ST. JOHN'S

Background Report

University Area Neighbourhood Plan



February 2025

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Neighbourhood At-A-Glance

The City is creating a Neighbourhood Plan for the University Area.

The Neighbourhood Plan will guide future redevelopment and improvements in the area – from the types of uses and the shape of buildings, to streets and park upgrades. The plan will build upon the direction and policies in the *Envision St. John's Municipal Plan* while providing more specific direction tailored to the University Area's local context and needs.

The plan will include direction for:

- The future desired mix of land uses
- Appropriate heights and density for new development
- Investments in transportation infrastructure
- Programming and priorities for parks and open spaces
- Protection of natural and cultural heritage features

Future development will be legally required to align with the Neighbourhood Plan policies.

Why Now?

The City has been allocated over $10.4 million in federal funding through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) to stimulate housing growth. Part of the City's HAF action plan includes neighbourhood planning. The University Area and Cowan Heights were prioritized due to the intensification areas that were identified in and beside them.

Background Report

At the beginning of every planning process, it is important to understand the context of the area being planned. This background report provides a high level summary of the supporting information that will be used to develop the Neighbourhood Plan. The report includes:

- **Neighbourhood At-A-Glace:** A high level summary of the project and context of Cowan Heights
- **Policy & Regulations:** An overview of the policy and regulations that apply to the area and that the plan must comply with
- **Existing Conditions:** A thematic overview of the land use, built form, transportation, and open space conditions of the area
- **Key Findings & Next Steps**: A brief discussion of findings and their implications for drafting the Neighbourhood Plan

The key takeaways from this report and the findings from Phase 1 Engagement will be used to develop the initial recommendations for the Neighbourhood Plan. These recommendations will be provided for review as part of Phase 2 Engagement.

The University Area

The University Area is a neighbourhood made up of several distinct communities. From historic Rabbittown in the south-east to the Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) campus, the plan area covers a range of different urban development eras. The University Area includes a mix of many different types of housing, commercial shops and amenities, institutional and healthcare uses, and recreational and cultural services focused around the University campus.

Boundaries

The boundaries of the University Area are Freshwater Road on the south, Prince Philip Drive to the Health Sciences Centre and Long Pond Road along the west and north, and Allandale Road, Bonaventure Avenue, and Newtown Road along the eastern edge of the plan area (shown in Figure 1). The University Area is located near the centre of St. John's, backing on to Pippy Park (Figure 2).

Unique Features

The University Area's most defining feature is its collection of institutional uses, including MUN and the Health Sciences Centre, supplemented by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the College of the North Atlantic.

Demographics

The area is home to a significant number of new Canadians, students, and renters. This creates a more mobile, lower income, and younger neighbourhood relative to St. John's as a whole. These demographics present opportunities and necessity to focus on the unique needs of residents in this neighbourhood, including increased reliance on transit and missing amenities such as grocery stores.

Quick Facts

5,896 people
total population

2.1 people
average household size

33.9 years
average age

49%
are retired or don't work

47%
own their home

53%
rent their home

$66,364
median household income

Source: Environics Analytics 2024 Neighbourhood Profiles, using 2023 Esri and Statistics Canada data.

Figure 1. Boundary of the University Area.



Figure 2. Citywide context.

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Policy & Regulations



Policy Context

The University Area Neighbourhood Plan must align with existing legislation and policy from all levels of government. Planning in St. John's is regulated through the Provincial Urban and Rural Planning Act, the City of St. John's Act, and the St. John's Urban Region Regional Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan must comply with the City's Municipal Plan and the City's Development Regulations will set out specific rules for development in line with the Neighbourhood Plan, once it is adopted.

Urban and Rural Planning Act (2000)

The Urban and Rural Planning Act (URPA) sets the province's planning framework and regulates regional planning, municipal planning, and the requirements of plans and development regulations prepared by municipalities. The University Area Neighbourhood Plan must comply with the Act.

City of St. John's Act (1990)

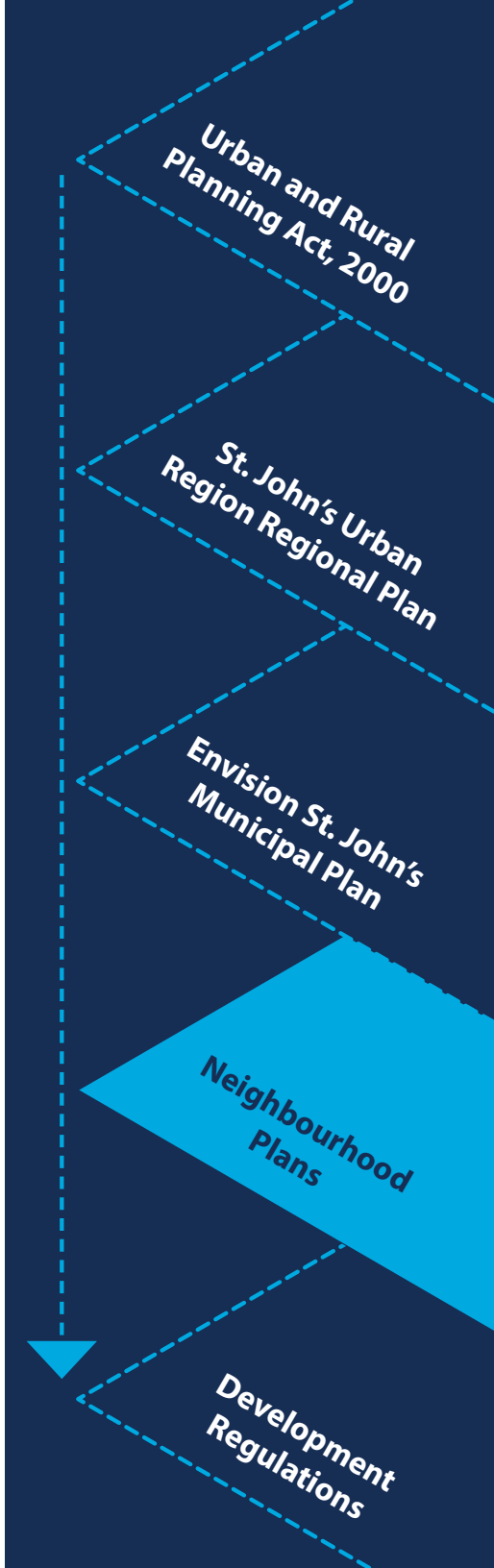
The City of St. John's Act establishes the municipal framework for the City of St. John's and sets out the powers, duties, and responsibilities of the City's government and its role in managing municipal infrastructure, services, and community development. The Act allows the City to establish development areas and conduct land acquisition, demolition, property development, designate heritage buildings and redevelopment agreements with corporations.

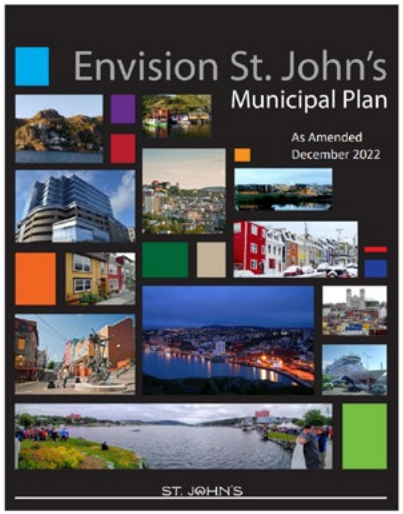
Urban Region Regional Plan (1976)

The University Area's original development largely pre-dates the Urban Region Regional Plan. Today, the plan area contains areas designated as Urban Development and Public Open Space which support residential development and the provision of parks and open spaces. The University Area Neighbourhood Plan will remain consistent with the Urban Region Regional Plan.

C.A. Pippy Park Commission Act (1968)

The C.A. Pippy Park Commission Act (CAPP) is a law that delegates a semi-autonomous crown corporation to oversee conservation and maintenance of lands within Pippy Park. As a semi- autonomous governing body, all authority of land use and development must go through the Pippy Park Commission.





Envision St. John's, Municipal Plan (2022)

The Envision St. John's Municipal Plan is the long-term land use plan for the City. The most relevant parts of the plan to the University Area are summarized below.

