Defining Sense of Place:

A Case Study of the Town of Lacombe

By: Locinne Wong

January, 1993

The University of Calgary
Faculty of Environmental Design

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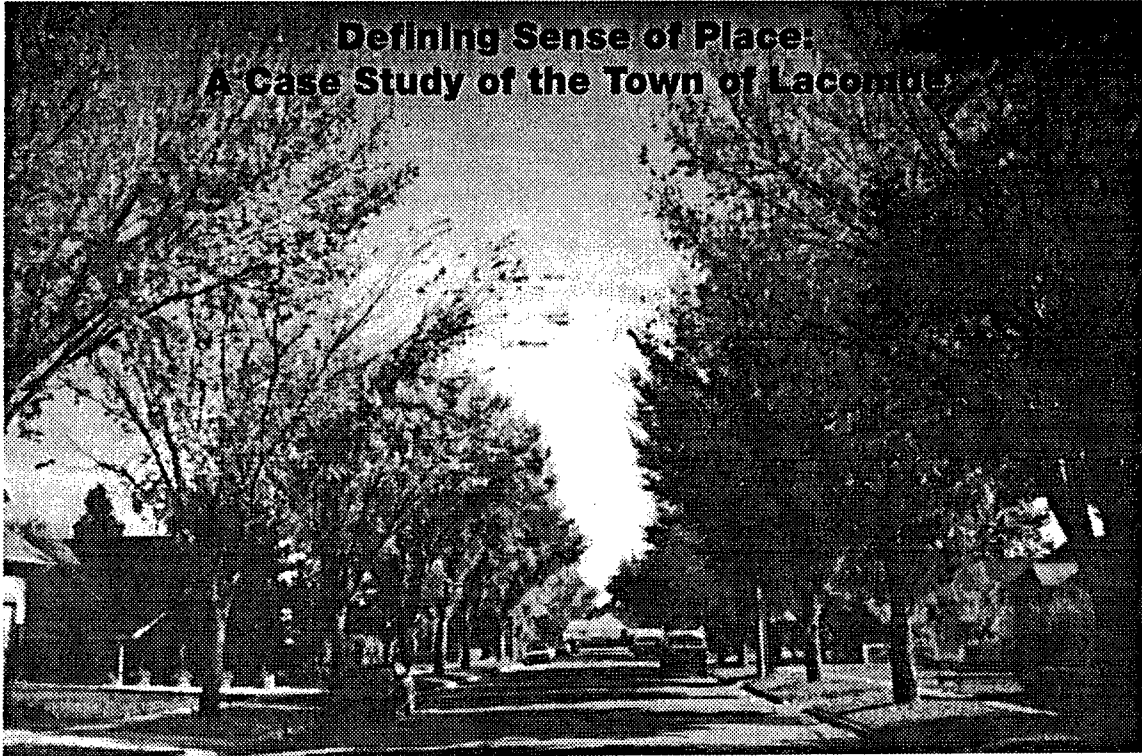
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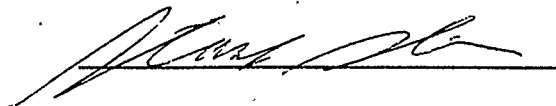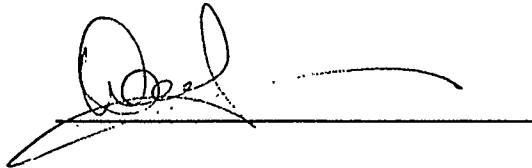Faculty of Environmental Design

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The undersigned certify that they have read,

and recommend to the Faculty of Environmental

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Project entitled Defining Sense of Place: A Case
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Abstract
Defining Sense of Place:
A Case Study of the Town of Lacombe

Prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the M.E.Des Degree in the
Faculty of Environmental Design, The University of Calgary
Supervisor: Dr. Walter Jamieson

This Master's Defense Project will examine the concept of sense of place and will apply it to a case study of the Town of Lacombe.

Due to the ever-changing nature of small towns, they are potentially threatened with the loss of their special character and sense of place. Many communities have recognized that the best opportunity for community development and community economic development lies in making the best use of the town's unique situation and special nature. One of the opportunities is to preserve the special character of the town. If the special character of the small towns are lost, also gone are the opportunities to achieve community development initiatives which are dependent upon the town's special character. Through the use and promotion of its unique character, a community's special qualities can be advantageous in the preservation of place and culture and can help to stimulate economic development.

"Sense of place" is a quality given to places which possess a distinctive character. It is a way of expressing uniqueness and how places over time have created a distinctive identity. Environmental, social, cultural and experiential factors influence the character and appearance of places. In order to protect and maintain a community's special character, it is important to recognize and identify the factors which produce it. Sense of place can be an effective planning methodology to consider and implement to maintain community identity and character as it allows for the identification of the things which contribute to community identity.

The Town of Lacombe is potentially under threat of losing its sense of place. The Town has recently experienced a rapid increase in its population base and subdivision development and projections indicate the trend will continue. It is destined to become a bedroom community to Red Deer and may soon acquire city status. The appearance of Lacombe is most affected at the town entrances and town boundaries where new subdivisions are being developed. With continued suburban expansion, the compact town form and the open space character will be destroyed. Lacombe has utilized physical planning and design to promote cultural tourism and preserve its sense of place, but efforts have been concentrated in the historic downtown core.

Planning for sense of place can help address some of the concerns Lacombe is facing with town growth and expansion. Although it is impossible to halt growth, its effects can be anticipated and the principles of community planning, community development and design can help Lacombe maintain, protect and use its natural and cultural assets.

Key words: sense of place, community identity, physical planning and design
farmland preservation, cultural landscape

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The Small Town

Small towns have a distinctive nature which give them personality and individuality and distinguishes them from larger urban centres. The appearance, physical form and sense of completeness of small towns are factors which give them character. Some have been struggling to survive due to population decreases and the downturn of the economy, while others have been successful in attracting new economic activity and residential development. Due to the ever-changing nature of small towns, they are potentially threatened with the loss of their special character and sense of place.

Historical Canadian settlement policies once made rural communities important centres of trade and settlement. Across the Canadian prairies, communities were established along rail lines, typically six miles apart. However, many towns did not succeed due to rail closures and poor town speculation. The successful towns were the social and economic centres which offered many opportunities, including education, religion, business, trade and socialization. Many prairie towns share similar characteristics in their appearance and physical form because of their common history in the rapid pace of western expansion and the relatively short time span these towns became developed. However, each community is also unique, having evolved from a different set of influences which have shaped its present appearance, function and vitality.

After World War II, Canada experienced revolutionary changes in transportation through technological advances. Changes in accessibility, personal mobility and decreased transportation costs affected transportation patterns. Shopping patterns and habits shifted to urban centres. Urban migration has continued to the present where the majority of the population live in or near larger urban centres. As a result, many small towns have experienced stagnating economies and a declining population base and many have been left with a decaying physical fabric due to neglect and lack of patronage.

Small Towns Today

Many of today's small towns which suffer from economic or population decline are simply reminders of the past which recall a formerly vibrant community, but do not function in the same manner. Some small towns have become bedroom communities, where residents commute to larger urban centres to work and shop. Towns which have become bedroom communities have lost much of their character in the physical form and in appearance resemble suburban neighborhoods. Beyond essential services and convenience stores, these towns do not satisfy the needs of today's society.

Some towns still hold out hope for the economic benefits that may occur should substantial economic activity locate within the town. Short term economic ventures which create non-indigenous employment opportunities and tax revenues tend to be unsustainable and highly volatile. Many communities have realized and recognized that the best opportunity for community development and community economic development lies in making the best use of

the town's unique situation and special characteristics. New community development ventures must arise from local initiatives and be sustained from local resources, including human potential. In order to ensure that these initiatives are successful, the special character of the town must be maintained and enhanced. The preservation of the community's special character can decrease the leakage of community spending, can foster community pride and can support community development initiatives such as entrepreneurship and cultural tourism.

The maintenance of the special nature of small towns has proven to be a difficult task with the increasing homogenization of the landscape through the influences of mass media and popular culture. Popular culture has done much to erode the vitality and distinctive character of small towns through the establishment of chain stores, franchises and strip malls. In addition, urban growth and development, particularly suburban development, has transplanted a ubiquitous form of urban design onto the town which does nothing to enhance the unique qualities which were once prevalent. If the special character of small towns are lost, also lost are opportunities to achieve the alternatives of community development which are dependent upon the town's special character.

Sense of Place

"Sense of place" involves the discovery of the identity of places. It is a search for a community's past and the identification of special artifacts, natural features and social factors which set it apart from other places. A community's special qualities can be advantageous in the preservation of place and culture and can stimulate economic development through the use and promotion of its distinctive character. As a poten-

tial planning tool, "sense of place" can help begin a community development process through the encouragement of such initiatives as entrepreneurship of local crafts and traditions, creating community identity for cultural tourism, for economic development opportunities, for historic preservation and for maintaining unique places. Principles of urban design and physical planning can help to restore and reclaim the spirit of the community. A town with a sense of place and spirit of place can utilize the cultural foundation for further community development projects. This can help the rebuilding process of the physical, social and economic heart of the small town.

The Town of Lacombe: A Case Study

The Town of Lacombe is under threat of losing its unique sense of place on the prairies. Situated in central Alberta, the Town of Lacombe's geographic location is both a positive and a negative factor affecting the town's health. It is conveniently located at the junctions of three major highways, making it very accessible to other regional centres. Its accessibility has been a factor for its rapid population growth and urban development. Only eighteen kilometres from Red Deer, the transportation network has made it an ideal bedroom community. This has also facilitated the leakage of community spending.

Lacombe has considered physical planning and design to better promote cultural tourism and preserve its sense of place. However, physical planning and design efforts have been concentrated in the historic downtown core. In its fourth year, the Lacombe Main Street Programme has made significant physical improvements to the commercial downtown buildings. It is hoped that the resulting revitalization im-

provements will make Lacombe's downtown a tourist destination. However, the preservation of architecture alone cannot invigorate the community. Without a strong retail mix and community patronage, Lacombe's downtown continues to suffer from economic and social decline.

As the Lacombe Main Street Project only focuses its efforts in the downtown, the rest of the town, particularly the residential fringe, is vulnerable to poor planning and to development pressures. The downtown has a well-defined nucleus, but the definition of the town is unclear at the boundaries. Physical planning and urban design of the new subdivisions has taken a different appearance and scale from older residential neighborhoods, resulting in a dramatic change of the urban form. If continued, the type of housing styles and the rapid pace of new development will alter the unique character of Lacombe.

The Town of Lacombe has not considered sense of place as a planning tool to identify and preserve its unique character. Although the residents are aware of the significance of the architecture in the downtown, many of the ordinary qualities and features such as views, pathways, trees and public gathering nodes remain vulnerable to loss. Already, several older buildings in the downtown have been torn down for parking space. At the time, it was unclear how the loss could affect the character of the streetscape. The character of residential neighborhoods is also changing with the removal of mature vegetation and the increase in the number of large infills. Many residents have commented on the changing character of Lacombe and they are concerned with the future of their community. Community involvement can help to identify and preserve community-valued features and regional advantages to help Lacombe determine and prepare for future growth and development.

This Master's Defense Project will examine the concept of sense of place and will apply it to a case study of the Town of Lacombe. The case study will identify and define the sense of place in Lacombe and illustrate how physical planning and design can be considered to help maintain and enhance town identity. It is hoped that the awareness of the impact of town development and growth will spur future action to protect the town's special character. Physical planning and design can help to enhance and maintain Lacombe's cultural heritage and link the historic downtown with other areas within the town. The objectives of this Master's Defense Project are:

- to gain an understanding of sense of place and how to identify and define the special nature of places,
- to attempt to identify and define how residents and visitors perceive Lacombe's sense of place,
- to examine how planning and design can enhance or improve the sense of place in Lacombe.

Chapter One will examine the dynamics of community identity, the role sense of place plays in providing community identity, the importance of considering sense of place in town planning and how design can help to enhance and preserve the special nature of places. Chapter Two will examine a variety of methodologies which have been used to identify, define and protect sense of place. Chapter Three will examine the historic context and current situation of the Town of Lacombe and identify potential areas of concern where sense of place can be better addressed. Chapter Four will examine potential planning and design recommendations the Town of Lacombe may wish to implement to strengthen and maintain its sense of place.

Community Identity

Each community has something unique which sets it apart from other places. Distinctive features and characteristics form community identity and give places special meaning and personality. Identity comes from environmental features and climatic influences, cultural adaptations to the environment, town construction, the use of building materials and technology, social values and traditions and the type of economy base. What develops is a cultural landscape, constantly evolving through time. Regional identity and character are influenced by social and institutional linkages which bind people to places. Through continual exposure and familiarity, community residents give significant meaning and understanding to their place of residence.

"Sense of place" is a quality given to places which possess distinctive character and personality. This special nature or character has been the subject of discussion by designers, geographers, historians, tourism planners and heritage preservation advocates. Initial work was concerned with physical characteristics, but recent studies have examined the environmental, social, cultural and experiential factors which make communities distinctive.

The Loss of Community Identity in Small Towns

"Sense of place" has been threatened in many small towns with the instability of the local economy and the changing nature of town growth and development. The loss of community identity often began in the downtown of small towns.

Figure 1: *The Town of Okotoks lost much of its historic nature in the downtown with increased commercial redevelopment.*

The 1950's to the 1970's were years of transition for rural communities, many of which experienced population decreases and stagnating economies. The nature of the downtown economy in these towns changed from providing essential services and goods to providing fewer quality services. The regional shopping centre in many rural areas replaced the downtown as a destination.

Physical planning often did not take into account the historic nature and regional identity of the town. Good urban design was not an important consideration of expansion and development. During this time, many buildings became neglected while others were torn down for parking space, leaving gaps in the streetscape. New downtown development and infill were unsympathetic modern additions to the existing historic streetscape. New development was typically constructed with different materials and were much larger in building mass and scale. Merchants and building owners struggling to stay competitive modernized buildings with slipcovers which hid or destroyed the original architectural detailings. To many people, the appearance of the downtown was no longer aesthetically pleasing, nor did it highlight the special qualities and regional forms of architecture once prevalent in the downtown.

The loss of community character and distinctiveness of the downtown also affected residential districts through suburban sprawl. Where residential neighborhoods were laid out on a gridiron pattern and streets were lined with mature trees, new subdivisions followed a curvilinear design where streets were wider, houses were larger and the front lawn was the dominant pattern of vegetation. Towns which once were different in appearance and distinctive in nature soon began to look more like urban centres and took on a universal identity. As a result, the identity of many communities became lost or confused.

The Homogenization of Landscapes and Places

Problems in the identity of places occur with standardization, a phenomenon Relph refers to as "placelessness." The progressive move from the distinctive to the similar is the consequence of the social, economic and technological changes of the post war years. Big businesses, such as national franchises and large corporations, are spurred by efficiency and economics, the two major forces behind standardization. Universal images are cost-effective, in that a single style or form is easier to transplant and can be easily associated with a company name. Often, the result is bland architecture and an international style which does not respond to regional influences, uses no local building materials or techniques and contains no special meaning to the local environment. Homogenization of the landscape makes no allowances for site and the circumstances of initial settlement.

Loss of sense of place appears to occur with the processes of growth and development. Hough identified several reasons for the loss of regional identity and sense of place:

i) Fragmented Landscape: The visual edge or boundary where urban development meets the countryside is blurred. There is little distinction in the boundary or separation when looking out towards the countryside or looking towards the townscape. New development does not draw its character or takes cues from the regional landscape.

ii) Urban Expansion: Growth, particularly subdivision development, is continuously moving outwards. The type of development which takes place does not have special attributes and adds to the homogenization of places.

iii) Poor Development and Urban Sprawl: The highway strip and the automobile mall can be found everywhere and the design for such places is similar everywhere. Franchises such as fast food places, gas stations and grocery stores have a familiar universal image. This further undermines the unique qualities of places (Hough, 1990, pp. 87-88).

Restoring Meaning and Identity to the Landscape

Cultural landscapes and pristine environments are rapidly changing with the impacts of human activity. Although change is inevitable and it is almost impossible to "museumize" or freeze places to a certain time period, change should be anticipated and planned for. The special nature and regional distinctiveness is a non-renewable resource which is vulnerable to irreplaceable loss. It is difficult to bring back a community's special characteristics and distinctive spirit once it has been lost or replaced. Distinctiveness and originality are qualities which should be acknowledged, celebrated and preserved. Restoring regional identity back to places and the landscape requires looking for and taking cues from the land, as the history of the region holds meaning and significance. It
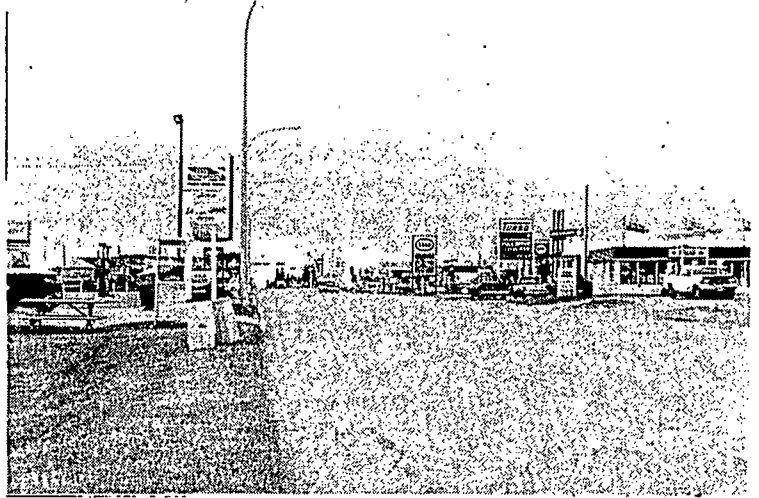
Figure 2: Highway commercial strip development located on Highway 12, east of Lacombe.

is the reflection of past achievements, aspirations and conflicts blended into the present through public recognition and acceptance (Prenshaw and McKee, 1979, p. 89).

Physical design and planning can greatly enhance the appearance of places and can bring back the meaning and identity the landscape once held. Hough states that "Creating a sense of place requires a conscious decision to do so." (Hough, 1990, p. 179). There has been a growing recognition of the advantages of preserving community identity and cultural heritage. The attractiveness of a community can be its greatest asset and the principles of design, preservation, community planning and development can be used to enhance the quality of life and degree of livability in a community. Places which have been able to preserve their sense of history can use the cultural past to forge community economic development. Cultural tourism, urban design and community economic development have all been vehicles communities have utilized to restore community identity.

Community Action

i) Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism celebrates the distinctions in local and regional landscapes. One aspect of cultural tourism is that it can be an economic development tool for making places attractive to both residents and to visitors. McNulty, President of Partners for Livable Places sees cultural tourism as a "process of making [a] community more livable." Through creating and marketing an attractive destination, cultural tourism is capable of attracting new development, community investment and employment. Cultural tourism can be seen as an effort towards enhancing and protecting cultural resources, landscapes, architecture, urban form, arts activity and unique local character (Claude Moulin in Planning for Cultural Tourism Symposium, 1989).

A small town with special qualities can potentially become a picturesque tourism destination. However, the impacts of mass tourism and poor management of growth and development can lead to the alteration or destruction of the unique characteristics. The initial attractive qualities often are lost or destroyed through a lack of understanding of the community's sense of place. Standardized development and the influences of popular culture further undermine the sensitive and sometimes ephemeral qualities which can escape description and explanation. Designing and planning for a better community appearance should primarily be a response and a reflection of the regional environment and the cultural landscape. Promoting cultural tourism is no exception. The special nature of the community is the greatest resource or asset for tourism and for cultural tourism to be successful, sense of place must be understood, identified and protected.

Figure 3: Medalta Potteries in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Figure 4: Front Street in the Town of Coupeville is a popular tourist destination.

ii) Community Design

The physical design and appearance of a community is a statement of a community's health, its livability and quality of life and the pride people have in their community. Urban design bridges physical planning and architecture and is concerned with improving urban form to produce

dynamic, healthy places. Good design is a crucial element to enhancing the unique characteristics of places and can help communities realize successful revitalization.

Some towns, particularly those within commuting distance of larger urban centres, are currently experiencing an increase in urban growth and economic development activity. Unfortunately, little consideration is given to the impact new development has on the appearance of the built and natural environments.

Small town planning and design strategies can help to create an attractive community which effectively serves its people and takes advantage of its unique qualities to promote itself. For J.B. Jackson, a successful town is realized, "when the physical or environmental concepts are in harmony with the social concepts; when the relationships between buildings and streets and spaces and neighborhoods and the encompassing countryside provide convenient and attractive places for social intercourse." (Barker et al., forward in The Small Town Design Book, 1981.).

For the small town, community design is an ideal model to implement as it examines how residents value and regard their town and the manner they use and function within it. Hester states that "the landscape serves as a resource that provides the basis for economic development [and] is a container of cultural life essential for a good lifestyle." (Hester, Jr., 1987, p. 45.).

With relatively simple physical townscapes, small towns are often unable to absorb large scale expansion and development. Planning and design activities must be tailored for small, rural communities as they differ in scale, appearance and function socially and economically in a manner different from their urban counterparts. Urban designers and com-

munity planners often transplant urban ideas onto the rural townscape with marginal success as they do not understand the social network of the town and how people function within it. Small towns are also visually different from urban places as they are low in profile and compact in scale. Planners and designers must be able to take the visual clues in the townscape and their plans must be sensitive and respect the town form.

Barker et al. discuss the problem of transplanting urban planning and design criteria onto small towns. "It is important to understand that the issue is not just aesthetics; the issue is the special ambience that the small town provides that results in a feeling of confidence, security and neighborliness. We must recognize that small town space is unique and that it has value in contributing to the social environment. Small town space affects the social ambience of the community. It directly affects the small town personality." (Ibid., p. 8)

iii) Community Development and Community Economic Development

Community development and community economic development are concerned with increasing the social, physical and economic health and livability of the community. Both community development and community economic development have been models for towns to adopt as successful employment creation has typically arisen from initiatives from within the community (Centre for Livable Communities, CED Briefing Note, 1992). Disenchantment with federal programs to generate economic development through granting locational incentives have led communities to initiate

and manage their own community development and economic development activities.

