

District of Fort St. James

Official Community Plan DRAFT



Bylaw: Number

Date: October 16, 2025

Land Acknowledgment

The District of Fort St. James occupies land that since time immemorial has been home to Nak'azdli Whut'en. We gratefully acknowledge that we live work and play on the unceded traditional territory of the Nak'azdli Whut'en.

Other Acknowledgments

The District of Fort St. James appreciates the efforts of numerous persons who dedicated much time, effort, and thought into the development of this Official Community Plan. The District would specifically like to thank the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, staff and leadership at Nak'azdli Whut'en, and the residents of Fort St. James who were involved in this planning process, reviewed draft documents and provided valuable input.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this Official Community Plan

This Official Community Plan (OCP) is a document that presents the long-range vision for the District of Fort St. James, and includes goals and policies intended to guide the future growth and development of the community. The OCP provides direction to Council, staff, and the community on future land use and development. While the OCP should provide certainty for residents and developers, it should also be flexible and responsive to community needs. The OCP identifies changes needed to District plans, bylaws and regulations. It also prioritizes investments in assets and infrastructure, while being adaptable through monitoring and regular updates.

As a critical planning tool, Council, staff and residents use the OCP to help make decisions about where new housing is located, which lands are protected from development, how natural hazards are mitigated, how transportation and infrastructure projects are prioritized and how local services can support community growth and sustainable development.

The OCP does not commit or authorize the District to proceed with any specific project, rather the OCP goals will be achieved through future decisions of Council as priorities are established, funding is allocated, and as land use planning decisions are made.

1.2 Legislated Requirements

In accordance with the *Local Government Act*, this OCP includes statements and map designations for:

- residential development required to meet anticipated housing needs over the next 20 years;
- present and proposed commercial, industrial, institutional, agricultural, recreational and public utility land uses;
- sand and gravel deposits that are suitable for future extraction;
- restrictions on the use of land with hazardous conditions or that is environmentally sensitive;
- phasing of any major road, sewer and water projects;
- present and proposed public facilities, including schools, parks and waste treatment and disposal sites; and
- targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and policies and actions to achieve these targets.

2 Community Context

2.1 History

Fort St. James is located on the shores of Stuart Lake and in Traditional Territory of the Nak'azdli Whut'en and is one of the oldest European settlements in British Columbia. BC Geographical Names notes that in the early days the settlement was called "Stuart Lake". The community's official name was changed to Fort St. James in 1822, but the reason for the name change was not recorded.

Settlers arrived with the fur trade and the establishment of a North West Company trading post at Stuart Lake in 1806. The post eventually came under the management of the Hudson's Bay Company, and operated as the administrative centre for the New Caledonia District until 1952. The fort was rebuilt several times and is now a National Historic Site of Canada, with buildings dating back to the 1880s.

Over the centuries, colonization and the residential school system worked to displace the local First Nation culture. Starting in 1904 Nak'azdli Whut'en children were sent to a Mission School in Fort St. James, and later to the Lejac residential school near Fraser Lake which operated from 1922 to 1976.

With the beginning of WWII came an increased demand for timber, leading to the expansion of the regional forest products industry. Following the war, the forestry operations continued to grow as smaller mills centralized into larger operations around the community. In 1952 Fort St. James had a population of around 600 and was incorporated as a village. The population of Fort St. James grew further with the arrival of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway (British Columbia Railway) and the opening of Highway 27 in the late 1960s. Fort St. James was incorporated as a district municipality in 1995.

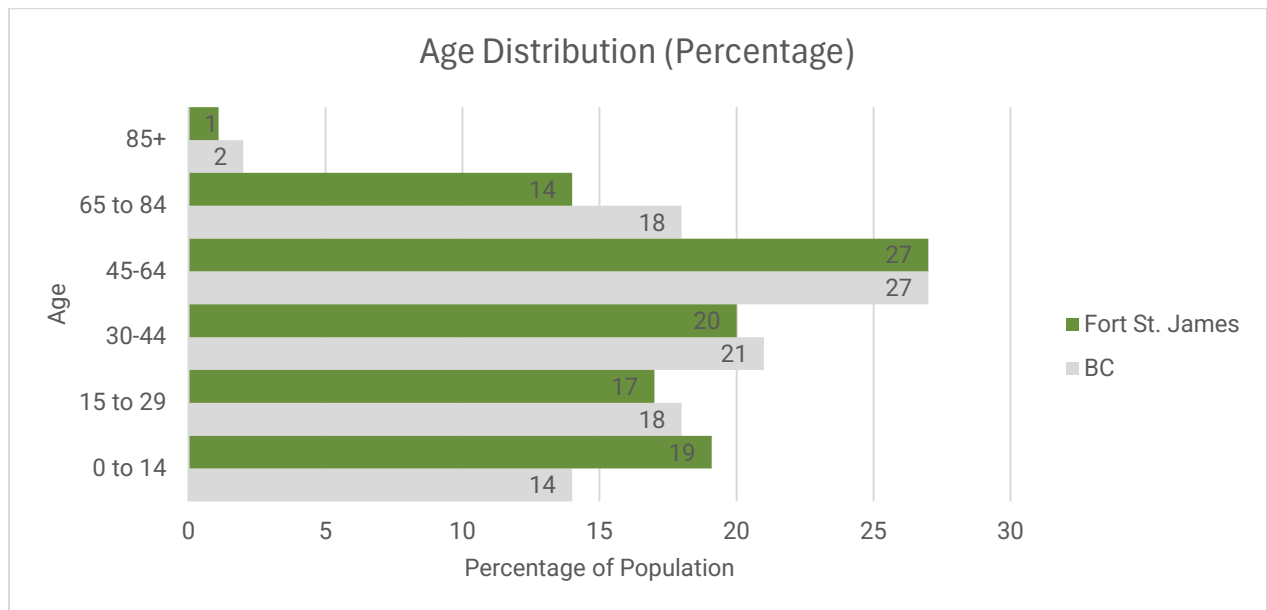


2.2 Demographics

The population of Fort St. James has fluctuated over the past 40 years, following the ebbs and flows of the local resource industry. According to the 2021 census, the District's population was 1,386, which is down 13% from 1,598 in 2011. As shown in the table below, the population decline in Fort St. James is following the same trends seen in nearby areas and across the region.

Region	Population by Year			
	2006	2011	2016	2021
District of Fort St. James	1,355	1,691	1,598	1,386
Nak'azdli 1	495	534	548	528
Electoral Area C	1,355	1,429	1,415	1,266
Regional District Bulkley-Nechako	38,243	39,208	37,896	37,737

As with most communities in BC and Canada, Fort St. James is seeing its population age over time. As the baby boom generation ages, the population of seniors in the community is expected to grow. According to BCStats, by 2044, 1 in 4 residents (25.2%) are expected to be 65 years or older, however, the District does have a higher proportion of younger people when compared to the rest of the province, as shown in the table below.



According to the 2021 Canada Census, the average age of the District's population is 39.5 years, while the average age across BC is 43.1. Moving forward, it will be important for the District to continue to retain and attract working professionals and families to drive economic growth and community sustainability.

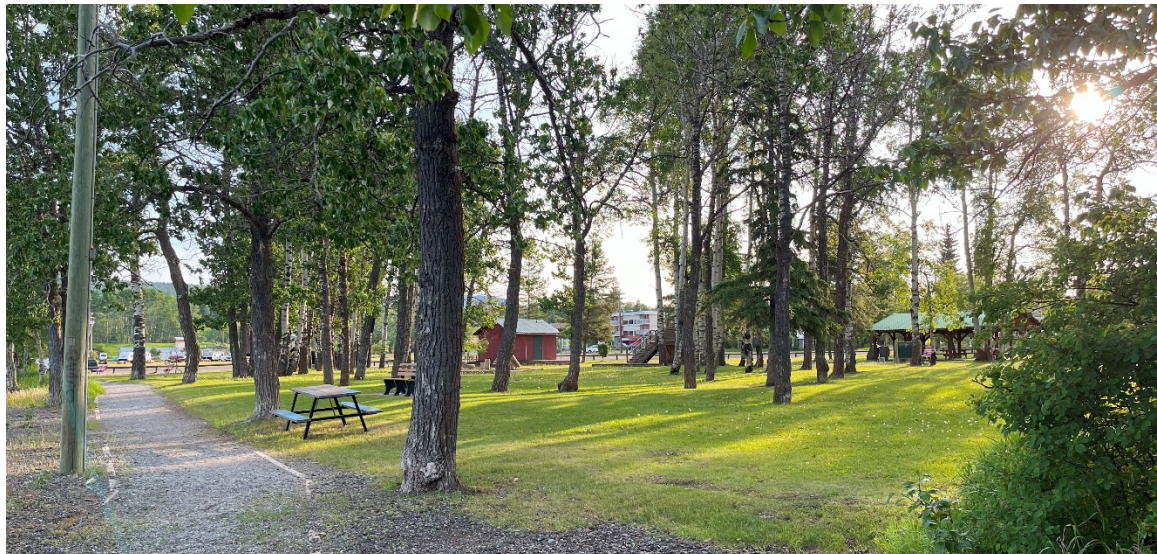
2.3 District Facilities and Assets

The District of Fort St. James owns and maintains a number of facilities that support the local services and operations for the community. This includes the Municipal Office on Stuart Drive, the Fire Hall, the Public Works Yard and the Public Library.

Other District assets are the Community Centre, which includes squash and racquetball courts, a ballroom, community theater, and conference spaces, the Fort Forum Arena which has a rink for hockey, speed skating, and figure skating, and a curling rink.

The District also maintains a network of parks and recreational facilities that are central to residents' high quality of life. Cottonwood Park, on Stuart Lake, serves as a hub for events like Canada Day and the Caledonia Classic Dog Sled Race and has a beach and small RV park. Goodwin Park provides family-friendly features including a splash park, tennis courts, and children's play areas, while Spirit Square functions as a vibrant gathering space for markets and seasonal celebrations. The Cottonwood Marina offers mooring and a boat launch.

The District's infrastructure assets include a drinking water well and reservoir, along with a distribution system with 16.7 kilometers of water mains that provide drinking water to the residents of the District and Nak'azdli. The community's sewer system also serves both Fort St. James and Nak'azdli and consists of a treatment facility and two lift stations.



2.4 Nak'azdli Whut'en

The Nak'azdli Whut'en's population is close to 2,000, with approximately 700 members living on Indian Reserve (IR) #1 usually called Nak'azdli. This community is adjacent to the District of Fort St. James along Kwah Road. Many Nak'azdli Whut'en members also live within the District of Fort St. James. The Band Council consists of a chief and eight councillors, and the Band is a member of the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council.

The Nak'azdli community is served by administration and satellite offices, an Alternate Justice Centre, the Nak'azdli Whut'en Child Care Centre, a Health Centre, the Ernie Sam Memorial Arena / Youth Center, the Nak'albun Elementary School, the Sana'aih Market, the Nak'azdli Development Corporation, and Carrier Food & Fuel.

2.5 Housing

Most residents of Fort St. James live in single-detached homes within walking distance of the downtown core, or on larger rural properties, many of which are along Stone's Bay Road. According to the last census, there were 671 private homes in Fort St. James and 74% were single-detached dwellings.

Housing Stock – Dwelling Types				
	Single-detached	Semi-detached, row, suite	Apartment	Movable
Percent of Units	74%	10%	12%	4%

The District of Fort St. James has a strategic advantage when it comes to housing affordability, especially compared to the rest of the province. The 2021 Canada Census showed that the community's monthly housing costs for both rental and ownership tenures were significantly lower than the provincial average. Maintaining this affordability by ensuring sufficient housing and diversifying the housing stock will be a key driver for enabling growth and attracting new residents.

Housing Costs		
	District of Fort St. James	Province of British Columbia
Average monthly housing cost (rent)	\$840	\$1,370
Average monthly housing cost (own)	\$1,008	\$1,668

The most recent *Housing Needs Report* was completed in 2025. As shown in the figure below, 41 new units will be needed over the next five years, and 118 units will be needed over the next 20 years. The largest drivers for the 5-year housing need are additional local demand, suppressed household formation (people who are unable to find their own unit and so stay with family or roommates), and anticipated growth. The largest drivers for the 20-year housing need are additional local demand, suppressed household formation, and extreme core housing need (households falling below thresholds for housing adequacy, affordability or suitability that would have to spend 50% or more of total pre-tax income on housing).