Overall Direction

The plan directs the City to balance growth to achieve protection of environmental stewardship, economic diversity, high quality urban design and heritage preservation, and the creation of complete healthy neighbourhoods. The policies in the plan encourage compact development within existing urban areas while preserving the pattern and scale of established neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood Plan Requirements

The Municipal Plan enables the creation of Secondary (Neighbourhood) Plans and sets out their requirements, including:

- Identifying and addressing land use opportunities and issues
- Adapting the direction of the City's Municipal Plan to the University Area's context and establishing local development policies to guide growth
- Promoting consistency in new/developing areas and compatibility with existing development

Future Land Use

For the University Area the Municipal Plan provides a high level future land use concept for the area (Figure 3). The area is designated as a split between mostly residential in the south two-thirds of the plan area, with the north third where MUN and the Health Sciences Centre are located identified with the Pippy Park designation. The Pippy Park designation recognizes that land use decisions in these areas are determined by the Pippy Park Commission, not the City. Within these lands and along the north side of Prince Philip Drive there is also an extensive 100 Year Floodplain identified in the Municipal Plan.

The University Area also includes several Institutional areas next to the main MUN campus, as well as several Commercial areas along Freshwater Road and at the Paton Street, Anderson Avenue, and Elizabeth Avenue intersections.

The University Area is also defined by Kelly's Brook which forms a natural dividing line between the older Rabbittown and newer suburban development closer to the MUN campus, as well as providing a Parks and Open Space corridor through the middle of the plan area.

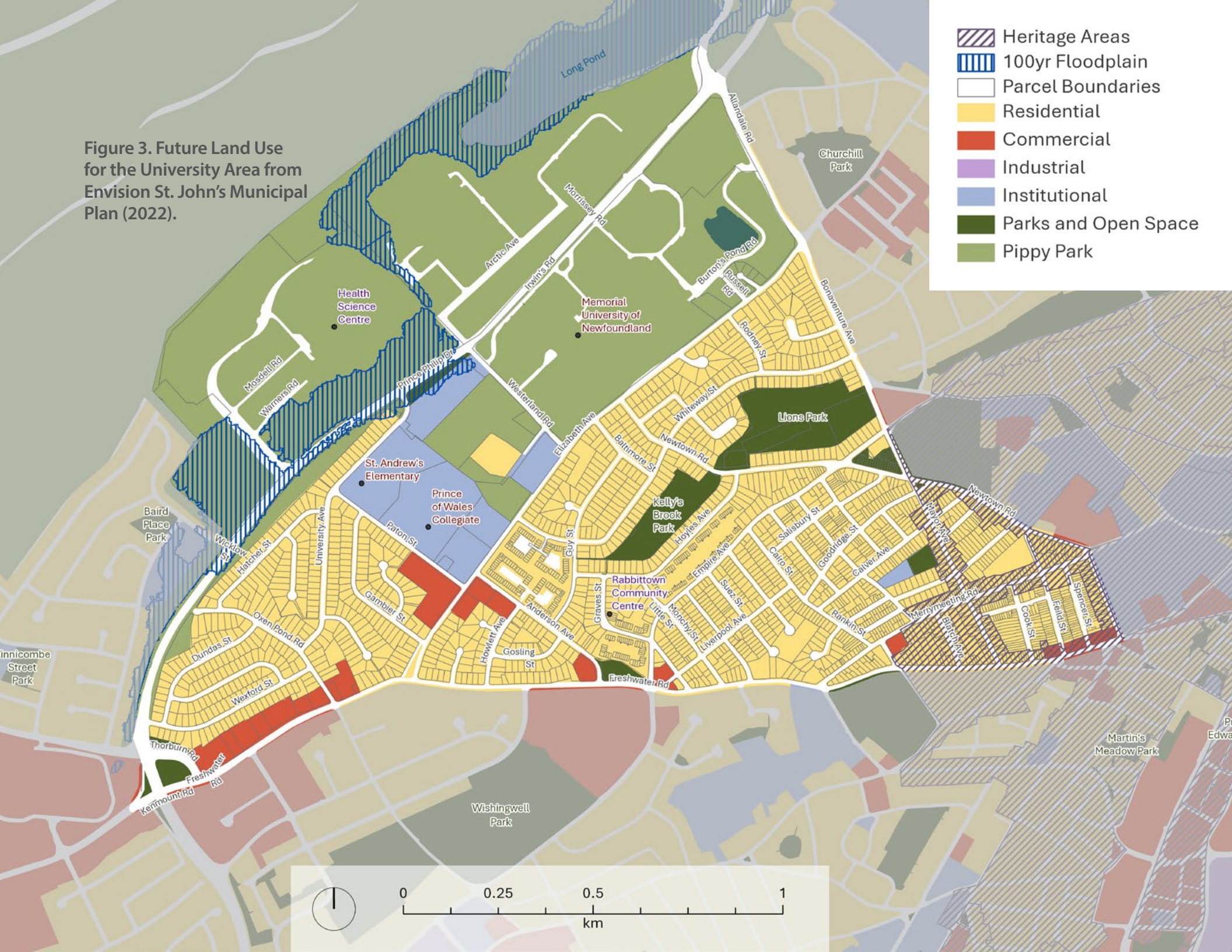
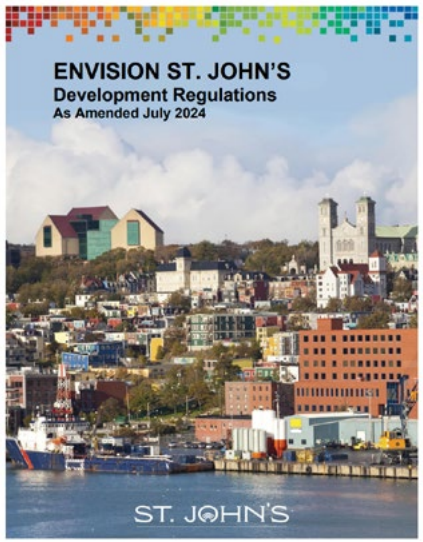


Figure 3. Future Land Use for the University Area from Envision St. John's Municipal Plan (2022).

Intensification Areas

The Municipal Plan also identifies two preliminary intensification areas just outside the boundaries of the University Area: one on the former Booth Memorial High School site, and the other along LeMarchant Road south from Freshwater Road (Figure 4).

As part of developing the University Area Neighbourhood Plan opportunities to revise or add to these Intensification Areas will be investigated.



Development Regulations (2021, as amended)

The Envision St. John's Development Regulations implement the City's Municipal Plan policies. The document sets out different zones that each have rules about the types of uses and the size of buildings that are allowed in that zone.

Through a formal public process land can be rezoned to enable new development. The existing zoning for the University Area is explored in the Existing Conditions Section of the Background Report.

