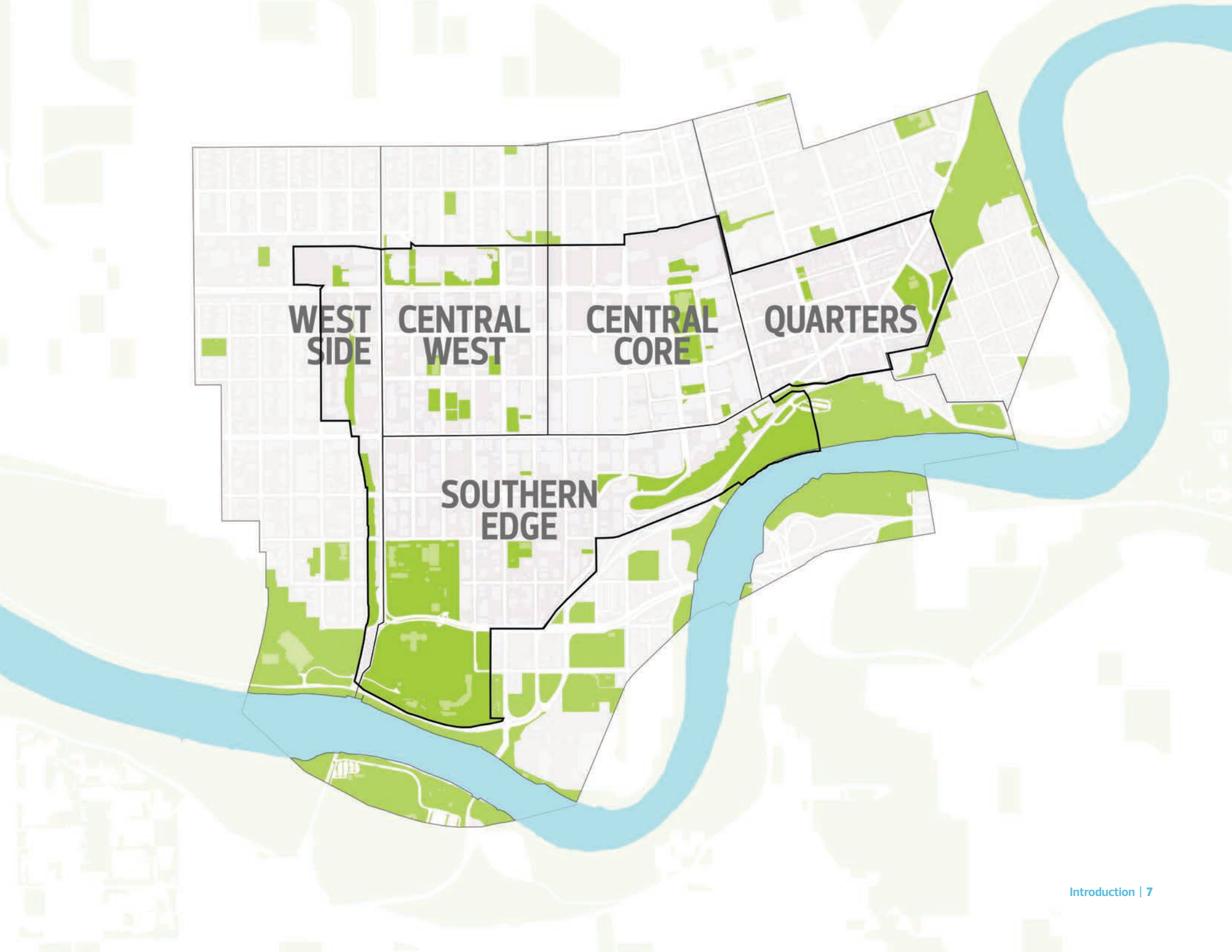
### The Quarters

The Quarters is the original location of the Edmonton's Downtown and the current home of Chinatown South. It is currently being revitalized into a diverse community with 10 times its existing population in the next 20 years. Planned improvements to the area include converting 96 Street into a pedestrian priority green street called the Armature which will contain an all-season park, plazas, and many commercial amenities, and serve as the spine of the district. Kinistinâw Park, being constructed in 2019, will create a community gathering space for the area. Other public places include Boyle Renaissance and Alex Taylor School sites as well as the adjacent Louise McKinney Riverfront Park. The Quarters is also home to a concentration of people experiencing homelessness.

### Southern Edge

The Southern Edge follows the top-of-bank of the North Saskatchewan River Valley, offering exceptional views. This area includes the Alberta Legislature (the largest public place in the study area), several mid-rise office towers, commercial uses, and sections of both the River Valley and Heritage Trails. The area is characterized by three major neighbourhoods: The Capital City District, McKay Avenue Neighbourhood, and Commercial Cultural Core. McKay Avenue has the highest residential density in the Downtown. The Southern Edge is very walkable and has a functional bicycle network; however, there is limited connectivity to riverfront public places due to the steep river valley. Recent developments such as the River Valley Funicular have helped to overcome this barrier in some areas. Overall, the Southern edge is lacking in child friendly spaces, and the northeast residents have less access to public places than their southern neighbours.





**WEST  
SIDE**

**CENTRAL  
WEST**

**CENTRAL  
CORE**

**QUARTERS**

**SOUTHERN  
EDGE**





## 2 A VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC PLACES

*Downtown's network of public places contributes to realizing a sustainable, vibrant, well-designed and accessible Downtown. The Downtown public realm will instill pride in Edmontonians, provide year-round spaces to play and retreat, and attract visitors from around the world. This section forms the basis of the Downtown Public Places Plan, outlining the eight strategic directions, four targets, and nine big moves of the Plan.*



## 2.1 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The Strategic Directions provide the framework for decision making regarding Downtown public places. They provide the foundation for a functional, beautiful, and active public places network that meets the needs of Edmontonians.

All of the strategic directions will be considered in the planning, development, programming, and operation of public places. The strategic directions also provide the basis for all of the recommendations of this Plan.



