ST. JOHN'S

Background Report

Rennie's River Neighbourhood Plan

November 2025



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Neighbourhood At-A-Glance

The City is creating a Neighbourhood Plan for Rennie's River.

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 Rennie's River'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.

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. Rennie's River was prioritized due to the intensification area within the neighbourhood boundary.

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 Rennie's River
- **Policy & Regulations:** an overview of the policy and regulations that are applicable to the area
- **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 and Neighbourhood Strategy for the Neighbourhood Plan. These recommendations will be provided for review as part of Phase 2 Engagement.

Rennie's River

Boundaries

The boundaries of Rennie's River generally follow Prince Philip Drive, Torbay Road, Military Road, and Bonaventure Avenue (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Unique Features

Rennie's River is a neighbourhood of neighbourhoods, with many unique and historic places from Churchill Park to Georgestown and the Ecclesiastical District. Elizabeth Avenue provides an important corridor through the area, with many commercial and service uses to support residents. The Rennie's River Trail is another feature amenity throughout the neighbourhood, servicing as a green pedestrian corridor throughout the community. The area also benefits from good access to open spaces, including Bannerman Park, Larch Park, and Kenny's Pond, as well as many smaller parks in residential areas.

Demographics

Rennie's River is an aging and higher-income neighbourhood compared to the City of St. John's as a whole. The median age is 47 years old, which is higher than the City median of 42 years old. The average household size of 2.0 people is also smaller than the City average of 2.2 people. Most households do not have children.

Of the total households in the neighbourhood, there is about a two to three split between residents who own their homes and those who rent.

Rennie's River has a higher median household income than the City of St. John's. Approximately sixty percent of residents are employed versus about forty percent who are retired or do not work.

Demographics

8,619 people
total population

47 years
median age

0.4
average children/ household

Households

3,715
households

2.0 people
average household size

65%
owned homes

35%
rented homes

Employment & Income

58%
are working

42%
are retired or don't work

$103,946
median household income

Source: Environics Analytics 2025 Neighbourhood Profiles, using 2024 Esri and Statistics Canada data.

Figure 1. Boundaries of Rennie's River.



Figure 2. Citywide context.

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Policy & Regulations



Policy Context

The Rennie's River Neighbourhood Plan must align with existing legislation and policy from all levels of government. Planning in St. John's is regulated through the Urban and Rural Planning Act, the City of St. John's Act, and the St. John's Urban Region Regional Plan. The City has a Municipal Plan, which the Neighbourhood Plans will form part of, and Development Regulations, which set out rules for development.

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 Rennie's River Neighbourhood Plan must comply with the URPA.

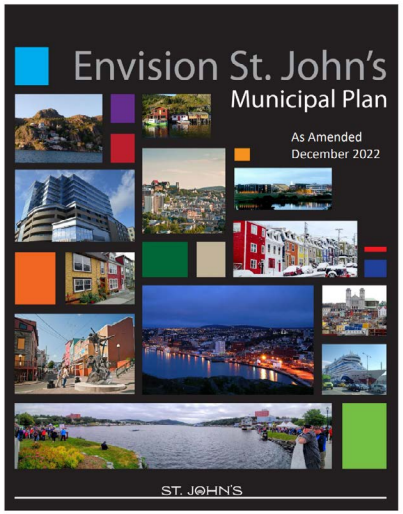
Urban Region Regional Plan (1976)

The Urban Region Regional Plan, established in 1976, applied Urban Development and Public Open Space designations to the existing Rennie's River neighbourhood. The Rennie's River Neighbourhood Plan will be consistent with these designations in the Urban Region Regional Plan.

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, and redevelopment agreements with corporations.





Envision St. John's, Municipal Plan (2021, as amended)

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 Rennie's River 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 Rennie's River's context and establishing local development policies to guide growth
- Promoting consistency in new/developing areas and compatibility with existing development

Future Land Use

The Municipal Plan provides a high level future land use concept for Rennie's River (Figure 3). The area is designated as mostly residential, with clusters of commercial and institutional uses along arterial roads and the edges of the neighbourhood. The plan also identifies flood hazard areas along the Rennie's River.

Intensification Areas

The Municipal Plan identifies one intensification area in the Rennie's River Neighbourhood, which includes Kenny's Pond, the Torbay Mall, and an existing commercial area along Elizabeth Avenue (Figure 4). This intensification area will be evaluated as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process.

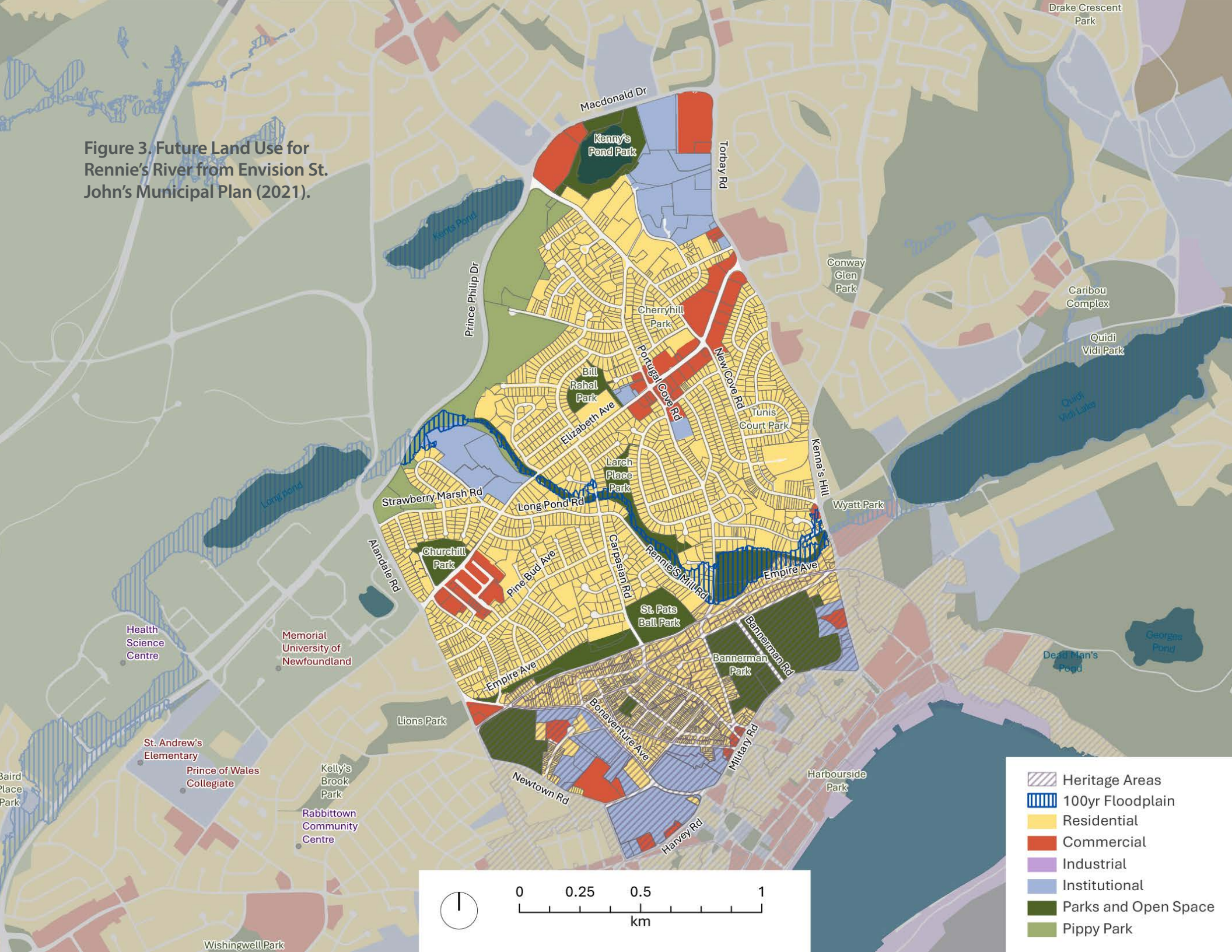
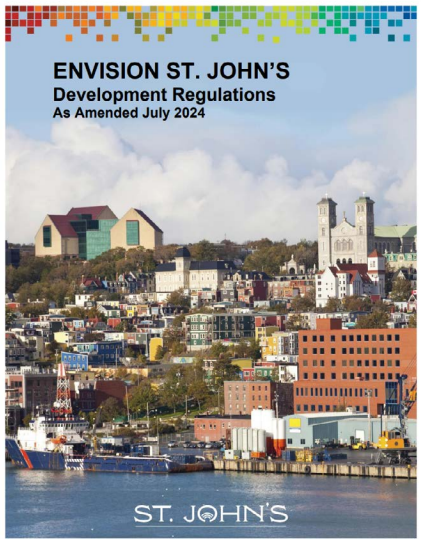


Figure 3. Future Land Use for Rennie's River from Envision St. John's Municipal Plan (2021).