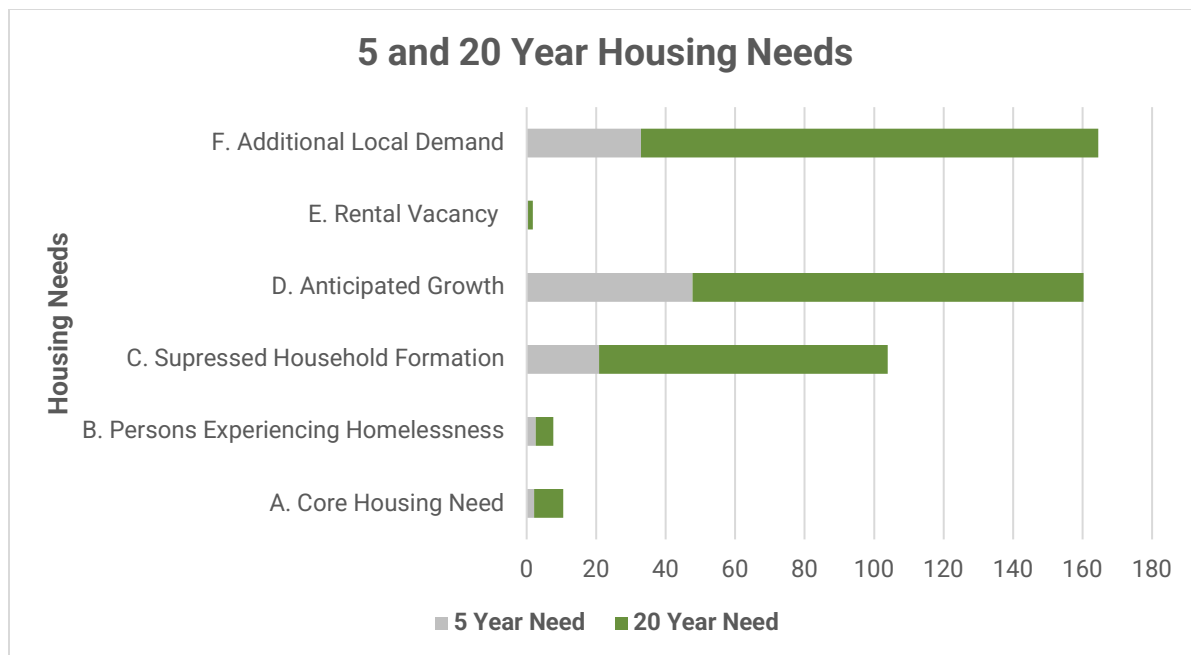


Figure 1: 5-Year and 20-Year Housing Needs (Interim Housing Needs Report 2025)

Given that the current housing stock is largely single-detached dwellings, it will be important to provide more diversified housing options including multi-unit buildings. Also, adding rental units of different sizes will be important for attracting and retaining a skilled workforce and to accommodate a diverse community.

The housing needs estimates reflect available data, demographics and trend forecasting techniques at the time this document was prepared. However, the future is not always predictable and economic development initiatives in the region may result in a scenario where the community's growth may differ than what is currently projected. These projections are a planning tool and provide a reasonable basis to inform land-use decisions. Adopting a flexible approach allows the District to adjust policies in case of higher growth.

2.6 Local Economy and Employment

Due to its abundant natural resources, the economy in Fort St. James was traditionally resource-based, with a focus on forestry, mining, and agriculture. Since its beginning as a fur trading post, the economy of Fort St. James has gone through many evolutions and continues to change today.

From the start of WWII, through to the end of century, timber harvesting and sawmill operations were key economic drivers for Fort St. James and the surrounding area. Over the past twenty years, the forest sector has experienced challenges, which lead to several temporary and permanent mill closures between 2007 and 2019. These closures have pushed Fort St. James to work towards more diversified economy and considered how to refocus and provide new and different employment opportunities. While resource-based activities remain important, the local economy will continue to evolve and diversify with growth in the tourism, retail, healthcare, and manufacturing sectors attracting new residents.

In 2021, Fort St. James had a total labour force of 680 people. The figure below outlines residents' education levels. Almost half of the District's residents have received a post secondary certificate, diploma, degree, and 15% have received a bachelor's degree or higher.

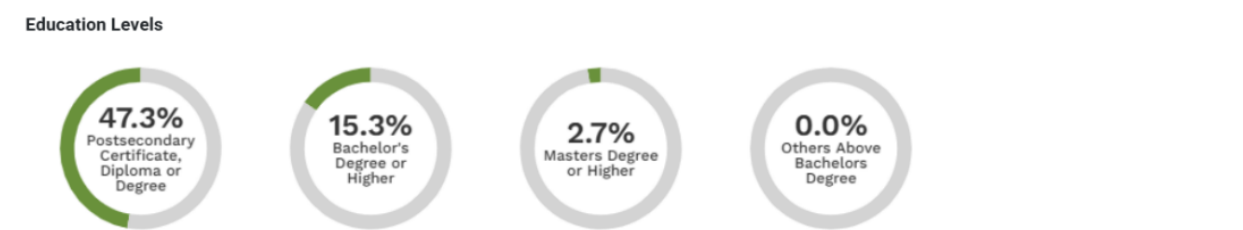


Figure 2: Community Education Levels, 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2021 Federal Census)

The figure below shows the District's employment sector breakdown. At 17.6%, Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest employment sector, while across BC this sector only accounts for 5.7% of the workforce. Retail trade, Manufacturing and Educational Services are the other major employment sectors which employ around 12.5%, 10.3% and 8.1% of the local labour force respectively.



Figure 3: Community Employment by Sector, 2021 (Fort St. James Community Profile)

As the economies of the province and Fort St. James continue to evolve, the District will need to ensure sufficient lands for future employment uses, support diversified and evolving employment opportunities and ensure infrastructure and transportation connections support future employment growth.

3 The OCP Planning Process

This OCP was developed using a collaborative process. The District of Fort St. James worked to prioritize open communication and public involvement during each of the project phases. The engagement strategy focused on meaningful and in-person conversations when possible. In an effort to work closely with Nak'azdli Whut'en, a meeting was held with Chief and Council during each round of engagement.

In 2023, the Regional District of Buckley-Nechako undertook a process to review and update the OCP. Although this draft was not adopted by the District of Fort St. James at that time, the planning process and the draft prepared have provided a good basis of the 2025 work.



3.1 Community Engagement

Engagement Process for 2023 Draft

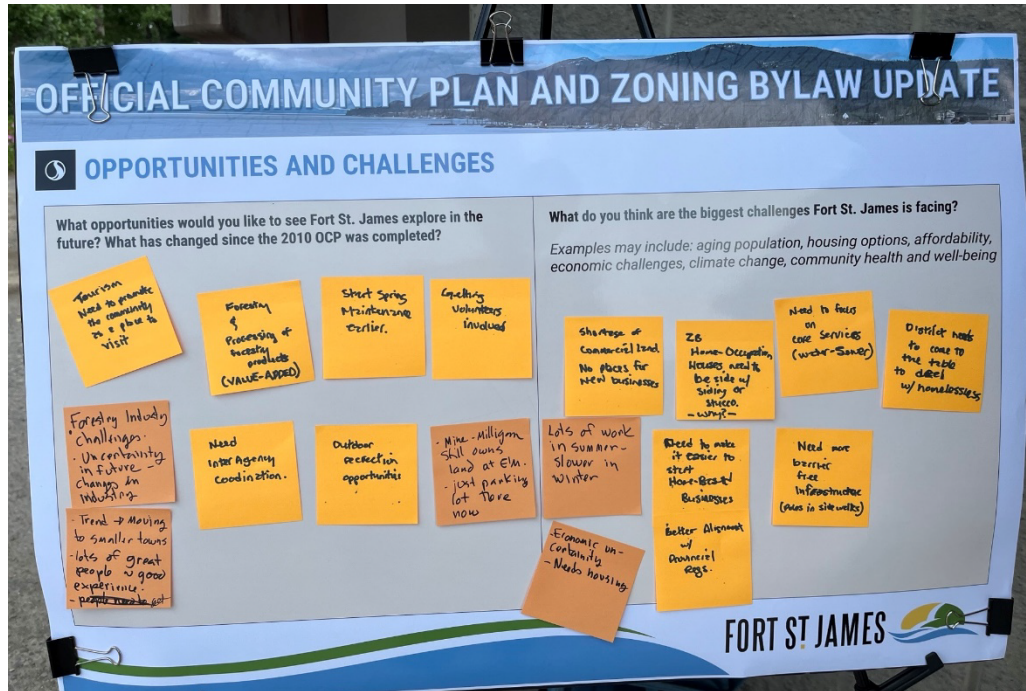
A series of engagement activities were held to support the development of the 2023 draft OCP. This included a public website, open houses, meetings with stakeholder groups, and the formation of a working group to provide consistent input and guidance through the planning process. The working group was made up of stakeholder representatives, representatives from Nak'azdli Whut'en, and members of the public. The results of this engagement were reviewed and integrated into the draft plan where appropriate.

Phase 1 Engagement Summary

The first round of engagement occurred through June and July 2025 and focused on raising awareness and collecting feedback on the community's vision, goals, and priorities. Activities included:

- 3 community pop-ups (at the Save on Foods, Spirit Square and BC Liquor Store)
- 1 community open house at the Community Centre
- Online Community survey (between June 16 and July 15)

Through the pop-up events and the community open house, a total of 38 participants provided feedback, while an additional 19 participants completed the survey. The events included display boards and presentation to provide an overview of the purpose of the OCP and Zoning Bylaw, and outline key themes and a draft vision based on input from previous OCP engagement. The following is a summary of the emerging themes and community comments received during the first round of engagement.



Key Themes

- When asked what they **love** about their community, residents noted:
 - The town is peaceful and quiet, with a small-town character
 - The people and sense of community
 - The community's heritage, arts, and culture
 - Access to nature, Stuart Lake, and wilderness
 - Access to nature and outdoor recreation opportunities
- Participants noted the following opportunities to help **improve** Fort St. James:
 - Enhancing tourism opportunities (year-round activities)
 - Supporting economic development and diversification (industry, small businesses, increasing retail and restaurant options)
 - Expanding recreation opportunities and increasing trail and path connectivity
 - Increasing housing options and choice (including seniors' housing)
 - Focusing on attracting and retaining residents of all ages
 - Improving the aesthetics of downtown and enhancing Spirit Square as a community hub
- The following areas were generally identified as **high priorities** for participants:
 - Climate and emergency preparedness
 - Community health and well-being
 - Environmental protection
 - Housing and more housing options
 - Outdoor areas and wilderness
 - Public spaces and recreation
- When thinking about **challenges** that Fort St. James will face in the future, participants noted:
 - Economic uncertainty due to the decline in the forestry sector
 - Challenges with attracting businesses and limited employment opportunities
 - Declining population
 - Increasing cost of living, especially when it comes to housing affordability
 - Limited housing options
 - Aging municipal infrastructure
 - Social issues, including homelessness, and challenges related to mental health and addictions

Phase 2 Engagement Summary

To be completed.

4 Community Vision

The District of Fort St James is located on the eastern shore of Stuart Lake, an area noted for stunning natural beauty and outdoor amenities in north central British Columbia. Fort St. James is a remote northern community, where residents appreciate the peaceful small-town feeling, the pioneering spirit, diverse residents, and close-knit and friendly community.

Changes to the local mining and forestry industries have been challenging for the community, but residents are optimistic about the future. Fort St. James has a lot to offer, including a young population, relatively affordable housing, a beautiful natural setting, a high quality of life, and a willingness to look for practical and innovative solutions to problems. Building on these assets, the community is well positioned to attract new investment in the tourism and service sectors, which will lead to new employment opportunities and a more resilient economy.

The District is adjacent to the Naka'zdlí Whutén's main community, the Williams Prairie Meadow Reserve, the North Road Reserve and the Utza (Nahounli Creek) Reserve. Fort St. James is an important service centre for municipal residents, the rural population and surrounding First Nations communities.

Residents of Fort St. James are excited about the future of their community and have a clear vision of how they want the community to develop and grow in the long term.

Fort St. James is a resilient community where the District and the Nak'azdli Whut'en work as partners in community planning and growth. Residents of all ages enjoy a high quality of life based on access to nature, affordable living, a vibrant downtown, a diverse economy, strong community spirit and a small community lifestyle.



5 Land Use Concept and Designations

5.1 Land Use Concept

The land use concept provides a flexible and long-term framework to guide future development and redevelopment. The concept is centered around the Downtown and Waterfront Designations, both envisioned as vibrant hubs of community and economic activity, and key drivers for tourism and employment which benefit the entire District.

A diverse mix of residential options ranging from rural to urban will be available across the community, supporting growth and meeting the needs of all residents. Opportunities for low and medium-density housing will enable the development of a complete community where residents have convenient access to their daily-needs and growth is supported by reliable transportation networks, robust infrastructure, and essential institutional services.

Central to the land use vision for the District is the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. A connected network of parks and open spaces, including access to the Stuart Lake shoreline, will offer meaningful recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike, contributing to a high quality of life.

The specific land uses that form the overall land use concept with land use designations is shown on Map 3.



5.2 Land Use Designations

The following table lists each of the land use designations as shown on Map X and provide a description of the types of uses that are allowed in each designation.

The table also list the corresponding zones from the District's Zoning Bylaw that are permitted within each Land Use Designation. Pre-existing zoning that is not listed within the compatible zoning will be permitted to continue as a legal non-conforming use.