Community development is concerned with increasing goods, services, productivity, human resources and local control over decision-making through means of public participation, self-reliance, mutual aid and use of local resources for the equitable welfare of all residents. The central principles of community development include:

- local participation in the processes of decision-making and planning,
- local control and management of resources addressed through participatory action,
- self-reliance, local initiatives and leadership development,
- optimum use of local and indigenous resources.

Community economic development is a revitalization strategy arising from local ideas and resources. Community economic development is concerned with more than just business development. It includes other social institutions which operate within the community, integrating community and business goals. It is a comprehensive program to improve the range of local social and physical resources in areas such as education, leisure, housing and transportation (Perry, 1989, p. vii). These community institutions provide information and additional sources of support to the business community to help them plan for anticipated changes. A strong community has a variety of institutions which can meet community needs locally.

Lacombe Community Action

All three routes of community action have been pursued by the Town of Lacombe and the uncoordinated efforts have produced mixed results. Physical planning and urban design efforts have only been concentrated in the downtown through the Lacombe Main Street Programme and the results have been very successful. The Town has undertaken the Community Tourism Action Plan process in order to facilitate cultural tourism possibilities, but have made no recent significant improvements to turn Lacombe into a tourist destination. What is needed is a coordinated approach which will utilize a combination of these tools to produce a comprehensive town plan to protect the special town character.

Sense of Place

Sense of place has been a subject of concern and attention and a cause of people's feelings, moods, responses, constraints and achievements for a considerable period of time (Steele, 1981, p. 9). Sense of place is the recognition of different places and different identities of a place (Relph, 1976, p. 63). Sense of place is a way of expressing uniqueness and how places over time have created a distinctive identity. Such qualities often cannot be quantified or even identified, but collectively, natural, cultural and social elements such as family ties, landscape features, cultural and environmental traits add to the character of places.

J.B. Jackson has described sense of place as one of the ways in which people identify the peculiar characteristics of a landscape and its inhabitants (Hough, 1990, p. 1). It refers to the complex bundle of meanings, symbols and qualities that a

person or group associate consciously and unconsciously with a particular locality or region (Downs and Stea, 1977, p. 108). Peirce Lewis defines sense of place as "something intangible in certain places, a kind of quality that makes certain places special and worth defending" (Prenshaw and McKee, 1979, p. 27). It is a feeling of special attachment to a specific geographic area and the experiences and expectations a person has in a place and involves a physical, emotional and spiritual aspect of the landscape. It is an awareness of place, a curiosity for regional history, a concern for the quality of life and is the composite reflection of a community's past achievements, its future aspirations and its conflicts in the physical landscape.

Sense of place can help to preserve history and culture. Sense of place reflects the unique qualities of places which have evolved through time and have been influenced by human culture and the environmental conditions of site and situation. The principles of physical planning and design are important in the preservation of places as an attractive community is a reflection of community values and traditions. Sense of place provides some understanding to how people and the environment interact to create distinctive places. It is important to recognize and understand the social, physical and environmental factors which shape and influence communities and town planning should protect and continue community values and traditions which support community identity. Town plans often do not include the impact sense of place has in the creation and reinforcement of community identity, especially intangible factors and qualities. In order to understand how places function and the meanings they convey, the interactions and interrelationships of the environment, the history and cultural activity must be studied. Such a study provides an understanding of the historical nature of communities and also provides a sense of identity for residents and visitors.

Importance of Sense of Place

The need for a sensible, applicable methodology has never been greater, as the rate of urban expansion and development far exceeds actions taken to preserve places and landscapes. Often, places have radically changed in appearance without people realizing how such changes could affect their quality of life. More and more often, people mourn for the loss of the special nature of the community after change has taken place. Where this has occurred, it is very difficult to preserve town identity and character. Hard measures which benefit and contribute to a high quality of life are difficult to assess and quantify and tend to be under-emphasized or avoided in the planning process. Such qualities and characteristics are fragile and are subject to loss in community identity and change the expression of the landscape when affected by insensitive development action. It is important to recognize the qualities which makes places special and set them apart.

Intangible, sensory qualities are seldomly articulated or protected in a town plan. Planning decisions are more concerned with land uses, environmental and social impacts and transportation issues. Land use planning techniques are used to emphasize important physical, environmental and social issues. Because of the intangible dimensions and the difficulty in defining the collective characteristics of sense of place, it has often been misunderstood or overlooked in community planning. The nebulous nature of sense of place makes it difficult to study places objec-

tively as it is different things to different people. Unquantifiable elements such as rootedness, feelings of belonging, family ties and "a good place to live" are difficult to express.

Sense of place can be an important planning tool to implement in order to maintain community identity. Successful community planning takes action to improve the quality of life and makes the community a better place to live. Communities which are able to understand the elements and qualities which contribute to

Figure 5: Agriculture has been identified as an important feature which contributes to the character of Ebey's Landing.

Figure 6: Character homes in the Town of Coupeville add to the sense of place.

sense of place are in a better position to control future development plans as well as maintain the special qualities which distinguish places. The Town of Coupeville in Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve in Washington State is such an example and its uniqueness is discussed in Appendix A. For any community development plan or action, a community should draw upon its resources. Understanding the meanings and intentions of the regional and local sense of place provides a strong base to build community planning decisions. Community development and economic development initiatives which reflect the true image and character tend to be more stable and successful as they capitalize on existing assets.

Communities need to identify and define the tangible and intangible qualities which compose the spirit and sense of place, qualities which make the community unique. The local and regional history, the natural and cultural elements and the activities provide distinctive identity to places. Individuality sets places apart, is a reflection of ecological diversity and human variety and is an expression of peoples' efforts and accomplishments (Relph, 1981, p. 176). Unfortunately, it also is a fragile quality which can easily be taken for granted and destroyed.

Sense of Place Factors

Natural, cultural and social influences have created distinctive landscapes. Each place has its own character which has evolved from human and natural influences. Since sense of place is a variety of features, qualities and elements, it is impossible to narrow it down or make it a simple definition. The following are some of the main characteristics which contribute to sense of place:

1. Natural Features

Some places draw their character from the region or are defined by the regional geography in which they are situated. Environmental conditions have historically influenced town location and urban form through factors of site and situation. Topography, bodies of water, climate, vegetation and geology influence regional form and cultural adaptation to the environment.

2. The Cultural Landscape: Human Influences

Past human activities and traces of settlements are part of the cultural landscape. Such landscapes reflect how people met basic needs for food, shelter, clothing and entertainment and adapted to the climate through the use of local building materials, craftsmanship and built form (Jordan and Rowntree, p. 22). Much of the character of the cultural landscape lies in the vernacular (Hough, 1990, p. 34). Vernacular refers to "the forms which grow out of pragmatic needs of people of a place and the constraints of site and climate" (Ibid., p. 34). Vernacular forms are shaped by the forces of nature, culture and history. These forces are unique to each region. Hough states that the people who have created these landscapes did not consciously plan or design their environment. Vernacular landscapes represent the unique character of different places and the conscious, intentional response to the landscape. It is the adaptation of site and situation of places as differences in places are the result of natural and social forces. Evidence of the cultural landscape include boundary demarcations, architecture, cultivation patterns and urban settlements.

Figure 7: Head Smashed-In Buffalo Jump is a natural and cultural landscape.

a) Strong Boundaries

In 1983, the National Trust for Historic Preservation studied twenty historic districts to identify, describe and analyze the elements that form their boundaries. These elements included:

i) Historic factors, including the boundaries of an original settlement or concentrations of early buildings

ii) Visual factors such as topography, vistas or entrances of architectural similarity

iii) Physical factors, including railroads, highways, open spaces, rivers, walls, embankments or land use changes

iv) Surveyed lines, such as legally established boundaries, rights-of-way or property lines

v) Political or socio-economic factors, including government or citizen opposition or residents' socio-economic levels (Hall, 1991, p. 23)

Strong boundaries announce the arrival into the town as well as define both the town and the surrounding region where it is situated, creating a sense of inside and outside. The inside of the town is different from the outside and gives a feeling of security against the surrounding landscape. As a tool to regulate the environment, boundaries must be flexible to accommodate change and expansion. The edges must respond to legal, economic, social and architectural factors. Boundary demarcation should be a composite of natural, political and cultural boundaries, beginning with a core district and working outward.

Figure 8: The pedestrian overpass functions as an entrance way and a town boundary to Coupeville.

b) Town Entrances

The town entrance or arrival point is where the town character is first seen and experienced. The entrance is the critical area which reflects a town's sense of place and is a sensitive area constantly under development pressure. Strip malls and businesses which rely on the automobile tend to be zoned in the town entrance area and this creates a poor visual impression of the

community before arrival. First impressions are important, as it is where tourist decisions are often made as to the town's appeal and whether or not to stop in the town or to bypass.

c) Townscape and Physical Form

Each town has a unique situation in terms of location, character, infrastructure, financial status, community attitude and appearance (Howell, 1983, p. 20). The physical structure of small towns is especially conducive to the discovery and experience of the special qualities. Due to the intimate scale and relatively low density of small towns, their compact physical form allows for pedestrian movement and exploration.

A town which possesses special natural and cultural features and qualities creates a rich visual scene. Colours, patterns, materials and details which catch the eye and stir the imagination define the sense of place. A town aware of its sense of place understands the forces which unify the appearance and produce its unique character. In most towns, the downtown typically is the physical, social and economic centre. A town with a vital downtown indicates that the community is functioning well economically, socially and physically, but a vital downtown must have more than picturesque qualities.

3. Social Influences

Social networks and social activities support, define and maintain a community's sense of place. Planning and design professionals and visitors often misunderstand or overlook the social ties which hold people together and make judgements about

the community without having a clear idea of how people function within it. The social factors of sense of place require more understanding in order to preserve valued places.

a) Ethnic Districts

An ethnic district or neighborhood is an area where people of the same ethnic background live or work. People of an ethnic group possess a common ancestry and cultural tradition which promotes a strong feeling of belonging and cohesiveness (Jordan and Rowntree, 1982, p. 269). Social activities such as friendships, kinships and business relations operate in an ethnic area. Social institutions and facilities such as churches, community halls, schools, stores and services reinforce the sense of identity in ethnic districts and neighborhoods.

b) Festivals and Events

Festivals and events are public celebrations which can promote culture, tourism and community development opportunities. Such activities animate places and add vitality to streets. Festivals and events can play a positive role on the host community:

- as a catalyst for urban renewal schemes, infrastructure construction and community economic development initiatives,
- through the creation of an image for the host community,
- as an attraction which promotes the host community as a tourism destination,
- as an animator in the community through static attractions, public facilities, special markets and community participation.

Figure 9: The festival market in Granville Island. Vancouver has been a catalyst for urban renewal.

There are many factors which create and reinforce community identity and sense of place. Communities have realized the importance in identifying and maintaining the special character in order to harness the potential advantages it can offer to community planning and development. Although sense of place has not been a part of community planning, its inclusion can be a significant contribution to the protection of regional identity, culture and history. Challenges to maintaining the sense of place arise from pressures of suburban growth and expansion, economic and environmental issues. Chapter Two will discuss the different approaches which can be used to define and identify sense of place and the various traditional and neo-traditional planning techniques which are in place to protect and maintain community character.

Chapter 2
Defining Sense of Place

Sense of Place and Community Planning

The fear of the loss of community identity is particularly strong in small towns. The rapid pace and extent of suburban sprawl does much to undermine the sense of place. Communities concerned about the changes in the population base, the quality of services and the appearance of their towns need to take action to maintain and preserve regional identity and distinctive characteristics. The use of the principles of community planning and community development are necessary for preserving community identity and achieving sense of place study objectives. Cornerstone principles of community development and planning include community self-help, promotion of sustainability, public participation and the use of local resources whenever possible. Sense of place holds meaning and intent to community residents and local support and input should be encouraged throughout the process of community planning. Typically, local residents, historians, artisans, planners, urban designers and architects need to be involved in sense of place projects to enrich and continue the emotions and memories a community evokes.

This chapter will examine the various methodologies which can be used to study and define sense of place and the how different planning regulations and design tools can be considered to maintain and preserve the special character of communities. The process of implementing a sense of place study, from listing community resources and special features to organizing and interpreting the collected data will be discussed.

Purpose of a Sense of Place Study

A sense of place study is an appropriate planning tool to incorporate in community planning and development. The information gathered can be used to help prepare community development and economic development objectives. Town administrators, council members, planners, developers and residents should determine what long term objectives they would like to see come from a sense of place study. A strategy which utilizes concepts of physical planning and design, community planning and community development can produce many options for the town to consider.

A sense of place study should attempt to gather information and data to understand what defines the community. Sense of place allows a community to understand itself and how its true image can be portrayed to the public. Ideal sense of place planning objectives include:

- to understand, record and communicate the community's sense of place,
- to encourage town planners, administrators and residents to initiate a comprehensive town plan and design approach which addresses future

concerns of preserving sense of place, while fostering sympathetic and orderly growth and development,

- to promote community development initiatives such as cultural tourism through identified regional sense of place resources and to encourage regional design factors to maintain, promote and enhance sense of place,
- to achieve the highest quality of life possible for residents.

In order to fulfill these objectives, it is necessary to study the community and gather information on the factors which add to the special character of the town. Since each place has different elements which contributes to its sense of place, defining sense of place should be specific to each region. Defining sense of place involves the identification and articulation of the various elements which characterize the community and region. As discussed in Chapter One, defining physical and tangible features is a relatively easy task, but intangible qualities such as place of birth, family ties and quality of life are more difficult to express. Sense of place can be hard to define due to the "soft" nature of the data and the number of different possible responses given by participants. The significance of sense of place is difficult to measure by empirical science as it is a multi-disciplinary subject and uses various social science techniques. Defining and identifying a community's sense of place may require several methodological techniques to ensure that essential qualities and characteristics are captured and recorded. It can be difficult to understand and identify the physical, cultural and social factors which create and reinforce a community's appearance, image, identity, historic meaning or purpose, but it is possible to understand how certain forces form

and reinforce a sense of community and how residents and visitors perceive the community. The following are examples in which the essence of place can be captured and recorded.

Visual Analysis

Sensory appreciation cannot be taught; it is experienced. A pedestrian's visual analysis provides a first-hand, intimate experience of the townscape and allows for interaction and observation with the setting. Researchers and sense of place participants conduct a visual analysis by walking throughout the town to explore, experience and discover new and different facets of the community. Textures, colours, patterns and materials can be revealed through a visual analysis and recorded through graphic illustrations, visual notes and photographs. Visiting and observing the town at different times (daily and seasonal) reveals rich details in the urban and rural fabric.
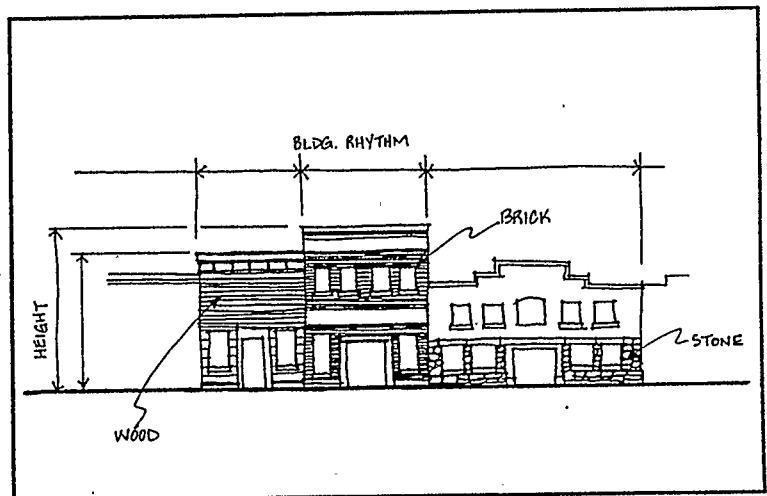
Figure 10: A visual analysis of a streetscape examines building materials, architectural styles, massing and the condition of the buildings.

Recording visual notes illustrates things which cannot be seen or easily described, such as transportation and pedestrian circulation patterns. Urban design and physical planning rely heavily on visual clues and collective experiences within the environment to properly assess and record impressions and activities.

Community Reconnaissance

The evolutionary circumstances of a community's physical appearance and the existing social network which reinforces the sense of community can help researchers understand the forces which hold the community together. A community reconnaissance examines community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, the state or health and quality of life which currently are in force. An analysis of the community's position provides an indication of how well it is currently faring and what future decisions can positively or negatively affect the community.

The condition and appearance of the urban form, the quality and carrying capacity of current and forecasted infrastructure (sewers, roads, electricity), the type of available community services (schools, health care, ambulance, police, fire department), demographics (population breakdown, growth rate, unemployment rate, potential employment) are often included in a community reconnaissance. Most towns have conducted a community profile to provide a general overview of economic activity and opportunities, the type of available services, community organizations and population figures.

Cognitive Mapping

An analysis of the mental images which people hold of their daily surroundings helps to understand a community's sense of place. A cognitive map tends to be a reflection on the individual's life space and daily routine within the community (Findley et al., 1989, p. 23). Cognitive mapping is a method to recall memories of special places which hold significant meaning to people. In The Image of the City, Kevin Lynch pioneered cognitive mapping with categories of nodes, districts, edges, routes and landmarks to help people define the image of their life space. The map tells where places are and lists their general character. Such details help to define and identify sense of place both on and off site. A mental image of the area is produced, typically with outstanding or memorable features listed. Because of frequent exposure, familiarity and sense of rootedness with their surroundings, residents often overlook the importance of the community's image until it is threatened by change. On the other hand, visitors rely on visual landmarks and clues and notice the different contrasts in the community's image.

Seldomly are cognitive maps exactly the same. This methodology is time consuming to administer and interpret, as the mapped elements and features noted are unique to each individual. Compiled cognitive maps normally are made into a composite map which identifies common features and elements. The features and elements in the composite map are typically general in nature and occupy a highly visible position within the community.

Landmarks	✡
Nodes	◯
Paths	⇐
Edges	⁞⁞⁞⁞⁞⁞⁞⁞
Districts	⬭
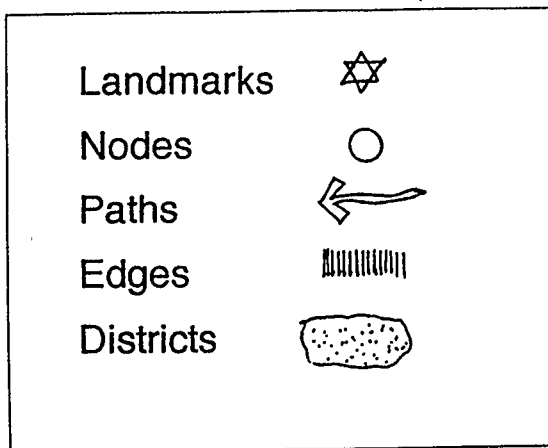
Figure 11: From The Image of the City.

Surveys and Inventories

Mapping and listing regional and local sense of place resources provides an inventory of significant elements, qualities, features and objects which contributes to the physical appearance to the community. An inventory is a reference list of the attributes which constitute and embody community meaning. The inventory identifies elements in context to their location, their condition and their significance in reinforcing community identity and meaning. Mapping the inventory or graphically illustrating special features can be very effective in communicating sense of place to the community, especially with things such as viewpoints, pathways and barriers or breaks in the linkage of places.

A questionnaire can be used to initiate an inventory. Relevant questions about the physical appearance of the community, desired changes, strength of community ties and length of residence provide invaluable information to how people see and use the community and how they would like to see it in the future. Information gathered can be plotted on a map to illustrate the community's resources and where sense of place is threatened by in-

appropriate development. With a wide variety of information, different maps can be made into overlays to create several categories of resources. For example, overlays can include a cultural (human influence) resources layer, a natural or environment resources layer, a social influences layer and a visual quality or view layer.

Creating a Database

In order for the gathered data to be accessible and useful for community planning, the information must be organized in a concise manner. The inventory of community resources and assets identified by residents, visitors and other involved parties can easily be placed in a database. The database can be a simple list, or the identified features can be mapped to show their location within the community. The visual prominence features command, the areas where sense of place is most strongly mirrored or weak areas where the special character of the community is threatened wih inappropriate development can be revealed. Since a sense of place study is an open-ended process, new features will continuously be added.

In Tourism: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly, Rosenow and Pulsipher outline a *community personality planning process*. The community planning process identifies elements which makes places unique and focuses on areas where the sense of place is most vulnerable to loss (Rosenow and Pulsipher, 1979, p. 63). The process is similar to the one used in the Town of Lacombe sense of place study. Four steps are involved in the community personality profile process:

1) Identify special areas:

Distinctive features which characterize and personify places such as unique or outstanding features, visual qualities, places of historic, cultural and environmental significance are identified and mapped. They may include:

- historic resources (sites, buildings, neighborhoods or districts associated with significant historic events or periods),
- urban landscape features (buildings, structures, parks or other man-made features of outstanding architectural or landscape quality),
- rural landscape features (farms, ranches, vernacular buildings and structures such as fences),
- ethnic and cultural features (districts, structures),
- recreation areas (facilities such as parks, golf courses, camping, picnic and ski resorts),
- natural features (landforms, vegetation, topography, geology, water bodies).

2) Identify critical zones:

Critical zones are important to include on the special areas and features map as these areas tend to be highly sensitive to development pressures and have a significant impact on the appearance of the community. Critical zones are areas where visitors first enter the community and visit, such as entrance routes, major traffic corridors and public areas. Because first impressions are established in critical zones, these areas are important to include in the identification process and should be extended to include visual foreground and background areas to create visual continuity to the landscape.

All planning and design efforts in critical zones should encourage a visually pleasing and environmentally compatible use.

3) Establish land use objectives:

The third step in the process is to examine how the identified features and areas affect the town in terms of appearance, function, form, economic use and quality of life. Problems or conflicts in land use, inappropriate development and potential threats to the sense of place are addressed at this stage. Community planning facilitated by planning and design professionals can determine suitable land use, future development intentions or routes of action. Principles of land use and community planning need to be combined to preserve the nature of the community, but there must be flexibility in the process to allow development and town expansion to take place.

4) Formulate specific action plans:

Showing some of the unique characteristics and how certain areas are sensitive to change can encourage the community to take action to preserve its sense of place. Establishing land use objectives can help to protect community character, but intangible qualities and social factors are difficult to include in a land use plan. Planning tools such as design guidelines and strict planning and development controls can limit the amount and type of change that will take place. Maintaining and protecting the sense of place can be accomplished through zoning, purchase of scenic easements, sign control ordinances, landscaping through public and private groups, purchase and preservation of historic buildings and structures (Ibid., p. 64-70).