Figure 4. Rennie's River Intensification Area from Envision St. John's Municipal Plan.





Development Regulations (2021, as amended)

The Development Regulations implement the Municipal Plan policies. The document sets out different zones, which each have rules about types of uses and the scale of buildings allowed in that zone.

Through a formal public process, land can be rezoned by Council. The existing zoning for Rennie's River is explored in the Existing Conditions section of the Background Report.

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 publicly owned land to build purpose-built rental housing for lower income households.

Resilient St. John's Community Climate Plan (2022)

This plan makes several recommendations for preparing St. John's for changes in climate including infrastructure improvements, supporting local food production, and engaging with residents to improve emergency response to extreme weather events.

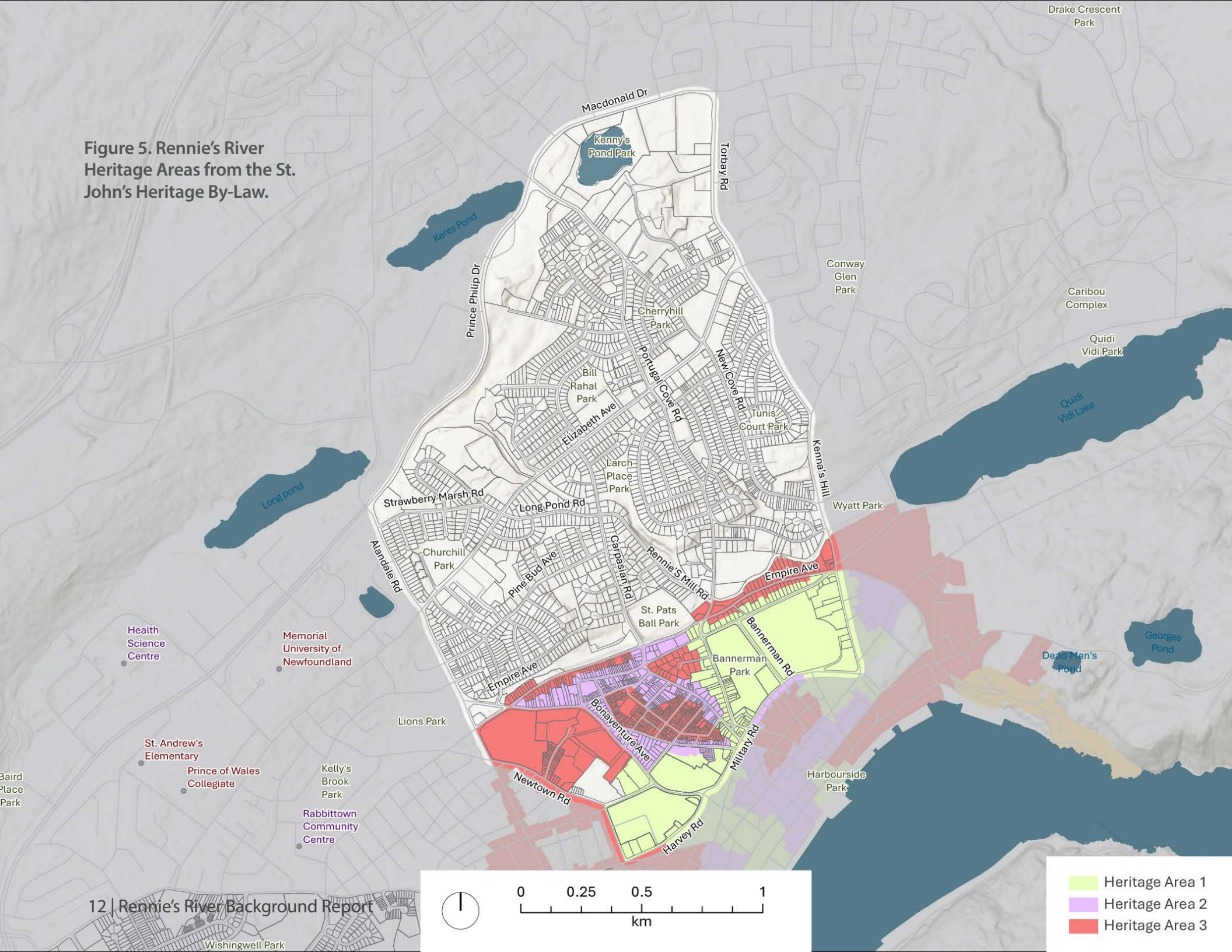
Accessibility Plan (2023)

The Accessibility Plan advocates for making new buildings fully accessible, building affordable residential units, 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 sets out a proposed citywide bike network and improvements, which are discussed further in the Transportation section.

Figure 5. Rennie's River Heritage Areas from the St. John's Heritage By-Law.



Heritage By-Law (2021)

The Heritage By-Law sets out building requirements for four Heritage Areas. Rennie's River contains areas within Heritage Area 1, 2, and 3. The City's powers to enforce this By-Law come from the City of St. John's Act.

Heritage Area 1 has the most significant heritage resources and streetscapes. Development in these areas must comply with required design standards. This areas includes Rennie's Mill Historic District, Bannerman Park, the C.L.B. Armoury, the Rooms, and part of the Ecclesiastical District encompassing the Basilica Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

Heritage Areas 2 and 3 are areas of significance. Development in these areas must follow design standards to ensure compatibility with historic streetscapes. These areas include Georgestown, Empire Avenue, and the remainder of the Irish precinct of the Ecclesiastical District.

Healthy City Strategy (2021)

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

Northeast Avalon Wayfinding Program (2021)

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

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.

Parks and Open Space Master Plan (2014)

The Plan identifies three special projects within Rennie's River:

1. Create a Master Plan for Century Park to help meet local resident needs.
2. Create a Bannerman Park Gateway Plan to increase the neighbourhood amenities and functions of the park while respecting its role as a city destination and historic context.
3. Develop a Churchill Park Special Master Plan to better connect the park with the Churchill Park Plaza.

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Existing Conditions



Existing Conditions

As an established neighbourhood, it is important to understand the existing conditions of Rennie's River 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 and heritage, transportation, and parks and recreation 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 & Heritage

Built form is defined by 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 Rennie's River. Understanding the existing context for pedestrians, cyclists, transit, and cars will allow for informed decision-making around where and how future investments in Rennie's River should occur.



Parks & Recreation

Parks are an integral part of complete and healthy communities. Understanding Rennie's River'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

Land use is regulated through the City of St. John's Development Regulations, which set out different zones for each property in the city. Each zone has different rules about what uses are allowed and the general scale and setbacks of buildings.

Just over half of the total area of Rennie's River is zoned for residential uses. Of these areas, the majority are zoned for low-density residential. There are a few areas of higher density, including Churchill Plaza, Georgestown, and individual apartments along arterial roads. The other half of the neighbourhood is a mix of open space, institutional, and commercial zones. Georgestown also includes the one remaining industrial site in the neighbourhood, which is an active brewery.

Low Density Residential (R1, RA, and RA1)

About 46% of the neighbourhood is zoned for low-density residential (R1, RA, and RA1). These zones allow single detached dwellings. Recent amendments to the Development Regulations have also made backyard suites, child care service, semi-detached dwellings, and four-plexes on corner lots permitted uses in the R1 Zone.

