

Economic Development Strategy

2022 - 2031




Merritt
FLOURISH UNDER THE SUN

Acknowledgements



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Executive Summary

The 2022 - 2031 Economic Development Strategy is a 10-year plan which builds on the work of existing plans and documents, including the 2022 Official Community Plan (OCP), combined with the input of key stakeholders and the community.

This plan was developed with the vision of a sustainable, resilient, and diverse economy with a vibrant City Centre, clean industry, and high-paying jobs. The guiding principles of Reconciliation, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Strength & Resiliency, Communication, and the City Centre as the Economic Heart of the Community further define the strategies and actions within this plan.

The five priority areas identified in this plan align with the objectives in the Our Economy section of the Official Community Plan (2022). The five priority areas are:

1. Promote a Vibrant City Centre
2. Economic Diversification and Growth
3. Business Attraction and Retention
4. Increase Housing Supply in City Centre and Urban Villages
5. Commercialization of the Merritt Airport Area

There are several strategies under each priority area which are the focus of economic development activities for the next five to ten years.

The 2022 OCP recommended prioritizing eight industry sectors. In the short to medium term, the City of Merritt will focus business investment and attraction initiatives on the following four priority sectors:

- Construction
- Light Manufacturing
- Tourism and Entertainment
- Transportation, Warehousing and Logistics

This plan further examines the opportunities and challenges in each of the above sectors. One of the key strategies will be to conduct an industry sector gap analysis to determine how to focus business attraction and retention initiatives to best serve residents, tourists, and businesses.

A detailed implementation and action plan for each of the strategies is included in this document (starting at starting on page 45).

The Economic Development Strategy should be updated every five years to measure progress and success and to continue to be relevant and responsive to the needs of the community.



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Introduction

The City of Merritt is on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Nlaka'pamux and Syilx people. Located at the intersection of Highways 5, 5A, 97C and 8, it has become a gateway city between the Lower Mainland and the Interior of BC.

BC Stats estimated Merritt's population to be 7,606 in 2021 [1]. The Housing Needs Report completed in 2021 indicated a conservative population projection estimate of 8,145 by 2026 [2]. The Official Community Plan (2022) provides a population projection range of 8,362 – 12,081 people by 2041 [3].

The City of Merritt's Official Community Plan (2022) established a vision for the community:

“

Flourish Together: Merritt is a desirable and inclusive community that values people, nature, and opportunity.

”

The Nlaka'pamux and Syilx people fished in the lakes and rivers, hunted game in the mountains, forests and grasslands, and gathered plants and medicines throughout the territory [4]. Prior to the large-scale settler economy, some of the earliest known economic activity in the area was with the fur trade. The Hudson's Bay Company developed a relationship with Chief N'Kwala, and later set up trading posts at Nicola Lake, Douglas Lake and Clapperton Lake. Most of the land that is now Merritt stands upon the historical ranchlands of three ranchers, Jesus Garcia, William Voght and John Charters. In 1907, coal mining became the primary economic activity as William H. Merritt III helped to establish a rail line that enabled shipment of coal out of the valley. The growth of coal mining triggered quick expansion of businesses, services and settlers and the eventual incorporation of the City in 1911. The introduction of the rail line also brought growth in the logging industry and large-scale sawmills [5]. From the growth in resource industries, Merritt became the retail and service hub for the Nicola Valley. With the opening of the Coquihalla Highway in 1986, Merritt's retail and service sector grew further to meet the demand of travellers between the Interior and Fraser Valley. According to the 2016 Census, Merritt's largest number of occupations is in Retail Trade (12.7% of all occupations), followed by Manufacturing (12.5%) and Health and Social Services (11%) [6].

City of Merritt Economic Development

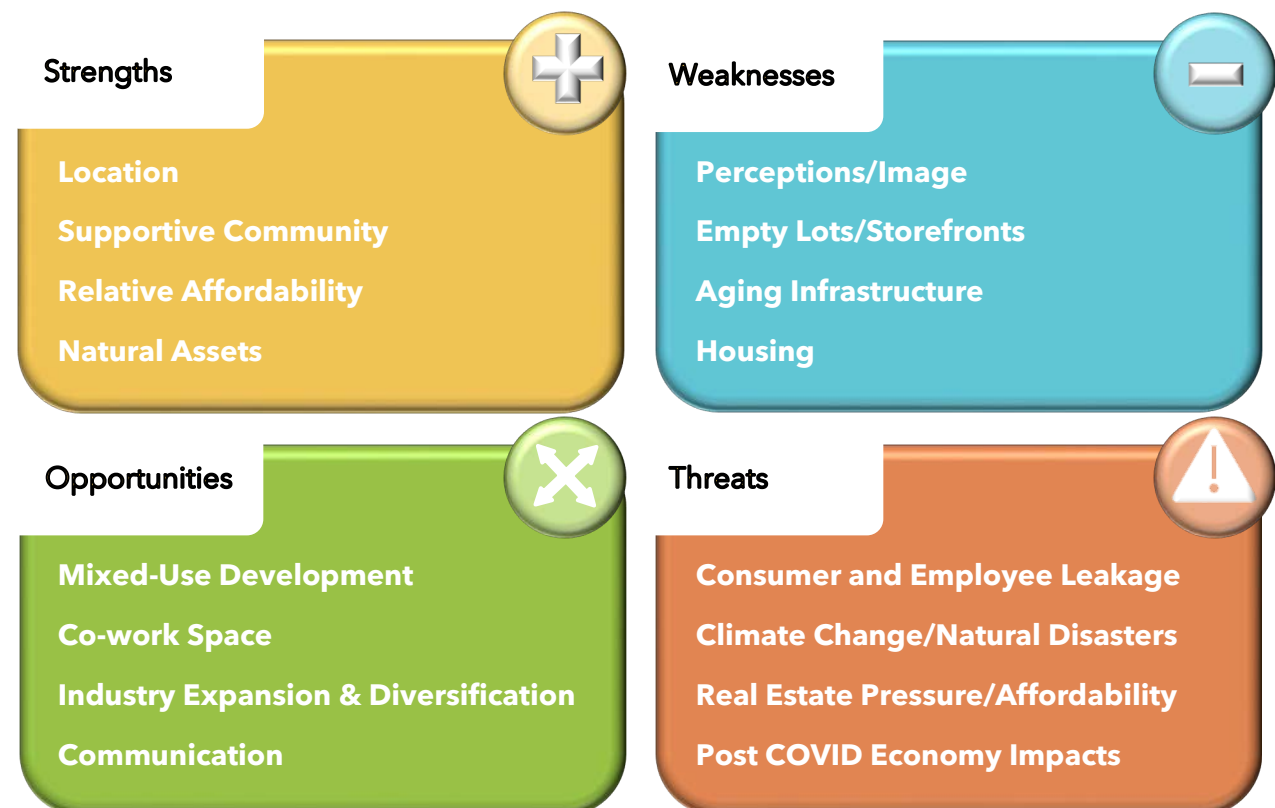
The City of Merritt is an economic development champion in the city and the Nicola Valley region. Economic Development staff, within the City's Development Services Department, work collaboratively with key stakeholders to create an overall economic development strategy and direction for Merritt. The City sets the regulatory framework for economic development through the Zoning Bylaw, business licensing, sign permits, tax rates, and other bylaws, as well as the Economic Development Strategy. The City also plays the lead role in business attraction and expansion.

The Economic Development Advisory Committee advises Merritt City Council on matters pertaining to economic development, City Centre revitalization, investment, business attraction, and long-term economic sustainability. Committee members are selected by City Council through an application and review process.

Community Futures Development Corporation of Nicola Valley, the Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Nicola Valley, and WorkBC provide resources and supports to local entrepreneurs, businesses, and employers. The strength of these organizations is crucial for the growth and development of a strong local economy through supporting business retention and expansion, and workforce development. Open communication and collaboration with the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and School District 58 Nicola-Similkameen is also important to identify training and education needs, and opportunities that will translate into future local job opportunities.

Merritt's economy is part of the broader economic context from the regional through to the global level. An environmental scan examines the economic, social, technological, environmental, and political/regulatory influences on the economy. Examining these influences helps us to prepare for and take advantage of emerging opportunities. A SWOT analysis examines the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats relevant to economic development within a community. A snapshot of the SWOT analysis is shown in the figure below. More information on Merritt's economic background as well as the detailed environmental scan and SWOT analysis are presented in Appendix B.

SWOT Analysis Snapshot



Purpose of the Economic Development Strategy

The previous Economic Development Action Plan was created in 2014/2015. The economic landscape in Merritt has changed significantly since that time. Some action items were not initiated or became irrelevant due to the changing landscape, while several other action items were completed.

A new plan reflects the desired current and future economic development for the community. It also addresses the economic challenges and opportunities facing the community. A well-drafted plan is a guiding document that clearly communicates the strategies and actions that will move the community toward achieving its economic development vision. Finally, the plan provides an opportunity to measure progress and success in achieving each objective.

This Strategy is intended to provide direction for economic development for the next 10 years, from 2022 through to 2031. While the Strategy's vision is for 10 year, it should be updated every five years to remain current and relevant, with the first update in 2027.

Community Engagement

This Strategy was developed with input from the community through industry focus groups, stakeholder interviews and an online community survey. Stakeholder interviews and industry focus groups were conducted from September through early November 2021. The November 2021 Coldwater River Flood disrupted some additional industry sector focus groups that were planned for mid to late November 2021. A previously recorded presentation of the focus group content and questions were made available online for feedback via email.

[Summary comments about community survey results to be inserted here]

Notes from the focus groups and interviews, and results from the community online survey are available in Appendix C.

Vision, Mission, & Guiding Principles



A statement of vision, mission, and guiding principles is important to setting the tone and overall direction of any strategy. In terms of the Economic Development Strategy, the Vision Statement describes the future and ideal status of the local economy. The Mission Statement describes how the Vision will be achieved. Guiding Principles define what is taken into consideration with every action item or decision.

The action items in this Strategy may be impacted by external factors which effect their outcomes, but the Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles remain the same. Decisions about new actions should be made in consideration of the Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles.

Vision

Merritt has a sustainable, resilient, and diverse economy with a vibrant City Centre, clean industry, and high-paying jobs.

Mission

The City of Merritt supports the growth of a strong, resilient, and diverse local economy through the implementation of clear policies and regulations that facilitate growth and development in targeted industry sectors and in the City Centre, infrastructure improvements that encourage development, business attraction and retention initiatives, and excellent communication with key stakeholders, First Nations, and the broader community.



Guiding Principles

Reconciliation

The City of Merritt Council and staff acknowledge that the City of Merritt operates on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Nlaka'pamux and Syilx people.

According to 2016 Census information, 22.9% of Merritt's population identifies as Indigenous [6].

There are five traditional First Nations in the Nicola Valley (Coldwater, Lower Nicola, Nooaitch, Shackan, and Upper Nicola). Cook's Ferry also has a presence in the Nicola Valley and is part of the Scw'exmx Tribal Council. Due to the proximity of the communities, First Nation members access Merritt for products, services, employment, education, and recreation. Similarly, First Nation businesses serve the Merritt area and First Nation economic development initiatives generate employment opportunities for the region.

Local First Nations contribute significantly to the regional economy and there is tremendous economic opportunity to work collectively with our neighbouring First Nations communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and wildfire and flood evacuations, have presented challenges in consulting with neighbouring First Nations communities. This plan has been developed keeping in mind the importance of ongoing dialogue, meaningful engagement, and the building of respectful relationships in our work towards reconciliation.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

The City of Merritt strives to be an inclusive and welcoming community. Working towards equity in the processes of community engagement, development of policies, access to programs, services, and information takes time and requires opportunity for review and feedback. We are committed to open communication and to listening to all community members to ensure that we continue to move toward equity for all.

Communication

Clear, consistent communication is the foundation of good relationship building. During the community engagement industry sector focus groups, participants raised the issue of the need for improved communication between the municipality, businesses, organizations, and residents. Strategies and actions to improve communication were addressed in the 2014/2015 Economic Development Action Plan. Many of these action items were either completed or are ongoing initiatives. Improved communication has been addressed throughout the recommendations in this plan. Excellent communication with residents was one of the Strategic Focus Areas for Merritt City Council for 2021 -2022 [7].

Strength & Resiliency

A strong and resilient local economy is built on sustainable practises. Sustainability means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future. The strategies within this document consider economic, social, and environmental impacts to ensure sustainability. The impacts of climate change are far-reaching and more prevalent than ever before. Business owners must be prepared to respond and adapt to these challenges and must have access to the resources and supports they need for succession planning, emergency preparedness, and responsiveness to economic trends. Business and industry attraction initiatives must consider the impact on existing businesses and residents. Industries that promote job creation must support high-paying jobs and opportunities for growth and development while maintaining and protecting our environment for the future. A focus on local food security and how local food systems can be sustained and enhanced is crucial to a sustainable community and economy.

Our City Centre is the Economic Heart of the Community

A city's centre defines its sense of place and community. It is a place to gather, dine, shop, live, work and play. The City's economic development efforts will be focused on enhancing and improving our City Centre to increase vibrancy and attract residents and visitors. This will include encouraging development of vacant parcels, co-work and professional office space, attracting the right commercial mix of restaurants and retail along Quilchena Avenue, facilitating the location of community and social service organizations in other areas of the City Centre, promoting events, festivals, regular programming, and interactive use of public spaces, and beautification and infrastructure improvements to promote pedestrian safety and walkability.



Quilchena Avenue.

Key Priorities and Strategies

Identifying priority areas for economic development helps to narrow the focus and concentrate efforts on achievable strategies and actions within the 10-year span of this Strategy. Each priority area contains several strategies to address their respective opportunities and challenges. Each strategy has action items which will help to measure the success and progress towards their achievement.

This Strategy focuses on five key priorities that will guide efforts to achieve our vision of a strong, diverse local economy:

1. Promote a Vibrant City Centre



A vibrant city centre is a major stimulator for economic growth. City centres are often a reflection of the economic strength of a community and showcase a city's culture and character. Many factors contribute to the creation of a vibrant and attractive city centre. These include beautification, programming and events, walkability, and functionality of space, as well as a mix of businesses and mixed-use developments that invite people to live, work and play.

2. Economic Diversification and Growth



Diversification of the local economy mitigates the risks of fluctuations in any one industry sector. The focus will be to encourage diversification within traditionally strong local industry sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, and retail, while also encouraging growth within industry sectors that Merritt is well-positioned to support.

3. Business Attraction and Retention



Business Attraction and Retention initiatives are key to strong local economic growth. Business attraction initiatives will focus on promoting Merritt's business friendly environment, competitive advantages, and opportunities to attract the targeted industry sectors outlined in this strategy. Retention initiatives will focus on strengthening business support organizations, and ensuring access to resources, programs, and information to foster economic resiliency and growth. Workforce development initiatives, coordinated by business and community partner agencies, will further support both business attraction and retention.

4. Increase Residential Housing Supply in the City Centre and Urban Villages



The Merritt Housing Needs Report (2021) identified a lack of diversity of housing options and a significant lack of rental units [2]. The November 2021 Coldwater River flood exacerbated the need for additional housing. Encouraging residential housing development within the City Centre and the Urban Villages, as identified in the 2022 OCP, will help to address this need, and support the workforce housing needs for businesses in these shopping districts [3].

5. Commercialization of the Merritt Airport Area



Improvements to the Merritt Airport will facilitate commercial development opportunities on the lands adjacent to the airport as well as support future opportunities for economic diversification in the Tourism Industry. It's important to note that the airport classification will remain AGNII Non-Instrument Approach, which will impact the potential commercial activities.

The strategies to address these priorities are detailed in the following pages. Each priority is represented by a different colour banner and icon.

The detailed Implementation and Action Plan, including action items for each strategy, timelines, and measures of success, follows in the next section.



Merritt Airport - Saunders Field.



Priority Area 1: Promote a Vibrant City Centre

Strategy 1.1: Develop a City Centre Revitalization Plan

The most recent City Centre Improvement Plan was adopted in 2008. The plan included recommendations for improvement projects from Central Park to Claybanks RV Park [9]. Many initiatives were completed and other items in the plan became irrelevant or require updating.

The City Centre Revitalization Plan will provide direction for the development of a vibrant downtown core with the right mix of business, mixed-use development, streetscape improvements and year-round programming to motivate residents and visitors to spend more time downtown. This will include action items for improving Quilchena Avenue, Spirit Square, as well as other streets and public spaces in the City Centre. The planning process will include engagement with business and property owners, as well as other organizations, located in the City Centre.

Strategy 1.2: Continue with an annual program of City Centre revitalization projects

In recent years, City Centre Revitalization projects have been included as part of the annual budget. This practise ensures that there is a continued effort and resources to maintain and improve the beauty and vibrancy of the downtown.

Current revitalization project plans include improvements such as curb extensions, creation of interactive parklets, bike parking, street art and murals. Future improvements may include the replacement and addition of street trees, planter boxes, as well as enhancement of the lane between Spirit Square and Quilchena Avenue for pedestrian use.



Family walking on Quilchena Avenue.



Revitalization projects should include winter city design such as features that block wind, maximize sun exposure, improve walkability and bikeability, and allow for snow clearing.

City Centre revitalization initiatives will be identified and outlined in the City Centre Revitalization Plan. The Plan will include timelines for the implementation of the projects.

Strategy 1.3: Secure a location and funding for public washrooms in the City Centre

Public washrooms contribute to a vibrant City Centre by enabling people to stay longer in the area and participate in more activities. Washroom facilities support programming and events in public spaces such as Spirit Square and commercial streets.

Renovation of the Community Policing Office building in Spirit Square to include a cafe and public washrooms would be a potential solution. Capital funding should be allocated to support this project. Alternatively, grant funding could be sought for the renovations.

Public washrooms were identified in the 2008 City Centre Plan [9] and have been recommended by the Economic Development Committee.

Strategy 1.4: Support and encourage regular programming within the City Centre

Promoting and encouraging regular year-round programming and activities will generate liveliness and animation of the City Centre.

Regular programming of commercial streets and Spirit Square would create a more vibrant atmosphere and a sense of community that draws residents and tourists.

Pedestrian malls, farmers' and artisan markets, cultural and performing art showcases, and recreational activities encourage participants to spend more time in the City Centre which would increase the economic impact of these events.

The creation of an Event and Festivals Society would support the organization and coordination of a schedule of events. City departments and non-profit organizations should work together with the society to program and animate the City Centre (For example the Recreation Department, First Nations, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, Nicola Valley Farmers Market Association, CFDC Nicola Valley, Nicola Valley Community Arts Council, Nicola Valley Fall Fair, Nicola Valley Rodeo Association, Merritt Country Christmas, etc.).

Programming should be encouraged throughout the year and include activation through the winter, expanding on the events such as the Merritt Country Christmas and other winter events and activities.



Strategy 1.5: Encourage winter events and activities through arts, recreation, storytelling, and festivals so that residents and tourists spend more time in the City Centre.

Activating the City Centre with events and activities in the winter months will encourage community building. It will also invite tourists, who are visiting the area for winter activities, to visit the City Centre. The Events and Festivals Society should work with local organizations that run events and activities throughout the winter months to develop a schedule of winter events that begins after the last farmers' market in the Fall and runs through to the first farmers' market in the Spring. These organizations include the Nicola Valley Community Arts Council and associated arts groups, Merritt Country Christmas, the Merritt Snowmobile Club, the Nicola Valley Nordic Ski Club, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, and more.