Preservation and Protection of Sense of Place

New development, urban expansion and growth pressures, outdated planning practices and the economic decline of the downtown in small towns has led to poor integration of old and new districts in the community. Preservation and protection of sense of place has similar, if not the same, objectives as defining and identifying sense of place.

1) To retain the diverse elements of the past
2) To perpetuate the distinct identities of places
3) To involve the community in landscape awareness and care
4) To practice a conservative approach to environmental and development change (Datel, 1985, p. 25)

Through these four objectives, community identity, economic stability, environmental awareness and control can be realized.

Using Planning and Design Tools to Protect and Maintain Sense of Place

Protecting and maintaining sense of place can be accomplished through regulatory and legal planning and design tools. Planning regulations through zoning and land use bylaws tend to enforce compliance or conformance. Voluntary compliance when people recognize, endorse and participate in the protection of sensitive qualities is preferable. Regulatory, legal and neo-traditional planning tools can work in conjunction with voluntary action. The planning approach to adopt will depend on the nature of the planning practice and town administration, the involved actors and the degree of significance sense of place takes within the community.

Legal Planning Tools

Zoning

Zoning is a legal planning tool to control land use. Zoning bylaws enforce building regulations on height, mass and density as well as the type of building use and land occupied. Zoning was first put into practice to separate incompatible land uses and to prevent the exploitation of land, but it has also been a measure to protect property values.

The downtown is the heart of the community where sense of place is most strongly mirrored. Zoning can be enforced in small towns to preserve the streetscape and pedestrian scale activities in the business district. Most downtowns are often zoned as direct control and auto-dependent businesses are zoned as highway commercial on the town periphery along major travel routes. Zoning and building permits separate the different types of commercial activities and minimizes locational conflicts.

Land Use Planning

Land use objectives reflect the local values of how people wish to see the town develop through long term planning. Environmental, physical, social and economic factors are important considerations, but land use planning alone does not protect a community's sense of place. Land use planning separates different functions and activities such as residential and industrial use. The resulting pattern of segregated land uses encourages urban sprawl and can destroy the intimate, compact scale of small towns. The separation of land uses increases the need for vehicular movement, wastes resources, destroys the pedestrian scale and sense of community.

Regulatory Planning Tools

Town Master Plan, General Plan, Area Redevelopment Plan

These planning documents state broad community objectives and goals town residents and administrators envision. They often include social, economic and environmental issues and concerns, forecasts such as population growth forecasts and economic development and planning regulations.

A General Municipal Plan (GMP) states the overall objectives and general governing policies of a town. The Alberta Planning Act requires that each municipality adopt a General Municipal Plan to address land use objectives and issues. A GMP has traditionally relied on land use planning to address planning concerns, but many such as the Town of Lacombe General Municipal Plan has included a range of municipal activities such as long range capital plans, operations plans, economic development plans and recreation plans to provide a comprehensive understanding of the municipality's affairs (Town of Lacombe General Municipal Plan, 1990).

An Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) is a planning document adopted by by-law which sets out a comprehensive program of land use policies and other planning proposals that help to determine and guide the future of a community. An ARP examines planning policies and community concerns and provides specific land use and development guidelines for the community.

Revitalization and Redevelopment Schemes

Economic revitalization and redevelopment plans affect entire districts or neighborhoods and involve upgrading or improving the urban fabric, public amenities and services through planning, urban design, heritage preservation and economic development (Jamieson and Perks, Planning and Development in Canadian Cities manuscript). Improvements to the physical townscape and the attraction of social activities and functions help to animate the community.

Old buildings and even districts change when the social, economic and visual forces of their location lose their original meaning and intent. New development should be sympathetic to older structures, but does not necessarily mean imitating or reflecting certain architectural details. It should be visually pleasing and enhances the existing fabric.

Historic Districts

The design relationship between old and new architecture is important in heritage preservation. Historic district designation can help to achieve some regulation or adopt a set of design guidelines for new development to be sensitive to the existing streetscape and architectural fabric. The preservation of buildings and structures alone does not maintain the identity and sense of place of communities. Entire areas and districts which contain special characteristics and meaning provide an accurate context for maintaining the spirit and sense of place as well as preserving the way of life. A historic district or a preservation

ordinance can be adopted to preserve the remaining historic fabric without compromising growth (Fleming, 1981, p. 22). However, the peripheral fringe outside of the designated historic district is subject to development changes.

An aesthetically pleasing historic district has economic value, but must support economic activity in order to remain viable. Historic districts are vulnerable to what is known as "museumization". Freezing an area back to a particular time period is not what historic preservation tries to achieve. Successful preservation tries to maintain a balance between old and compatible new structures. Change cannot be halted.

Preservation criteria determines what kind of relationship new structures will have with existing structures in the historic district. Criteria standards include architectural detail, land use, setbacks, density, floor area ratio, signage, subdivision and street plans. Collectively, the criteria must be able to achieve preservation goals. Preservation criteria include the significance of cultural resources as well as the feasibility of economic reuse. They must foster the renovation of old buildings and the construction of new buildings in an historic district while maintaining functional and aesthetic compatibility. The criteria should provide some guidelines for relating the new to the old and should be explicit enough to protect the character and sense of place. Carefully drawn preservation criteria and a well-structured design review process alone do not guarantee design excellence. Architects, landscape architects, planners and historians are all necessary to create design excellence.

Design Guidelines

Successful design review efforts are a result of community based efforts to identify what is special, unique or worthy of preserving. Design reviews based on public opinion, programs and framework designs may be advisory or controlling. They are a flexible way to deal with questions of quality and aesthetics.

Regulations could be recommended to control the quality and type of private development through public controls such as zoning, building codes and subdivision standards. These regulations would take into account factors of topography, building mass and visibility, surface textures and use of materials, preservation of views and open space and shadow cast controls. Height, surface cover and mass are three physical factors which are important when examining a new building for its impact on the surroundings. The visual impact of a building's mass is dictated by height and surface cover and depends on the various relations established between the overall proportions.

The quality of sense of place can be positively affected by appropriate design decisions at strategic places of high visibility. A strict building review committee would be able to judge requests for building permits according to certain merits and contributions to its surroundings as well as the entire townscape. The planning department or an advisory body would conduct a survey for the diagnosis of the existing regional quality as it is used and perceived by residents and visitors. Information would be the basic data for public action, private development and education. The information gathered should be accessible to all for this to be successful.

"Good architecture" involves good design which is sensitive to the overall character of the area and streetscape. There are no guarantees or controls to ensure good design. Design controls and reviews may be a means of legally preventing the intrusion of inappropriate structures into a historic area. Criticisms of design control include the stifling of creative design.

Neo-Traditional Planning Techniques

The move towards achieving and fulfilling environmental protection and sustainable development have fostered neo-traditional planning and design techniques to conserve valuable land and offer efficient and economical alternative planning methods. It has become increasingly more difficult to conserve land as curvilinear residential designs supplant the traditional town form based on the gridiron plan. Modern subdivisions require more land and houses have become larger to suit consumer demands.

Neo-traditional planning techniques can allow for the continuation of agricultural activities, even when the land becomes more valuable and susceptible to subdivision pressures. Such techniques also help to maintain and protect the regional character, preserve environmentally-sensitive areas and encourage design options for a more regionally sensitive residential plan. Many of these techniques have not been widely adopted as traditional planning approaches continue to dominate, and in many cases, encourage suburban development. In addition, criticism has often been aimed at the development industry for its lack of innovativeness and creativity in putting new ideas into practice. Trends indicate that there will be more opportunities for neo-traditional techniques to be considered, as many communities in the United States have already successfully employed these methods. The growing disenchantment with current conventional planning methods points to the direction of new ideas.

Farmland Preservation Techniques

Open space and agricultural activities are typical sense of place qualities for prairie small towns. However, the nature of current planning regulations do not reflect the need to preserve uninterrupted panoramic views. Urban sprawl and rapid development are fast intruding into the rural landscape, destroying the urban-rural distinction which separates the town periphery from the surrounding countryside. There needs to be some controlling mechanism to preserve open space and farmland while allowing for orderly growth and expansion. The following are examples of several preservation techniques which have been employed in the United States.

i) Diversion of Urban Expansion

Urban expansion can be diverted onto lower capability agricultural land to conserve prime agricultural land. This technique is dependent on the quality, location and amount of agricultural land adjacent to the community. If the town is surrounded by prime agricultural land, diverting development is almost impossible. Higher costs incurred by development on poorer quality lands, such as poor drainage, steep topography and geological faults may also prevent suitable development to take place.

ii) Differential Assessments for Farmland/Agricultural Zoning

Agricultural zoning allows farmers who restrict land use to farming to become eligible for property tax credits. This makes it more affordable for the farmer to stay in areas under development, particularly when property prices have increased with urbanization pressures.

iii) Right-to-Farm legislation

This technique is most apparent in rural areas experiencing steady growth and development and helps to determine land use conflicts between farmers and homeowners. "Right-to-Farm" laws provide limited protection to farmers from nuisance suits and assessments for urban improvements. This technique is most successful when it is included in development control bylaws. Right-to-Farm legislations often define buffer areas between agricultural activity and areas of urban development and requires new homeowners to be notified they are moving into an agricultural area.

iv) Purchase of Land Interests/ Purchase of Development Rights

Many states have funded purchase of development rights (PDR) programs which pay landowners to permanently protect their properties (Peters, 1990, p. 21). Because of the cost of PDR programs, only strategic areas, such as river valleys and greenbelts are protected. PDR programs also help to stabilize agricultural practice, as they enable farmers to realize development equity without having to sell their land (Ibid., p. 21).

Figure 12: Farmland preservation techniques have enabled agricultural activity to be preserved in Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve.

v) Purchase of Land Interests/ Transfer of Development Rights

This technique directs growth and development to more appropriate areas. Under TDR, landowners in a preservation district can sell their development rights to those who own land in a development district. In order for TDR to be successful, there must be a strong development market, a strict exclusive agricultural zoning district and a progressive planning department which is willing to adopt neo-traditional planning and development techniques (Ibid., p. 23).

vi) Private Trusts

Private trusts or land trusts are non-profit organizations which are established to protect open spaces and farmland. Land is purchased for scenic easements, development rights and dedications (Belits, 1989, p. 12).

vii) Performance Zoning Ordinances

Performance zoning ordinances serve as a mechanism to control and direct development while preserving prime agricultural farmland (Ibid., p. 12). The purpose is to maintain or preserve natural processes as the land undergoes cultural change. Performance criteria may include a certain ratio of farmland to be developed and preserved. Prime agricultural land and environmentally-sensitive tracts of land are ranked a higher priority for preservation through zoning or other planning enforcement.

The identification of environmentally-sensitive areas, prime agricultural soils and important scenic views are mapped to determine where residential development should be situated. Performance zoning ordinances promotes a more land intensive development in a limited section of land. Cluster development (discussed below) is an alternative subdivision design to the typical subdivision layout of single family residences with this preservation technique. The same density can be achieved as with conventional zoning or with density bonus to maintain landowners' equity (Ibid., p. 12). Performance zoning and natural resource protection standards are generally written into an ordinance and function as a planning and design guideline. As part of the development application, the developer must map prime agricultural soils, natural features such as water bodies, topography characteristics, vegetation stands and ecologically-sensitive zones (Ibid., p. 12). Not only does this technique preserves valuable land, it promotes good design and implements sustainable development principles.

viii) Subdivision Control and Design

Tracts of land zoned for residential development has become a familiar North American phenomenon that has threatened the character of small towns. It is one of the strongest forces of standardization and homogeneity which destroys regional character. Conventional subdivision design based on current zoning regulations wastes resources, including land, and creates a monotonous urban form which does not reflect the regional character or sense of place.
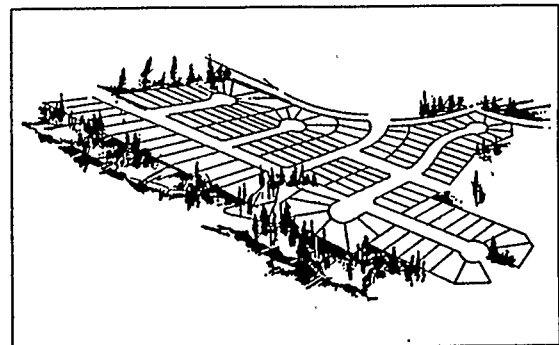
Figure 13: A typical subdivision development maximixes lot exposure to the street.

The neo-traditional clustered method for subdivision design is an alternative to the curvilinear streetscape now commonly adopted. The cluster development's form and ideology has its origins in the New England settlements. The Center for Rural Massachusetts in Amherst promotes cluster development as an alternative form of single family development (Knack, 1990, p. 5). The cluster development plan typically organizes housing around a commons, greens or other open space area. Planning regulations enforce development to be limited in the designated clusters so that a large portion of the land remains as wildlife habitat, farmland or some other appro-
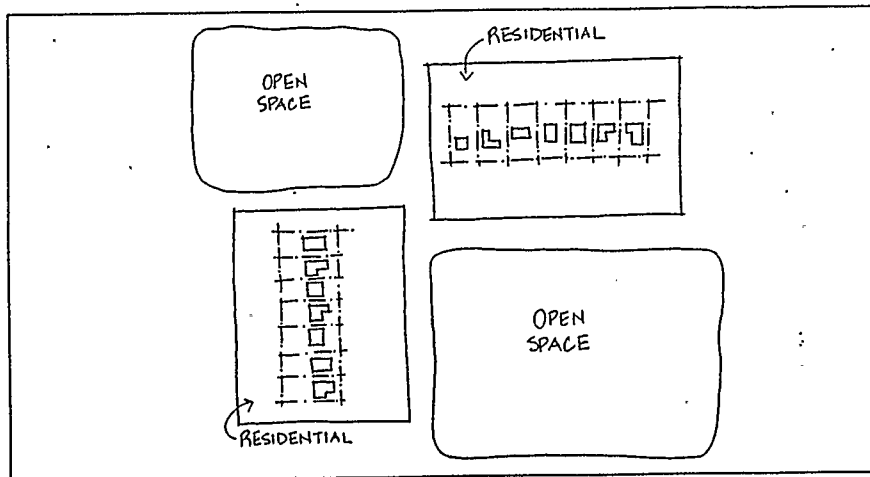
Figure 14: Cluster Development situates residential development on appropriate land and preserves views, agricultural activity and environmentally sensitive areas.

priate use which maintains the character and visual continuity (Ibid., p. 6). Cluster development layouts are pleasant, cheaper to build and are environmentally sounder (Ibid., p. 5). Concentrated development is also more cost effective for the community to service.

Small towns which have experienced suburban sprawl have facilitated growth through traditional zoning regulations. Urban growth and conservation of land is possible, but planning regulations have to change to make it happen. Randall Arendt, associate director at the Center for Rural Massachusetts, states that the pattern of development, not the developer, is not to blame for the current state of subdivision development. Planning regulations have to be changed to provide a framework for development which takes into account what makes each town special. Zoning laws have to be changed to make compact development mandatory or to even make it a reality.

To encourage the community to adopt new land use and zoning regulations for subdivision development, a map with all

areas zoned for development should be illustrated. In such graphic terms, community members often are unaware how much of their town is susceptible to development and how much of the open areas are threatened. Arendt proposes that developers and construction agencies must submit two concept plans with one based on a standard subdivision layout. This plan is used as a guideline to determine how many units will fit an a tract of land under existing zoning regulations. The other must show cluster development with houses to be located on environmentally sound portions of land.

Cluster development may not yield more units of housing or may be more economically attractive as standard development, but this is where the community must decide what it is willing to forego in economic terms to preserve its sense of place. A recent study by the Center for Rural Massachusetts compared sales and resale prices for conventional and cluster developments in two communities. The study concluded that cluster houses have appreciated at a higher rate.
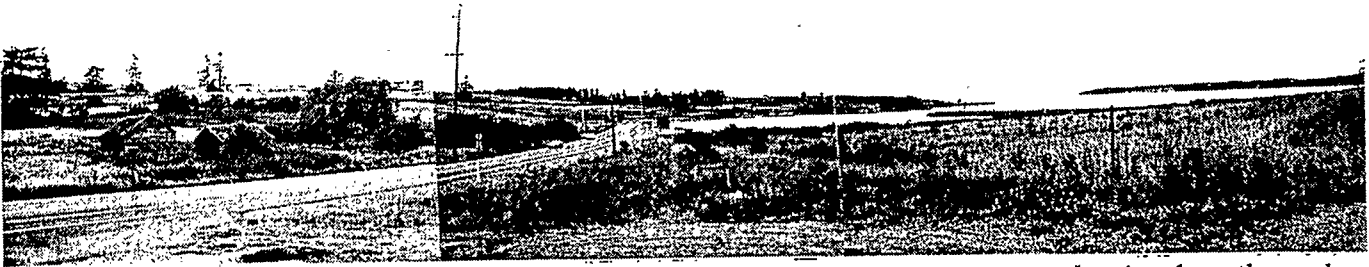
Figure 15: This scenic easement in Ebey's Landing National Historic Reserve preserves the view from the road.

ix) Scenic Easements

A scenic easement is a contractual agreement granted by the property owner of key scenic areas to prohibit certain types of development in order to preserve the scene or vista (Lins, 1991, p. 6). The easement may require that an agricultural scene be preserved, rather than specifying what activities may not take place. An easement often expresses a desired level of maintenance. For example, buildings and fences must be kept to a certain standard and historic field patterns must be maintained by mowing or grazing (Ibid., p. 6). In order for scenic easements to work for the landowner and the community, the community must respect that it is still private property and the landowner must be convinced of the importance of the site and situation of his land to maintain the sense of place.

x) Cultural Landscape Designation

Cultural landscapes are the result of human-environment interactions and relationships. Cultural landscapes are not static; they are constantly evolving and changing over time to produce distinctive characteristics and land patterns. The National Park Service in the United States has studied cultural landscapes in the past ten years and has categorized the concept of cultural landscape into four categories: historic site landscapes, designed landscapes, socio-cultural landscapes and vernacular landscapes (Ibid., p. 5). The National Park Service has recognized the importance of human actions on their landscapes and strives to preserve the way of life, rather than freezing the landscape back to a particular time period.

The National Park Service in conjunction with rural communities have a common interest in using and conserving a cultural landscape's natural and cultural resources. The cultural landscape designation's purpose is to utilize and preserve natural and cultural resources while maintaining living, economically viable landscapes (Ibid., p. 4). The approach to land management is to allow the cultural landscape to evolve over time and to preserve and protect those activities and features which contributes to the identity and character.

A cultural landscape designation requires complete commitment by the community or communities to retain the traditional bonds to the landscape and the vernacular appearance of the region. In the case of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve on Whidbey Island, Washington, the National Park Service used planning tools such as scenic easement agreements, purchase and exchange of development rights to retain the vernacular character of the landscape. The Ebey's Landing Protection Plan emerged to preserve the Ebey's Landing Reserve. The plan encourages private landowners to maintain the identity and character of their property. The goal of the land protection plan is to preserve the open space and agricultural lands through exchanges or by development rights donations (Ibid., p. 8). Developed land is clustered in wooded areas to minimize the visual impact on the landscape. Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve is discussed in further detail in Appendix A.

The Ebey's Landing Protection Plan emphasizes the maintenance and enforcement through local control. Community support is extremely important to keep this plan; residents also allow the public use of their lands, showing a high degree of residential cooperation and commitment (Ibid., p. 9). The National Park Service provides technical advice and assistance in land management, protection and interpretation of the reserve. This is a wonderful example of local, state and federal governments working in conjunction to preserve and protect nationally significant cultural landscapes.

Figure 16: Ebey's Bluff in Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve is protected from development under the Ebey's Landing Protection Plan.

Recognizing the special nature of a community and attempting to identify and define the distinctive features, qualities and elements is a positive step towards maintaining and protecting the sense of place. Chapters One and Two provide an introduction to the concept of sense of place, the strong relationship people have with their environment and how to recognize and identify sense of place. It should be remembered that sense of place in this document has been offered as a possibility for use as a planning tool. Its context as a planning tool for community planning and design has meant that sense of place has to have some definitive qualities that have been defined by the community.

Chapter 3
Prairie Towns

Background

Part Two of this document is a case study of the Town of Lacombe. It will illustrate how awareness and recognition of sense of place can be beneficial to community planning and development. At the time I was involved with this study, the Town of Lacombe was interested in using its sense of place for cultural tourism possibilities. Recognizing the position of the Town on pursuing cultural tourism, I have examined Lacombe's sense of place in terms of how its physical appearance can be both a positive asset and a detriment, and how physical planning and design may help realize a better quality townscape and bring about economic development opportunities.

Prairie Towns

The physical structure of prairie towns are similar in their settings, layouts and functions, with little variation in land use patterns. Frank Lloyd Wright commented that the prairie landscape possessed "a great simplicity" in the building forms typically seen in the region. In many cases, low structures constructed of available materials were purely functional. There were no existing regional styles or traditions to respect and the individuality of the prairies was often not acknowledged by the surveyor, town planner, or architect. The history of the prairie settlement can be illustrated through the case study of the Town of Lacombe. Due to its centrality,

accessibility and the strong visual qualities of the natural and built environment, Lacombe has the potential to demonstrate how a town can successfully promote its sense of place through addressing planning and design concerns to enhance and maintain its unique character and forge a strong base to encourage cultural tourism possibilities.

The Town of Lacombe:
Its Past, Present and Future

The Town of Lacombe shares a common legacy with other prairie settlements in that its period of initial settlement and development was facilitated by the railway and was influenced by its townspeople. Town development was marked by a rapid influx of settlers and particular local influences which have affected the present visual appearance and physical form of the community. Lacombe's past can be seen in the present streetscape.

Lacombe is an agricultural community located eighteen kilometres north of Red Deer. The townsite is strategically located at the junctions of Highway 2, Highway 2A and Highway 12 and is aptly known as "The Crossroads to the Parkland". Lacombe is significant in Alberta's history as it was incorporated as a town in 1902, at a time when other Alberta centres were few; Calgary was the dominant city and Lethbridge, Edmonton and Macleod were the only other towns.