Medium Density Residential (R2, R2C, R3, and RD)

Medium density residential zones make up about 7% of the neighbourhood. These areas are concentrated north of Mount Cashel Road, at Chalker Place, and in Georgestown and allow for ground-oriented types of housing, such as duplexes, semi-detached dwellings, townhouses, and triplexes.

Apartment (A1, A2, AA, and A3)

Apartment zones make up about 4% of the neighbourhood. These zones are distributed throughout the neighbourhood, mainly focused around Churchill Park, the Ecclesiastical District, and near Kenny's Pond. The A1 zoned areas allow 14 metre building heights, AA allow up to 20 metres, A2 allow up to 24 metres, and A3 allows up to 52 metres.

Figure 6. Land use zones by percent of neighbourhood land area.

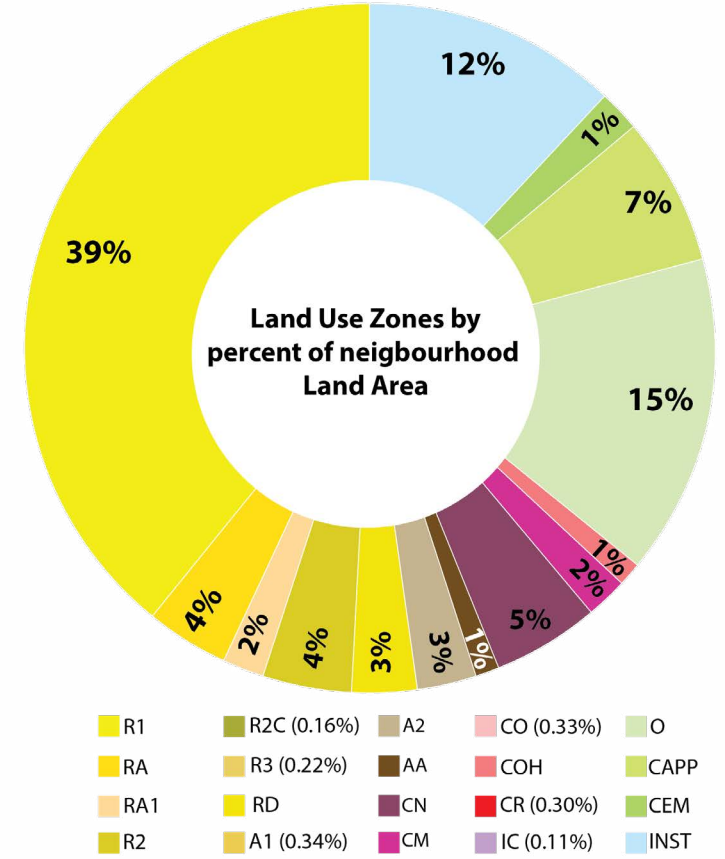
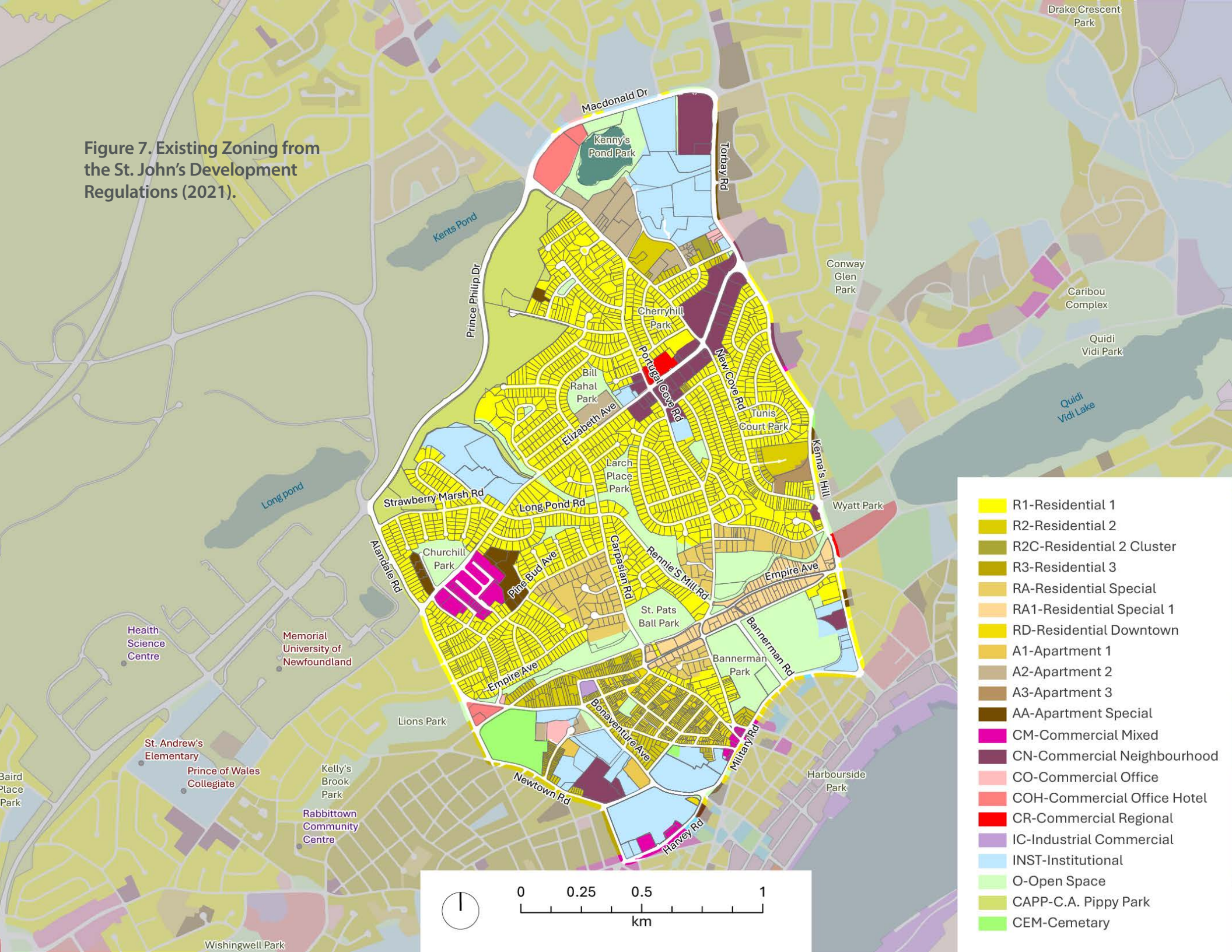


Figure 7. Existing Zoning from the St. John's Development Regulations (2021).



Local Commercial (CN)

About 5% of the neighbourhood is zoned Commercial Neighborhood (CN). These areas are mainly concentrated along the eastern section of Elizabeth Avenue and Torbay Mall, though there are also nodes along King's Bridge Road and within the Ecclesiastical District. These areas typically contain commercial plaza format uses such as gas stations, banks and other services which are accessible to the nearby residents.

Commercial Mixed (CM)

The Commercial Mixed zone makes up 1% of the neighbourhood. The main area is Churchill Park Plaza, located on the west side of the neighborhood along Elizabeth Avenue, which has ground floor commercial with residential apartments above. There is also a small cluster of Commercial Mixed along Military and Harvey Roads on the neighbourhood boundary.

Large Scale Commercial (CR, CH, COH)

Approximately 2% of Rennie's River is zoned for large-scale commercial uses, such as hotels, large-format retail, shopping centres, and offices. These areas are located on Macdonald Drive, Elizabeth Avenue, Mayor Avenue, Margaret's Place, and a small note on Torbay Road.

Industrial Commercial (IC)

There is only one property zoned as Industrial Commercial, which is the Molson Brewery in Georgestown.

Institutional (INST)

Approximately 12% of the neighbourhood is zoned Institutional in Rennie's River, including parts of the Ecclesiastical District, the Rooms, and clusters of schools and places of worship along Torbay Road and Smithville Crescent. Some of these areas also include important social service uses.



Figure 8. Churchill Park Plaza.



Figure 9. Bannerman Park entrance.

