

# **The Towns Pier: Using Place Branding to Revitalize St. John's Harbour Front Through Design**

by

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kmaq'i,  
the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.  
We are all Treaty people.

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## **Abstract**

The identity of downtown St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador has been lost. Businesses are migrating to other parts of the city; fewer residents frequent the downtown and a security fence blocks the harbour from the community. Using place branding theory as a solution for urban revitalization, the city's image will be reinvigorated to redefine the sense of place. Using community, culture, and heritage, this thesis will strengthen the identity of the downtown core.

Change from a city perspective, the Pedestrian Mall in St. John's demonstrated growth through a community push. From a cultural perspective, the tradition of mummering shows how residents can reframe a positive image of any negative perception. By involving the community, people can dictate their city's authentic image. The Towns Pier, furthers change by envisioning a new harbour front with housing, commerce, and amenities to celebrate tradition and heritage while providing the community space to dwell.

# Acknowledgements

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Thanks to my parents for their unwavering support and to my partner, Nick, who has been there to listen and provide me with his engineering insight, asked or not asked.

Lastly, thank you to family, friends, local business owners and the community of St. John's who participated in surveys and local interviews. The information I received about the community has been the driver for this thesis.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Personal Reasons

Growing up in St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador, I saw the city as unique and vibrant. With age, I began to notice a change. The downtown core was always community-centric and culturally extraordinary; however, the recent decline of this area has left me feeling disheartened. Specifically, in relation to the harbour front which lacks a sense of community that it once had. Through travel, I have recognized that many cities utilize their sense of identity through celebration of community, culture and heritage. Specifically, living close to the Halifax harbour front, I have seen the potential for waterfront community space. Currently, St. John's is lacking use of its harbour for the community, and losing its identity to residents. It is time to address the reasons for this change and how it can be resolved.

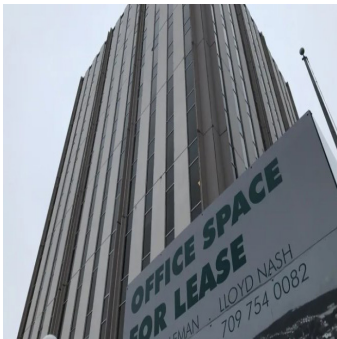


Small portion of the public harbour front in 2015 + old Newfoundland Flag

Before starting an architecture degree, I graduated from Memorial University with a Bachelor of Business Administration. This education led me to explore place branding and marketing techniques that I later felt could be applied to architecture. Therefore, my goal for this thesis was to explore both areas of my education, while creating a proposal to reinvigorate the city I was born in. This will, in turn, change the perception of branding from selling a product or service to thinking about branding techniques as a tool to create an identity that helps rethink a place for the people.

## Downtown St. John's

The downtown of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, has always been an economic hub for the province. This



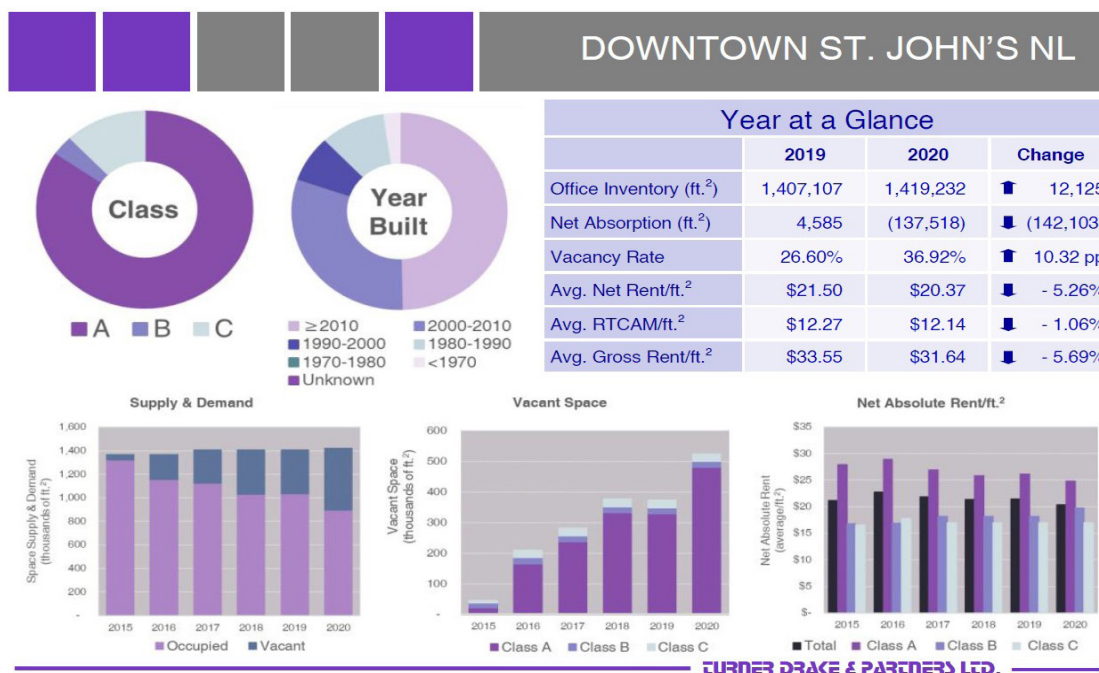
Vacancy in Downtown St. John's (CBC News 2019)

region has seen wharves, stages, shops, and dwellings (Collier 2011). At the core of St. John’s long-standing identity, the harbour front is the city’s heart. As time has passed, the downtown core has become increasingly bleak, with many residents, businesses, and offices relocating within the city due to increases in rent prices, increases in suburban sprawl and mass culture. The office vacancy rate in downtown St. John’s rose by 4.54 points to 26.69 percent in 2018 (McLean 2019). Additionally, in 2013, the Port Authority of St. John’s installed a substantial fence for security and safety reasons. This barrier has caused a physical and metaphorical divide between the city and the harbour, allowing the community to turn its back on the long standing history that comes with the city of St. John’s, its harbour.



Security Fence installed by St. John’s Port Authority in 2012

The Pedestrian Mall, a community program, was launched by the City of St. John’s in June 2020. Many viewed this social project as the city’s first strong initiative in some time.



Market Survey St. John’s NL Offices & Warehouses (Turner Drake & Partners Ltd., 2020)



In response to the pandemic, this plan has drummed up more foot traffic for struggling restaurants and retail shops, proving to be a success in the eye of the public (Moore 2022). The Pedestrian Mall is an exemplary initiative that redefined the image of the city. This thesis builds on this momentum by proposing an opportunity for further development through place branding theory to redefine the city image of downtown St. John's, specifically in relation to the harbour front.

### **Place Branding Approach**

The branding strategy explored in this thesis is known as place branding. Place branding focuses on using elements relating to the community to rejuvenate a place, with the objective to give back a place for the residents. For architecture to become an urban marketing tool, it must provide identity that lends the city a new meaning as a place. It must also offer a memorable experience to inhabitants and visitors alike (Klingmann 2007, 241). This approach to place branding theory focuses on taking the notable elements of community, culture, and heritage to find new meaning in a place that relates directly back to the place being researched. This theory is tested through St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, by involving the residents, the culture, and the heritage to discover the authentic identity of the place and propose an urban design to reinvigorate the harbour front. Marketing is not discussed here as a quick advertising technique but as a conceptual framework of communication in order to build a two-way street between a user and a commodity or service (Klingmann 2007, 186).

### ***The Process***

The process of place branding will be explored further in subsequent chapters but as a brief introduction, place branding focuses using architecture's power to create affirmative spaces that prompt memories, discoveries and desires that extends the brand, place, and landscape through design (Klingmann 2007, 4). The identity of the residents, culture, and heritage redefines the place brand. This study adopts an interpretive–constructivist approach where the intentions are to understand the meanings constructed by people through their interactions with others in the community and the surrounding city. These interactions account for the social and historical attributes that contribute to building a place and a sense of identity (Aitken and Campelo 2011, 7).

### **The Towns Pier: The Goal**

In St. John's, the place branding approach that I have applied in this thesis aims to foster the identity of the place, in the eyes of the community. This has been done through the evaluation of community, culture and heritage. Involving community feedback, the cultural elements of mummering and harbour's heritage, the new place brand can be formed. To argue for change, the momentum from the Pedestrian Mall, in downtown St. John's and the shifted perceptions of Newfoundland & Labrador's mummering tradition are used to explore how to push for further change within the community. The restored brand that I created in this thesis is, The Towns Pier, which defines the architectural design through community spaces developed along the harbour front, that returns a key piece of identity for the community and the city to re-connect with.



Logo for the Towns Pier,  
created by author for the  
project

## Chapter 2: St. John's Identity

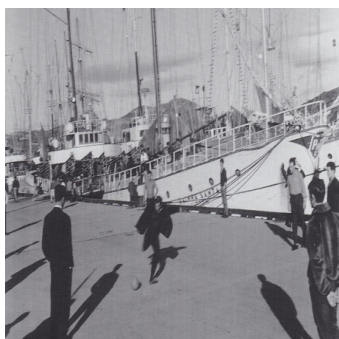
### Downtown St. John's

#### *Historic Identity*

The historic downtown has long been an indicator of the city's economic well-being (Roberts 2019). With the city dependent on the harbour, merchants typically owned a shipping and fishing fleet at the finger piers on the harbour side and sold their goods on the wharves or at the building store frontage along Water Street. These wharves, fish stores, and warehouses constructed on the harbour's north side accommodated the fish trade and created a local gathering point in the city.



St. John's City, from Signal Hill (The Rooms Collections 1890)



Portuguese playing soccer on the harbour front in 1965 (Beautiful Sign)

#### *Relevance of History in Place Branding*

All places have pasts, and some have heritage. However, not all places with heritage use it as a signal of current and future success for their stakeholders. Indeed, many places possess a long tradition of innovation and perseverance, but not all emphasize these achievements in their advertising or public relations efforts to attract businesses, residents, or tourists (Wilson 2018, 351). St. John's has always celebrated their heritage. It has, in many parts, defined the place's identity. However, as time has passed, the city has begun to lose its image, heritage, heart, and harbour. Venturi argues that any good architecture must refer to personal, historical, and locational contexts and that different contexts require different architectural expressions (Venturi, Brown, and Izenour 1972, 179). By incorporating heritage in the place branding process, the design approach looks to embody historical elements of the place to help bring back the city's long standing identity.

### ***Change in Image***

Over the years, there has been a significant shift in the downtown core of St. John's. According to records, more than a quarter of office space in the downtown core is now vacant. Many large offices are left practically empty as big employers migrate to suburban commercial areas (Roberts 2019). The change in the downtown has created an obsolete and unrecognizable identity for the city's heart.

### ***Current + Future Identity***

The demise of the downtown started in the early 2000s, beginning with the removal of the finger piers. These piers acted as an extension of the city, where many local businesses owned different piers. A concrete overlay replaced the piers towards the end of the 1900s, to a now car-centric isolated street: Harbour Drive. Additionally, in 2013, The St. John's Port Authority completed the construction of a fence that blocked the city from the harbour. The city's reasons were safety and security (Port of St. John's, n.d). This decline of the downtown core continued to reverse after oil prices collapsed in 2014. Companies like Suncor and ExxonMobil have transitioned to office buildings outside the downtown to mitigate capital costs, and parking concerns (Roberts 2019).



St. John's: harbour and narrows taken before 1933 (Old St. John's 2016)



Air Newfoundland - Sunset St. Johns (Brian Carey Photography 2016)

### **Perception vs. Reality**

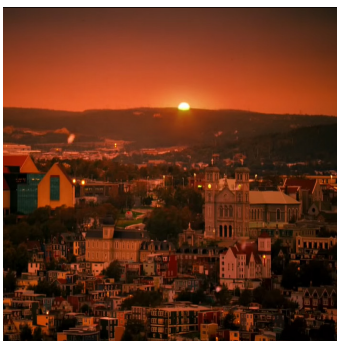
#### ***"500 Years" St. John's Tourism Video - The Perception***

One of the main problems in advertising is the prominence of selling a product or place, as opposed to addressing the realities and downfalls in efforts to enhance the place. In the "500 Years Young" video created about St. John's in 2011 for NL Tourism, paints a picture of "a vibrant,

historic, colorful, and contemporary city of St. John's ("St. John's" n.d). It begins with an older man exploring the vast coastlines of Signal Hill, the Narrows, and the views of the harbour, moving into the downtown core of St. John's. The video showcases historic buildings, churches, murals, and a panoramic view of the harbour from the Rooms Museum. From there, it shows the downtown businesses, people entering coffee shops, families walking, and the nightlife of pubs and restaurants. The video ends by circling back to the older man looking out at the city, with a voice over of "this place is no stranger to holding people captive." The video avoids one of the most critical parts of the city's five hundred years of history: the harbour front. The avoidance of the seaport community emphasizes the reality that the downtown is becoming idle and unkept. As stated in the advertisement, "exploring this warm and culturally rich place, you will marvel at the defiance of typical engineering logic, expressed by jellybean row houses lining steep hills, and homes and fishing wharfs clinging to rocky cliffs" (Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism 2011). What it does show is, the significant barrier between the community and the harbour, and the abundance of vacancy within the car-centric downtown core.



500 Years Young  
(Newfoundland & Labrador  
Tourism 2011)



500 Years Young  
(Newfoundland & Labrador  
Tourism 2011)

### ***The Deconstruction of Tourism - The Reality***

The truth behind this ad, is that St. John's, a fantastic city with many years of settlement, charm, and character that needs to recognize why the image is failing. The city neglects to acknowledge that change is needed. Tourists view St. John's as precisely what the tourism ads show, a romanticized version of the truth, which they are led to believe when they visit the place. Nevertheless, the community sees

it differently. For the community, a solid connection to the coastline is undeniably important. The historical access to the harbour was always quite endearing, but now residents have lost access to it. Consequently, this restricts circulation throughout the downtown, causing it to become obsolete.



Downtown St. John's collective memory to today's reality.

## Chapter 3: Place Branding Methodology

### Branding & Architecture

#### *Negative Perception of Branding*

**Why must branding be perceived as negative in architecture?**



Enough House - Shobac,  
MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple  
(ArchDaily 2016)



CopenHill: The Story of  
BIG's Iconic Waste-to-  
Energy Plant (ArchDaily  
2019)

Many people believe that branding is about selling products. A brand is not a product; a brand is something much less tangible – the aura of meaning (Klingmann 2007, 55). Some architects assume branding is not a part of the design process, as they do not perceive it as “authentic” within that same process. However, branding efforts have contributed substantially to how firms are recognized today. Similarly, firms brand themselves in a particular way, such as MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple’s cultural regionalism branding, or “starchitects,” like BIG Architects, showing how branding can be a powerful tool in defining the identity of a firm. Architects can benefit from these observations: brands no longer focus on the product but on associations with particular lifestyles, contexts, and consumers (Klingmann 2007, 63). Architecture informed by marketing can be beneficial to the community at all scales (urban planning to residences) and for many programs (community centres to institutions) (Klingmann 2007, 187). The three main goals are maximizing architecture’s potential and offering authentic and inventive solutions. To affect change in public opinion and to combine economic objectives with cultural and social objectives.

## Place Branding Methodology

### *What is place branding?*

Unlike product marketing and corporate branding, place branding is a process that enhances place image through the experience of authentic place identity and the change of mindsets of place consumers (Anholt 2010, 7). Using this methodology of finding authenticity in the design process, one can develop a design that connects back to the place and enhances the identity. This process applies to architecture by using constructive branding methods for communities, corporations, and individuals alike when dissecting the process through which our identities are now built (Klingmann 2007, 3). Place branding must be a comprehensive process entailing integrated strategies that enhance a city's formant potential from the inside out. Then we can redefine urbanism from the distribution of mass and infrastructure to being a force within a more extensive set of socioeconomic issues that recapture genuine community spirit and desire (Klingmann 2007, 285).



Ghirardelli Square by Lawrence Halprin and William Wurster in 1964 (Ghirardelli Square)

### *How has place branding been used in the past?*

In certain cases, only one specific characteristic defines the place brand. For example, the Ghirardelli Square was one of the first major adaptive re-use projects in the United States by Lawrence Halprin and William Wurster. Originally a chocolate factory, has now turned into shops, and restaurants within the existing building. This happened due to the community, as they did not want to see the existing building's rich heritage get demolished. Another example is in San Francisco, The Exploratorium project by Esherick Homsey Dodge and Davis' firm (EHDD) uses heritage of place to drive the project by re-introducing the



San Francisco Exploratorium opened in 2013 by EHDD (Architect Magazine 2016)





The Granville Island Public Market by Norm Hotson and Joost Bakker opened in the 1970s (Paper City Magazine 2018)

city's defunct finger piers as catalysts for revitalization of the historic waterfront. Lastly, Granville Island by Norm Hotson and Joost Bakker, uses culture and tradition to transform an industrial wasteland into Vancouver's premier artistic and cultural hub, located in an urban, waterfront location and steeped in a rich industrial and maritime heritage.

