

DOWNTOWN NANAIMO INITIATIVES

September 2024



DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

Overview

We respectfully acknowledge that the city boundary lies within the Traditional Territory of Snuneymuxw First Nation who have many significant ancestral village sites throughout the city including Stlilnup (Departure Bay) and Sxwuyum (Millstone River).

Nanaimo was established on Snuneymuxw territory and its downtown landscape has seen significant change over time. When the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company purchased the town from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1862, they hired an architect to draft a town plan and the fan-shaped pattern of Nanaimo's downtown streets was developed.

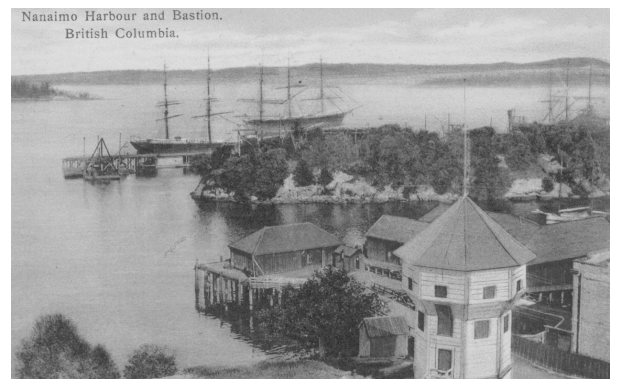


The first permanent structure to be built in Nanaimo was the Bastion which, over time, served as a jail, store, clubhouse, museum and interpretative centre. The history of Nanaimo's early development is well-documented and many significant historical structures still stand in our downtown today.

Read more about Nanaimo's historical development:

<https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/about-nanaimo/nanaimohistoricaldevelopment.pdf>

In December 1874, the City of Nanaimo became the sixth municipality to be incorporated in British Columbia. Today, Nanaimo is among one of the top five fastest growing cities in Canada and home to more than 107,000 residents, according to the 2024 State of the Nanaimo Economy report.



Breathing new life into Downtown Nanaimo is a priority for the City. This document captures some of the initiatives past, present and future that will help to revitalize the heart of our community.

DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

INVESTMENTS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Investing in our downtown's public spaces, infrastructure and amenities is important for building and maintaining a vibrant, thriving and sustainable city. Public investments in our community help to ensure that improvements made today will serve generations to come.

Maffeo Sutton Park Inclusive Playground



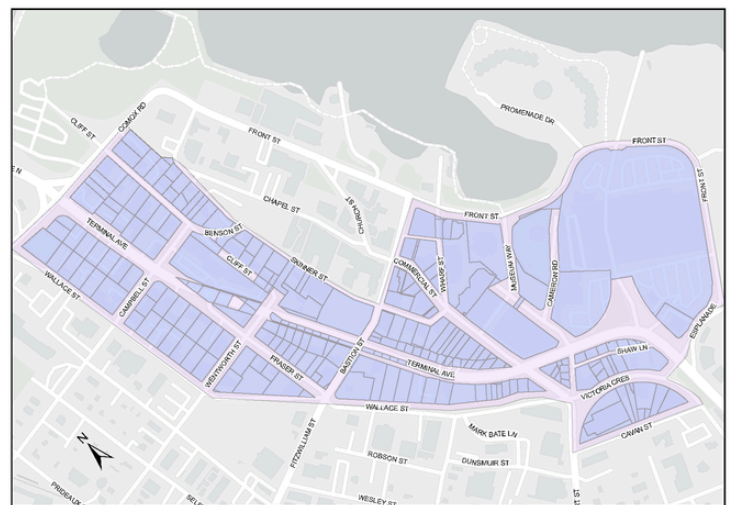
Between 2020 and 2022, one of Nanaimo's most popular destination playgrounds was transformed. Through collaboration with a number of community groups, Maffeo Sutton Park Playground was upgraded in two phases and has been redesigned to be accessible and inclusive.

With features such as Nanaimo's first wheelchair accessible swing and rubber surfacing allowing those with mobility challenges to access the play areas, the new playground invites inter-generational play and brings new life to this much-loved park. The project included First Nations art pieces throughout, and a hand carved cedar canoe, created by Snuneymuxw First Nation artist Noel Brown.

Paving the way for downtown revitalization

In June 2023, the City received notice from the Province that significant barriers to downtown development were being removed thanks to the efforts of a partnership between the City of Nanaimo, downtown property owners and Planning Design and Development Nanaimo.