The History of Lacombe *(excerpts from Lacombe The First Century, 1982)*

Lacombe's early success in attracting settlers is due in part to the presence of historic trails which converged at the townsite and joined the Calgary-Edmonton Trail. Hudson's Bay trading posts established at Rocky Mountain House and Fort Edmonton created well-travelled overland routes. Branching trails westward to Fort Benton at Gull Lake and eastward to Buffalo Lake widened the fur trade route.

The town derived its name from the missionary, Father Lacombe, who travelled the parkland region in 1850. He interacted with the Blackfoot and Cree and later mediated between the natives and the C.P.R. It was Father Lacombe's intervention with Chief Crowfoot that allowed the railway to be built across Alberta. The decision made by C.P.R. officials to make the town a stopping point for the Calgary-Edmonton rail line in 1890 fostered rapid growth in the region.

The Survey

The western frontier was surveyed prior to settlement. The land survey as set in the Homestead Act of 1871 marked Lacombe as the 40th township. Each township was thirty-six square miles or sections, with each section divided into four quarters of approximately one hundred and sixty acres. The quarters were further divided into four forty acre sections; each quarter section was a homestead unit. Sections 11 and 29 of each township were reserved as school lands and sections 8 and 29 were reserved for the Hudson Bay Company, leaving sixteen sections available for homesteading in Lacombe. For ten dollars, a homestead
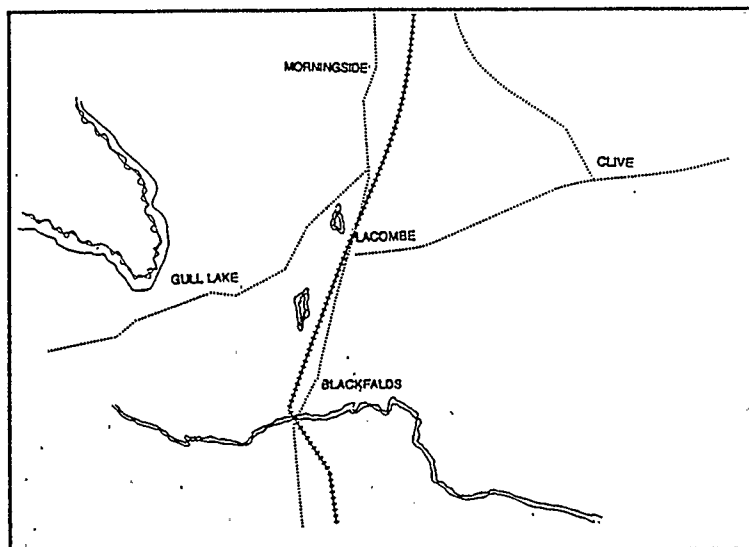
Figure 17: Historic trails in the Lacombe region converged at the townsite and joined the Calgary – Edmonton Trail.

claim could be filed, with the homesteader's guarantee that a house would be built and the land would be broken for farming within three years.

The Impact of the Railroad

The Canadian Pacific Railway west to Calgary was completed in 1883 and construction of the Calgary-Edmonton Trail began in 1890. The Canadian Pacific Railway was denied by legislation to build a north-south line in Lacombe, but because of the Calgary-Edmonton link, it received twenty-two miles of land on each side of its right-of-way. The Canadian Pacific Railway arrived in Lacombe in 1891 with a regular schedule between Calgary and Edmonton. The railway provided an impetus to town growth. Settlers were attracted to Lacombe due to its convenient proximity to the rail line. A spur siding was built near the existing homesteads and a boxcar became the Siding No. 12 station. It was known as Barnett Siding for several

Figure 18: The Lacombe Railway Station served the town for seven decades. (courtesy of The Maski-Pitoon Historical Society, Lacombe)

Figure 19: Looking north up Glass Street (49th Street) from top of the Brackman Ker grain elevator, circa 1901. (courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Calgary)

years before it was renamed Lacombe after the missionary who serviced the Alberta frontier.

The C.P.R. were not the only stakeholders within the town. The Canadian Northern Railway was also interested in the Lacombe region. Due to the discovery of coal, the C.N.R. announced its intent to establish Lacombe as a major western terminus for fuel distribution in 1912. Its

vision in 1912 saw Lacombe as the divisional point for the Brazeau and Calgary-Strathcona lines. The junction south of Lacombe was important for the C.N.R. as the coal supply for the entire system was to be distributed from this point. As a result, the C.N.R. purchased large tracts of land in and around the Town of Lacombe and the town rode on a wave of land speculation. Almost one thousand acres of land was purchased in speculation and the town experienced a population growth and tremendous town boom in development. The railway acquired a right-of-way through town and petitioned the federal government for permission to cross the C.P.R. line. However, the start of the First World War and the refusal for the C.N.R. to cross the Calgary-Edmonton line ended the early grandiose visions of town development. In 1915, one thousand lots of land was forfeited to the town in lieu of taxes. These lots remained vacant months after they were put up for sale by public auction. This illustrates the importance of the railroad and the impetus it had for development.

Town Development

With increased activity brought on by the railways, town developers and speculators had planned new residential areas in anticipation of purchasers. On April 9, 1896, the community requested the Territorial Government in Regina to declare Lacombe a village. The petition was granted on July 28, 1896. Lacombe was incorporated as a town in 1902 and became an important community centre which serviced a large region. Agriculture was the dominant industry and by 1895, over a dozen small businesses in the town provided a variety of goods and services. The commercial district at this time was located
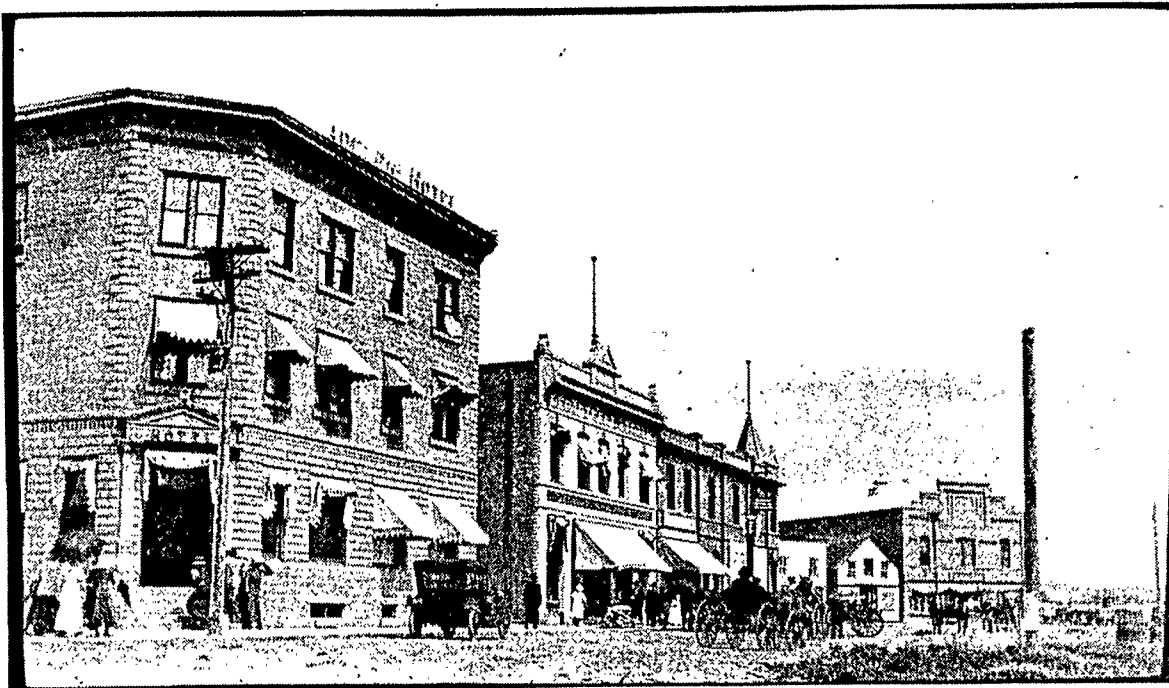
Figure 20: Looking east along Barnett Avenue, circa 1920. (Courtesy of Maski-Pitoon Historical Society)

along the railway line (Railway Street) and Barnett Avenue (50th Avenue). The establishment of industry, such as the Lacombe Brick, Tile and Cement Company, the Lacombe Nurseries and the Lacombe Flour Mill attracted many new residents and new growth encouraged the development of planned building sites. Publicity brochures featured Lacombe as a "predestined city of great commercial importance". House construction kept a steady pace with the influx of new residents. By 1930, there were approximately 6,000 parcels of land. Many of these houses still survive today with little change in appearance.

Fire was a frequent hazard to the town's evolution. The early years of the town boom saw buildings hastily constructed of wood. Frame construction, the prairie grass and the shortage of water all were weaknesses to control fire. A by-law was passed by the town council after the fires of 1907, 1909 and 1911 to require all frame buildings within the fire limits to be brick veneered and all new structures to be predominantly brick. This provided a boon to the brick making industry; in the 1900's, four brickyards served Lacombe with brick made from red clay obtained at the slough banks, now known as Centennial Park. The disposal of ashes, the clearing of grass and refuse were also enforced to decrease the risk of fire. This by-law has had much impact on the physical appearance of the town today.

Automobile Traffic

Roads typically were placed as boundary markings between homesteads or as orientation lines established by the early surveys. Road improvement did not occur until after 1910 with the arrival of the au-

tomobile. Improvement of the east-west trails (Highway 12) was encouraged by Lacombe merchants, but many road improvements were undertaken by homesteaders as payment for taxes.

The Lacombe Board of Trade also realized the importance of roads which would eventually increase settlement, efficiently serve business functions and facilitate tourism traffic. In March, 1930, R.W. Manley, Chairman of Town Planning in Wetaskiwin stated that it was to Lacombe's advantage to have tourists go through the main streets rather than pass through its outskirts. Recommendations were made by the Town Planning Commission of Lacombe and the Engineer of Public Works to construct four different highway routes to better serve future traffic. In addition, streets and sidewalks within the town were upgraded. In 1948, Highway 2A was constructed parallel to the west side of the C.P.R. line. A four lane "superhighway" was planned to follow the old Macleod Trail to Edmonton; construction of Highway 2 began in the 1960s. However, the new highway did not fulfill the anticipated increase in tourism for Lacombe and many other small communities along its route. Small towns suffered economically as the road bypassed communities and channelled high speed traffic from Fort Macleod to Edmonton.

The Present Situation

An examination of the town profile, historical patterns and projected trends provide invaluable insight and information to assess the current health of the town and its position for future action plans. This information provides some clue to the nature of the town's sense of place and possibly how appropriate steps can be taken to enhance and maintain the special character of the community. Alternatively, it can illustrate what is detrimental or has impacted on the sense of place.

Population

The Town of Lacombe has significantly increased its population base at a rate of 15% per year since 1988 (Town of Lacombe statistics, 1991). Recent statistics indicate the population is projected to continue to grow at an annual rate of 4%, accelerating development and urban expansion. Mayor Judy Gordon forecasts Lacombe to be a large regional centre as more people are attracted to the charm of living in a historic small town within commuting distance of larger urban centres. This acknowledgement is important in consideration of Alberta's statute in determining town and city status based on population figures. Lacombe will acquire city status when its population reaches 10,000 and with city status, there will be economic, social and physical ramifications. The possibility of an increased tax base, the loss of the compact form of the town and its transformation into a bedroom or satellite community are plausible. Lacombe is currently becoming a popular place of residence for people who work in the region. The attractiveness of the town, the proximity to Red Deer and the competitive housing prices make Lacombe an ideal bedroom community. The rate of town growth is important to consider if suburban expansion exceeds efforts to maintain town character.

The Town of Lacombe Office is currently preparing to update its 1986 census and town profile. Many significant population and residential changes have occurred since the last community profile. The population breakdown provides insight to the potential participating labour force and a residential lifestyle.

Historical Population

Year	Population
1900	100
1905	900
1907	1100
1912	2500
1921	1133
1931	1259
1941	1603
1951	2277
1971	3407
1981	5489
1992	6770
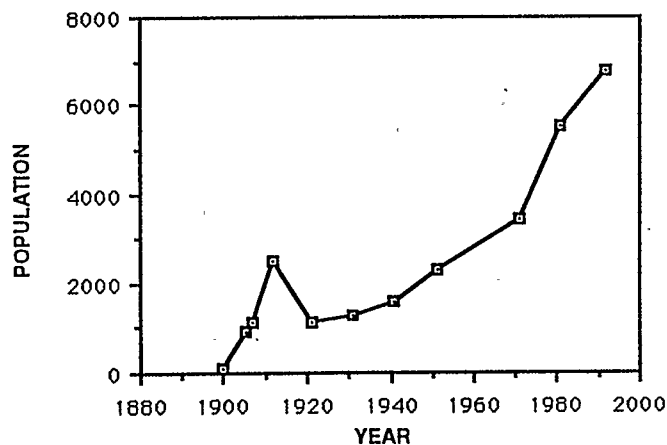
Figure 21: From Lacombe: The First Century, 1982 and Town of Lacombe Statistics, 1982.

Population Breakdown (1986)

Age	Males	Females	County Total
0-4	250	260	510
5-9	245	240	485
10-14	240	235	475
15-19	245	225	470
20-24	245	235	480
25-34	515	540	1055
35-44	395	355	750
45-54	220	230	450
55-64	220	270	490
65+	385	545	930
Total	2955	3130	6095
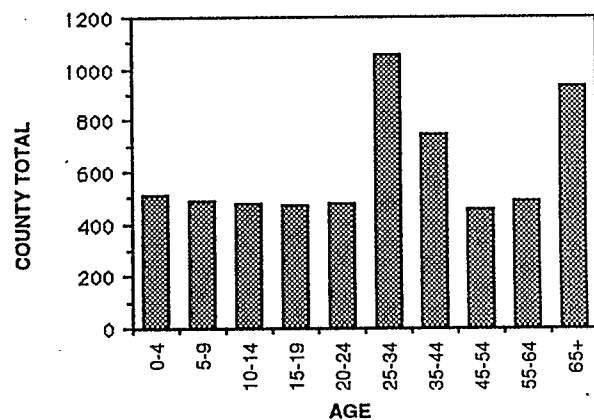
Figure 22: From Town of Lacombe Community Profile, 1986

1986 Potential Labour Force (15-65 Years)		
	Male	**Female**
Employed	2210	1115
Unemployed	200	110
Participation Rate	76%	55%
Unemployment Rate	12%	9%

Figure 23: From Town of Lacombe Community Profile, 1986

Residential Patterns

Although the Town of Lacombe is predominantly agriculturally based, the community is rapidly becoming a bedroom community (Town of Lacombe Office personal communication, May 13, 1992). In 1986, there were 1,610 families in private households. No official statistics were available at this time to verify the number of commuters who live in Lacombe and are employed outside of the town, but the Town Office acknowledged that a significant proportion of the employed residents are commuters.

In The Town of Lacombe Community Profile, there were one hundred and six (106) housing starts listed as of December, 1987. This constituted 71.9% of the building permits. In 1991, there were sixty-nine (69) completed single family residences. From the period of January to April, 1992, there were nineteen (19) listed housing starts. This illustrates the number of new single family residential units that have recently been constructed. Most of the new single family dwellings are located in the new subdivisions north of the downtown. Only one infill in an established neighborhood was listed with the Town Office for 1992. Ten (10) multi-units are under construction. There is a 5% vacancy rate (as of December, 1988).

The Physical Form Today

The Town of Lacombe has many outstanding characteristics which make it a special and distinctive community. The historical nature of Lacombe is the basis for its present physical form and appearance. Visually, the town has very strong identifiable features which can be attributed to regional circumstances and the history of its boosterism spirit. These include:

- An irregular grid system produced by two different surveys in the 1880's
- A compact, defined downtown with a rich collection of buildings
- Several architectural landmarks
- A predominance of brick Edwardian style buildings, including one of only two flatiron blocks in Alberta
- A variety of architectural styles, which represent a time span from 1903 to the 1990's
- Outstanding building features, including colours, materials, craftsmanship and detailings
- A varying natural environment produced by glaciation (lakes, flat and rolling topography)

Lacombe retains much of its original historic fabric and character in the town core and the physical form of the town has not changed except at the town periphery where new expansion and development has occurred. Present and future development, location of roads and the evolution of the roadscape, landscape form, building construction and tree planting/landscaping have been greatly influenced by the gridiron surveys of the late 1800's. However, the automobile has become a dominant force to change the appearance of the townscape and has affected travel patterns and travel routes. Commercial expansion and development has radiated outwards

Figure 24: The Town of Lacombe figure ground, 1992.

Figure 25: The flatiron building signals the arrival into the downtown from Highway 12.

on major corridor routes from the historic downtown core and periodic annexation of the town boundaries has facilitated the spread of residential development.

Dominant landmarks such as the flatiron building and the grain elevators illustrate the arrival into the historic downtown core and provide orientation and reference of its relative location within the town. Local citizens and organizations such as the Lacombe B.R.Z. (now defunct), the Lacombe Main Street Programme and the Lacombe Chamber of Commerce have provided financial assistance and guidance to the preservation of the commercial downtown core.

The community's goal to revitalize the downtown core and restore its original role as the economic and social 'hub' of the community has been successful in terms of physical historic preservation. Difficulties with economic development and revitalization still exist, particularly since many people shop at the regional shopping centre located on the periphery of the downtown and Red Deer. The Lacombe Main Street Programme has completed its initial three year phase and the town is continuing preservation efforts. The town is cur-

rently addressing many of the design concerns discussed in S. Acteson's Master's Defense Project (1986). They include a more sensitive streetscape design, addressing landscaping, parking needs, signage, building facade maintenance, decreasing vacancy rates and aggressive marketing of the downtown as a destination.

Because Lacombe displays such a strong, physical sense of place, it attracts much attention from visitors and planning and design professionals. It is an example of how the past can be preserved to effectively function in the present and illustrates how far a community has advanced since its beginning. Community pride has continued in local residents, as it had in the pioneers of the community over a century ago. However, the rapid pace of expansion and development have placed pressures on the town and the surrounding landscape. The small town character is under threat from growth, particularly visible in the new residential districts. If Lacombe loses its distinctive character and special qualities, it will lose its sense of place. It may also lose its appeal for cultural tourism possibilities.

Potential strategies for continued preservation activity and design, economic and social revitalization and tourism development should be considered in order to provide a future planning framework and guidance for the Town of Lacombe. Lacombe has many assets it can incorporate and market for community economic development purposes. The community must come to understand itself in how it has evolved to its present state and how it can serve to function in the larger central Alberta region.

The historic downtown core has typically been the focus of most studies and preservation action while the rest of the town has largely been ignored or consid-

ered as unimportant for preservation or as an important resource. Sense of place does not simply exist in one area of the town and not in other areas. The town should be regarded as one entity, although there may be more outstanding or memorable qualities in one area than another. This is important to note, as weak areas or unattractive neighborhoods can be targeted for design attention or recommendations to make a better fit into the townscape. In order to fully understand the community for this study, distinctive parts of Lacombe were examined. The separate components fit together in the town framework and define the physical boundaries of the study.

Figure 26: The grain elevators on the east side of Highway 2A mark the arrival into the downtown.

The Railroad Lands

With improved road networks catering to the private automobile, the railroad ceased to be an important transportation option and its social status slowly vanished. Due to the central economic, social and physical role the railroad once commanded in Lacombe, it has left visible traces of its activities on the east side of Railway Street. Empty land for parking occupies much of the C.P.R. right-of-way. The area east of Highway 2A is zoned for industrial and storage use. Grain elevators still stand on the south side of Railway Street and recall the legacy of the past dominance of the railway and the agricultural livelihood. Grain elevators are landmarks for most small prairie towns and are a symbol of the importance of the agricultural heritage. Lacombe's grain elevators mark the arrival into the downtown from Railway Street and are important visual landmarks.

Railway Street acts as the southern boundary to the downtown core and as a result, the grain elevators stand isolated from the rest of the town. Railway Street,
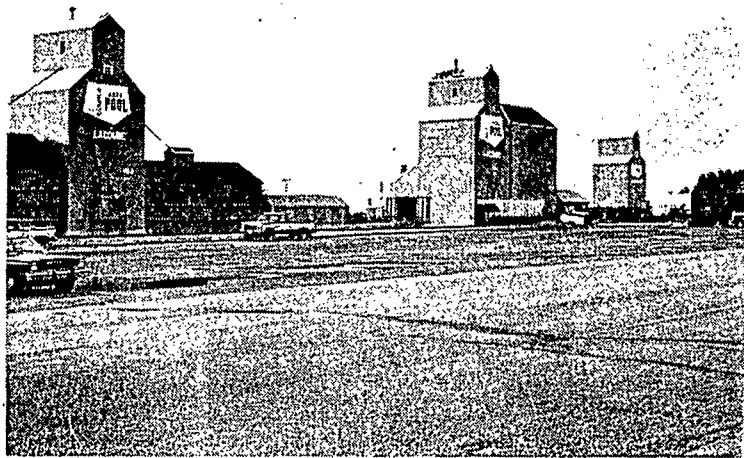
as Highway 2A, is a major thoroughfare. The street is not conducive to pedestrian traffic; the designated land uses and businesses which occupy the strip have long setbacks from the street. Much of the space adjacent to Railway Street is used for parking. The Department of Transportation's mandate is to move traffic efficiently along Highway 2A and the streetscape lacks a human scale perspective. Recent efforts have been made to landscape the strip of Railway Street adjacent to the grain elevators. It is hoped that a more sensitive design in this area will soften the hard edge and decrease the barrier or fragmentation.