### ***How can we define place brand methodology?***

In this thesis, place branding methodology draws from all three characteristics mentioned; community, culture, and heritage. The design method uses place branding terminology, in relation to design terms to connect place branding with the design process. The place identity and image define the design criteria and outcomes. Place brand identities are the design parameters, and the place brand image represents the design goals. The place identity or design parameters focus on the community engagement, culture, tradition, and heritage of the place. Place brand image is defined by the design goals, characterized through the design parameters. This results in an architectural design and community connection. In theory, this approach could be applied to any specific town or city.

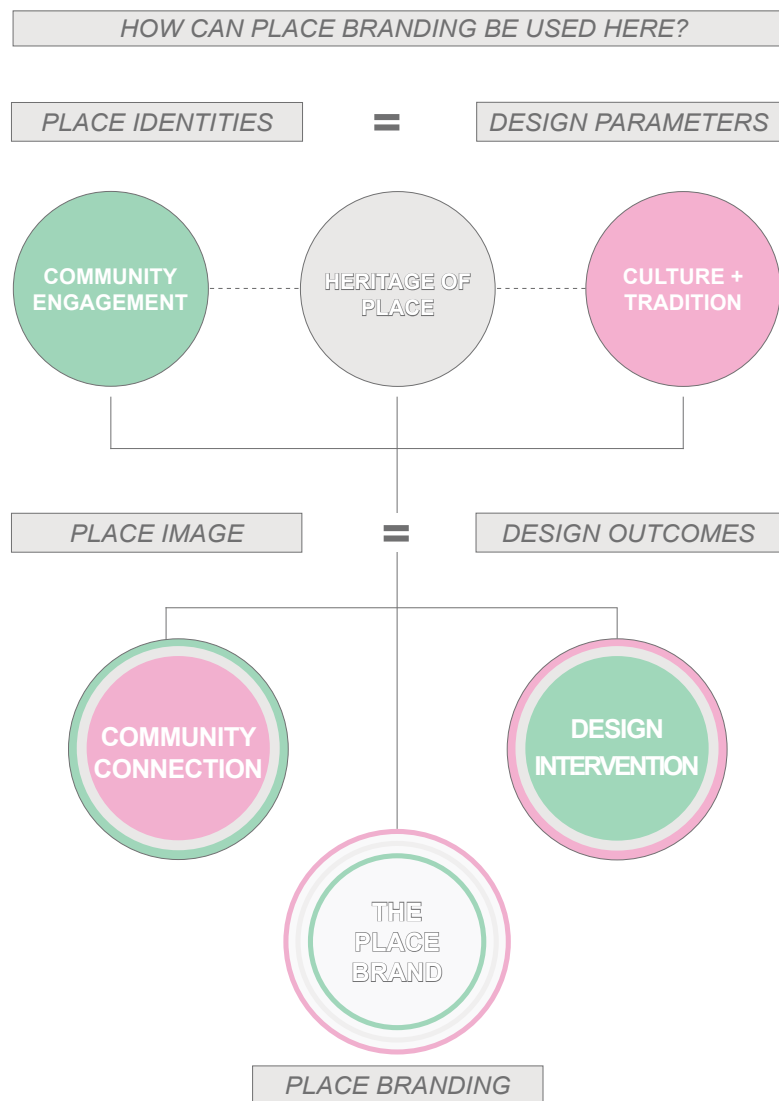
## **Place Branding Terminology**

### ***Place Identity***

Accepted place identities and senses of place within place branding literature derive from a given place's intrinsic features, history and a shared (personalized) relationship to these elements (Mayes 2008, 125). In turn, the community perspective, the culture and traditions of the place, and the heritage of the place are significant. They take the role of the place identity as the design parameters.

### **Place Image**

Place image refers to a set of beliefs or associations relating to the specific place or sign in the mind of a resident or visitor (Anholt 2010, 7). By creating something that aligns with the brand identity, the design goals focus on creating associations within the city that relate to the place, derived entirely from community, culture, and heritage as the core identities. Planning strategies hinge on the value attached in local and regional narratives to an image of place (Van Assche and Ming Chien Lo 2011, 123). These design goals



Place branding approach applied as a design method in this thesis.

create a revived image for the city that links residents back to the community, creating a powerful connection to their city.

### **Place Branding Based on Community, Culture & Heritage**

Brands play an integrative role when related to places because at the core of the brand is culture and the people who live and create it (Aitken and Campelo 2011, 913). The community, and history that has formed the community culture over the years, are integral in the place branding methodology. From individual perceptions, the identity of a place takes shape through shared perceptions across a community. These shared perceptions influence attitudes, define values, create meanings, and determine the degree of their importance in the community's life (Aitken and Campelo 2011, 922).

Feedback from the community is crucial to show how residents see their city, culture, and heritage. Frequently, residents and the community are left aside in the process, leading to very little connection to and understanding of the sense of the place and the ties, relationships, and networks that determine the communal organization of society. As a result, this lower level of identification with the brand does not promote authenticity, recognition, acceptance, and commitment by the local community (Aitken and Campelo, 2011, 918). The objective of using these characteristics is to create a nourished sense of place for the people.

#### ***Architecture Defining Place Branding***

Redefining place image through place branding will be done through the design goals. One of these defining



Logo for community

factors focuses on the design intervention, the architecture derived from the place brand identity or design parameters. Architects must come up with authentic solutions that are surprising and distinctive but firmly anchored to a city's local character by taking place DNA, its unique social and economic potential as a source of lasting transformation (Klingmann 2007, 283) constitutes the architectural design derived from the design parameters. Architecture can be a critical catalyst for generating an authentic identity for people and places (Klingmann 2007, 3). The architecture informed entirely by the design parameters, involving pieces of community feedback, attributes of the culture and the history of the place to define the architectural design.



Logo for culture and tradition

### ***Community Connection Defining Place Brand***

Smaller community events are significant but often overlooked in place branding and event studies literature – and yet they are recognized as a means of increasing the attractiveness of a place for residents through building a sense of community and contributing to the quality of life (Jepson and Clarke 2013, 8). This acknowledgement introduces the second design goal in redefining the place image: a community gathering event that strengthens the community connection. With event opportunities, the brand will be honoured and recognized by the community as a place to gather and celebrate community, culture, and heritage. One notable example of this is the Fasnacht Festival in Basel. Each February, in the dead of winter, this deeply rooted sense of city bursts into the light for three nights in a pattern of constant renewal. This event is representative of the urban identity of Baslers. It is an established tradition that reinforces the city's essential character and its inhabitants (Bonnemaison and Macy 2007, 240). Events provide a



Logo for heritage of place



Basel's Fasnacht carnival  
lights up the city again  
(Swiss Info 2022)

forum to interact, display a common purpose, and reflect the values of individuals united through shared beliefs and collective memories – all of which may help to consolidate local place identity and enhance a sense of community (Derrett 2002, 51).

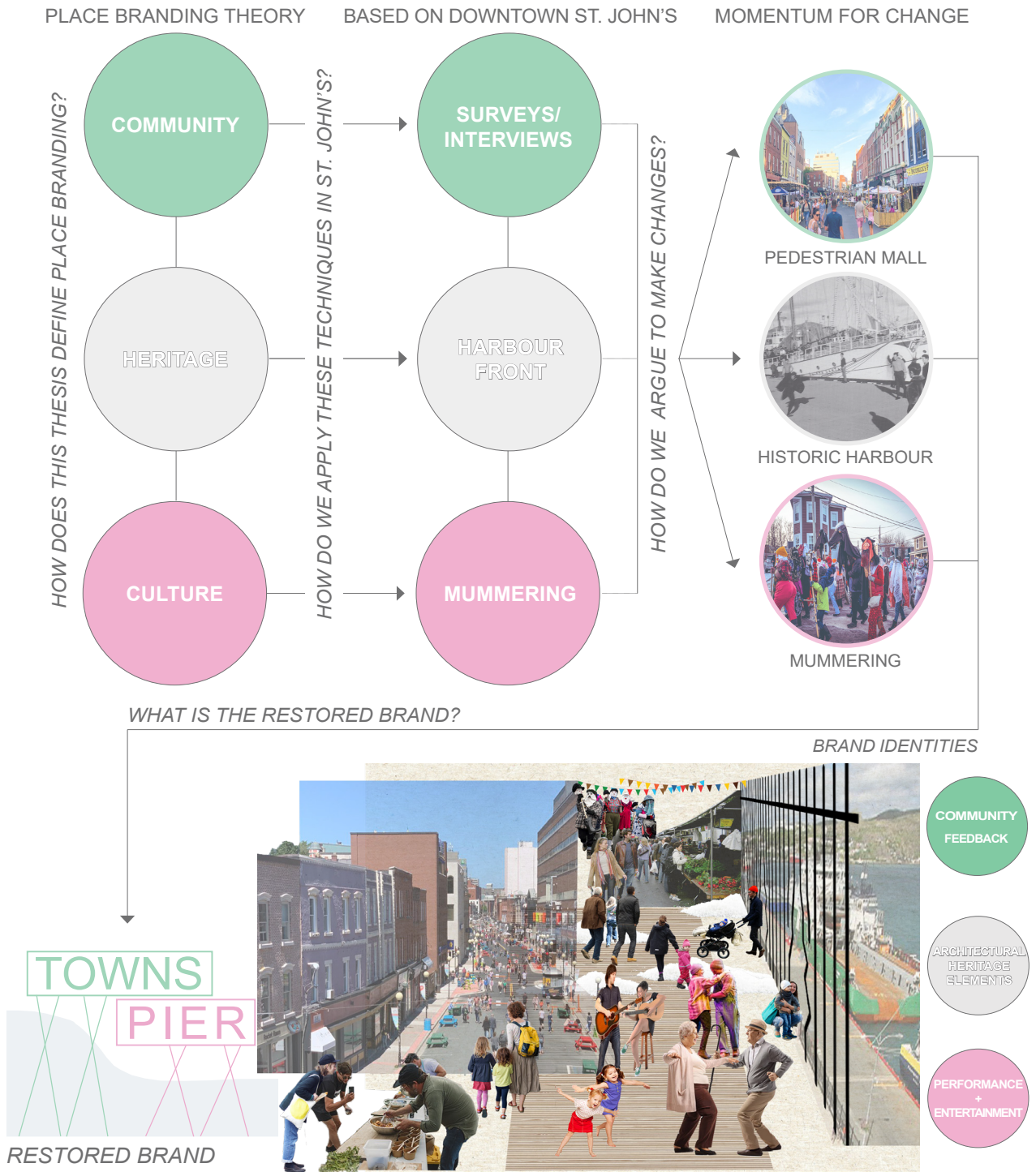
### **Applying Place Branding to St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador**

St. John's, Newfoundland, and Labrador is researched through this proposed place branding approach. With the downtown core of St. John's identity in question, residents are losing their connection to the city. Local interviews and surveys define the community perspective in relation to the community identity and the design parameter. From the cultural identity, the tradition of mummering is examined as a regional symbol for culture in Newfoundland & Labrador. Lastly, the heritage of the harbour exposes it's core existence in the city, as the heart of the city, revealing how it has become isolated and forgotten as years have passed.

Place branding proves how community involvement grants people the power to dictate their city's image. By taking the elements of community perspective, mummering attributes, and the harbour heritage, the brand, The Towns Pier, is formed. The Towns Pier informs the architectural design through a consistent and cohesive approach that helps to draw people back to the harbour, re-engaging the harbour with the landscape, the city fabric and the community.

WHAT IS PLACE BRANDING?

Different from product branding, place branding is regarded as a process that enhances place image through the experience of authentic place identity (Anholt 2010).



This thesis' approach to use place branding as a design method that is applied to St. John's. This is done through community (survey/interviews), heritage (harbour), and culture (mumming). With these elements, and push for change from the Pedestrian Mall, the isolated harbour and mumming, the brand, the Towns Pier, is formed.

## Chapter 4: Community Identity

### Community Voices

Community engagement revealed what the city's residents see. Every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his/her image is soaked in memories and meanings (Lynch 2008, 1). For that reason, it is crucial to include the residents in the process.

The data was collected and analyzed through online surveys from community members and personal interviews with local business owners and operators in downtown St. John's. The survey was distributed by word-of-mouth and through social media platforms in the fall of 2022. The participants were fifteen to eighty years old, with roughly four hundred responses. Personal interviews took place via phone or online video platforms. The questions asked for descriptors of Newfoundland and Labrador traditions, people and culture, St. John's identity, activities, attractions, and some activities or spaces explicitly relating to the downtown core of St. John's.

### ***Relevance of Community Engagement in Place Branding***

One fundamental issue that needs addressing is the reaction of residents to marketing efforts from a given place, meaning that not only do tourists have a view of the city, residents also need to believe in these marketing methods too. Emotional ownership of the brand belongs to those who have affection for the brand (Balmer 2002, 25). It is crucial to for residents to feel involved in defining their city's identity. Architects can achieve unique experiential value in the long run only if the principles of place branding are successfully

combined with local practices that invite people to contribute to shaping the identity of their city, further enriching it with their presence and behaviour (Klingmann 2007, 284). As a consequence, the involvement of residents in any place branding strategy is of utmost importance. The role of residents as an integrated part of the place brand could be the result of a deliberate brand strategy, but it is more often a natural process steeped in the fact that residents are the “bread and butter” of places (Braun, Kavaratzis, and Zenker 2013, 20).

### ***Relevance of Community Engagement in Newfoundland & Labrador***

Newfoundland and Labradorians can be hesitant to change. This is due to a history of culture and tradition being taken away from them through modernization and globalization. If they are involved in the process, it is more likely that the community will want the change to happen. These questions allowed community members to feel involved in the place branding process, acknowledging their association with the changes to create a stronger sense of place for their community. This involvement produces a more authentic outcome for everyone involved. For that reason, this information quickly became the driving force for defining the St. John's brand.

### **Survey & Interview Process**

The survey was administered through an online website where participants could click the circulated link and answer the questions anonymously. This was distributed by word-of-mouth and social media platforms. The participants were people who have lived in Newfoundland and Labrador,



currently live in Newfoundland and Labrador or are from Newfoundland and Labrador, specifically St. John's.

Local business owners and operators completed the interviews. The interviews took place online. The interviews did not use scripts, just general questions about the interviewee's views on the downtown core of St. John's.

## **Survey Results**

The surveys conducted provided meaningful feedback. The anonymous nature of the survey empowered participants to answer the questions honestly. The questions focused on specific areas throughout the survey, starting with place branding specific, then site and program-specific questions. The questions are listed below:

## **Survey Questions**

### **Place Branding Specific: Newfoundland & Labrador**

What is one word you would use to describe the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

What is one word you would use to describe the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador?

What rituals, festivals, or traditions define Newfoundland and Labrador to you?

Place Branding Specific: St. John's

What defines St. John's identity to you?

What are some words you would use to describe downtown St. John's?

What are some words you would use to describe the history of downtown St. John's?

NL CULTURE	
UNIQUE	17%
VIBRANT	7%
WELCOMING	6%
CULTURALLY RICH	5%
FUN	4%
WARM	4%
SOCIAL	3%
TRADITIONAL	3%
FRIENDLY	3%
COLOURFUL	3%
RESILIENT	2%
INVITING	2%
CARING	2%
PROUD	2%
HARD WORKING	2%
CONNECTED	2%
KIND	2%
LIVELY	2%
ARTISTIC	2%
REMAINING WORDS	30%

Survey results for NL culture

NL PEOPLE	
FRIENDLY	
RESILIENT	40%
WELCOMING	9%
CARING	5%
GENEROUS	3%
GENUINE	3%
KIND	3%
OUTGOING	3%
WARM	3%
AUTHENTIC	3%
HOSPITABLE	2%
SELFLESS	2%
UNIQUE	2%
UNITED	2%
REMAINING	2%

Survey results for NL people

### Site & Program Specific: Downtown St. John's

What do you think is working in downtown St. John's?

Where would you create a community gathering space in downtown St. John's?

Are there any activities you would like to see in downtown St. John's?

If anything, what would you change about downtown St. John's?

### Place Branding Specific

#### *Newfoundland & Labrador*

By beginning with questions relating to Newfoundland & Labrador (NL), it gave participants the time to think about the province, before diving deep into the specific culture and history of St. John's. For words to describe the culture, 17% of people said unique, with the second highest percentage of 7% describing the culture as vibrant. For the people, 40% of people used friendly to describe the people of NL. The most popular answers for festivals, rituals and traditions were community gatherings at 13%, Tibb's Eve, George Street Festival and Mummering all at 9%. This information was interesting to cross-examine with St. John's specific questions to see how well they aligned.