The potential for events and festivals in the winter months are endless. Some ideas include arts festivals, traditional Indigenous celebrations and storytelling, other cultural celebrations, ice sculpting, a cooking contest (for example a chili cook off), scavenger hunts, a winter-themed running event (hot chocolate run, glow run), Family Day schedule of events, and activities that encourage families to get out, be active and disconnect from digital screens and devices. Festivals and events should include both indoor and outdoor programming.

Strategy 1.6: Enhance Spirit Square for everyday use and year-round programming and events.

Spirit Square is a beautiful plaza in the City Centre that has great potential for use as both a casual gathering place for lunch or coffee and as a space that can be programmed with a wide range of events and activities. The covered stage presents opportunities for concerts, storytelling, and other performing and cultural arts. The space could also be booked for instructional purposes such as yoga, tai chi, dance, and art classes.

A few key improvements to Spirit Square would support increased use of the space. These improvements include adding shade, conversational seating and having food vendors and public washrooms located in the square or nearby.

Strategy 1.7: Encourage initiatives to plan and program year-round use of Spirit Square

Spirit Square is a great venue for performances, activities and events and should be programmed throughout the year.

Regular programming of Spirit Square through the City's Recreation department would showcase its amenities and possible uses. This could include recreation classes such as



yoga or dance. The City's Music in the Park series could be expanded to include Music in the Square and Movies in the Square.

The opportunity to book Spirit Square for events and activities should be widely promoted to the public and potential user groups, including arts, recreation, wedding, event, and festival groups. The Event and Festival Society should utilize Spirit Square for events and festivals. Private and not-for-profit groups should be encouraged to book the Square for practises, performances, activities, and events. Potential local user groups include, but are not limited to, the Nicola Valley Community Arts Council, Love to Dance Academy, school and youth groups, service clubs, and special interest groups.

Strategy 1.8: Enhance the lane between Spirit Square and Quilchena Avenue to encourage its use as a pedestrian connection.

The lane that runs from Voght Street to Garcia Street, north of Quilchena Avenue, provides a unique opportunity to connect the main shopping block of Quilchena Avenue to Spirit Square. Enhancements to the lane may encourage more pedestrians to use this walking connection. These improvements could include interactive and point of interest murals, street art, green or planter walls, street furniture, and lighting. Owners of commercial properties, which back onto the lane, should be encouraged to improve lighting at the back of their buildings and add signage and beautification features such as planter boxes to assist in creating a more pedestrian friendly lane.



Jetty Road performs at Spirit Square. Photo Credit: Jade Swartzberg



Strategy 1.9: Support and facilitate opportunities for short term, temporary, or shared use of City Centre commercial spaces through regulation, programs, and incentives.

The presence of mobile vendors and food trucks increases the vibrancy of commercial streets. Food truck rallies have proven to be popular events in other cities that draw groups of people out to sample the different dining options. Pop-up shops and opportunities for micro-businesses to share retail and service space may also draw more people to browse and shop in the City Centre. Short-term, or temporary use, of commercial space can assist in filling vacant storefronts. The City can support this by ensuring existing bylaws and regulations enable these opportunities.

Food truck related regulations and regulations for other mobile vendors should be incorporated into the Business Licence Bylaw to facilitate and simplify the licensing process for these businesses.

The Zoning Bylaw supports many business uses in the C6 Commercial Zone (City Centre District) [17]. Communicating with business and property owners as well as business support agencies about these opportunities may help increase the number of pop-up shops and other short term uses.

Strategy 1.10: Improve and integrate winter city design through the development of buildings, the public realm, and open spaces that improve outdoor pedestrian comfort as well as public spaces that are more vibrant and inviting.

Elements of winter city design should be considered and included with infrastructure upgrades, new developments, and redevelopment or revitalization of existing buildings and public spaces. Infrastructure improvements include considerations for proper snow clearing and drainage of snow melt on sidewalks, roadways, and bike lanes. Other improvements include designing public spaces for maximizing winter sun exposure and wind protection, the use of colour to brighten spaces, and improved lighting for dark evenings.

Strategy 1.11: Explore strategies and funding mechanisms to stimulate development in the City Centre.

The Zoning Bylaw, updated in 2020, supports development opportunities that promote a vibrant City Centre. This includes the potential to build up to six stories in the City Centre District which enables mixed-use commercial and multi-storey residential buildings [17]. These may be attractive options for property owners of vacant parcels within the City Centre and could also be an option for redevelopment of other parcels.

The Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw should encourage multi-storey development by providing a tax reduction for developments that meet the goals and objectives for City Centre revitalization, housing, façade improvements, and more.



Regular communication with developers and property owners will assist in promoting these opportunities as well as determining other strategies and mechanisms that would stimulate City Centre development.

Strategy 1.12: Encourage infill development of vacant parcels in the City Centre.

The availability of vacant parcels in Merritt's City Centre is a unique opportunity to build modern and functional buildings that meet the commercial and residential needs of the community. City staff should initiate conversations with property owners to understand the owners' plans for future use of the property. These conversations are also an opportunity to discuss the vision for a vibrant City Centre and the initiatives that support this vision. This includes informing owners and developers about Zoning bylaw changes that support City Centre development, the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw, and business investment and attraction initiatives. City staff should also investigate opportunities to purchase vacant parcels for uses such as public washrooms, affordable housing developments, and a new visitor information centre. Vacant parcels in the City Centre should be included in the land supply and infrastructure review in Strategy 3.8.

Strategy 1.13: Encourage urban design excellence through policy and incentives.

The City Centre Development Permit Area Guidelines in the 2022 OCP include design elements that promote urban design excellence [3]. Other policies that could promote urban design excellence include updating the Zoning Bylaw to include height/density bonuses for exceptional design and winter city design elements, as well as including a façade improvement program in the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw.

Strategy 1.14: Encourage an evolution of the business mix on Quilchena Avenue to be retail and restaurant focused.

Quilchena Avenue is the main shopping area in the city. There is opportunity for additional unique retail shops and restaurants to locate on this main street. As part of this transition, non-profits and social service agencies would relocate off Quilchena Avenue. City staff can facilitate this by working with non-profit and social service organizations to identify opportunities to relocate into buildings that suit their needs. City staff can also work with commercial property owners on Quilchena Avenue to encourage more retail and restaurant businesses.

The formation of a Business Improvement Area could also encourage additional retail and restaurant businesses along Quilchena Avenue. Retail businesses and restaurants benefit more from the activities of a BIA than a non-profit organization or service-focused business.



Strategy 1.15: Implement a Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw for the City Centre

Implement a Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw with a focus on the City Centre and consider tax strategies for City Centre businesses and developers to attract and grow the local economy, while developing regulations and processes that are efficient, streamlined and easily understood to enhance Merritt's competitiveness for investors and entrepreneurs.

The Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw should include tax reduction incentives for mixed use development and multi unit residential development in the City Centre as well as for façade improvements to existing buildings. It should also include incentives for purpose built multi-storey rental developments.

Strategy 1.16: Develop a façade improvement program for the City Centre.

Façade improvement programs support business and building owners in beautifying their storefronts and collectively improve the streetscape. A matching funds program allocated in the City budget could be designed to support a set number of façade improvements per year over a set number of years. The criteria for the program would need to be developed and façade improvements would need to meet the development permit area guidelines for the City Centre as identified in the OCP. Façade improvements could also be included in the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw.

Strategy 1.17: Creation of a Business Improvement Area in the City Centre

Facilitate the creation of a Business Improvement Area (BIA) in the City Centre to identify, manage and implement key infrastructure and capital improvements and promote businesses in the City Centre.

This initiative was first raised in the 2008 City Centre Plan [9].

A BIA is an association of commercial property and business owners within a specified commercial area who promote economic development of that area through various marketing, beautification, safety, and advocacy initiatives. BIA's are enacted through special legislation, governed by a volunteer board of directors and funded through a member-based property tax levy.

A BIA within the City Centre could increase interest, awareness, and activity within the downtown through events and other initiatives that make the area attractive for visitors and residents. A BIA can also address area-specific issues of safety and cleanliness of streets and sidewalks.

The formation of a BIA requires considerable consultation with property and business owners to determine the boundaries of the BIA and to build consensus for the proposal.



Strategy 1.18: Transform Quilchena Avenue into a shared street or pedestrian street.

Many of the above strategies will need to be in place before a proposed transformation into a shared street or pedestrian street could be developed on Quilchena Avenue. Pedestrian-designed streets function best when the street has the right business mix, such as a variety of retail shops and restaurants, with the potential to attract both tourists and residents.

Street Markets demonstrate the potential of a pedestrian street with a wide variety of vendors, food trucks, buskers, and the opportunity to stroll in the street. Additional streetscape design features that encourage people to stay and play such as street furniture, interactive parklets, and bike parking will assist in the transition to a more pedestrian-friendly street. These features draw people to the City Centre, making the area more attractive for retail businesses, restaurants, and additional development.

Mixed-use commercial and multi-unit residential developments in the City Centre will increase the number of people living in the area, creating more demand for shops and restaurants.

Additional consultation with the BIA, business owners, property owners, other stakeholders, and the public will be required to determine the best pedestrian friendly design option.



Priority Area 2: Economic Diversification and Growth

Strategy 2.1 Target key industry sectors for diversification and growth

The City of Merritt is targeting eight industry sectors to diversify the local economy through the creation of economic opportunities which will provide services to residents, tourists, and the business community. The following sectors were chosen based on historical strength, the mix of existing businesses and industries, consultation with business owners and business support organizations, as well as the competitive advantages that Merritt has to offer businesses in these industry sectors:

- Agriculture & Forestry
- Construction
- Healthcare
- Light Manufacturing
- Remote Work & Home-based Business
- Retail & Hospitality
- Tourism & Entertainment
- Transportation, Warehousing & Logistics

Construction, Light Manufacturing, Tourism & Entertainment, and Transportation, Warehousing & Logistics will be the priority focus for business investment and attraction initiatives in the short to medium term.

Opportunities and challenges in each of the industry sectors are described below. Innovative opportunities for economic growth and diversification often occur at the intersection of multiple industries. This creates the potential for growth of ancillary businesses which further strengthen the local economy. Technology is driving change in all industry sectors and the use of leading-edge technology to promote efficiency and sustainability is encouraged in all industries. While these eight industries are the focus, businesses that primarily fit into other sectors, such as professional services, are invited to explore the opportunity to do business in Merritt.

During the community engagement sessions, several business opportunities were identified in each of the industry sectors. A complete list of these business ideas can be found in Appendix D.



Agriculture & Forestry

The agriculture and forestry industry has historically been one of the largest industry sectors in Merritt and the Nicola Valley. This sector is also a large part of the neighbouring First Nations' economy. Surrounded by lands in the agricultural land reserve and forested areas, this industry is expected to remain prominent for many years to come.

Traditional practises in these industries are particularly susceptible to climate change and extreme weather events. With new technology, there are opportunities for growth and diversification. Indoor vertical farming is a growing trend that can be accomplished on smaller parcels of land and is less susceptible to extreme weather events. Structural engineered wood product manufacturing is another trend on the rise.

Extreme weather events have highlighted the urgent need for food security solutions. The Food Security Assessment Report, developed as part of the 2022 OCP, noted the need to support and grow the local food and agriculture economy by working with neighbouring communities to ensure local food producers have access to nearby facilities for packaging, processing, and distribution needs [18]. These opportunities include exploring options for a commercial processing kitchen, cold storage facilities, regional abattoir and cut and wrap facilities.

While forestry remains an important part of the local economy, it has experienced challenges in recent years. A reduction in the annual allowable cut for softwood lumber led to a lack of supply and subsequent closure of the Tolko Mill in Merritt in 2016. Aspen Planers has also been impacted in recent years by changes to softwood lumber supply.



3 Bar Farms at Quilchena Street Market



There may be an opportunity to explore a Community Forest License to support a diversified local forest industry, mitigation of future wildfire risks, expansion of recreational trail systems, and more. Other opportunities in forestry include silviculture and the harvesting of wildfire damaged wood for biomass energy production.

Construction

There are many opportunities for growth in the Construction industry in the Merritt area. This industry encompasses a wide variety of businesses and career opportunities from general contractors and tradespeople working in residential construction to specialty and heavy construction, including building roads and bridges. Construction is one of the four priority industries for business investment and attraction initiatives in the short to medium term.

2021 was a record year for construction within the City of Merritt with over \$30 million construction value, \$21 million of which was for residential construction. 2020 was also a very active year for construction in the city with almost \$24 million in construction value. This upward trend is expected to continue beyond 2022.

In residential construction, there is an increased need for trades and general contractors to meet the demand for additional housing as well as for renovations and rebuilds. There will also be a need for skilled trades with experience in building multi-storey residential buildings. The 2021 Housing Needs Report identified the need for more rental housing, affordable housing, and housing suitable for seniors [2].

In commercial construction, there is opportunity for multi-storey mixed-use development of vacant parcels as well as redevelopment and renovation of existing buildings.

With the City's Economic Development Department working to attract more light industry there will also be opportunities for construction of warehouses, production facilities and construction of utilities to service these properties.

The Nicola Valley Institute of Technology offers several foundational trades training programs to prepare the learner for apprenticeships. The NVIT trades program also includes more advanced Level 3 training in residential construction. City staff should discuss with NVIT their plans for trade program expansion, and the opportunity to develop an interest in trades at the high school level, as well as other educational opportunities related to the construction industry.

Rapid highway and bridge reconstruction, following the November 15, 2021, Coldwater River flood, brought many new companies into Merritt and showcased the opportunity to set up base operations within the city. Road and bridge construction and maintenance will continue to be in demand in Merritt and the surrounding area.

The need for additional residential developments and infrastructure construction also presents the opportunity for professional services which are not currently available in



Merritt, such as surveyors, architects, and engineers. Professionals from nearby communities could potentially set up part-time satellite offices in Merritt to provide services locally.

Healthcare

The Healthcare sector encompasses a wide range of private businesses, government, and non-profit organizations.

The Wellness industry sub-sector intersects with recreation and tourism. Merritt's proximity to larger centres and accessibility via major provincial highways, as well as its climate, natural beauty, and abundance of outdoor recreational pursuits allows for growth in this sector including wellness or spa retreats.

In traditional healthcare, the Nicola Valley Hospital and Health Centre has eight acute care beds, a recently expanded Emergency Department, Rehabilitation, Physiotherapy, Public Health, Mental Health, Home and Community Care, Home Support, Laboratory, and X-ray. Merritt residents currently travel to Kamloops and Kelowna for maternity, surgery, cancer and chronic disease management, diagnostic testing, and other specialty medical care.

There is opportunity to utilize Merritt's lifestyle assets to attract more physicians and other healthcare professionals such as Nurse Practitioners, Physiotherapists, and Registered Massage Therapists. A multi-storey, modern, elevator-equipped, professional and medical office building would create more space for clinical practise for these professionals.

Merritt has a strong network of social support agencies offering a wide range of services to the community. There are many job opportunities available for people with Social Work and Human Service Work backgrounds.



Nicola Valley Hospital and Health Centre



NVIT's Health and Human Services Career Training Programs as well as their Bachelor of Social Work degree support the training and education of workers for the Health and Social Services sector. Discussions with NVIT about plans for expansion of these programs could help support further growth in this sector.

Light Manufacturing

Merritt's economy was built on heavy industry, including coal mining and lumber mills. Light manufacturing processes generate less noise and emissions than heavy industrial activities. Light manufacturing encompasses a wide range of manufacturing processes and industrial uses. Merritt has undeveloped industrial lands, an advantage over other cities that have limited or no available industrial land. The City lowered the industrial tax rates in 2021 to be more competitive with other municipalities. Diversifying Merritt's economy with light manufacturing businesses that create high-paying jobs would support a stronger, more resilient community. Light Manufacturing is one of the City's top four priority industries for business investment and attraction.

The Middlesboro Industrial Park Development Plan will provide direction for the development of the large parcel of land that was formerly the Tolko mill site. The property could be subdivided into several light industrial parcels. Additional infrastructure such as water, sewer, roads, and other utilities will be required to service the land.

The goal will be to attract light manufacturing businesses with a focus on green manufacturing, low water use processes, and industries that build on our current assets and strengths to further complement and strengthen our existing businesses.



Construction of Barkman Concrete plant.



Remote Work & Home-based

Merritt's relative affordability, proximity to urban centres, and accessibility to recreational pursuits are competitive advantages in attracting remote workers. COVID-19 contributed to a growing trend of remote workers. Access to, and increased use of, digital platforms has enabled a widespread transition to remote work. Remote workers contribute to the local economy by spending their earnings on goods and services in the community. Construction of additional housing units will be an important element to attract remote workers.

Home-based businesses are a great option for service or retail businesses that operate online or have limited customer foot traffic. Many home-based businesses are artisans or crafters who regularly participate in Farmers Markets or similar events. Others provide mobile services. There is opportunity for more bed and breakfast accommodations, professional services, tradespeople, and consultants to set up home-based businesses within the city. Developing a list of home-based businesses, and initiating regular communication with these business owners, will assist in understanding their needs, challenges, and opportunities. This process can be assisted by business support agencies such as CFDC Nicola Valley and the Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce. Support agencies, realtors and property managers may also assist in promoting the City's home-business regulations, including the Zoning Bylaw and Business Licensing.

Development of a co-working space or hub could be an attractive option for both remote workers and home-based business owners. With options to rent a desk or office on a periodic or regular basis, as well as bookable shared meeting space, remote workers and home-based business owners would have an alternative space for client meetings and presentations, and they would have the option to periodically work in an office setting with others. Co-working space amenities often grow and develop from the needs of the members and can include creative studios, production space, shared kitchens and more.

Retail and Hospitality

According to the 2016 Census, the largest percentage of occupations in Merritt are in the retail sector. There is room for growth and diversification of this sector, particularly for entrepreneurs looking to start unique or niche businesses in the City Centre. This includes a need for more diverse restaurant options and more restaurant patios within the City Centre. A range of retail shops with interesting and distinctive items that encourage people to browse and explore along Quilchena Avenue will contribute to increased vibrancy. A few of the retail business opportunities that have been identified through the community engagement sessions include a bakery, specialty grocery store, a vintage clothing store or consignment shop, and more places or activities for young people. Several business ideas for restaurants and retail are listed in Appendix D.

Merritt has 16 fixed roof hotels and motels but a limited supply of other alternative accommodation. Some of the motels have been converted into long-term housing, and



therefore there may be a need to expand the number of hotel units to support future tourism efforts. There are nine vacation rental residences listed on AirBnB with one additional residence listed on VRBO. Encouraging short term rental providers to obtain the required permits for operation of their business will need to remain a focus of City staff. Many travelers, particularly those looking to stay and explore an area, are looking for accommodation experiences such as a bed and breakfast, guest ranch, or wellness retreats.

Retail and hospitality businesses serve both residents and visitors. Creating a vibrant City Centre with a diverse mix of businesses, as well as programming, and design features that beautify public spaces, will enhance the visitor experience, increasing the likelihood of a return visit or a longer stay.