### SAFE + INCLUSIVE

*Ensure Downtown public places serve as safe and inclusive places for all Edmontonians.*



### ACCESSIBLE + CONNECTED

*Ensure that the Downtown public places network is accessible, pedestrian-oriented, and well connected by high quality active transportation corridors and streets.*



### LINKED TO THE RIVER

*Ensure Downtown is physically and visually linked to the top of bank and riverfront of the North Saskatchewan River Valley.*



### VIBRANT + LIVABLE

*Make Downtown a vibrant, healthy, and animated place to live, work, learn, visit, and grow up in.*



### SENSE OF COMMUNITY

*Ensure that Downtown public places reflect Downtown's distinct neighbourhoods and the strong sense of community, diversity, social interaction, and engagement that they offer.*



### GREEN + SUSTAINABLE

*Enhance the environmental sustainability of the Downtown public places network.*



### CELEBRATIONA

*Celebrate Downtown as a regional and national centre for entertainment, sport, creative arts, entertainment, festivals, and culture.*



### COHESIVE PUBLIC REALM

*Ensure that Downtown has a high quality public realm that is well-designed, year-round, cohesive, and well-maintained.*



## 2.2 TARGETS

In addition to the strategic directions, the targets of the Downtown Public Places Plan provide the ability to monitor the City's success in achieving the vision for Downtown public places. The four targets are based on the results of the Analysis Report, which looked at the provision, connectivity, and functionality of the Downtown public places network.

### TARGET

#### PROVISION LEVEL

**Acquire 2 ha of City owned public places in the Downtown.**

In the next 20 years, the population is projected to increase to approximately 45,000 people. This means that existing public places will face increasing pressure as they are used by a larger number of people. Overall, the provision of public places per person will decrease due to the rapid population growth. To reduce pressure on existing spaces and ensure Downtown is adequately served, the City aims to acquire 2 hectares of public places in the plan area.

When factored in, privately owned public spaces provide an additional 1.3 hectares of publicly accessible space.

#### CONNECTIVITY

**Fill existing gaps in the public places network to ensure that there is at least one publicly accessible place accessible within 200 m of any point in the Downtown.**

Most of Downtown is within 200 metres walking distance of a publicly accessible place, with a few exceptions. To address these gaps, more walkable connections must be established to connect these places to the pedestrian network.

**Ensure all public places are within 200 m of a transit stop.**

Transit is an essential way to get to and around Downtown Edmonton. The Downtown Public Places Plan establishes a target for all of the public places within the Downtown network to be within 200 metres of a transit stop. This can be a bus or LRT station. To achieve this target, public places and transit will need to be planned in coordination with each other.

#### MULTIFUNCTIONALITY

**Ensure each public place has high functionality for one of the three Breathe themes and moderate functionality for a second Breathe theme.**

Ideally, all spaces should serve all three functions of Ecology, Celebration, and Wellness, but this is not always possible. Sometimes uses conflict, such as quiet leisurely walking areas and retreats versus large boisterous festival spaces. With this in mind, the Downtown Public Places Plan sets out the target for every open space to be highly functional for at least one of the three themes, with moderate functionality for a second theme at a minimum.

**Increase the Downtown-wide Wellness functionality of the public places network to at least 20%.**

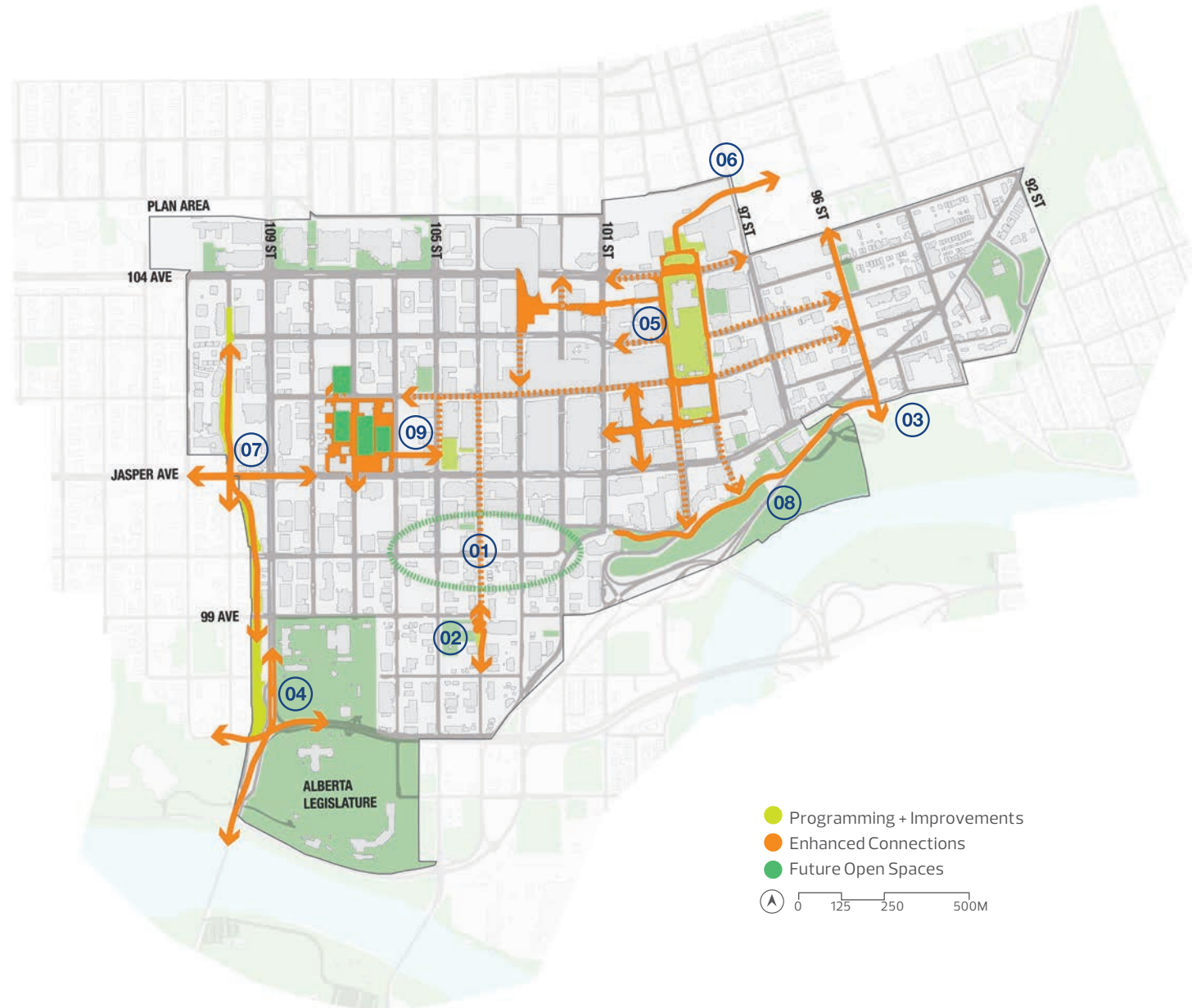
Overall, the Downtown public places network is lacking in public places that serve Wellness functions. Increasing the Wellness functionality of the Downtown is increasingly important with the projected doubling of the residential population. People need spaces to relax, connect with each other, exercise, walk their dogs, and families need places for active play and learning. This is why the Downtown Public Places Plan establishes the target to increase the overall Wellness functionality of the public places from 6.4% to 20%.