#### *St. John's*

The survey showed some cross-comparative answers from more selective questions surrounding St. John's with Newfoundland & Labrador questions. Some overlapping descriptive words were friendly, welcoming, vibrant, historic, unique, and culturally rich. St. John's identity was described by its vibrant colours at 23%, friendly people at 17% and

ST. JOHN'S IDENTITY	
VIBRANT COLOURS	23%
FRIENDLY PEOPLE	17%
COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS	13%
RICH HERITAGE	9%
SEAPORT CITY	7%
DOWNTOWN CORE	7%
SIGNAL HILL	6%
ARTS & CULTURE	5%
TOPOGRAPHY	5%
TRADITIONAL FOOD	3%
TRADITIONAL MUSIC	3%
DIALECT	2%
GEORGE STREET	2%

Survey results for St. John's identity

DOWNTOWN ST. JOHN'S	
HISTORIC	15%
COLOURFUL	13%
FUN	11%
VIBRANT	8%
UNIQUE	6%
BEAUTIFUL	4%
QUAINT	3%
CULTURAL	3%
DIRTY	3%
EXCITING	2%
INTERESTING	2%
INVITING	2%
MUSICAL	2%
SCENIC	2%
BUSY	2%
COZY	2%
ENTERTAINING	2%
POTENTIAL	2%
SOCIAL	2%
TRADITIONAL	2%
VACANT	2%
WELCOMING	2%
REMAINING WORDS	11%

Survey results for downtown St. John's identity

community connectedness at 13%. The descriptive words used for downtown were historic at 15%, colourful at 13%, and fun at 11%. The descriptive words used to describe the downtown historically were 11% culturally rich and 6% unique. The overarching theme of the character and culture of downtown begins to outline its vibrant colours, rich culture, and unique history.

### Site/Program Specific

(Refer to Appendix A for results)

The site and program-specific questions determine where and what the potential community space could be. This analysis proved beneficial, as the initial hypothesis was that the harbour front of St. John's is currently obsolete and underused by the public. The results validated that theory, with 22% answering that harbourfront activities are missing from downtown, 33% would change the access to the harbour front in downtown, and 62% felt that there should be a community gathering space in the northwest harbour front area. This information determined the site-specific investigations.

Additionally, it is crucial to consider the areas that are working within the downtown core, where 51% stated that the Pedestrian Mall was working. Even though many noted that the Pedestrian Mall was successful, many thought it needed more attention to other activities outside the narrow scope of bars and restaurants. Here, the missing activities came into play, which was beneficial information for what programmatic elements could be introduced in the downtown core. Aside from the answers surrounding the missing activities on the harbour front, 16% felt year-round activities were missing, and 12% felt markets were missing.

Other smaller percentages suggested an extension of the Pedestrian Mall, community gathering spaces, family-friendly activities, pedestrian-friendly activities, and more local entertainment. This information helps develop the programmatic elements of the design. This space can introduce activities currently missing from the city or in need of revival in a new sense.

### **Key Take-Aways**

Overall, the feedback indicates a clear understanding of Newfoundland and Labrador's people, culture and place, specifically in the capital city of St. John's. The people take pride in their friendliness and hospitality. They are proud of their vibrant and unique culture. Based on feedback, this perceived image of St. John's as a vibrant, fun, and historic city has lost its image somewhere along the way. The prominent downtown area of St. John's is currently lacking its perceived value and there is an opportunity to reconsider the image. Based on the understanding from the survey feedback, participants felt there was something absent in the downtown core and it is vital to evaluate the heritage, tradition, and culture when considering how to redefine the lacking image.

### **Interview Results**

The personal interviews were useful to gather more in-depth information regarding the downtown of St. John's. There were many different conversations about what is and isn't working downtown but the general sense is that change needs to happen. The first and most important detail to note is that almost every interviewee made comments about how difficult it is to create change within the City of St. John's. Many mentioned initiatives they have been involved with or



Perceived: Jellybean row houses and vibrant city

heard about that were for the purposes of enhancing the downtown core. These initiatives were never successful due to the lack of support from the municipality. They felt that this has left people unmotivated and discouraged to continue to push for change within the city. Therefore, in pursuit of change, place branding urgently needs to strengthen the communication between residents and the city's officials, as well as give more control to the residents themselves (Braun, Kavaratzis, and Zenker 2013, 24).

### Perceived

- Jellybean row colours
- Hospitality
- Friendly people
- Accents
- Rolling Topography
- Fishing port
- Rich vibrant culture
- Bars / restaurants / George Street



Under- recognized: Sea-dependent and coastal community

### Under-Recognized

- Harbour views
- Sea-dependent city
- Resilience
- Local entertainment
- Local artists
- Access to big nature
- Heritage / history
- Coastal connection



Reality: George Street stage garbage (Sweet 2022)

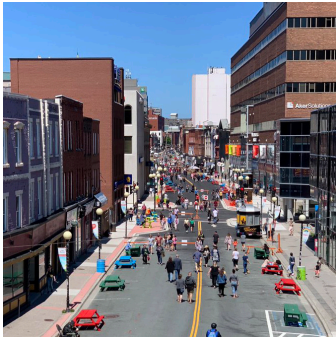
### Reality

- Lack of residents living downtown
- Lack of security downtown
- Lack of municipal support
- Lack of open spaces

- Lack of amenities (ex. grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.)
- Isolated harbour (no public access)
- Emphasis on vehicles rather than pedestrians
- Dirtiness, theft, and no incentive to clean it up (especially George Street)

### Key Take-Aways

To summarize the results, there were three areas to categorize the information gathered; what St. John's was known for, what is under-recognized and what they felt the reality of St. John's is. It seemed that there was a perception of what St. John's is based on tourism's advertising efforts compared to what the community thinks. Many locals felt frustrated when speaking about pushes for change, as most felt there was little hope for approval by the municipality. An example used repetitively was the summer Pedestrian Mall that opened on Water Street. People felt it took years to start and only got approved because of COVID-19. Even after it was proven to be a huge success, getting the city to approve it for more than just the summer, let alone make it a year-round activity, has still been challenging.



Pedestrian Mall in downtown St. John's (Marx 2020)

Interviewees questioned about harbour front development pointed out how little public access there is to the harbour front because of industrial activities. If tackling the harbour front, the majority felt the location should be on harbour drive, which the Port Authority has jurisdiction over. This access point is where the security fence exists, creating a barrier between the harbour and the city. Harbour Drive will be a challenging site as it is in the federal government's jurisdiction, and the fence is for the safety and security of incoming vessels. However, this site was the most popular because it could create a continuous pedestrian flow



Isolated Harbour Drive

from George Street, Duckworth Street, and Water Street. Some mentioned that using the perpendicular streets to Water Street and Harbour Drive to connect back down to the harbour is possible. Acting as the finger pier wharves historically did.

## **Successful Design is Rooted in Identity**

### ***Involvement in the Process***

If residents are given the chance to be involved in the process, they are typically more willing to make a change. For Newfoundland & Labradorians, the fear of losing parts of their culture, identity and heritage has often come with change, but if they are involved in the process, this risk will be subsided. The importance of community feedback is allowing people to feel a part of the process. This inclusion creates a stronger sense of connection for the community. For that reason, the community feedback completed in this thesis research is fundamental in defining the community's identity. The more involved in the process, the more authentic the place brand and design outcome can be.

### ***Willingness to Change***

### ***Newfoundland & Labrador Resilience***

Newfoundland and Labradorians are resilient. They will hold out for what they feel is right, no matter how hard it might be. From a long history of doing things themselves, they will push for what they need. When they are given the opportunity to make changes, they will do so with the respect and appreciation for their community, culture and heritage. In this sense, this thesis pushes to advocate for the people, to give the residents back what they deserve, the heart of their city, the harbour.

## Chapter 5: Cultural Identity

### Mumming History

The practice of mumming originated in Rome and spread through England during the Middle Ages. However, it was not until the 18th century that it was introduced to Newfoundland by English and Irish sailors (Bramley 2016). As mentioned in the CBC article, Larry Dohey says: “It is just like many of the costumes that we had,” referencing Newfoundland and Labrador’s diverse background of settlers. As Gerald Pocius has argued elsewhere, the objectification of mumming as a unique aspect of Newfoundland tradition dates to the 1960s when academics focused on it (Pocius 1988, 57). Typically, during the Christmas season, it involves dressing up in any number of layers of clothing, while masking face and voice to conceal a person’s identity. Traditionally, mumming would take on different forms: parades or walks, a play – usually involving a fight between a hero and a villain – and more informal house visits (Bramley 2016). In Newfoundland, mumming has meant, in its most basic form, wearing a costume that disguises identity and going from house to house, visiting neighbours. It is a game of sorts: at each stop, the hosts would try to guess the mummers’ identity (Laskow 2016).



St. John’s Mumming Festival in 2016 (Laskow 2016)



St. John’s Mumming Festival in 2016 (Laskow 2016)

House visits are the most common form of mumming today, specifically during Christmas. A group of mummers will call on friends and neighbours, and they get up to hijinks, play music, dance, and act the fool. It is then the hosts’ job to guess the identity of each masked mummer. Once correctly identified, they can remove their masks (Bramley 2016). This unique tradition has granted community members the



freedom to be anyone they want to be by layering on pieces of clothes to hide their true identity.

## Ban of Mummering

### Negative Connotations

Although the tradition is now associated with fun and tomfoolery, this has not always been the case. Mummers often carried large sticks or other weapons; between the 1830s and 1860s, there were several reports of violence (Bramley 2016). Specifically, on December 28, 1860, mummering took a decidedly darker turn. The cover of darkness and disguise was a way to commit criminal behaviour for some mummers, says Larry Dohey of The Rooms. It started with the incident in Bay Roberts on December 28, 1860, when fisherman Isaac Mercer was said to have been murdered by mummers (Coles 2018). Isaac Mercer was walking home at night with his two brothers-in-law when a crowd of masked mummers beat the men. Searching backwards and forwards from this event, through court records, newspapers, and government acts and statutes, the research has uncovered over twenty other cases of offences by mummers, which



Depiction of Mummering in St. John's, Newfoundland in 1912 (Coles 2018).

were processed in the courts between 1831 and 1863 (Fraser 2009, 7). This event was the last straw in a list of crimes committed by those in disguise. It led to the 1861 Act Outlawing Mumming, which stipulated: “Any Person who shall be found ... without a written Licence from a Magistrate, dressed as a Mummer, masked, or otherwise disguised, shall be deemed guilty of a Public Nuisance.” The punishment was “a Fine not exceeding Twenty Shillings” or a maximum of seven days’ imprisonment (Consolidated Acts of Newfoundland, 1861: 10). The harassment and violence for which mumming was used as a cover could be related to personal grudges, family disputes or religious or class conflicts, Dohey said in an interview (Coles 2018).



Unknown mummies in Harrington Harbour, circa 1950s (Laskow 2016)

## Revival of Mumming

The negative perception of mumming changed around the 1960s. This change was due to the revival of song, dance and stories based around mumming in the past. Renewed interest and participation in this custom in Newfoundland since the 1970s has grown through influential academic studies – most notably Herbert Halpert and George Story’s *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* (1969) as well as the activities of revival groups, artists, musicians, and the media (Pocius 1988, 57). The composition “Any Mummies Allowed in?” was the latest work written and performed by a group from Fortune Bay – Simani – a band that had already achieved widespread popularity for their work (Pocius 1988, 57). This song remains today, played when mummies knock on a door saying, “any mummies ‘loud in?” Where they proceed to dance and sing this song if permitted to enter. Indeed, the song was the most apparent indication of a growing nativistic movement within Newfoundland that



Myself and partner mumming costumes 2019

had focused on mummering as a powerful identity symbol of cultural revival (Pocius 1988, 57).

### Celebrating Regional Culture

The tradition of mummering is metaphor for the identity of Newfoundland & Labrador. It shows how the province celebrates their joy for fun, playfulness, entertainment, gathering and the trust of their community. Mummering initially became more than a simple custom because of the work of intellectual elites like academics and revivalists. However, because of Simani's Mumpers Song, it has become one of the most forceful cultural identity symbols for ordinary Newfoundlanders (Pocius 1988, 58).

Much like the friendly, inviting, community-driven culture of Newfoundland and Labrador, mummering carries those same attributes in its celebration, where strangers feel unusual freedom to talk and tease with whomever they are around. Social norms are suspended, and people are



Mummering Party that was held at my cabin in 2023, in North River.

free to be any version of themselves that they want to be without being recognized. The outward characteristics of mummering evoke socialization, fun, entertainment, and freedom but, in a more indirect sense, brings forth everyone to the same social class and status with no judgements or power over one another, really celebrating the acceptance of all Newfoundland & Labradorians. As a symbol of regional identity, forms of mummering traditions respond to the threat of losing a precious way of life due to modernizing forces (Davis n.d.).

### **Newfoundland & Labrador’s Ability to Make Change**

Not only is mummering described as the province’s cultural identity, but it is also an example of Newfoundland & Labradorians positive approach to their culture and identity. Their optimism and respect for their culture allows them to shift any negative perception into something positive. A tradition once regarded as violent and criminal has now become a fun celebration of community and identity that defines the culture of Newfoundland & Labrador.

I chose mummering as the driver to decipher the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador and support the place branding of St. John’s harbour front redevelopment. This exciting, fun, and celebratory tradition can bring vibrance, culture, music and entertainment back to the city, all while bringing the community together. Many programmatic elements of celebration and performance are used in this branding strategy. Mummering acts as a driving metaphor for the project, The Towns Pier.





Collage to depict the forms of mummering traditions today - the festival, the house visit, and the party.

## Chapter 6: Harbour Heritage

### Heart of the City



View of West End of the Harbour and St. John's (Memorial University of Newfoundland Libraries 1999)

The identity of St. John's took shape through different settlements over the years, all arriving for the same reason, the cod fishery and the harbour. The uniquely land-locked harbour runs to the ocean through a long, narrow channel sheltered by cliffs. This topography was the perfect opportunity to create a protected city with a strategic harbour that helped supply different industries, such as fisheries and oil and gas. This strategically placed harbour, protected and private from the city's outskirts, has attracted many different settlers over the years to take advantage of it. All were coming for the same reason the harbour at the heart of the city.

### Historic Identity

Historically, the most prominent area of the city has always been the downtown core, which has acted as the gathering point for the community. Particularly, Water Street continuing down to the north side of the harbour, which saw wharves, fish stores, and warehouses constructed to accommodate the trade which first grew because of the fishery. A path which crossed the various streams and brooks running down the side of the hill connected these premises. This became known as the lower path and later as Water Street - the oldest commercial street in North America (City Of St. John's, n.d.). The streetscapes ran parallel to the harbour, and perpendicular streets extended into the harbour, much like finger piers. Some of these streets include Bishops Cove, Beck's Cove, Ayres Cove, Clift's - Baird's Cove and

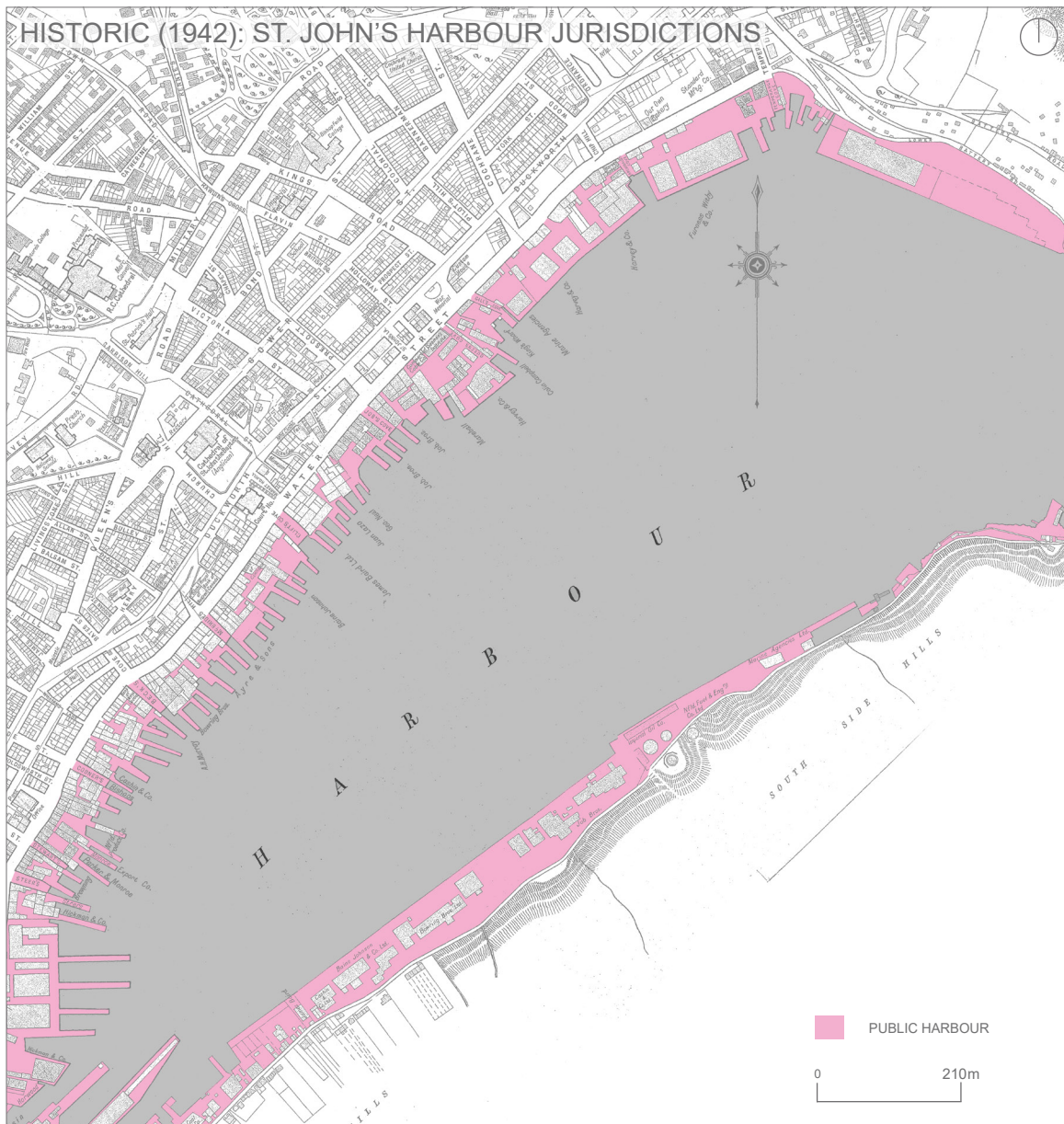


Men standing on the harbour front wharf with dried cod (Memorial University of Newfoundland Libraries 1999)

Jobs Cove. All in all, the identity of the unique heritage lies within the connection of the downtown core with the harbour.