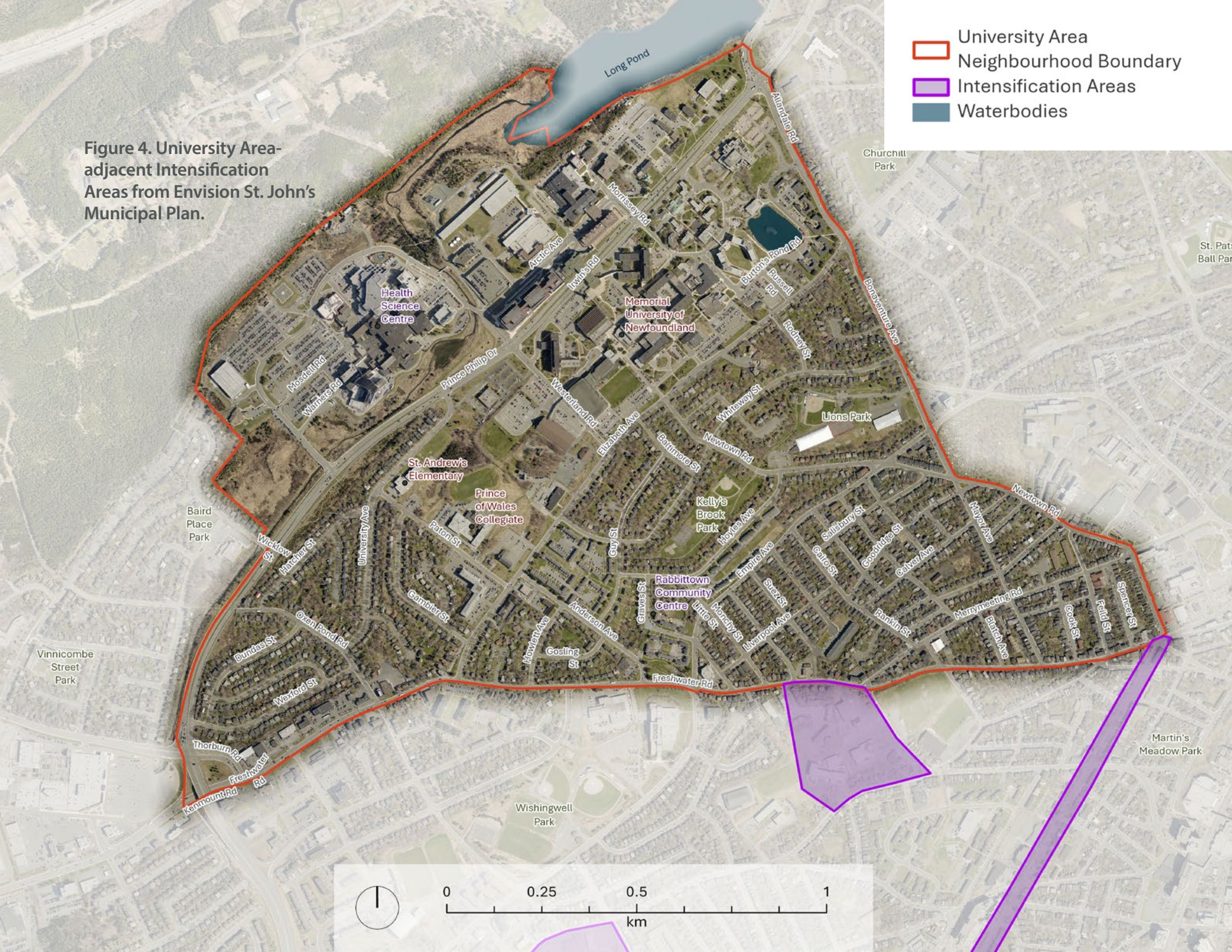


Figure 4. University Area-adjacent Intensification Areas from Envision St. John's Municipal Plan.

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Existing Conditions



Existing Conditions

As an established neighbourhood, it is important to understand the existing conditions of the University Area today to make informed planning decisions about how the neighbourhood should grow and change in the future. The following sections provide a summary of the existing land use, built form, transportation, and parks and open space conditions.



Land Use

Land uses are the types of activities allowed in an area, such as residential or commercial uses. Uses can be mixed or standalone if they have different needs or impacts. Understanding current land use patterns helps make sure that future development compliments existing neighbourhood uses and needs.



Built Form

Built form is the height, style, setbacks, and size of buildings in the community. Understanding existing built form helps make sure future development or changes over time supports the character and sense of place of the community.



Transportation

Transportation includes all the ways residents and visitors move around the University Area. Understanding the existing context for pedestrians, cyclists, transit, and cars will allow for informed decision-making around where and how future investments in the University Area should occur.



Parks & Recreation

Parks are an integral part of complete and healthy communities. Understanding the University Area's existing open space network, including how residents use it both for recreation and for moving throughout the community, is important context to consider when preparing the Neighbourhood Plan.

Land Use

The University Area is a collection of several distinct communities that have developed over the past 100 years. Rabbittown is the oldest community, and was developed following World War I to provide housing for returning soldiers and a growing urban population. This is the densest community in the University Area, and is comprised of rowhouses and smaller-lot single detached houses. Across Kelly's Brook, the neighbourhood transitions to traditional 1950s-90s automobile-oriented suburban development, defined by culs-de-sac and long, winding roads.

The most recent development in the community is tied to the upcoming Canada Games and includes high-rise apartments. Because the University Area is already built out, as the community continues to grow it is anticipated that denser forms of residential redevelopment will be the primary form of future residential redevelopment.

Besides residential development, the neighbourhood is defined by institutional lands and parks and open spaces. Pippy Park lands, MUN, and the Health Sciences Centre define the northern third of the neighbourhood, while Kelly's Brook provides a substantial parks corridor through the heart of the neighbourhood.

Low Density Residential (R1)

Roughly half of all land in the neighbourhood is zoned residential, and approximately half of that land is zoned for low density residential (R1), as shown in Figure 5. The R1 Zone allows single detached dwellings. Recent amendments to the Development Regulations have also made Backyard Suites, Child Care Service, and Four-Plexes on corner lots permitted uses in the in the R1 Zone. These areas are predominantly made up of single detached homes and surround the MUN campus and Health Sciences Centre, created a belt of R1 zoning around these key institutional areas.

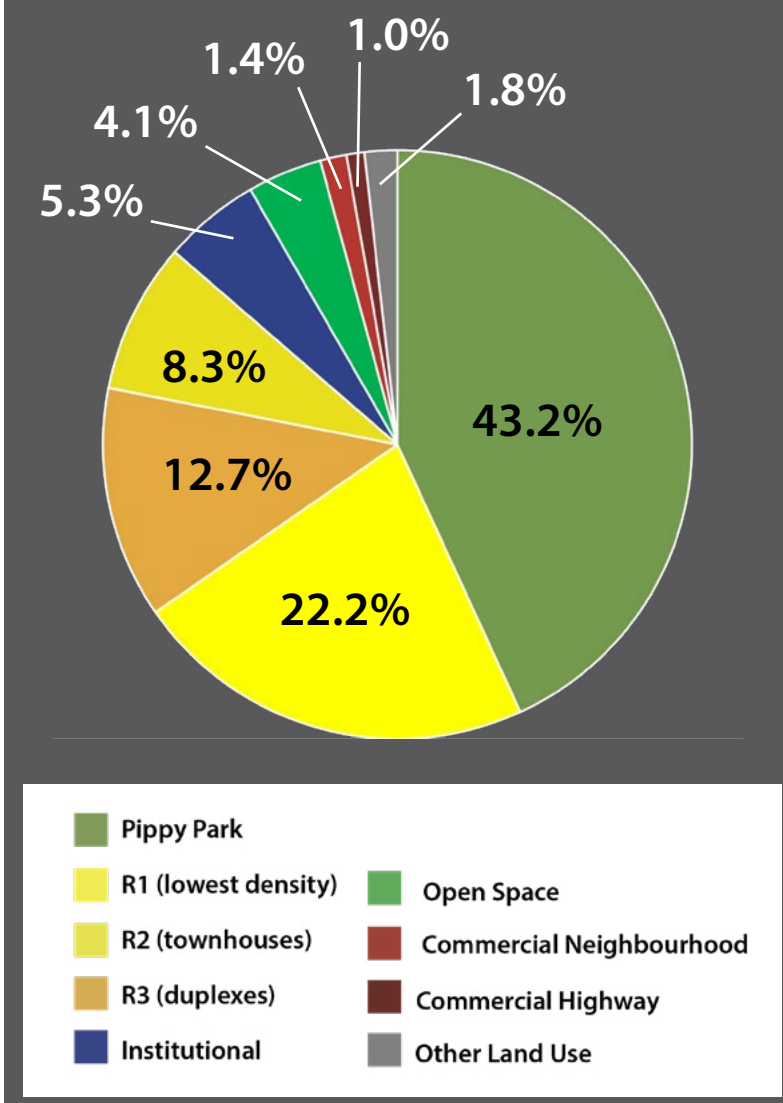
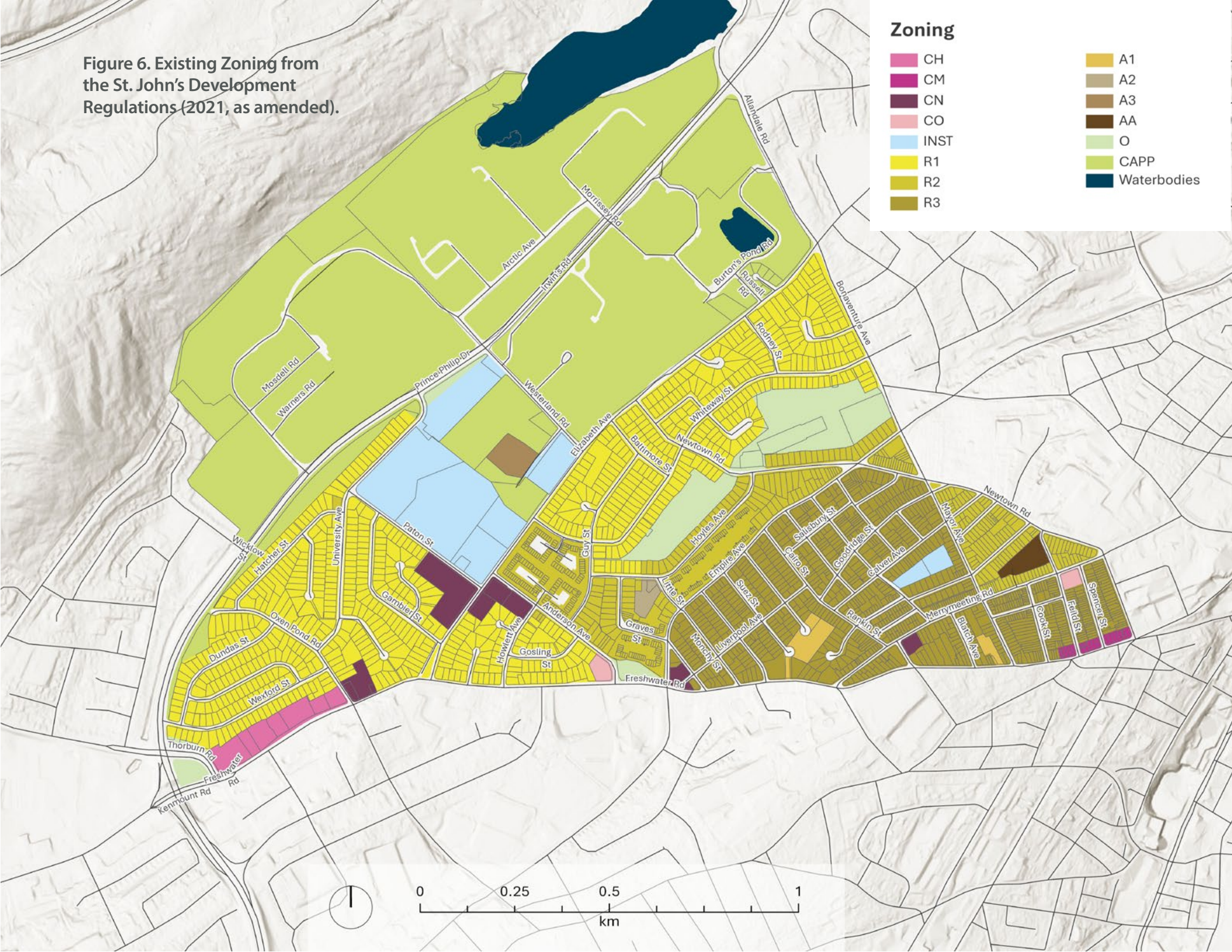