The Historic Downtown

Lacombe's strong identity is partly attributed to the appearance and intact condition of the historic downtown core. The concentration of Edwardian style brick buildings along 50th Avenue and the eclectic moderne style buildings along 50th Street form the core of the downtown. Newer commercial development has occurred immediately around these two streets.
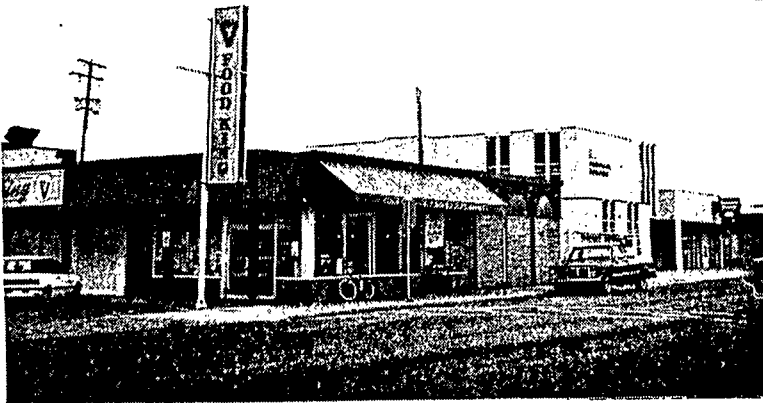
Figure 27: The West portion of 50th Avenue appears very differently from the historic buildings.
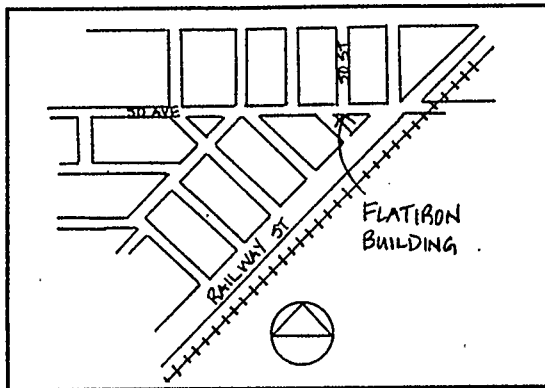

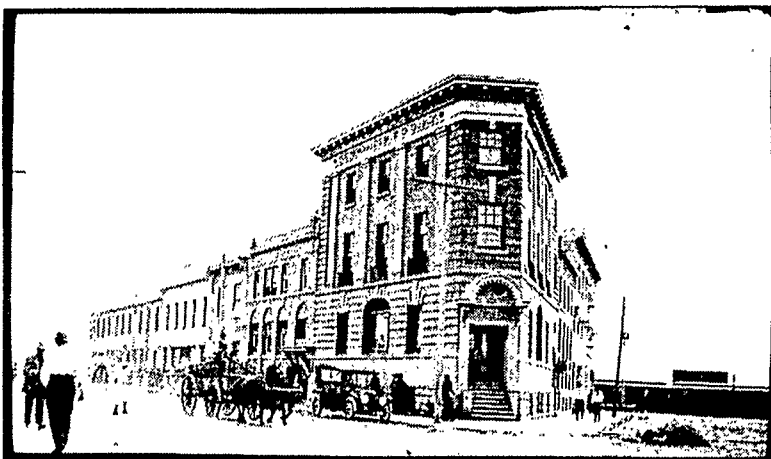*Figure 28: Map of downtown Lacombe.*

Figure 29: The flatiron building circa 1918. (Courtesy of the Maski-Pitoon Historical Society, Lacombe)

These later establishments do not reflect the historic character of the core and appear very distinctively as newer additions of the 1960's and 1970's.

Historic circumstances have made 50th Avenue the central focus of Lacombe. 50th Avenue is the original heart of Lacombe and the buildings are physically and visually dominant. The buildings themselves announce the entrance into the historic downtown core. Early in its history, the town council and business merchants decided to close off the Calgary-Edmonton Trail east of town in order to maximize business exposure along 50th Avenue. Traffic moved east along 50th Avenue, then proceeded north on 50th Street. The street today follows the same direction; Highway 12 runs east-west and turns into 50th Avenue within the town limits. It ends at a T intersection with Railway Street at the western edge of the downtown.

As evident in the present urban form, the road has been widened to accommodate increased traffic volumes and parallel and angle parking is permitted on both sides of the street. This disrupts the visual continuity of the buildings. The high traffic volumes which cut through the downtown to reach Highway 2A also prevent the original pedestrian system from functioning cohesively. This linear road is a safety concern and fractures the downtown in half. With the increase in the volume of traffic, parking is accommodated in a gravel lot off the main thoroughfares.

The flatiron building, located on the corner of 50th Avenue and 49th Street, is a dominant downtown landmark. It is one of two in Alberta and has special significance on a regional basis. The brick building is located on the junction of two survey gridirons, hence the triangular shape to suit the land parcel. For many visitors

travelling to Lacombe on Highway 12, The Merchants Bank in the building and the Royal Bank Building across the street on 50th Avenue mark the gateway to the downtown with their sharp rise in height from the flat landscape. There have been no significant changes to the flatiron building and it appears very similar today as it did in the 1900's.

The streetscape along 50th Avenue illustrates the transition Lacombe has experienced from its original state. Although many buildings have been meticulously maintained and rehabilitated through building owners and the Lacombe Main Street Programme initiatives, there are still several which are in various states of neglect or have been altered to an extent that they show no relation to the rest of the historical streetscape.
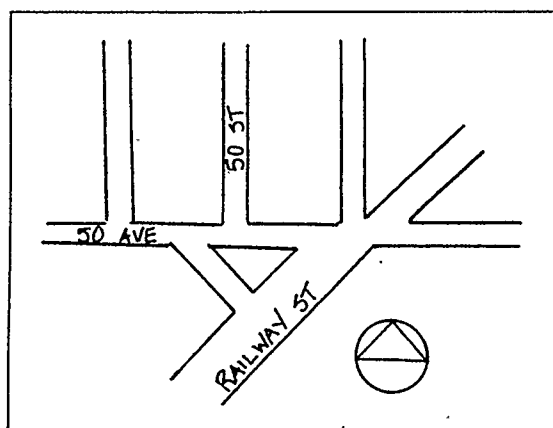
Figure 30: Map of 50th Street and 50th Avenue intersection.

50th Street, previously Nanton Street, runs perpendicular to 50th Avenue. It forms a T intersection and effectively creates a visual sense of enclosure when looking towards 50th Avenue. The commercial buildings are an eclectic mix of architectural styles whose construction dates range from 1902 to 1935 and are in

Figure 31: A visual sense of enclosure is seen when looking south on 50th Street.

various stages of repair. 50th Street does not have the same unified character seen on 50th Avenue due to the different architectural styles and use of materials. Wood and sheet metal were extensively used and are now brightly painted to emphasize contrasts. This provides a very diversified visual and textured character and it is fitting that these buildings are grouped along this street. 50th Street does not command the same vertical depth as 50th Avenue. Rather, there appears to be a horizontal alignment of buildings which stretches northwards.

Figure 32: The west side of 50th street has a low horizontal alignment.

Figure 33: Breaks in the streetscape on the east side of 50th Street disrupt the horizontal continuity and rhythm.

There are abrupt breaks in the streetscape, particularly beside the A-1 Restaurant, which weakens the horizontal continuity. These buildings provide another clue to the history of Lacombe's downtown - that business was not just focused along 50th Avenue and that commercial growth did spread outwards from the main street.

The majority of the buildings on 50th Street are not as well kept as 50th Avenue. It appears that building owners and occupants have concentrated their restoration and beautification efforts to the lower section of their storefronts; many cornices, pediments and brackets on the upper portions of buildings are in poor condition. There is not the same sense of visual rhythm seen on these storefronts as several buildings have lost their original storefront appearance due to unsympathetic renovations. However, there are others which have gone through the Lacombe Main Street process to uncover the layers of accretions.

Most of the businesses in the downtown are service-oriented, such as hotels, restaurants and personal services. S. Acteson found in 1986 that the majority of downtown tenants were service-oriented (33% of the total), but there were also seventeen vacant stores (16% of the total). People prefer to drive to larger regional centres such as Red Deer, only fifteen minutes away and to Edmonton, one and one half hours away. These two destinations have taken a severe toll on Lacombe's ability to compete economically on a local and regional basis. People are willing to drive further away for lower prices and better selection. This is typical of small bedroom or satellite communities whose businesses operate on convenience and low order goods and services. Although historic preservation has been realized for many of these buildings, the buildings do not contribute to the town's economy on their own. Empty buildings and a poor retail mix are deterrents to maintaining the sense of place as the presence of people attract more people. Economic development is a crucial component to the success of the Main Street Programme and must be realized in Lacombe.

The community has expressed a desire to revitalize the downtown in order for it to command the social and economic vitality it once had. By-laws can help ensure and reinforce the integrity of the physical fabric. However, action is needed to help the lagging commercial and social functions. The Lacombe Design Guideline Review provides a detailed outline of how to restore and maintain the historic quality and heritage of the buildings and physical fabric of the downtown. What the design guideline book does not address is the sensory qualities, the town identity and image, the value people place on unimportant and ordinary features and the activities and social functions which occur and provide meaning and a sense of belonging to the community.

Although its historic character is a part of Lacombe's identity, the downtown needs to encourage adaptive reuse of the buildings if it is to achieve successful preservation efforts. A retail mix which serves the residents of Lacombe is also necessary for its social and economic revitalization. Revitalization schemes which cater to the tourism industry or non-local population can increase the quality of life for some communities. Specialty stores, boutiques and beautification programs attract tourists, but do little to fulfill the needs of the local population. The specialty shops and boutiques replace the stores which primarily serve the community, such as a hardware or drug store. A traditional and functional downtown serves as the community's social gathering place. The downtown as a shopping district is very different from the downtown as the place to carry out a variety of functions. A community's downtown must be multi-purpose in order to revitalize the heart of the town.

The Residential Districts and Town Periphery

Lacombe's original residential districts are readily apparent by the age (and sometimes the condition) of the houses and their streets. Like many other small towns, Lacombe's older housing stock surrounds the adjacent borders of the downtown core. Several fine residences built by prominent community members stand on 50th Avenue. Postwar housing, prevalent as infills of their time, are also in these neighborhoods, radiating outwards.

An area of poorly maintained housing is located on the fringes immediately outside the downtown core. The encroachment of commercial activities into the resi-

Figure 34: New townhouse development has gentrified the older districts of Lacombe.

dential area include poorly maintained yards, littered with garbage and derelict cars, uncut lawns (of both houses and businesses), old signs and oil and chemical stains dripping onto the street. The proximity of these incompatible land uses and the lack of enforcement for industrial cleanup does not add to the attractiveness of the town. However, new townhouse development is gentrifying the area.

Figure 35: In the older residential districts, vegetation separates private property.

Figure 36: Mature trees line both sides of the street and add to the sense of place in the older residential districts.

It is apparent that there was a postwar boom in residential development as much of the housing look similar in age and style. These are mainly bungalow and split level houses, covered with stucco and aluminum siding. Several have been modernized to accommodate a garage or expanded to increase living space. There is also a sprinkling of houses within these blocks that are of Victorian style, almost all in very good condition. One or two of these have also

been renovated, but they still echo the original style with their wooden construction, gingerbread detailing, decorative brackets and porch spindles. Overall, the housing stock in these older neighborhoods is well kept. A feeling of "community" is expressed in gardening efforts and the absence of fences to separate yards. In many cases, hedges and bushes separate private property. Special characteristics of some of the older neighborhoods include:

- mature deciduous trees lining both sides of the street,
- the standard grid pattern of streets, giving a familiar, friendly pedestrian format and easy orientation,
- individual gardens, with mature vegetation,
- absence of attached garages and driveways, giving a very cohesive streetscape with generous setbacks (for gardens),
- variable setbacks of houses (see figure 24),
- the "small town" feeling of neighborhoods, as seen by the occasional tree swing, the bird house on the front lawn, the friendliness of residents and the tranquil streets.
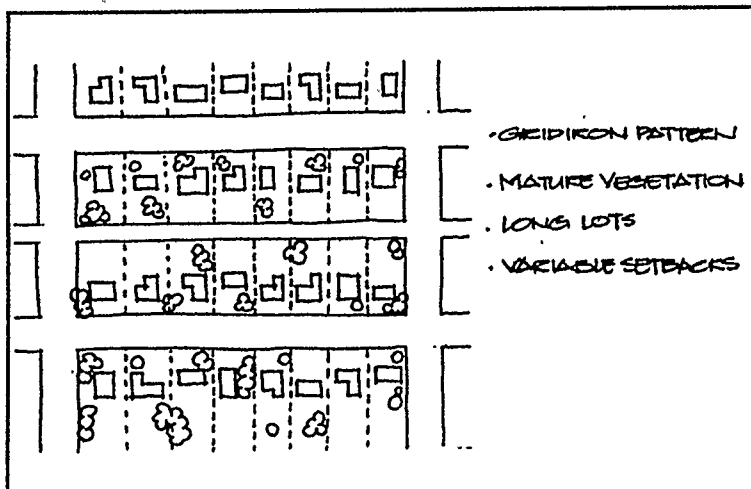
Figure 37: A typical older residential neighborhood.

Not all of the neighborhoods are as picturesque as the established ones. The mobile home park and the newer neighborhoods with ubiquitous housing development do not reflect the local sense of place. This housing stock is generic, as it is found everywhere and is not constructed to adapt to regional environmental influences and conditions. These houses are built on a mass scale and the urban design is that of a standard subdivision seen in large urban suburbs. These houses infringe upon neighboring streets as their large mass, their shoulder-to-shoulder placement, their pastel colours and their

driveways and attached garages do not echo the "small town lifestyle". Some characteristics of new subdivisions include:

- Curvilinear streets in crescents and cul-de-sacs
- Wide streets with sidewalks on one side
- Little or no landscaping
- Uniform setback of houses
- "Imported" residential designs with frontal garages
- Small residential lots with little green space

This sort of residential development is insensitive to the regional setting and does not positively add to Lacombe's sense of place. The new suburban neighborhoods have taken on a different identity which does not complement the older town districts. In addition, the subdivision names do not reflect local values or traditions. English Estates, Hearthstone Estates and Fairway Heights are imported names which have primarily been chosen to market a charming ready-made neighborhood.

The Urban-Rural Interface

Although the Town of Lacombe has defined legal boundaries, they do not correspond to where town development ends to meet the surrounding rural landscape. What is evident is that development at the town fringe or periphery does not complement the distinctive historic core and older residential neighborhoods. At the outer edge, Lacombe is fast becoming more and more similar to a suburban neighborhood in an urban centre. Housing and industry encroach and spill into the rural landscape and the meeting of the urban-rural interface is neither visually appealing nor appropriate. A clear definition of the town's
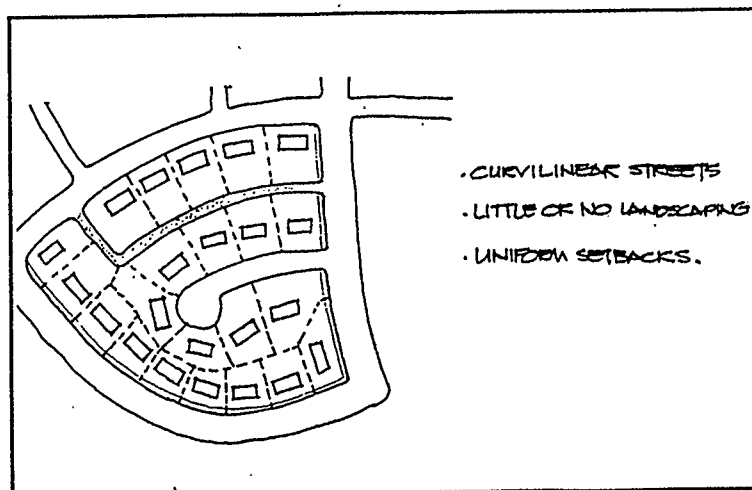
Figure 38: A typical newer residential neighborhood.

physical boundaries creates an opportunity to enhance and design town entrances, to preserve and enhance travel corridors and to integrate the urban fringe into more appropriate development which is both sensitive and reflects the regional and town character.

Strip commercial and residential development has occurred where farm road frontages have been divided into smaller lots. This is evident on the eastern edge of town on Highway 12. The rural landscape

Figure 39: Ubiquitous housing does not reflect Lacombe's sense of place.

Figure 40: Map of Highway 12 east of Lacombe.

character has been altered by the construction of new roads and buildings which have an architectural form very different from the vernacular or regional style. Modern buildings and houses which were originally 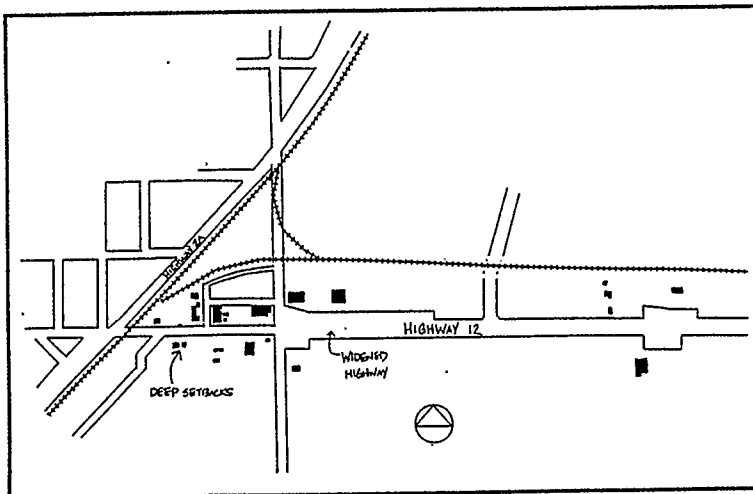designed for suburban and urban settings are superimposed on the landscape, where they have been transported to Lacombe's countryside. Particularly along Highway 12 on the east side of the railway line, strip development has radi-

cally altered the town image and has the potential to undermine Lacombe's special qualities if encouraged to spread (see figures 2 & 41). Trees have been removed, roads have been widened and resurfaced and the ditches have become choked with highway and industrial litter. The buildings along this highway strip have no distinctive architectural qualities and the streetscape is visually disrupted by the deep setbacks and parking areas. Subdivision of farmland will continue, radiating outwards and spoiling the attractiveness of Lacombe. The process of annexing more land is unsustainable, particularly if development is that of a standard subdivision design containing single family residences.

Although the town has suffered economic setbacks from advances in the regional transportation network and its location between two large provincial centres, Lacombe continues to grow. As stated in Lacombe: The First Century, the town "is small enough to maintain a town identity charm, yet [is] large enough to enjoy all essential services that are normally present in the larger centres." (Lacombe Chamber of Commerce, 1982, p. 25) However, the rapid pace of residential growth experienced in the past three years coupled with town council seeking to diversify the economic base through industry can spell doom to Lacombe's unique and special qualities and small town atmosphere.
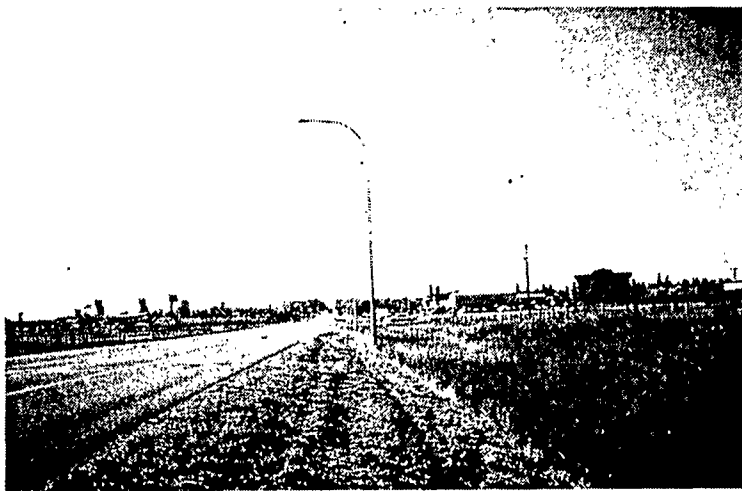

Figure 41: Looking west to Lacombe from Highway 12.

An Integrated Town Strategy to Maintain the Sense of Place

The emphasis on Lacombe's sense of place stems from its physical nature, but there are many intangible qualities which also distinguish this town. The sensory qualities which are a part of the small town atmosphere are possibly Lacombe's strongest assets. Lacombe's sense of place must be protected as its history can be to its advantage. Lacombe is taking the appropriate measures to protect its physical resources through the Main Street Program, but this has been the only area protected. Efforts should not be limited to the historic downtown core. A well-defined downtown commercial core cannot sustain the identity of the entire town. A fragmented or disjointed town cannot provide a distinctive identity for its residents to take pride in nor can preservation be limited to tangible, physical elements. A town is composed of many parts which form a cohesive unit. Since it is a relatively compact form, all the parts must work, complement each other and bind together into a whole. The unity of town appearance functions for both residents and visitors.

Lacombe's sense of place is everywhere, in the railyards, the residential districts and in the surrounding landscape.

The town's slogan: "Lifestyle Lacombe", will no longer hold true if the community does not initiate actions to retain its town status and small town values. The town office predicts that Lacombe will become a major regional centre in the near future. At the present rate of population growth, Lacombe may attain city status sooner than realized and the small town identity will be lost forever. This study does not recommend halting Town growth, but attempts to raise the awareness of the need to recognize the special qualities Lacombe has and to propose a strategy to effectively deal with maintaining those identified qualities and features without compromising growth. Sense of place analysis can be an extremely valuable planning tool, providing data and information which may otherwise be missed. Town appearance or townscape has inherent value which may not be converted to dollar value. Preserving the appearance and character of Lacombe can provide a sense of belonging to the community and retain a high quality of life most people are seeking.
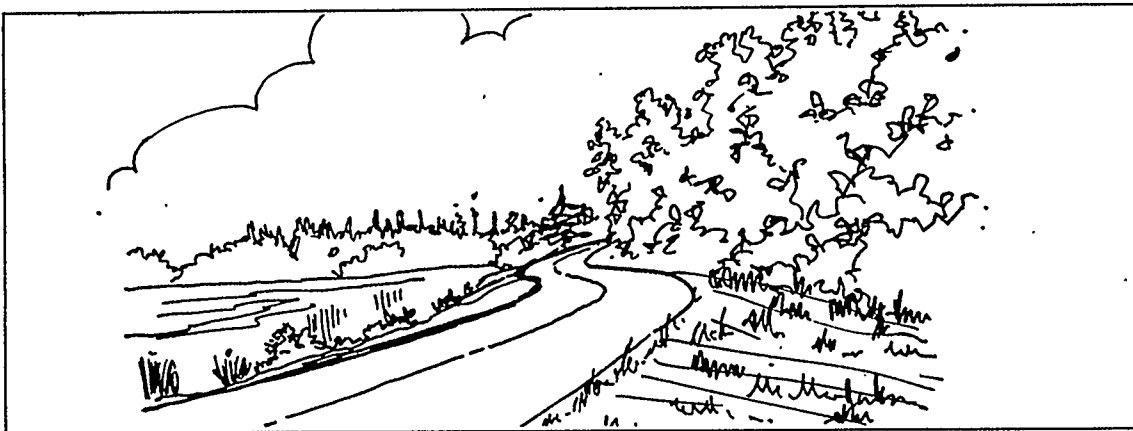

Figure: 42: Open space is a desirable feature in the Town of Lacombe.