C.A. Pippy Park Zone (CAPP)

C.A. Pippy Park zone includes the College of the North Atlantic along the west edge of the neighbourhood, making up about 7% of Rennie's River's area. The uses and zones standards in this area are under the authority of the Pippy Park Commission.

Open Space (O and CEM)

Open space makes up about 15% of Rennie's River. These areas include recreational areas and parks. There are eight major and minor parks located in the East-West areas of the neighborhood, which are discussed further in the Parks and Recreation section of this report. An additional 2% of land is designated for Cemeteries

Key Land Use Takeaways

- Almost half of the neighbourhood is zoned for low density residential. The current zoning rules in most of these areas allow for gradual increases in density over time through the addition of subsidiary apartments (suites) and four-plexes on corner lots.
- Georgestown is one of the densest areas of the neighbourhood with the tightest road block pattern. There are opportunities to enable some further mixing of uses to bring back some of the historic commercial uses.
- There have been recent rezonings in the neighbourhood for medium density and apartment residential uses, typically along arterial roads or within the existing Intensification Area, indicating demand for these housing forms.
- Commercial and institutional uses are generally well distributed in various nodes along arterial roads, including Churchill Park Plaza to the west, Downtown on the opposite side of the boundary to the south, the Dominion across from King's Bridge Road adjacent to the neighbourhood's east edge, and Elizabeth Avenue and Torbay Road commercial areas to the north.

Built Form

Rennie's River is home to some of St. John's oldest neighbourhoods including the historic Georgestown and the Ecclesiastical District. The area is also home to Churchill Park, one of St. John's first suburbs built north of Newtown Road and developed under the "garden city" movement that prioritized access to greenspace.

Though the most common form of housing in the area is single detached, Rennie's River does have several clusters of townhouses and apartments. Approximately 44% of residents live in single detached homes, 27% live in apartments, 18% live in duplex or semi-detached homes, and the remaining 11% live in a townhouse (Figure 7).

In addition to its diverse residential and commercial areas, there are many institutional clusters of buildings, many of them historic, such as the Basilica Cathedral of St. John the Baptist within the Irish Precinct of the Ecclesiastical District.

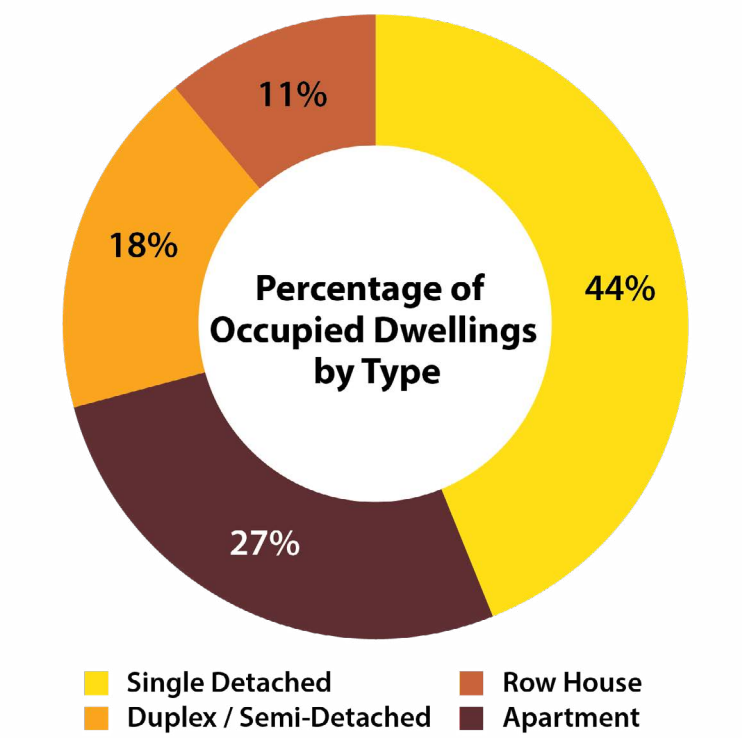


Figure 10. Percentage of Households of each Housing Type (Esri Neighbourhood Profile, 2025).

Single Detached Housing

There are a diverse range of single detached homes in the Rennie's River Neighbourhood. Most typically have large front lawns and backyards with setbacks ranging from 5-9 metres and are located along curvilinear roads and cul-de-sacs, with some surrounding small central park spaces.

Homes developed between 1946 and 1963 are often smaller or one storey with no or attached garages and driveway access along the side of the property. Homes developed after the 1970s are often larger two-story or split-level format with attached garages.



Figure 11. Single detached homes.



Figure 12. Townhomes in Georgestown.



Figure 13. A six-storey apartment building.

Source: Google Maps (2025).

Duplexes, Semi-Detached, and Townhomes

High- density low-rise residential developments such as townhomes, semi-detached, and duplexes are mainly concentrated within Georgestown. They have vibrant coloured siding, are narrow, and are often situated only a few feet away from the sidewalk. Some homes have access to limited on-street parking. Some of these townhomes were built in the early 1900s, while others have been replaced by newer buildings.

Apartment Buildings

In the Rennie's River neighbourhood, there are various apartments ranging from 3 to 8 stories.

In the Churchill Plaza, modern developments have built apartments on top of commercial units, intensifying residential density in the year 2023. These mixed-use apartments contain features of balconies, proximity to amenities and services such as banks and pharmacies.

Commercial Areas

The commercial areas in Rennie's River are typically in strip mall or vehicle-oriented formats with significant surface parking along major arterials like Torbay Road and Elizabeth Avenue. There are also several standalone office buildings along Elizabeth Avenue.

Military Road has some smaller-scale neighbourhood commercial and mixed use areas that directly front onto the street whereas Churchill Park Plaza reflects more modern mixed-use development, with ground-floor retail space and several storeys of apartments above.



Figure 14. Commercial at Torbay Mall.



Figure 15. Small-scale mixed-use Military Road.



Figure 16. Churchill Park Plaza mixed-use.

Source: Google Maps (2025).



Figure 17. The Basilica of St. John the Baptist.



Figure 18. Rennie's Mill Historic District.



Figure 19. The Colonial Building.

Source: Google Maps (2025).

Heritage Areas

Rennie's River contains some of the most valuable heritage areas within the City of St. John's. The Ecclesiastical District is a National Historic Site, containing a cluster of several major institutional and religious buildings from the 19th and 20th centuries. Rennie's River encompasses one portion of this precinct.

The neighbourhood also includes the Rennie's Mill Road National Historical District. These residential areas are made up of a cluster of Second Empire and Queen Anne Revival-style wooden homes developed in the later part of the 19th century, after the Great Fire of 1846.

There are also Provincial Historic sites, including the Government House and the Colonial Building. The Government House is a large-scale Palladian-Style mansion which was home to past governors of Newfoundland from 1831 to 1949. This is the formal home of the Lieutenant Governor. The Colonial Building Provincial Historic Site was the home of the Newfoundland and Labrador Legislative Assembly from the 1850s to 1959. The impressive stone building is surrounding by formal landscaped grounds.

An additional area of note is Georgestown, which is located between Military Road, Monkstown Road, Empire Avenue, and Bonaventure Avenue. This was originally a village built in the early 1800s as a suburb of Downtown. Today it is a vibrant and relatively dense residential area.

Key Built Form Takeaways

- Existing low-density residential areas are relatively stable and many contain historic development patterns that are popular today due to their mature landscaping and incorporation of private and public open space.
- There are opportunities to support larger format residential and apartments along arterial roads, particularly in the northern part of the neighbourhood.
- Most larger format commercial areas are automobile-oriented. There are opportunities to improve pedestrian access to these areas while still ensuring access for vehicles.
- Small-scale mixed-use areas fit well into the existing character of the neighbourhood. These areas could potentially be expanded to increase walkability and access to services and amenities.
- Large areas of surface parking present potential opportunities for redevelopment over time to apartment or mixed-use formats.
- The Ecclesiastical District is made up of many different land uses and property owners, making it a unique working heritage site that will take collaborative efforts to conserve.