After reviewing an environmental study and application that had been sent to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, it was determined that more than 145 properties in the Terminal Avenue area would be exempt from regulations that assess groundwater quality during site investigations, simplifying the development process for property owners.



map of downtown exemption area

This decision removed a big obstacle to revitalizing the City's downtown core, cutting costs and reducing timelines for development. Given its proximity to Commercial Street, the waterfront and the future downtown transit exchange, the development potential in this area is tremendous.



www.getinvolvednanaimo.ca/downtown-reimagined

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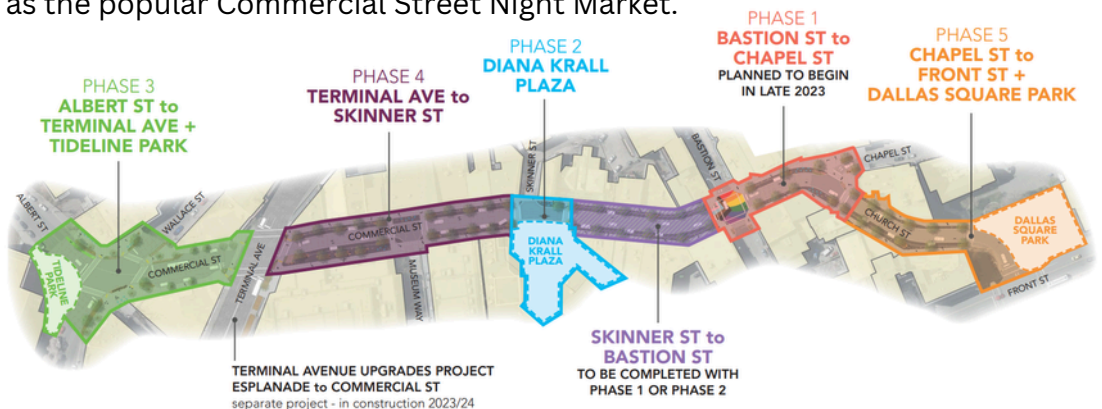
INVESTMENTS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Commercial Street Revitalization

Commercial Street is at the heart of Nanaimo's downtown. This historic street was once recognized as one of the Great Places in Canada due to its mix of historical buildings and lively commercial activity. While Commercial Street has many positive attributes, the public realm has become tired and there is an opportunity to refresh this important area of downtown.

The Design Commercial project will see the public areas on Commercial Street enhanced through a design that reflects the wants and needs of the community and increases opportunities for community events, such as the popular Commercial Street Night Market.

Construction on Phase One of this exciting project broke ground this fall! Check out this video for a sneak peak of the concept plan which was endorsed by Council June 20, 2022.



Diana Krall Plaza Upgrades

Named after the world-famous, Nanaimo-born jazz musician, Diana Krall Plaza is a public open space that backs onto the Port Theatre and provides access to the Nanaimo Public Library and Coastal Community Credit Union. At present, the space is largely underutilized but improvements are coming...

In 2020, a design review of the Plaza was undertaken to help guide the City of Nanaimo in developing options for transforming the space into an attractive and vibrant public plaza.



The Re-Envision Diana Krall Plaza project was led by a volunteer urban designer and involved a collaboration of community members, downtown organizations and businesses, City of Nanaimo staff and Vancouver Island University's Masters of Community Planning Program staff and students.

At a meeting held October 25, 2021, Council provided direction for Staff to consider the concepts outlined in the Diana Krall Plaza Redevelopment Plan as part of the Design Commercial project (scheduled for Phase 2).

Learn
more



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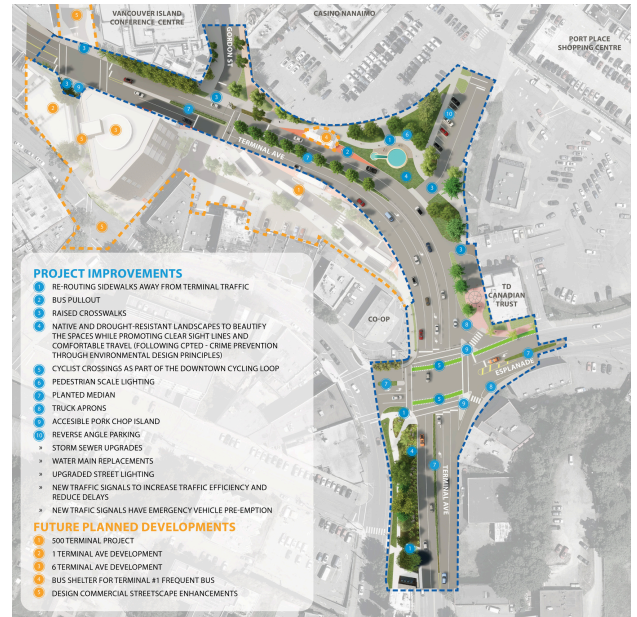
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INVESTMENTS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Terminal Avenue Upgrades

Terminal Avenue is the gateway to Downtown Nanaimo and a series of utility upgrades and streetscape improvements are underway to transform this important corridor. The end result will feature an enhanced, safer corridor with improved pedestrian crossings at key areas and resurfaced vehicle lanes. Phase 1 started July 2023 and was completed August 2024.