Tourism and Entertainment

Merritt has enormous tourism potential due to its location between the Lower Mainland and the Okanagan, accessibility from major highways, great climate, abundance of natural assets, and its reputation for hosting world class festivals. There are many opportunities for business development in this industry. Tourism is one of the City's top priority industry sectors for business investment and attraction. The City of Merritt's tourism business attraction collateral, developed in 2021, will assist with promotion of these business opportunities and should be expanded to include the full range of tourism possibilities. Growth in tourism will present more options for visitors to extend their stay from one activity to an overnight stay, or from a one-night stay to multiple nights.

There is an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities in Merritt and the Nicola Valley. Scenic hiking and mountain biking trails are just a short distance from the City Centre. The city also has several ball diamonds, pickleball courts, tennis courts, a disc golf course, multi-sport box, skateboard park, bike park, 200 metre outdoor running track, and a nine-hole golf course. The numerous lakes in the Nicola Valley are ideal for a wide variety of water sport activities including paddle boarding, kitesurfing, windsurfing, sailing, canoeing, kayaking, boating, water skiing, wakeboarding, and fishing. Winter outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy snowshoeing and cross-country skiing on nearby trails, ice-fishing on nearby lakes, and skating on frozen ponds or the outdoor skating rink. The Nicola Valley is also a popular area for horseback riding, hunting, quad or ORV riding, and snowmobiling. There is opportunity for growth in outdoor recreation and adventure tourism through the development of businesses to support these activities, including bike tours, water sport equipment rentals (boats, wakeboards, paddle boards, kayaks, canoes, etc.), and parasailing adventures. The Nicola and Coldwater rivers present opportunities for growth in outdoor recreation tourism such as development of a launch area for non-motorized watercraft (canoes, kayaks, and float tubes), and a watercraft rental and shuttle service. There are also opportunities for the development of tourism businesses through the Merritt Airport such as heli-tours, back-country skiing, skydiving, hang gliding, and paragliding.



Merritt has several parks and playgrounds, including accessible playgrounds and a children's water spray park. Rotary Park and Spirit Square are equipped with covered stages for outdoor performances. Many parks are connected to walking paths and the City's Active Transportation Network Plan encourages the future connection of parks, trails, and the City Centre [14].

Merritt also has several indoor recreation amenities and activities. The Nicola Valley Aquatic Centre contains a 25-metre main pool, slide, diving board, rope swing, "Lazy River & Vortex", leisure pool, hot tub, sauna, and fitness room. The Nicola Valley Memorial Arena is home to the Merritt Centennials Junior A hockey team as well as the Nicola Valley Figure Skating Club, Merritt Minor Hockey Association, and Nicola Valley Lacrosse. The arena is also open for drop-in skating and hockey in the Fall and Winter. Other indoor recreation activities in Merritt include curling, bowling, yoga, dance, and more.

Food and beverage, accommodations, and retail businesses experience a boost from increased tourism activity around the many sporting events that utilize Merritt's facilities. These include hockey and ball tournaments, rodeos, swim meets, and dog shows. Merritt Secondary School sports also draws athletes and family members from out of town to the community.

The Claybanks RV Park property is zoned C2 Tourist Commercial, which allows several different commercial uses and has the potential to increase economic activity in the City Centre. This property could become a 'must-see' stop in the Merritt and Nicola Valley tourist experience. The creation of a Claybanks Development Plan would help guide the direction of the rebuild and future development of the property.



Godey Creek Mountain Bike Trails



Cultural experiences are driving modern tourism visitations. The Nicola Valley has a rich history from the Indigenous cultures of the First Nations to the history of ranching and cowboy experiences. There is potential to develop curated tourist experiences through historical tours, Indigenous art, traditions, and storytelling, and other arts and cultural experiences. Protecting historical structures and landmarks is an important part of maintaining our heritage and culture. The Arts & Culture Strategy should be updated to ensure that this sector continues to grow for the benefit of residents and visitors.

Working collaboratively with provincial, regional, Indigenous, and local tourism organizations as well as local business support agencies will be essential to presenting cohesive messaging to both visitors and potential tourism business operators. An updated 5-year Tourism Plan will guide the direction, prioritize the action items, and identify roles and responsibilities for tourism in Merritt and the Nicola Valley. In addition, determining the appropriate governance structure of a local Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) and identifying a sustainable funding model, such as the MRDT (Municipal & Regional District Tax), for this agency will be a priority for the future of local tourism.

The development of an Events and Festivals Society, as noted in Strategy 1.4, would also support growth in tourism. Programming year-round events and activities in city parks, plazas, and commercial streets, while building on the momentum of existing popular festivals, benefits residents and tourists. The Rockin' River Festival and Bass Coast Music Festival have successfully attracted thousands of visitors and drawn the interest of other festivals, such as the Canadian Bluemoon Elvis Festival. There is potential to build further on this success to develop festivals within the city such as arts festivals and other music festivals utilizing public and private venues in the city, festivals around major sporting events (World Cup Soccer, Olympics, etc.), and winter themed festivals.

Finally, with growth and development of the tourism industry in Merritt and the Nicola Valley, there may be a need to explore options for a new tourist visitor information centre in the City Centre. A larger visitor information centre would be able to accommodate a greater number of visitors at one time, provide washroom facilities, and sell souvenirs.



Transportation, Warehousing and Logistics

Merritt's location at the intersection of multiple provincial highways and available light industrial land present many opportunities for growth in the Transportation, Warehousing and Logistics industries. This industry sector is one of the top four priority sectors for business investment and attraction. An ideal example of a such an opportunity is for a distribution warehouse, where larger ground transport vehicles would deliver items to the warehouse for dispatch to other communities. Other potential opportunities include cold storage facilities and distribution as well as other food and agriculture storage and distribution services.

Ground transportation via major highways will continue to be the most viable option for transportation of goods in the Nicola Valley. Provincial highway infrastructure was severely damaged by the series of atmospheric rivers in the fall of 2021. Most of the damaged highways have re-opened and will be re-constructed with resiliency to future climate change impacts in mind.



Transport truck driving North on Highway 5.



Strategy 2.2 Determine priority sector industry challenges, opportunities, and gaps, and work with businesses to find solutions that integrate industries and strengthen supply chains.

More information is needed to better understand how to support and grow the targeted industry sectors. Some business opportunities have been identified throughout Strategy 2.1. However, an in-depth SWOT analysis for each sector and subsequent business gap analysis, would help to define and prioritize business attraction, retention, and expansion efforts.

This process should identify business opportunities that best support existing businesses by strengthening supply chains and provide employment opportunities, products, and services to residents. Integrating agriculture and manufacturing to support local area food producers is one example. More examples have been identified in Strategy 2.1.

Strategy 2.3 Develop public infrastructure to support a vibrant local economy and competitive business environment

The development of public infrastructure should meet the needs of existing businesses and keep pace with future development plans and the growth of the community. Public infrastructure includes well-maintained roads, pathways and sidewalks, as well as improving the connectivity of the community for pedestrians and encouraging active transportation. These improvements contribute to the safety, accessibility, and community appeal for both business and resident attraction.

Ensuring that municipal utilities, such as water, wastewater and storm water, keep pace with development is also crucial to ensuring continued growth of residential and commercial development. The Sanitary Sewer Utility Master Plan and the Water Utility Master Plan provide recommendations based on a conservative population projection of 9,067 by 2030 and a greater population projection of 14,496 by 2030 [18][19].

The city also has excellent fibre optic network coverage throughout the municipality with most of the area meeting the standard of 50/10 Mbps. With technological innovation and increasing reliance on digital technologies, it will be important to ensure Internet connectivity remains competitive.

Strategy 2.4 Identify opportunities to support the expansion and range of programs and services at the Merritt campus of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology

The Nicola Valley Institute of Technology currently offers several areas of study including career training in health, environmental studies, human services, education, justice studies, and trades, as well as business administration certificate and diploma programs, a Bachelor of Social Work, University transfer courses, and Continuing Studies programs.

Training and education programs currently support workforce development in agriculture and forestry, health and social assistance, construction, and hospitality (specifically culinary



arts). As noted in Strategy 2.1, there may be opportunities to expand education and training programs to support these industry sectors. The SWOT and gap analysis in Strategy 2.2 will help to identify additional needs for expanding programs to prepare workers for future job opportunities in targeted industries.

The City should work closely with NVIT to identify opportunities for training and education of City staff, such as First Aid, job skills upgrading, and customized training and education.

Strategy 2.5 Encourage entrepreneurial opportunities through support for creative workplace solutions.

A coworking space or hub would provide opportunity for more solopreneurs to kick start their businesses and would enable remote and mobile workers to have an office base in the city. Coworking spaces can offer businesses a wide range of services including renting a desk or office, wifi, utilities, bookable meeting space, and administrative support services. Other models, such as a business incubator or accelerator, provide additional supports which may include things like bookkeeping, legal and mentorship supports.

Development of multi-storey mixed use commercial buildings in the City Centre could accommodate a wide variety of creative workspace options. The City, working collaboratively with CFDC Nicola Valley and the Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce, should work to first promote the potential development opportunity and subsequently promote the availability of creative workspace options for professionals, remote workers, and other entrepreneurs.



Strategy 2.6 Explore the possibility of establishing shared food production and agricultural resources

The in-depth SWOT and business gap analysis (Strategy 2.2) will help to identify the need for shared food production and agricultural resources such as product storage, processing, sales, and distribution. This will include working collaboratively with the Thompson-Nicola Regional District and First Nations to develop a list of local area food and agriculture producers, determining their needs, and how these needs can be supported through economic development initiatives. The Food Security Assessment Report (2021) notes several economic opportunities to support agricultural resources and food production including establishing an agricultural hub with cut and wrap facilities, staff butcher, grain silos, bulk orders on feed, fertilizer, and seed, and a docking station for mobile abattoir [20].



Priority Area 3: Business Attraction and Retention

Strategy 3.1 Support economic recovery and business retention

Merritt's business community is resilient and passionate about their work. Supporting the business community through business retention initiatives is key to maintaining a solid foundation on which to grow the economy. A strong network of business support agencies is an important part of this foundation for business retention.

Working collaboratively with organizations, such as CFDC Nicola Valley, the Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, and WorkBC, the City will identify opportunities to provide resources and information to the business community. These could include workshops such as Succession Planning, Emergency Preparedness/Business Continuity Planning, as well as access to training and resources to participate in the digital marketplace (web development, online sales, social media marketing, inventory management, etc.).

Regular communication through Business Walks and e-newsletters will help build and maintain relationships with business and commercial property owners. Information about programs and resources such as wage subsidies, Work Integrated Learning, Workforce Skills Training Grants, etc. should be shared broadly to ensure our local businesses have equitable access.

A comprehensive business contact list and a plan for business owner crisis communication should be developed in advance of the next emergency.



*Joe Nemeth, Loans Officer with Community Futures Nicola Valley, and Richard Wilby of Forged Fly Fishing.
Photo courtesy of Community Futures Nicola Valley.*



Strategy 3.2 Promote Merritt as a vibrant community and an extraordinary place to live, work, play, grow, create, and do business.

Attracting residents to the city is complementary to business attraction efforts. Prospective business owners want to see that the city is an appealing place to live to attract future employees. Messaging should reinforce that Merritt is an extraordinary place to live, work, play, grow, create, and do business. To attract workers, including professionals, Merritt should be marketed as a liveable community with good housing options, an active cultural scene, and year-round outdoor recreation activities.

Strategy 3.3 Develop, maintain, and promote a business and investment friendly climate.

Business investment and attraction initiatives should be based on comprehensive data to inform investment decisions, targeted marketing that showcases the strategic advantages of doing business in Merritt, and business-friendly policies and plans that support economic growth.

Advancements in data collection technologies have made it possible for multiple software platforms to work together to present detailed information that can guide decisions related to infrastructure improvements, development, and business investment. The World Council on City Data (WCCD) has developed the ISO 37120 Series on City Data, a global standard, to enable cities to make data-driven decisions and promote sustainable, resilient, prosperous and smart growth. The City should review existing data collection for gaps and opportunities and ensure the right data is being collected to inform investment decisions. The data should then be used to update the Investment Ready Community Profile and presented on the City website to support business attraction efforts and showcase the competitive advantages of doing business in Merritt.

As identified in Strategy 2.1, business attraction efforts in the short and medium term should focus on Construction, Light Manufacturing, Tourism & Entertainment, and Transportation, Warehousing & Logistics. This will include identifying business opportunities through the gap analysis in Strategy 2.2, targeting specific businesses and identifying how their business needs align with Merritt's strategic advantages, and taking the actions required to attract these businesses to the city. Efforts should also focus on actively marketing opportunities to purchase successful local businesses.

Marketing communications should promote Merritt as a vibrant, business-friendly community, that is strategically located for business. In addition, marketing the availability and relative affordability of industrial lands, ample power supply, fibre optic network, and overall robust utility networks will be important for business attraction.

To support business investment and attraction, City plans, policies and bylaws should be easy to read and enhance Merritt's competitiveness for investors and entrepreneurs. Much of this work has been started through the 2022 OCP, this Strategy, and other plans that



provide a clear direction for the growth and development of the city. Both the Zoning Bylaw and Business Licence Bylaw were updated in 2020 and have enhanced the city's business-friendly climate. In 2021, the City lowered the industrial tax rate to be more competitive with other communities. Implementation of the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw will encourage the type of development that fits with the vision for City Centre.

Strategy 3.4 Work with School District 58 and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) to support hiring of secondary school and NVIT graduates

The Nicola Valley Institute of Technology is an asset to the community and a key resource for local workforce development to support existing and prospective businesses. Strategy 2.4 focused on supporting the expansion of NVIT programs to enhance workforce development in the eight targeted industry sectors. Supporting the hiring of local graduates, both from School District 58 and NVIT will help retain a young local workforce.

Working together with business support organizations, new and existing businesses should be encouraged to hire local graduates. In addition, the City should actively seek opportunities to hire School District 58 and NVIT students and promote available job openings to graduates..

There is also potential for the business community to connect with NVIT for research and capstone projects, as well as apprenticeship and job opportunities. NVIT's Cooperative Education and Work Integrated Learning programs are great examples of connecting students to the business community through work placements.



Nicola Valley Institute of Technology.



Strategy 3.5 Create a Regional Workforce Development Strategy

The City should partner with neighbouring municipalities, First Nations, and local businesses to develop a Regional Workforce Development Strategy, including the identification of opportunities, value addition, and synergies for existing and new business development.

The labour shortage is a complex issue that includes skills mismatch, retirement of older workers, worker transitions, technological advancements, and migration of residents and newcomers [19]. The organization of a Regional Workforce Development Roundtable would assist in determining the best strategies to address labour shortage issues in the region. This group should include private industry employers, service providers, the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, School District 58 Nicola-Similkameen, the City of Merritt, Thompson-Nicola Regional District and First Nations.

The Regional Workforce Development Strategy should address how to attract new workers to the region and ensure that training and educational opportunities match local employment opportunities and are accessible to job seekers. This may also include addressing barriers to accessing education and work opportunities such as transportation or other resources. Opportunities for Work Integrated Learning, wage subsidies, Job Creation Partnerships, internships, co-op and other youth or student work opportunities should be communicated to local employers.

Strategy 3.6 Undertake a review of land supply and infrastructure necessary to support continued commercial and industrial growth.

Undertake a review of land supply and infrastructure necessary to support continued commercial and industrial growth, including the enhancement of City-owned properties adjacent to the airport to attract airport related businesses. This strategy aligns with the industry sector gap analysis in Strategy 2.2 and with business attraction initiatives in Strategy 3.2.

Gaining an understanding of the existing commercial and industrial lands, and the needs of future business development, will inform future zoning amendments. Working with real estate agents and commercial and industrial property owners will build a greater understanding of the land that is available. In addition, understanding the infrastructure capacity servicing these lands, including water and sewer utilities, power supply, and broadband connectivity, will better inform business attraction efforts. This data can then be built into the MuniSight GIS system where it will be readily available for business inquiries.

The development of the Middlesboro Industrial Park Plan will present opportunities for a wide range of land uses.



Strategy 3.7 Create main entrances and gateways into Merritt

Merritt has the unique opportunity to draw in travellers that are heading to the Lower Mainland, Interior, or Okanagan regions. Attractive signage using distinctive urban design features and detailing, such as enhanced vegetation and landscaping, should be installed near the highway exits to notify the travelling public and residents that they have arrived at the municipality.

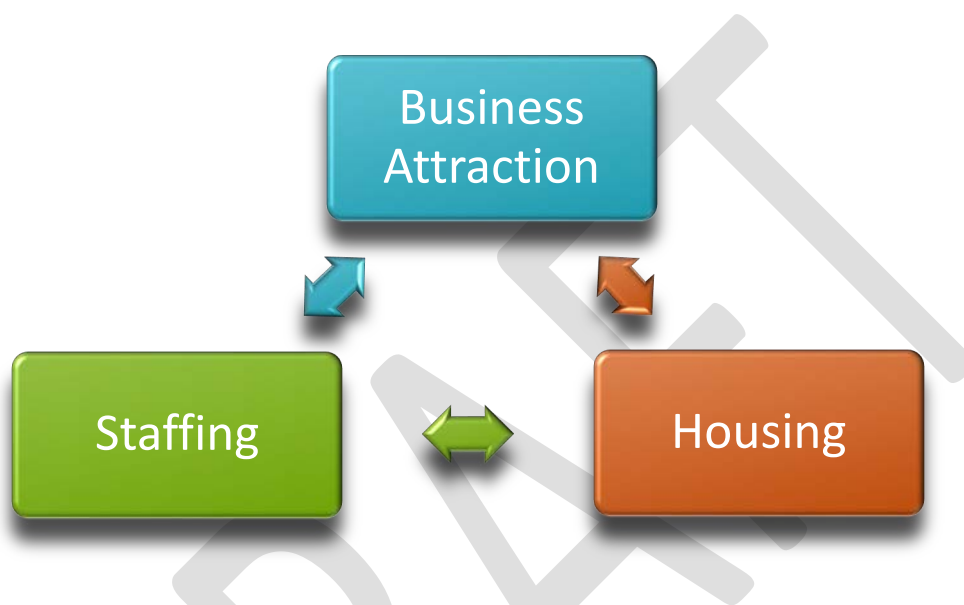
Further, once people have exited the highway, additional signage is needed to draw people to the City Centre and the businesses, restaurants, and activities that they are seeking.

In addition to signage, the appearance of the entryway corridors need improvement. This may include working with property and business owners along the entry corridor and with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.



Priority Area 4: Increase Residential Housing Supply

The housing supply shortage is a challenge throughout British Columbia, which puts increasing upward pressure on house prices and rental rates. It is a barrier to workforce attraction which subsequently impedes new business investment and economic growth. Larger employers are interested in knowing about housing availability before relocating or setting up shop in a new community. Housing development and densification is needed to meet current and future residential needs.



Strategy 4.1 Encourage housing development, mixed-use commercial, and multiple unit residential in the City Centre and Urban Villages.

Increasing the housing supply in the City Centre and Urban Villages aligns with the focus of increasing vibrancy in the City Centre (Priority Area 1) and with creating 15-minute neighbourhoods where people can access day-to-day amenities within a 15-minute walk, bike, or bus ride [3]. Development of residential units in the City Centre and other commercial districts provides the opportunity to shop, eat, work, and live all within walking distance.

Incentives, such as the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw, for the development mixed-use commercial and multiple unit residential may encourage developers to explore these opportunities. The City can also work with developers to determine locations for multi-storey development. The land supply and infrastructure review (Strategy 3.6) will assist with identifying suitable and available development locations.