Transportation

There are many ways to travel throughout the Rennie's River neighborhood; however, when it comes to commuting to work, three quarters of residents drive. Of the other ways to travel, 13% of residents walk to work, 5% take public transit, and 2% cycle.

Streets

The borders of the Rennie's River neighbourhood are mainly major and minor arterials roads, including Prince Philip Drive, Torbay Road, and Allandale Road. Apart from Georgestown, the local residential streets in the neighbourhood are commonly curved, have sidewalks on both sides of the street, and often include loops or cul-de-sacs. The exception is Georgestown, which has a similar grid street system to Downtown, with a few laneways. The larger commercial shopping areas have access roads and driveways, rather than connected street networks as well.

Some of the arterial roads in the area are very wide, with five lanes of traffic. Depending on where the crosswalks are located, in some areas it can be difficult to cross as a pedestrian without having to walk a long distance.

There is ample surface parking throughout the neighbourhood, although closer to Downtown, street parking can fill up with commuters during the day and for major events.



Figure 21. Torbay Road, an example of an arterial street.

Figure 20. How residents get to work



75%
usually drive to work



13%
usually walk to work



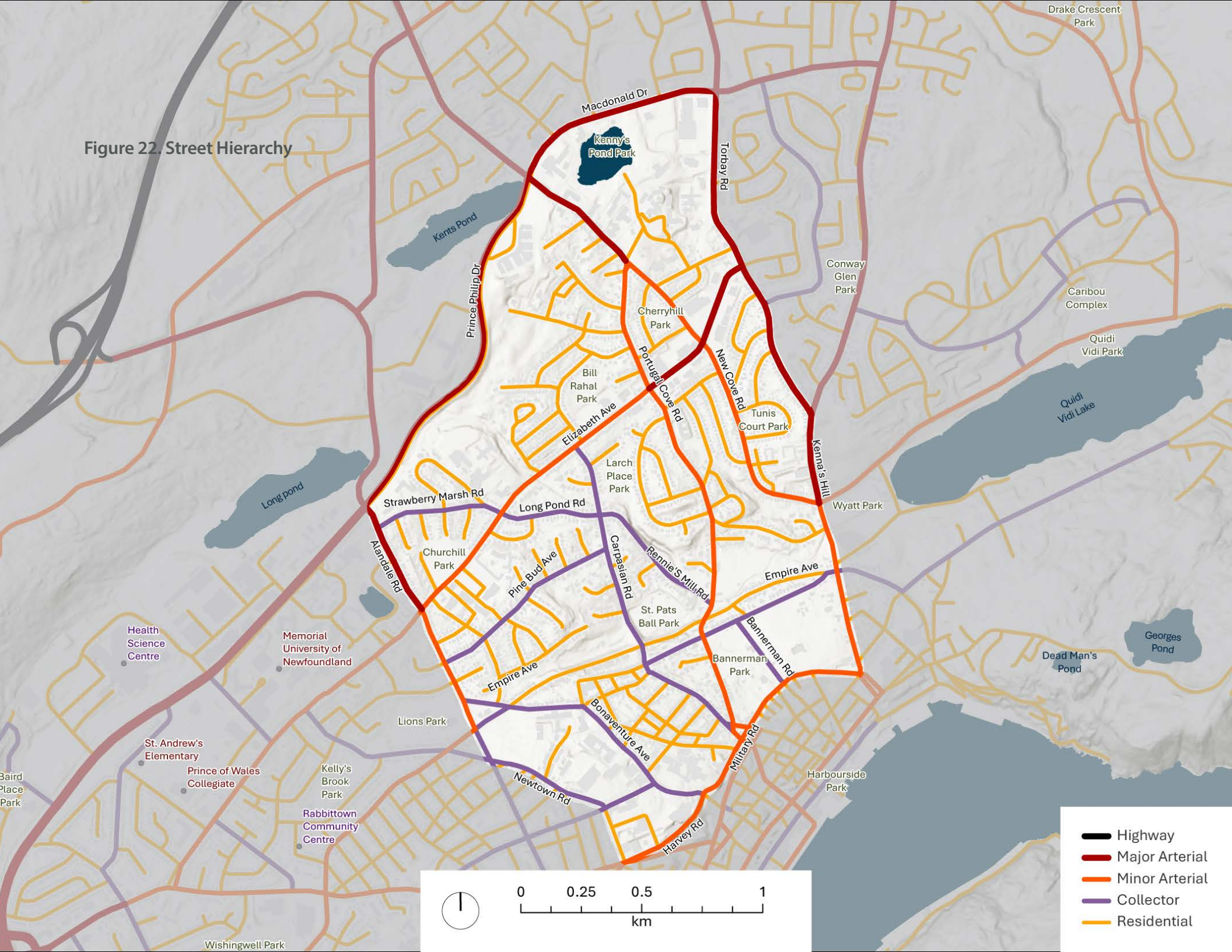
2%
usually bike to work



5%
usually take transit to work

Source: Environics Analytics 2025 Neighbourhood Profiles, using 2024 Esri and Statistics Canada data.

Figure 22. Street Hierarchy



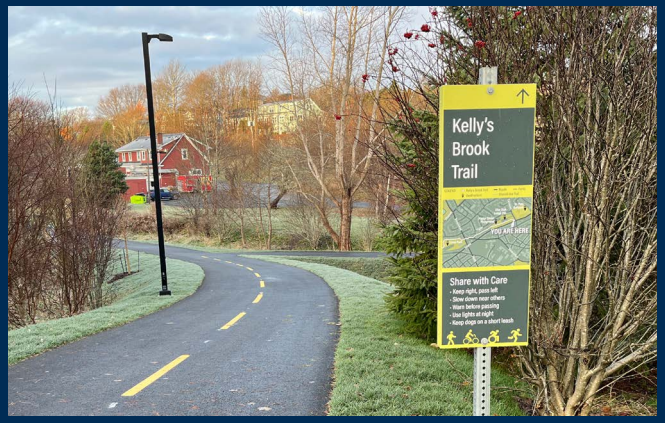


Figure 23. Kelly's Brook Shared-Use Path.



Figure 24. Rennie's River Trail.

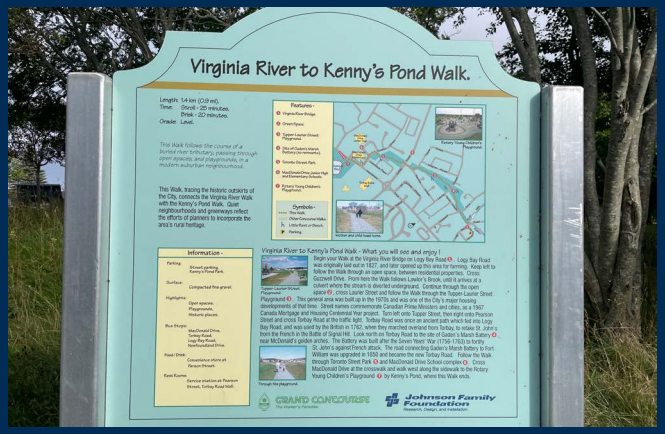


Figure 25. Trail signage at Kenny's Pond.

Source: O2 site photos.

Active Transportation

The Bike St. John's Master Plan identifies several planned cycling routes, shown on Figure 26. Parts of these connections have already been constructed, including a segment of the Kelly's Brook Shared-Use Path, from Kelly's Brook Park to Carpasian Road, and a section of shared-use path beside Kenny's Pond Park. The Bike Master Plan envisions a bike connection all the way along Elizabeth Avenue and formalizing the Rennie's River Trail as a cycling route.

There are some feasibility challenges with converting the Rennie's River Trail to a paved cycling path, given the narrow width, flooding issues, and several areas of steep grade requiring stairs. There were also concerns from Phase 1 engagement (Fall 2025) about converting or paving the trail that is currently used by walkers and joggers.

There are many identified sections of the Grand Concourse that run through the neighbourhood, shown as part of the 'trails' in Figure 26. Many of these trails overlap with the proposed cycle network.