Downtown Designation	
Description and intent: Anchored by Stuart Drive and Douglas Avenue, the Downtown is envisioned as a vibrant, mixed-use hub with a blend of residential, commercial, institutional, and open spaces. As the heart of Fort St. James, the Downtown will draw both residents and visitors by offering views of Stuart Lake, public spaces, a variety of housing options, and essential goods and services. To create this pedestrian-friendly environment, development will have appropriate landscaping, lighting and attractive streetscaping. As the District continues to grow and evolve, there will be opportunities for the Downtown to introduce mixed-use buildings that combine commercial and residential uses, increasing the number of pedestrians in the Downtown, and creating a livelier environment. As these types of changes are introduced, and the Downtown intensifies, thoughtful transitioning between the Downtown and the adjacent Urban Residential areas will be important.	Compatible Zones: To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw
Waterfront Designation	
Description and intent: Stuart Lake is one of the largest natural freshwater lakes in BC and is enjoyed by both residents and visitors. The Waterfront area offers opportunities to enjoy the lake and surrounding public spaces. As a popular recreation destination, the Waterfront area will grow into a vibrant focal point for tourism, leisure, cultural and commercial activity. As the waterfront develops, there will be a wide range of uses, including a marina, retail shops, accommodations, restaurants, parks, and tourist activities. These will help create a lively, accessible area that supports both community needs and visitor experiences. High quality pedestrian connections will be important in this area.	Compatible Zones: To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw
Urban Residential Designation	
Description and intent: Urban Residential areas are intended to accommodate residential uses along with compatible institutional and commercial uses, and parks and open spaces. These lands will be fully serviced with piped water and sewer and infrastructure installed at the cost of the developer. To meet the diverse needs of the District, Urban Residential areas will include a mix of housing including single-detached homes, duplexes, townhouses, and apartments. Although each neighbourhood will predominantly consist of single-detached homes, future development is encouraged to have an overall housing ratio of 75% single-detached family dwellings and 25% multiple-unit dwellings. New multi-unit dwellings should be located where their residents can easily access parks, commercial uses, major roads, and prominent trail connections. During the development of multi-unit dwellings, careful consideration should be given to traffic, parking lot placement and landscaped buffers with the goal of minimizing impacts on existing residents. Where small-scale, neighbourhood commercial developments are in the Urban Residential areas, considerations should be given to provide residents with convenient access to the services, while remaining compatible with existing neighbourhoods.	Compatible Zones: To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw
Rural Residential Designation	
Description and intent: Rural Residential areas are intended to provide residents with a more rural atmosphere and lifestyle, on larger lots. As these areas will on the periphery of the community and along major highways, there is	Compatible Zones: To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw

also an opportunity for highway commercial development in Rural Residential areas. Appropriate parks, recreation facilities and greenspaces will also be found in this designation. All servicing in this area, whether private or proposed for connection to the municipal system, must be constructed at the cost of the developer, and meet all applicable regulations and guidelines.	
Parks and Greenspace Designation	
Description and intent: The Parks and Greenspace designation is intended to include major parks, open spaces, campgrounds, and picnic areas; although small neighbourhood parks and greenspaces may be distributed throughout the community in other designations as well. Some lands in Parks and Greenspace are unsuitable for other types of development because they are environmentally sensitive areas, areas subject to flooding, or have slope stability issues. Where this is the case, such as for lands located along watercourses, development will be limited to preserve the quality and natural functions of the land.	Compatible Zones: To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw
Light Industrial Designation	
Description and intent: Light Industrial activities are located at the south end of the District, including along 2nd Avenue. These areas are intended to support uses such as warehousing, distribution, testing, repairs, and may include small retail stores. As compared to the Heavy Industrial areas, the Light Industrial area provides a space to use that require smaller lots and connection to municipal services, and where operations will have limited impacts on surrounding land use. As the community grows, improving the appearance of this area will be important as it serves as the southern gateway to Fort St. James, providing a first impression to both visitors and residents.	Compatible Zones: In town, along 2nd Avenue To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw Out of town off Highway 27 To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw
Heavy Industrial Designation	
Description and intent: Most Heavy Industrial activities in Fort St. James are located at the north end of the District, near Highway 27 and Tachie Road. Uses in this area include large-scale operations such as manufacturing, processing, assembly, storage, recycling, and salvage which do not require connection to municipal services. This area has access to both rail and highway infrastructure and provides a location that is a safe distance from residential areas and the main town site.	Compatible Zones: To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw
Rural Holdings Designation	
Description and intent: One area in the north portion of the District has been designated as Rural Holdings; this area is intended to be maintained for a resource use such as forestry and agriculture, or used as a natural open space, but limited residential options are allowed.	Compatible Zones: To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw
Agriculture Designation	
Description and intent: There are three areas within the District that are designated in the Agricultural Land Reserve and it is vital that these lands are protected for long-term food production, employment, and local food security. Agriculture areas can support agriculture, forestry product processing, and outdoor recreation. A principal residence and one secondary dwelling are permitted. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this bylaw, all lands within the Agricultural Land Reserve are subject to the Agricultural Land Commission Act, its regulations, and any resolutions of the Agricultural Land Commission. This act and its regulations generally restrict non-farm use and subdivision of Agricultural Land Reserve lands, unless otherwise exempted.	Compatible Zones: To be updated based on Zoning Bylaw

6 Truth and Reconciliation

Fort St. James is situated on the Traditional Territory of the Nak'azdli Whut'en and with this acknowledgement comes respect for the land, people and unique histories of this area. The District of Fort St. James and the Nak'azdli Whut'en are two separate and independent jurisdictions, each with their own responsibilities and authorities. There are however many opportunities for the two governments to work together on projects related to servicing, infrastructure, recreation, tourism, and community activities and celebrations. Partnerships and collaboration between the District and Nak'azdli that are based on trust, honesty and respect will benefit both governments, the greater community, and all Fort St. James residents.

The goals and policies below outline the District's commitments as it moves towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and strengthening its relationship with the local First Nations.

Goal 6.1 Operate in a way that is respectful of the history, culture, and diversity of Indigenous people of the area.

Policy 6.1.1 Ensure staff are adequately trained to provide services and engage with the public in a manner that is inclusive and appropriate for all cultures.

Policy 6.1.2 Take advantage of opportunities to incorporate Dakelh into District signs, public buildings, and informational materials.

Policy 6.1.3 Take advantage of opportunities to showcase First Nations culture and heritage such as the incorporation of local First Nations art into public places.

Goal 6.2 Use Truth and Reconciliation to advance relationships, community health, and healing.

Policy 6.2.1 Establish strong formal and informal communication channels that allow the District to identify and address local First Nation government interests in the municipal decision-making processes.

Policy 6.2.2 Work with Nak'azdli Whut'en to update the *2014 Protocol on Cooperation and Communications Agreement*.

Goal 6.3 Provide municipal services in a manner that fosters the inclusion of local Indigenous people.

Policy 6.3.1 Ensure municipal services and programs are delivered in a manner that is accessible by Indigenous people, with a special focus on the inclusion of youth.

Policy 6.3.2 Support the provision of local provincial services (healthcare, social support, and education) in a manner that is accessible by Indigenous people, with a focus on the inclusion of youth.

Goal 6.4 Collaborate with the Nak'azdli Whut'en to foster a close working relationship based on trust and respect.

Policy 6.4.1 Coordinate in the provision of local services to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts and increase efficiencies.

Policy 6.4.2 Seek opportunity to partner with the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation on joint ventures and planning in areas such as shared services, economic development, tourism, education and training, community health and well-being, and environmental stewardship where mutually beneficial.



7 Natural Environment and Hazardous Lands

The health of the natural environment and the protection of the community's natural features are important to residents, vital to the quality of life, and an important draw for visitors. Wise environmental stewardship includes protecting the health of ecosystems, watersheds, airsheds, and environmentally sensitive areas. Stuart Lake and its shoreline, and Nahounli Creek are the community's most notable natural features and should be protected.

The natural features that contribute to our community's beauty can also pose significant risk of natural hazards. The proximity of developed lands to Stuart Lake, Nahounli Creek, forests, and steep slopes brings with it an increased risk of flooding, slope instability, landslips, and wildfire.

Natural areas that need to be protected are designated as Parks and Greenspace in this OCP. The shores of Stuart Lake and the area along Nahounli Creek, are environmentally sensitive and there are special conditions set out in the *Natural Environment and Hazardous Conditions Development Permit Area* that apply to these lands.

Goal 7.1 Conserve open spaces, natural assets, and environmentally sensitive areas.

Policy 7.1.1 Protect ecologically significant and sensitive areas such as Stuart Lake and Nahounli Creek for the long-term benefit of the environment and the enjoyment of residents.

Policy 7.1.2 Protect environmentally sensitive riparian areas from development by using the following mitigation measures:

- a. Dedication as a park or trail where the area complements the District's long-term park and trails planning; or
- b. Ensuring any development within 30 metres of a stream, lake or wetland is properly assessed as required by the federal *Fisheries Act* and provincial *Water Sustainability Regulation* under the *Water Sustainability Act*, the *Riparian Areas Protection Regulation* under the *Riparian Areas Protection Act*.

Policy 7.1.3 New development shall avoid negative impacts to the surrounding natural environment.

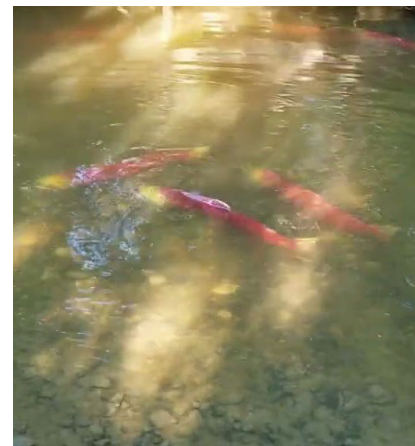
Policy 7.1.4 In the areas designated Downtown and Waterfront, maintain lake and mountain views whenever possible.

Goal 7.2 Protect land, air, and water quality for future generations.

Policy 7.2.1 Ecologically significant and sensitive areas will be protected and regulated through the *Natural Environment and Hazardous Conditions Development Permit Area Guidelines*.

Policy 7.2.2 Discourage development on lands that have steep slopes, a risk of flooding, in riparian areas, or subject to other environmental hazards.

- Policy 7.2.3 Reduce negative impacts to air quality by encouraging paving, and landscaping of roads and parking areas within the District.
- Policy 7.2.4 Use professional advice, either through the Ministry of Environment and Parks or through qualified professionals, in determining the exact boundaries of riparian areas.
- Policy 7.2.5 Implement clear signage to discourage inappropriate use (such as dumping of garbage and all terrain use) in significant natural areas.
- Policy 7.2.6 Consider initiatives that reduce air, noise and light pollution in the community.



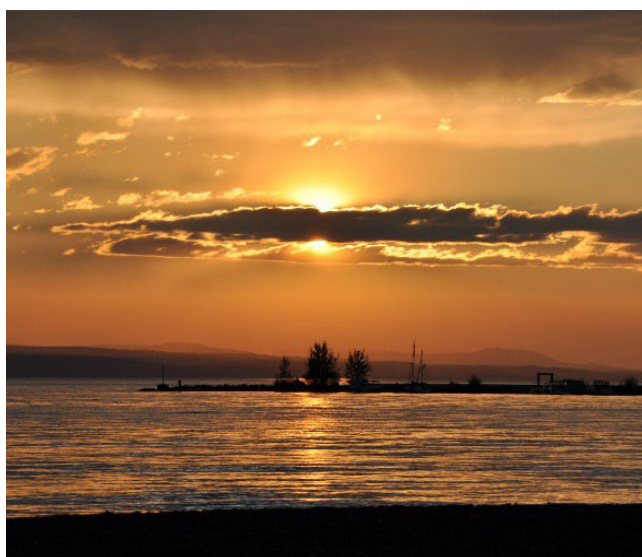
8 Climate Change

Climate change presents a major challenge to communities across Canada, with traditional climate patterns such as temperature and precipitation changing and expected to continue to change even more in the future. A key part of a local government's role in climate action is to reduce emissions caused by its own assets; this helps it meet its requirements as a signatory of the *BC Climate Action Charter*. Reducing corporate GHG emissions will also reduce local government energy costs, show that the District is leading by example and foster economic development by leveraging external funding for projects.

The District is committed to doing its part to achieve reductions in emissions and completed a *Corporate Energy and Emissions Plan in 2024*. The report resulted in an inventory of the District's corporate emissions and a series of actions related to new buildings and infrastructure, existing buildings and infrastructure, renewable energy, transportation, and enabling actions and corporate leadership. If implemented, the actions identified could reduce GHG emissions by 35% in 2030 (relative to 2018).

The majority of the emissions that are generated in the District are subject to limited influence by the District – an estimated 99% of emissions are community emissions, while 1% are corporate emissions. However, the District recognizes that it has a role to play through policies for land use, transportation, recreation, and consumption can impact local emissions.

Land use planning can be an important tool to prevent and reduce impacts of severe hazards and events due to climate change. Local governments can increase their community's resilience through integrated land use planning that recognizes and attempts to proactively address the impact of climate change. Built and natural systems are intricately linked and as the District continues to evolve, it is critical to apply a climate lens to build resilience and minimize future risks.



Goal 8.1 Reduce community greenhouse gas emissions by promoting compact land use patterns that create complete communities.

Policy 8.1.1 Support compact growth and encourage infill and mixed-use development to promote the efficient use of land and minimize greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.

Policy 8.1.2 Strive to achieve the community's greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

Goal 8.2 Promote energy efficient buildings and alternate forms of energy.

Policy 8.2.1 Integrate the use of renewable energy systems and energy efficiency into the District's buildings and infrastructure.

Policy 8.2.2 Encourage district energy systems in new developments.

Policy 8.2.3 Consider low carbon options in municipal purchase and development agreements.