Chapter 4
Strategies for the Town of Lacombe to Preserve and Maintain its Sense of Place

As described in Chapter Three, Lacombe has a very distinctive and well-defined historic downtown core surrounded by residential areas and some light industrial activity. The downtown has such a powerful sense of place that it creates and defines much of the town's identity. However, this identity is inconsistent when one examines the rest of the town, particularly the neighborhoods located at the town periphery. Much of the development at the town periphery in the past five years has been residential development. Because of the rapid population growth and outward urban expansion, the potential threat of loss of the community's character and sense of place is heightened.

This chapter will focus on the results of the research undertaken to determine the sense of place and planning and design recommendations which may help to maintain and reinforce Lacombe's identity, character and cultural attributes.

Background to the Town of Lacombe Sense of Place Study

The Centre for Livable Communities in The Faculty of Environmental Design directed by Dr. Walter Jamieson initiated the original Sense of Place Study in order to better understand the dynamics of small towns and to examine the special characteristics which created town identity. In April, 1991, the Town of Lacombe passed the Lacombe Sense of Place Study through Town Council. The Town Council members were enthusiastic in their support given that this study had the potential opportunity to accomplish several objectives:

- to enable Lacombe residents and visitors to participate in the initial phase of the study,
- to find out how Lacombe residents and visitors perceive the townscape,
- to utilize the research results for further community planning and development initiatives.

Two questionnaires were distributed within the Town of Lacombe. The first questionnaire was distributed in the summer of 1991 to visitors. The Lacombe Main Street Office and the Lacombe Globe assisted in the administration and distribution of the visitor questionnaire. The questionnaires were left at business establishments within the downtown core and summer students were hired on the weekend of Lacombe Days to distribute the questionnaire. The design format of the questionnaire was straightforward and required five to ten minutes to complete. It was intended that the visitor questionnaire would provide some indications to what features Lacombe offered to attract cultural tourism and why people came specifically to Lacombe. See Appendix B for the questionnaire and results.

The second questionnaire was administered in March, 1992 to all Lacombe residents. The questionnaire was distributed through the town utilities mailing list; every household which received a utility statement had an opportunity to participate in the questionnaire. This questionnaire was more in-depth than the previous visitor questionnaire. The residential questionnaire attempted to find out what tangible and intangible characteristics contributed to the quality of life in Lacombe and the degree of satisfaction people felt living in Lacombe. One question specifically asked what things people hoped would never change in Lacombe. It was anticipated that the responses correlated with the special features which contributed to the town's identity. See Appendix C for the questionnaire and results.

With both questionnaires, the return rates were low. Approximately sixty visitor questionnaires and one hundred resident questionnaires were returned. The interpretation and summary of the research findings may not be entirely representative for the entire town, but are likely indicative of the views of residents and visitors.

Due to the subjectivity and nature of the concept of sense of place, it was difficult to design a questionnaire which could accommodate a variety of answers. An open-ended format which allowed respondents to "fill in the blanks" was preferable over one with pre-determined answers that limited the choice of responses. Because of the strong identity and visual dominance of the historic downtown, it was assumed that many of the responses would refer to that area of Lacombe. This did occur. The majority of the respondents for both questionnaires gave similar responses and observations, despite the open-ended questionnaire format and design. This provided a very strong indication to some of the aspects which contribute to Lacombe's sense of place.

Visitor Questionnaire Results

In the visitor questionnaire, people came to Lacombe to visit friends and relatives or were passing through the town. The majority of the responses focused on the physical, tangible attributes of the historic downtown core. The residential districts and the rest of the town outside the downtown were not mentioned as having outstanding or memorable characteristics although many respondents liked the cleanliness, appearance and small town atmosphere.

The responses from visitors illustrated that the Town had historic charm which could interest and draw visitors. The downtown's physical appearance was Lacombe's main asset. The responses described some of Lacombe's most important visual landmarks and determined its identity to be drawn from the downtown. This information is important to consider if the Town continues to encourage cultural tourism. Efforts should then be focused on marketing the historic downtown core or raise the awareness of the identity of rest of the town. The fact that the responses did not mention other parts of the town outside of the downtown indicates they have few special characteristics that were worth remembering. If the outlying areas detract from the special nature of the downtown or are incompatible with the older town core, future attention to incorporate a more compatible comprehensive town design is needed if Lacombe is to preserve its sense of place.

Resident Questionnaire Results

In the resident questionnaire, there was consistency in the similarity of responses to what people liked about living in Lacombe. The majority of the responses liked living in Lacombe for its small town atmosphere, its proximity to Red Deer, the convenience of its location to work, reasonably priced property and the presence of family and friends nearby. Factors which contributed to Lacombe's character tended to be physical features or town attributes such as the agricultural research station, old houses, Cranna Lake, the golf course, mature trees and clean streets. For the residents, Lacombe portrayed the image of a clean, well-kept small town rich in history with friendly residents. When asked to list factors which contributed to Lacombe's character, most of the responses consisted of tangible, highly visible features. This indicates that these features have inherent value and contribute to the town's character and identity. However, it is interesting to note that such things as the grain elevators, the railway track crossings,

the views looking into the town and other ordinary town features were not mentioned.

The kind of changes residents would like to see included improved facilities which would increase the quality of life. Improvements suggested continued revitalization efforts in the downtown, to clean streets and pave back alleys, to plant more trees, to implement more bicycle paths, to clean up the highway and to continue efforts to build an indoor pool. These responses are important to consider in relation to the next question which asked what things people hoped would never change: the small town atmosphere and the nature of the historic downtown. These responses indicate that most residents would like to see facilities and amenities typically offered in a larger urban centre, but do not wish to affect or change the small town atmosphere.

In the opinion of many residents and several decision-makers, the commercial buildings and the streetscape in the historic downtown will probably always be preserved as they are through the continued efforts of the Lacombe Main Street Programme, the Chamber of Commerce and the Town Council. Strong public support will allow for the ongoing preservation action in the downtown as the efforts of the past three years have garnered financial backing and citizen support of the Lacombe Main Street Programme.

Older houses and mature trees were identified by a few people as contributing to Lacombe's character. The newer residential subdivisions were not mentioned in any of the questionnaires. This may indicate that these areas do not have unique characteristics which contribute to Lacombe's sense of place. In fact, the lack of mention of the newer neighborhoods may indicate that the houses and

Figure 43: The view from the Canadian Union College.

streetscape of the subdivisions are generic in nature and may even detract from the historic charm of the downtown. With residents desiring more and more conveniences, they do not realize they are undermining the very essence which has brought them to live in Lacombe.

In summary, the residential questionnaires provided very positive indications of the value people placed on their community. Residents clearly articulated the things they liked about Lacombe and the features which contributed to the town's identity and image. As predicted, the historic downtown core provides much of Lacombe's identity and is regarded as its strongest asset. The newer subdivisions were not mentioned as contributing to Lacombe's character and the lack of discussion about these neighborhoods indicates they are not perceived to have a special character and are not important to enhance. The presence of a strong town core and weak outlying neighborhoods indicates that Lacombe needs to address the impact of the appearance of new residential development. The homogeneous appearance of subdivisions which does not reflect or enhance the local character may detract from Lacombe's cultural heritage seen in the downtown and older residential neighborhoods. This also identifies the areas which need to be addressed in planning and designing for a sense of place.

The research findings obtained from the two questionnaires are not conclusive. Because of the low return rates, the results are the opinions and views of a small number of people. For accuracy and to encourage further participation, another set of questionnaires should be administered.
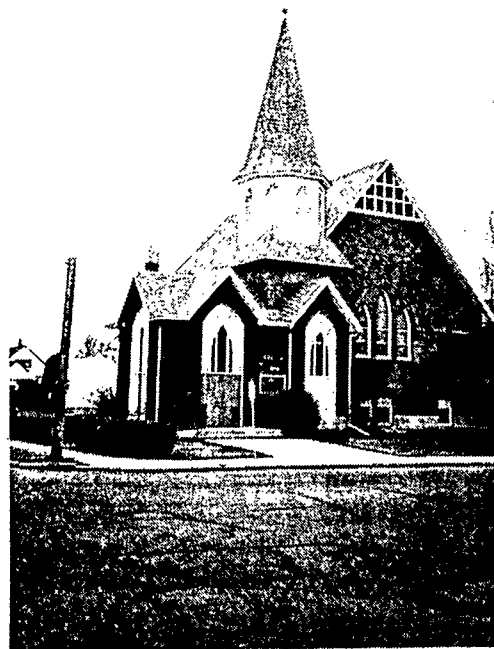

Figure 44: Social institutions such as Saint Andrew's United Church reinforce the sense of community.

Protecting and Enhancing Lacombe's Sense of Place

The Town of Lacombe is currently experiencing urban problems which occur with an increasing population base and changes in the social and physical fabric. Mapping Lacombe's resources and sense of place characteristics can help produce planning and design recommendations to maintain and enhance the townscape and social community.

Figure 45 is a compilation of Lacombe's special characteristics which have been identified by residents, visitors and myself. It is the first step taken to identify and define Lacombe's sense of place. It provides many insights into how

the urban fabric is knit and held together, how well the town functions and how it appears to both the residents and visitors of Lacombe. This map can be used as a tool to devise a strategy to identify, maintain and protect the community's sense of place in future community planning and design decisions.

Mapping Lacombe's Sense of Place

It was anticipated that a wider range of responses would identify more special features outside the downtown area. These would then be mapped to illustrate the cultural, natural and intangible qualities and features worthy of protection against change. Highly visible and obvious landmarks were consistently identified, but ordinary and common things such as the grain elevators, open spaces, farmsteads, view corridors and natural vegetation were not thought of as contributing to Lacombe's sense of place or people were not aware of these things. Either these features did not equal the drawing power of the downtown buildings and streetscape or they were so common to the Alberta landscape they were not thought to be special or unique.

Figure 45 illustrates natural and cultural features identified in the questionnaire. Intangible things such as Lacombe's small town atmosphere, friendly people and cleanliness were not included in the map as such qualities are difficult to convey graphically. However, the map identifies several social and recreational facilities where people have the opportunity to meet and socialize. These public places indirectly illustrate the importance of Lacombe's social activities, social network and the opportunities townspeople have to actively participate in the community. Because most of the responses focused on the features in the downtown area, I have added features and elements I have thought to be significant to the Town of Lacombe which have been overlooked. The map forms a mental picture of Lacombe and from it arises some of the elements which contributes to the sense of place. Strong and weak visual areas show places which require attention to enhance and protect the sense of place.

LANDMARKS

1) Royal Bank Building
2) Merchant's Bank Building
3) St Cyprian's Anglican Church
4) Stewart Residence
5) St. Andrew's United Church
6) Lest We Forget Memorial
7) Canadian Union College
8) Cemetery
9) Grain Elevators
10) Ag. Canada Research Centre
11) Alta. Ag. Research Farm

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

1) Michener House
2) Lacombe Memorial Centre
3) Town Office
4) Library
5) Post Office
6) Hospital
7) Lacombe Golf & Country Club
8) Michener Park
9) Schools
10) Lacombe Curling Rink
11) Lacombe Ice Centre
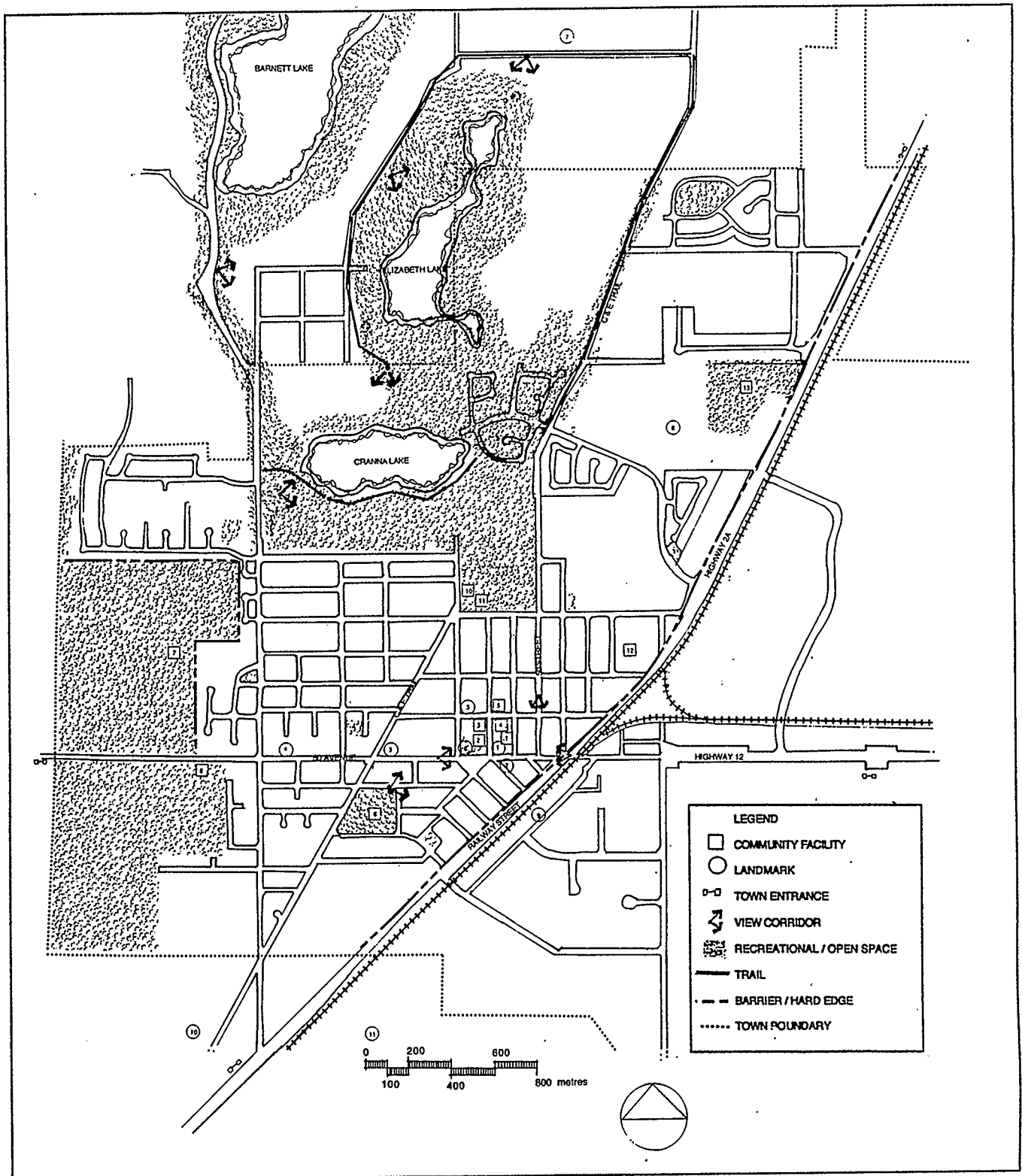12) Lacombe Mall
13) Kinsmen Park

Figure 45: Identified natural and cultural features of Lacombe.

Presenting Lacombe's Sense of Place

One drawback of the map is that it is a one dimensional representation of the Town. Photographs, sketches and other artwork can be included with the map to help capture Lacombe's character. Design sketches and vignettes of the special qualities of Lacombe as it appears now (or appeared at one time) and how the Town would look if residential development and suburban sprawl were to continue can strengthen the ideas the map is attempting to communicate. Figure 63 is a land use map of Lacombe which identifies areas zoned for development and provides an idea of the extent allotted future development.

Visual presentations using photographs and graphic illustrations provide very powerful images of the natural and built landscapes and can facilitate community preservation action. This format of presentation which juxtaposes images of
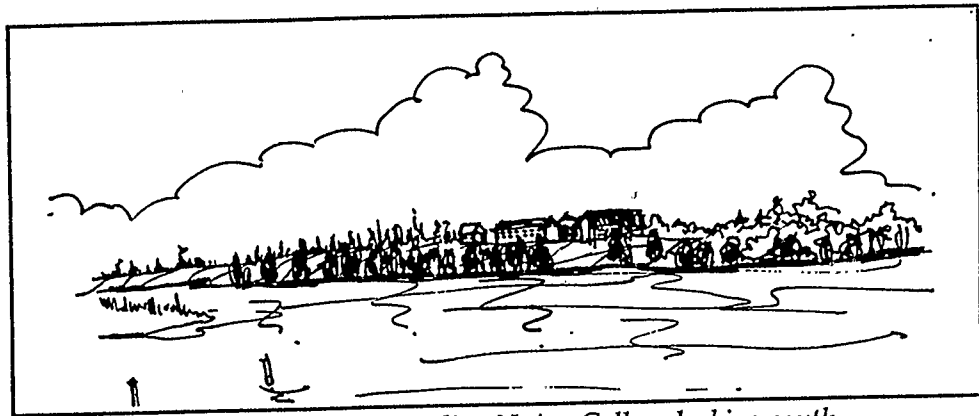

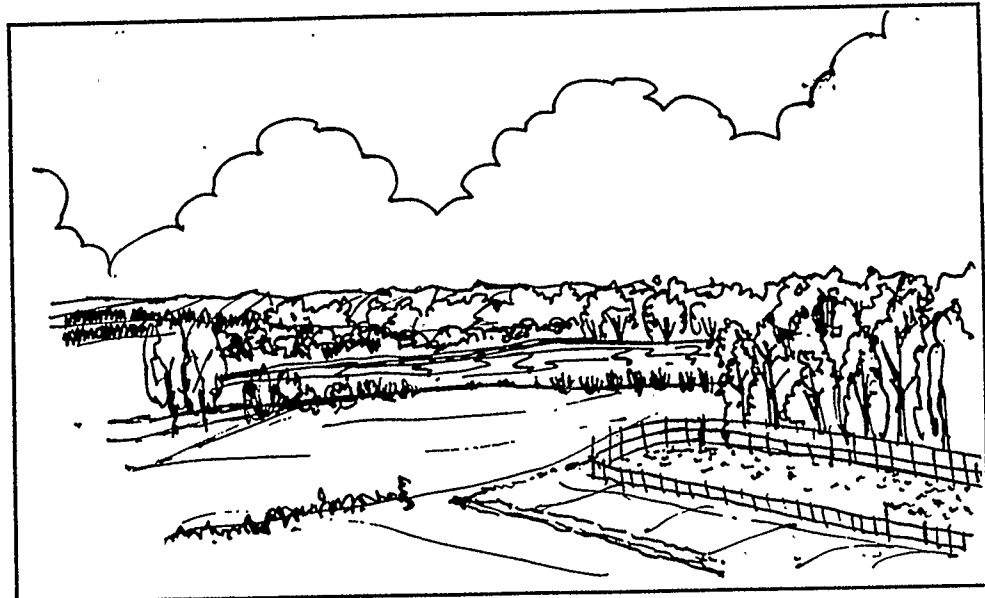*Figure 46: The view from the Canadian Union College looking south.*

Figure 47: The Canadian Union College Campus.

towns and surrounding countryside before and after standard subdivision development has taken place (or potentially will take place) has proven to be an effective catalyst for community preservation action for The Center for Rural Massachusetts (Ruth Eckdish Knack, "Selling Cluster" in Planning., Sept. 1990, p. 5). The Center for Rural Massachusetts uses videos and photographs to show attractive areas where proposed residential development will occur and how the landscape will look like with "checkerboard' subdivisions, based on conventional zoning standards currently in practice. The result is a monotonous urban form which does not preserve important areas and artifacts. Alternative subdivision designs, based on cluster development, show a vastly different urban form which preserves open space and environmentally sensitive areas. Houses are clustered in a design compatible with the preserved space.

Researchers at the Center for Rural Massachusetts have realized the power of its visual presentation and have been successful in convincing townspeople to consider neo-traditional planning strategies to preserve farmland and encourage cluster development. Arguments for cluster development include affordability in construction, preservation of environmentally sensitive and valued places, high resale property value and a visually pleasing neighborhood. While neo-traditional planning and design ideas may be considered too innovative and risky in Alberta, the possibilities do offer alternative methods to traditional subdivision planning. For example, the Town of Okotoks is currently designing a new subdivision based on traditional town planning ideals. This is discussed further ahead in the chapter.

The following are general guidelines to direct initial efforts to maintain and protect Lacombe's sense of place. The planning and design work is conceptual at this stage and are recommendations for the Town to consider. These recommendations are based on the vulnerable nature of Lacombe's sense of place has to the encroachment of town growth and development. Improving the visual quality of the town should be targeted in areas where the town's character is most visible and sensitive to change, such as the town entrances. Working at highly visible areas will illustrate the efforts of this project and gain community support.