Figure 26. Active Transportation Network

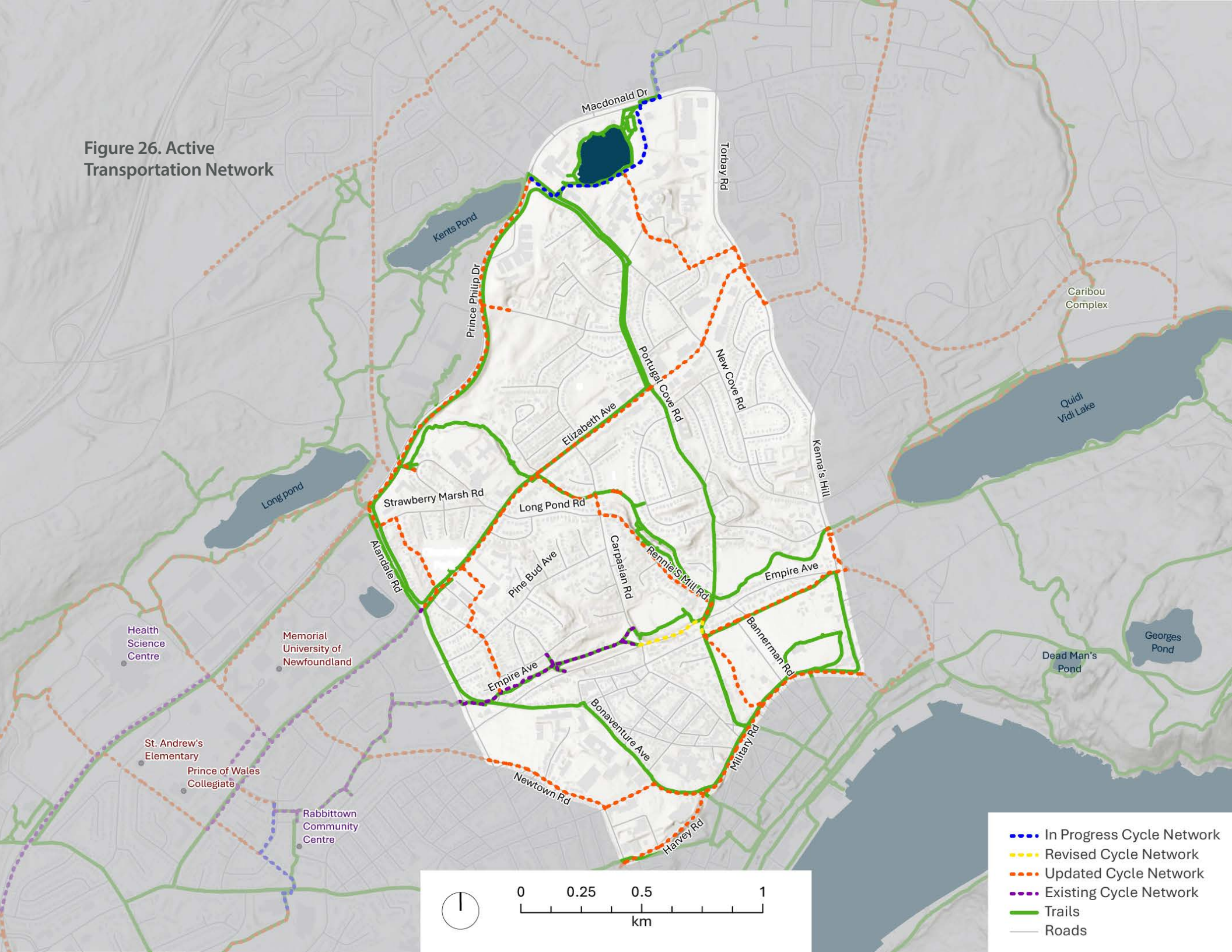
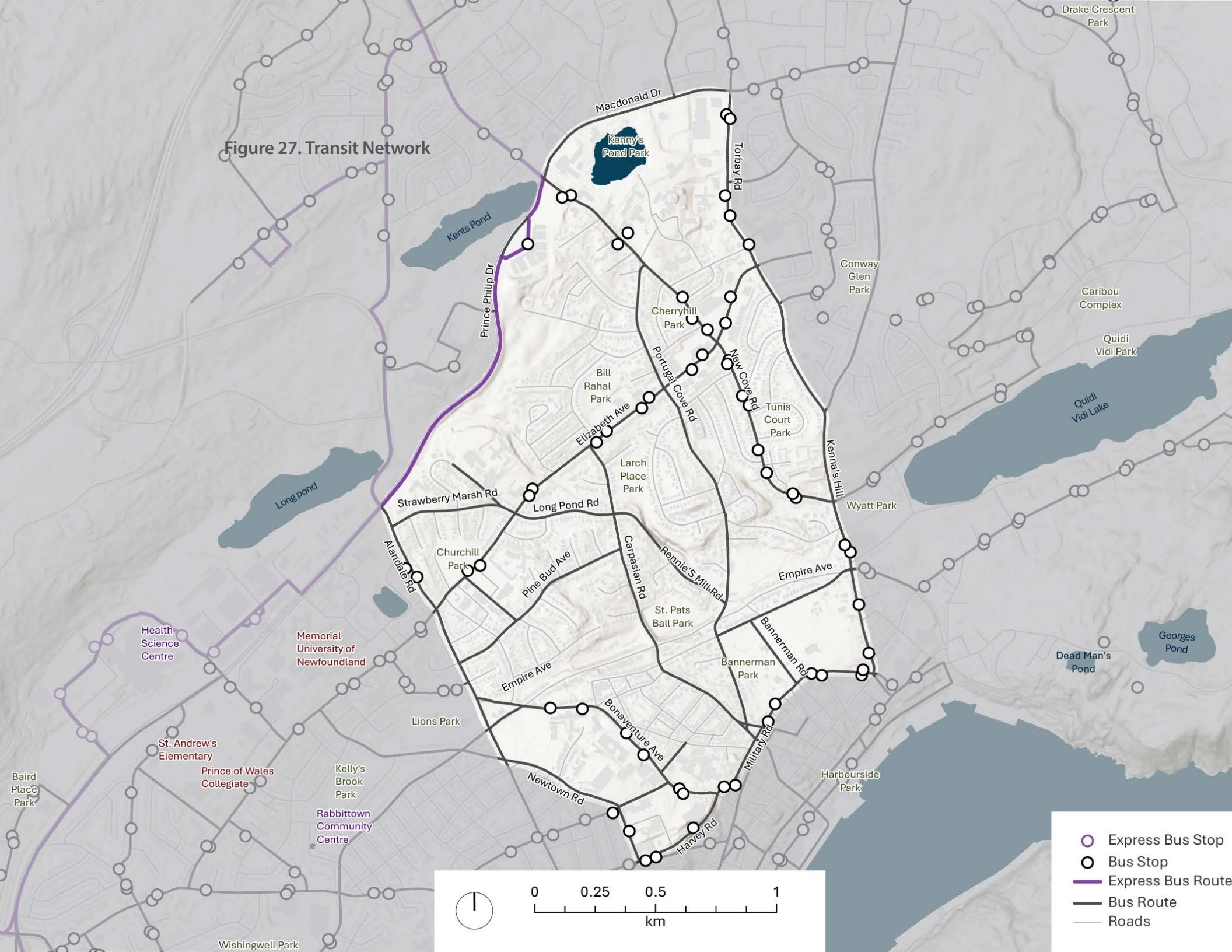


Figure 27. Transit Network



Transit

The Rennie's River Neighbourhood is limited in local and express transit routes; shown in Table 1 and Figure 27. Most of the route frequencies are roughly 15 minutes at peak times, but off-peak weekday times, these routes can take more than an hour for service. Stations are also concentrated on major and minor roads, reducing the transit accessibility within the centre of the neighbourhood.

The bus stop facilities range from a glass and metal shelter, often located on larger roads, to pole mounted signs with no seating.

Table 1. Metrobus transit routes servicing Rennie's River.