***Harbour was based around:***

The identity of St. John's created from different settlements over the years all related back to the harbour. The harbour was a place to gather, housing activities like community markets, supporting local businesses on the harbour front,



Map of historical downtown circulation and harbour front in St. John's, 1942 highlighted in pink. Base map from City of St. John's Archives.

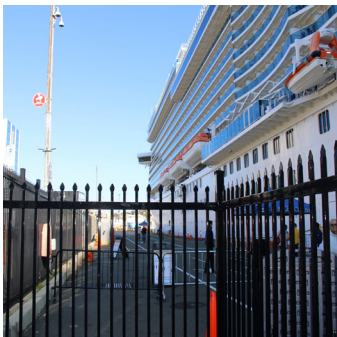


Men sorting seal pelts on harbour front (Memorial University of Newfoundland Libraries 1999)

through to Water Street, where everyone had access to the harbour front to watch these activities. St. John's, because of its harbour and proximity to the fishing grounds, gained prominence as a commercial trading outpost for the Basques, French, Spanish, Portuguese and English engaged in the fishery along the western side of the North Atlantic (City Of St. John's, n.d.). With the rise and fall of economic times, St. John's remained relatively prosperous due to its abundant natural resources and reliance on the fishing industry. Even with the concentration on growing wholesale consumer trade in the 1980s, the port continued to be crucial to the economy through its use of supply and repair of local and international fishing fleets.

### Current Identity

Through commercialization and the cod moratorium, the importance of the harbour has become less relevant to residents today. This evolution is partly due to the required security and safety jurisdictions as it is a working harbour. The "working harbour" argument is a term created by bureaucrats to condescend any discussion related to the harbour based on aesthetics, pedestrian enjoyment, tourist interest, history, support of Water Street commerce, music, arts, entertainment, civic pride, or fresh air (Case 2019). The biggest issue is the sizable fence installed for security purposes by the St. John's Port Authority in 2013. Prior to this, the community was opposing the new fence. This harbour means so much to so many people that we should not build a fence around it," said Carol Adams, one of the protesters (CBC 2012). This barrier developed a divide between the city's people and the harbour, which has always been connected. At that point, the city turned its back on the



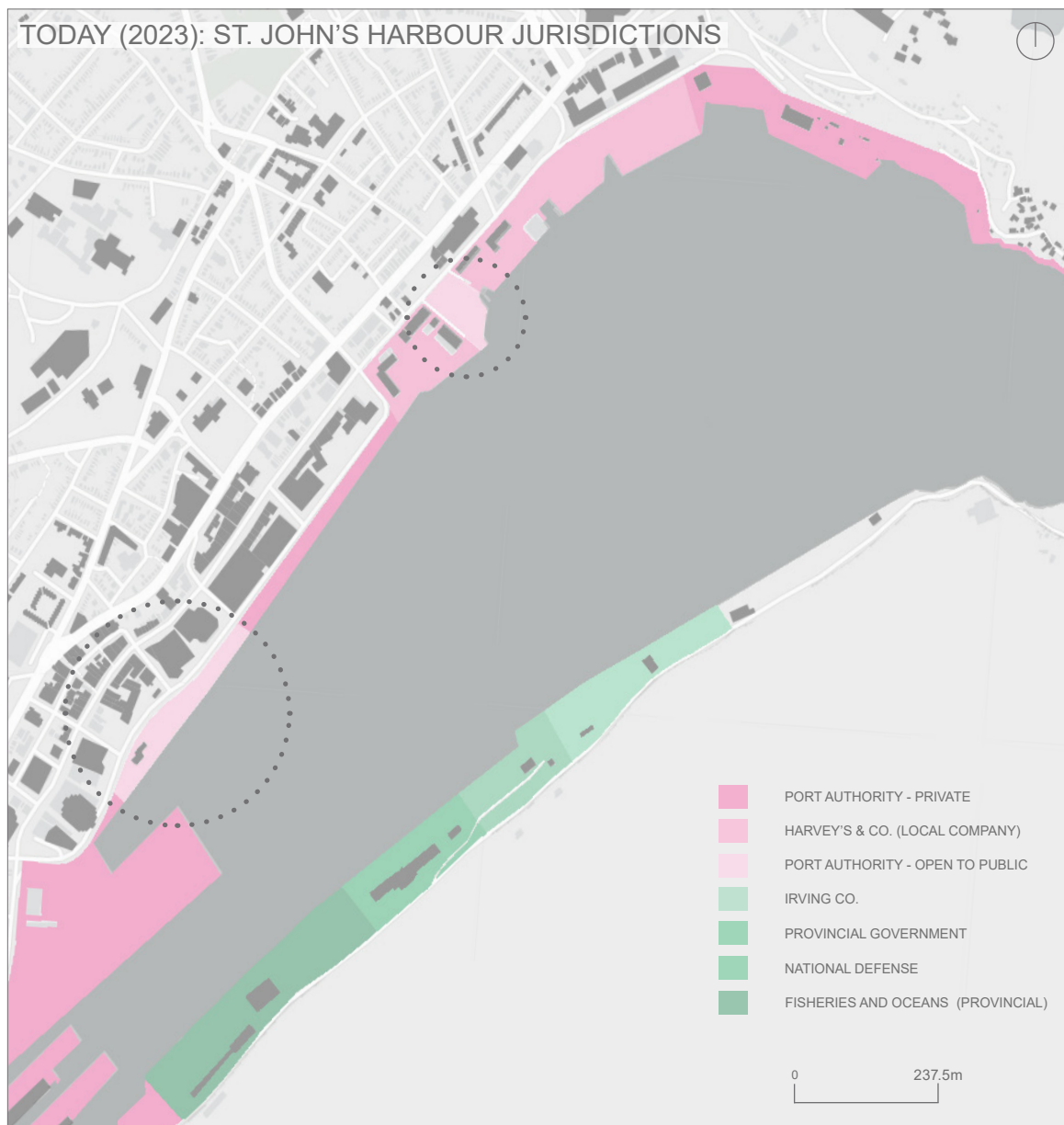
Fence at harbour front today shown with cruise ship on right



harbour, in turn losing its sense of value in the city for the community.

***Harbour is now based around:***

Today, Harbour Drive, once a series of finger piers, is now replaced by a concrete road. It is a dense traffic area isolated from pedestrians. Large buildings overshadow the harbour, leaving few connections to the harbour from other



Map of current downtown St. John's circulation and harbour front. Base map from City of St. John's.

downtown streets within the city. This development has become a street that people seldom visit anymore.

Partly because of the fenced barrier that blocks the harbour from the community and partly because the street has become highly dense in traffic, leaving pedestrians to pick safer areas to walk within the city.

## Returning the Harbour

The harbour has always had a special place in the city. For this reason, the first step to creating a renewed and strengthened identity for the city would be to return the past that has gone missing. This design re-establishes a community gathering space in a place that has always

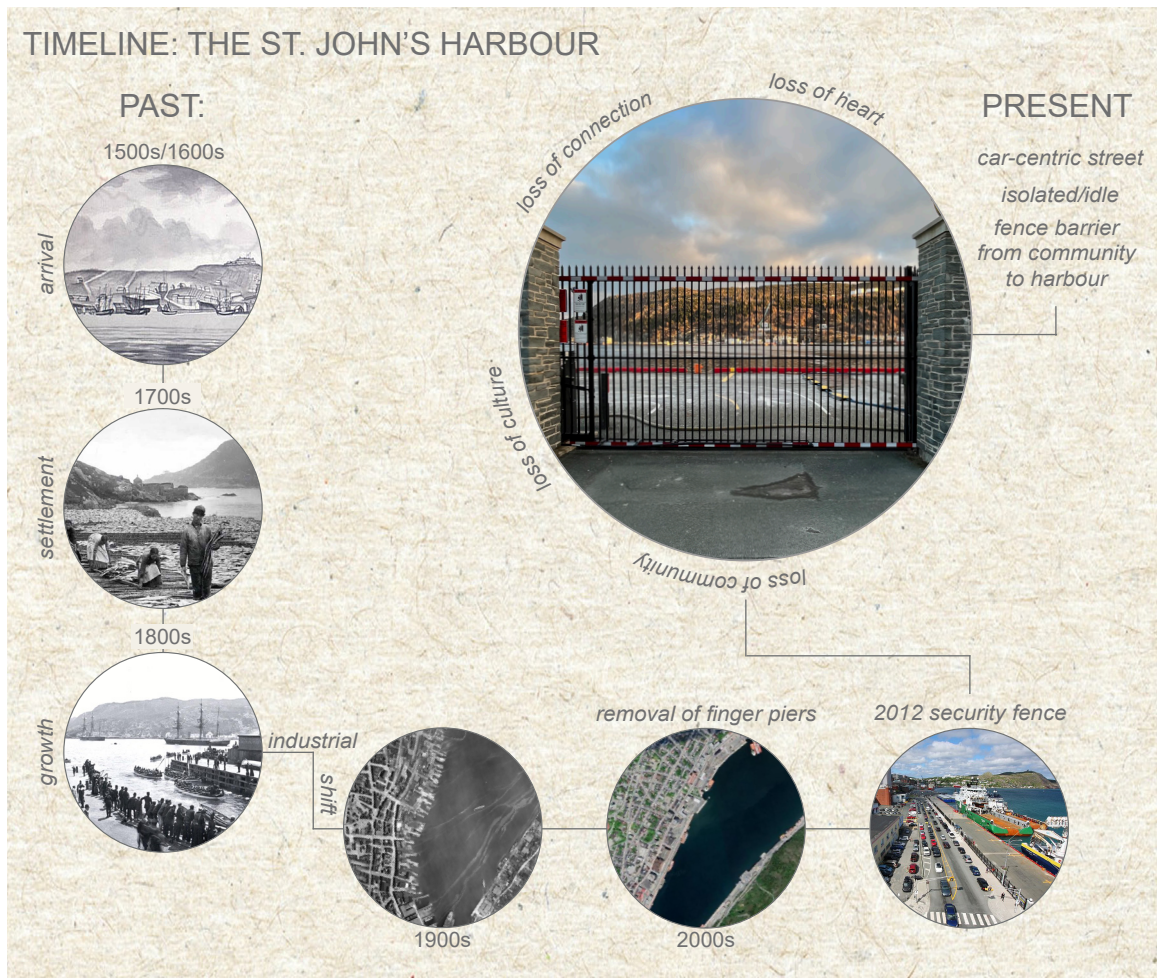


Photographs of current condition of harbour front state from the point of view of the public.

been of utmost importance to the people of St. John's, their harbour.

**Why go back?**

The number of empty buildings in the downtown area has increased over the years as restaurants, and other businesses pack their bags to move into other areas of St. John's (CBC 2020). With the increase of vacancy, dirtiness, and loss of vibrance, there is a need for change to the downtown core. Through the city's unique heritage, the most obvious solution to this problem would be to go back to what always worked in the past. It is important to return a crucial piece of heritage to the city. Based on future predictions,



Past/Present: Historical timeline of the harbour front in St. John's from 1500s to today.

the port will see far less traffic in the coming decade than it has in the past two. Offshore servicing demands will decrease, and many service vessels will be redeployed or put to other use. The three docking spaces that the Port Authority has reserved for cruise ships between Jobs Cove and Ayres Cove are no longer required (Case 2020). This begins to recognize that it is time to fight for change. Taking momentum from successful initiatives like, the Pedestrian Mall, outlines the value for these initiatives in community to re-establish urban space.

### ***Successful Historic Revival: Pedestrian Mall***

Historically, in 1969, Water Street was used as a pedestrian-only street where residents could visit stores and restaurants throughout their walk. During that time, this initiative was a success. Residents and tourists could walk through the area where, at the time, most stores and restaurants existed within the city. This success continued when the City of St. John's decided to return the Pedestrian Mall to the community in 2019. This effort resulted from COVID-19 when local businesses and restaurants in the city were suffering. Residents initiated a petition to open the street to pedestrians only so restaurants and businesses could make sales outside during COVID-19. The goal was to help the local economy while maintaining precautions surrounding COVID-19. The downtown Pedestrian Mall has been hugely popular among residents and visitors alike, with 79% of survey respondents reporting three or more visits in 2021 (Change.org, 2022). The Pedestrian Mall has become an annual initiative, as the residents demonstrated the value of these initiatives in the community.



The pedestrian mall in downtown St. John's (CBC News 2020)



The pedestrian mall will return in 2021 (Saltwire.com 2021)

## Successful Urban Design Projects

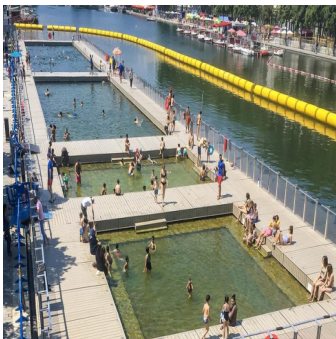
Using other case studies outside of St. John's, the objective is to show the way cities can change urban space for the good and the impact that can have on the entire community. A new image can form when cities feel changes are necessary to public urban space. When a city feels connected to the identity and the fabric of the place, residents feel the positive impacts of that sense of place. These case studies show what can happen when the identity of cities changes through site interventions.



Paris Plages (Official website of the Convention and Visitors Bureau Paris Plages 2022)

### Paris Plages

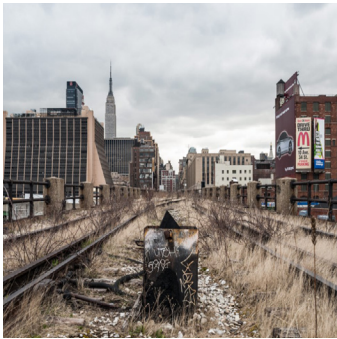
In 2003, for the second year, the Paris municipality entrusted a young theater designer with the transformation of one stretch of the banks of the Seine River, normally congested with heavy traffic, into an open space evocative of the seaside (de la Pradelle and Lallement 2004, 135). This initiative was so successful that it created a new image for the people of Paris. They felt that a place in the city was theirs again, away from the overflow of tourism. This area became the community's place, below the quays of the Seine. It was listed as part of the world heritage by UNESCO, between the Pont des Arts bridge and Ile St. Louis. The area runs the Georges Pompidou expressway, the main artery crossing Paris from east to west since 1967 (de la Pradelle and Lallement 2004, 135). The expressway was replaced with trees, parasols, hammocks, deck chairs, and sandy beaches with restaurants and activity centers such as; a climbing wall, roller-skating track and a trampoline. Initiated by the mayor of Paris at the time to promote his politics of green city, Mayor Bertrand Delanoë developed this plan to give back the riverside to the Parisians. He says, "it is a



Paris Plages (Official website of the Convention and Visitors Bureau Paris Plages 2022)

feasible dream. Paris Plage will be a nice hangout at which people, with their differences, will mingle. It is a philosophy of the city, a poetic time for sharing and brotherhood” (de la Pradelle and Lallement 2004, 135).

This case study is a perfect example of how a small change within a city can create an entirely new image for the urban community. This project created a space where everyone could experience togetherness and use public space to imagine city life differently. The critical phrase in [the mayor’s] platform was “to give Paris back to the Parisians,” meaning that Paris would no longer be appropriated by the tourists and the privileged but would belong to everyone (de la Pradelle and Lallement 2004, 135). This case study shows how changes within a city can give back to the community, help redefine the resident’s connection to the place and fuel a new brand of the city.

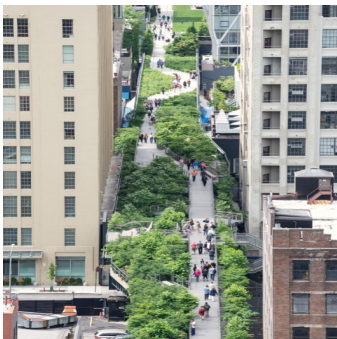


Before High Line (HighLine)

### **New York High Line**

The High Line served as a rail line from the mid-1930s until 1980, when it was known simply as the West Side Elevated Line. These tracks became used less and less until, by 1970, part of the line had closed at Bank Street, and by 1980, use of the rest of the line had halted (High Line, n.d.).