Property owners can also be encouraged to explore the opportunities for housing and mixed-use commercial development. This could be particularly beneficial for owners of vacant lots or existing buildings that have the potential for redevelopment.



Regular communication with real estate agents may also assist in increasing interest in these types of development. This should include two-way communication about properties for sale, the development intentions of interested buyers, and how the City can facilitate the development process.

Strategy 4.2 Promote the availability of residential and mixed-use land within the City Centre and Urban Villages.

Housing development in the City Centre and Urban Villages can be encouraged by promoting the availability of land and the opportunity for six storey multiple unit residential and mixed-use commercial buildings to developers, property owners and real estate agents.

Information about available land and development opportunities should be promoted through the City website. Available properties should be easily identified, and regularly updated, on the MuniSight GIS map. This online information could be utilized by real estate agents and promoted via social media and direct marketing.

Promotional materials should be developed that direct interested investors to the City website, the MuniSight GIS map, Development Services information, and data that would inform an investment decision. The materials and online information could be utilized for presentations to prospective developers, investors and real estate agents.

Strategy 4.3 Establish incentives for the development of multi-unit residential, affordable housing, and mixed-use commercial in the City Centre and Urban Villages

The Housing Needs Report (2021) identified the need for more rental housing units [2]. Ensuring that there is available and affordable rental housing is important for workforce attraction. Establishing incentives to build multi-unit residential, affordable housing and mixed-use commercial in the City Centre and Urban Villages, may encourage more of this type of needed housing development. The Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw should include tax reduction incentives for the development of multi-unit residential, including rental units, and mixed-use commercial in the City Centre. Updating the Development Cost Charges Bylaw to include fee reductions for residential rental units, including affordable housing, should also be considered. Other incentives could include City Centre and Urban Village parking reductions, and density and height bonuses.

Strategy 4.4 Develop a Housing Affordability Study to maintain and enhance Merritt's relative affordability advantage

Land and housing prices are relatively affordable in Merritt compared to the Lower Mainland and the Okanagan. However, prices have risen dramatically in recent years. Affordable land is one advantage for promoting and encouraging residential or mixed-use



development. Merritt's relatively affordable housing prices are an advantage in workforce attraction. A Housing Affordability Study provides a clearer picture of the existing situation and what needs to be done to maintain that affordability advantage. The Study will inform the creation of a Housing Strategy.

Strategy 4.5 Housing Strategy

A Housing Strategy should provide clear direction on how the municipality plans to contribute to improving housing opportunities and outcomes and address the need to increase housing supply, diversity, and affordability. This may include policy or process changes and identification of how to facilitate priority residential developments. The Housing Strategy should span a five-year time frame and should be regularly updated following each update of the Housing Needs Report.

The 2021 Housing Needs report identified the need for more affordable housing, more rental units, and housing suitable for seniors [2]. As the population ages, there is a need for additional smaller housing units to accommodate seniors who are downsizing due to a smaller number of people in their household. As seniors downsize, more single-family dwellings will become available in the market. This will open more housing supply for families. However, a diverse range of housing options, including affordable rental housing, is required to accommodate all family sizes and needs. A general increase in the number of housing units will also be needed as the population grows.



Priority Area 5: Commercialization of the Merritt Airport Area

Strategy 5.1: Support business and industry expansion in and around airport lands as an economic driver for the City and region.

There are several opportunities for business growth and expansion in the airport area. The City should contact commercial and industrial airport-area property owners to inform them of potential opportunities and determine their interest and future intended use of their land. In addition, the City should include potential airport-related and flight-based business opportunities in the Merritt Airport area in business attraction efforts. This should include direct contact with current airport users, potential future flight operators, flight-based tourism businesses, and discussions with Ministry of Forests regarding expansion of use of the Merritt Airport, such as designation as a Rapattack Base.

The Merritt Airport is classified as an AGNII Non-Instrument Aerodrome. This classification restricts the type of aircraft that can use the airport. However, there are many opportunities to expand the economic impact of the Merritt Airport area. To better understand the development potential of the airport adjacent properties, a survey of the airport should be conducted, and drawings should be created which identify the Obstacle Limitation Surfaces (OLS). Once established, the OLS should be protected through regulation, such as the Development Permit process. The City should discuss protecting the OLS with the Thompson Nicola Regional District on the adjacent agricultural land outside of municipal boundaries [11].



Airplane at Merritt Airport.



Strategy 5.2 Recognize and support the Merritt Airport (YMB) as an important transportation asset for businesses and residents.

There are opportunities for growth and development of flight transportation in and out of the Merritt Airport for businesses and residents. The City should recognize and support the use of the Merritt Airport by flight-based service businesses, emergency operations, government ministries, and the potential growth of tourism businesses such as helicopter tours, hang gliding, para gliding, and sky diving. Residents and visitors also utilize the airport for personal aircraft and charter flights.

Strategy 5.3 Encourage the establishment of airport-related businesses that cater to activities for children and families.

The City should encourage and support airport-related businesses and activities that cater to children and families. Re-introducing the Annual Community Airport Day would connect youth and families with the airport and raise interest and awareness of this important community asset. The Merritt Airport has a long history dating back to the landing of the first airplane in 1919. There is opportunity for the Nicola Valley Museum and Archives to host a satellite museum that highlights Merritt's airport and flight history.

Strategy 5.4 Investigate Federal and Provincial government investment opportunities for the Merritt Airport to enhance the terminal and airport infrastructure to support airport expansion.

The City should seek funding opportunities through both the Federal and Provincial governments to support the development and expansion of airport infrastructure. Grant opportunities, such as the BC Air Access Program and the Federal Airports Capital Assistance Program, should be explored for requirements and eligible projects.

The Merritt Airport offers many unique opportunities for the growth and diversification of the local and regional economy. The City should place priority on airport improvements that will support the overall vision for this major asset. Immediate improvements that should be addressed are the installation of airport fencing and runway lighting to improve taxiways. The City should continue to identify grant funding opportunities for other airport improvements.

Accessibility between the airport and the rest of the city is limited to vehicle traffic, making it difficult for airport visitors to access businesses, restaurants, hotels, activities, and amenities. Improving active transportation and transit access between the airport and commercial districts may encourage more fly-in travellers to stop in Merritt.



Strategy 5.5: Promote the installation of hangars on lands adjacent to the airport runway, including City-owned lease lots.

Development of the lands adjacent to the airport present unique economic opportunities. The City of Merritt owns several parcels that are zoned C8 Airport Commercial which could be further developed. The C8 zoning permits uses such as warehousing, transportation and logistics, and aircraft and aviation related services and businesses. Airport adjacent lands should be enhanced with the installation of hangars for short-term or long-term storage of aircraft.

Strategy 5.6: Update the Zoning Bylaw to rezone properties adjacent to the airport runway for airport commercial.

Most of the land parcels to the northwest of the airport runway are zoned Service Commercial (C7) or Light Industrial (M1), which permit a broad range of uses. To encourage the desired mix of businesses in the airport area as well as in the other commercial districts, the City should explore rezoning airport adjacent lands to Airport Commercial (C8).

Strategy 5.7 Leverage the Airport Committee to foster airport improvements and increased commercial use.

The Airport Advisory Committee is comprised of members with experience and connections in the aviation industry. Drawing from the committee members' knowledge and expertise in the industry will inform future improvements to attract increased commercial use. A regular Airport Advisory Committee report to City Council would create more awareness of airport use and required improvements.

Implementation and Action Plan

The tables below detail the action items and timeline for each strategy as well as the measures of success for their implementation.

Update the Economic Development Strategy on a 5-year cycle

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Economic Development Strategy 2022	Lead: Development Services					
Update Economic Development Strategy						

Measures of Success: Completed Economic Development Strategy in 2022, Updated Economic Development Strategy in 2027

Priority Area 1: Promote a Vibrant City Centre

Strategy 1.1: Develop a City Centre Revitalization Plan

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Host community engagement sessions and conduct stakeholder interviews and surveys for input into the City Centre Revitalization Plan.	Lead: Development Services					
Draft and finalize the City Centre Revitalization Plan.	Lead: Development Services Others: Recreation & Facilities, Public Works & Engineering, Finance					
Implement the City Centre Revitalization Plan recommendations						

Measures of Success: Completed City Centre Revitalization Plan, Implementation of action items

Strategy 1.2: Continue with an annual program of City Centre revitalization projects

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Include City Centre revitalization projects in annual budget process	Lead: Development Services Others: Finance, Public Works & Engineering, Recreation & Facilities, City Centre Business Improvement Area					
Follow prioritized recommended projects laid out in City Centre Revitalization Plan						

Measures of Success: Number of improvement projects year over year

Strategy 1.3: Secure a location and funding for public washrooms in the City Centre

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Determine suitable location and costs of construction for public washrooms in the City Centre.	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering, Recreation & Facilities, Finance					
Determine funding source (grants, capital budget, reserves) for public washrooms in the City Centre.	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services					
Construct public washrooms in the City Centre.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering					

Measures of Success: Washrooms open daily to the public in the City Centre as well as during events, evenings and weekends.

Strategy 1.4: Support and encourage regular programming within the City Centre

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Gather community organizations and stakeholders to create an Events & Festivals Society	Lead: Development Services Others: Recreation & Facilities, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, Scw'exmx Tribal Council, Tourism Merritt & Nicola Valley, Nicola Valley Community Arts Council, Youth Council, CFDC of Nicola Valley, and other organizations					
Coordinate and host monthly Street Market events on Quilchena	Lead: Events & Festivals Society Others: Recreation & Facilities, Development Services, City Centre Business Improvement Area, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, Nicola Valley Farmers Market, CFDC of Nicola Valley, Tourism Merritt & Nicola Valley					
Promote bookable City Centre space to external agencies	Lead: Recreation & Facilities Others: Events & Festivals Society, City Centre Business Improvement Area					
Host weekly Movies in the Square	Lead: Recreation & Facilities Others: Events & Festivals Society					
Host City-planned recreation activities in Spirit Square	Lead: Recreation & Facilities					
Host weekly Music in the Square events	Lead: Recreation & Facilities Others: Events & Festivals Society					
Create a schedule of events and activities in the City Centre throughout the year	Lead: Events & Festivals Society Others: Recreation & Facilities, City Centre Business Improvement Area, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, Scw'exmx Tribal Council, Tourism Merritt & Nicola Valley, Nicola Valley Community Arts Council, Youth Council, CFDC of Nicola Valley, and other organizations					

Measures of Success: Number and frequency of regularly programmed activities and events in Spirit Square and along commercial streets.

Strategy 1.5: Encourage winter events and activities through the arts, recreation, storytelling, and festivals so that residents and tourists spend more time in the City Centre.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Consult with organizations regarding potential events and activities in the City Centre.	Lead: Recreation & Facilities Others: Development Services, City Centre Business Improvement Area, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, Scw'exmx Tribal Council, Tourism Merritt & Nicola Valley, Nicola Valley Community Arts Council, and other organizations					
Develop and implement winter event ideas, such as expansion of Merritt Country Christmas, Christmas Moonlight Madness shopping, Rockin' New Years Eve in Spirit Square, Family Day on Quilchena, Hot Chocolate Run, and Fire & Ice (chili & ice sculpture)	Lead: Events & Festivals Society Others: Recreation & Facilities, City Centre Business Improvement Area, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, Scw'exmx Tribal Council, Tourism Merritt & Nicola Valley, Nicola Valley Community Arts Council					
Plan and implement infrastructure for winter activities, such as a City Centre outdoor skating rink, improving active transportation routes and facilities, and winterizing outdoor patios and plazas	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering, Recreation & Facilities, Tourism Merritt & Nicola Valley, City Centre Business Improvement Area					

Measures of Success: Increased number of community events and activities in the winter months in the City Centre

Strategy 1.6: Enhance Spirit Square for everyday use and year-round programming and events.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Budget for annual Spirit Square Improvements	Lead: Finance Others: Recreation & Facilities, Development Services					
Plan and install conversational seating in Spirit Square	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering					
Pursue opportunities for on-site food and beverage sales in Spirit Square	Lead: Recreation & Facilities Others: Development Services					
Install weather/wind resistant shade structures in Spirit Square	Lead: Public Works & Engineering Others: Recreation & Facilities					
Perform ongoing maintenance of Spirit Square facilities	Lead: Public Works & Engineering					

Measures of Success: Increased regular use of Spirit Square year-round

Strategy 1.7: Encourage initiatives to plan and program year-round use of Spirit Square

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Implement Movies in the Square series in Spirit Square	Lead: Recreation & Facilities Others: Events & Festivals Society					
Program weekly yoga classes in Spirit Square						
Program outdoor dance fitness classes, such as Zumba, in Spirit Square						
Expand Music in the Park series to Spirit Square						
Promote use of Spirit Square to other groups & organizations	Lead: Recreation & Facilities Others: City Centre Business Improvement Area, Events & Festivals Society Event & Festivals Society					
Plan and host regular weekly and monthly events throughout the year in Spirit Square	Lead: Event & Festivals Society Others: Recreation & Facilities, City Centre Business Improvement Area, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, Scw'exmx Tribal Council, Tourism Merritt & Nicola Valley, Nicola Valley Community Arts Council, Youth Council, CFDC of Nicola Valley, and other organizations					

Measures of Success: Increased number of events and activities in Spirit Square on a regular basis year-round.

Strategy 1.8: Enhance the lane between Spirit Square and Quilchena Avenue to encourage its use as a pedestrian connection.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Budget for annual improvements and maintenance to the land between Spirit Square and Quilchena Avenue.	Lead: Finance Others: Public Works & Engineering, Development Services					
Research funding opportunities for improvements in the lane between Spirit Square and Quilchena Avenue, such as murals, green walls, street art, lighting, and other improvements	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services					
Pursue opportunities for partnerships with other organizations to improve the lane between Spirit Square and Quilchena Avenue.	Lead: Development Services Others: Nicola Valley Community Arts Council, City Centre Business Improvement Area, property and business owners, and other organizations					
Install infrastructure and improvements to encourage pedestrian traffic (lighting, bright coloured street painting, etc) through the lane between Spirit Square and Quilchena Ave.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering Others: Development Services					
<i>Measures of Success:</i> Increased pedestrian use of the lane, residents and tourists sharing social media posts with interactive art						

Strategy 1.9: Support and facilitate opportunities for short term, temporary, or shared use of City Centre commercial spaces through regulation, programs, and incentives.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Incorporate Food Truck related regulations into the Business Licence Bylaw to facilitate licensing process	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services					
Encourage the use of vacant commercial space for short term, temporary retail and food and beverage businesses in the City Centre	Lead: Development Services Others: Commercial Property Owners					
Encourage local businesses to host pop-ups shops within City Centre retail or food and beverage venues, such as a pop-up clothing shop in a craft brewery.	Lead: Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce Others: Development Services , CFDC of Nicola Valley, City Centre Business Improvement Area					
Develop informational material to promote the City's business-friendly environment for mobile vendors, pop-up shops, and food trucks	Lead: Development Services Others: CFDC of Nicola Valley, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce					

Measures of Success: Increased number of food trucks, mobile vendors, pop-up shops, and temporary shops.

Strategy 1.10: Improve and integrate winter city design through the development of buildings, the public realm, and open spaces that improve outdoor pedestrian comfort as well as public spaces that are more vibrant and inviting.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Improve the Civic Plaza by adding elements to make the space more comfortable for residents and visitors during winter.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering Others: Development Services					
Construct public washrooms in the City Centre that are open regularly, including winter evenings and weekends.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering Others: Recreation & Facilities, Development Services					
Implement public realm improvements on Quilchena Avenue to make the street more comfortable for residents and visitors to stroll and shop during winter.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering Others: Development Services					
Improve the Baillie House property by adding winter city elements to make the space more comfortable for visitors during the winter.	Lead: Nicola Valley Heritage Society					
Improve Spirit Square by adding elements to make the space more comfortable for residents and visitors during winter.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering Others: Development Services					
Improve the lane between Spirit Square and Quilchena Avenue by adding elements to make the space more comfortable for residents and visitors during winter.	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering, City Centre Business Improvement Area, property and business owners, and other organizations					

Measures of Success: Public spaces that are safer and more inviting for pedestrians during winter months

Strategy 1.11: Explore strategies and funding mechanisms to stimulate development in the City Centre.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Promote zoning regulations which permit six storey mixed use commercial and multi-unit residential developments in the City Centre to property owners and developers.	Lead: Development Services					
Promote the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw for development of mixed-use commercial and multi-storey residential in the City Centre property owners and developers.	Lead: Development Services Other: Finance, Corporate Services					
Communicate with developers, builders, and property owners to determine further initiatives to encourage development in the City Centre	Lead: Development Services					

Measures of Success: Increased development in the City Centre

Strategy 1.12: Encourage infill development of vacant parcels in the City Centre.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Initiate conversations with property owners of vacant parcels in the City Centre regarding future development of their land.	Lead: Development Services					
Inform property owners of vacant parcels in the City Centre about initiatives to encourage City Centre development such as the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw, and updated zoning regulations which permit the development of six storey developments						
Include vacant City Centre land parcels in the land and infrastructure review (Strategy 3.6)						

Investigate opportunities to purchase vacant commercial land parcels in the City Centre for City-led or partnership-based developments, such as mixed-use commercial development with coworking space, multi-storey affordable housing development, or a potential new visitor information centre	Lead: Finance Others: Recreation & Facilities, Development Services, Corporate Services					
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Measures of Success: Development of vacant parcels in the City Centre

Strategy 1.13: Encourage urban design excellence through policy and incentives.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Promote the 2022 OCP Development Permit Area guidelines for City Centre development to builders, developers and property owners.	Lead: Development Services					
Include a façade improvement program in the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services					
Include incentives for energy efficient design in the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw						
Promote the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw, which incentivizes energy efficient design and façade improvements.	Lead: Development Services					
Consider Zoning Bylaw revisions to include height or density bonuses for urban design excellence that align with the vision of a vibrant City Centre.						
Explore the possibility of implementing City-led Urban Design Awards for developments that prioritize urban design.	Lead: Corporate Services Others: Development Services					

Measures of Success: More vibrant spaces designed for function and pedestrian comfort

Strategy 1.14: Encourage an evolution of the business mix on Quilchena Avenue to be retail and restaurant focused.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Work with non-profit and government organizations, realtors, and developers to identify suitable space for relocating non-profit and government offices from Quilchena Avenue to other streets in the City Centre	Lead: Development Services Others: Non-Profit Organizations and Government offices located on Quilchena Avenue, Real Estate Agents, Developers					
Promote the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw to encourage development to suit restaurants and retail businesses on Quilchena Avenue.	Lead: Development Services Others: Finance, Corporate Services					

Measures of Success: Fewer non-profit and government organizations located on Quilchena Avenue, More unique retail businesses and diverse range of restaurant options located on Quilchena, Business Improvement Area implemented

Strategy 1.15: Implement a Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw for the City Centre

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Draft Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw for Council Adoption	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services, Finance					
Implement Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw.						
Promote Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw to commercial property owners and developers in the City Centre.						