Figure 5. Graph showing land use zones as a percentage of the neighbourhood area.

Figure 6. Existing Zoning from the St. John's Development Regulations (2021, as amended).



Medium Density Residential (R2, R3)

The denser, older parts of the University Area include large blocks of R2 and R3 zoned properties, including all of Rabbittown. Most of this area is comprised of small lot single detached houses or older townhouses and semi-detached houses. There are also pockets of publicly-owned social housing and supportive housing operated by a variety of organizations, including the Association for New Canadians and the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

Limited neighbourhood commercial uses are also included throughout these parts of the neighbourhood, particularly along Empire Avenue and Merrymeeting Road.

High Density Residential (A1, A2, A3, AA)

The Apartment (A) Zones enable multi-residential developments at a range of heights and densities. A3 provides the greatest scale of development, up to 52 metres in building height, and is the zone being used for the new Westerland apartment buildings being built for the Canada Games. Despite this, most development in these zones takes the form of smaller-scale townhouse-style buildings such as the Oak Ridge development on Sulva Street.

Local Commercial (CH, CN, CM)

Only three percent of the University Area is zoned Commercial. Three main clusters of commercial developments exist within the University Area. The main commercial areas are:

1. Freshwater Road between Oxen Pond Road and Columbus Drive;
2. Paton Street and Elizabeth Avenue; and
3. Merrymeeting Road and Empire Avenue.

Each of these local commercial areas provide a different commercial experience, and have different zoning. The Freshwater Road commercial strip between Oxen Pond Road and Prince Philip Drive is zoned Commercial Highway (CH), and is primarily vehicle-oriented, with stores setback behind large parking lots on a busy street.

The Paton and Elizabeth developments meanwhile provide a more comprehensive strip mall or plaza-style commercial experience, where many shops and services can be accessed in one location once parked. These shops are zoned Commercial Neighbourhood (CN), and are also more easily accessible by foot than those on Freshwater Road.

Lastly, the Merrymeeting Road and Empire Avenue commercial developments are historic, small-scale neighbourhood commercial uses integrated seamlessly into the residential context of the Rabbittown neighbourhood. These shops usually feature a mixed commercial and residential built form, and are primarily zoned R3.

Open Space (O)

The Open Space Zone regulates the ongoing use of the City's existing parks and open spaces. This zone only establishes permitted and discretionary uses - zone standards are left to Council's discretion.

C.A. Pippy Park Zone (CAPP)

Over 40% of the plan area is under the regulatory authority of the Pippy Park Commission. These lands comprise the majority of MUN's lands as well as the Health Sciences Centre, but the City of St. John's does not have planning authority to manage land uses and zone standards on these lands.

Relevant City Documents

10-Year Affordable Housing Strategy (2018)

The Affordable Housing Strategy recommends the following land use strategies:

- Building a diverse and inclusive housing stock
- Promoting subsidiary dwelling units and tiny homes
- Supporting intensification and mixed-use developments along transit corridors and near parks
- Providing incentives for affordable housing (cash-in-lieu for the Civic Housing Fund, exempt developments from municipal fees).

Housing Needs Assessment (2023)

The Housing Needs Assessment encourages the City to explore partnerships with non-market housing providers to expand affordable housing supply. The assessment also recommends using public-owned land to build purpose-built rental housing for lower income households.

Institutional (INST)

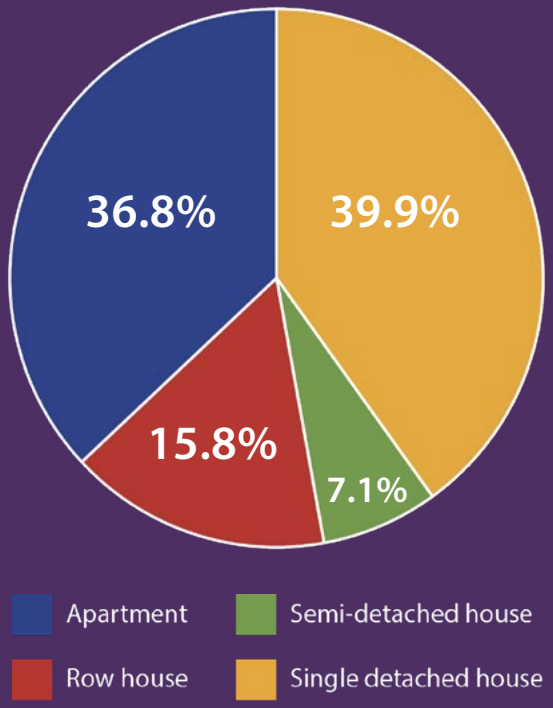
Because of the Pippy Park Zone, there are limited Institutional properties in the University Area despite being one of the City's largest concentrations of Institutional uses. These lands are primarily owned by the School Board and local churches, and are located between Paton Street, Prince Philip Drive, Westerland Road, and Elizabeth Avenue. While the Institutional zone allows for a broad range of uses, these sites represent some of the best opportunities for future intensification in the plan area, and may warrant further land use consideration as part of the planning process.

Key Land Use Takeaways

- The existing land use pattern concentrates lowest residential densities nearest to the primarily economic drivers of the University Area - MUN, the Health Sciences Centre, and other Institutional uses near campus.
- The University Area is relatively under-serviced with commercial uses, although it is ringed with nearby major commercial centres (Avalon Mall, Churchill Park, Merrymeeting Sobeys). Empire Avenue and Merrymeeting Road's local commercial demonstrates one way to integrate more commercial uses into the overall neighbourhood.
- Opportunities exist to support density on Institutional lands and along major roads throughout the neighbourhood in a way that concentrates growth in key areas to support new commercial developments coming to the area.
- Currently, social housing is clustered in one area of the neighbourhood, rather than the more current best practice of distributing this throughout the community.
- The Pippy Park Zone requires the City to plan for externalities caused by land use decisions outside of its control.



Figure 7. A conventional single detached house in Rabbittown.



Source: Environics Analytics 2024 Neighbourhood Profiles, using 2023 Esri and Statistics Canada data.

Figure 8. Percentage of households by housing type.