Policy 8.2.4 Promote new developments to incorporate clean energy technologies, such as solar-ready rooftops and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Policy 8.2.5 Promote retrofitting existing buildings with renewable energy systems and energy efficient techniques.

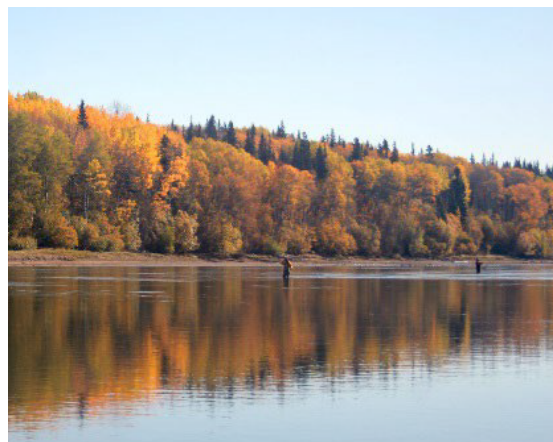
Goal 8.3 Increase community resilience and minimize the impacts of climate change by integrating a climate change lens into community planning.

Policy 8.3.1 Discourage development on lands that have environmental hazards.

Policy 8.3.2 Ensure the District's *Hazard Risk and Vulnerability Assessment* remains up to date for public infrastructure to understand the District's vulnerabilities related to climate change.

Policy 8.3.3 Encourage new developments to include climate adaptation measures including low impact design, rain gardens, bio swales, and fire-resistant materials.

Policy 8.3.4 Ensure risk management protocols that guide the District's decision-making during environmental emergencies remain up to date.



9 Parks and Recreation

Community parks and recreational assets are important to the quality of life in Fort St. James. The community's access to outdoor recreation opportunities is key to attracting and retaining residents and families. Parks and recreation facilities provide a critical service in the community by encouraging physical activity, mental well-being, and promoting social inclusion and community building. Community members have expressed a strong desire to see these facilities continue to expand to meet resident's evolving needs. Investing in the improvement of parks, recreation, and cultural facilities is a priority, with increased access to the Stuart Lake waterfront identified as being especially important.

There are several significant park and recreation facilities in the District including the Stuart Lake and Cottonwood Marina, the Stuart Lake Golf Course, the curling rink, the splash park, Fort Forum Arena, and the Fort St. James National Historic Park. In addition, the community has a wide range of parks designed for recreational play including ice-rinks, running tracks, soccer fields, and tennis courts. Neighbourhood parks typically include playground equipment and playing fields and should be well connected to the neighbourhood it serves.

Goal 9.1 Establish a system of parks, open spaces, trails, and recreation facilities that serve residents' daily needs, promote healthy and active lifestyles, and support tourism.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Policy 9.1.1 | Establish long-term priorities to enhance community parks and recreation opportunities to meet the community's needs, support population growth and tourism within Fort St. James. |
| Policy 9.1.2 | Continue to acquire 5% of subdivided land for park land. In some cases, taking cash-in-lieu of land dedication may be appropriate. |
| Policy 9.1.3 | Integrate recreation and cultural opportunities by building experiences around the District's natural assets, revitalizing Ripples of the Past Interpretive Tour and working with the Nak'azdli Whut'en to increase Indigenous experiences and interpretation. |
| Policy 9.1.4 | Implement trail expansion, guided by the <i>Trails Master Plan</i> , to increase connectivity of the parks and open space network. |
| Policy 9.1.5 | Incorporate elements of <i>Crime Prevention through Environmental Design</i> in parks to ensure safety of all users. |
| Policy 9.1.6 | Redevelop Spirit Square to increase its use as a centre of community life in the downtown core. |
| Policy 9.1.7 | Actively cooperate with the School District, other levels of government, and local voluntary organizations to identify residents' recreational needs and develop appropriate facilities. |

Goal 9.2 Support increased access to waterfront areas.

Policy 9.2.1 Protect environmentally sensitive areas adjacent to Stuart Lake and its shoreline through designating *Environmentally Sensitive and Hazardous Conditions Development Permit Areas*.

Policy 9.2.2 Improve opportunities for increased pedestrian and recreation access to Stuart Lake waterfront including Cottonwood Beach and Cottonwood Marina.

Policy 9.2.3 Develop and enhance Stuart Lake waterfront and Cottonwood Beach as important public spaces for residents and visitors.



10 Housing

The small-town character of Fort St. James is reflected in the residential neighbourhoods that surround the Downtown. These neighbourhoods are very walkable and have excellent access to parks and recreational opportunities.

The predominant housing form in Fort St. James is older single-detached dwellings with three or more bedrooms and the local housing stock is less diverse than other BC communities. There is increasing demand for more diverse forms of housing including studio suites and one- or two-bedroom units in townhouses or apartments as the District looks to attract more young professionals and families. Also, there is a need to increase the number and quality of rental units in the community.

In 2024, an *Interim Housing Needs Report* was completed. The assessment highlights that 41 additional units will be required in 5 years and 118 additional units will be required in 20 years.

BC's *Local Government Act* requires the *Housing Needs Report* to include a statement regarding the locating of housing in close proximity to transportation infrastructure that supports walking, bicycling, public transit, or other alternative forms of transportation. The District of Fort St. James will continue to seek opportunities to link existing and planned transportation networks with housing, based on current demographics and population projections, land use patterns, and municipal resources.

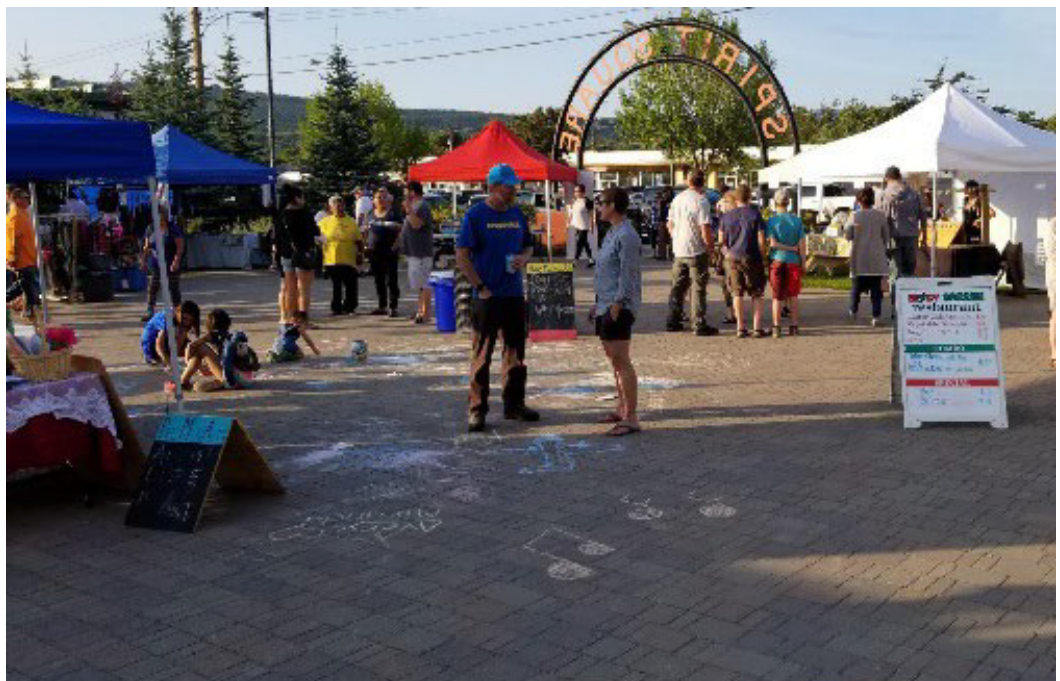
Goal 10.1 Ensure that the community is growing responsibly and that the housing supply meets future needs as outlined in the Interim Housing Needs Report.

- Policy 10.1.1 Ensure that sufficient land is designated for residential growth within the District.
- Policy 10.1.2 Encourage infill and development of underutilized or vacant lots within the Downtown and Urban Residential Designations to accommodate more housing and use existing infrastructure.
- Policy 10.1.3 New residential development should be contiguous to existing or planned areas.
- Policy 10.1.4 Direct new residential development away from environmentally sensitive areas.
- Policy 10.1.5 New residential developments should be located near parks, schools, and other amenities.

Goal 10.2 Support the development of housing options across the housing continuum that meet the diverse needs of residents of all ages.

- Policy 10.2.1 Allow for the development of diverse housing forms and densities including secondary suites, semi-detached, row housing, and small-scale apartments in the Urban Residential Designation.

- Policy 10.2.2 Higher density residential developments must be located in the Downtown or Urban Residential Designations and in proximity to the Downtown core, parks and open spaces, and other amenities.
- Policy 10.2.3 Encourage a housing stock that ensures people of all income levels and ages have access to adequate housing.
- Policy 10.2.4 Low density, rural housing on large lots may be located in the Rural Residential Designation.
- Policy 10.2.5 Collaborate with other orders of governments and other partners to provide innovative housing forms.
- Policy 10.2.6 Work with partners in the private sector, the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, the Province, and First Nations, to facilitate the development of non-market housing developments, the provision of future infrastructure, and recreational opportunities.



11 Local Economy

Fort St. James has a growing local economy. The median household income has seen an increase, rising from \$81,000 in 2016 to \$95,000 in 2021. This upward trend in income reflects the community's economic vitality and the opportunities available to its current and future residents.

The District's economy is supported by four primary employment sectors: health care and social assistance, retail trade, manufacturing, and educational services. These sectors provide a diverse range of job opportunities, contributing to the overall economic stability and growth of the community. Health care and social assistance play a crucial role in ensuring the well-being of the community, while retail trade and manufacturing drive local commerce and production. Educational services are essential for fostering a skilled workforce and supporting lifelong learning.

Given recent economic challenges related to a downturn in the resource sector, the District of Fort St. James is motivated to diversify its economy, which includes building on its natural assets to further develop and market tourism. In 2021, the District developed a tourism strategy that identified a number of strengths, challenges, and opportunities related to Fort St. James' tourism sector that have informed the policies in this OCP.



Goal 11.1 Attract people to the District to live, work, and visit.

- Policy 11.1.1 Support Fort St. James as an all-season tourist destination by encouraging tourism related business such as restaurants, stores, accommodations, cultural attractions, and other recreational amenities located in the Downtown and Waterfront Designations.
- Policy 11.1.2 Work with the Province, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, and local First Nations to create an economic development strategy that focuses on diversifying the local economy and facilitates investment in value added industry.
- Policy 11.1.3 Support the provision of healthcare facilities throughout the community to attract businesses and residents to the community.
- Policy 11.1.4 Work with local community organizations to explore ways to welcome and orient new residents and businesses to the community.

Goal 11.2 Improve the visual identity of the waterfront and strengthen downtown as the central hub for economic, entertainment, and tourism activities.

- Policy 11.2.1 Enhance the vitality of the Downtown and Waterfront Designations as the primary centre for tourism accommodation, office, retail, and service businesses.
- Policy 11.2.2 Encourage higher density and mixed-use developments in the Downtown Designation.
- Policy 11.2.3 Encourage development to incorporate high-quality design elements to enhance overall aesthetics.
- Policy 11.2.4 Support year-round events and festivals to increase tourism, stimulate local business, and increase vibrancy.
- Policy 11.2.5 Support initiatives and partnerships that promote small business development and local employment.

Goal 11.3 Support economic growth and increased commercial and industrial employment opportunities.

- Policy 11.3.1 Promote economic development that provides a diverse range of employment opportunities for the community.
- Policy 11.3.2 Ensure the District has sufficient lands designated for a diverse range of commercial and retail uses to support the long-term growth of the community.
- Policy 11.3.3 Ensure the District has sufficient lands designated for industrial growth to support the long-term growth of the community.
- Policy 11.3.4 Lands designated as industrial shall be protected for a variety of industrial uses and should be developed considering the surrounding land uses to minimize potential land use conflicts (noise, odour, or other impacts).
- Policy 11.3.5 Support economic development by promoting the District as a place to invest and do business, increasing the local tax base.

12 Transportation

The District of Fort St. James and the BC Ministry of Transportation and Highways work together to build and maintain the community's road network. The goal is to create a framework of existing and future municipal roads to ensure efficient and safe vehicle and pedestrian movement as the community grows and develops.

The District operates a free on-demand transportation service through the Seniors Helping Seniors Program providing transportation for seniors to services and medical appointments in town, to Vanderhoof, and Prince George.

Future transportation planning should include public transit and active transportation to increase the mobility options of the residents of Fort St. James. The provision of local transportation options as well as transportation services between surrounding communities such as Vanderhoof and Prince George should be explored.

The Fort St. James Perison Airport, owned by the District is an important component of the District's economic development and tourism strategy. It is also important for emergency response and air ambulance service in the region.