Included in Phase 1 was a renewal of the Italian Square Park and Pioneer Park. Both parks had been fenced off and closed to the public in 2021 due to concerns for public safety, but were reopened as gateway features as part of the improvements. Future phases will include improvements between Commercial Street and Wentworth (Phase 2) and Wentworth Street and Stewart Avenue (Phase 3).



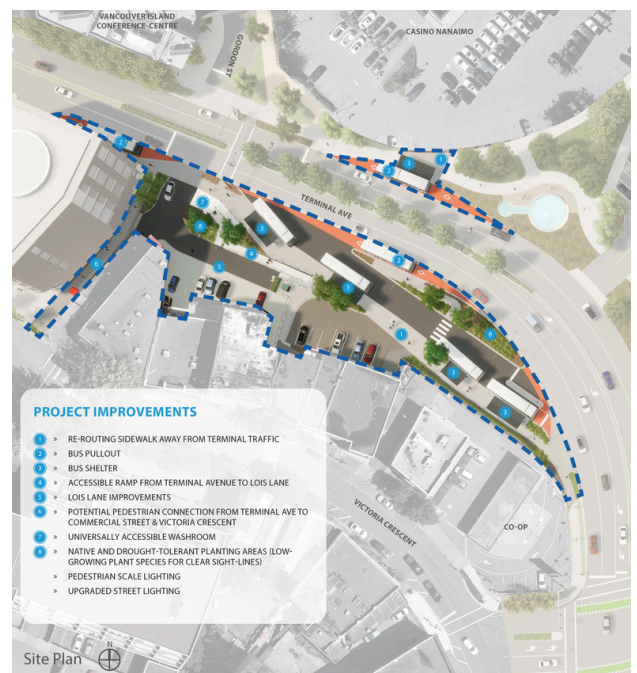
Downtown Transit Exchange

On September 18, 2023, the federal government announced a joint investment of more than \$15 million to build a Downtown Nanaimo Transit Exchange, to be located on the 500 Block of Terminal Avenue.

The Government of Canada is investing \$6,018,033 in this project, while the Government of British Columbia is investing \$6,018,033 and the Regional District of Nanaimo is contributing \$3,009,016. The City of Nanaimo is contributing the land.

When considering site options, relocating the transit exchange to this area was determined to be the best location due to a number of factors including its close proximity to stores and shops.

More information can be found on the project page: www.nanaimo.ca/goto/DTEX



www.getinvolvednanaimo.ca/downtown-reimagined

DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

INVESTMENTS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Downtown Events



There are a number of free City-hosted events that take place in the downtown each year including Canada Day celebrations at Maffeo Sutton Park and Concerts in the Park at various locations. Last fall, Council also increased the annual amount of funding for the Downtown Event Revitalization Grants program from \$150,000 to \$250,000 per year.

These grant funds help community groups with the costs to organize and deliver events and initiatives in downtown Nanaimo, attracting residents and visitors to the area, supporting Nanaimo's cultural vibrancy and stimulating business activity. This includes

popular events such as the Loyal Nanaimo Bathtub Society's Marine Festival, the Nanaimo Blues Festival and the Commercial Street Night Market, among many others.

Welcome Poles

On September 27, 2021, a welcome pole was installed in Maffeo Sutton Park's Spirit Square. The pole was carved by Snuneymuxw Master Carver Noel Brown. In discussing the meaning of a Welcome Pole, Snuneymuxw leaders have shared:

"...the installation of a Welcome Pole is an invitation to the broader community to think more deeply about a way of being that is built on a foundation of humility, connectivity and reciprocity"

Welcome poles such as those installed in Spirit Square and at Fire Station No. 1 bring the rich culture of Snuneymuxw First Nation to the forefront in public spaces, and reflect the City's commitment to reconciliation, representation and inclusion as embedded into the City Plan goal of an Empowered Nanaimo.