Built Form

In the University Area approximately one third (35%) of households live in apartments, almost equal to the proportion of residents living in single detached houses (40%). The remaining households are 17 percent in rowhouses and eight percent in semi-detached homes. It is important to note however that the prevailing built form changes dramatically across the University Area's distinct neighbourhoods. Rabbittown features an older, higher-density rowhouse-style development pattern, with some portions included in Heritage Area #3. In contrast, newer subdivisions closer to MUN reflect the automobile-oriented design standards of the 1960s-1990s, with single detached homes on larger lots, winding roads, and culs-de-sac.

As discussed in the Land Use section, commercial development changes across these communities as well. Fine-grain neighbourhood commercial is directly integrated with housing in the older Rabbittown area, while commercial transition to more automobile-oriented built forms in the newer subdivisions.

Single Detached Housing

There are two distinct styles of single detached housing in the University Area. The first is in Rabbittown and was built between the World War I and World War II. These houses are on small, narrow lots and spaced closely together, close to the street. These homes are much older than most of the University Area, and are typically deeper, lower-slung bungalows or shorter two-storey buildings.

Across Kelly's Brook, most housing was developed post-World War II in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Examples of this include the Churchill Park development that originally crossed Bonaventure Avenue and extended to Rodney Street. In this area and west of Paton homes are typically located on wider, larger lots and with much deeper setbacks from the street than in Rabbittown.

For all the University Area, parking is accessed from the front with no lanes, and backyards provide private amenity space. Despite the age of many homes, limited redevelopment of lots has occurred, maintaining the prevailing rhythm and development scale of most housing throughout the University Area.

Semi-Detached and Townhouses

Higher density low-rise residential developments such as semi-detached and townhouses are largely concentrated in the Rabbittown and Kelly's Brook portions of the University Area. Rabbittown area housing follows the more historic built form pattern of downtown, with rowhomes built directly up against the street or set back from the street by only a couple of feet. These buildings maintain the same low-slung heights and narrower widths that most single detached houses in the Rabbittown area also exhibit.

Newer developments in the Rabbittown area however take two diverging paths. Some developments reflect more modern, larger-scale built forms while filling in orphaned lots in behind historic developments, such as the Oak Ridge townhouses shown in Figure 9. Alternatively, other forms of redevelopment emulate the historic look and feel of the community, as shown in Figure 10.

In the Kelly's Brook area, many pockets of social housing have been developed in townhouse and semi-detached built forms including between Empire Avenue and Hoyles Avenue, along Graves Street, and between Elizabeth Avenue, Whiteway Street, Guy Street, and Anderson Avenue. These developments are reflective of 1960s and 70s large-scale housing projects, and feature many similar buildings placed within large, open greenspaces.

Apartment Buildings

Apartment-style developments are rare in the University Area outside of the MUN campus. Despite this, some examples exist, including the Westerland Road apartment towers that are under construction. These developments will feature an urban context with walkable areas between each tower and pedestrian connections to the nearby campus, aquarena, and street network. Limited surface parking is provided, minimizing the paved landscape around the development, giving the overall project a relatively urban feel despite its context in a block that is primarily large disconnected institutional uses.



Figure 9. Modern rowhouse development.



Figure 10. Newer townhouse development.

Relevant City Documents

Accessibility Plan (2023)

The Plan advocates for making the following improvements to improve accessibility across the City:

- Ensuring sidewalks are clear and accessible
- Building affordable residential units



Figure 11. Neighbourhood commercial in Rabbittown development.



Figure 12. Westerland apartments under construction.

Relevant City Documents

Heritage By-law (2021)

The Heritage By-law recognizes portions of Rabbittown as worthy of enhanced design standards and additional regulatory review prior to demolition, including the preparation of a Heritage Report.

Local Commercial Sites

As discussed in the Land Use section, commercial sites vary in size and scale across the University Area. Fine-grain, mixed-use mid-block and standalone street-corner commercial can be found throughout the older Rabbittown portion of the University Area. These developments usually feature limited to no parking and very small setbacks from the street (including Fabulous Foods on Merrymeeting Road, shown in Figure 11). They provide a wide range of amenities and services within close proximity to many residents.

In contrast, the rest of the University Area features more automobile-oriented commercial developments. Freshwater Road and the Paton Street and Elizabeth Avenue intersection both feature standalone commercial developments with large setbacks between buildings and the road. Front yard space is usually paved for parking, creating a distanced feeling from the street. The Paton Street and Elizabeth Avenue development integrates a range of professional services and retail into one development, providing a more comprehensive all-in-one commercial experience relative to the Freshwater Road highway-oriented developments.

Key Built Form Takeaways

- The Rabbittown area provides a living example of a walkable, complete community in terms of housing choice and access to services and amenities.
- Wider lots in the newer suburbs could support modest infill development on two or three parcel consolidations.
- Opportunities to consolidate highway-oriented commercial properties along Freshwater Road could deliver more mixed use style developments.
- Large institutional land holdings around the existing Westerland apartments could develop over time into an urban centre if comprehensively planned.

Transportation

The University Area features one of the most dynamic modal splits (rates at which people commute by different methods) in the City. Less than two-thirds commute by car, with almost one in five choosing to walk and another 16 percent taking transit. This contrasts sharply against a City-wide average of roughly 90 percent commuting by car.

These numbers are largely driven by two factors. First, residents of the University Area are surrounded by significant employment options. MUN and the Health Sciences Centre provide thousands of jobs, as do the nearby Avalon Mall on Kenmount Road, CRA office on Freshwater Road, RNC station on Merrymeeting Road, and many other nearby places of employment. This proximity makes it easy to choose to walk, bike, or take the bus to work.

The second factor is the neighbourhood's demographic profile. With significantly more students and newer Canadians, both of whom are less likely to drive, their uptake of alternative modes of transportation influences the overall University Area statistics.

Despite these splits, barriers to walking, biking, and taking transit exist, particularly the hilly terrain and lack of infrastructure supportive of active modes of transportation such as walking and biking.

Streets

The University Area is bounded almost exclusively by Major and Minor Arterials (see Figure 14) fostering less enjoyable experiences for active modes, but more efficient travel for cars and bus transit. Internal to the neighbourhood, irregular grids in Rabbittown and curvilinear development patterns closer to MUN create conditions that discourage through traffic unless accessing local destinations. Road right-of-ways in the older parts of the University Area tend to be more constrained, while ample space exists closer to MUN to accommodate street parking and in some cases active modes infrastructure such as the new Elizabeth Avenue shared-use pathway.

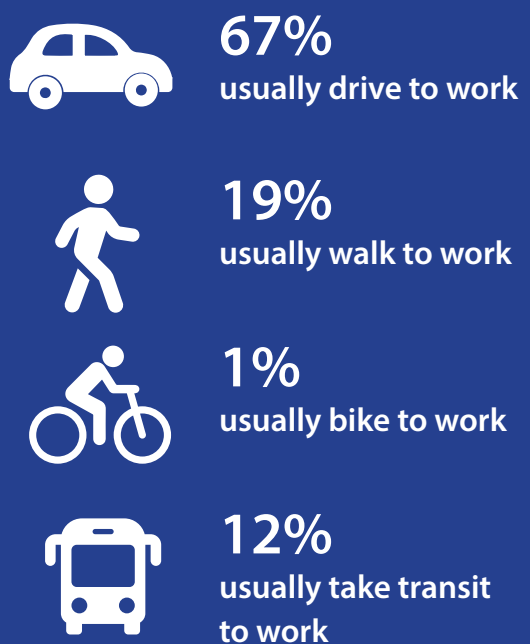


Figure 13. Commuter Mode Split

Source: Environics Analytics 2024 Neighbourhood Profiles, using 2023 Esri and Statistics Canada data.