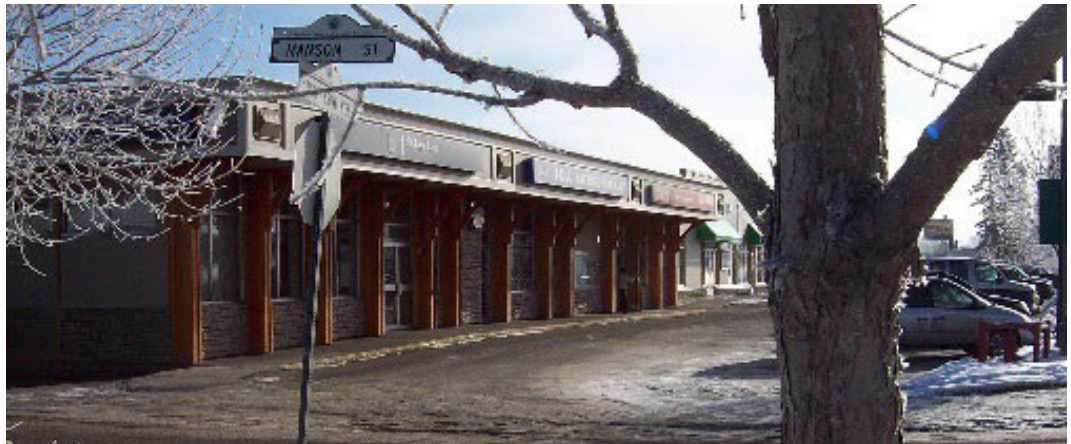
Goal 12.1 Develop a multi-modal transportation network that accommodates all modes of transportation.

- Policy 12.1.1 Implement the District of Fort St. James *Active Transportation Feasibility Study*.
- Policy 12.1.2 Expand active transportation infrastructure to improve connectivity and safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Policy 12.1.3 Collaborate with the Ministry of Transportation to make improvements to Highway 27 within the District to facilitate the movement of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles and to make the corridor an attractive gateway to the community.
- Policy 12.1.4 Collaborate with the Ministry of Transportation, BC Transit and other partners to identify and support the provision of public transit and on-demand transportation.
- Policy 12.1.5 Continue to improve connectivity and surfacing of the District's trail system.
- Policy 12.1.6 Collaborate with Nak'azdli Whut'en to provide enhanced multi-modal transportation options with a focus on active modes.
- Policy 12.1.7 Implement the *Airport Master Plan* to leverage and upgrade the Perison Airport to increase the District's connectivity and to support economic development.

Goal 12.2 Ensure the District's transportation network is accessible, safe, equitable, and sustainable.

- Policy 12.2.1 Ensure all new development includes appropriate transportation infrastructure. All new development within the Urban Residential Designation should encourage sidewalks and require all streets to be paved.

- Policy 12.2.2 Ensure the transportation network is safe and efficient for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.
- Policy 12.2.3 Encourage transportation infrastructure to be universally accessible and inclusive to accommodate people of all ages, abilities, and mobility needs.
- Policy 12.2.4 Provide year-round maintenance of streets, sidewalks, and pathways to support safe use for all modes of transportation.
- Policy 12.2.5 Support innovation and emerging technologies such as electric vehicles and micro mobility.
- Policy 12.2.6 In new commercial or multi-unit residential developments, parking lots should be located at the side or rear of the building to enhance the streetscape.



13 Community Services and Culture

Community Services and cultural amenities include schools, hospitals, health clinics, libraries, emergency response bases, and places of worship. These uses are critical in supporting the health, education, safety, cultural and spiritual needs of the community. Community Services should be centrally located with good pedestrian access and should be accessible throughout the community.

School District 91 operates two schools within the District (David Hoy Elementary School and Fort St. James Secondary School). Nak'albun Elementary School is located within the District, and is operated by Nak'azdli Whut'en. In addition, the College of New Caledonia operates a satellite campus in the District. At present, the educational needs of the community are well met. The community is further served by a fire hall, fire training facility, a Federal R.C.M.P detachment, and Provincial Courthouse.

A new 6,300 sq metre hospital opened in early 2025 to replace the fifty-year-old hospital. The new facility increases the community's access to health care and includes 27 beds (18 community care beds and 9 in-patient acute beds), an emergency department with two treatment rooms, expanded laboratory and diagnostic imaging, a Primary Care Centre, and spaces designed to create a culturally safe healing environment for all community members. Hospital landscaping includes a Healing Garden and Palliative Care Garden developed in collaboration with local Indigenous Elders and plant experts.

Fort St. James' arts and culture scene boasts a wide range of workshops, classes, and other creative community events. These are offered by dedicated local not-for-profit groups such as the Community Arts Council (Pope Mountain Arts), Fort St. James Public Library Association, Seniors Centre, and Fort St. James Music Makers Society.

Fort St. James is small northern community with a vibrant cultural and a rich past. In addition to the known heritage buildings, there is the opportunity to further tell a range of stories that will help to keep the community's rich history and Indigenous heritage alive.

Goal 13.1 Ensure residents have access to a range of community services and facilities that meet their daily needs.

- Policy 13.1.1 Encourage public and institutional uses to be located in the Downtown and Urban Residential Designations surrounding the Downtown core.
- Policy 13.1.2 Explore opportunities to enhance cultural and community facilities within the community.
- Policy 13.1.3 Support a variety of cultural and community groups to develop a wide range of programs, events, and facilities that foster community pride and personal well-being.
- Policy 13.1.4 Support "aging in place" principles, graduated care facilities and principles that support retention of family members of all ages within the community.
- Policy 13.1.5 Encourage neighbourhood pop-up libraries or little free libraires throughout the community to encourage social connectivity.

Policy 13.1.6 Support the development of clinics, healthcare services, and childcare facilities in Fort St. James.

Policy 13.1.7 Advocate to increase healthcare services and facilities to better serve the needs of the District.

Goal 13.2 Support and showcase the diverse culture and heritage of the community.

Policy 13.2.1 Support the development of diverse public art for civic facilities, public areas, and in private development.

Policy 13.2.2 Support a variety of cultural activities by local groups to enhance the community's creativity, culture and arts.

Goal 13.3 Recognize the value of cultural assets through enhancing areas of unique historical significance within the District of Fort St. James.

Policy 13.3.1 Protect areas of historical, archaeological, and paleontological significance within the District of Fort St. James.

Policy 13.3.2 Support marketing initiatives for the Fort St. James National Historic Site as a major cultural and tourism asset.



14 Community Infrastructure

The District of Fort St. James is serviced with a water distribution system and sanitary sewage collection system that serve residents of the district and Nak'azdli. Most of the District's water and sanitary sewer infrastructure was developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, during a period of substantial community growth. The original water and sewer system construction included drilling a water well, developing a sewage lagoon, and installing water distribution, sewage collection mains and pumping stations.

In the mid-1980s these water and sewer systems were upgraded by adding more water mains, the Pineridge Way booster station, and the water storage reservoir. During the same period, the sewage lagoons were upgraded by adding systems for aeration and disinfection. Stormwater drainage is primarily managed by a system of roadside ditches and driveway culverts. A limited amount of buried storm drainage piping exists along Stuart Drive East and Kwah Road.

Minor upgrades to the systems have been completed since the 1980s, but that does not change the fact that most the community's water and sewer infrastructure is roughly 50 years old. Between the age of the infrastructure, desires for improved drinking water quality, issues with sewage odors, and increased regulatory requirements, upgrades to the District's water and sewer infrastructure are needed.

Water Distribution System

The water distribution system consists of 16.7 kilometres of mains fed from a 500,000 imperial gallon reinforced concrete reservoir that provides storage for fire protection. The District has begun work on an ambitious program of water distribution system re-newel, including the replacement of water service connections and fire hydrants at various locations across the community.

Water Treatment System

The District's drinking water is supplied from an artesian ground water well. This well provides drinking water that meets the health criteria of the *Canadian Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality*, but it contains levels of iron and manganese that is above the aesthetic limits of the Guidelines and is not meeting the water quality expectations of the residents of Fort St James and Nak'azdli. High levels of iron and manganese, while not a public health concern, have resulted in complaints from residents related to issues such as staining of plumbing fixtures and clothing, intermittent odor issues, and water which, from a visual perspective, is not desirable for drinking.

In 2023, the District completed a Water Master Plan that provided feasibility level designs and cost estimates for a new Water Treatment Plant. In late 2025, the District applied for grant funding to assist with estimated \$9.5 million cost of the proposed Water Treatment Plant. Pending approval of grant funding, construction of the water treatment plant may proceed in the coming years.

Sanitary Sewer System

The District of Fort St. James and Nak'azdli sanitary sewer collection systems moves sewage to a lagoon-based sewage treatment facility located south of the District that discharges treated effluent to the Necoslie River. The sewage treatment lagoons have been source of community frustration due to

seasonal odors. Currently, the District of Fort St James and Nak'azdli are working together to evaluate options for either upgrading or replacing the sewage treatment lagoons.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater in Fort St James is generally managed using a system of open channel ditches with culverts at driveways and road intersections. The exception to this is Stuart Drive, where curb and gutter and concrete sidewalks have been installed, along with associated catch basins and buried storm drainage piping. The current open channel ditch drainage for storm water will remain until the cost implications of increased level of service are considered as a part a review of the *Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw*.

Solid Waste

Solid waste and residential recycling services are managed and operated by the Regional District through transfer stations and regional landfills. The municipality provides curbside waste pickup for transport to the Fort St James transfer station, located on Necoslie Road in the rural area.

Fire Fighting

Fort St. James is served by Volunteer Fire Department, with a paid fire chief and over 20 paid on-call volunteer fire fighters. The Fire Department provides protection to the District of Fort St. James, Nak'azdli Reserves No. 1 and 2, and a large portion of Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Rural Area "C". The Fire Hall is outdated and options for replacement need to be considered.

Goal 14.1 Provide safe, reliable, and efficient water and sanitary sewer services that meet the needs of the community.

- Policy 14.1.1 Ensure municipal water and sanitary sewer systems adequately service all existing and future urban development.
- Policy 14.1.2 Continue to implement the *2023 Water Master Plan*, with a specific focus on pursuing funding opportunities to construct a new water treatment plant.
- Policy 14.1.3 Continue to work with Nak'azdli Whut'en to evaluate and implement options for either upgrading or replacing the sewage treatment lagoons.
- Policy 14.1.4 Ensure an adequate level of fire protection be provided by the community water supply system and by the Volunteer Fire Department.
- Policy 14.1.5 Encourage the incorporation of low-impact development principles including xeriscaping, green stormwater infrastructure, bioswales, and permeable surfaces to assist with stormwater management.

Goal 14.2 Minimize waste being deposited in regional landfill sites.

- Policy 14.2.1 Collaborate with the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako to ensure effective and efficient solid waste management as the community grows and evolves.

Policy 14.2.2 Encourage residents and businesses to rethink, reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, and manage residual waste to contribute to waste reduction.

Policy 14.2.3 Explore options for municipal recycling pickup service.

Goal 14.3 Provide appropriate community emergency management and response services.

Policy 14.3.1 Explore the feasibility of developing a new Fire Hall for the community.

Policy 14.3.2 Wildfire risk reduction initiatives will be pursued throughout the community.

Goal 14.4 Plan and develop new infrastructure to support future growth in a logical and cost-effective manner.

Policy 14.4.1 Review and update the District's subdivision and development servicing standards in the *Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw*.

Policy 14.4.2 New developments must be staged and contiguous to ensure the logical and efficient extension of infrastructure.

Policy 14.4.3 Ensure required upgrades to municipal services support future residential and employment growth.

Policy 14.4.4 Require developers of new developments to provide and pay for the full cost of necessary infrastructure and servicing extensions and/or improvements.

Policy 14.4.5 Require developers to provide rights of way within new developments for future telecommunication companies.

Policy 14.4.6 Advocate to telecommunications and internet service providers for the provision of high-speed internet and telecommunication services across the community to support economic development.

Policy 14.4.7 Explore grant opportunities and partnerships with other orders of governments to support infrastructure upgrades.

15 Growth Management

Fort St. James has a population of 1,386 (2021), this is an 18% decrease from 2011. Looking ahead, population projections prepared by BC Stats indicate that the population of Fort St. James will likely stabilize or show marginal growth. Across the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, the population is expected to grow approximately 2% by 2033. Over the next decade, the population in the region is expected to remain stable.

The District of Fort St. James has a small-town character and most residential neighbourhoods are within a fifteen-minute walk of the downtown commercial area, a school, or a park. The District will maintain the community's compact form and ensure that higher density residential development is centrally located and well served by schools and parks. It is important that new urban residential development occurs in a manner which provides pedestrian access to adequate parkland, school sites, and shopping services.

Less centrally located lands that are not suitable for higher density residential development are designated Rural Residential. The Rural Residential Designation accommodates larger lots, with most lots in rural areas not serviced by a municipal sewer and water system. Where rural lots are close to existing water and sewer infrastructure, they may be connected to the sewer and water systems. The Rural Residential Designation accommodates single-detached or duplex dwellings.

An inventory of existing parcels within the District was undertaken in 2022 and determined that there are approximately 84 parcels within existing neighbourhoods currently available and ready for development. This includes situations where a residential occupancy has been established on a double lot, but the buildings are located on only one parcel.

There are over 100 hectares of undeveloped land designated for urban residential development. This is in addition to the 84 undeveloped parcels within existing neighbourhoods currently available and ready for development. For planning purposes, it is anticipated that the population of Fort St. James may increase annually by as much as 1% per year over the next 10 years. A population growth of 1% per year would result in a population increase of 14-15 persons per year. Based on the average household size of 2.3 persons a 1% growth rate translates into an increased housing demand of 6 dwellings per year. The existing inventory of land designated for Urban Residential development is more than adequate to accommodate future growth.