## 2.3 BIG MOVES

The plan recommends nine big moves to improve the Downtown Public Places network. These big moves are visionary, high-level, long-term actions that were established as priorities through public and stakeholder engagement and determined to have the most significant impact on the overall network. The Big Moves will guide future projects and investments Downtown.

1. McKay Avenue Central Gathering Space
2. 104 Street Staircase
3. Quarter's Connection to Louise McKinney
4. 109 Street Connection
5. Central Core Connections
6. 97 Street Bridge
7. Railtown Park Crossing + Expansion
8. MacDonald Promenade
9. Warehouse Campus Park + Beaver Hills House Park



### 2.3.1 109 Street Connection

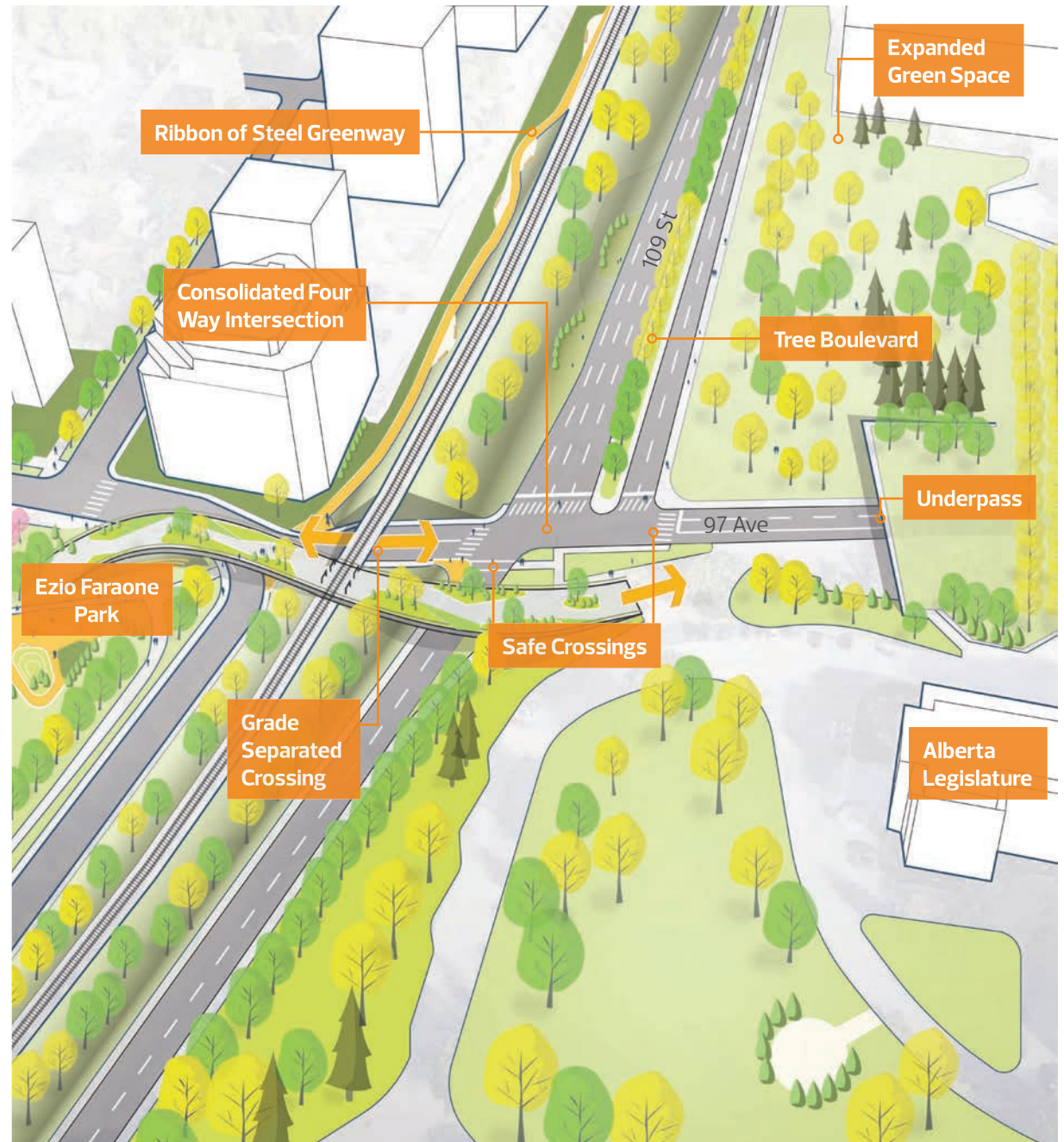
*Enhance north-south and east-west pedestrian and cycle connections between Ezio Faraone Park and the Alberta Legislature at 109 Street at 97 Avenue.*

The Legislature Grounds, Ezio Faraone Park, High Level Bridge and River Valley are currently not well connected to each other. This big move seeks to improve connectivity by redesigning the intersection of 109 Street and 97 Avenue.

Upgrading this intersection will create a safer, more direct pedestrian and cycling connection. The intersection redesign will be coordinated with other transportation considerations including the High Level Bridge renewal, transit and the High Level Streetcar.

The linkage will take into account the importance of 109 Street as a major access point to the Downtown. Improvements to this intersection will also consider improved transit access for pedestrians on 109 Street.

Improving the connection between Ezio Faraone and the Legislature will enhance these existing public places and help to tie the green corridors of the West Side to the greater public places network.