Measures of Success: Implementation of the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw that encourages development to support a vibrant City Centre

Strategy 1.16: Develop a façade improvement program for the City Centre.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Include a façade improvement program in the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw.	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services					
Budget funds annually for the façade improvement program.	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services					
Promote the façade improvement program to City Centre property owners and businesses.	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services, City Centre Business Improvement Area					

Measures of Success: More City Centre buildings with updated facades to improve the streetscape and vibrancy of the City Centre

Strategy 1.17: Creation of a Business Improvement Area in the City Centre

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Consult with stakeholders regarding the creation of a City Centre Business Improvement Area.	Lead: Development Services					
Determine the Business Improvement Area boundaries, vision, purpose, and structure	Others: City Centre commercial property owners and business owners					
Creation and City Council adoption of the City Centre Business Improvement Area Bylaw	Lead: Corporate Services Others: Finance, Development Services					
Implement City Centre Business Improvement Area	Lead: Development Services Others: City Centre commercial property owners and business owners					

Measures of Success: City Centre Business Improvement Area implementation.

Strategy 1.18: Transform Quilchena Avenue into a shared street or pedestrian street.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Implement the action items in Strategies 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, and 1.9 – 1.17 to improve streetscape, active transportation, beautification, and increase events and activities in the City Centre, specifically on Quilchena Avenue, throughout the year.	Lead: Various as outlined in above strategies. Others: Various as outlined in above strategies.					
Budget for Quilchena Avenue pilot projects to transition the street from vehicle to pedestrian use.	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services, Public Works & Engineering					
Implement pilot projects to gradually transition Quilchena Avenue from vehicle to pedestrian use.	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering					
Budget for Quilchena Avenue redesign and construction.	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services, Public Works & Engineering					
Source grant funding for Quilchena Avenue redesign and construction	Lead: Public Works & Engineering Others: Development Services					
Design and construct Pedestrian Street on Quilchena Avenue.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering Others: Development Services					

Measures of Success: Vibrant City Centre main street that is ready for a pedestrian or shared street design; Pedestrian/shared street design constructed.

Priority Area 2: Economic Diversification & Growth

Strategy 2.1: Target Key Industry Sectors for Diversification & Growth

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Promote and encourage technological innovation across all industry sectors.	Lead: Development Services					
Agriculture & Forestry						
Work with the Forest Tenures Branch of the Province of BC to investigate the opportunity for a Community Forest License for the City of Merritt	Lead: Development Services Others: Province of BC					
Educate property owners about the potential for urban agriculture within municipal boundaries, including residential zones (R1, R1A, R2, and R3).	Lead: Development Services					
Work with local First Nations, Thompson-Nicola Regional District, and food producers to establish an abattoir locally.	Lead: Development Services Others: TNRD areas M and N, Coldwater Indian Band, Lower Nicola Indian Band, Nooaitch Indian Band, Shackan Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, agricultural food producers					
Encourage agricultural producers to diversify their crops, such as orchards, vineyards, and beverage production.	Lead: Development Services					
Encourage and promote the establishment of agri-tourism businesses.	Lead: Development Services Others: Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, CFDC of Nicola Valley					
Construction						
Promote opportunities for the establishment of more construction and trades businesses to support growth in the construction sector.	Lead: Development Services Others: Southern Interior Construction Association, Planning Institute of BC, Association of BC Land Surveyors, Engineers & Geoscientists of BC					
Promote opportunities for professional services that support the construction industry, such as planners, surveyors, engineers, and architects.						
Maintain City development and building processes to ensure construction continues to thrive.	Lead: Development Services					

Strategy 2.1: Target Key Industry Sectors for Diversification & Growth

Work collaboratively with NVIT, School District 58, and local tradespeople to increase local apprenticeship opportunities	Lead: Development Services Others: NVIT, School District 58, Trades Businesses					
Healthcare						
Promote Merritt as an attractive location for wellness retreats and spas.	Lead: Development Services					
Promote Merritt's lifestyle advantages, such as recreation amenities and proximity to larger centres, to attract physicians and other healthcare professionals.	Lead: Development Services Others: Interior Health					
Promote the development of a multi-office professional building that could support medical and other professional services within the City Centre.	Lead: Development Services Others: Commercial Property Owners, Real Estate Agencies, Developers, Builders, Interior Health					
Work with NVIT to support their plans for expansion of healthcare education and training programs.	Lead: Development Services Others: Nicola Valley Institute of Technology					
Work with Interior Health to expand services at the Nicola Valley Hospital and Health Centre.	Lead: Development Services Others: Interior Health, Nicola Valley Health Care Endowment Foundation					
Light Manufacturing						
Hire a consultant to develop the Middlesboro Industrial Park Plan to support multiple mid-sized green and innovative manufacturing businesses in the Middlesboro Industrial area.	Lead: Development Services					
Identify and attract innovative and green manufacturing businesses through direct marketing methods, such as cold calling and industry presentations.						
Promote industrial land availability and opportunities throughout the city.	Lead: Real Estate Agencies Others: Development Services					
Remote Work & Home-based Business						
Promote the development of co-work space to developers and commercial property owners to provide work and meeting space for remote workers, consultants, and other professionals.	Lead: Development Services					

Strategy 2.1: Target Key Industry Sectors for Diversification & Growth

Develop and maintain a list of Merritt home-based businesses to ensure they are kept informed of business events, activities and opportunities.	Lead: Development Services Others: CFDC of Nicola Valley, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce					
Educate home-based business owners and business support agencies about improvements to the OCP, Zoning Bylaw, and other City plans and bylaws which allow more flexibility to home-based business operations throughout the city.	Lead: Development Services Others: CFDC of Nicola Valley, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce					
Promote home-based business opportunities, such as bed and breakfast accommodations, professional services, consultants, and trades, in business attraction initiatives.	Lead: Development Services Others: CFDC of Nicola Valley					
Retail & Hospitality						
Attract unique boutique retail shops to the City Centre	Lead: Development Services					
Attract more diverse restaurant options to the City Centre						
Promote the opportunity for shared and temporary use of commercial space to property owners and prospective business owners						
Tourism & Entertainment						
Hire a consultant to develop a 5-year Tourism Plan	Lead: Development Services					
Determine and develop the appropriate governance structure for a local Destination Marketing Organization (DMO)	Others: Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, Destination BC, Indigenous Tourism BC, Tourism Nicola Valley, Thompson-Nicola Regional District, Coldwater Indian Band, Lower Nicola Indian Band, Nooaitch Indian Band, Shackan Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, Nicola Valley Heritage Society, Accommodation and Hospitality businesses, other Tourism Stakeholders					
Identify and implement a sustainable funding model for tourism marketing, such as the MRDT						
Implement action items in the Tourism Plan.						
Update the Tourism Plan every 5 years						
Promote outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities to attract visitors to Merritt and the Nicola Valley.	Lead: Designated Destination Marketing Organization Others: Merritt Mountain Bike Club, Nicola Valley Explorers, Nicola Valley Nordic Ski Club					

Strategy 2.1: Target Key Industry Sectors for Diversification & Growth

Promote festivals, events, and arts, culture, and heritage to attract visitors to Merritt and the Nicola Valley.	Lead: Designated Destination Marketing Organization Others: Event & Festivals Society, Nicola Valley Community Arts Council, Nicola Valley Heritage Society					
Promote tourism business opportunities and build on existing tourism business attraction materials to attract tourism businesses that will support tourism growth and development such as activity tours, guided tours, activity equipment rentals and more.	Lead: Development Services					
Hire a consultant to create the Claybanks Development Plan to maximize the tourism potential of this property.	Lead: Recreation & Facilities Others: Development Services					
Implement recommendations from the Claybanks Development Plan.						
Explore the costs and potential locations for a new visitor information centre in the City Centre.	Lead: Development Services Others: Recreation & Facilities, Nicola Valley Heritage Society					
Transportation, Warehousing, & Logistics						
Promote Merritt as an ideal Southern Interior hub location for ground shipping, distribution, and warehousing						
Attract transportation, warehousing, and logistics businesses through direct marketing methods.	Lead: Development Services					
Explore opportunities for transportation, warehousing & logistics businesses to support other industry sectors such as cold storage and distribution for agriculture.						

Measures of Success: Growth and development in each industry sector with a priority focus on Construction, Light Manufacturing, Tourism & Entertainment and Transportation, Warehousing & Logistics

Strategy 2.2: Determine priority sector industry challenges, opportunities, and gaps, and work with businesses to find solutions that integrate industries and strengthen supply chains.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Conduct an in-depth SWOT analysis for each of the targeted industry sectors.	Lead: Development Services					
Conduct a detailed business gap analysis for each industry sector to identify business opportunities to support existing businesses, residents, tourists, and strengthen supply chains.						
Prioritize business attraction efforts towards opportunities that support existing businesses and strengthen supply chains.						

Measures of Success: A comprehensive list of businesses that would support the growth of the local economy and the needs of residents, tourists, and businesses; The number of new businesses that support existing industries and businesses

Strategy 2.3: Develop public infrastructure to support a vibrant local economy and competitive business environment.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Ensure annual budgets and plans allow for continued improvements and maintenance of municipal infrastructure such as roads, sidewalks, paths, lighting, and water and sewer.	Lead: Finance Others: Public Works & Engineering					
Review development proposals to ensure servicing and utility improvements meet long-term demands including growth and development of commercial and industrial areas.	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering					
Pursue funding opportunities to support expansion of the active transportation network and facilities as per the Active Transportation Plan.	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services, Public Works & Engineering					

Measures of Success: Public infrastructure that is implemented, maintained and improved to meet future demands and provide for a vibrant and competitive business environment.

Strategy 2.4: Identify opportunities to support the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology to expand the range of programs and services at the Merritt campus.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Initiate and maintain communication with the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) regarding plans for expansion of education, workforce development, and training programs.	Lead: Development Services Others: Nicola Valley Institute of Technology					
Share information about the City's strategies for economic growth and diversification, and business and industry attraction with NVIT.						
Support Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) to increase enrollment in academic programs through communication with businesses.	Lead: Development Services Others: Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, CFDC of Nicola Valley, and local businesses and organizations					
Seek opportunities to utilize NVIT for City staff training, such as first aid training, job skills upgrading, and cultural sensitivity training.	Lead: Human Resources Others: NVIT, All City Departments					

Measures of Success: Strong working relationship between the City and NVIT; Workforce development supported by local training and education programs.

Strategy 2.5: Encourage entrepreneurial opportunities through support for creative workplace solutions.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Work collaboratively with business support agencies to further develop and promote a co-work space hub to remote workers, solopreneurs, consultants and professionals.	Lead: Development Services Other: Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, CFDC of Nicola Valley					
Work collaboratively with business support agencies to develop and promote an online hub or digital marketplace for local businesses.	Lead: Development Services Other: Small Business BC, BC Farmers' Market, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, CFDC of Nicola Valley,					

Measures of Success: More professionals, consultants, remote workers and solopreneurs working in the City Centre.

Strategy 2.6: Explore the possibility of establishing shared food production and agricultural resources.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Working with neighbouring communities, establish an agriculture working group to discuss opportunities for shared resources and future needs for sustainability and growth in this sector	Lead: Development Services Others: TNRD, Coldwater Indian Band, Lower Nicola Indian Band, Nooaitch Indian Band, Shackan Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, Small Scale Meat Producers, BC Farmers' Market Association, Nicola Valley agricultural and food producers, and landowners					
Gather resources needed to carry out identified initiatives by the agricultural working group.	Lead: Agricultural Working Group Others: Development Services					
Implement initiatives identified by the agricultural working group.						

Measures of Success: Establishment of an Agricultural Working Group.

Priority Area 3: Business Attraction and Retention

Strategy 3.1: Support economic recovery and business retention

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Continue to work collaboratively on economic and business development initiatives with economic development organizations.	Lead: Development Services Others: Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery, & Innovation (JERI), ETSI-BC, BC Economic Development Association (BCEDA), CFDC Nicola Valley, Merritt & District Chamber, WorkBC, Tourism Nicola Valley					
Support the Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce in their growth and development to become the voice of business in Merritt.	Lead: Development Services Others: Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce					
Support CFDC Nicola Valley in the growth and development of their business start-up and support services, and community economic development initiatives in the Nicola Valley.	Lead: Development Services Others: CFDC of Nicola Valley					
Maintain e-newsletter communication with business owners, non-profit organizations, and other economic development stakeholders in the Nicola Valley.	Lead: Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce Others: Development Services, CFDC Nicola Valley, WorkBC					
Resume annual Business Walks to determine needs and concerns of local businesses and how to address these issues.	Lead: Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce Others: Development Services, CFDC Nicola Valley, WorkBC					
Deliver workshops on business emergency preparedness and continuity planning.	Leads: CFDC Nicola Valley Others: Development Services					
Deliver workshops on succession planning and other workshops identified by business owners through Business Walk interviews.	Lead: Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce Others: Development Services					
Develop and maintain a business contact list for crisis communications with commercial and industrial property owners and business owners during emergencies.	Lead: Development Services Others: Fire & Rescue, Corporate Services, Finance, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, CFDC of Nicola Valley					

Measures of Success: Regular meetings with business support organizations; The number of businesses retained or supported through workshops; The number of jobs created or maintained

Strategy 3.2: Promote Merritt as a vibrant city and an extraordinary place to live, work, play, grow, create, and do business.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Develop and implement a marketing campaign (such as magazine ads, billboards, online publications, TV and radio, and promotions at events) to promote Merritt as a vibrant city and an extraordinary place to live, work, play, grow, create, and do business to attract prospective business owners and workers, with a focus on young families.	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services					
Include annual funding in the Economic Development budget for marketing and attraction of prospective business owners and workers.	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services					

Measures of Success: Increased number of inquiries about Merritt amenities, services, and work opportunities; Increased number of residents under 50 years of age.

Strategy 3.3: Develop, maintain, and promote a business and investment friendly climate.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Seek funding opportunities to support WCCD ISO 37120 certification for city data to support business attraction.	Lead: Finance Others: All City Departments					
Pursue ISO 37120 Series certification process to support business attraction.	Lead: Development Services Others: All City Departments					
Update and maintain the economic development and data sections of the City of Merritt website to support business investment and attraction	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services					
Update and maintain the Investment Ready Community Profile every five years	Lead: Development Services					
Fund marketing and attraction activities to show Merritt as a vibrant, business-friendly community, that is strategically located for business.	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services					

Prioritize business attraction efforts on the businesses identified through the gap analysis (Strategy 2.2)that strengthen industry supply chains and existing businesses.	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services				
Promote the city's strategic advantages such as an ample power supply, data fibre network and overall robust utility networks, as well as business friendly regulations, to attract business investment.					
Use direct marketing methods, such as cold calling and presentations, to attract specific businesses.					
Promote business opportunities through local, regional, and provincial business support agencies and industry associations.	Lead: Development Services Others: Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, CFDC of Nicola Valley, industry and professional associations				
Review and evaluate progress of business attraction efforts.	Lead: Development Services				
Ensure new policies, bylaws, and plans for economic development are clear and easy to read to attract business investment and entrepreneurs	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services				

Measures of Success: Number of new businesses from the targeted industry sectors; number of jobs created; Increased new business investment in Merritt that fill identified gaps in products and services and supports the needs of existing businesses, residents and tourists; Number of new businesses from the targeted industry sectors; number of jobs created

Strategy 3.4: Work with School District 58 and Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) to support the hiring of secondary school and NVIT graduates.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Work with School District 58 to promote hiring opportunities for SD58 graduates by new and existing businesses in Merritt and the Nicola Valley.	Lead: Development Services Others: SD58, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, CFDC of Nicola Valley, and local businesses and organizations					
Post City job postings with SD58 and seek opportunities to hire SD58 graduates for City positions	Lead: Human Resources Others: All City Departments					
Work with NVIT to promote hiring opportunities for NVIT graduates by new and existing businesses in Merritt and the Nicola Valley.	Lead: Development Services Others: NVIT, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, CFDC of Nicola Valley, and local businesses and organizations					
Post City job postings with NVIT and seek opportunities to hire NVIT graduates for City positions	Lead: Human Resources Others: All City Departments					
Promote opportunities for NVIT students to work with organizations for research or capstone projects	Lead: Development Services Others: NVIT, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, CFDC of Nicola Valley					
Promote NVIT cooperative education, apprenticeship placements, and Work Integrated Learning opportunities to local businesses.						

Measures of Success: Increased number of SD58 and NVIT graduates employed locally in their field of study; Increased number of SD58 and NVIT graduates employed at the City.

Strategy 3.5: Create a Regional Workforce Development Strategy

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Organize a roundtable to identify the workforce development needs of the region and how the partners can work together	Lead: Development Services Others: Thompson-Nicola Regional District, Coldwater Indian Band, Lower Nicola Indian Band, Nooaitch Indian Band, Shackan Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, WorkBC, NVIT, School District 58, Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce, medium to large employers from different industry sectors					
Develop a Regional Workforce Development Strategy using input from the roundtable.	Lead: Development Services Others: Regional Workforce Development Roundtable					

Measures of Success: A Workforce Development Strategy that connects job seekers with skills training and job opportunities, and supports the growth of the targeted industry sectors.

Strategy 3.6: Undertake a review of land supply and infrastructure necessary to support continued commercial and industrial growth.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Conduct a review of commercial and industrial land supply and infrastructure	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering					
Incorporate land supply and infrastructure review data into the MuniSight GIS platform						
Update the land supply and infrastructure data on the MuniSight GIS platform on a weekly basis						
Maintain regular communication with real estate agents, and commercial and industrial property owners regarding available land and infrastructure improvements	Lead: Development Services Others: Commercial & Industrial Property Owners, Real Estate Agents					
Continually monitor City infrastructure to determine necessary improvements or replacement.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering Others: Development Services					

Measures of Success: Up-to-date information on available industrial and commercial lands and infrastructure servicing.

Strategy 3.7: Create main entrances and gateways into Merritt

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Secure funding for main entrance signage on exits off Highway 5, Highway 97C and entry from Highway 8 to encourage travellers to visit Merritt.	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services, Public Works & Engineering, Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure (MOTI)					
Design and install gateway signage to encourage travellers to visit Merritt.	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering, MOTI					
Secure funding for signage on Nicola Avenue and Voght Street welcoming visitors to the City Centre.	Lead: Finance Others: Development Services, Public Works & Engineering, Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure (MOTI)					
Design and install signage on Nicola Avenue and Voght Street welcoming visitors to the City Centre.	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering, MOTI					
Work with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) to improve the appearance of entryway corridors including exploration of the transfer of Nicola Avenue to the City.	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services, Public Works & Engineering, Finance, MOTI					
Continue working with property owners to improve the appearance of properties along Nicola Avenue and Voght Street, including processing of Development Permit applications.	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services, Public Works & Engineering, MOTI					

Measures of Success: Improved and attractive signage at entryways that draw visitors into the community and into the City Centre.

Priority Area 4: Increase Residential Housing Supply

Strategy 4.1: Encourage housing development, mixed-use commercial, and multiple unit residential in the City Centre and Urban Villages

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Promote the opportunity to build six storey multi-unit residential and mixed-use commercial developments in the City Centre and Urban Villages to developers, builders, real estate agents, and commercial property owners.	Lead: Development Services Others: Developers, Builders, Real Estate Agents, City Centre and Urban Village property owners					
Include incentives for City Centre multi-unit residential and mixed-use commercial developments in the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw.	Lead: Development Services					
Work with developers and real estate agents to identify locations for housing development, mixed-use commercial, and multiple unit residential in the City Centre and Urban Villages	Lead: Development Services Others: Developers, Builders, Real Estate Agents, City Centre and Urban Village property owners					
Maintain up-to-date information on available land and condition of infrastructure to support development.	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering					

Measures of Success: Increased housing development, mixed-use commercial, and multiple unit residential in the City Centre and Urban Villages.