The priority growth areas for residential development are shown on Map 4.

Goal 15.1 Encourage compact and contiguous growth to optimize infrastructure investment.

Policy 15.1.1 New residential growth is encouraged to be contiguous and compact to allow for the efficient extension of infrastructure.

Policy 15.1.2 Encourage infill and intensification of vacant or underutilized lots within the Downtown, Waterfront, and Urban Residential Designations.

- Policy 15.1.3 The District will explore different tools to manage derelict and problem properties including but not limited to developing an abandoned or derelict building/problem properties bylaw.
- Policy 15.1.4 Encourage new developments to be planned through comprehensive neighbourhood plans to ensure the development of complete communities.
- Policy 15.1.5 Support agricultural uses in designated areas and ensure that agricultural activities remain the primary use on lands within the *Agricultural Land Reserve*.
- Policy 15.1.6 Support edge planning elements along the boundary of the *Agricultural Land Reserve* to ensure adjacent land uses are compatible and negative impacts to adjacent agricultural uses are minimized (this may include buffers, landscaping, low-intensity land uses, fencing, berms, or other techniques).
- Policy 15.1.7 Permit a full range of agricultural and complementary uses in the *Agricultural Land Reserve* and encourage value-added activities which are ancillary to primary farming activities and do not impact the agricultural capability of farmland.



16 Development Permit Areas

16.1 Introduction

The *Local Government Act R.S. 2015 (s. 488)* provides the District with the authority to designate *Development Permit Areas* for a number of purposes including: protection of natural environments; protection of lands from hazards; revitalization of commercial areas; and for establishing objectives for form and character of intensive residential, commercial, and industrial development. Within these areas more detailed information is required before development proceeds. The District has four development permit areas, as outlined below.

Development Permit Area	Purpose	Applicable Location
Natural Environment and Hazardous Conditions	Protection of the natural environment, its ecosystems, and biological diversity. Protection of development (e.g., life, property, the economy, and the environment) from hazardous conditions. (<i>Local Government Act</i> Section 488 (1) a, b).	All lands as shown on Map 4 and any lands: within 15 metres of the natural boundary of Stuart Lake and Nahounli Creek, with an average slope of 30% or more, and/ or within a 15-metre setback from the top of a slope of 30% or more.
Multi-Unit	Establish objectives for the form and character of multi-unit residential development. (<i>Local Government Act</i> Section 488 (1) f).	All developments proposing multi-unit housing forms with over four dwelling units
Commercial	Revitalization of an area. Establish objectives for the form and character of commercial development. (<i>Local Government Act</i> Section 488 (1) d and f).	All properties zoned for commercial use.
Light Industrial	Establish objectives for the form and character of industrial. (<i>Local Government Act</i> Section 488 (1) f).	As properties within the Light Industrial designation.

16.1.1 Application

Within a Development Permit Area the owner of land must first obtain a Development Permit, at the applicant's expense, prior to undertaking any of the following:

- Subdivision of land.
- Construction, additions, or alterations to a building or structure.
- Alteration of land, if the land is located within the Natural Environment and Hazardous Condition Development Permit Area.
- Alteration of land, buildings, or structures, if the land is located within the Multi-Unit, Commercial, or Light Industrial Development Permit Areas.

If the submitted plans adequately show how the proposed development aligns with the applicable Development Permit Area guidelines, a development permit is issued. A development permit issued by Council may vary or supplement the regulations in the *Zoning Bylaw*. Only one development permit is

required if an area is located within more than one development permit area; however, all applicable guidelines must be addressed.

16.1.2 General Exemptions

The following activities occurring in a Development Permit Area shall be exempt from the Development Permit application process:

- a. Any interior building alterations.
- b. Actions undertaken during an emergency.
 - i. Actions and activities necessary to prevent immediate threats to life or property.
 - ii. Any activity conducted under the Provincial Emergency Program.
 - iii. All actions used to resolve emergency situations must be reported to the District and the appropriate Federal/ Professional authorities immediately prior to removal or disturbance.
- c. Public works and services
The construction, repair and maintenance of public works and services by the District or its authorized agents and contractors are exempt from the formal Development Permit Area approval process, but the works must be completed in accordance with the assessments and recommendation of a qualified environmental professional in accordance with the *Riparian Areas Regulation Assessment* methodology and other applicable environmental and *Building Code* regulations where required.
- d. Farming
Activities related to normal farm practices, located in the *Agriculture Land Reserve*, in accordance with the *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act*.
- e. Minimal changes
 - i. Change of the exterior building colour of a building or structure, provided it adheres to the applicable Development Permit Area guidelines.
 - ii. Addition of canopies or decorative building features adhering to the applicable Development Permit Area guidelines.
 - iii. Balconies, decks or patios less than 20m² and adhering to the applicable Development Permit Area guidelines.
- f. Vegetation management
Removal of plants provided they involve any of the following:
 - i. Deemed hazardous by a qualified environmental professional and pose an immediate threat to buildings, life, or safety;
 - ii. Removed for the purpose of FireSmarting, in accordance with provincial *FireSmart* standards; or
 - iii. Invasive species.

- g. Implementation of a habitat restoration plan prepared by Qualified Professional (Registered Professional Biologist or Landscape Architect).
- h. A technical subdivision for lot consolidation or road widening.

16.1.3 Definitions

Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP) An individual may serve as a Qualified Environmental Professional if:

- a. The individual is registered under the Professional Governance Act as any of the following professionals:
 - i. an agrologist;
 - ii. an applied science technologist or certified technician;
 - iii. a registered professional biologist or registered biology technologist;
 - iv. a professional engineer or professional licensee engineering;
 - v. a professional forester or registered forest technologist; or
 - vi. a professional geoscientist or professional licensee geoscience;
- b. The individual is in good standing with the regulatory body under that Act for the individual's profession, and
- a. When carrying out that part of the assessment, the individual is acting:
 - i. within the individual's area of expertise,
 - ii. within the scope of professional practice for the individual's profession, and
 - iii. under the code of ethics of the regulatory body referred to in paragraph (b) and is subject to disciplinary action by that regulatory body.

16.2 Natural Environment and Hazardous Conditions Development Permit Area

16.2.1 Purpose

The purposes of the Natural Environment and Hazardous Conditions Development Permit Area is the protection of the natural environment, its ecosystems, and biological diversity; and the protection of development (e.g., life, property, the economy, and the environment) from hazardous conditions.

These areas will generally remain free of development and in their natural condition except for fencing, trails, and work to control erosion, protect banks, protect fisheries or otherwise protect and enhance the natural water course. The exact boundary will be set out in the development permit based on the area required to conserve the streamside habitat and the streamside area.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans of Canada standards must be followed for development near identified watercourses.

16.2.2 Permit Area and Application

Lands within 15 metres of the natural boundary of Stuart Lake and Nahounli Creek and all lands with an average slope of 30% or more, and a 15 metre setback from the top of a slope of 30% or more, are designated as Natural Environment and Hazardous Conditions Development Permit Area and are shown on Map 4.

16.2.3 Exemptions

A Natural Environment and Hazardous Conditions Development Permit is not required for the following development:

- a. Renovation or repair of an existing building, where the area of the building does not change.
- b. Gardening and yard maintenance activities within a landscaped area existing at the time of the adoption of this bylaw, such as mowing lawns, pruning trees and shrubs, planting vegetation and minor soil disturbance that does not alter the general topography of the land.
- c. The construction of a fence if the disturbance of native vegetation is restricted to 0.5 metres on either side of the fence.
- d. The construction of a small pump house, gazebo, garden shed or playhouse if the total area of the building does not exceed 10 metres².
- e. The construction of a private trail less than 1 metre wide where the trail is designed in a way that prevents soil erosion.
- f. Ecological restoration and enhancement projects.

- g. Construction, maintenance or operation of municipal works and services undertaken or authorized by the District of Fort St James.
- h. Emergency response actions required to prevent, control or reduce an immediate threat to human life, the natural environment or public or private property.
- i. Removal or modification of trees that may be a hazard.

16.2.4 Guidelines

Development permits issued in this area shall be in accordance with the following guidelines:

- a. Natural vegetation should be retained, and soils should be undisturbed as much as possible to ensure minimal disruption to the natural environment.
- b. A 15 m leave strip, which are areas of land and vegetation adjacent to watercourses, shall be maintained to protect riparian areas and fish and wildlife habitat.
- c. Lesser or greater leave strips shall be considered where the size is determined based on a specific assessment report provided by a qualified professional.
- d. Construction of buildings and structures should avoid the floodplain.
- e. Deposition of materials, surface runoff and subsurface drainage should not negatively affect any wetland, pond or watercourse.
- f. Protection measures, including the installation of a fence and/or the planting or retention of vegetation and trees, may be required to preserve, protect, restore, or enhance riparian protection, control drainage or erosion or protect banks.
- g. The alteration of land, removal of vegetation, or disturbance of soils on lands with an average slope of 30% or more should not occur unless a qualified Professional Engineer has determined that the development is safe and will not negatively impact slope stability.
- h. Stormwater drainage including runoff from roofs should be directed away from steeply sloped lands or lands otherwise subject to erosion or landslide.
- i. The setback of buildings along watercourses are to follow the general standards identified in the *Streamside Protection Regulation*.
- j. All new lots created by subdivision shall have a building and development site that is appropriate for the uses permitted on that land.

16.3 Multi-Unit Development Permit Areas

16.3.1 Purpose

There is increasing demand in Fort St. James for more diverse forms of housing including studio suites and one- or two-bedroom housing in townhouses, cluster arrangements or apartments. The District would like to encourage the development of multi-unit housing in areas that are close to the downtown core and within walking distance of essential services. New multi-unit housing development should be compatible with existing residential uses nearby, and impacts should be minimized.

16.3.2 Permit Area and Application

All multi-unit residential developments are designated as Multi-Unit Development Permit Area. All new buildings or expansion of existing multi-unit buildings with four or more units shall apply for a Development Permit.

16.3.3 Exemptions

A multi-family Development Permit is not required for the following developments:

- a. The alteration of a building where there is no substantial change to the outside of the building or a structure.
- b. The replacement of less than 20% of a façade.
- c. The construction of a wood frame accessory building that is less than 100 metres².
- d. Landscaping maintenance or parking redevelopment where the design of the landscaping or parking area is not being substantially changed.

16.2.4 Guidelines

Development Permits issued in this area shall be in accordance with the following guidelines:

- a. The building shape should be sufficiently varied to avoid a monotonous or box-like appearance through the use of various design features including articulation, windows, use of multiple siding materials, and/ or gabled roof.
- b. The building shape and height should be compatible and fit within the context of the surrounding neighbourhood.
- c. When possible, buildings should be oriented toward Stuart Drive West and Stuart Lake to take advantage of viewscales and sunlight exposure.
- d. Exterior building facades materials used are encouraged to incorporate colour, so as to add visual interest to an otherwise white landscape during the winter months.

- e. Buildings should be street-oriented and parking should be provided predominantly to the side and rear of the site. Where feasible, parking can be broken into several smaller lots instead of one large one.
- f. Areas not required for buildings, parking and access should be landscaped using a combination of native trees, shrubs and grass following *FireSmart* principles.
- g. Parking lots including accesses, maneuvering aisles and loading areas should be surfaced with asphalt or cement, with adequate space provided for snow removal.
- h. Lighting should be directed towards the ground to minimize light pollution.
- i. Garbage containers shall be located at the side or rear of buildings and screened from view.
- j. All multi-unit buildings should have bike racks.



16.4 Commercial Development Permit Areas

16.4.1 Purpose

Downtown Fort St. James is the community's core and the centre of community life. The Downtown and Waterfront Designations are home to most of the restaurants, tourist accommodation facilities, commercial retail, office and service uses in the District. All commercial properties should be developed to a high-quality design standard that will improve the Downtown core and ensure that commercial uses in all neighbourhoods are compatible and appropriate.

16.4.2 Permit Area and Application

All properties zoned as commercial are designated as Commercial Development Permit Areas.

16.4.3 Exemptions

A Commercial Development Permit is not required for the following developments:

- a. The alteration of a building where there is no substantial change to the outside of the building or a structure.
- b. The replacement of less than 20% of a façade.
- c. The construction of a wood frame accessory building that is less than 100 metres².
- d. Landscaping maintenance or parking redevelopment where the design of the landscaping or parking area is not being substantially changed.

16.4.4 Guidelines

Development Permits issued in this area shall be in accordance with the following guidelines:

- a. The development of new buildings shall be complementary to adjacent buildings.
- b. In the Downtown Designation, buildings should be oriented to the street to encourage a continuous and active streetscape through the incorporation of windows, murals, awnings, landscaping, sidewalk cafes, or other design features that add visual interest.
- c. Developments in the Waterfront Designation (adjacent to Stuart Lake) should provide streetscape amenities such as seating areas and create connections between the commercial activities, the street, and the waterfront.
- d. Natural construction materials such as stained wood, logs, brick, stone, and shingles and shakes are preferred. Gabled roofs will be encouraged.
- e. Public entrances should be designed to be the dominant feature of the façade.