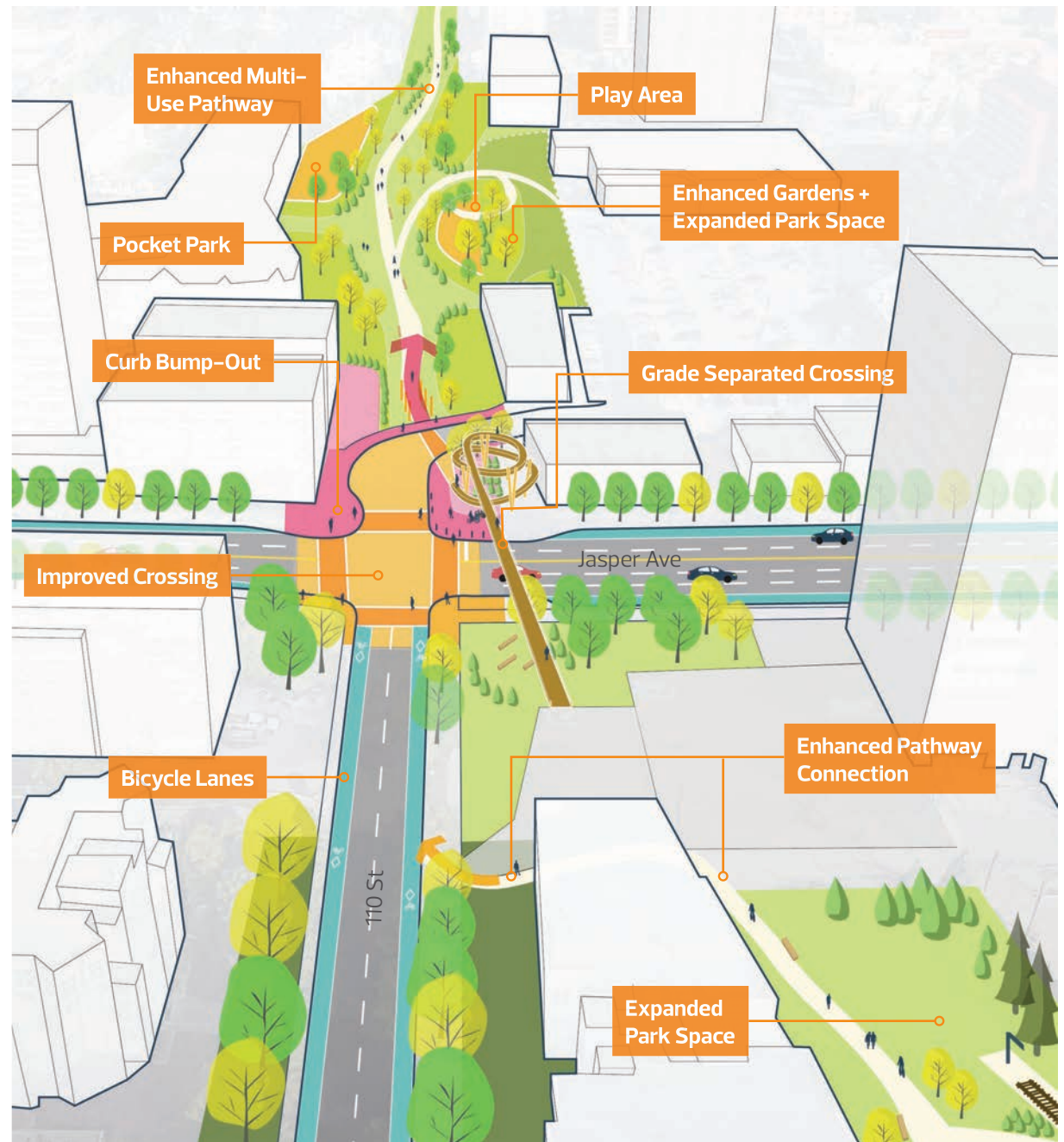
### 2.3.2 Railtown Park Crossing + Expansion

*Enhance the connection and function of Railtown Park as part of a green corridor.*

This big move seeks to create a seamless pedestrian and cycle experience by introducing a grade-separated crossing over Jasper Avenue between the High Level Streetcar Jasper Avenue Terminus and Railtown Park. The grade-separated crossing will be subject to further feasibility analysis and concept development.

Railtown Park will also see the addition of green space along its eastern side to support wellness programming, such as child play spaces, seating, and fitness features.

The connection and expanded spaces will be designed so it can be coordinated with future development in the area. This big move will ensure that Railtown Park and the Ribbon of Steel Greenway to the south become the green spine of the western edge of Downtown, stretching from MacEwan University to Ezio Faraone Park.