Figure 14. Street Hierarchy

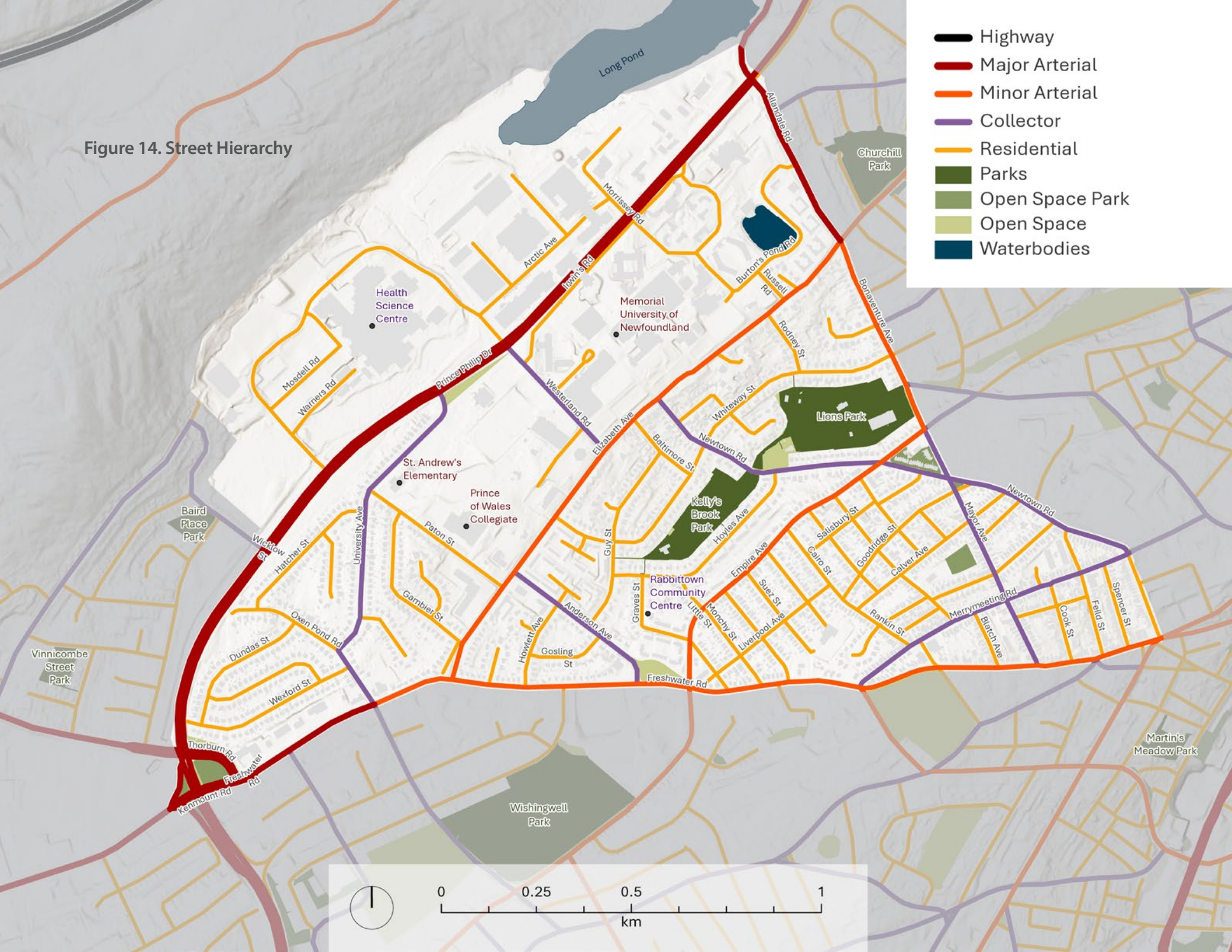


Figure 15. Active Transportation Network



Active Transportation

Recent investments in shared-use pathways along Prince Philip Drive, Elizabeth Avenue, and through Kelly's Brook Park and Lions Park have helped to better connect both the east and west ends of the University Area as well the rest of the City to the University Area. Opportunities exist to further enhance the existing shared-use pathways with stronger north-south connections. This would help to create a skeletal grid internal to the neighbourhood, supporting the large portion of residents that already walk, bike, or take transit for their daily commutes.

Future investments in the active transportation network in the University Area are anticipated to be directed by the existing Active Transportation Network outlined in the Envision St. John's Municipal Plan and through this Neighbourhood Plan process.

Transit

The University Area is also well served by local and express transit routes, shown in Table 1 and Figure 16. The MUN University Centre lay-by off of Arctic Avenue serves as a transit hub and provides transit access to the rest of the City. Most of these routes run on a 15 or 30-minute frequency, however off-peak and weekend times can drop to hourly service for many of these routes. Metrobus costs $78 for a monthly pass or $2.50 for a single adult fare. The bus stop facilities range from a glass and metal shelter, often located on larger roads, to bus stops located on the side of the sidewalk.

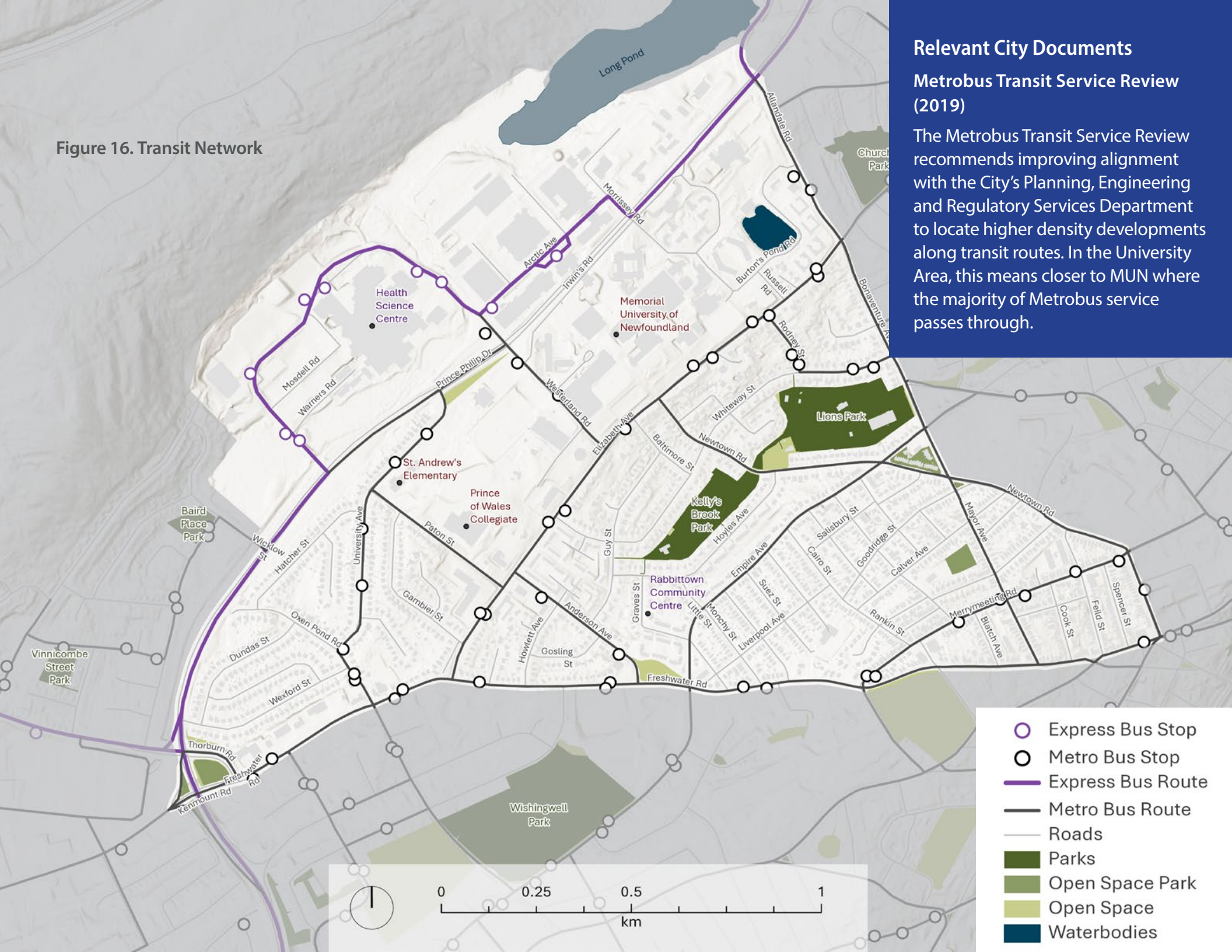
While many routes serve the University Area, it is important to note that the current hub location is not easily accessible for most residents of the neighbourhood.

Table 1. Metrobus transit routes servicing the University Area.

Route Number	Route Name	Weekday Peak Frequency (minutes)
1	Village - Institutes	10
2	Avalon - Institutes	15
9	MUN - Torbay Rd - Logy Bay Rd	15
10	Downtown - MUN - Avalon	15
12	Village- Avalon	30
13	Village - Institutes (Express)	30
14	Airport - Torbay Rd - MUN	65
15	Cuckholds Cove - MUN - Avalon	30
16	Kenmount Terrace - MUN	30
23	Avalon - MUN - Stavanger	60
24	Airport Heights - MUN Express	One-Daily
26	Kenmount Terrace - MUN Express	25

Source: Metrobus, 2024.