- f. Vehicular accesses should be created at right angles to connecting roads and away from intersections.
- g. Parking lots including accesses, maneuvering aisles and loading areas should be surfaced with asphaltic or cement pavement and shall be well lit.
- h. Lighting should be directed to the ground to minimize light pollution.
- i. Areas not required for buildings and parking should be landscaped using a combination of native trees, shrubs and low ground cover following *FireSmart* principles.
- j. All commercial sites in excess of 1,000 m² must include provision for bicycle racks.
- k. In mixed-use developments where there is both residential and commercial uses, the residential use shall have a separate entrance.
- l. *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* principles are encouraged to be incorporated into building and site design.
- m. Encourage downtown revitalization through the consideration of allowing shared parking schemes, temporary uses of empty lots, identifying blank walls for public murals as organized by the District, and the addition of landscaping, streetscaping, wayfinding, decorative lighting, public art and interpretative panels and signs.



16.5 Industrial Development Permit Areas

16.5.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Industrial Development Permit Area is to give the District some control over aesthetics of industrial development along key corridors and in the Light Industrial area that is adjacent to Downtown. Allowing industrial development that has a pleasant and attractive aesthetic will result in a positive experience for both residents and visitors.

16.5.2 Permit Area and Application

The Industrial Development Permit Area applies to industrial development on all properties zoned I-3 Industrial – Intermediate and within 50 metres of Tachie Road and Highway 27. In addition, all properties designated as I-1 Industrial – Light are within the Industrial Development Permit Areas.

16.5.3 Exemptions

A Industrial Development Permit is not required for the following developments:

- a. The alteration of a building where there is no substantial change to the outside of the building or a structure.
- b. The replacement of less than 20% of a façade.
- c. The construction of a wood frame accessory building that is less than 100 metres².
- d. Landscaping maintenance or parking redevelopment where the design of the landscaping or parking area is not being substantially changed.

16.5.4 Guidelines

Development Permits issued in this area shall be in accordance with the following guidelines:

- a. Large buildings should be designed to create the impression of smaller units and less bulk by encouraging architectural treatments for roof systems, façade relief and variety between sections.
- b. No blank walls shall be permitted adjacent to roads.
- c. Parking lots including accesses, maneuvering aisles and loading areas should be surfaced with asphaltic or cement pavement and shall be well lit.
- d. Lighting should be directed to the ground to minimize light pollution.
- e. Areas not required for buildings and parking that are within public view should be landscaped using a combination of native trees, shrubs and low ground cover following *FireSmart* principles.

- f. Where industrial uses occur on properties abutting residential property, the development must provide buffering through fencing, landscaping, screens or berms.
- g. Areas used for storage of equipment and supplies, waste products, or other unsightly conditions should be screened from public view and from adjacent residential uses.
- h. Garbage containers shall be at the side or rear of buildings and screened from view from the street and on three sides and away from residential uses.
- i. *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* principles should be incorporated into building and site design.



17 Implementation

The District of Fort St. James has many plans and strategies in place that provide direction for planning and development, parks and recreation, environmental management, tourism, infrastructure development, and economic development. Any future updates or creation of new plans or strategies should align with the District's OCP.

The *Zoning Bylaw* is a critical tool to implement the OCP and ensure the community's vision and objectives are being realized. The *Zoning Bylaw* is being updated concurrently with the OCP to ensure the two documents are aligned. Any future amendments to either the OCP or the *Zoning Bylaw* must consider the other and the District should ensure they remain aligned.

All development proposals submitted to the District are required to align with the OCP's policies and land use designations and contribute to realizing the community's vision. If there is an application for an OCP amendment, it must clearly demonstrate how the proposal will help realize the OCP's vision, goals, and objectives.

District staff should periodically report to Council on development activities, whether the vision and goals of the OCP are being met and determine if a general update to the OCP is necessary. Monitoring and reporting on progress toward (or away from) achieving the OCP vision helps inform decision-making and enables for continuous improvement.

The *Local Government Act* requires that the OCP be updated at least every five years. These updates must align with the findings of the most recent Housing Needs Report and plan for at least 20 years of housing supply.

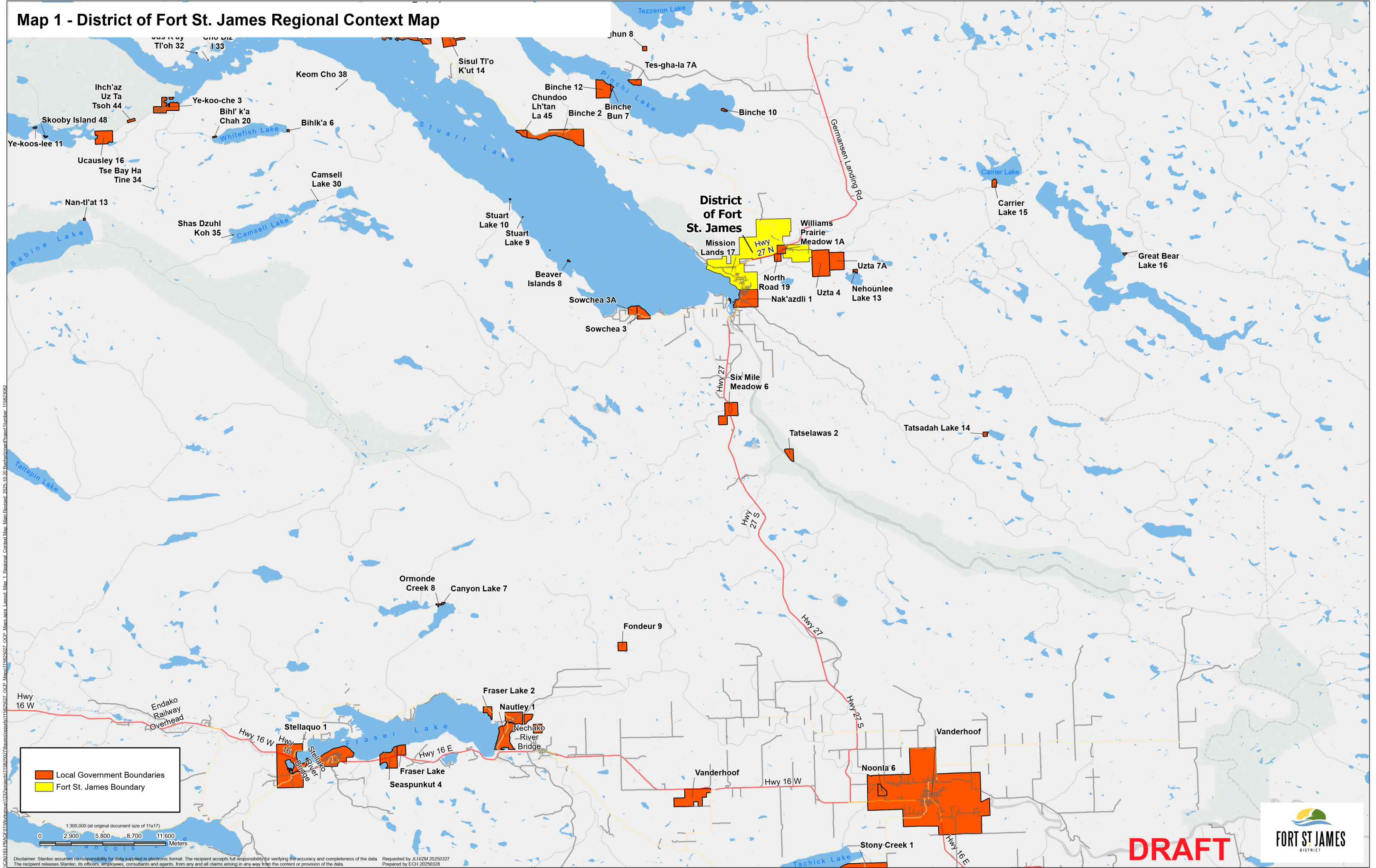


Official Community Plan

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Appendix A

Map 1 - District of Fort St. James Regional Context Map

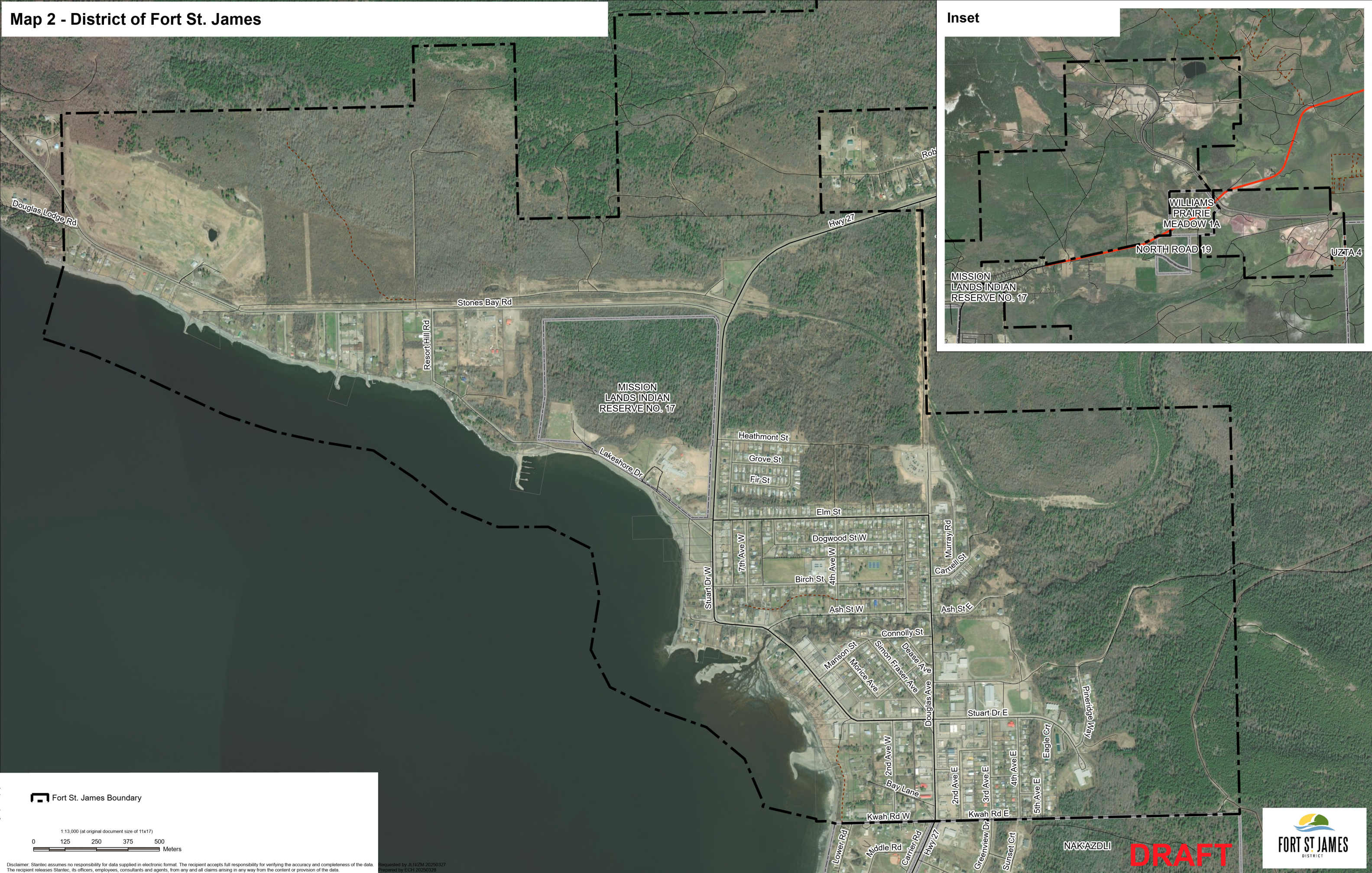


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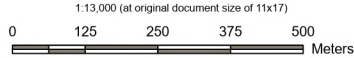