The High Line became overrun with weeds and grass. It was not maintained and generally viewed as an eyesore for community members. However, a few residents had secretly taken over the structure and saw it as the potential for a thriving garden of wild plants. Joshua David and Robert Hammond founded Friends of the High Line, a non-profit conservancy, to advocate for its preservation and reuse as a public space (High Line, n.d.). Designed in collaboration with James Corner Field Operations and Piet Oudolf, this



High Line Today by James Corner Field Operations and Piet Oudolf (HighLine)

initiative took time to be funded, but within sections over the years. With the efforts of Friends of the High Line, it became a 1.45-mile-long space that was utilized as a public, free park space with art installations and food vendors dotted along the lengthy path. Deconstructing the High Line refers to the park as “one of the city’s most popular tourist attractions and an anchor for the super-gentrification of western Chelsea (Loughran 2016, 321). This space transformed from an area used for old tracks to a new innovative program, an attraction point for community members and tourists alike. The High Line encapsulates the city, its history, present public space and its serenity and speed. The space has re-invited New York, creating an entirely new image for this particular part of the city.



Bergen waterfront image from visiting in 2018

### **Bergen Fish Market**

Bryggen is a historic harbour district in Bergen, Norway one of North Europe’s oldest port cities on the west coast of Norway which was established as a centre for trade by the 12th century (UNESCO World Heritage Centre n.d). Through revitalization, there have been inevitable changes in the spirit of the place, particularly along the front facades, where the atmosphere of the Hanseatic period can still be sensed in the more secluded area further back (UNESCO World Heritage Centre n.d). Since the 1200s, the city has housed local fish markets, especially on the waterfront. It has been one of the most important places for trade between fishermen, farmers, and the city’s inhabitants (“Fish Market in Bergen,” n.d). In the 2000s, the city decided that a permanent symbol should be designed to celebrate that piece of the city’s history. Eder Biesel Arkitekter completed a revitalized fish market, Fish Market - Mathallen, that permanently



Fish Market in Bergen  
- Eder Biesel Arkitekter  
(VisitBergen)



Fish market in Bergen / Eder Biesel Arkitekter completed in 2012 (ArchDaily 2013).

defined the identity of Bryggen. Bergen's Fish Market has always played an essential role in Bergen's identity and the Bergen people's hearts. This space emphasizes a place for the community with an open and visible market that strengthens movements and contacts between areas in the city. Through this design, the market has become a strong city icon of everyday life for the people of Bergen, a cultural



gathering place for public life, where many events happen like festivals, and food shows (“Fish Market in Bergen” n.d).

***Conclusion: How can these studies help contribute to the importance of St. John’s identity?***

These studies reveal the significance of city support in acknowledging and changing city identity. The involvement of the municipality, planners and architects knowledgeable about design of public spaces that are in accordance with today’s desire for mixed community spaces that incorporate market, togetherness, wellness and green design. The community can be the ultimate driver for re-identifying the place. These interventions reveal successful community spaces of different scales that preserve space, appreciate heritage, and provide value for the community through revived urban concepts.

## Chapter 7: Patterns of Change

### Power to Change

Newfoundland and Labradorians are proud of their identity. They have always resisted negative perceptions of their culture and place. They push for change in a positive direction, and they are resilient to succeed. This can be shown through two examples, from a cultural perspective and a city perspective.

### Mumming



Photo from mummering party in North River

From a cultural standpoint, the tradition of mummering in Newfoundland & Labrador was unfavourable at one point in time. Mummering was illegal and looked down on. Then, suddenly, mummering became revived again. Around the 1960s, through a community push for change, renewed interest and participation in this custom began. Through the involvement of local academics, artists, and entertainers, mummering became a very positively perceived tradition. Through community involvement, like the St. John's Mummer's Festival, and other positive initiatives today, mummering is regarded as a cultural identity symbol for Newfoundland & Labradorians.

### Pedestrian Mall



Water Street Pedestrian Mall in 1969 (CBC 2020)

As mentioned, in a city context, the 1969 Pedestrian Mall was a flourishing city initiative. As time passed, the world became more car-centric, and so did Water Street. In 2019, the picture resurfaced from the 1969 Pedestrian Mall, and it caused residents to see the value in this pedestrian-only space. With that momentum and a struggling downtown core, residents fought for change, and the municipality

gave in. “I think it has proven itself as a successful animal. It is a great economic generator for downtown and brings people together. I think it is the item that downtown St. John’s has been looking for decades now to bring people down from all walks of life,” said Lorne Loder, owner of Boca Tapas Bar and Cojones Tacos and Tequila on Water Street (Kennedy 2022). If it were not for COVID-19 and the push from the community to support the local restaurant and retail industries, the Pedestrian Mall might not have happened. “We were going in this direction, but COVID and outdoor dining pushed the initiative a lot more quickly for a much larger pedestrian area,” Loder said of the first two summers of downtown St. John’s new pedestrian mall (Ryan, 2021). With the community’s help in pushing for change, the Pedestrian Mall was introduced, and it has been a success ever since.



VOCM, Water Street to  
“Walker Street,” 2020

## Momentum for Change

Both mummering and the Pedestrian Mall examine how Newfoundland & Labradorians have the power to make change happen. Using these drivers, this argues for the rationale behind the push for change to the harbour front. The Pedestrian Mall is drawn on for its recent value to the city and potential to expand its success to the harbour. Mummering is a metaphor for the cultural identity of the harbour front, where stripping down the fence exposes the city’s historic identity. The mummering characteristics of celebration, festival, entertainment, and community trust are also drivers for the programmatic elements of the design.



St. John’s Walking Tour,  
St. John’s Pedestrian Mall,  
2022

PATTERNS OF CHANGE: THE GOOD TO BAD

PEDESTRIAN MALL



1880: Start of Pedestrian Street



1969: Pedestrian Street



2018: Car-Centric Street



2021: Revived Pedestrian Mall

MUMMERING



1820: Beginning of Mumming



1861: The Ban of Mumming



1981: Revival of Mumming



2021: Celebration of Mumming

HARBOUR FRONT



1800s: Heart of City



1900s: Play in City



2000s: Forgotten Piece of City



Future: Heart of the City

Timeline of the momentum for change initiatives in St. John's based on community push. The harbour front is the next step in pushing for change.

## The Towns Pier - The Harbour Front

The harbour front was always the heart of the city. As of the 2000s, it has been forgotten. Based on community results, residents feel it needs to be revived as the city's heart again. Using the Towns Pier, the design method is defined. The design parameters focus on community feedback completed in this thesis, historical architectural elements derived from the history of the harbour and performance and entertainment derived from the tradition of mummering. These design parameters dissect information to achieve the design goal, The Towns Pier. This produces a series of spaces along the harbour that I will be giving back to the community to redefine the image for the city.



Logo

# Chapter 8: The Towns Pier - Design Approach

## Designing through Place Branding

Research from community identity, cultural identity, and harbour heritage drives the design outcomes of the Towns Pier. These fundamental elements are used in the brand to define the place. The Towns Pier will guide the design to produce a new harbour front celebration for the community.

## Design Parameters

### Community Context: Residents

Based on residents' feedback, the community feels proud of where they are from, even if there are issues to address. They believe in a unique culture, vibrant place, and friendly people. They are content with the restaurants, bars, and entertainment existing downtown. However, they see the area becoming obsolete, dirty and lacking general amenities such as grocery stores and pharmacies. That said, they do not want to lose their strong connection to the community, and right now, that seems to be at risk. From the community's input, this is achievable by returning heritage, giving them



### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TAKE-AWAYS



PLACE BRANDING KEY WORDS



THRIVING

LACKING

Key take-aways from community engagement.

access to the harbour, causing year-round activities, local markets, local festivals, family-friendly activities and pedestrian-friendly activities to exist along the water.

***Harbour Heritage Context: Architectural Heritage Elements***



In the process of reinventing the city, the decision to choose the harbour was an obvious one. By celebrating the historic elements of the harbour front as an extension of the city, it can be strengthened. This will be done through the exploration of specific historical architectural elements, such as, Jellybean row houses, finger piers, sheds and stages that historically existed on the harbour and throughout the downtown core. While addressing the community's current concerns in the city, the harbour will not just be returning a piece of heritage, it will be creating a place where people can appreciate the connection with water, while housing the identity of the city within the image of the design. This also reintroduces circulation, as an extension to the downtown, encouraging movement and connectedness throughout the downtown core.

***Mumming Cultural Context: Performance + Entertainment***



Just as mumming grants people the power to be whomever they want, the design will follow that same concept. Through the illusion of different identities throughout the design, the program will act as one element to the outside, exhibiting a more "advertised" perception of St. John's. When moving inside the series of designs, each phase will reveal new programmatic elements that exposes the genuine identity of St. John's to the community. Much like mumming, the types of performance and entertainment culture is very unique to Newfoundland and Labrador. These key elements

are explored through the various programs in the design through the celebration of culture that evokes life within the city.

## **Design Goals - The Towns Pier**

The brand, The Towns Pier, focuses on revitalizing St. John's and defining a stronger identity for the place. Involving community, heritage, and culture in the place branding design approach builds an authentic symbol for the city of St. John's.

### **The Towns Pier: Design Intervention**

#### ***Architecture Defining City Brand***

The architecture derived from The Towns Pier will renew the city brand. The various forms incorporate a modern approach to many traditional architectural heritage elements that existed on the water front, such as the finger piers, sheds, stages and Jellybean Row houses. Through the use of sheds and stages, the tradition of The Shed Party & The Kitchen Party is examined through the programmatic elements of the design. The program of this design aligns with performance and celebration as a symbol for the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador, while incorporating the community feedback that was gained from the survey and interview results. The interior material elements focus on existing materials along the waterfront with cohesiveness throughout to create connectedness, bringing each area, the harbour and the community together. The exterior focuses on a perceived approach of what St. John's identity is, based on tourism efforts. This follows a celebration of traditional and new made old materials that bring out vibrancy, colour and life, just as St. John's is perceived to be by their Jelly



Existing Fishing Shed in the Battery, St. John's in 2019



Rick Mercer NYE Special Mallard Cottage Kitchen Party in 2017



Bean Row houses, designed with vibrant colour palettes so that fishermen could see their homes as they entered the typically foggy harbour of St. John's.

## **The Towns Pier: Community Connection**

### ***Community Events Defining City Brand***

Christine Macy refers to festival architecture as “a form of urban design through public programming (Bonnemaison and Macy 2007, 240). Festival architecture is employed in this design to define the city through the public program of the place. The identity will be instilled through The Towns Pier, creating a year round place to gather in St. John's. Specifically incorporating a stage with various few points for entertainment and celebration to take place. This encompasses all that the culture of St. John's is, celebratory, entertaining, vibrant and friendly, located in the heart of the city, the harbour front.



Vibrance - Jelly Bean Row Palette (photo by Newfoundland & Labrador)

## **Removing the Fence: Design Intervention**

### ***How did it happen?***

The security fence constructed in 2013 cost St. John's taxpayers roughly \$425,000 of the total cost – estimated to be in the vicinity of \$850,000 (Case 2009). However, cost is not the point here, cutting Newfoundlanders off from the waters to which they have had access for five hundred years, is the point. With much speculation on the purpose of the fence, the Port Authority stated, "the fence defines a secure port area that is compliant with MARSEC Level 1. Canadian Marine Transport Security Regulations define Level 1 as a marine facility security plan (that contains) security procedures appropriate to the facility's operations to prevent unauthorized access or activities in restricted areas (Case 2009). To that point, the interesting observation here is that other jurisdictions along the harbour are not fenced off and are used in the same capacity. The St. John's Port Authority has said the fence is necessary to provide extra security for shipping, including in the offshore oil industry, and it needs to meet federal requirements (CBC 2013).

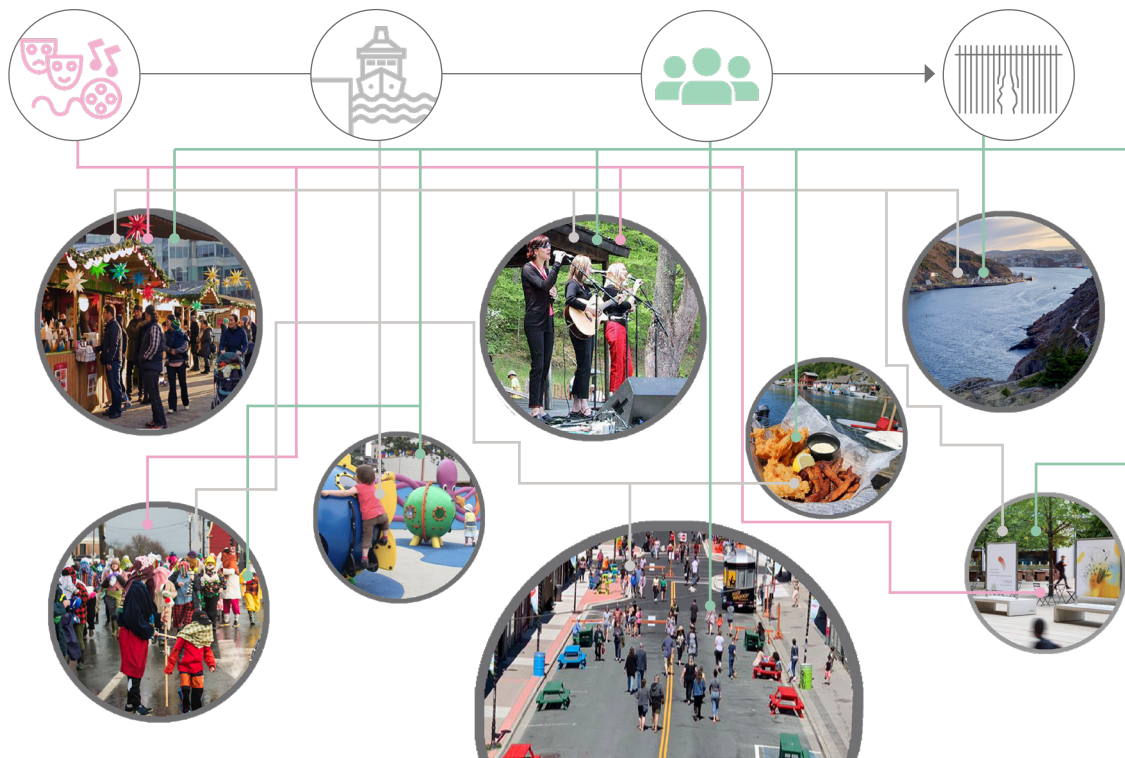
### ***Removing the Fence***

By removing the fence, residents can regain access to the harbour that is rightfully part of their identity. The area that is currently defined as MARSEC 1, can be given over to public space for walking, cycling and performance. Restaurants, coffee shops and pubs can lease portions of the outdoor space, with initial rights going to the downtown businesses in this area. The pandemic has demonstrated that catering off-site can work effectively and hopefully turn a profit if the opportunity is given to local entrepreneurs (Case 2020).

The Towns Pier focuses on removing the fence from its current position and relocating it to a smaller area within the harbour, while still maintaining a connection between this fenced area and the public. This is done through the reintroduction of finger piers, shifting the current working port down the harbour front. This allows for an abundance of space to be given back to the community while also meeting the safety and security requirements needed for any international port. This is analyzed further in the urban strategy chapter.

### ***The Harbour + Downtown Core***

The harbour and the downtown core have always had a symbiotic relationship but, as outlined, this has changed. Through the proposed design intervention, the circulation system within the downtown area is strengthened, reconnecting the city back to the harbour. The Pedestrian Mall acts as an extension to the Towns Pier and vice versa, where pedestrians can move throughout the downtown core freely. By incorporating concepts that the residents contributed to the surveys, the harbour's heritage is returned, and the missing activities that residents feel should exist are introduced. An open area of the harbour, with no barriers between the city connects the community, culture, and heritage back to the people of the city. This redefines the image of the city for residents and in turn, brings back the authentic identity of the city of St. John's.



Wish Image: Poking holes in the fence. Collage activities that could take place on the harbour front relating back to design parameters.

## Chapter 9: Urban Strategy

### The Towns Pier

#### *Current Harbour Front*

The majority of the existing harbour front is isolated by a security fence in place by the Port Authority for security and safety reasons. Meaning that majority of the waterfront is currently for industrial use, with very minimal public use, only two buildings currently exist, that take place as two chain restaurants leased from the Port Authority. The remainder of the road remains car-centric, with minimal public pedestrian use.