1. Define the Town Boundaries

As discussed in Chapter One, Lacombe should consider similar elements to strengthen its boundaries, particularly at the northern boundary where subdivision sprawl is continuing. People often do not
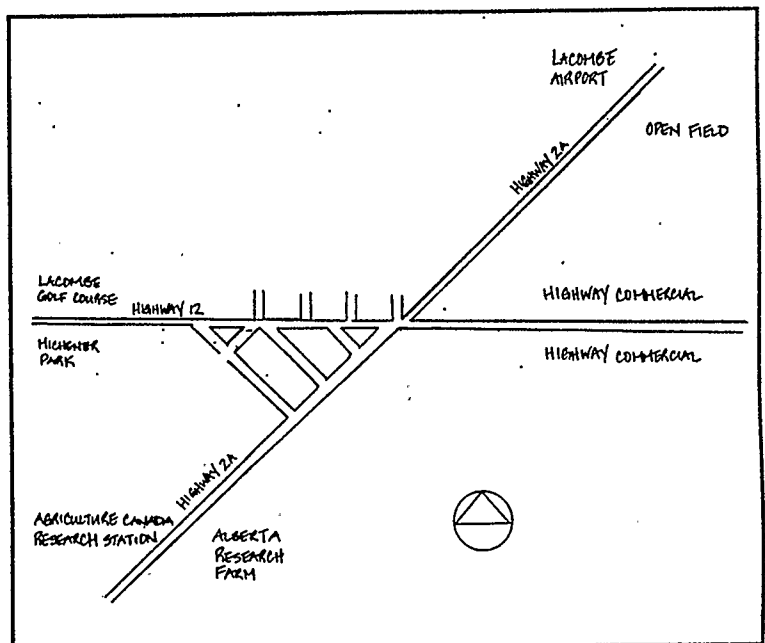

Figure 48: Town Boundaries

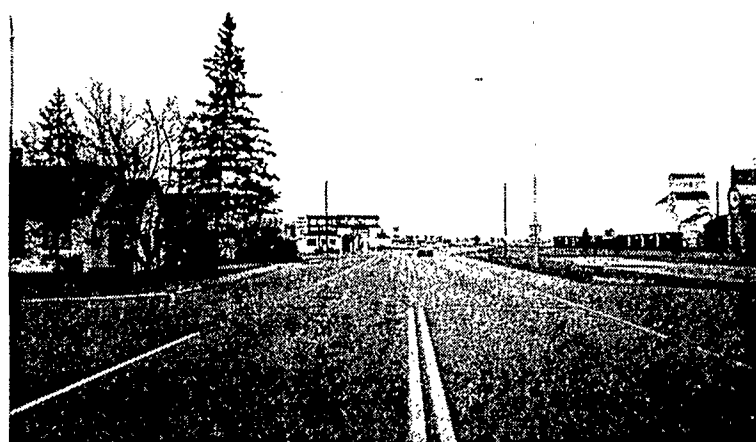*Figure 49: The research station marks Lacombe's southern boundary.*

Figure 50: Highway 2A marks Lacombe's eastern boundary.

tained within the town. The C.P.R. right-of-way and Highway 2A form a strong boundary on the eastern edge of town. Reinforcement of this edge is unnecessary. The southern town boundary is defined by the location of the Alberta Agriculture Research Farm and Agriculture Canada Research Station. While the two operations are located outside of the legal town boundaries, residents consider them to be a significant contribution to Lacombe's character and their immediate location to the town boundary effectively halts suburban growth southward. The western town boundary is both located and perceived by many people to be at the Lacombe Golf Course limits as it is the first town feature seen from Highway 12.

Much suburban growth has been located at the north section of town and the sprawling nature of development has met much controversy with residents. A buffer zone which retains much of the open space and functions as a scenic easement should be maintained at the north boundary to limit the northern expansion of development. This is already in place between the Canadian Union College, Bennett Lake and Elizabeth Lake, but needs to be continued eastwards towards Highway 2A.

realize where the town begins, even though there are signs at the highway entrances. In order to reinforce these boundaries, efforts should be concentrated in several areas to help define the sense of place.

The east and south town boundaries are Lacombe's strongest boundaries which separate the town from the countryside. The eastern, western and southern boundaries are determined by physical barriers and what people perceive is con-

2. Announce the Arrival at Town Entrances

The town entrances roughly correspond with the town boundaries. The arrival into Lacombe is formally determined by the town signs, but residents and visitors perceive the arrival into town earlier with the location of such features as the Lacombe Golf Course from the west, highway commercial development from the east, the Lacombe Airport from the north and the Agriculture Canada Research Station and

Alberta Research Farm from the south. The four access routes traverse across prairie and farmland and the approach towards Lacombe is linear. The approach which best reveals Lacombe's character and sense of place is east along Highway 12 as houses and the flatiron building announce the arrival into the downtown. The small town atmosphere is most apparent along Highway 12. In comparison, the townscape as seen along Highway 2A is very different. On this route, the traveller's perception of Lacombe is limited to light industrial activity and the C.P.R. right-of-way.

The town entrances are critical zones which are sensitive to change and inappropriate development. An entrance design must reflect Lacombe's character and be visually pleasing for the arrival experience. The entrance points should be examined in how well Lacombe's character and image is revealed during the movement into and out of town. The townscape and the surrounding environment should complement one another and a design of the entry should reflect some of the special character of Lacombe. An entrance design which retains much of the open space can help to maintain the sense of place.

Through provisions of the Land Use By-Law and the 1990 Town of Lacombe General Municipal Plan, the special character of Highway 12 is acknowledged, particularly the transition from open space to historic residential to historic commercial, but it is not protected. Development should be minimal and Town Council should review all development applications along Highway 12 to preserve the transitional character and the enframement where the vista is framed by trees and houses.

At the north town entrance/boundary by the entrance sign, there is a stand of shrub which screens the new subdivision immediately behind it. The view to the east

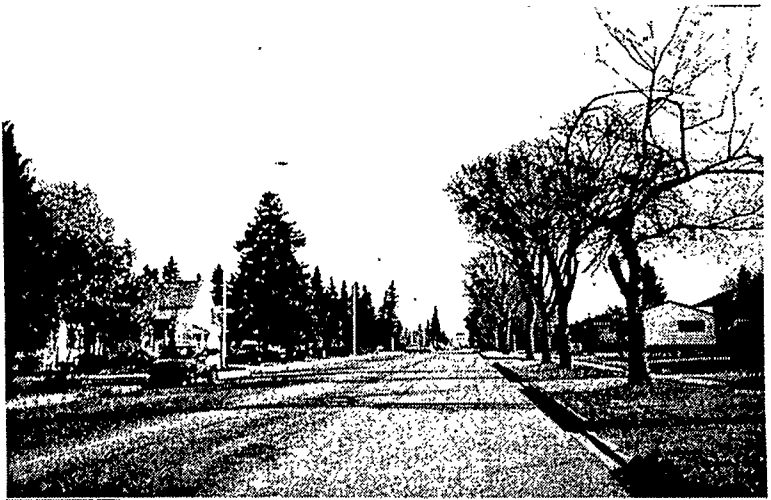Figure 51: Looking east on Highway 12: the arrival into Lacombe.

Figure 52: The special character of Highway 12 shows the transition from open space to residential to historic commercial.

consists of open fields and farmland. It is imperative that this stand of vegetation be maintained as it greatly enhances the entrance area. It is also appropriate for Lacombe to retain agricultural activity in this area to preserve the character. Although zoned as Highway Commercial, development along this route should be monitored so that business signs do not dominate and compete for attention.
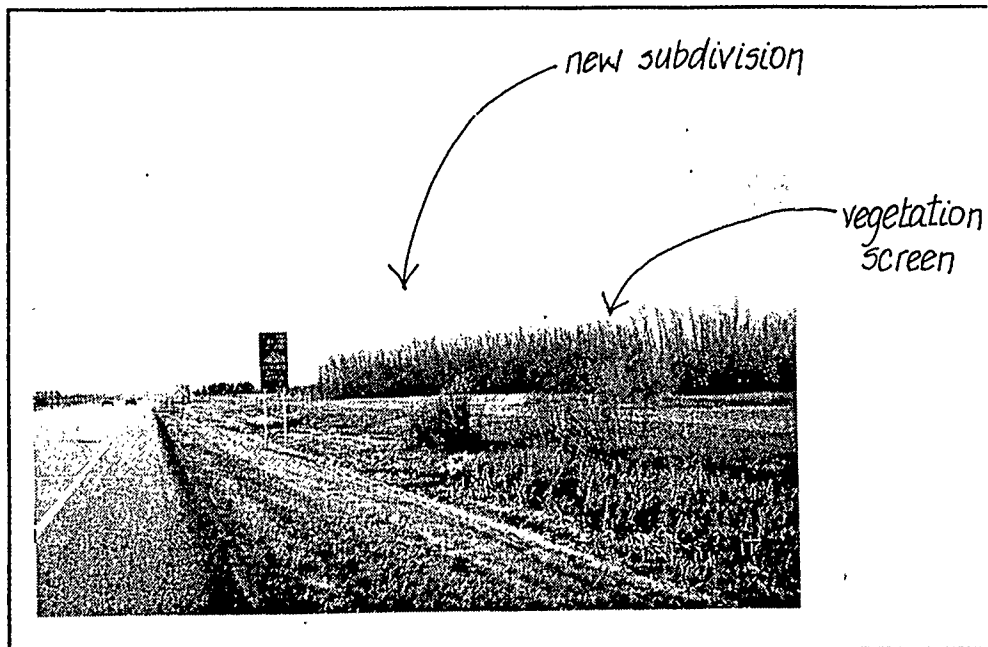
Figure 53: The town entrance at the north boundary.

3. Monitor Subdivision Development

Much of the residential development in Lacombe is single family housing, low in density and occupying a great deal of space. Much of Lacombe's residential area lies within the legal town boundaries set from the last annexation approval, but three subdivisions are situated adjacent to the

Figure 54: Open space on the east side of Highway 2A enhances the town entrance.

north boundary. Much of the current development and development applications are in the north section of town, where much of the open space and environmentally-sensitive areas are located.

Competing interests of residential development versus protection and preservation of the natural environment has incited community action. Mr. Philip Newman, senior planner at The Red Deer Regional Planning Commission, provides planning advice to the Town of Lacombe. He has noted that public interest in subdivision development has increased with the recent development proposal near Cranna Lake. Residents opposed to the proposed subdivision came to public meetings to protect and maintain the environmentally-sensitive area. Mr. Newman believes community opposition to future development will continue, particularly if open space is lost or encroached upon. In order to gain support and acceptance of new subdivision plans, developers will have to work closely with the community and their design submissions must try to retain as much open space as possible.
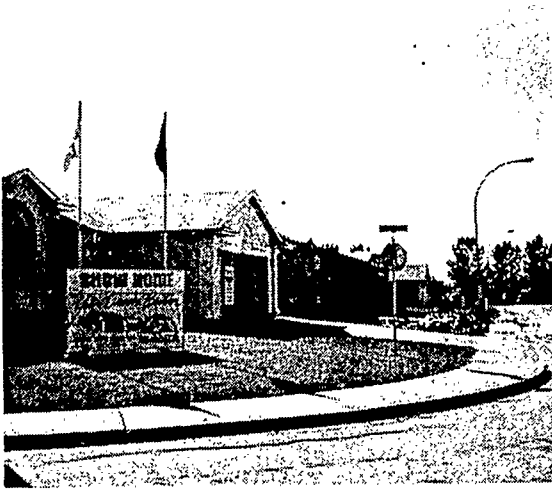
Figure 55: A new subdivision in Lacombe.

4. Maintain a Vital Downtown

A town with a strong sense of place has an identifiable physical, social and economic centre or downtown. A town with a vital downtown indicates that the community is functioning well economically, socially and physically. While many towns such as Okotoks have lost much of the unique character and architecture of their downtowns, Lacombe has been fortunate that much of its downtown has experienced little change since the 1920's.

The historic character and intact condition of the downtown gives the town a distinctive and cohesive identity. The visual dominance of the commercial buildings generates community pride and provides a setting for daily interaction. It is a functioning business district and for this reason, preservation and enhancement of the main street should be continued. Lacombe's downtown has a very powerful visual impact. The Edwardian style buildings have been noted to be the richest collection in Alberta and are valuable assets for the town. From the questionnaire sampling, the downtown contributes significantly to Lacombe's identity and special character. However, a vital downtown must have more than picturesque qualities. Although the historic downtown is well-defined and its presence is physically significant, it has lost its role as the community's hub. Physical revitalization has been realized, but the downtown no longer functions as the community's economic and social centre. People prefer to travel to Red Deer or Edmonton as the downtown's selection of goods and services are minimal and prices are higher. Apart from the restaurants, only a few businesses such as the hardware store service the local population. The changing functions of the downtown is a response to the change in shopping attitudes and the type of people who frequent these businesses.

Community support of the businesses should be encouraged to generate local spending. In order for this to occur, the Lacombe Main Street Office must actively seek local entrepreneurs to establish businesses which can be supported by the community. Development permits should be granted on the basis of the community value each commercial establishment would contribute within Lacombe and on a regional basis. S. Acteson identified the desire and need for a bookstore, a stationary store and a local handicraft store. However, Lacombe should not seek to develop the downtown as a special retail district catering only to tourists. Although visitors can and do contribute to the local economy, Lacombe's identity and sense of place would be better strengthened by people who use the downtown on a regular basis. People attract other people and make streets vital.
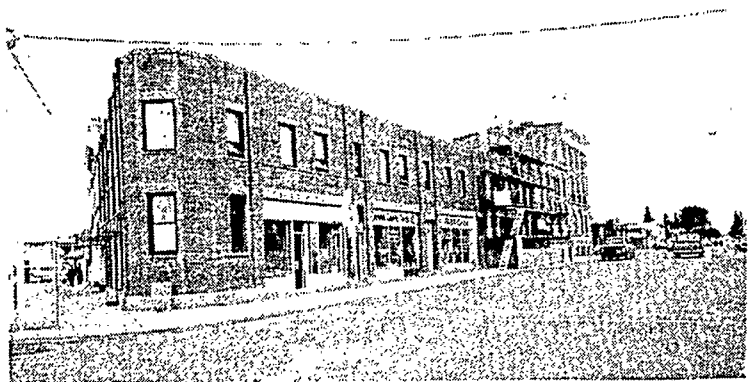

Figure 56: Restoring the facade of the flatiron block.

5. Continue Historic Preservation Efforts

The Town has recognized that much of its identity and resources to promote cultural tourism lies in the architecture and historic nature of the downtown. Currently in its third year of operation, the Lacombe Main Street Programme's efforts to revitalize the downtown have pleased both residents and visitors. Its initial objectives were to restore and rehabilitate the commercial buildings in the downtown to generate economic revitalization. Working in conjunction with the Lacombe Main Street Programme and the Maski-Pitoon Historical Society, the Town is proactively protecting its cultural heritage through the interpretation of its historic buildings and sites. Archival materials and information has also been compiled by the Maski-Pitoon Historical Society.

Although the attempt to establish the downtown as a historic district was unsuccessful, both the Town and the Lacombe Main Street Programme have been very successful in maintaining a positive relationship with property and business owners and the community to continue further preservation efforts. Through economic incentives, many building owners have participated in the Lacombe Main Street Programme and have restored their property according to the Main Street design guidelines. Economic incentives such as tax breaks and matching grants has persuaded many owners to recycle buildings which may otherwise lie vacant or be demolished.

Historic preservation and adaptive reuse have been important objectives for the Lacombe Main Street Office to achieve. Adaptive reuse is an economic method to preserve old buildings by adapting them to new uses (Fitch, 1990, p. 47). Adaptive reuse is desirable when a suitable function or use has been established which repects and maintains the integrity and historic nature of the structure. Several buildings in the downtown have been torn down as adaptive reuse was not considered to save the structures. The community lost much of the streetscape along 49 Street across from the Merchant's Bank of Canada Block. Redevelopment did not occur and today, much of the block is used for parking. To protect and maintain the built environment, the 1990 General Municipal Plan for the Town of Lacombe states its cultural objectives:

Historical buildings in Lacombe will be identified and wherever possible, their historical character will be conserved and protected from incompatible surround land uses. The Town will endorse participation in the Main Street Alberta Program or similar restoration programs aimed at rehabilitating and preserving heritage buildings in the downtown core.

Figure 57: The vacant lot is now used for parking.

6. Maintain Pedestrian Scale

Heavy traffic and residential expansion outwards is eroding Lacombe's compact physical form. The pedestrian scale should be brought back to the downtown and residential neighborhoods. Lighting, protective covering and sidewalks should be designed for people to use during all times of the day and year. The nature of such an intimate setting produces what residents like about Lacombe: the small town atmosphere where everyone seems to "know" each other. Informal spots where people enjoy to sit, watch the street and meet others work best in an intimate community such as Lacombe.

Design and beautification schemes such as pedestrian lighting and walkways can bring about a more sensitive streetscape than what currently exists. The street lighting bests services vehicular traffic; it is not suitable for encouraging pedestrian traffic at night as the light posts are too tall and only illuminates spots along the street. Awnings protect pedestrian traffic from the climate, shielding them from rain, snow, rain and sun. They provide a sense of enclosure on the street level and were an original feature for many of the stores.

50th Street is a primary highway route which carries a high volume of traffic through the Town. The exceptions are heavy trucks and trucks transporting dangerous goods which are required to use Highway 2A. The Town is implementing a landscape design along Railway Street to buffer noise and dust and encourage vehicular traffic to slow down near the downtown area. The Town is also attempting to post highway signs to raise the awareness of the historic downtown. It is hoped that the signage will draw travellers to Lacombe and direct dangerous and heavy traffic through alternate routes.
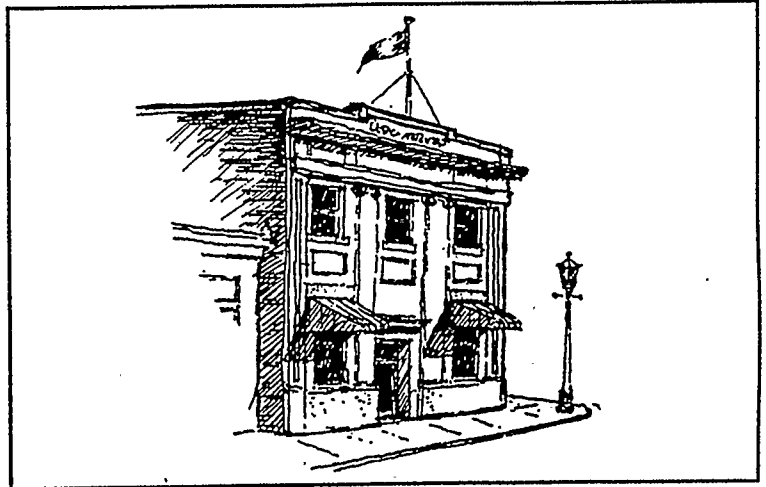

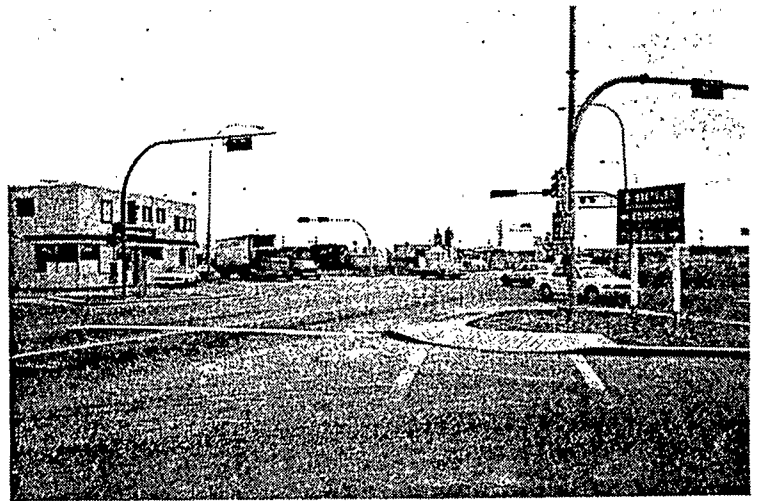Figure 58: A sensitive streetscape in the downtown.

Figure 59: The intersection of Higways 2A and 12 is dangerous to cross.

Because of the heavy volume of traffic that runs through the downtown, pedestrians do not walk far from downtown core. Poor crosswalks as well as the awkward angle of the 50th Avenue and Railway Street intersection deter pedestrian traffic from crossing the streets. Better designed linkages can connect the town centre with other areas of Lacombe. For instance, it is difficult to walk north along Railway Street to the Lacombe Shopping Centre because of the high volume, fast traffic. Better marked

pedestrian crossings, either through signage and/or painted or raised pavement is necessary, especially at the intersection of 50th Avenue and Railway Street.

7. Maintain and Highlight Special Qualities

Although the downtown is visually very rich, people tend to overlook the common elements which are an essential part of Lacombe. These common, even ordinary things are particularly vulnerable to loss as their worth may be overshadowed by more architecturally significant features of the cultural landscape. For example, the visual corridor looking down 50th Street towards 50th Avenue must be preserved. The sense of enclosure reinforces the visual wealth of the streets and the diverse architectural styles captures the spirit of the town. Comparing the archival photograph in Figure 60 (circa 1913) with a current photograph in Figure 32, change has taken place, but the sense of history in the evolution of the town can be seen.

Other common elements not protected in the Lacombe Design Guideline Manual include the Club Cafe sign and the different views of the town. Construction and renovation is underway at the Club Cafe Restaurant and the Main Street Office has stated the new owner will not be keeping the neon sign. This will be a significant loss to the streetscape as it was one of a very few signs not flush with the building facades which caught peoples' attention. Another concern to the streetscape is the redevelopment of the corner lot formerly occupied by the Mainline Motors building and the adjacent building. Because of the size and visibility of the site, the new building must be sympathetic to the historic nature of the street.

Walking and driving through Lacombe, it can be seen that the regional open space and agricultural farmland is a significant contribution to the special character of the Town. The regional parkland character of the area consists of rolling topography, aspen stands and small lakes and this character is reflected within the Town boundaries, particularly in the areas designated as Urban Reserve and the mature vegetation in residential areas. The uneven topography reveals glimpses of different aspects of the town, such as the tops of grain elevators, the flags on top of buildings and the church steeples from different vantage points. Maintaining the regional character will not be difficult once it is recognized as an important feature that creates much of Lacombe's sense of place.

Figure 60: Looking south on Nanton Street, circa 1913. (Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Calgary)

8. Create Strong Linkages

Breaks in the townscape which act or are perceived as barriers can be mended with linkages. A hierarchy of streets exist in the Town, including busy commercial streets, highway corridors and quiet side streets. 50th Avenue, the main street, is bisected by 50th Street and Railway Street to form the main arterial system. The gridiron pattern orders the downtown and older residential neighborhoods whereas curvilinear streets order the newer neighborhoods. The new physical form is different from the original township as the gridiron pattern and the compact scale of development is not continued outward. They are also more sterile in appearance due to the lack of mature vegetation and the wide street allowances.

As illustrated in Figure 63, public parks, amenities and green spaces tend to be unconnected and best serve those who are located near them. Many of the green spaces in the newer residential areas are small playgrounds. Kinsmen Park and Michener Park cater to the Lacombe region and are located on the outskirts of town. Deterrents to pedestrian movement can be due to few direct routes to public amenities, sidewalks on only one side of the street in the new subdivisions and greater walking distances. One example of a popular route is the C and E Trail, but walking on the shoulder of the road can be dangerous. The Town may explore the possibilities of establishing a trail system that would connect public places and facilities that would increase safety, shorten distances and expose pedestrians to more of the open space and regional character of Lacombe. Empty lots and land held in reserve can be potential trail routes.