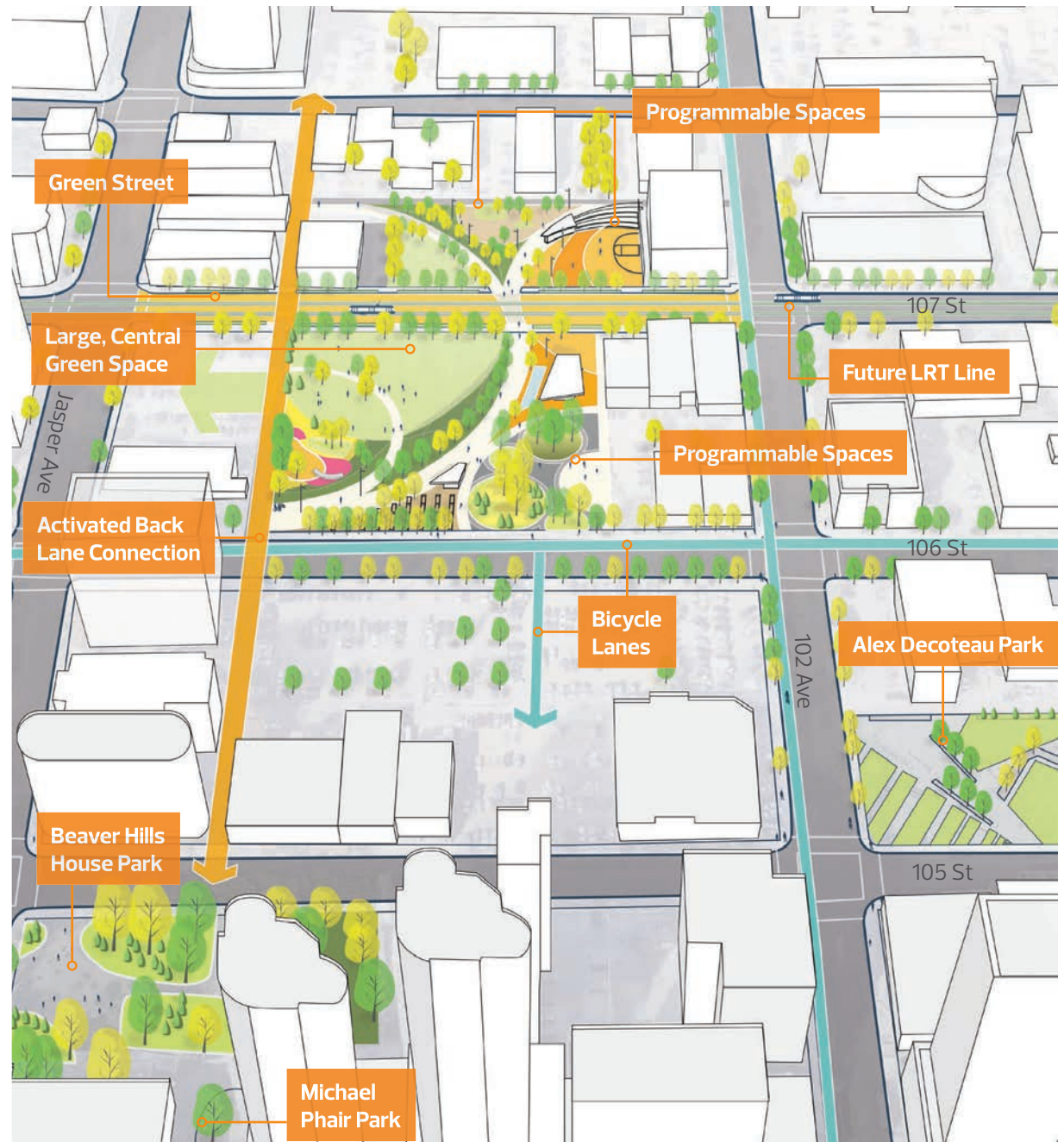
### 2.3.3 Warehouse Campus Park

*Create a large central green space in the heart of the Warehouse District.*

Acquisition of land for the Warehouse Campus Park is currently underway as directed by the approved Capital City Downtown Plan. The City is converting several contiguous downtown surface parking lots to a multi-functional community park that spans 107 Street. It will primarily serve the growing residential population in the Warehouse District north of Jasper Avenue between 104 and 108 Street.

Warehouse Campus Park will be large enough to host community events and gatherings while also providing many informal recreation and leisure opportunities suitable for families. 107 Street will be converted into a showcase green street with a significant tree canopy and stormwater treatment components that ties the two halves of the park together.

The development of the Warehouse Campus Park will be designed to complement Beaver Hills House Park and Michael Phair Park. Strong linkages will be made to Beaver Hills House Park, 104 Street, Jasper Avenue, planned LRT lines, and Alex Decoteau Park.



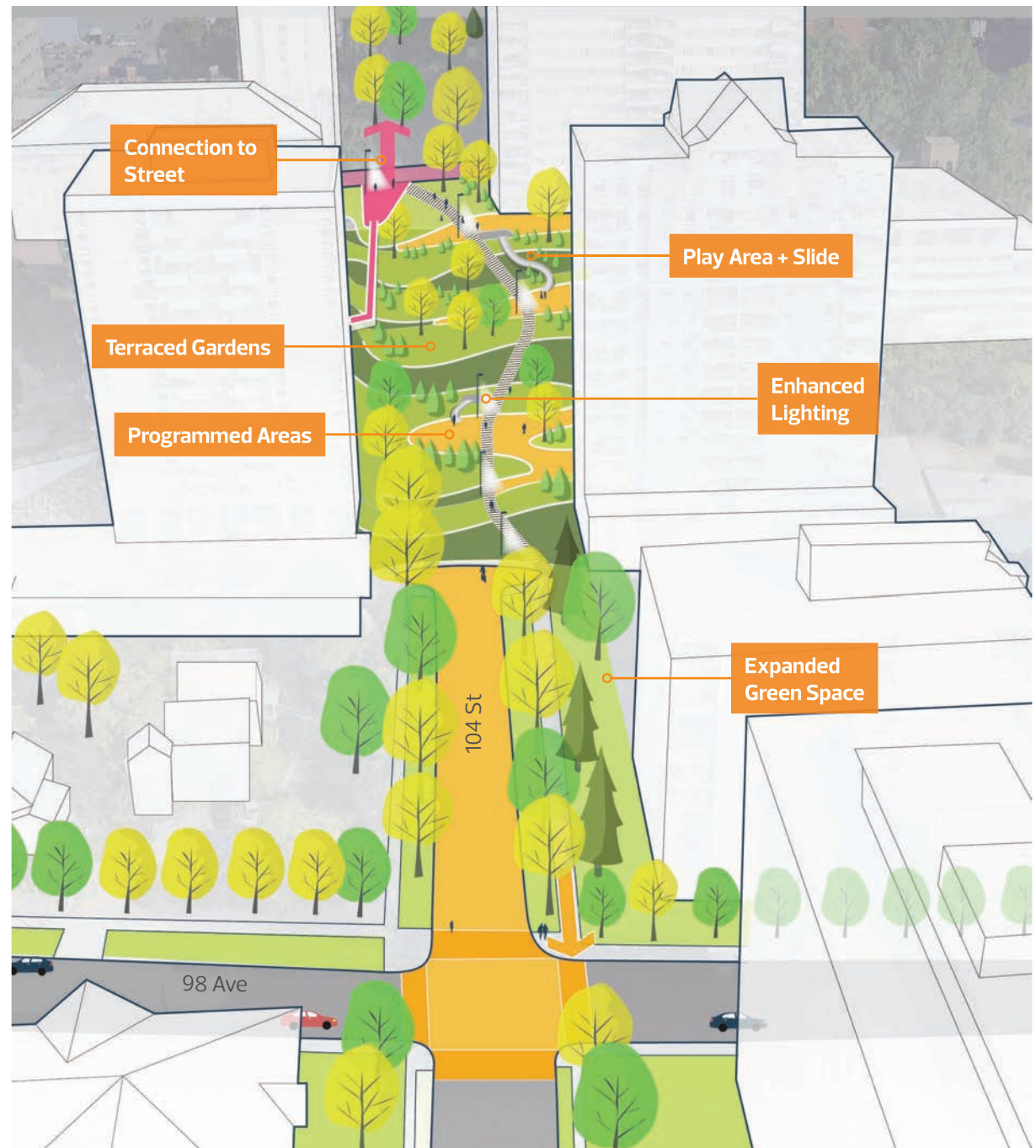


### 2.3.4 104 Street Staircase

*Develop a grand staircase with cascading tiers to provide an enhanced connection to the River Valley and a playful public place.*

The 104 Street Staircase will be reimagined as a grand staircase that serves as both a destination and a connection. This big move will create an activity node between Downtown's 104 Street Promenade and the proposed Pedestrian-Oriented 104 Street in Rosssdale/River Crossing, linking this part of Downtown and the River Valley.