Route Number	Start/End Location	Weekday Peak Frequency (minutes)
1	Village | Institutes	15 min
2	Avalon | Virginia Park | Village	15 min
3	Village | Downtown | Stavanger	15 min
9	Torbay Road | Logy Bay Road	1 hr 5 min
10	Downtown | MUN | Avalon	20 min
13	Village | Institutes Express	35 min
14	Airport | Torbay Road | MUN	1 hr 5 min
15	Cuckholds Cove | MUN | Avalon	35 min

Source: Metrobus, 2025.

Key Transportation Takeaways

- Rennie's River has good vehicle access and is well connected to the city.
- The residential areas are generally quite walkable, with sidewalks on both sides and lots of shade from the mature tree canopy.
- Some arterial roads are difficult to cross as a pedestrian or cyclist, given the large distances between crosswalks.
- The completed sections of the Kelly's Brook Shared-Use Path have been well received in the community.
- There is opportunity to rethink cycle connectivity north-south through the neighbourhood, without modifying the existing amenity and nature of the Rennie's River Trail.
- There is opportunity to formalize east-west pedestrian connection through the Torbay Road area.
- Transit access is generally limited to the edges of the neighbourhood along arterial roads. The centre of the neighbourhood has limited transit access, with long walks to get to a bus stop.
- There are opportunities throughout the neighbourhood to increase wayfinding to key destinations, parks, and trails.



Figure 29. Paved courts at Cherry Hill Park.



Figure 30. Bill Rahill field.



Figure 31. Elm Place playground.

Source: Mills & Wright photos.

Parks and Recreation

The Rennie's River neighborhood has eight main parks: Churchill Park, St. Pats Ball Park, Bannerman Park, Larch Place Park, Tunis Court Park, Cherryhill Park and Kenny's Pond Park. Seven of these parks are categorized as community and neighbourhood parks. Bannerman Park, is categorized as a municipal park. The area also benefits from the publicly accessible grounds at the Government House.

Bannerman Park

Bannerman Park is a destination parks that has a city-wide draw. This more formally designed park was last updated in 2015 and contains an outdoor pool, baseball field, playground, splashpad and outdoor skating loop.

Given the park's proximity to Downtown and many social service locations, there have been increasing concerns about safety in the park and conflicts between different park users.

Neighbourhood Parks and Community Commons

Neighbourhood Parks and Community Commons are often situated behind residential properties and provide a play space for the local neighbourhood. These areas are often composed of informal sports courts and limited equipment or amenities, many which are reaching their end of life.

Recreation Spaces

The neighbourhood features major recreation assets such as St. Pat's Ballfield, Riverdale Tennis Club, Feildian Grounds, Churchill Park, and Bannerman Park. The area is also well-served by neighbourhood parks offering pickleball, tennis courts, and ballfields at Bill Rahal, Larch, Cherry Hill, Century, and Tunis Court Parks.

There are opportunities to increase amenities such as restrooms or community gardens within the neighbourhood.

Figure 32. Parks, Trail, and Existing / Proposed Bike Network.





Key Parks & Recreation Takeaways

- Bannerman Park has been recently updated and is a popular park with a city-wide draw in all seasons. There are opportunities to work with nearby service providers as well as increase passive surveillance and lighting in the park to improve perceptions of safety.
- The neighbourhood is well-served by playgrounds, pickleball, tennis courts, and ballfields; however, many of these are in poor condition and nearing the end of their usable life. There are also opportunities to modernize these facilities to provide a greater range of play experiences.
- Many of the neighbourhood parks (Tunis Court, Cherry Hill, Bill Rahal, Larch) are located behind houses and are poorly signed, making them easy to overlook and giving them little street presence or sense of place.
- There are several unprogrammed open spaces within parks that provide residents with opportunities for passive recreation activities such as picnicking, sunbathing, tossing a ball or frisbee, relaxing, etc.

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Key Findings



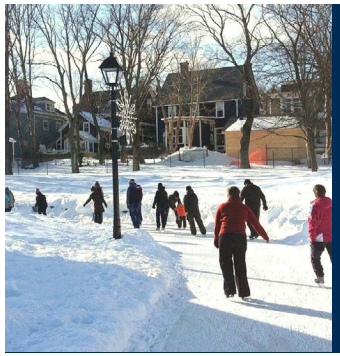
SWOC Analysis

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges 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 identifying these things early on in the planning process it is possible for the Neighbourhood Plan to appropriately consider and incorporate them into the 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 threats that exist in Rennie's River.

Strengths



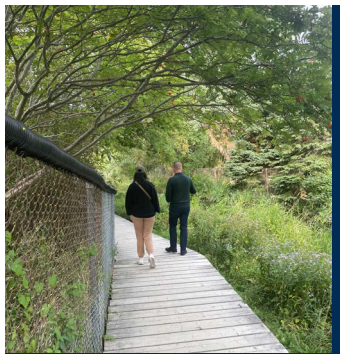
Parks and Recreation

A range of both programmed and unprogrammed parks—from major destinations like Bannerman Park to small tot lots and open lawns—offers diverse recreation opportunities for all ages.



Access to Services and Institutions

The area's proximity to Downtown, shopping areas, Memorial University, and various institutions makes it a complete and walkable neighbourhood.



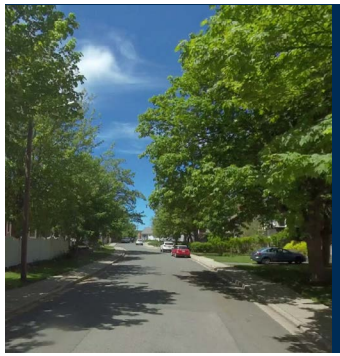
Trails and Shared-Use Paths

The Rennie's River Trail, Kelly's Brook Shared-Use Path, and Kenny's Pond Trail provide access to natural landscapes and recreation while also providing ways to travel through the neighbourhood.



Heritage and Cultural Assets

There are many historic areas including Georgestown and the Ecclesiastical District and cultural institutions such as The Rooms that enhance neighbourhood sense of place and civic character.



Character and Built Form

Tree-lined residential streets and human-scaled blocks contribute to a strong sense of place. The combination of heritage buildings and modern amenities reinforces the area's unique identity.

Weaknesses



Incomplete Active Transportation Links

East–west active transportation routes have improved with the completion of Kelly's Brook Trail sections. North–south connections still need to be completed.



Aging and Underused Parks

Several smaller parks behind residential blocks are poorly signed, reducing visibility and use. Some courts and play areas in these parks are nearing the end of their lifespan.



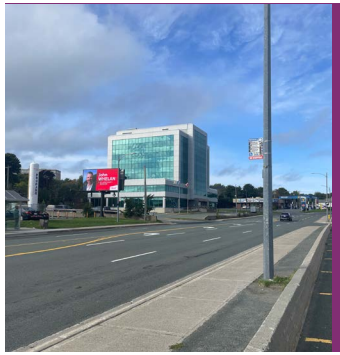
Housing Choice and Need

Demographic trends suggest there is a need for more small unit houses, such as apartments, particularly for seniors and renters. The neighbourhood is currently lacking these types of housing.



Pedestrian Crossings on Arterials

There are gaps in pedestrian crossings on arterials, including Portugal Cove Road, New Cove Road, and Prince Philip Drive. There is also a lack of pedestrian priority at existing arterial crossings.



Transit Service Gaps

Transit routes are limited to major corridors, leaving large residential pockets without walkable access. Transit stop design is minimal, consisting mainly of signposts and a few shelters, with no central hub.



Flood Hazard

Areas along the Rennie's River are within the current floodplain and have historically flooded. Some level of flood mitigation will be needed to protect these areas from future flood events.

Opportunities

1 Torbay Road Intensification

There is opportunity for greater mixed use and density at the intensification area identified in the Envision St. John's Municipal Plan. The area already benefits from Kenny's Pond and many commercial services. New growth could be further integrated with transit.

2 Elizabeth Avenue Mixed-use

There are opportunities to enable more mixed use development on Elizabeth Avenue and connect spaces like Churchill Park Plaza to existing park spaces like Churchill Park as well as planned active transportation improvements.

3 Re-evaluate Cycling Routes

There is opportunity to provide an alternative cycling route between Prince Philip Drive and Downtown through the centre of the neighbourhood, instead of modifying the existing Rennie's River Trail.