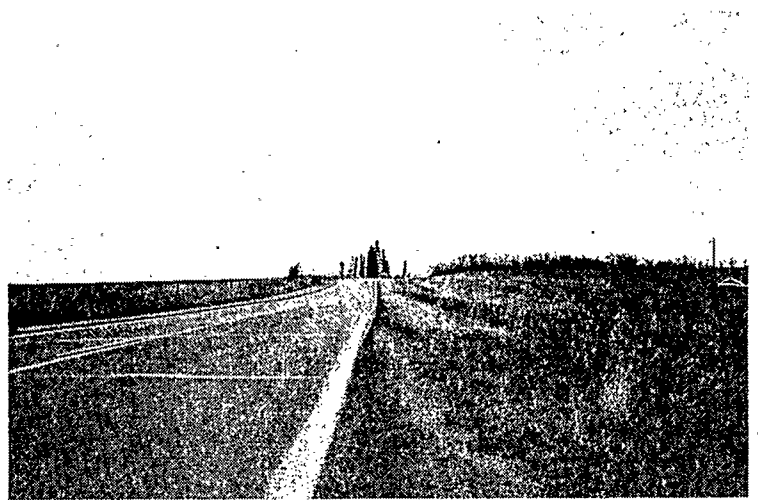Figure 61: A multi-use trail in Lacombe.

Figure 62: The C and E (Calgary-Edmonton) Trail links many districts in Lacombe.

Following Page
Figure 63: Land use map. (Courtesy of Red Deer Regional Planning Commission)

LEGEND

Residential

Commercial and Office

Highway Commercial

Industrial and Storage

Parks and Open Space

Agricultural and Other
Lands (not for urban use)

Creeks and Lakes

Town Boundary

✳ Institutions and Places
of Public Assembly

○ Schools

Areas Where
Section 66.6
Apply

100 200 300   500   700
metres

↑ NORTH

Future
Land Use Concept
Lacombe & Environs

Map 1

dian Union
College

Lacombe Airport

Arena

Community
Hall

Hospital

Agriculture Canada
Research Station

Alberta Agriculture
Research Farm
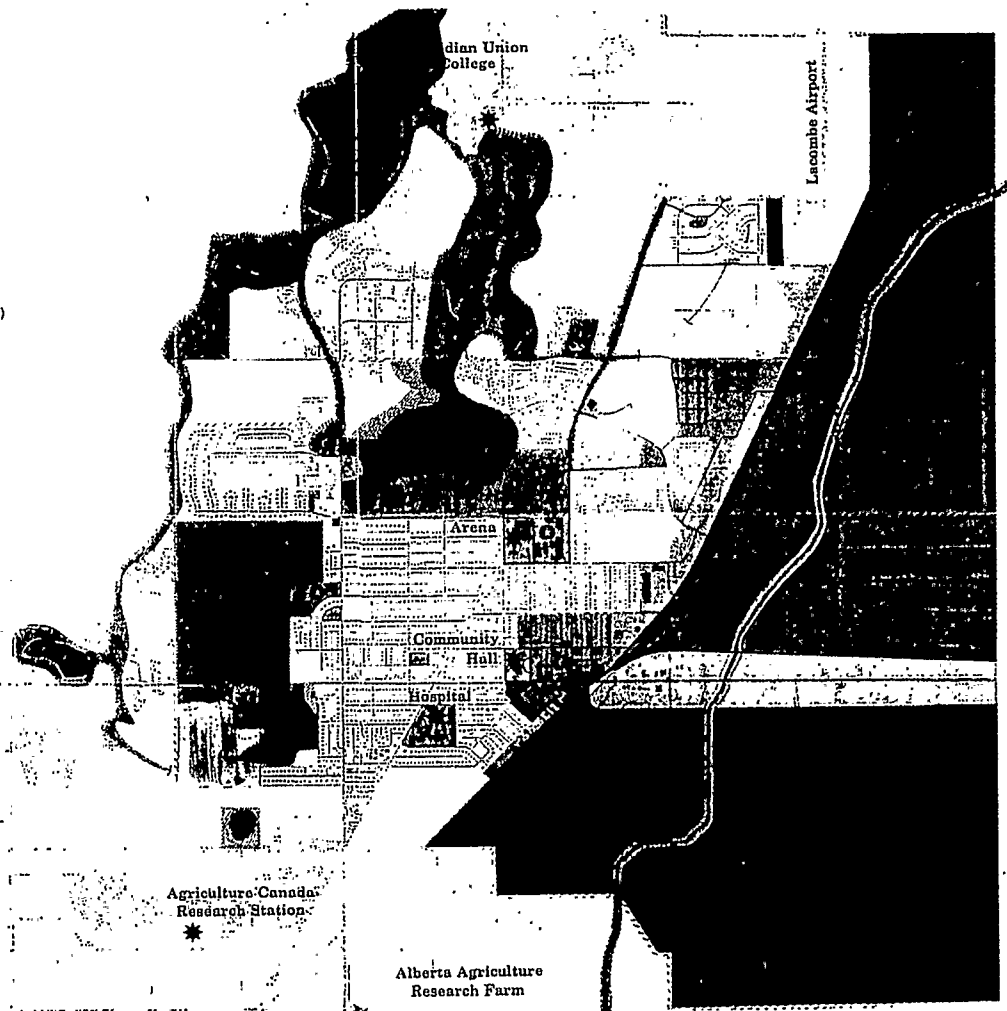
9. Reinforce Community

In the questionnaire, residents responded they liked living in Lacombe because of the small town atmosphere where everyone seemed to "know" each other. Many also had friends and relatives who lived in town or near Lacombe. Along with the extensive community network, many of Lacombe's resources included the recreational facilities and amenities, the clubs and organizations which bring people together and reinforce a feeling of belonging to the community.

Because of the strong social activities and networks in place, the Town has developed as strong base for community development and economic development initiatives. As discussed in Chapter One, social institutions help to integrate community and business goals in community economic development. The questionnaires asked respondents to list the special events which contributed to making Lacombe a special place to live and visit. Many of the events such as baseball tournaments, Snowfest, Lacombe Days and the Farmers' Market are successful community development and economic development ventures. The Town has realized the importance of programming special events to bolster community spirit, tourism and business opportunities and this should be continued to animate the Town.

10. Encourage Diversity

A town which possesses special natural and cultural features and qualities has a rich visual scene. Colours, patterns, materials and details which catch the eye and stir the imagination add to the sense of place. Diversity in the natural and cultural landscape should be encouraged for Lacombe. Although the historic down-
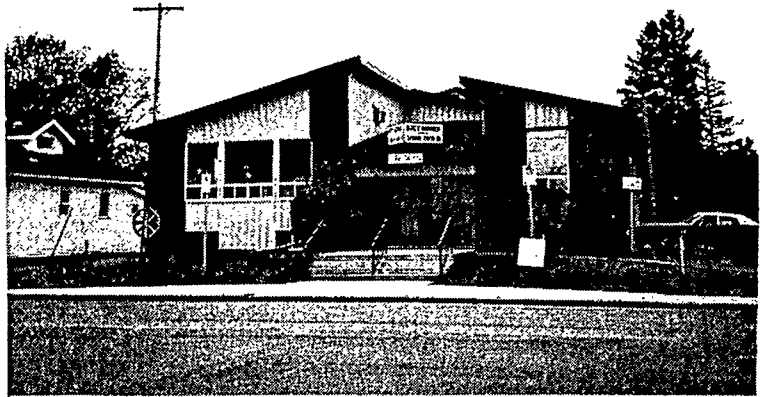
Figure 64: The Kozy Corner Seniors Centre is an important social facility.

town can be generally regarded as a homogeneous area, the buildings' differences as well as their similarities form a strong identity for the town. Their vitality lies in the variety of textures, colours, building materials, craftsmanship and condition.

Developers and construction firms working on new housing should take this clue from the downtown. Often, new subdivisions are homogeneous and the houses lack individuality as the developer has used the same team of architects and designers to design the housing. Diversity in housing styles and building patterns should be encouraged as homogeneity does not stimulate visual interest. Variety can be created and supplied by different designers, architects and construction teams working on the same neighborhoods. Many developers in the City of Calgary have adopted design guidelines for new residential neighborhoods to ensure that certain colours, building materials, building additions and renovations do not decrease the value of the house or the neighborhood. Such design guidelines have to protect the

Figure 65: The new Westridge Subdivision in the Town of Okotoks is inspired by existing town planning principles.

rights of homeowners, allow for some flexibility and have to be supported by the community.

New housing does not have to echo historic patterns to enhance sense of place. Clues taken from older residential neighborhoods can be continued in new developments. Such visual clues include maintaining the front yard through deep setbacks, encouraging the planting of vegetation and canopy trees and moving the garage to the rear of houses. The Town of Okotoks is currently developing a new subdivision which respects the traditional values of community and is designing the neighborhood with a sense of place. The director of planning for the Town of Okotoks sees the subdivision as "becoming the showpiece of suburban innovation." A development firm working in conjunction with Calgary architect Dan Jenkins is attempting to bring back the traditional values of community on the neighborhood plan. The design team walked throughout Okotoks and noted visual clues and observations from the older residential neighborhoods. The team looked for things which added to the character of the town and adopted some of the design elements seen in some of the older housing stock to their neo-traditional residential designs. The new housing designs state a traditional language to fit in with existing homes. Features and details such as front porches, dormer windows, horizontal wood siding and the use of traditional or vernacular prairie colours are prevalent. Garages are placed at the rear, de-emphasizing the car. Jenkins states "My feeling is the world is quickly becoming the same...it's our responsibility to reinforce regional architecture, so Westridge doesn't look like Calgary. It looks like Okotoks." (King, Calgary Herald, May 2, 1992)

Conclusion

People seek out the unusual and value the differences between places. Distinctions in the cultural landscape and the natural environment are remembered and community planners and designers are slowly becoming aware of the intrinsic value people place on their environment. "Sense of place" is a quality community planners and designers have become aware of and are attempting to address the special nature of communities in planning documents. The trend is to protect the physical landscape, to preserve social traditions and to maintain a way of life, while allowing the landscape to evolve over time.

Planning as a profession is normatively based, where the planner evaluates and judges his decision-making action and is guided by his own values and ethics. The planner for the Town of Lacombe faces challenges to maintaining the quality of life, but must also facilitate subdivision approval and achieve economic development. The planner not only represents the interests of the Town, but also the rights of property owners and individuals. He continuously faces conflicts in decision-making.

Lacombe is an ideal case study which illustrates conflicts to maintaining the town character while fostering growth and development. The appearance and intact condition of the town core as well as the strong community support accounts for the planning efforts Lacombe has made. For some other towns, such planning and preservation efforts may not be feasible to implement as the original townscape has been lost or replaced. Lacombe draws much of its character from the open space which surrounds the Town and from the lands designated as Urban Reserve. The built environment also defines Lacombe's character. The historic nature of the downtown is a significant part of the Town's identity and is where the sense of place is most vividly reflected. Lacombe loses much of its vitality and identity at the town periphery where suburban growth and industrial activity has taken place. The Town must review the current policy and standards for subdivision approval because if this activity is to be continued, Lacombe will lose its compact form, its "small town feeling" and its sense of place. Residents enjoy the quality of life in Lacombe, but the things they identified as being important and which they hoped would never change may be impacted upon with continued outward expansion.

The rate of population growth is projected to continue at an annual rate of 4% and this may further accelerate the outward expansion of town growth. Although the pattern of urban development and growth is not favorable to preserving Lacombe's sense of place and special character, it is desirable for many who seek to live within the community. Town growth cannot be halted, but it can be better managed. Future planning and design activity must look beyond subdivision development and heritage preservation in the downtown. Fostering a sustainable and slower growth rate can allow the town to retain its compact form through sensitive planning, development and urban design. Lacombe possesses a strong sense of place and future planning, design and development activities must ensure the protection and maintainence of the Town's special character.

Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve

Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve is located on Whidbey Island on the west coast of Washington State. The Reserve is an interesting study as the nature of its conception, its administration and its maintenance is unique to the State of Washington and illustrates a creative and effective approach a community has adopted to protect and maintain its sense of place. The Reserve has been designated and protected for almost fifteen years, but the management of the area is still considered an experiment. Although the approach taken by the community to protect the cultural landscape is unique to Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve and may not be a practical approach for the Town of Lacombe to consider, the Reserve illustrates an alternative route of action community residents have pursued in conjunction with different levels of government and the National Park Service. Their efforts to preserve the regional character and maintain a high quality of life has led to the stability and continued viability of agricultural activity, has increased the awareness of the Reserve through tourism and has allowed for sensitive and monitored residential development to occur without compromise to the sense of place.

The Establishment of a National Historical Reserve

Fearing the rapid pace of development which threatened the character and agricultural activity within Ebey's Landing, the community worked with their Congressman to initiate the preservation of the cultural landscape. In 1978, the Reserve was established by an act of Congress as an affiliated area of the National Park Service "to preserve and protect a rural community which provides an unbroken historic record from the ninteenth century exploration and settlement in Puget Sound to the present time." (National Park Service literature on Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve)

The Cultural Landscape

The area has been designated as a national historical reserve because of the historical patterns of land use which are still evident. The Reserve is a cultural landscape as the inter-relationship between people and the landscape is continuously evolving. Architectural styles, farming practices and transportation systems are dynamic forces which constantly change with need and efficiency. In response to natural resources, economic conditions and community development, the land use in the Reserve is a reflection of the evolution of activities and land use patterns from early settlement.

Agricultural activity continues on the prairie regions, commercial development is concentrated in the Town of Coupeville and natural areas such as woodlands, forests and wetlands have been maintained since the time of white settlement.

Cultivated fields, pastures, woodlands and open space comprise the majority of the Reserve. Much of the Reserve is privately owned and this makes the park different from others. Over 90% of the Reserve's 17,000 acres is privately owned. Visitors have unlimited rights to visual access throughout the Reserve, but physical access is limited to publicly owned land and public use areas. The Town of Coupeville is the commercial centre of the reserve, occupying 740 acres of land.

The Administration and Management of the Reserve

The Reserve is administered and maintained by a nine member Trust Board, representing a partnership between the National Park Service, the federal government, the State of Washington and the Town of Coupeville. Three of the Board members are from the Town of Coupeville and Washington State Parks and Recreation Department. The N.P.S.' involvement has provided interpretation directives to raise the awareness of the Reserve, architectural and historical documentation of the cultural landscape and aid in the purchase and acquisition of key scenic easements. It was never in the intentions of the National Park Service to maintain control of the Reserve. This in itself was a new concept for the N.P.S. It is hoped that when development and land preservation efforts are complete, the management and administration of the Reserve will be turned over to local authorities.

Planning Tools

A task force was established with representatives from the four partners to prepare a Comprehensive Plan which would become a guiding tool for planning and development issues within the Reserve. The Comprehensive Plan became an interlocal agreement which stated the goals and purpose of the Reserve, as well as the roles the N.P.S., the County and the Town of Coupeville would be expected to carry.

Within the Comprehensive Plan, an extensive inventory was conducted and identified forty-eight working farms ranging from five to seven hundred acres. These farms cover approximately six thousand acres. Buildings over forty years old, significant and ordinary landscape features important on a local and regional level were also identified. The historic significance of each was evaluated according to National Register criteria and many of the significant buildings and landscape features (both natural and cultural) have been placed on the National Register to ensure their documentation and protection. The 1983 Building and Landscape Inventory identified three hundred and thirty-eight historically significant structures on the Reserve. One hundred and seventy-seven historically significant buildings are located in Coupeville. The structural and cultural significance of the buildings were evaluated in terms of architectural style, their relationship to surrounding elements, such as water, roads, other structures, vegetation and topography. No single style dominates the building character on the Reserve although there is cohesiveness amongst the various structures. Building materials, construction techniques, architectural detailings create a local sense of place and visual continuity.

Other features which add to the local and regional sense of place include the Fort Casey State Park, Sunnyside Cemetery, views, the prairie landscape, roads, walls, fences and historic trail systems.

A Design Guideline has also been prepared to guide planning and development within the Reserve. The Design Considerations for Historic Properties provides information to aid residents within the Reserve in the preservation and maintenance of their property. The approach allows for growth and development, while maintaining the historic integrity that creates and supports the special character of the region. The publication provides an understanding of the elements which create the cultural landscape and describes appropriate guidelines for maintaining and protecting landscape features, barns and outbuildings, residential and commercial property and the form and type of new development which can take place. The Trust Board functions as a design review committee, reviewing development proposals and enforcing design guideline principles. The Trust Board must satisfy the needs of a growing residential population, the demands placed on the Reserve through the impacts of tourism and rights of landowners to protect and live on their property. It has become increasingly difficult for the Trust Board to enforce the planning and design regulations set out in the Comprehensive Plan and the Design Considerations for Historic Properties, particularly when landowners refuse to cooperate with authorities to maintain the sense of place. However, the National Park Service and local Trust Board representatives feel that their efforts in the past ten years have been extremely successful and the integrity of the Reserve will always be maintained. The efforts have been successful due to active local involvement, continuous awareness of the Reserve to both residents and visitors and a strong partnership between all levels of government.

Lacombe Visitor Questionnaire

1. Where do you live?
Red Deer (9)
Edmonton (6)
Calgary (5)
Barrhead (3)
Drumheller (2)
Drayton Valley (2)
Coronation (1)
Vancouver (1)
Hendershire, Sask. (1)
Lethbridge (1)
Wetaskiwin (1)
Ponoka (1)
Camrose (1)
N.W.T. (1)
Banff (1)
Hanna (1)
Leduc (1)
Penticton (1)
Winfield (1)
Grand Prairie (1)
Rimbey (1)
Durham, UK (1)

2. How many persons are in your party?
1 person (6)
2-4 persons (32)
Over 5 persons (10)

3. Was there some reason for your visit to Lacombe?
Visiting friends and/or relatives (4)
Business (7)
Vacationing in the area (5)
Baseball tournament (10)
Car show (5)
Parade (3)

4. How much time will you spend in Lacombe?
Less than 1 day (21)
2-4 days (16)
1 week (5)
More than 1 week (6)

5. Is this your first visit to Lacombe?
Yes (11)
No (37)

6. When you arrived into Lacombe, what was the first thing that caught your attention?
Historic buildings (7)
Clean streets (5)
Baseball diamond (5)
Wide streets (5)
Road construction (5)
Trees, green fields (4)
Mall (4)
Parade (1)
Saan sale (1)
Michener Park (1)

7. What things do you like about Lacombe? Are there some special characteristics which make Lacombe a unique town?
Historic buildings (9)
Nice town (8)
Quiet (5)
Parks (4)
Baseball diamond (3)
Mall (3)
Outdoor pool (1)
Trees (1)
Christian community (1)

8. Is there anything you especially dislike in Lacombe?
Nothing (22)
Highway 2A/12 intersection (3)
Empty lots (1)
Buildings in need of repair (1)
Lack of good restaurants (1)
Nothing for teenagers (1)

9. What activities have you done or plan to do during your stay?
Shopping (12)
Parade/Lacombe Days (11)
Baseball tournament (11)
Eating (6)
Car show (5)
Golf (3)
Pool (3)
Dance (2)
Bar (2)

10. What facilities will you use during your stay in Lacombe?
N/A

11. What would you recommend Lacombe do to enhance its sense of place?
Preserve past (7)
Advertise more (5)
Revitalize downtown (5)
More shops (1)
Trees (1)
Restrooms (1)
Pave back alleys (1)
Redo sidewalks (1)

Lacombe Resident Questionnaire

1. Were you born in Lacombe?
N/A

2. If not, how long have you resided in Lacombe?
N/A

3. What do you think has influenced you to move/remain in Lacombe?
Small town atmosphere (65)
Proximity to Red Deer (44)
Convenient location to work (43)
Reasonably priced property (40)
Friends and family nearby (39)
Friendly people (39)
Good schools (27)
Historic buildings (18)
Employment (8)
Location (8)
Facilities (5)
Low crime rate (4)
Clean (3)
Hospital (3)
Golf Course (1)
Slow pace of life (1)
Well-kept homes (1)

4. What is your occupation?
N/A

5. What special events do you feel contribute to making Lacombe a special place to live and visit?
Lions ball tournament (23)
Snowfest (20)
Lacombe Days (13)
Sport and trade show (13)
Kinsmen Rodeo (12)
Gold tournament (9)
Cultural fair (9)
Farmers market (6)
Canadian Union College events (5)
Auctions (3)
Flower show (3)
Youth activities (3)
Dinner theatre (2)
Dog trials (1)

6. Other than the historic downtown core, please identify some of the things which you feel contribute to the special character of Lacombe.
Research station (27)
Old houses (26)
Cranna Lake (15)
Golf course (11)
Trees (11)
Clean streets (10)
Canadian Union College (10)
Michener Park (10)
Parks (10)
Clean, well-kept homes (9)
Small town atmosphere (6)
Ball diamond (6)
Location 6)
Gull Lake (5)
People (5)
Sports facilities (4)
Schools (3)
Rural farming community (3)
Recreational programs (3)
Good for seniors (3)
Friendly tradespeople (3)

7. Do you feel that there are any changes which are necessary for improving Lacombe's appearance? If yes, what would you recommend?
Revitalize downtown (17)
Clean streets, pave back alleys (17)
More trees (15)
More bike paths (12)
Clean up highway (11)
Indoor pool (11)
Preserve old homes (6)
Upgrade water (6)
Control traffic (4)
Revitalize railway tracks (4)
Flowers (4)
Remove sewage lagoon (4)
Improve signage (4)
Redo sidewalks (3)

8. What things do you hope will never change in Lacombe?
Small town atmosphere (50)
Historic downtown (23)
Trees (8)
Good place to raise children (4)
Medical care (2)

9. What do you think is Lacombe's image?
Small town atmosphere (46)
Historical (22)
Friendly (18)
Clean, well-kept community (15)
Bedroom community (10)
Rural, agricultural town (9)
Seniors/retirement community (9)

10. What would you recommend that a visitor see and do in Lacombe?
Research station (43)
Michener Park (39)
Golf and country club (36)
Walking tour of downtown (32)
Cranna Lake (15)
Canadian Union College (9)
Mall (6)
Gull Lake (5)
Sports facilities (5)
Baseball diamond (5)
Library (3)
Special events (3)
Farmers market (3)
Craft stores (3)
Creamery (2)
Thompson Palliser Fish Hook Plant (2)

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