The redeveloped staircase will incorporate multiple landings, offering views of the River and places to sit and rest. Programming elements will include play features and the continuation of the Heritage Trail route to make this an exciting public place to explore.

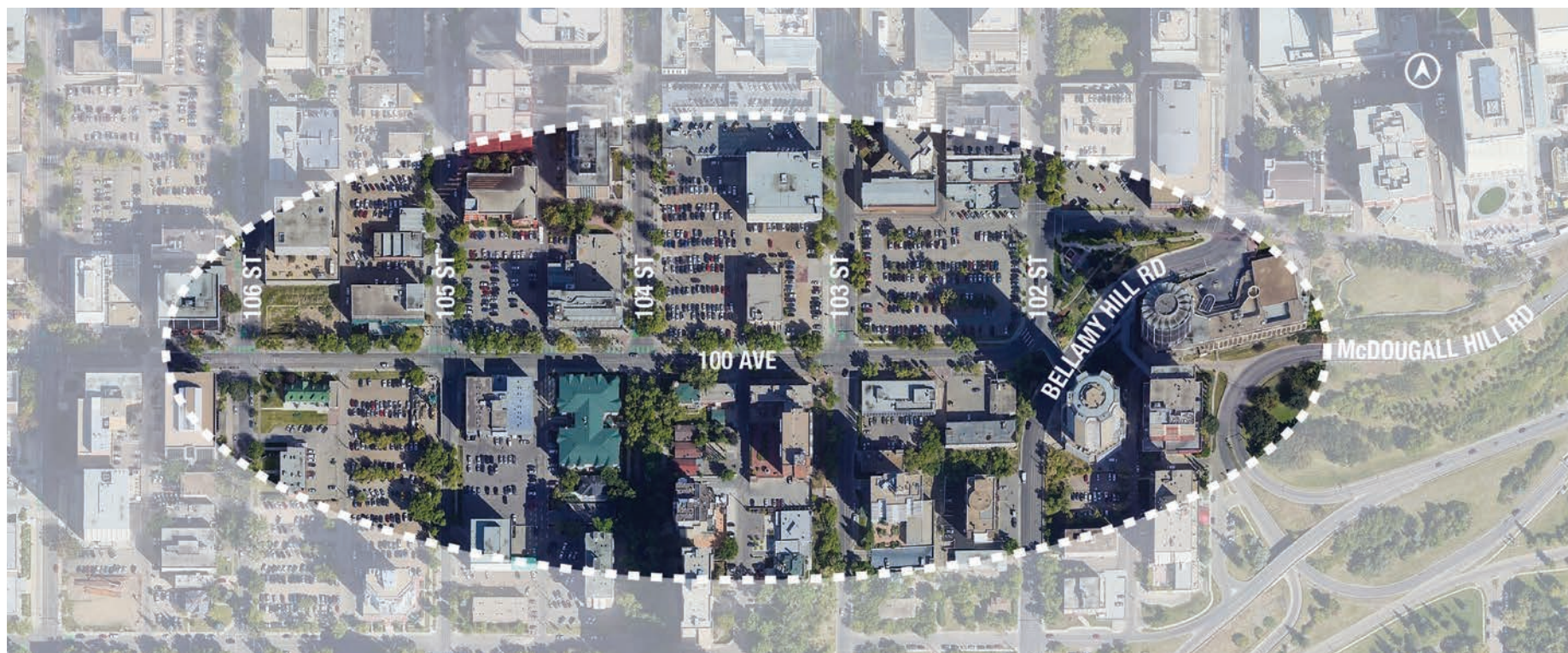


## 2.3.5 McKay Avenue Gathering Space

*Develop a community gathering space for the McKay Avenue neighbourhood.*

The approved Capital City Downtown Plan identifies the development of a new central gathering space to serve residents of McKay Avenue. The City is exploring underdeveloped locations to accommodate a central gathering space. The City will determine the feasibility of park acquisition at a later stage.

The location should be close to 100 Avenue, well connected to the Downtown cycle network and approximately 1 hectare in size. The public place should be developed to provide for community events and a wellness space for day-to-day use.