4 East-West Active Modes Connection

There is opportunity to formalize an active transportation connection through the Torbay Road Intensification Area as part of any redevelopment.

5 Small Park and Public Realm Renewals

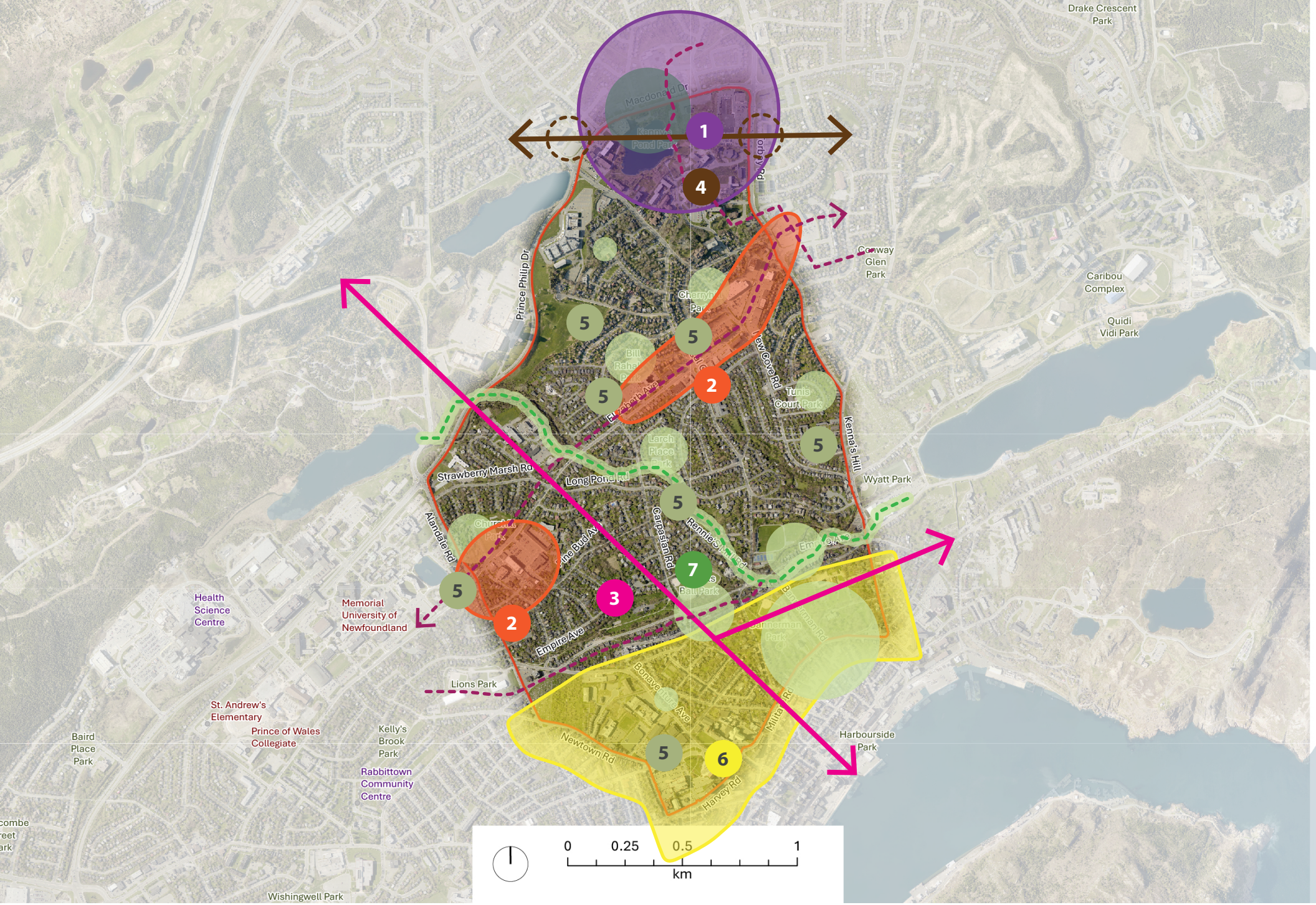
Underutilized Tot Lots could be updated and reimagined to support more passive leisure uses, such as community gardens or picnic areas. Additional signage and wayfinding could encourage greater use of these spaces.

6 Heritage Area Public Realm Improvements

There are opportunities to enhance streetscapes in existing heritage areas through improvements such as contextual lighting, sidewalk upgrades, better crossings, and public art or signage.

7 Enhance Naturalization of the Rennie's River

There are opportunities to further restore and naturalize the Rennie's River and provide better flood mitigation further downstream.



Drake Crescent Park
Macdonald Dr
Kennys Pond Park
Conway Glen Park
Caribou Complex
Quidi Vidi Park
Prince Philip Dr
Cherryhill Park
Bill Rahal Park
Elizabeth Ave
New Cove Rd
Tunis Court Park
Kenna's Hill
Larch Place Park
Strawberry Marsh Rd
Long Pond Rd
Wyatt Park
Alandale Rd
Churchill Park
Pine Bud Av
Carpasian Rd
Rennie's Mill Rd
Empire Ave
Ball Park
Bannerman Park
Health Science Centre
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Lions Park
Bonaventure Ave
Newtown Rd
Harvey Rd
Harbourside Park
St. Andrew's Elementary
Prince of Wales Collegiate
Kelly's Brook Park
Baird Place Park
Rabbittown Community Centre
Wishingwell Park
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
0
0.25
0.5
1
km

Challenges

1 Infrastructure and Servicing Constraints

Current planned intensification areas will likely require servicing upgrades to support additional growth, particularly in areas where there is older infrastructure.

2 Increasing Construction Costs

Construction costs for labour and materials have risen across the country. This has impacts on the financially feasibility of redevelopment and has impacts on the affordability of any new residential units.

3 Citywide Absorption

Different economic and planning factors will impact overall growth in St. John's. If there is less growth overall or greater demand for growth in other areas of the City, redevelopment in Rennie's River may take longer to achieve.

4 Impacts of the Housing and Affordability Crisis

Rennie's River is an important neighbourhood for people who are accessing housing and mental health services. The impacts of these crises on the neighbourhood includes decreased perceptions of safety in public spaces.

5 North-South Active Transportation Route

Converting the Rennie's River Trail to a paved facility would be challenging and there are differences of opinion on whether this should be a bike route. Without the Rennie's River Trail conversion, an alternate shared-use path route is required.

6 Retaining Character and Heritage

There are regulations in place to protect heritage buildings and heritage areas, but further collaboration and ingenuity will be required to ensure that heritage buildings are not neglected and can be repurposed for complimentary uses.

7 Modal Cultural Shift

To encourage more use of transit and active transportation, a cultural shift is required. Transit service must be frequent, dependable, and comfortable enough to enable users to decide to choose this option over using a personal vehicle. At the same time, the ability to provide more frequent transit service is influenced by level of ridership.



Key Findings

In conclusion, Rennie's River has significant strengths, including its strong sense of place, historic areas, tree-lined streets and its many trails and parks. These strengths should be maintained and enhanced.

As the area grows, the main opportunity for intensification is the Torbay Road Intensification Area. There is opportunity to encourage mixed-use redevelopment that leverages existing access to amenities and better integrates transit within the area. Additionally, there is potential to enable greater mixed-use development along Elizabeth Avenue to leverage planned active transportation improvements and existing park spaces. Allowing some additional density and mixed-use in these areas would help to expand housing options, while respecting and retaining existing lower density areas.

There will be several challenges to overcome in the area, including addressing flood areas, addressing perceptions of safety in public spaces, continuing to protect and adaptively-reuse heritage buildings, and re-visiting active transportation connections throughout the area. Additional factors, like market demand, servicing constraints, and construction costs will also pose a challenge for future development in the area.

Next Steps

The following phases of the Neighbourhood Plan will consider the findings presented in this background along with engagement results from Phase 1 Engagement 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 Winter 2026.



Phase 1 Engagement

Fall 2025



Phase 2 Engagement

Winter 2026



Draft Plan Release

Summer 2026



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