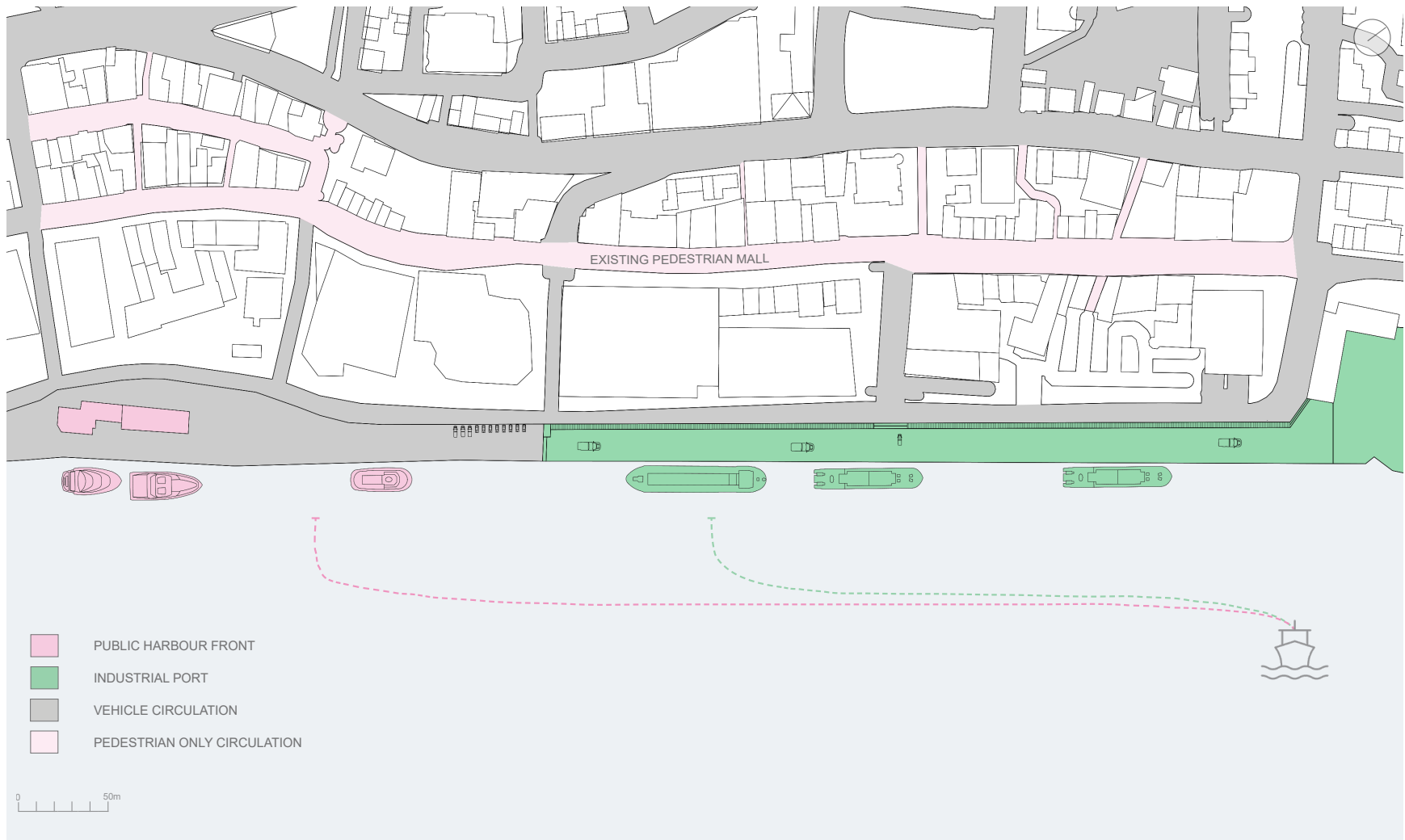
#### *Future Harbour Front: Proposed Strategy*

The proposed urban strategy follows three phases that creates continuous circulation throughout the downtown core. This connects the existing Water Street Pedestrian Mall to the rest of the downtown core. The strategy proposed is an entirely pedestrian-friendly harbour front, with two drop-off points for busses, and shuttles to bring pedestrians to the Towns Pier, shown on the “Proposed Urban Strategy: Harbour Front Zones + Circulation” map.

The three phases are as follows:

#### *The Old Made New*

The Old Made New phase explores the historical architectural elements mentioned previously being sheds, stages and piers. This area encompasses the programmatic elements of performance and entertainment experienced in Newfoundland and Labrador culture. This phase is designed with areas for all age groups.



Existing harbour front: harbour front and circulation zones. This shows the industrial and public zones with the current pedestrian and vehicle circulation.

### ***The Outside to Inside***

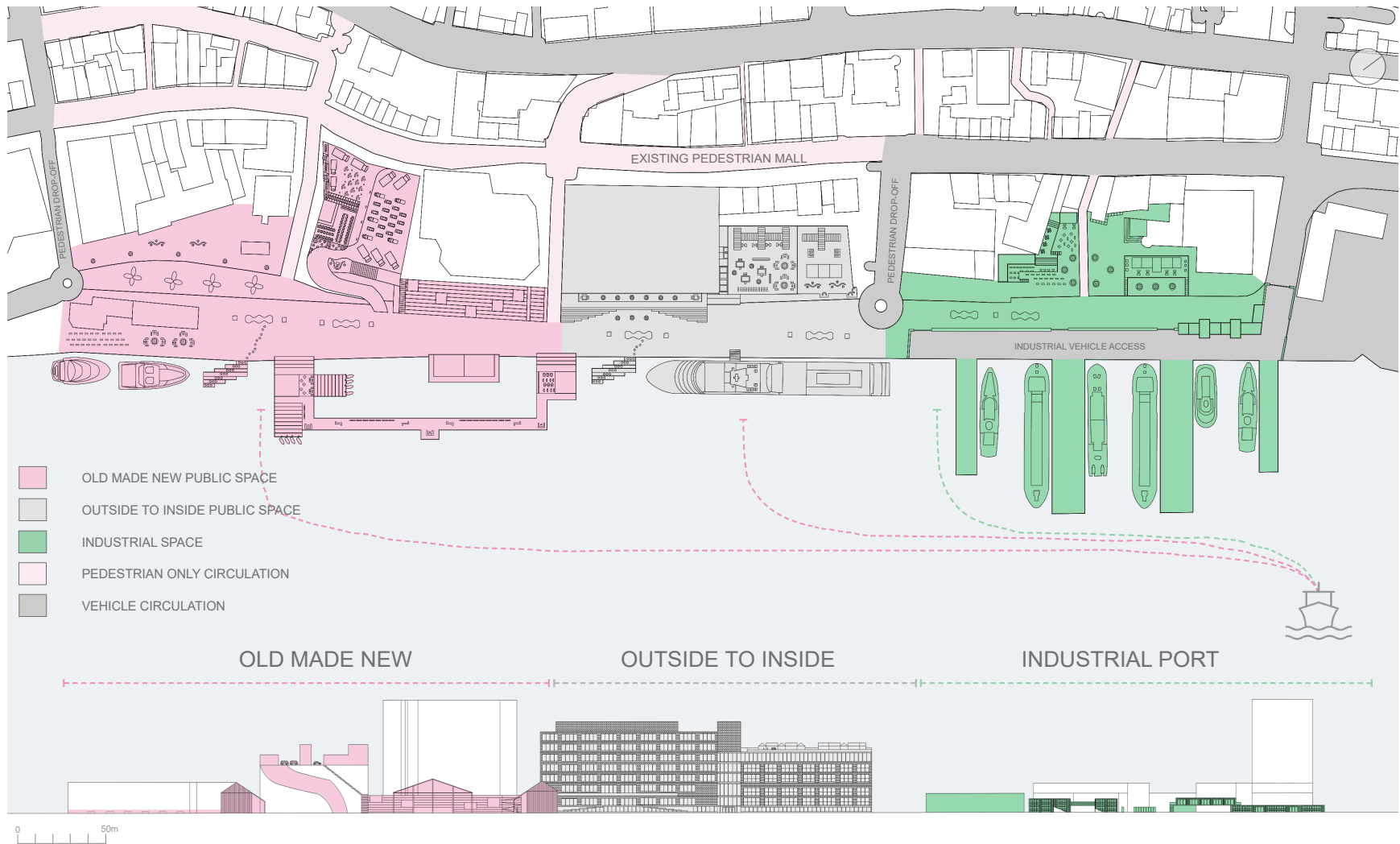
The Outside to Inside phase takes an adaptive reuse approach to two existing buildings, an office building, Atlantic Place, and an adjacent parking garage. This creates two complimentary indoor spaces for the community on St. John's particularly cold days. The Outside In creates holes in the existing fabric to connect the Towns Pier with the Water Street Pedestrian Mall, and the rest of the downtown core.

### ***The Industrial Port***

The Industrial Port has been moved farther down the harbour front and rotated ninety degrees to re-introduce the finger piers that historically existed. This creates a much smaller portion of the harbour to be fenced off from the community. This new fence remains transparent and approachable to the public with its own vehicle access to allow cars and trucks to transport goods/services needed for the industrial ships. The architectural approach to this area features the same vibrant aesthetic that the Jellybean Row houses take with a new industrial twist, of shipping container design, where public spaces are created for the community aside from the Industrial Port to integrate both the working and the leisure.



Proposed design, from left to right: Old Made New, Inside to Outside & Industrial Port.



Proposed urban strategy - The Towns Pier: harbour front zones and circulation. This shows the three phases of the urban strategy with new pedestrian and vehicle circulation.



## Chapter 10: Design

### The Towns Pier

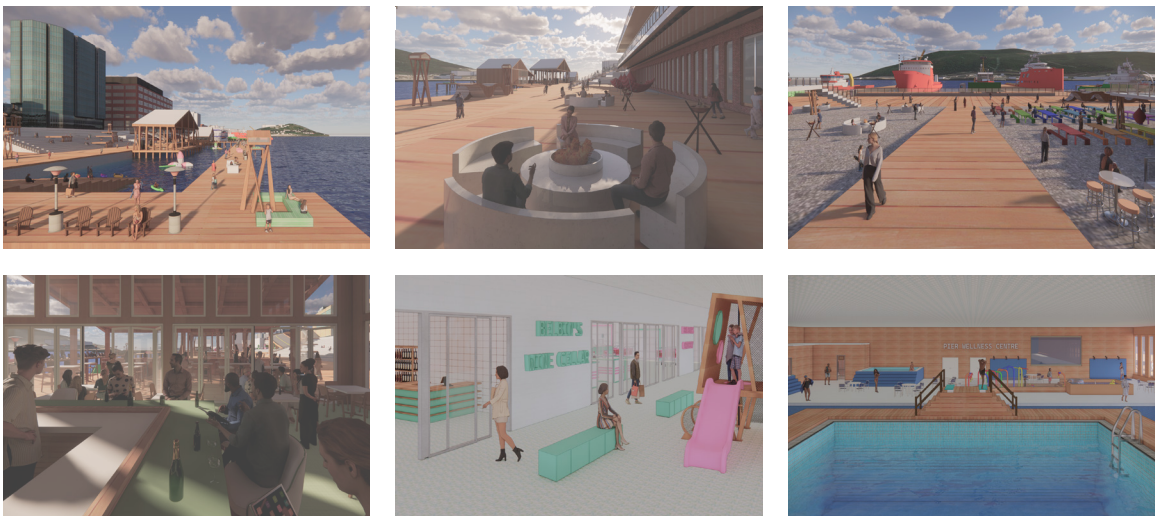
The overall design embraces indoor and outdoor elements to create consistency and fluidity throughout. Each area has a variation of programs to create spaces for all ages within the community, ranging from younger to older generations.

#### Outdoor Elements

- Boardwalk
- Heated Seating Areas
- Pedestrian Flow
- Public Space Furniture
- Outdoor Public Spaces

#### Indoor Elements

- Residential
- Health & Wellness
- Bar & Restaurant
- Public Market + Amenities



Overall design goals - outdoor & indoor elements. Top row, outside elements: boardwalk, public space furniture, heating seating, and pedestrian flow. Bottom row, inside elements: bar and restaurant, public market, general amenities and health & wellness centre.



Quidi Vidi Kitchen Party,  
(Facebook 2018)

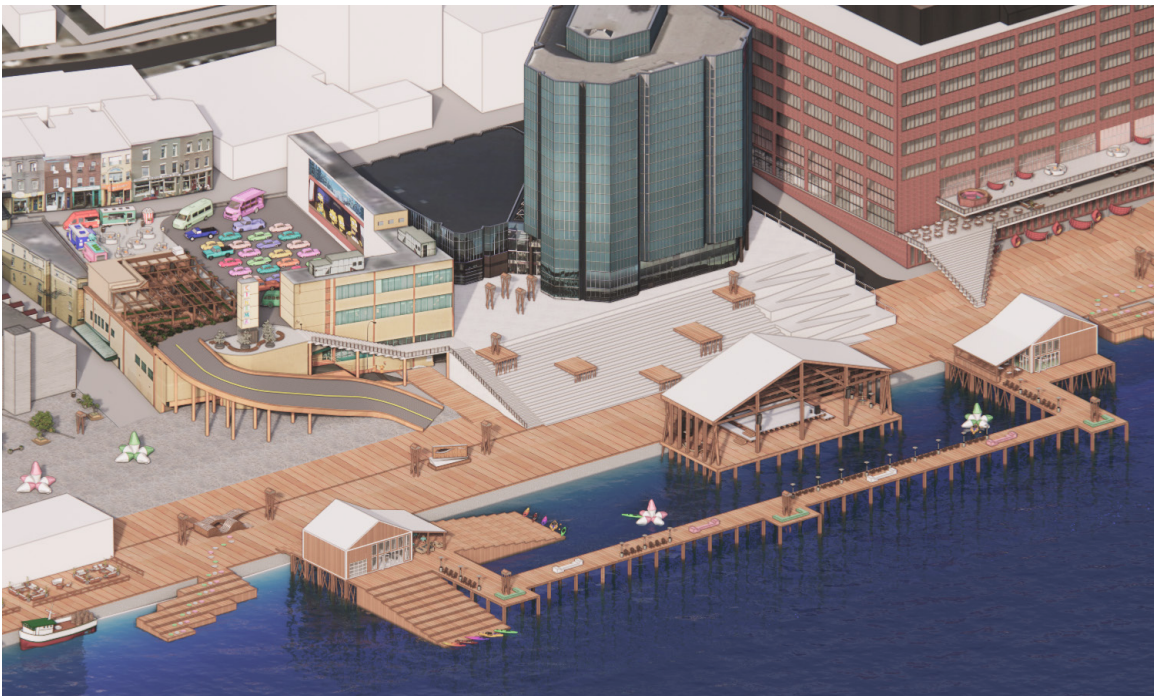
## Old Made New

To move into a more in-depth analysis of the Old Made New, this design features two programmatic elements:

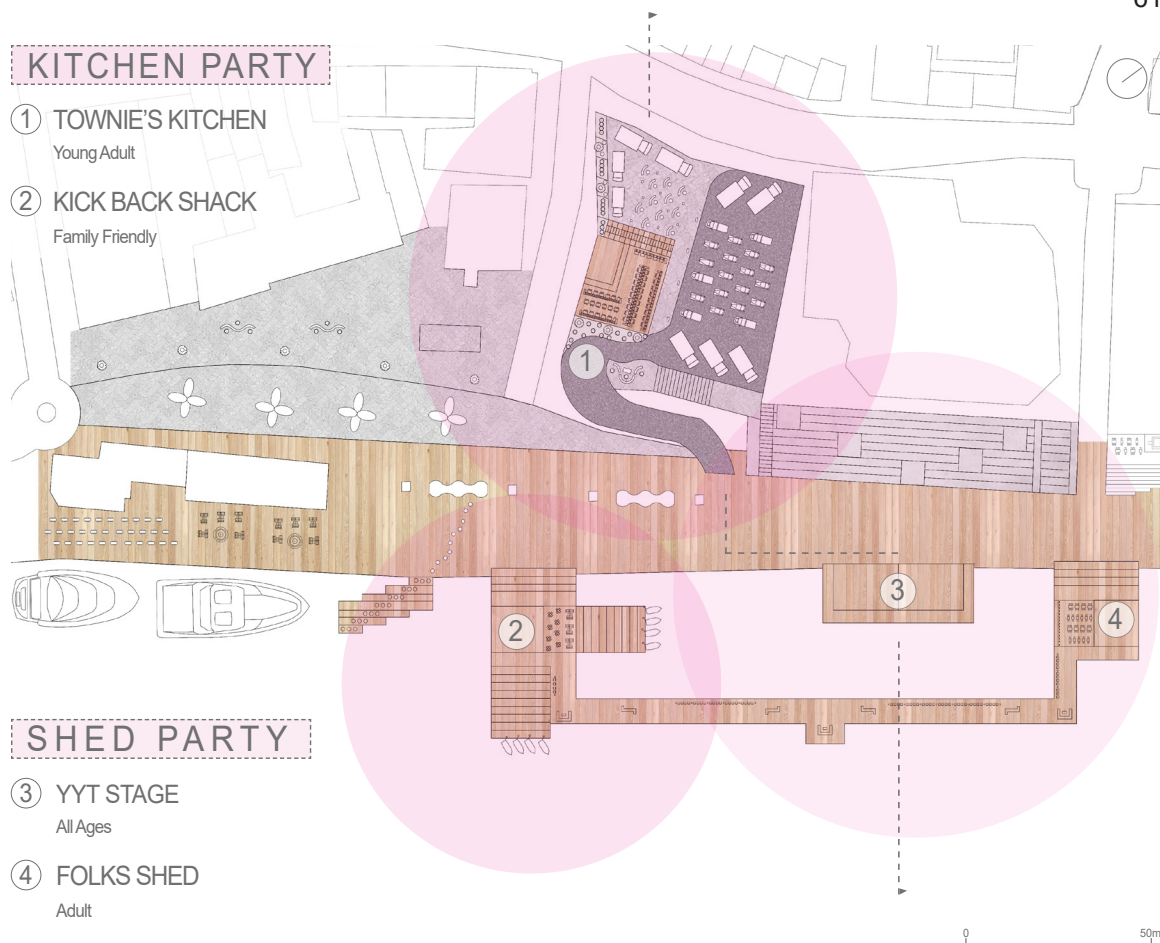
- **Kitchen Party**
- **Shed Party**

These are two Newfoundland and Labrador traditions, where people would pack themselves into their small shed or a friend's kitchen, to drink beer, eat food, perform Newfoundland and Labrador music, and enjoy each other's company. This approach follows the same celebratory programmatic elements but at a larger scale, expanded to the entire town, rather than a person's household.