Figure 16. Transit Network



Relevant City Documents

Metrobus Transit Service Review (2019)

The Metrobus Transit Service Review recommends improving alignment with the City's Planning, Engineering and Regulatory Services Department to locate higher density developments along transit routes. In the University Area, this means closer to MUN where the majority of Metrobus service passes through.

Key Transportation Takeaways

- The University Area has one of the highest proportions of transit users and walkers in the City.
- Continued investments in transportation infrastructure that support the needs of students and New Canadians will help enhance overall safety and mobility of residents in the University Area.
- Existing internal circulation is relatively good, and recent investments in active modes infrastructure along the Mundy Pond Walk (in Kelly's Brook Park and Lions Park) and along Elizabeth Avenue have further improved safe movement through the neighbourhood east-west.
- Protected north-south connections, particularly between MUN and the downtown, are currently limited. Investment in a dedicated shared-use pathway along one of these corridors would help improve overall movement through the community.
- Transit service in the University Area is good, but access to the transit hub itself is challenging given its location across Prince Philip Drive from most residents of the neighbourhood.

Relevant City Documents

Healthy City Strategy (2021)

The Healthy City Strategy facilitates the development and sustainability of healthy neighbourhoods. At a City-wide level, the plan encourages building mixed use complete communities that support active transportation to get residents active.

Accessibility Plan (2023)

The Accessibility Plan advocates for locating accessible parking spaces close to building entrances and improving winter maintenance of bus stops.

Bike St. John's Master Plan (2019)

The Bike St. John's Master Plan specifically sets out a proposed City-wide bike network and improvements. The plan classifies the proposed bike facilities along Elizabeth Avenue and Prince Philip Drive as a part of the "backbone" network that extends City-wide. Priority active transportation projects for the University Area will be identified in the Neighbourhood Plan to support the overall Bike St. John's vision.

Northeast Avalon Wayfinding Program (2021)

The Program calls wayfinding signs along pedestrian pathways to improve the connectivity and presence of the pathways system across the region.

Parks and Recreation

The University area has three public parks, Kelly's Brook Park, Lions Park, and St. Andrew's Elementary Park. Behind MUN portions of Pippy Park, including Long Pond, sit within the University Area boundary and beyond. Meanwhile, within the neighbourhood, the Field House operates as a recreation centre and includes a soccer field, swimming pool, and is in the process of installing new facilities as part of the Canada Games Complex.

Community Parks & Outdoor Recreation

Figure 17 demonstrates how the University Area's parks exist largely in isolation. Only Kelly's Brook Park and Lions Park are connected by the Mundy Pond Trail. Besides these two parks, most park spaces in the University Area require driving or crossing large arterial roads to access.

Both Kelly's Brook Park and Lion's Park are in the center of the neighbourhood providing easy access from surrounding areas. These two parks are the main neighbourhood parks within the University Area, and are well connected via the Mundy Pond Trail to other parts of the City. Together the two parks feature ample open space, tennis courts, a basketball court, and baseball diamonds.

Indoor Recreation Spaces

Several indoor recreation facilities exist in the University Area. The largest is the MUN Field House, discussed earlier. The Canada Games Complex that is under development will add additional indoor recreational facilities, while the St. John's Curling Club in the Re/Max Centre and the Green Belt Tennis Club provides additional options for indoor recreation.

Pippy Park

Pippy Park includes most of the MUN campus, the Health Sciences Centre, Long Pond, and lands north of those sites. The park itself is regulated by the C.A. Pippy Park Commission independent of the City of St. John's, but offers a range of passive and active recreation activities, including walking, hiking, biking and winter activities such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

Relevant City Documents

Parks and Open Space Master Plan (2014)

The Plan proposes a refined parks and open space network, as well as identifying design and maintenance guidelines, implementation strategies, and steps for the infill and expansion of the parks and open space network for future generations. From a University Area perspective, the Plan speaks specifically to Rabbittown and Lions Park.

The Master Plan identifies Rabbittown as being under-serviced relative to parks and open space, and recommends incorporating the provision of more park space into any future community revitalization planning.

Lions Park is identified as a Priority One Project for revitalization, meaning it is recognized as a neighbourhood anchor for park connectivity and is one of the most important focus areas for infrastructure improvements such as the recent shared-use pathway installation.



Figure 17. Parks, Trail, and Existing / Proposed Bike Network.

Key Parks & Recreation Takeaways

- The University Area generally has good access to outdoor recreation amenities, but access decreases towards the older Rabbittown community.
- Connections between parks and park spaces in the neighbourhood could be strengthened, particularly for residents of Rabbittown.
- The neighbourhood benefits from proximity to Pippy Park and the amenities there, although access to the park requires a vehicle or crossing Prince Philip Drive.
- Opportunities to expand public awareness of and access to the Field House and the Canada Games Complex long-term could help increase community benefit from these existing assets.
- Access to parks, particularly Kelly's Brook Park, could be improved from the south, mitigating potential conflict with and trespassing across adjacent homes.

Relevant City Documents

Arts Space: Demand Needs Analysis (2012)

The report identifies the importance of preserving and expanding arts and culture spaces throughout the City to improve access, cost, and quality for artists.



Figure 18. Park pathways in Kelly's Brook Park.



Figure 19. Pathway and wayfinding improvements in Lions Park.

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Key Findings



SWOC Analysis

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) Analysis looks at a broad range of current conditions that are particularly relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan process. This analysis identifies not just the conditions themselves, but also the potential impacts that they could have on the community over the life of the Neighbourhood Plan, whether they are potential positives (strengths and opportunities) or potential negatives (weaknesses and threats).

By appropriately identifying these aspects early on in the planning process, it is possible for the Neighbourhood Plan to consider and incorporate them into future policies. This includes leveraging and enhancing existing strengths, working to mitigate and eliminate weaknesses, identifying and activating opportunities, and addressing and staving off potential threats.

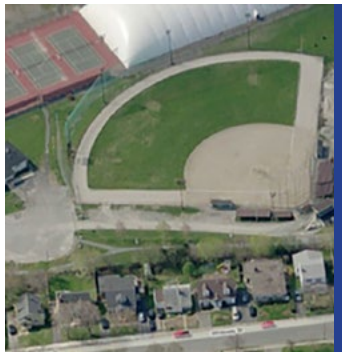
The following pages outline some of the key areas of focus identified through the SWOC Analysis for further consideration in the Neighbourhood Plan, but importantly, should not be seen as an exhaustive list of all strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges that exist in the University Area.

Strengths



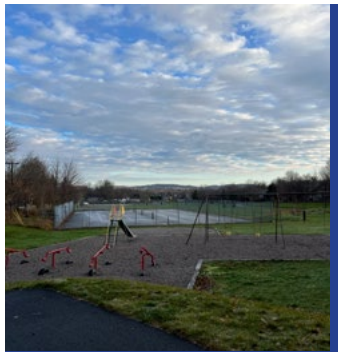
Proximity To Everything

MUN, the Health Sciences Centre, the Aquarena, the Field House, the Avalon Mall, Churchill Park, and more. Whether it's jobs, education, shopping, or housing, the University Area is a convenient place to live.



Recreation Amenities

The University Area enjoys close access to many recreational amenities, ranging from the Canada Games and MUN infrastructure to community ball diamonds, tennis courts, and more.



Inter-Connected Parks

Pippy Park and the Mundy Pond Walk through Kelly's Brook and Lions Park provide access to large-scale park networks not available in every neighbourhood in the City.



Range of Housing Choice

While some housing demand remains unmet, the University Area features a larger range of housing types and choices than many parts of St. John's, providing a strong starting point to address shortages.



Significant Transit Service

With so many employers and amenities nearby, particularly MUN, transit service in the University Area is some of the best in the City. Residents can travel by bus directly to almost anywhere in town.



Social Supports

Several not-for-profit organizations provide considerable social supports and programming in the neighbourhood, including First Light, the Association for New Canadians, Stella's Circle, and more.

Weaknesses



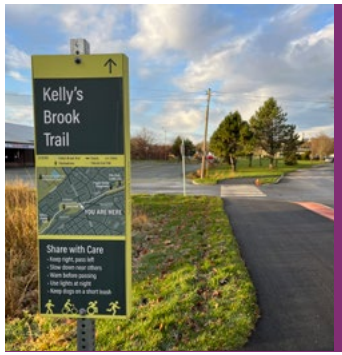
Inadequate Rental Supply

Despite growing supply of purpose-built rental housing, there remains an unmet demand for additional rentals, particularly smaller units for students and multi-bedroom units for New Canadians.