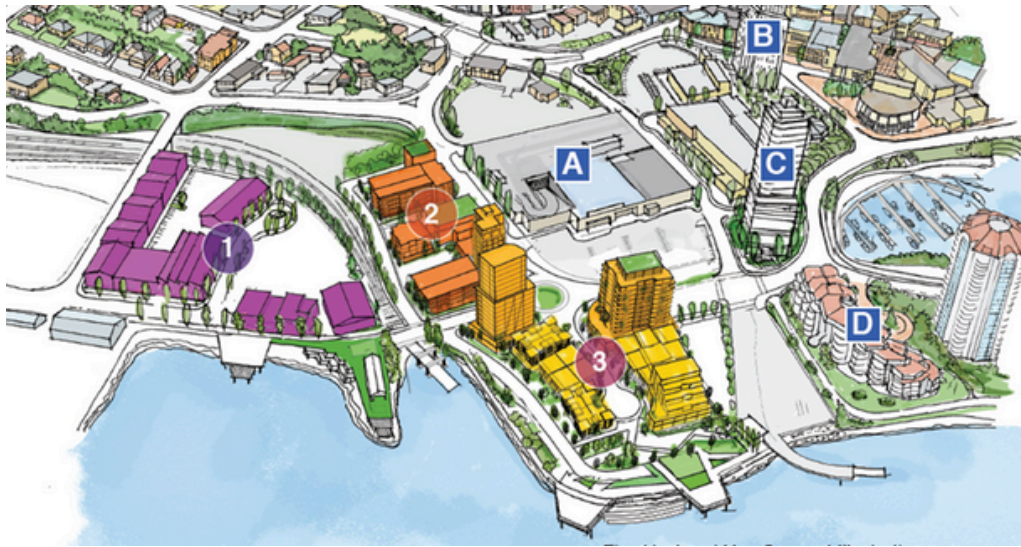


DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

INVESTMENTS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Future Projects

The future is bright! While we can't build everything at once, there are a number of exciting projects that we look forward to seeing progress on in the years ahead.



Port Drive
land use concept
illustration

- 1 Industrial Precinct
- 2 Mixed Use Precinct
- 3 Residential Precinct
- A Port Place Mall
- B Potential Future Building
- C Potential Future Building
- D Cameron Island

1 Port Drive

The City of Nanaimo acquired the lands at 1 Port Drive from CP Rail in March 2013. The Port Drive Waterfront Master Plan was developed and adopted in June 2018, providing detailed policy and direction on the vision for the property's future. Background information was provided to Council at a meeting earlier this year with future steps including continued discussions with Snuneymuxw First Nation, preparation of a rezoning application and a report with options to consider for next steps.

Art Gallery

Located at 150 Commercial Street, the Nanaimo Art Gallery has been operating out of its downtown location since 2015. The Nanaimo Art Gallery is working on plans to expand its facility to meet the needs of our growing community. With next steps for the Gallery including developing a detailed business plan, case for support and capital campaign, the future of this creative cultural hub has the potential to help shape Nanaimo's downtown improvements.

Maffeo Sutton Park Washrooms

Nanaimo's signature park is getting a much asked for upgrade... new washrooms! Designs are underway for a universal washroom facility which will be located next to the Lions Pavilion. This new amenity will incorporate numerous fun and creative exterior elements to ensure that it's not just a new washroom facility but it is also an engaging part of this special cultural and recreational space.

Design work started in the summer of 2024 and construction is anticipated to begin in 2025. This project has been funded by the Province's Growing Communities fund, intended to support building stronger BC communities.

DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

INVESTMENTS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Courtyard by Marriott

Located across the street from the Vancouver Island Conference Centre (100 Gordon Street), the Courtyard by Marriott hotel opened March 2023.

The development of what had previously been a City-owned site into a nine-storey, 172-room hotel brought a nearly 2-decade project to completion.



6 Commercial Street

In 2021, the City of Nanaimo announced it had purchased the former site of the historic Jean Burns building which caught fire on March 30, 2016. One of the most high profile vacant sites in the City, its redevelopment will play a key role in downtown Nanaimo's revitalization efforts.

An Expression of Interest for the site was issued in June 2023 and the City is now working with a developer to redevelop this site to support residential and commercial uses.

350 & 398 Franklyn

Previously a City-owned staff parking lot, the City sold the properties to a developer earlier this year in an effort to further revitalize downtown.

A development permit for a mixed-use commercial and multi-family development on the site was issued on July 22, 2024.



DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENTS

Key Site Development

Private investments are bringing much needed commercial space and hundreds of new homes to the downtown. This page outlines some of the key private investments that are currently in the works.

1 Commercial

Known to most as the former A&B Sound building, this two-storey commercial building is being updated to accommodate an indoor market, commercial retail units and office spaces.

388 Machleary St

The site of Nanaimo's old hospital, and later the Malaspina Gardens care home, a five-storey, 145 unit seniors apartment building is currently under construction at this site.