Strategy 4.2: Promote the availability of residential and mixed-use land within the City Centre and Urban Villages.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Schedule regular meetings with developers, builders, & real estate agents to acquire information on the availability of land zoned for multi-unit residential and mixed-use commercial in the City Centre and Urban Villages.	Lead: Development Services Others: Developers, Builders, Real Estate Agents					
Add a layer to MuniSight GIS map to show available land zoned for multi-unit residential and mixed-use commercial in the City Centre and Urban Villages and update weekly.	Lead: Development Services					
Develop resources on the availability of land zoned for multi-unit residential and mixed use commercial in the City Centre and Urban Villages, including the use of the City website, MuniSight GIS, and other communication platforms.	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services					

Measures of Success: Increased interest and inquiries about developing residential and mixed-use buildings within the City Centre and Urban Villages.

Strategy 4.3: Establish incentives for the development of multi-unit residential, affordable housing, and mixed-use commercial in the City Centre and Urban Villages

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Include tax reduction incentives in the Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw for mixed-use commercial and multi-unit residential, including rental units, in the City Centre.	Lead: Development Services					
Update the Development Cost Charges Bylaw to include fee reductions for development of residential rental units, including affordable rental housing.	Lead: Development Services					
Explore a parking requirement reduction for rental housing development in the City Centre and Urban Villages.						
Explore density and height bonuses for residential rental units in the City Centre and Urban Villages.						
Promote incentives for the development in the City Centre and Urban Villages to prospective developers, property owners, real estate agents	Lead: Development Services Others: Developers, Builders, Real Estate Agents					

Measures of Success: Increased interest in development of multi-unit residential rental, affordable housing, and mixed-use commercial units in the City Centre and Urban Villages.

Strategy 4.4: Develop a Housing Affordability Study to maintain and enhance Merritt's relative affordability advantage within the context of the Lower Mainland and Okanagan

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Hire a consultant to conduct a Housing Affordability Study	Lead: Development Services					

Measures of Success: A Housing Affordability Study that provides a clear picture of the existing situation and what needs to be done to maintain Merritt's affordability advantage as compared to other areas of BC.

Strategy 4.5: Develop a Housing Strategy

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Hire a consultant to develop a Housing Strategy	Lead: Development Services					
Utilize the information in the Housing Affordability Study to inform the development of a Housing Strategy						
Implement recommendations from the Housing Strategy						
Update the Housing Strategy every five years following updates to the Housing Needs Report.						

Measures of Success: A Housing Strategy that provides clear recommendations for updates and changes to municipal policies and processes to improve housing opportunities and outcomes, and address the need to increase housing supply, diversity, and affordability.

Priority Area 5: Commercialization of the Merritt Airport Area

Strategy 5.1: Support business and industry expansion in and around airport lands as an economic driver for the City and region.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Recognize and promote the airport as an AGNII Non-Instrument Aerodrome.	Lead: Development Services					
Research potential commercial expansion in the Merritt Airport area, including business opportunities such as airport-based tourism activities, flight training school, forestry training centre, and aircraft maintenance.	Lead: Development Services					
Initiate discussions with operators of airport-based and flight-related businesses in other communities to understand their business needs and gauge their potential interest in relocating or expanding to Merritt.	Others: Airport Advisory Committee, property owners in the airport area					
Work with property owners in the Merritt Airport area to identify potential business and development opportunities for their properties.						
Include airport-related businesses and flight-based tourism businesses in the business gap analysis (Strategy 2.2)	Lead: Development Services					
Include airport-related businesses and flight-based tourism businesses in the business attraction efforts (Strategy 3.2)	Others: Airport Advisory Committee					
Initiate discussions with the Ministry of Forests regarding expanded use of airport for wildfire response training or operations, such as a Rapattack base.	Lead: Development Services					
Hire surveyors to conduct an airport survey and Obstacle Limitation Surfaces (OLS) analysis, including the creation of drawings.	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering					
Protect the OLS through regulation, such as the Development Permit Process.	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services					
Work with Thompson-Nicola Regional District to ensure OLS is protected on lands outside of municipal boundaries.	Lead: Development Services Others: Corporate Services, Thompson-Nicola Regional District					

Measures of Success: Increased development of vacant commercial and industrial parcels near the Merritt airport; Increased number of businesses operating on airport adjacent lands and utilizing the airport; An Obstacle Limitation Surface survey and drawings that identify development restrictions (such as building height) in the Merritt Airport area.

Strategy 5.2: Recognize and support the Merritt Airport (YMB) as an important transportation asset for businesses and residents.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Recognize and support the Merritt Airport as an important transportation asset for tourism businesses such as helicopter tours (including fishing, skiing, and scenic), hang gliding, paragliding, and sky diving.	Lead: Development Services Others: Airport Advisory Committee					
Recognize and support the Merritt Airport as an important transportation asset for residents including use of personal aircraft, charter flights, and emergency services.						

Measures of Success: Increased number of flights in and out of the Merritt Airport to support the needs of businesses, residents, and tourists.

Strategy 5.3 Encourage the establishment of airport-related businesses that cater to activities for children and families.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Re-introduce Annual Community Airport Day	Lead: Airport Advisory Committee Others: Public Works & Engineering, Development Services, Corporate Services					
Explore the opportunity to develop an Airport Museum	Lead: Nicola Valley Museum & Archives Others: Development Services, Airport Advisory Committee					
Support the development of airport-related businesses that cater to children and families.	Lead: Development Services Others: Airport Advisory Committee					

Measures of Success: More activities for families and children; Increased awareness of the airport.

Strategy 5.4 Investigate Federal and Provincial government investment opportunities for the Merritt Airport to expand the terminal and airport infrastructure to support airport expansion.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Apply for BC Air Access Program funding for airport lighting, fencing and other infrastructure improvements.	Lead: Finance Others: Airport Advisory Committee, Public Works & Engineering					
Research the Federal Airports Capital Assistance Program for eligible airport improvement projects and costs.						
Research other provincial and federal funding opportunities to support airport expansion.						
Secure funding for airport lighting and fencing, and other airport improvements through the BC Air Access Program.	Lead: Finance Others: Public Works & Engineering					
Install airport lighting and fencing.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering					
Explore funding opportunities for the improvement of taxiways.	Lead: Finance Others: Airport Advisory Committee, Public Works & Engineering					
Evaluate options and develop a plan for improving active transportation and transit accessibility between the Merritt Airport and the rest of the city.	Lead: Development Services Others: Public Works & Engineering, Airport Advisory Committee					
Hire consultant(s) to design and construct active transportation accessibility improvements between the Merritt Airport and the rest of the city.	Lead: Public Works & Engineering					

Measures of Success: Funding secured to support airport lighting, fencing and infrastructure improvements; Funding to support other airport expansion projects; Improved active transportation and transit connections between the airport and commercial districts, Improved safety features to enable more flights in and out of the airport, particularly outside of daylight hours;

Strategy 5.5: Promote the installation of hangars on lands adjacent to the airport runway, including City-owned lease lots.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Consult with commercial and industrial property owners in the Merritt Airport area regarding intended land use.	Lead: Development Services Others: Commercial and industrial property owners in the Merritt Airport area					
Consult with the Airport Advisory Committee and their network to determine demand for hangars.	Lead: Development Services Others: Airport Advisory Committee					
Explore costs of hangar installation on City-owned property adjacent to the Merritt Airport runway.	Lead: Development Services					
Promote the installation of hangars on airport adjacent lands to property owners of lands adjacent to the Merritt Airport runway.	Lead: Development Services Others: Airport Advisory Committee, property owners of runway adjacent lands					

Measures of Success: Increased number of hangars installed on lands adjacent to the airport runway; Regular use of hangars to support flight-based and airport-related business activities.

Strategy 5.6: Update the Zoning Bylaw to rezone properties adjacent to the airport runway for airport commercial.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Consult with commercial and industrial property owners in the Merritt Airport area regarding intended land use.	Lead: Development Services					
Rezone airport adjacent properties to Airport Commercial (C8) to support the desired economic growth in the airport area.						

Measures of Success: Development of the desired business mix in the airport area.

Strategy 5.7: Leverage the Airport Committee to foster airport improvements and increased commercial use.

Action	Responsibility	2022/23	2024/25	2026/27	2028/29	2030/31
Continue regular meetings of the Airport Advisory Committee (minimum of four times per year).	Lead: Corporate Services Others: Airport Advisory Committee, Public Works & Engineering, Development Services					
Continue regular communications between the Airport Advisory Committee members and City Departments.	Lead: Airport Advisory Committee Others: Development Services, Public Works & Engineering, Recreation & Facilities					
Present a report of airport statistics and highlights to City Council annually.	Lead: Airport Advisory Committee Others: Corporate Services					
Continue to explore suggestions from the Airport Advisory Committee members to support economic development of airport area.	Lead: Development Services Others: Airport Advisory Committee					

Measures of Success: Increased economic development in the Merritt Airport area; Airport infrastructure improvements to support increased commercial use.

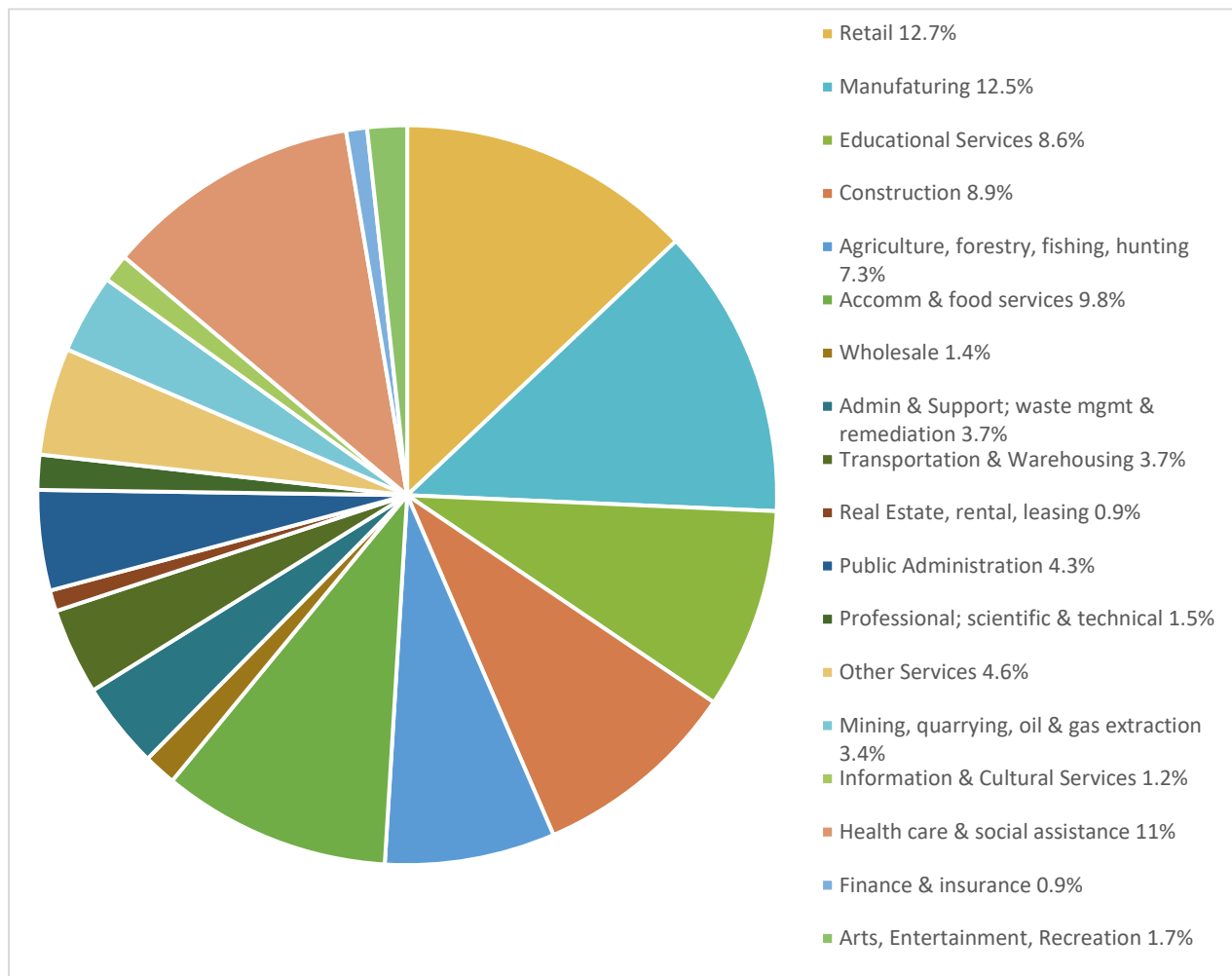
Appendices



Appendix A: Economic Background

Historically, Merritt was built on ranching, mining, and logging. According to the 2016 Census, the largest number of occupations is in Retail Trade (Figure 1). Much has changed since the 2016 Census including the closure of the Tolko Mill, a loss of more than 200 jobs and indirect impact to several others who were employed as contractors or suppliers. The 2020 Census data on occupations had not yet been released at the time of this publication.

Figure 1: Occupations by Industry



As of March 31, 2022, there were 538 business licenses in the City of Merritt. Some of these licenses were for businesses located outside of municipal boundaries that provide services within Merritt. The business license applicant self-selects the industry classification for their business on the license application form. The top ten industry sectors in Merritt by business license, based on the 2022 business license list, is shown in the chart below. Manufacturing represents a smaller number of business licenses, but remains one of the largest employers.

RETAIL TRADE	59	10.97%
CONSTRUCTION	56	10.41%
ACCOMODATION AND FOOD SERVICES	52	9.67%
OTHER SERVICES (EXCEPT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION)	30	5.58%
HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	26	4.83%
Non Profit Organization	19	3.53%
REAL ESTATE AND RENTAL AND LEASING	18	3.35%
GENERAL LICENCE	13	2.42%
FINANCE AND INSURANCE	11	2.04%
MANUFACTURING	11	2.04%

Merritt's location and connectivity to the BC Interior and Fraser Valley is a key asset that presents both opportunities and challenges. Merritt has developed a reputation as a stopping point for travelers to fuel up on trips between the coast and interior. The short drive to larger municipalities also makes it easy for local residents to access goods, services, and activities elsewhere creating consumer leakage. Conversely, there is opportunity for businesses to locate in Merritt and serve nearby communities.

Appendix B: Linkages to Other City Plans and Documents

The Economic Development Strategy has been developed in alignment with other City and regional plans and documents.

Official Community Plan 2022

The City of Merritt has been in the process of updating the Official Community Plan (OCP) since early 2020. COVID-19 public health restrictions, as well as evacuation alerts and orders due to wildfires and floods, have delayed the completion of the project. A draft plan was made public in late October 2021 and a revised draft was released in April 2022. The Economic Development Strategy is directly linked to the key priorities and strategies in Section 5 of the OCP (2022) Our Economy.



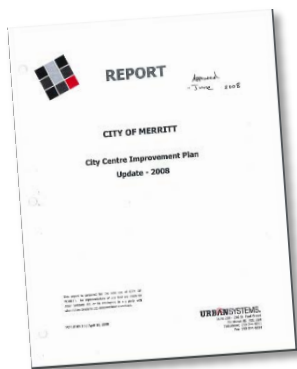
The overarching goal in Section 5 of the OCP is: Grow and Diversify the local economy to attract investment and support a viable, diverse, and sustainable economic future for the people and businesses of Merritt. In addition to the goal statement, the proposed OCP outlines the following economic objectives:

- Objective 1: Promote a Vibrant City Centre
- Objective 2: Support Initiatives for Economic Diversification and Growth
- Objective 3: Support Business Attraction and Retention
- Objective 4: Increase Residential Housing Supply in City Centre and Urban Villages to Support Local Businesses
- Objective 5: Promote the Continued Commercialization of the Merritt Airport [3]

Economic Development Action Plan 2014/2015

The previous Economic Development Action Plan was developed in 2014/2015. The plan contained five key focus areas and 27 strategic actions. All of the recommendations within the plan have been explored. Some projects are ongoing, while others have been completed. The new Economic Development Strategy builds on the actions completed from this plan and examines the current and future economic development needs of the community. [8]





City Centre Improvement Plan 2008

The 2008 City Centre Improvement Plan included recommendations for improvements from Central Park to Claybanks. Several initiatives were completed, while others were delayed for various reasons. Many of the initiatives in the plan that have not yet been achieved are still relevant and should be reviewed with the development of the City Centre Revitalization Plan. [9]



Thriving Communities (2020)

The Thriving Communities Labour Market Study, completed in February 2020 by Community Futures Thompson Country, with support from Community Futures Nicola Valley and the City, provides detailed information about Merritt's unique labour market and recommendations to address labour market challenges and opportunities. The report also makes recommendations about economic diversification and opportunities for Merritt to be a leader in emerging industries.[10]



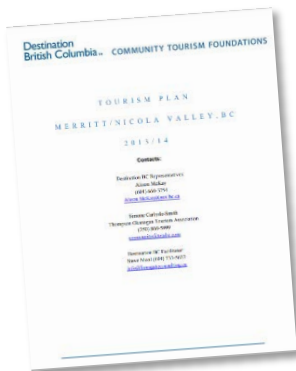
Airport Development Plan Review (2019)

The Airport Development Plan Review provides an analysis of the current airport uses and airport classification. The report suggested a potential change in airport classification, depending on the future vision for the airport and adjacent lands. However, due to adjacent land development, the Merritt Airport will maintain its current airport classification of AGNII Non-Instrument Aerodrome. Planning and business attraction strategies will need to focus on uses appropriate for this classification. [11]



Tourism Asset Inventory (2018)

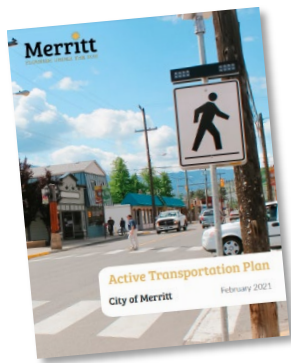
The Tourism Asset Inventory is a report on regional and global trends in tourism as well as the status of tourism in Merritt. The report presents a gap analysis and opportunities for the growth of tourism businesses. Many of the recommendations from this report are reflected in Section 2.1 Tourism [12].



Merritt/Nicola Valley Tourism Plan 2013/2014

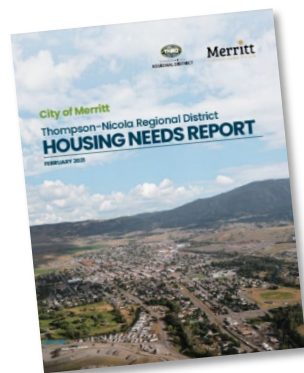
This plan identified three strategic priorities with several action items under each. Actions such as the Wayfinding Strategy and Tourism Asset Inventory, as well as several other action items, were completed. The proposed actions in Section 2.1 Tourism address the remaining recommendations from this plan. A new five-year plan is needed to provide future direction for tourism [13].