## 2.3.6 MacDonald Promenade

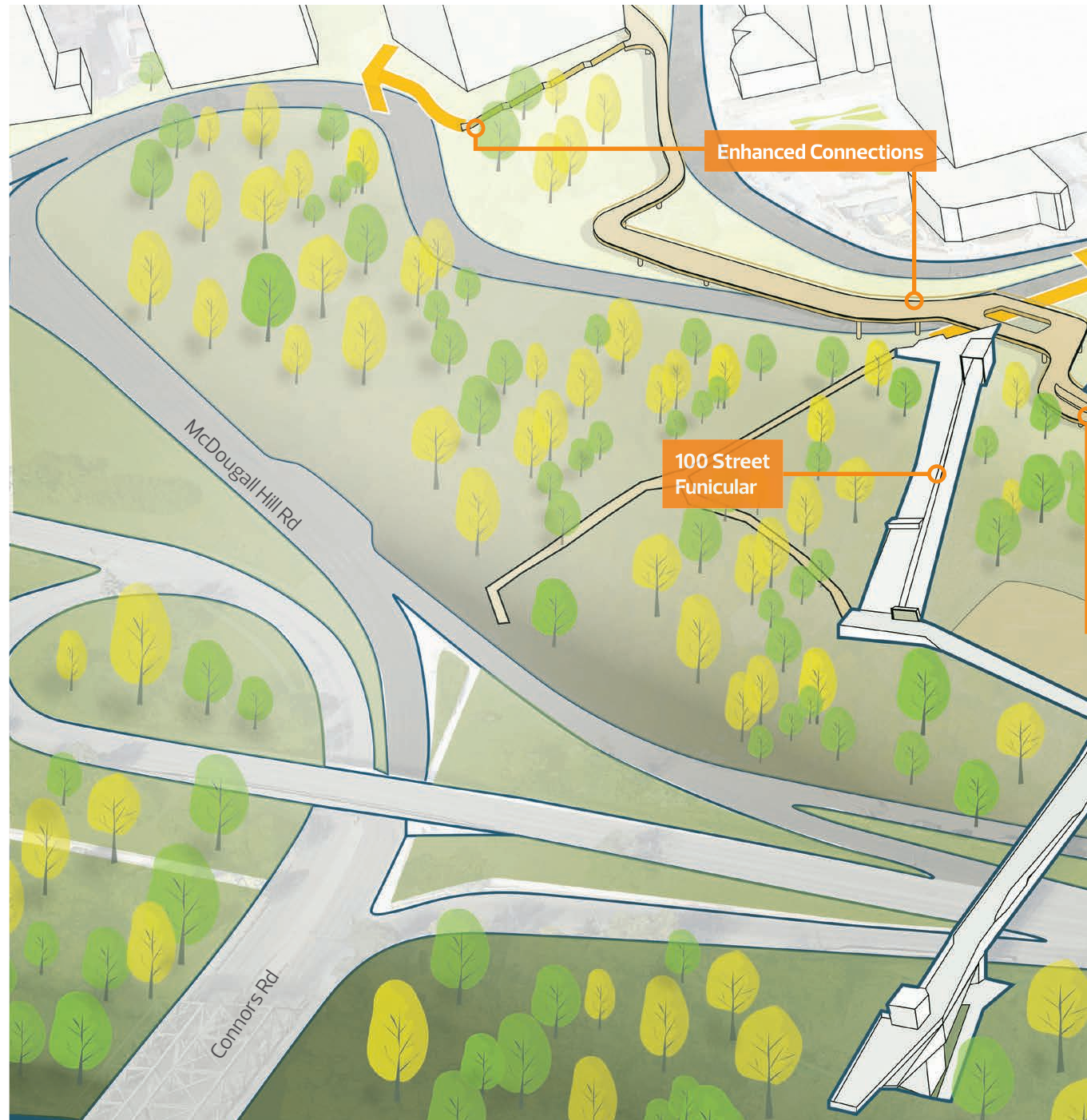
*Create the balcony of Downtown Edmonton.*

The MacDonald Promenade will be the balcony of Downtown Edmonton, winding its way along the top-of-bank edge of the River Valley and crossing over 100 Street.

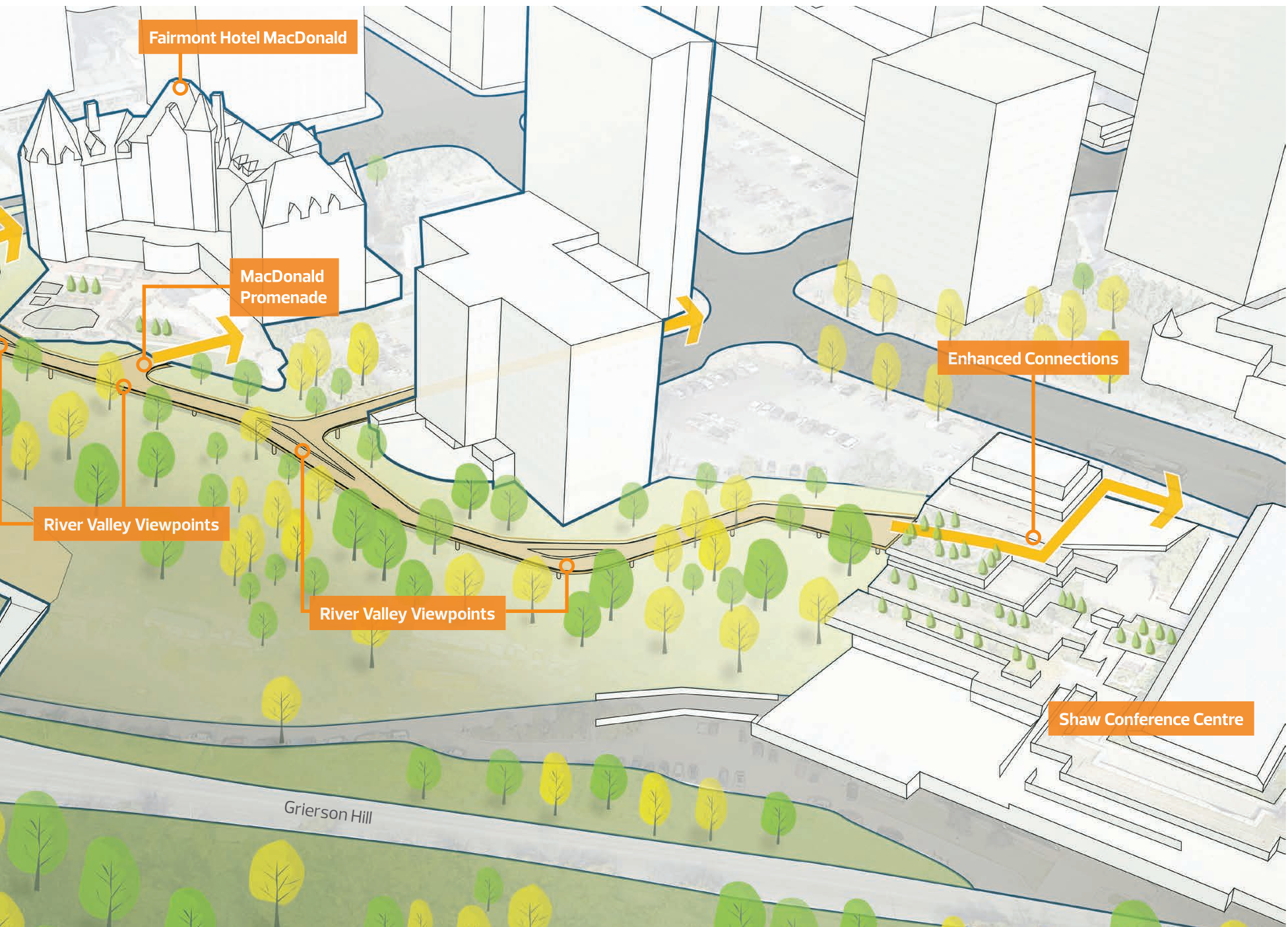
The existing vista and streetscape along MacDonald Drive will be enhanced and integrated into the promenade. Several points along the way will connect Downtown to the River Valley, including the 100 Street Funicular and the Shaw Conference Centre.