77 Chapel St

Located across from the Nanaimo courthouse, a developer is working on a building permit to transform a pair of parking lots into three six-storey buildings (154 units).

340 Campbell St

The former site of the Caledonia Clinic, construction on a six-storey, 162 unit rental apartment building is currently underway.

235 Wallace St

Currently under construction, this development (known as Telus Living) transforms a 1.6 acre undeveloped lot into a 195-unit apartment building consisting of two, six-storey towers.

507 Milton St

Part of the Downtown Revitalization Tax Exemption Program, this 3-storey commercial/multi-family building will be opening soon and features 14 residential units and 3 commercial units.



DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

INVESTMENTS IN COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Fire Station No. 1



Nanaimo's busiest firehall, located at 666 Fitzwilliam Street, is home to Fire Rescue Operations, the Emergency Operations Centre and the Fire Rescue Command and Business Centre. Built to replace an aging facility, the new Fire Station No. 1 opened its doors for operations July 2022.

An official opening ceremony was held on June 21, 2023 (National Indigenous Peoples Day), bringing together Snuneymuxw First Nation and the City of Nanaimo for the unveiling of a welcome pole by Snuneymuxw Master Carver Noel Brown.

Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan

In 2022, the City of Nanaimo implemented the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan in response to an increase in homelessness, open drug use and social disorder in the downtown core. This led to the hiring of 12 Community Safety Officers and the establishment of 2 Clean Teams, resources dedicated to working in Nanaimo's downtown.

In July 2023, the City received \$75,000 from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to evaluate the Plan and explore the feasibility of expanding it to other areas of the city. An update was presented at the April 29, 2024 Council meeting and staff were directed to prepare a cost analysis for expanding the program. Options will be presented for Council to consider in the fall as part of the 2025 budget deliberations.



DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

INVESTMENTS IN COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Supportive Housing

The City of Nanaimo and BC Housing signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2019 to build new housing in the community, including two key supportive housing projects in Nanaimo's downtown.

702 Nicol St.



In March 2022, residents moved into Samaritan Place, located at 702 Nicol Street. Here, 52 units provide long-term housing for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. There are also 14 bridge-to-housing beds for women.



285 Prideaux



In May 2024, residents moved into Cornerstone, located at 285 Prideaux Street. Cornerstone provides 51 new permanent homes with supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Downtown RCMP Unit

Nanaimo RCMP launched a pilot project in downtown Nanaimo on June 1, 2024 with four officers now assigned to hotspots in the downtown core, focusing on community concerns and targeting repeat offenders.

These officers are the result of a commitment that the City made in 2020 to provide funding for three new RCMP officers each year for five years, for a total of 15 new members.

Working with the RCMP's bike patrol unit and the City's Community Safety Officers, together they are helping to ensure there is a coordinated approach to addressing concerns in the downtown area.



DOWNTOWN NANAIMO

MOBILITY INITIATIVES

Investments in mobility are essential for a healthy, growing community. Having a *Connected Nanaimo* that provides safe, equitable access for people of all ages and abilities is one of the five goals of *City Plan*.

Downtown Mobility Network

The Downtown Mobility Hub Project laid the framework for a number of mobility improvements which have been made within the last few years. These short-term improvements include:

- **Safer Intersections** at Albert/Wallace/Victoria; Front/Church; and Bastion/Commercial
- **Cycling routes** on Front Street (complete) and Albert Street (partially complete & in progress)

Other priorities identified in the project included a downtown transit exchange and parking strategy.



Future Rapid Transit

The development of the Downtown Transit Exchange provides the opportunity for a new rapid bus route. The project plans include a northbound and southbound rapid bus stop, along with two southbound “drop-off only” stops.

The RDN’s Transit Redevelopment Strategy outlines a proposed 1 Nanaimo Rapid Line which would start at Woodgrove Centre and eventually extend to an enhanced transit hub at South Parkway Plaza.



Hullo Ferries

In August 2023, Hullo’s operations set sail, providing a direct, convenient connection for foot passengers between downtown Nanaimo and downtown Vancouver.

Parking Apps

In March 2024, the City introduced the HotSpot Parking app to street parking areas around Nanaimo Regional General Hospital. The app provides a convenient and easy way for drivers to pay for parking and plans are in the works to roll out this service to pay parking areas in the downtown.

Evolve E-Bike Share

On May 1, 2024, the City launched its first e-bike share program in partnership with BCAA’s Evolve E-Bike Share. This pilot program aims to improve transportation in Nanaimo by providing residents with a new, convenient, sustainable and affordable mobility option.