Active Transportation Plan (2021)



The Active Transportation Plan shows that many Merritt residents rely on vehicles to move around the community. The transition to more active modes of transportation will be facilitated by constructing new paths, bike lanes and sidewalks, providing connectivity to existing paths and sidewalks, updating and improving existing paths, providing bike parking, and adding enhanced safety features. The plan notes the opportunity for pedestrian-only or pedestrian-focused streets, such as Quilchena Avenue, which contribute to vibrant commercial districts. [14]

Housing Needs Assessment Report (2021)

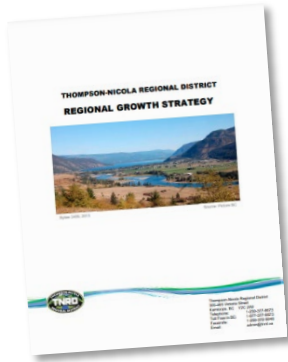


The Housing Needs Report points to the need for more diversity in housing options, including more rental housing options and housing that is suitable for seniors, as well as more non-market and supportive housing. The report recommendations included:

- Expand affordable market housing incentive programs
- Regulate short-term rentals
- Enhance support for non-profit developers through incentives
- Encourage development of smaller, multi-family, accessible units

Housing is key to attracting businesses and staffing for those businesses. The modest population growth projections in the report indicate an immediate need to address the housing shortage. Due to aging demographics, more seniors and fewer families, additional housing units will be required to accommodate smaller household sizes. The November 2021 Coldwater River flood caused significant additional strain on the need for housing, which will need to be addressed in the short and long-term. [2]

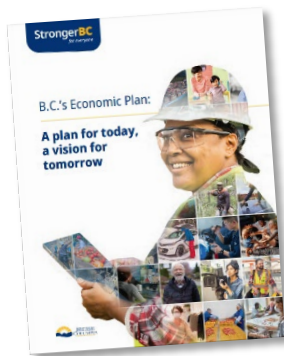
*Thompson-Nicola Regional District Regional Growth Strategy
(2013 and annual updates)*



The TNRD Regional Growth Strategy goals under 3.0 Economy are:

- Broaden the region's economic base through diversification and expansion.
- Support and encourage existing primary, secondary, and tertiary industries while promoting new economic development opportunities.

This Strategy aligns with the TNRD Regional Growth Strategy, particularly through Priority Focus Area 2: Economic Diversification and Growth. [15]



BC's Economic Plan 2022

The overarching goals of the Province of BC's Economic Plan 2022 are Inclusive Growth and Clean Growth. Merritt's Economic Development Strategy aligns with the provincial plan in the areas of reconciliation, housing, food security, clean industry, workforce development and encouraging innovation across all industry sectors. There is also a strong focus on agriculture, forestry, construction, manufacturing, tourism, and transportation and logistics within the plan [16].

Other plans reviewed in the creation of this document:

- Zoning Bylaw (2020)
- Business License Review Report (2018)
- Wayfinding Strategy (2015)
- Integrated Stormwater Master Plan (2014)
- Sanitary Sewer Utility Master Plan (2012)
- Water Utility Master Plan (2012)
- Integrated Growth Strategy (2010)
- DCC's Bylaw (2007)
- Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw (1987)
- 10 Year Capital Plan (draft)
- Revitalization Tax Exemption Bylaw (draft)

Appendix C: Environmental Scan



There are several trends impacting both the local Merritt economy as well as broader provincial, national, and global economies.

COVID-19 Pandemic

March 2020 marked the emergence of the COVID 19 pandemic in Canada (with origins back to November 2019 globally). To minimize the strain on healthcare and reduce the spread of the virus, a series of shutdowns and fluctuating public health restrictions were implemented. These restrictions had significant impacts on the economy and society as a whole. Food and beverage, hospitality, tourism, and sport and recreation industries have been the hardest hit by fluctuating public health restrictions. The future of the pandemic is still unknown, and communities need to prepare for continued uncertainty and ongoing changes to the way we work and do business.

Supply Chain Disruption

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted issues with the production and transportation of goods in our global economy. A shut-down in one part of the world can lead to a backlog or shortage of products in another part of the world. Supply Chain issues were further exacerbated when a cargo ship blocked the Suez Canal for six days in March 2021 impacting not only that ship's cargo delivery but also the billions of dollars of shipping cargo that move through the Canal daily [21].

Finally, severe weather events have impacted goods shipped by road and rail throughout British Columbia through either precautionary road/rail closures or landslides and washouts.

Technology

Technology has been changing the way we do business for decades. However, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for virtual communications and digital commercial transactions. A strong digital presence is imperative for all businesses and organizations when physical operations are restricted. Technology and technological advances intersect all industry sectors. Innovation in historical industry sectors can lead to growth and new job opportunities. One technology trend that could present unique manufacturing and production opportunities for the Merritt area is the rise of 3D printing.

Labour Shortage

The labour shortage issue existed pre-pandemic, but this issue is now more complex. Factors affecting the labour shortage include an aging population, skill-set mismatch, and workers transitioning into different occupational fields. The shortage exists across all industries and skill-levels. However, food services, healthcare and retail are reportedly the hardest hit sectors [22].

The unemployment rate in February 2022 in the Thompson-Okanagan was 5.9% [23]. This is a percentage point higher than the unemployment rate in December 2021 but 1.4 percent points lower than the same period in 2021. Low unemployment rates can contribute to staffing challenges as workers feel there is more freedom to move from one job to another.

Housing

Affordable housing is an issue across Canada. British Columbia had the highest average house price in March 2022 at \$1,089,600, while the average Canadian house price in March 2022 was \$796,068 [24]. Across the country housing supply is cited as the key issue in driving housing prices up. However, the UBCM report Building BC: Housing Completions & Population Growth 2016 – 2021 shows that private dwelling growth is keeping pace with population growth. The key issue identified in this report is the use of housing and that tackling housing affordability needs to be focused on the right kind of housing supply and deterring investors and speculative buyers [25].

The highest housing rental rates are in BC and Ontario which corresponds with housing prices. The median rental rate for a one-bedroom apartment in BC was \$1,808 in the first quarter of 2022 [26]. The average rental rate for a one-bedroom apartment in Kamloops was \$1,018 in October 2021 a 3.2% increase over the previous year [27]. Using the suggestion that only 30% of your net income should be spent on housing, an individual would need to earn \$3,400 net income per month for that rate to be considered affordable.

Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events

Climate change and extreme weather events are predicted to occur more frequently, and the impacts of these events are expected to be more severe into the foreseeable future. The province and local communities must continue to take action to protect our environment while also preparing for inevitable disasters. In 2021, British Columbia saw one of the most disastrous wildfire seasons in history and 3 of the worst wildfire seasons have occurred in the last five years. The 2021 wildfire season followed a devastating heat dome in June 2021 in which 526 people died in BC [28]. In November 2021, the province was hit by a series of atmospheric rivers which dropped a tremendous amount of precipitation and subsequently caused massive flooding in the Fraser Valley, Thompson-Nicola Regional District, and Similkameen.

These events directly impacted the City of Merritt and our neighbouring communities. During the heat dome, a cooling centre was set up at the Merritt Civic Centre to support those who did not have a cool space to retreat to during the day. On June 30, 2021, the Village of Lytton was evacuated due to wildfire that burned through the centre of town. Many evacuees received supports and accommodation in Merritt. Both the July Mountain Fire and the Lytton Creek Fire caused additional evacuation orders in neighbouring communities and the City of Merritt was put under evacuation alert. Merritt could not accommodate additional evacuees and many people were sent to the Fraser Valley. During the evacuation alert many businesses shut down because the staff or business owners resided in the evacuation order area.

On November 14, 2021, the Coldwater River breached its banks and waters continued to rise and flood the City through November 15th. Evacuations began on the evening of November 14th and by 10am on November 15th the entire City was evacuated due to a failure of the wastewater treatment plant. Several homes and some businesses were damaged by the flood. Most businesses were shut down for a minimum of three weeks while repairs were made to the damaged water system. When businesses were able to open many were limited by the number of staff available to work because so many residents were not able to return home. As of December 21, 2021, 226 properties remained on evacuation order and the City was actively working to find temporary housing solutions for displaced residents.

Highway Closures

Merritt relies on our highways for travel to work, access to healthcare, transport of goods, and recreational travel and tourism. The Coquihalla Highway (Highway 5) is a major commercial and recreational route between Merritt and Hope. As a high elevation mountain pass, road conditions can become treacherous resulting in accidents and road closures. The recent extreme and widespread weather events have showcased the possibility of several highway closures at one time. During the 2021 fires, several routes out of Merritt were closed periodically for safety reasons. The atmospheric river events and subsequent flooding caused closures of Highway 5 and Highway 8 as well as periodic closures of Highway 3. The damage to Highway 5 and 8 was severe with several areas washed out. Highway 5 reopened with temporary repairs, to commercial vehicles on December 20, 2021 and was reopened to all traffic on January 19, 2022. It is anticipated that construction of permanent repairs will be ongoing through 2022.

Legislative/Regulatory Changes

In addition to fluctuating public health regulations, businesses must comply with legislation that may impact business operations or increase the cost of doing business.

On June 1, 2021, minimum wage in BC increased to \$15.20 per hour as part of a scheduled plan of increases that began in 2017, when minimum wage was \$11.35 per hour. These increases will bring more workers close to a living wage, but will impact employment costs for businesses.

Effective January 1, 2022, employers will be required to provide employees with up to 5 days of paid sick leave whether they are full-time or part-time workers. These improved work conditions will discourage employees from coming to work when they are sick and provide more equity in benefits for all workers.

SWOT Analysis

This SWOT Analysis is an inventory of Merritt's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the current and future opportunities and potential threats. The full list from the community engagement sessions is available in Appendix C and the top factors are listed in Figure 2 below.

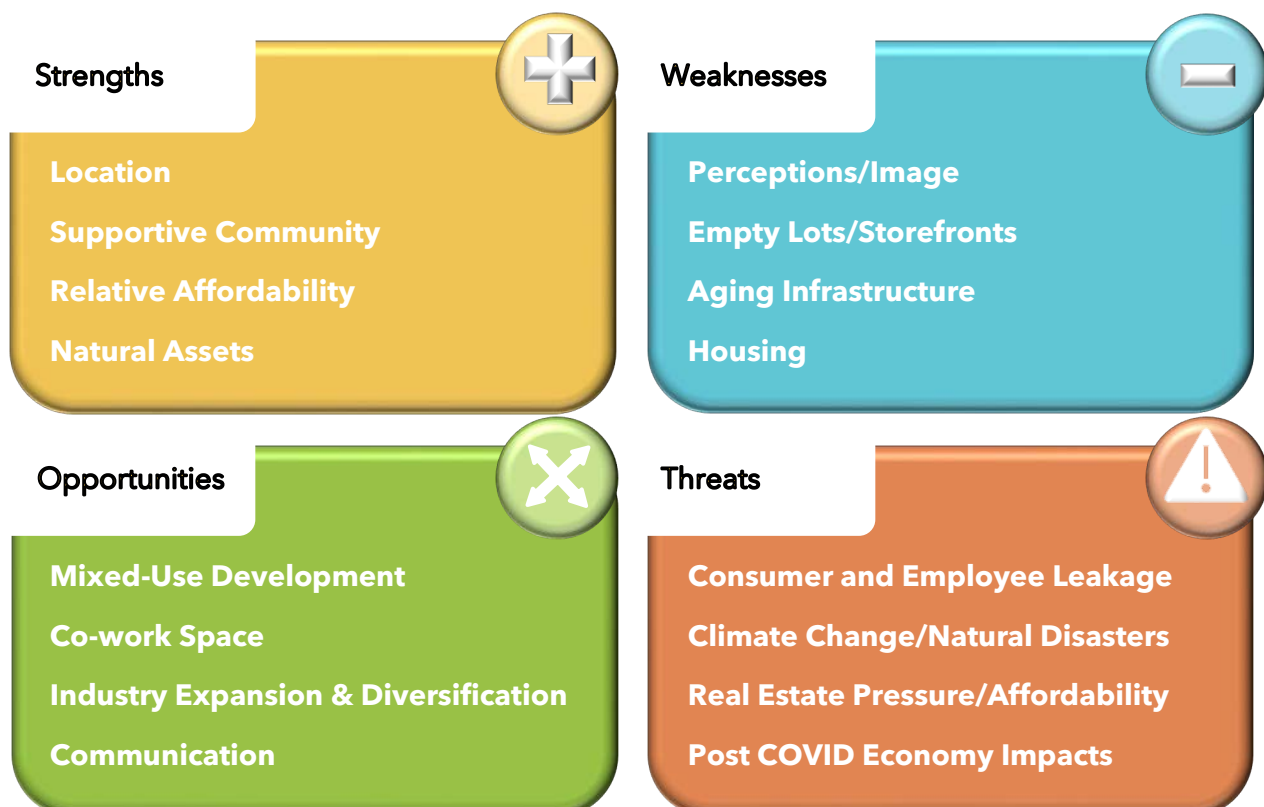
Strengths

Merritt's location, at the junction of Hwys 5, 5A, 97C, and 8 with easy access to the Fraser Valley, as well as Kamloops and Kelowna, is one of its key strengths. This combined with the relative affordability and availability of land, as compared to other markets, positions Merritt as an ideal location for businesses that produce and distribute products throughout the province. Merritt's other key strengths include the natural assets in the surrounding area and the opportunity for outdoor recreation, as well as a strong community network of people and businesses that are supportive of one another.

Weaknesses

Merritt has incredible economic development potential but negative perceptions about the community, both internally and externally, may be holding back future economic activity. The city has been impacted by a series of negative events that received widespread media attention. Job losses from mill shutdowns, flooding, and fires have put Merritt in the spotlight. However, we must ensure that our successes and recovery from these events are showcased as well. Successes and positive stories must also be shared among residents and local businesses to grow local pride in our community.

Figure 2: SWOT Analysis



A lack of housing options is another challenge that the City of Merritt is working to improve. The City has been encouraging the development of more rental units, higher density residential options, and mixed-use developments in the City Centre. The City is also actively working to improve aging infrastructure which can have an impact on future development.

Empty storefronts and empty lots in the City Centre have been an ongoing challenge. Increasing the number of residents living in the City Centre will create more demand for shops and restaurants in the downtown core. Additional communication with the property owners is needed to determine what actions will best support the development of these vacant lots.

Opportunities

Merritt's relatively affordable and available land opens the opportunity to proceed with the development that the city needs now and into the future. Mixed-use development in the City Centre and in Urban Villages will create more housing, vibrancy, and animation in these areas. There is also the potential to develop co-work space and/or live/work units to welcome remote workers, solopreneurs, and professionals into our community.

Merritt has immense tourism potential particularly for travellers seeking outdoor recreation experiences such as mountain biking, kayaking, paddling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, etc. New and existing businesses could build these experiences for visitors and residents.

Improved communication between the City, residents, businesses and organizations will build community spirit and assist with sharing success stories and important information throughout the community. Collaboration with community partners will be key to ensure that the reach is broad and that efforts are not duplicated.

Threats

In addition to the trends noted within the environmental scan, there are other threats to economic development growth in Merritt. Merritt's proximity to other urban centres makes it easy for consumers to shop and access services elsewhere. Online shopping has made it even easier to purchase goods outside of Merritt.

Another threat to economic development growth is the pressure from real estate purchasers from larger urban centres driving up the price of land and property within Merritt.

Risk Assessment & Mitigation Strategies

Planning for potential foreseen risks is necessary to minimize negative economic impacts and be prepared for a quick response.

The Environmental Scan (pages 99 - 102) highlighted several issues that have impacted the local economy. Climate change and extreme weather events are forecasted to become more frequent, and it is imperative that the community is prepared. Information in the table below is focused on economic risks. More information on community emergency preparedness can be found on the City's website at: <https://www.merritt.ca/emergency-preparedness/>

Risk	Caused by	Caused by	Mitigation Tactics
Disruption of Normal Business Activities	Evacuation Alert Or Evacuation Order	Wildfire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Continuity Planning/Preparedness - Business Owner Emergency Contact Information
		Flood	
		Hazardous Material Spill	
	Loss of Power (hydro electricity)	Storm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Continuity Planning/Preparedness - Business Owner Emergency Contact Information
		Vehicle Incident	
		Earthquake	
	Highway Closures	Wildfire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Continuity Planning/Preparedness - Resiliency in supply chain management and systems - Local Food Security Initiatives
		Flood	
		Vehicle Incidents	
		Hazardous Materials Spill	
		Landslides	
		Washouts	
		Sinkholes	
	Pandemic		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Continuity Planning/Preparedness - Communicable Disease Safety Plan
	Loss of Internet or Cyber Attack		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Continuity Planning/Preparedness - Secure storage of data and information - Processes to enable offline operations
Loss of Major Employer			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic Diversification - Partner Agency Response Strategy
Temporary Closure of Major Employer			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic Diversification - Partner Agency Response Strategy

Appendix D: Community Engagement Responses

The content for this Strategy was developed with feedback from the community, including input that was gathered during the 2022 OCP engagement sessions. Community engagement activities that were specific to the Economic Development Strategy included an interactive display booth at the September 18, 2021 Quilchena Street Market, industry sector focus groups from September - November 2021, a recorded online presentation, a presentation and Lunch and Learn session at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, presentations to the Economic Development Committee and Airport Advisory Committee, several interviews and an online survey.

The industry sector focus group sessions included a SWOT analysis discussion and gathering input for the five priority focus areas. A compiled list of the input from these sessions follows in the Focus Group SWOT Analysis Discussion Notes, the Priority Focus Area Input list, and the Targeted Industry Sector Input list. The input from these sessions has not been edited unless a comment or suggestion was repeated.