The Kitchen Party of the Old Made New design focuses on entertainment for the younger age groups. This has the Townie's Kitchen, which is a rooftop cinema with food trucks and a beer garden. This space acts as a scaled-



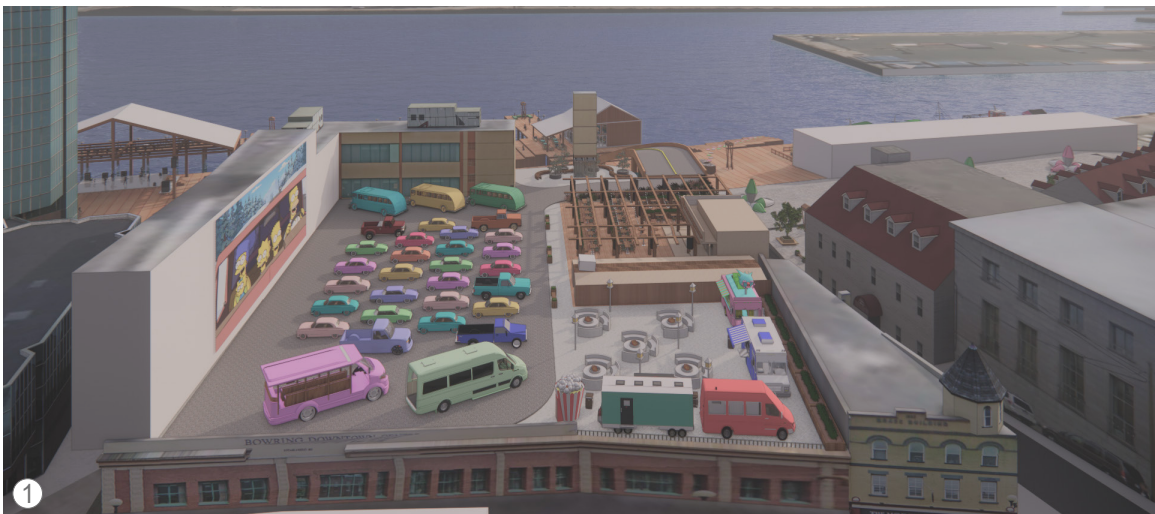
Old Made New Aerial Perspective.



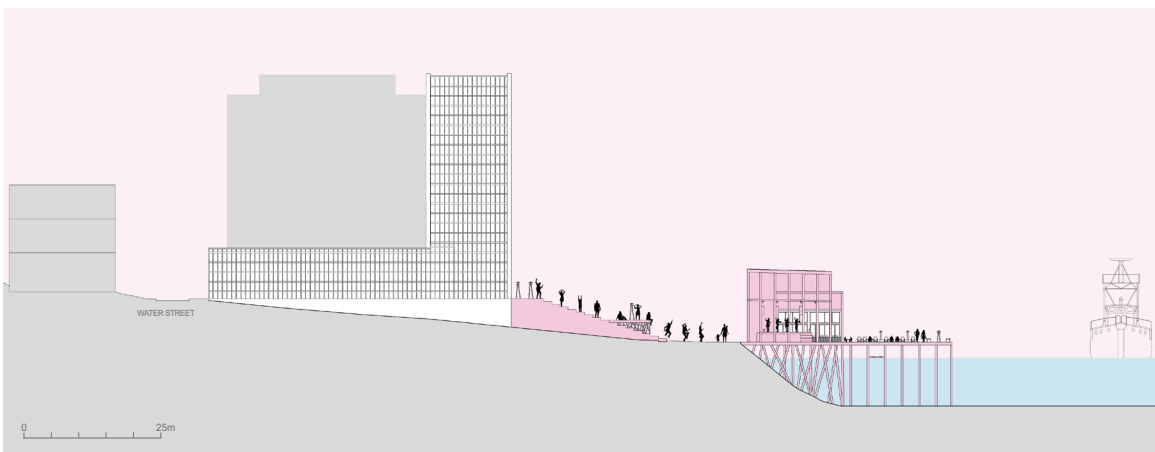
Plan outlining area of Old Made New - featuring the Kitchen Party & Shed Party zones.

up household for the entire community to watch movies with friends, eat local fish N' chips, and potentially grab a beverage. Additionally, the more family-friendly area is the Kick Back Shack. This is a cafe in the form of a scaled-up traditional shed on the harbour front, where families can take their children to have lunch, with a wood stove fireplace to cozy up next to. This space opens to the pier with additional outdoor seating and two send-off areas adjacent to the cafe for people to take out kayak, and canoe rentals. These rentals are stored in the garage space at the back of the Kick Back Shack. During the winter, there is additional storage spaces in the ceiling rafters of the shack, just as residents often store equipment in their own shed rafters as seasons change.

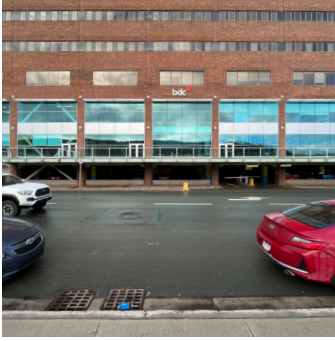
For the Shed Party, this area celebrates the performance culture of Newfoundland and Labrador. There is an outdoor stage, the YYT Stage, named after the YYT St. John's International Airport. This space has tiered seating and different view points from the piers and sheds designed for all ages to view the performances taking place at the YYT Stage. Additionally, the Folks Shed is another scaled-up customary shed connected to the piers, where adults can act and play, the same way that they traditionally do in their own sheds, to drink local beer, eat local food, and watch performances from the YYT Stage. All spaces within the Old Made New redefine a connection with the downtown core and the harbour as shown in the section.



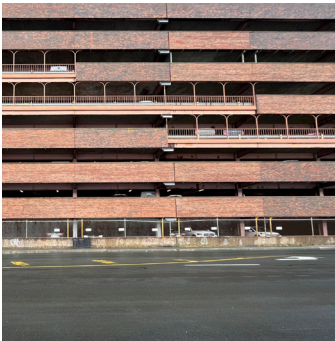
1 - Townie's Kitchen (evening space for entertainment), 2 - Kick Back Shack (daytime for relaxation and socializing).



3 - YYT Stage (outdoor performance space), 4 - Folks Shed (bar / restaurant for socialization and viewing of performance from YYT Stage), Section - connection from YYT Stage to Folks Shed.



Existing Atlantic Place



Existing Parking Garage

## The Outside to Inside

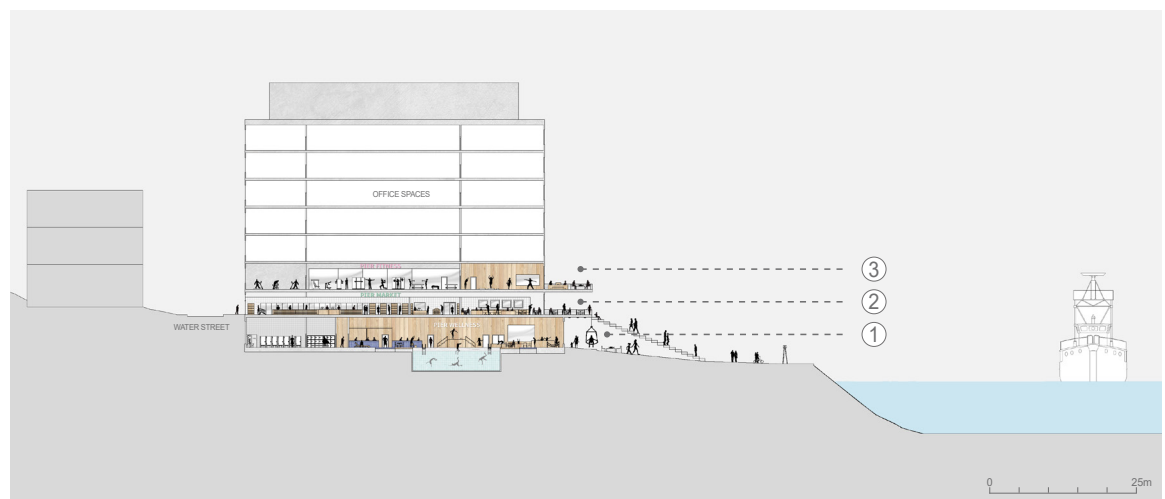
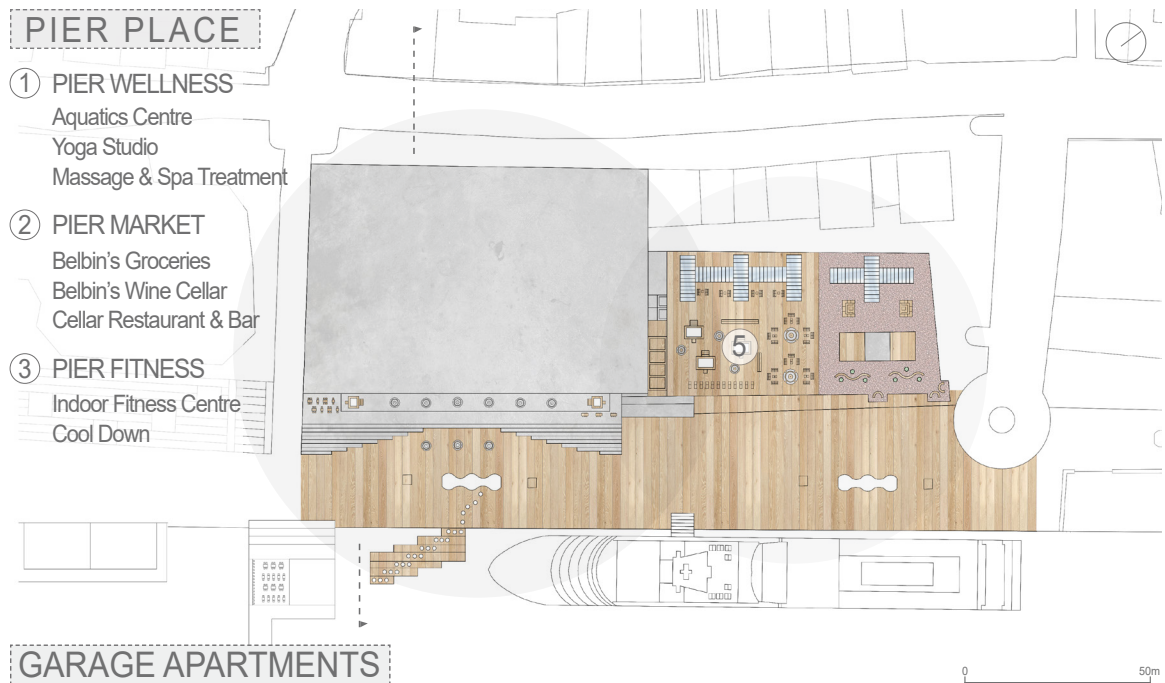
The Outside to Inside portion of the Towns Pier features an adaptive reuse approach to two existing buildings. The first building, previously named Atlantic Place, has become more and more empty over the years due to the lack of draw to the downtown core. The other building, the parking garage, is currently one of the many parking garages that exist within the downtown core. These two buildings have been transformed to the: Pier Place + Garage Apartments.

- **Pier Place (Existing Atlantic Place)**

The Pier Place, main floor focuses on a market area to house the many important amenities that are lacking within the downtown core. Some of these amenities include; a grocery store, pharmacy, liquor store, and public market space. Starting on the lower level of Pier Place, this space was previously used as a parking garage. This has now transformed into The Pier Wellness Centre. The centre has an indoor pool, hot tubs, saunas, spa, massage clinic and yoga studio. Additionally, this space extends



Inside to Outside Aerial Perspective.



Plan outlining area of Outside to Inside - featuring Pier Place + Garage Apartments. Section emphasizing connection through from Water Street to Pier Place through to the Towns Pier.

to the boardwalk outside with a heated balcony space for hammocks and fire pits. On the next level is the Pier Market. This open concept extends from Water Street through the building to the balcony and down the steps to the boardwalk, creating a continuous flow from Water Street to the Towns



1 - Pier Wellness Centre (year-round indoor health and wellness for entire community), 2 - Pier Market (year-round market and amenities for entire community).

Pier which can be seen in the section. This has space for local vendors to participate in the market, seating areas to observe and a children's play place. The market also houses a local grocery store, Belbin's Groceries, which is named after one of the oldest grocery stores remaining in city since 1943. This has a pharmacy inside of it, along with a liquor store and wine bar adjacent, Belbin's Wine Cellar and The Cellar Restaurant and Bar. The next level is the Pier Fitness Centre, which has areas for weightlifting, cardio, and group classes. This space also extends outside to the balcony with fire pits and hot tubs for post work out relaxation. The remaining floors are projected to be office spaces, in hopes to draw back more business to the downtown core.

- **Garage Apartments (Existing Parking Garage)**

Attached to the Pier Place, is the Garage Apartments. This apartment building is projected to have one and two bedroom rental units for residents as there are very few apartment buildings within the downtown core. The Pier Place acts as a complimentary building to the Garage Apartments, so if you are living in the apartments, most of your amenities exist right next door, without having to leave the building.



The top of the Garage Apartments is a rooftop overlooking the harbour that creates additional year-round community space. This is named the Hove Off Retreat, with two areas, the Hove Off Nordic Spa and the Hove Off Farm to Table. The Hove Off Nordic Spa has hot and cold plunges, saunas, and fire pits. Within this space, there is also a series of greenhouses with change rooms, showers, bathrooms and a separate area for relaxation with many plants and greenery to enjoy. The Hove Off Farm to Table is an outdoor event space that has complimentary greenhouses to grow crops and hydroponic systems. The outdoor event space has an outdoor kitchen, barbeques, and a wood fire oven for chefs to participate in local events utilizing the resources from the greenhouses. With a dance floor and eating spaces, you can throw any kind of event on the rooftop for the community.

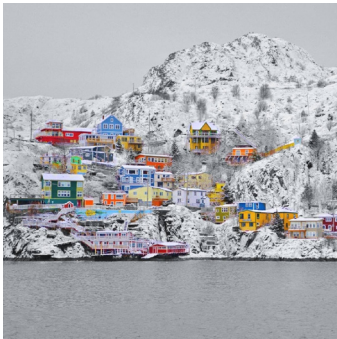


5 - Hove Off Retreat - top row: Hove Off Nordic Spa (year-round outdoor wellness), bottom row, Hove Off Farm to Table (year round outdoor community kitchen and greenhouses for eating and entertainment).

## The Industrial Port

The last phase of the harbour front revitalization is the Industrial Port. This area is very important as it creates a solution for the current fence that exists on the harbour front today. This has two zones: Seaport Settlement + Industrial Zone.

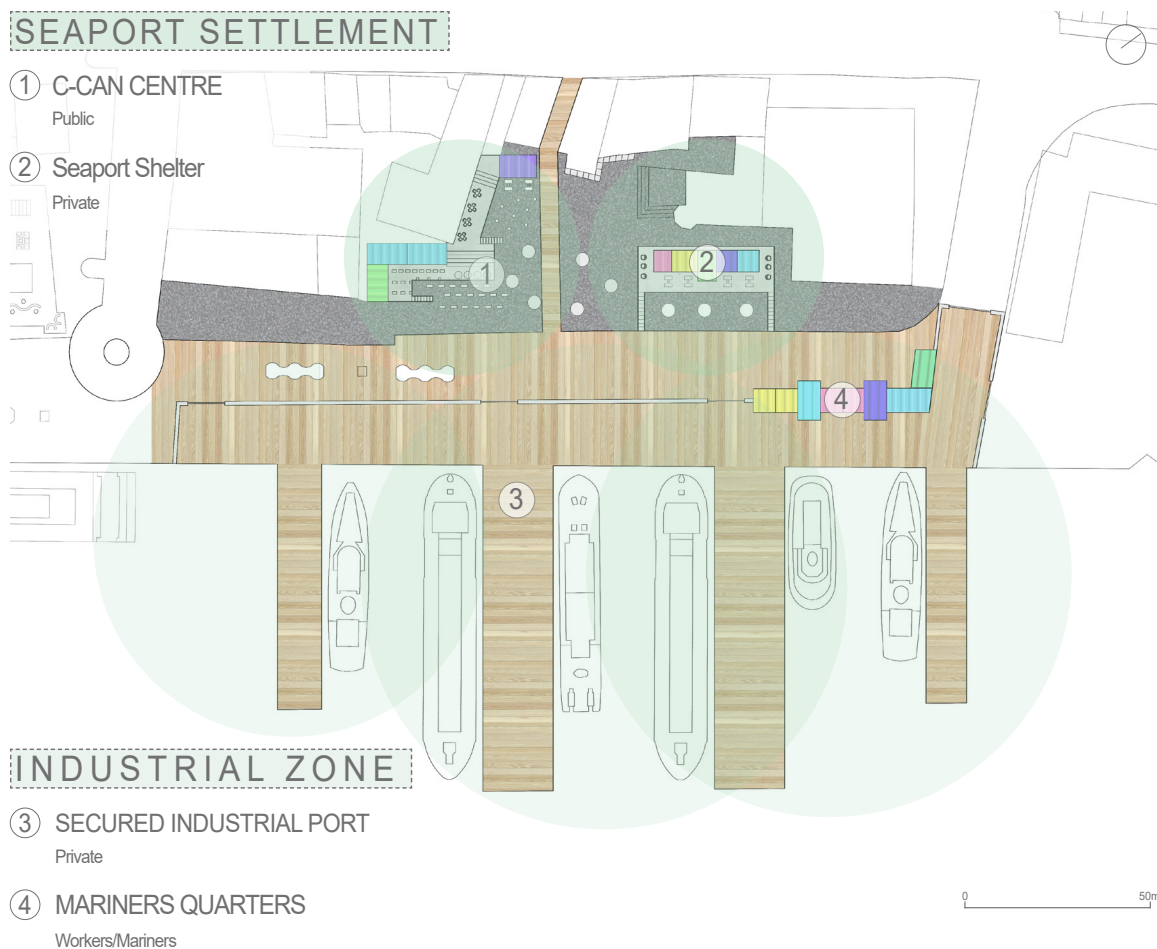
The design approach follows the bright aesthetic of the classic St. John's Jellybean Row houses. With a new material and form, this colour palette remains to locate the seaport settlement and the industrial zone when boats are arriving into the foggy harbour just as fishermen did historically while looking for their homes. The shipping containers exist along the existing fabric, but they are organized chaotically, just as the Jellybean Row houses were scattered along the landscape. Transitioning from the conventional wood material, the industrial port takes the form of a modern material, corten steel, similar to shipping containers. These shipping containers appreciate another



Old Battery Fresh  
Snowfall by Adam Pearce  
Photography (Facebook  
2015)



Industrial Port Aerial Perspective.