The southern exposure of the Promenade means it will be a sunny place to walk or linger. The Promenade will offer vistas of the River Valley through prominent viewpoints and stops of interest along the way. These places will support informal programming and wellness activities.

The MacDonald Promenade will be a premier Edmonton destination, enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.









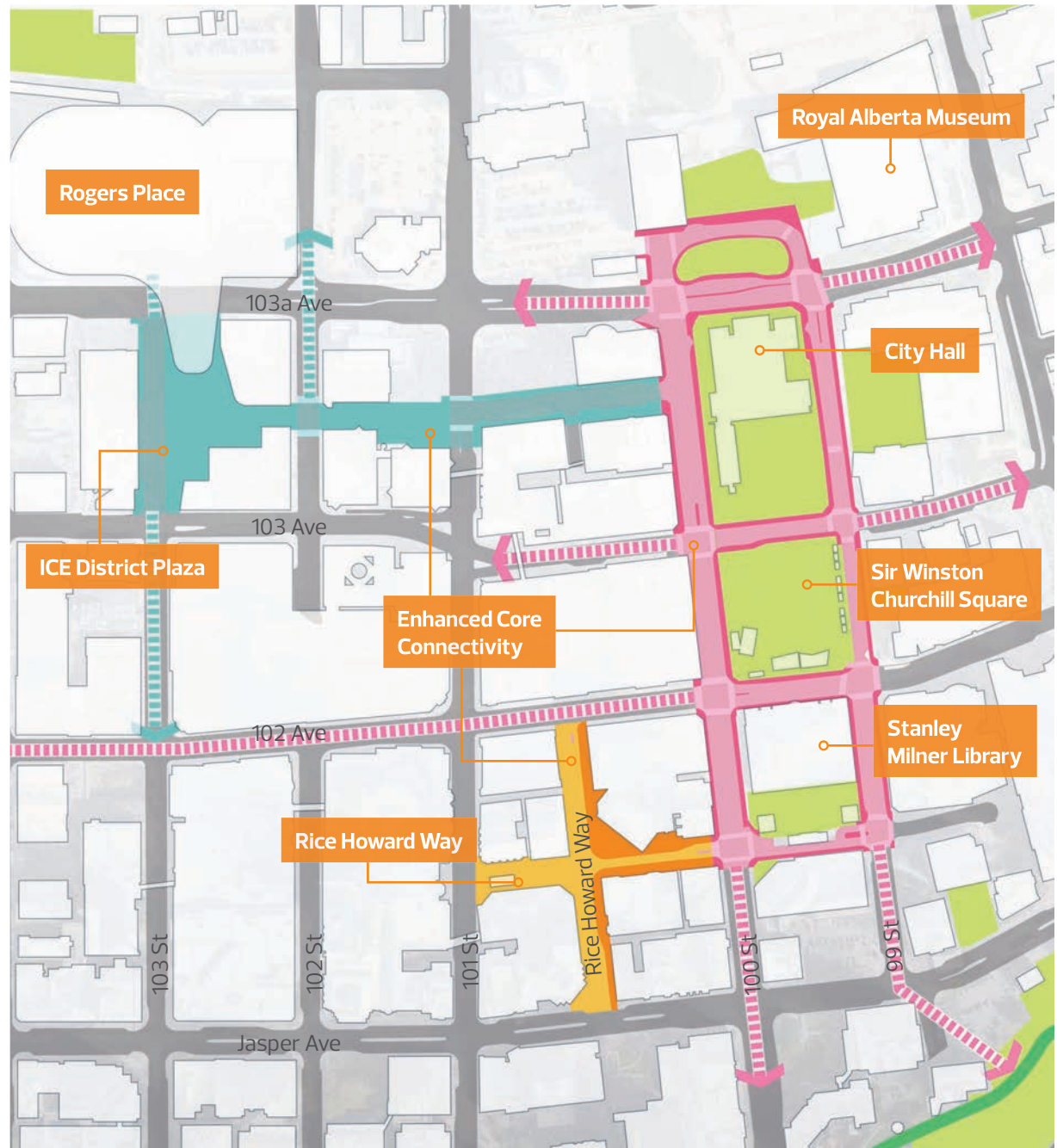
### 2.3.7 Central Core Connections

*Enhance the connections between major civic and entertainment spaces in the Core of Downtown.*

The Central Core is the Civic and Entertainment heart of Downtown Edmonton. This big move focuses on making the centre of Downtown a more cohesive network of public places.

The pedestrian realm will be enhanced through coordinated landscaping, surface, and lighting treatments between ICE District Plaza, Churchill Square, Centennial Plaza and Rice Howard Way. Particular attention will be given to the treatment of Rice Howard Way to support additional seating, programming, and activation at the street level.

Improvements to the Core will focus on making the area more child and family friendly for everyday use, while also retaining its primary function as a regional hub for major events, amenities, shopping, civic services, arts, and culture. Streets will be designed so that City events can spill onto them to further animate the centre of Downtown.



### 2.3.8 97 Street Bridge

*Renew 97 Street Bridge as active transportation linkage.*

This big move replaces the 97 Street Bridge north of 103A Avenue with a structure that serves as a destination and linkage extending the LRT multi-use pathway from the Quarters into the Central Core.

The bridge and a route behind the Royal Alberta Museum will connect this area north to Chinatown, west to the 101 Street, and east to the Ironworks building. Mary Burlie Park will also be enhanced and better integrated as a node along this active transportation route.

The bridge replacement will be designed to improve visibility and pedestrian safety above and below it and provide direct connections up to the bridge from street level. The new bridge will serve as both a connection and a viewpoint.

This connection will be designed so it can be coordinated with future development in the area.





### 2.3.9 Quarters Connection to Louise McKinney

*Connect the Quarters to the River Valley.*

This big move extends the 96 Street Armature from the Quarters Downtown into the River Valley.

This structure will be a grade-separated pedestrian crossing over Grierson Hill into Louise McKinney River Valley Park and link into the MacDonald Promenade. This connection will be designed so it can be coordinated with future development in the area.

This linkage will create better access to the River, trail system, and amenities of Louise McKinney River Valley Park for the growing communities in the Quarters.