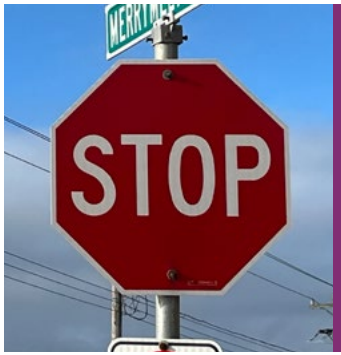
Missing Daily Needs

While surrounded by many nearby amenities, groceries, pharmaceuticals, and other daily needs are under-provided within the University Area. This makes access difficult for those without cars.



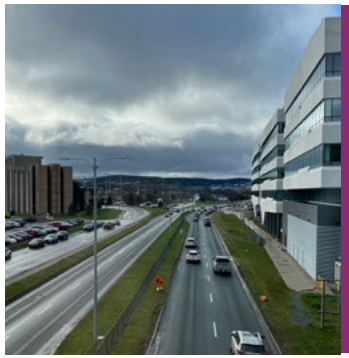
Lack of North-South Connections

Despite strong east-west shared-use pathway linkages, there are no north-south connections to provide access through the University Area and towards downtown where many residents work.



Resistance to Change

Demand for more rental housing and more affordable housing types has met community resistance and in some cases led to housing projects being canceled in favour of lower density developments.



Transit Access

Although the neighbourhood enjoys substantial transit service, access to most lines is primarily located across Prince Philip Drive from the majority of residents, making it challenging to access.



Moving Across Arterials

The University Area is ringed with major and minor arterials, creating hostile conditions for pedestrians and cyclists to access services outside of the neighbourhood.



Long Pond
Larch Place Park
Churchill Park
St. Pats Ball Park
Allandale Rd
Morrissey Rd
Arctic Ave
Irvine Rd
Burton's Pond Rd
Russell Rd
Bonaventure Ave
Rodney St
Health Science Centre
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Mosdell Rd
Warners Rd
Prince Philip Dr
Westerland Rd
Elizabeth Ave
Whiteway St
Lions Park
Newtown Rd
Baltimore St
St. Andrew's Elementary
Prince of Wales Collegiate
Kelly's Brook Park
Hoyles Ave
Empire Ave
Salisbury St
Goodridge St
Calver Ave
Mayor Ave
Baird Place Park
Wicklow St
Hatcher St
University Ave
Paton St
Guy St
Rabbittown Community Centre
Graves St
Little St
Monchy St
Suez St
Liverpool Ave
Cairo St
Merrymeeting Rd
Rankin St
Blatch Ave
Cook St
Feild St
Spencer St
Gambier St
Anderson Ave
Howletown
Gosling St
Freshwater Rd
Oxen Pond Rd
Dundas St
Wexford St
Thorburn Ave
Kenmount Rd
Martin's Meadow Park
Prince Edward Plaza
Wishingwell Park
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
0
0.25
0.5
1
km

Opportunities

1 Relocate Transit Hub

The University Area enjoys substantial transit service, but the hub's location on Arctic Avenue places it far away from most residents. Relocating the hub to Prince Philip Drive or Elizabeth Avenue would help increase community access to this resource.

2 Create a North-South Active Modes Connection

Providing a shared-use pathway from MUN to the downtown would help enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists throughout the University Area and beyond seeking to access its many amenities and resources.

3 Finish East-West Active Modes Connections

Completing the Prince Philip Drive and Elizabeth Avenue shared-use pathways through the University Avenue neighbourhood will contribute to the ongoing development of a complete active transportation network, and better connect the neighbourhood City-wide.

4 Mixed-Use Redevelopment

Several existing commercial nodes in the University Area are well-positioned to redevelop into larger-scale mixed-use projects over the next 10-20 years. Enabling these kinds of development through the Neighbourhood Plan will provide clarity around where and how this should happen.

5 Enable Grocery Stores Through Density

A lack of grocery stores within the University Area was identified as a challenge by many residents. By targeting specific areas for increased density it is more likely that market conditions can be fostered to induce more grocery options locally.

6 Leverage Canada Games Investment

Canada Games investments in and around the MUN campus should be leveraged for additional public good. In particular, opportunity exists in the block where the new Canada Games Complex and Westerland Apartments are being developed to further build this area out as a comprehensive community.

7 Support Social Housing Redevelopments

Through preliminary interviews with social housing operators, opportunities to leverage redevelopment interests on their properties could potentially yield more social and market housing through partnerships than could be achieved on their own.

8 Define a Range of Intensification Areas

Intensification looks like a range of different scales, and what growth is right for where depends on the context and servicing capacity of the area. Intensification areas are still to be determined and a range should be identified across the University Area to accommodate residential growth.

Challenges

1 Servicing Access and Constraints

Access to municipal servicing for infill and intensification can be difficult depending on where in the University Area development is proposed. Similarly, constraints to storm water infrastructure limit the ability of development to be financially viable when on-site storm water management is required.

2 Smaller Development Feasibility

Local market conditions combined with increased construction costs for labour and materials makes the feasibility of smaller-scale infill projects challenging. This means increased demand for housing in the University Area will likely require larger-scale developments that are able to achieve economies of scale.

3 Concentration of Social Housing

While managed by several different operators, the majority of social housing provided in the University Area is consolidated in one location around the centre of the Neighbourhood Plan boundary. Best practice recommends mixing social and other housing forms to create stronger social cohesion.

4 NLHC Development

The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation has plans to redevelop properties they own in the University Area. This could be a great opportunity to partner with local developers to provide more social housing cheaper while also integrating market housing into a mixed tenure development. However, NLHC staff have indicated that Provincial regulations can make it challenging for the NLHC to enter into such partnerships.

5 Changing Immigration Rates & International Student Limits

The University Area features a substantial community of New Canadians, and this group has driven recent population growth. However, changing Federal rules around immigration numbers and international student limits could slow or eliminate this growth.

6 MUN Decision-Making

MUN has an out-sized impact on the University Area. Decisions the University makes around total number of students, on-campus student housing, and other factors will influence the growth and change experienced in the University Area.

Key Findings

In summary, the University Area is starting from a place of strength. Its richness of employers, transit, parks, and recreation amenities makes it a walkable, complete community with a high degree of access to daily needs and housing choice. These strengths should be maintained and improved upon as the neighbourhood grows through additional active transportation links, ongoing collaboration with MUN, and intentional policy approaches to increasing densities and housing choice in strategic locations throughout the community.

Opportunities to better connect residents to the rest of the City by transit and active modes of transportation exist particularly around improving community access to the MUN transit hub and introducing at least one north-south shared-use pathway connection from the university to downtown. Targeted higher-density intensification around the new Westerland Road apartments could be used to help induce additional commercial retail in the community, particularly a grocery store. At the same time, more contextually sensitive infill development along minor arterials and some collectors could help to further encourage different types of housing opportunities and provide more in-demand rentals.

One of the main challenges for future redevelopment in the area are market factors and potential servicing challenges for redevelopment. Development requires certain scales to achieve profitability, but local servicing is often too constrained to support such densities. Finding strategic locations and partnerships where these two factors are addressed will be critical to delivering more housing choice and commercial demand to the University Area.

Potential Directions

- Investigate servicing constraints to prioritize areas incapable of supporting additional development without investment in stormwater servicing upgrades.
- Determine market feasibility for smaller-scale infill developments to identify what kinds and where they could be financially viable.
- Investigate opportunities to facilitate partnerships between social housing providers and private developers to deliver greater housing outcomes together than would be possible individually.
- Determine feasibility and interest from MUN and Metrobus in relocating the MUN bus terminal to a more central location for students, workers, and area residents.
- Support residential intensification in key areas to support greater local commercial options.
- Identify a north-south active modes connection between MUN and downtown.

Next Steps

The following phases of the Neighbourhood Plan will consider the findings presented in this background along with engagement results to inform recommendations and policies. Preliminary policy ideas will be developed alongside further financial, engineering, and planning analysis of the neighbourhood's current context over the next phase of the project, with Phase 2 Engagement planned for late Spring 2025.



Phase 1 Engagement

Fall 2024



Phase 2 Engagement

Spring 2025



Draft Plan Release

Fall 2025



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