Plan outlining area of Industrial Port - featuring the Seaport Settlement + the Industrial Zone.

portion of the harbour's history, the main port in the province for transporting goods in and out of.

- **Seaport Settlement**

The Seaport Settlement portion of the Industrial Port is designed for the public. This integrates the working and the leisure. The first space is the C-Can Centre which is open to the community for all age groups. These containers start with more family-friendly spaces towards the water, a diner, bike and scooter rentals, fire pits and seating throughout. More towards the back, there is a beer stage, with seating on the ground level and balcony spaces, as well as an entertainment area for games. In the more private area on

its own raised balcony is the Seaport Shelter. This is a space of refuge, for anyone in need of a roof over their head. This space has multiple rooms with beds and bathrooms and a communal kitchen space with its own private outdoor seating area for people to enjoy if they need their own space.

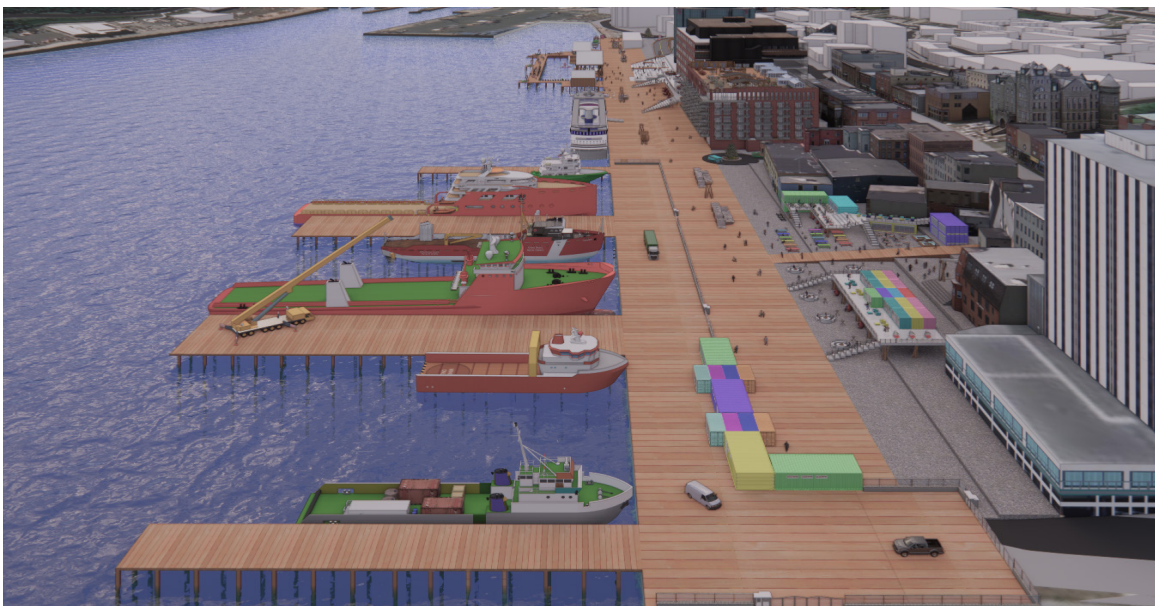
- **Industrial Zone**

The Industrial Zone is the new industrial port, where boats are required to be secured when entering into the harbour under international law jurisdictions. This is where the finger piers have been re-introduced to eliminate the amount of secured space on the harbour front, instead creating more public space for the community. The fence abides by requirements but becomes more transparent and inviting.



1 - C-Can Centre (public relax and entertainment), 2 - Seaport Shelter (public housing), 3 - Industrial Port (working harbour), 4 - Mariners Quarters - (workers rest and relaxation space).

Additionally, within this zone, there is a space of unwinding for the mariners on boats, or people working within the Port Authority, the Mariners Quarters. The quarters start from private at the end of the security fence and transition to more public spaces, creating places of rest, comfort, eating, and entertainment, all with potential areas to exist and experience the public spaces within the Towns Pier.



Aerial view of the Seaport Settlement and the Industrial Zone.

# Chapter 11: Conclusion

## The Towns Pier

### *Reflections*

Although each area has its own approach, the overall goal of the design is to really understand the community and what they need to create a stronger sense of place for the people. This thesis is not about creating a brand and getting customers to like it, but rather the opposite, understanding the community and creating something for them.

In this sense, tourism comes as a secondary element to the design, because the Towns Pier is fundamentally for the community, all year round. This doesn't eliminate tourism, however, it just acts as a secondary element to the brand that will stimulate the economy during the regular tourism season, the spring and summer months. However, the design functions all year round, intended to create places for residents to appreciate the indoor and outdoor spaces, no matter what the Newfoundland & Labrador weather might bring.

The use of branding within this thesis has allowed people to see the positive side of branding, rather than its perception of commodification. However, even though the community engagement piece of place branding theory was a main driver in the project, my own personal experiences and precedent studies also helped define the programmatic elements of the design. I addressed the concerns and wishes of the community but I also added spaces that I believed would also further develop the downtown core. Some of these included, the public pool as an indoor space

for the community to ensure the design met year round needs. As well, the rooftop greenhouses were an additional element that would create indoor spaces throughout the rooftop spa, as well as public a place for growing all year round to accommodate the farm to table rooftop design. Lastly, the housing piece of the design, both the apartments and the flexible social housing, act as a push to encourage more people to live within the core of downtown. These additions come from research done abroad that I felt would be attractive to give more life to the downtown. All this went beyond a pure response to the community engagement that I completed. By integrating personal experiences, research and community engagement, the design creates a well-rounded series of spaces for the community.

To conclude the Towns Pier focuses on an approach that creates an authentic place identity for the community of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. This place brand encompasses all that is the city of St. John's, both now and in the past. By drawing from the community, the heritage and culture of this city, the new place brand, the Towns Pier, is a strengthened community space for the residents that can redefine the downtown core.



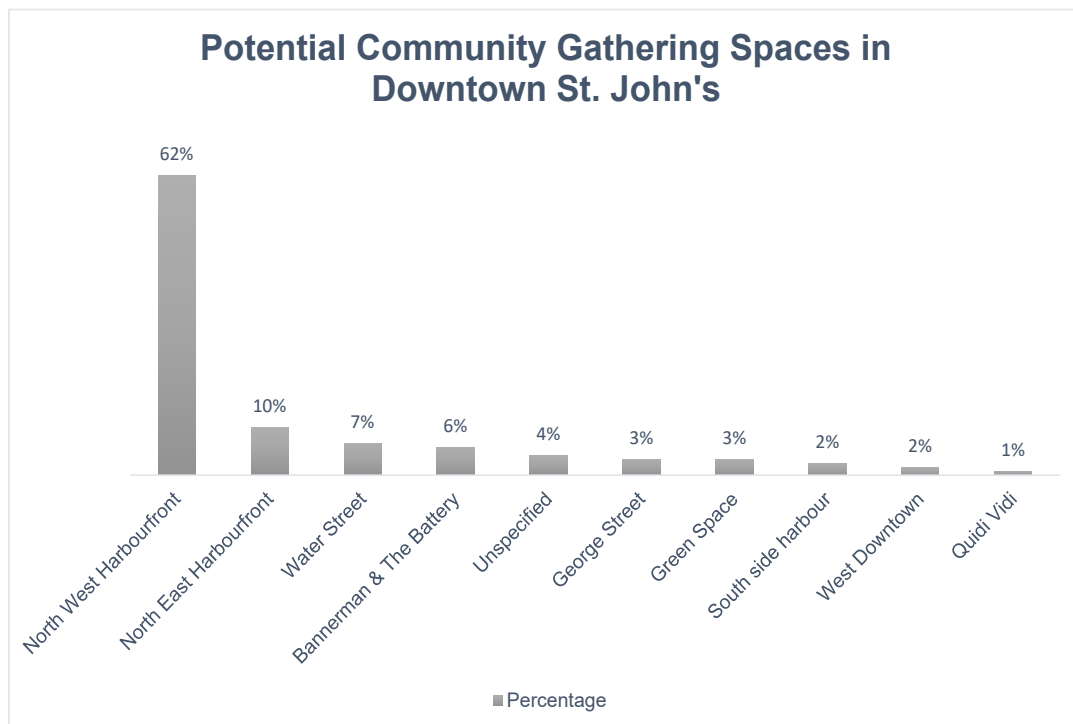
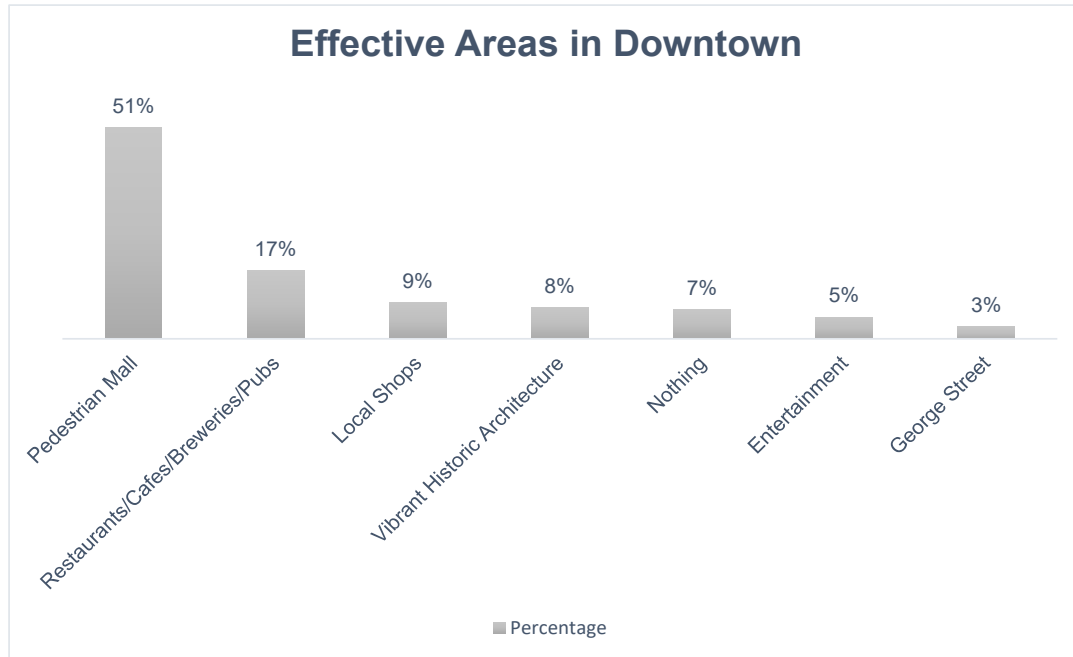
Aerial view overlooking the harbour from the Townie's Kitchen, admiring the heart of the city, the harbour.



Aerial view overlooking the harbour from the Hove Off Retreat, admiring the heart of the city, the harbour.

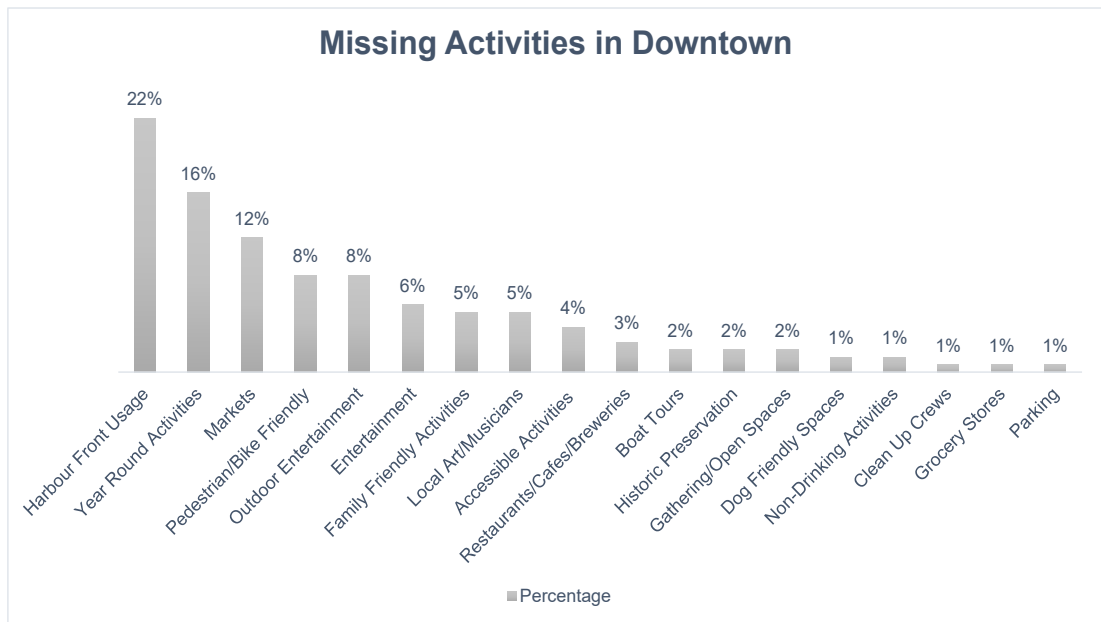
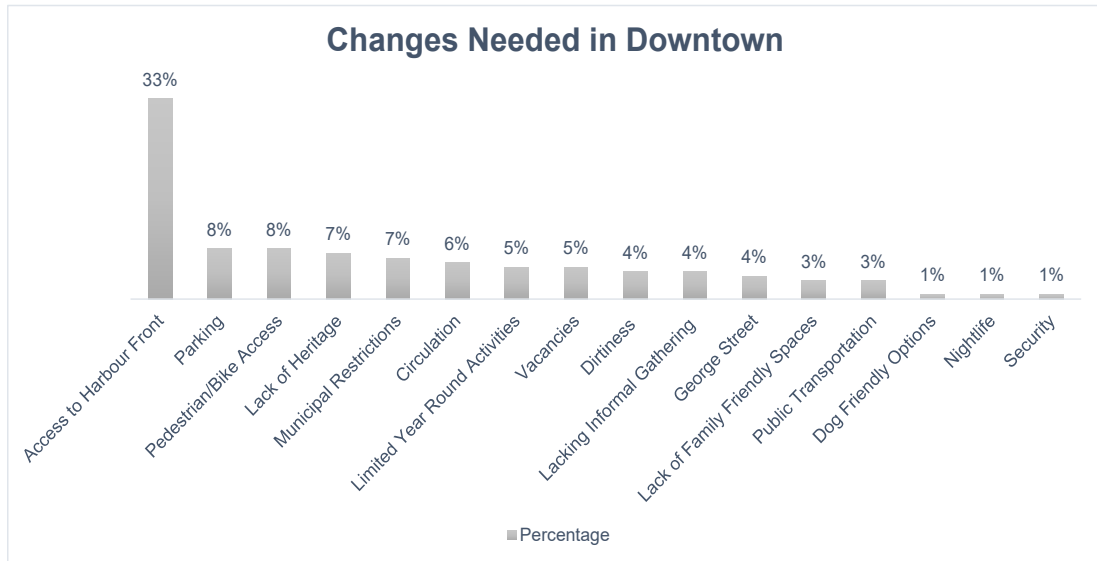


## Appendix A: Sense of Place Survey Results



Survey results from site specific questions.

# Appendix B: Program Specific Survey Results



Survey results from program specific questions.

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