Focus Group SWOT Analysis Discussion Notes ---

Strengths

- Supportive caring community
- Businesses supportive of one another
- Lot size
- Affordability of land
- Location
- Accessibility to outdoor recreation
- Climate
- Positive and supportive local media
- Recreation facilities
- History & heritage buildings
- Walkability
- Short commute to anywhere
- Nicola Valley Institute of Technology
- 7 practising General Practitioners (Physicians)
- Expanded Emergency at the Hospital
- Scw'exmx Health Services
- Nlaka'pamux Health
- Several dental offices
- Access to eye care and audiologists
- Cohesive, collaborative Health Planning Table

Weaknesses

- More regular/frequent street sweeping in the City Centre
- Cleaning/sweeping of sidewalks
- Lack of presence of Bylaw officer and/or RCMP in City Centre
- Wayfinding signage visibility and consistency
- Bikes/skateboards on side walks
- Parking/accessibility challenges in City Centre
- Aging infrastructure that may not be able to support growth
- Response from City Hall not quick enough for development demand/capacity
- No protective/conservation measures for heritage buildings
- Accessibility to health services - transportation, mobility, safe welcoming space
- Health equity

Opportunities

- Promote, encourage visiting City Centre to shop and explore
- More street markets - desire for Saturday markets
- Once per month Friday night event in City Centre
- More city staff to support growing development demand
- MLA advocacy for government support for city growth and development needs
- Pursue heritage status to preserve heritage buildings
- Nurture cultural awareness
- Improve communication with citizens, businesses, non-profit sector, cultural groups including First Nations Bands
- Public Safety education - steps that a person should take when they encounter a potentially dangerous situation or crime in progress (for example vandalism, theft, unconscious person)
- More addictions and mental health supports and services
- More support for arts, culture & heritage
- Promote positive image of the community
- Change the mindset of travelers - more than a 'pit stop' on your way to somewhere else
- Support Tourism type organizations and businesses with improved wayfinding signage
- Connectivity of walking trails and improvements to streetscape to encourage residents and visitors to walk about the community to explore.
- Pop-up shops and opportunities for businesses to creatively collaborate and/or co-locate

Opportunities Continued

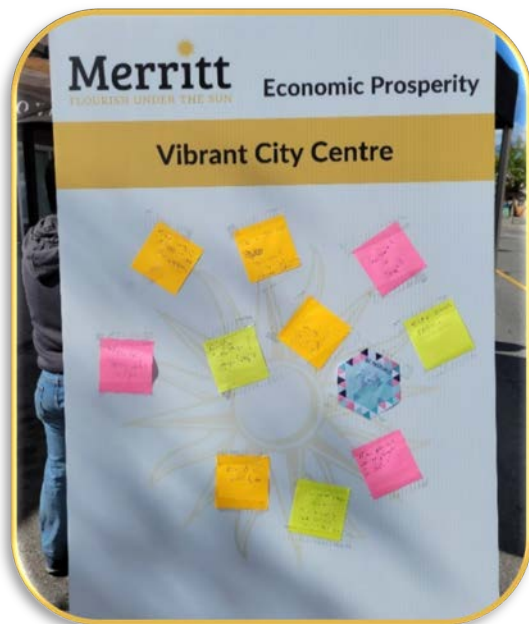
- Co-work space or business consortium
- Promote industry sector gaps locally and externally
- Engage with young people to find out what career avenues they are interested in pursuing – and encouraging youth to explore opportunities in the industry sectors that would keep them in our community
- Health hub in City Centre for accessible, safe services
- Mobile services for people with diverse abilities
- Walk-in clinic
- More physio and RMT
- Mixed use buildings with health service
- Collaborative effort to attract General Practitioners (GP)
- Promote quality of life aspects to attract professionals
- Primary care network – GP's, Nurse Practitioners, Allied Health Services
- Market to developers/builders the need for appropriate health services space in City Centre
- Ensure zoning regulations continue to support health services in the City Centre

Threats

- Empty lots and empty buildings
- Absentee landlords
- Lack of mental health and addictions supports
- Support services should be located on City Centre periphery
- Traffic issues with pending developments
- Vandalism to properties: commercial, residential, non-profit, urban, rural
- Housing challenges contribute to staff challenges
- Supply chain disruptions, globally and domestically (affecting many industries, parts and supplies difficult to obtain)
- Lack of childcare spaces
- Lack of affordable lease space for businesses
- Competing with neighbouring communities for health care staff
- Interior Health posting for casual nurses (people won't move for a casual posting)
- Reduction in long term care options for seniors

Focus Group Priority Area Input

Priority Area 1: Promote a Vibrant City Centre



More farmers markets on Quilchena
More things for young adults to do
Revitalize main street - street lamps
More dining patios
Downtown farmers markets
Every child matters
Indoor kids playground
Events in spirit square
More for our young people to do
Housing/people downtown
Pedestrian mall on Quilchena
A place to hang out in downtown
Downtown beautification
Spirit Square games, children's entertainment
Entertainment, street buskers
Cafes/coffee shops
Restaurants
Brewery

Be the example and support local
Theme

Seasonal skating rink

Anticipate an influx of young healthy people and cater to their needs as parents would a child (apartments above storefronts where they may work from home)

More EV charging stations - conflict with space at farmers market

Food trucks

Be open to suggestion & change

Promote Merritt in a good light to attract tourism business downtown

Clean up the downtown, both literally and figuratively

Downtown businesses are mostly small stores where shoppers spend 5 - 10 minutes, no incentive to spend more than 30 min - more time downtown = more \$ spent

More downtown events/guided experiences

More garbage/recycling cans on trails and downtown

Expand rose garden - place for outdoor weddings

Bring back window dressing empty store fronts

Develop empty lots

Bring property owners to council

Foraging trail - fruit and nut trees

More events

A performing arts centre as a city venture will attract businesses to restaurants

Downtown patio seating, picnic tables, etc

Improve visual appeal when entering
Merritt from the East
2nd story (or higher) housing above
commercial properties
Make an effort not to attract Big Business
Need a movie theatre
Encourage a bakery
Reduce concentration of non-retail
business in city centre core
Reduce empty storefronts
Encourage more restaurants, coffee
shops
Community vision for our downtown -
colours, façade, etc
Working with landlords to fill up vacant
buildings
Heritage building designation
Story boards, history
Home Town Makeover - American TV
series
Public safety for being comfortable
walking downtown
Indigenous culture for downtown
Better signage

Revamping heritage style and actual
heritage buildings
Performing arts and movie theatre
Focus for businesses? Antiques, western
outdoor adventure?
Renewable/Innovative Highlights - green
roofs, solar panels
Nice matching plants
Street sweeping program
Enforcing bylaws
New, larger no bikes and skateboards on
the sidewalk signs
Banners
Banner at entryway sign - Downtown
Ahead
Food, beverage, entertainment
Better advertising
Evening entertainment
Buskers
More music in the park
Food vendors at music in the park events
Live music
Evening activity options

Priority Area 2: Economic Diversification & Growth



Wind and solar energy plant
Budget grocery store, more grocery competition
Youth activities, youth seminars, youth incentives
More trades training programs and positions
Promote remote work
Teen wellness centre
More diverse restaurants
Commercial greenhouses - food procurement

More support for trail maintenance work by the MMBA
Consignment shop
Cleaner air
Extend river walk
Recycling education program

More education about domestic water use - water metering
Cobs bread
Forestry training centre
Flight school - NVIT
Cleaner industries
More experience-based businesses
Spaces for travelling workshops
Place for private plastic surgery
Drug/alcohol long term treatment, short term dryout
Partner with other communities for bus tours
Community performing arts centre
Encourage bus tours for art theatre events
Promote more secondary industry related to primary heritage industries of agriculture and forestry
Training for leaders and boards of directors so all the community's non-profits function well and grow
Reduce the very slow processes in place for development
More gyms and fitness centres
Develop mountain bike trail events
Forestry school for logging equipment
Horsemanship
Agriculture
Recognize arts, culture, heritage as its own industry category/priority
Local tech support for businesses - website creation/maintenance, computer program creation/maintenance

Priority Area 3: Business Attraction and Retention



Attractive entrances to the community
More dining options patio and outdoor events and seating incentives for restaurants downtown
Community block events downtown
More benches on walking routes and trails
Mini golf
More diversity of restaurants
Go karts
Movie theatre
Thai restaurant
Chopped Leaf
More restaurants
Good steak house
Beautify exit 286 entrance into town especially alongside Aspen Planers
Small business grant for locals particularly for business sectors not currently filled or other incentive - first year business license free for locals
Outdoor nature-based activities for kids

Keep up the good work towards a robust trail network for the entire city - bikes and walking
Bubble tea shop
Local bakery
Small breakfast place
Chamber needs funding, it can't be volunteer-run
Businesses need a lobby & support
Coworking space owned by the City that caters to different industries/multifunctional
Host regular business roundtables
More consistent and strong community policing
Housing
Batting cage
Restaurants variety
Water quality, chloride quantity levels, usage balance
Business Improvement Association
City needs to be more engaged with all businesses - local & surrounding
Specialty food
Footwear
Clothing- fashion for adults and children
Educational toys and games for young adults
Law firm
Competitive taxes
Strong chamber of commerce
Partnerships - NVIT and Bands
Tax incentives
Good zoning
Laminated log industry
Fire mitigation - community forest
Existing businesses need city support to show they care about retention and growth

Courier - Amazon, Fedex
Promote trade-based businesses via NVIT
Will tie into housing - businesses need
places for staff to live
High end bar/lounge
Restaurants & food trucks
Need to attract families
Look for opportunities to build off
Ashcroft Terminal
Warehouses for businesses like Ikea,
Active and efficient communication
channels withing the community between

groups, societies, city, clubs, etc. so we
can know what each other is doing and
how we can support one another
Better delivery services - no local terminal
for couriers
Online warehouses
Support for ppl moving - like a
newcomers club
Training and testing facility options for
online learning - library gets a lot of
requests

Priority Area 4: Increase Residential Housing Supply



Mixed Use - Commercial on bottom, residential on top

Housing is desperately needed

Housing for low-income people, seniors

More reasonably priced houses because there are rental issues

More retirement housing

More affordable housing

More low-income housing

More low rental housing

Low-income family housing

Upgrade water treatment system ahead of development so that people will stop opposing large scale developments

More low barrier supportive housing for marginalized adults

Grab vacant land along riverside (Tolko) while we can for housing and greenspace

Increase density

Supportive housing - shelter unable to keep up

Supportive/low-income housing for persons with disabilities

Rent controlled apartments or housing

Large scale developments - rezone for 3,4 + floors

Good quality townhouse complex - opportunity for AirBNB or convert to rentals

Make it easier to have a suite, offer incentives to home owners so there is a standard

Housing is the key issue

Build for density and affordability

Develop vacant land throughout downtown

Seniors housing including low cost

Seniors housing like Parkview or McCallum gardens for people moving here who are retired

Alzheimer's safe community for IH

Affordable Housing - vulnerable population, ppl who work but can't afford a house

More rental units

Better supported and more living facilities

No more trailer parks

No more housing projects

Strata condo development for seniors

There are no building lots currently available

Need development of lots, homes & condos

Better response from the City to development

Senior communities

Multiple housing units - apartments vs mobile homes

Co-op Housing

BC Housing

Seniors Housing

Affordable Housing

Priority Area 5: Commercialization of the Merritt Airport Area



Aircraft mechanic
Shipping/distribution
Flight school
Coordinating training centre for BC
Wildfire Service

Turn the lights on the runway
Helicopter tours, Skydiving
Private hangers with maintenance shop
Paint MERRITT and FUEL on the
airstrip
Lighting, fencing
Hangars
Build up of business around airport
Helicopter tours
Big Art
Incorporating Signage and art
Fly-in recreation properties
Hangar with accommodation above
Flight school
Airplane mechanics
Airport day to continue for public
awareness

Focus Group Targeted Industry Sector Input

The targeted industry sector input from the focus group sessions is listed in order of the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes.

NAICS 11 - Agriculture & Forestry	
Pursue Community Forest License application	Agri-tourism is growing but guest ranches are rarely promoted
Vertical/urban farming	Farm tours
Regional Abattoir	Farm to table experiences
Agri-tourism	Direct forestry support
Forestry Training Centre	Investigate community forest license
Bees/wildflower, nurture knowledge of cultivation	Fire interface plan
Grassland, nurture knowledge, promotion of beauty to city neighbours to export from rural to urban (nursery & bouquet)	Local licensed abattoir for sales of natural beef
Community Forest for fuel, clean forest floor, fire breaks around city	Protecting the grasslands around Merritt from industry and ATV spoilage, preserving the wild for non-harm activities like hiking and mountain biking
Diversify agriculture - dairy, grapes, specialty ag-products	None of the local ranches encourage any tourism activities except expensive overnight stays at fishing lodges
Wine, beer, hops, cider	Publicize forestry demonstration/interpretive trails
Lobby ALR to decrease acreage size - not all need to be greater than 20 acres, smaller lot size needed	Food security - 100-mile diet, diversify food production plan
Ranch tours	Cross over with cultural sector and agriculture & forestry
Cowboy experiences	
Walking gardens, meditation gardens	

NAICS 23 - Construction

Trades training - connect with apprenticeships	Wait 6 - 8 months for someone to do a small job or reno project, need more handymen
Job Creation Partnerships	Connectivity - pay phones
Build an indoor equine arena, partner with First Nations and NVIT trades, corporate sponsorship	Improved signage ++
Diverse housing needs	Housing that caters to limited abilities
Re-construction of Lytton will need our wood & labour	Housing for seniors
Affordable seniors' facilities	No further housing projects
More higher density housing with landscaping requirements	Strata condos downtown core for retirees
More seniors' housing - Parkview and also low cost	Building lot development
	Lack of trades
	Extend city limits
	Build more homes
	Promote local environment to attract more contractors

NAICS 31-33 Manufacturing (Light)

Food and Beverage Manufacturing	Solar panels - green energy
Wood product Manufacturing	High tech
Non-Metallic Mineral product manufacturing	Movies/filming /stunt school
Furniture and Related product manufacturing	Wind turbines
Green Industries - solar panels, wind turbines	Clothing industry - what is uniquely created in Merritt and promote
Low water consumption	Inside industries (for air quality)
Well-paying jobs	Warehousing
Job creation partnerships	Manufacturing (all sorts)
Sustainable, low water consumption	Fabricating
Intersection of industries	Manufacturing is now all at the south side of town and wind blows dust thru town, develop business area near airport

NAICS 44-45 Retail

Bakery	Better signage of current businesses
Deli	Better advertising for awareness of current businesses
Children's Clothing	
Plus Size and Mature Women's Clothing	How do we bring summer home people into town?
Vintage Store	
Educational Toy Store	Promote what we have, small town friendly service (local butcher, empty keg, etc)
Air BnB/VRBO	
Boutique hotels	Central means to communicate what is happening - right now it's across multiple sites and calendars, either belonging to organizations or with various restrictions
Destination Spas/Retreats	
Bakery & Deli Combined	Good host courses for all local businesses (staff)
Vehicle dealership	NVIT - training programs to match needs, micro credentials/industry partners
Biking trail from Merritt to Spences Bridge accompanied by all retail to promote use and lifestyle	
50's diner would be safe place for youth to hang out	More diverse businesses
Fine dining restaurant	Downtown businesses open past 5pm
Thai or Vietnamese restaurant	Dinner restaurants
Accessibility for all body types - plus sizes	Ramen
Fill downtown empty buildings	Shopping - boutique retail
More restaurants	Outdoor patios
Glamping/RV Recreation vehicles rented ready for city tourists, and education to promote City through this industry	Less box stores and more boutiques
Restaurants to have nice dinner in the evening	Craft distilleries
Entertainment - weekly somewhere?	Cocktail options
More unique small businesses downtown	Casual dining - not fast food
	Outdoor market in the summer needs to be expanded

NAICS 48-49 Transportation and Warehousing

Shipping and Distribution centre opportunity

Improved transportation between communities for safe access to employment and services

Flight School

Helicopter tours

Skydiving

Aircraft Maintenance

Need a distribution warehouse

Distribution for delivery services - courier

Amazon & Fed Ex courier services

More bus service (to places outside of Merritt), and promote Merritt on that service

Trucking/warehouse centre

Fast charging stations for electric vehicles

Online goods warehouses

Manufacturing facilities

Hot shot services

Better access to reliable shipping

NAICS 62 Health Care and Social Assistance

Accessible - safe

Diagnostic and Allied Health Services within the City Centre on transit routes - joint/shared suitable office/appointment space

Walk in clinic

Attract more doctors, nurses, and nurse practitioners

Drug/alcohol long term treatment

Mental health supports

Teen wellness centre

Supports for volunteerism (connecting volunteers to non-profits)

Seniors home - extended care, long term care

Condos - low maintenance options, low strata fees

Seniors community programs/activities with transportation

Wellness centre

Adults with disabilities - group housing? Huge gap in services

Healing centre - address addiction/substance abuse

Partners with City /IH to give financial incentives to encourage Doctors/hiring

Very important when people consider moving to Merritt

Devise means to reduce strain on ER

Mental health and addictions support - do we have this in place? (Wait times too long!!)

Need to allow female doctors in Merritt (apparently local board won't hire any)

Promote healthy living community, access to outdoors, recreation, meditation groups, support for this

Senior care - do we have enough supports to keep seniors here and in homes

Bigger hospital and more home care workers to support more patients, testing and care within Merritt

Walk-in clinic

Wellness, food, exercise, movie theatre

Wellness retreats

Maternity care clinic

Specialty visiting clinics

NVIT on campus walk in clinic with Nurse Practitioner and other health supports

Meditation centre/garden

In home care so seniors can live at home

More doctors

Financial incentives for doctors

Stronger connections/communications with Interior Health

Holistic wellness

Triage centre

More massage and complementary healthcare services

Health oriented services located downtown

Food security

Social determinants of health

Local health planning table

Attract specialists so patients don't have to leave town

NAICS 71 Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (including Tourism)

Heritage	Farm tours
Outdoor recreation tour services (river float, mountain bike tours, atv tours)	Youth activities
Community Theatre	Youth sports
Public Art	Well-organized DMO that works hand in hand with Destination BC and TOTA to secure funding
Buskers	Heritage status for the community will enable our many heritage buildings to be saved and used
More Entertainment options	Rodeo association is working hard to increase use of property for equine and other agricultural events - working with the City to publicize this
Agri-tourism - specialty meats/cheeses	Better/bigger signage (where to park an RV, where the museum is, signage for people walking around downtown)
An indoor equine arena - for clinics, rodeos, tractor pull, monster trucks	More promotion of what we have here, not just a pitstop
Race Track	Make pitstop a thing/activity like in car racing - have our elevator pitch ready
Promote festival grounds	Theatre for performing arts
Indigenous tourism	Seasonal outdoor rec opportunities - promote and change activities regularly, not just once and forget it
Rodeo	Walking and biking trails
Movie theatre	Volunteer opportunities for new people to town
Tour guide company	Better snow removal on sidewalks and trails
Hunting/fishing	Easier to access museum location
Utilize music festival grounds year-round with various events/music	Street markets
Children's festival	Utilizing large spaces for concerts, movies, etc and invite local businesses/vendors to participate
Rail trails	Friday evening/weekend downtown customer appreciation
Live theatre	New arena
Sleigh rides	
Rally races	
Safe hang out for high school youth	
Guided tours (outskirts and surrounding areas)	
Ranching tours (cowboy experience)	
Promote Nicola Valley to film-makers	
2 - 3 x per day shuttle to local parks - not a lot of day use parking	
Hot air balloon festival	
Salmon return celebration	

NAICS 71 Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (including Tourism) continued

Add Indigenous Welcome on Welcome to Merritt sign	Promote biking
Implement cultural activities within the City - invite local FN bands to showcase/host seasonal ceremonies	River sports
Theme park attractions	Indigenous integration
Upgrade hotels, motels	Highlight outdoor recreation
More first nations arts - murals, sculptures, etc.	Attractive entrances to downtown
	Tours - mtn bike, kayaking, fishing, river float business

NAICS 72 Accommodation and Food Services

Boutique hotels	Craft breweries/distilleries
Fine Dining	Food Trucks
Casual Dining	Cocktail lounge
Breakfast Place	Glamping
More ethnic variety - eg. Thai, Vietnamese, Ramen	Recreational Vehicle parks

Remote Work & Home-based Business (cross over many industry sectors & NAICS)

Technology (need infrastructure)	Indoor year-round market
Artisans	Cheaper & faster internet access
Chamber membership for home-based	More "fairs" to encourage/promote home-based businesses
Promote that we have fibre optik internet here for remote work	More social media to promote community assets
Incentives	
Education of how to build websites and make business bases	

Community Survey Results

Appendix E: Resource Documents



The following list of plans, documents and articles have been referenced within this Strategy. The resources are listed in the order that they have been cited within this document.

- [1] BC Statistics Population Estimates, updated February 2022
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