Map 2 - District of Fort St. James

Inset



Fort St. James Boundary



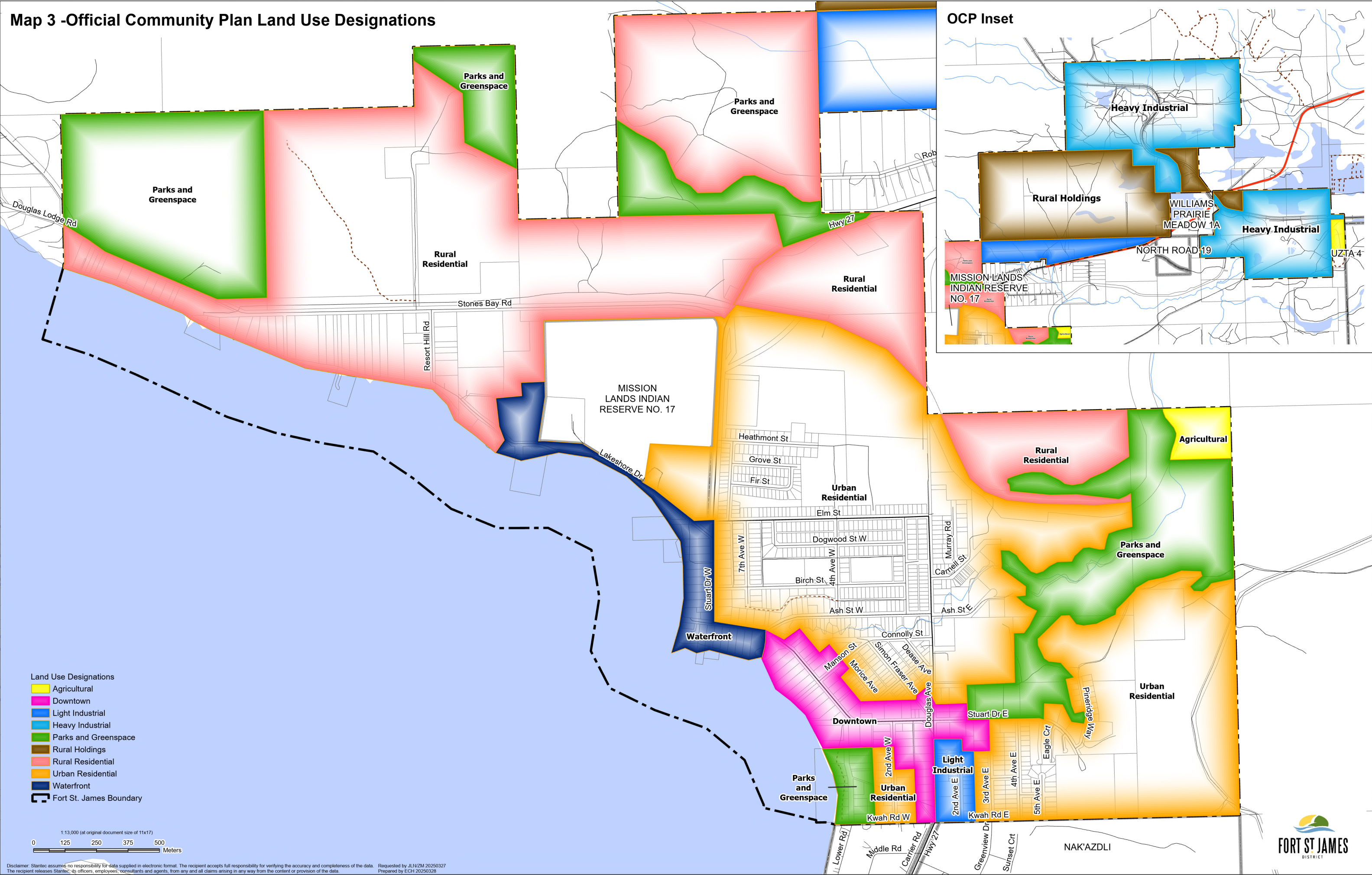
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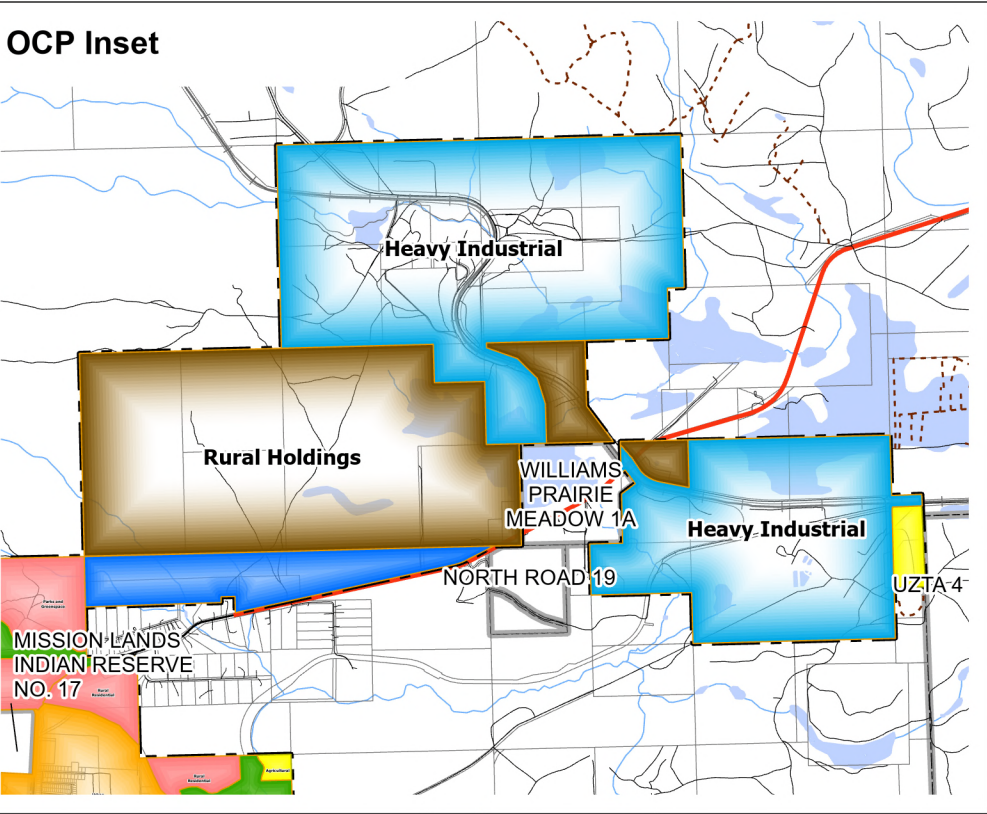


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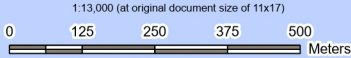
Map 3 -Official Community Plan Land Use Designations



OCP Inset



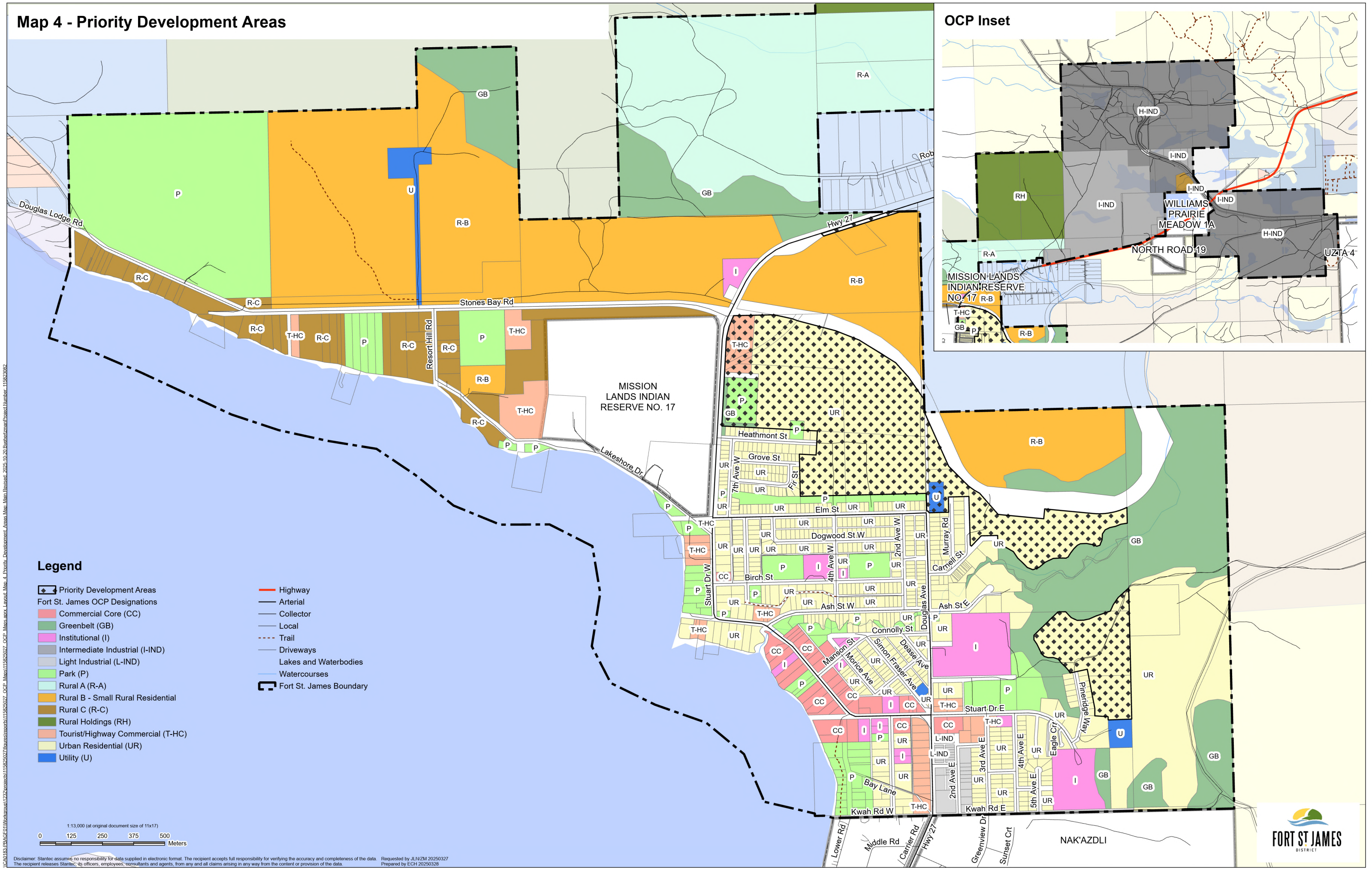
- Land Use Designations
- Agricultural
 - Downtown
 - Light Industrial
 - Heavy Industrial
 - Parks and Greenspace
 - Rural Holdings
 - Rural Residential
 - Urban Residential
 - Waterfront
 - Fort St. James Boundary



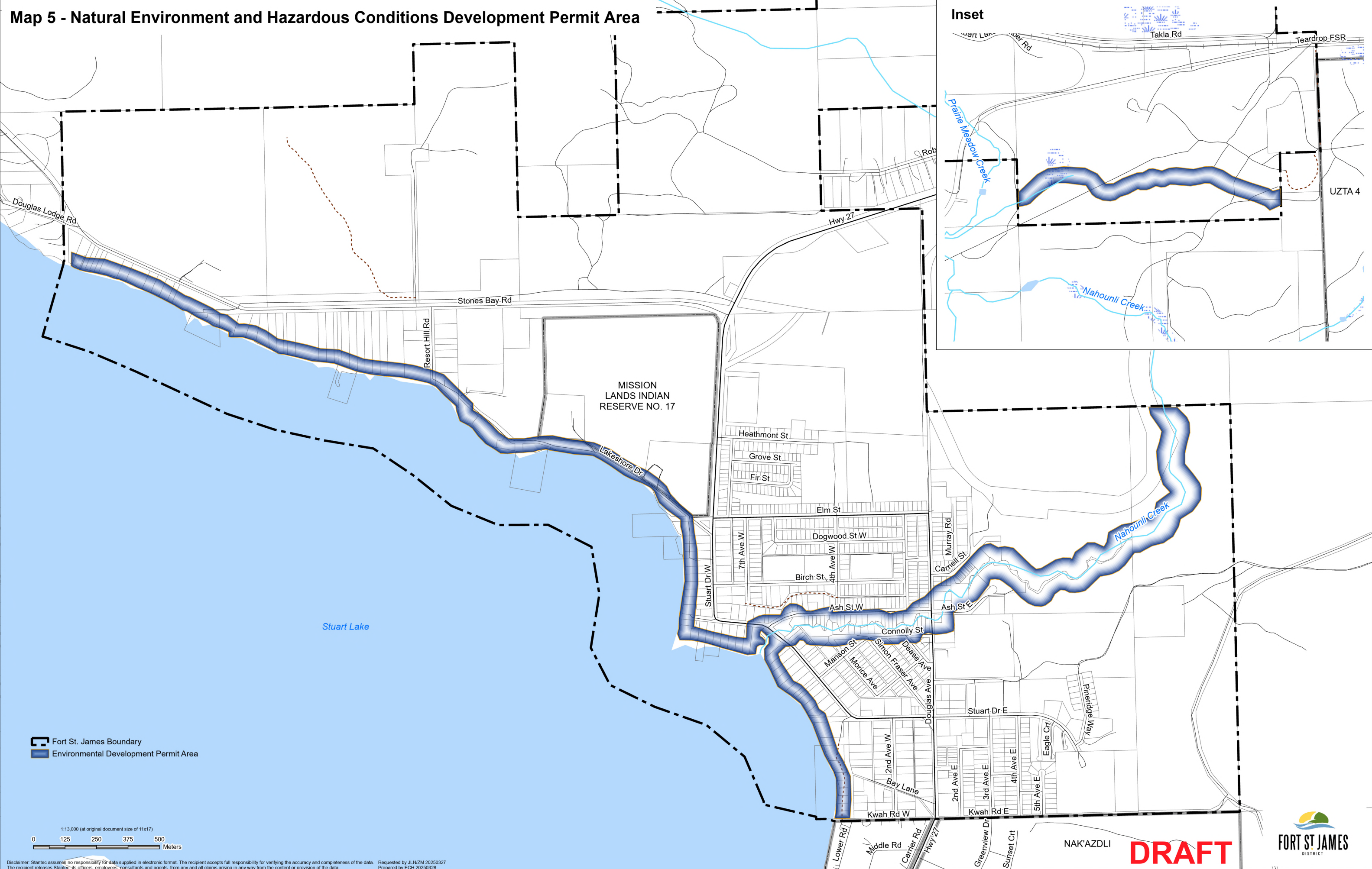
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Map 4 - Priority Development Areas



Map 5 - Natural Environment and Hazardous Conditions Development Permit Area



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