



Community Trends 2020

Role of Cities in COVID-19 Recovery



INTRODUCTION



The Covid-19 pandemic has been an enormous challenge globally, nationally and locally. Its immediate impacts to human health and economic well-being have resulted in the suffering of thousands of Canadians. In comparison to other regions, BC has had success in limiting the loss of life - the result of strong leadership from public health and community buy-in on physical distancing measures. However, British Columbia remains under a state of emergency with big questions surrounding the long-term impact of the pandemic and no defined timetable for a vaccine. This year's Community Trends Report (CTR) explores the challenges presented by the pandemic as well as the role of cities in supporting both the immediate and long-term recovery from this public health emergency.

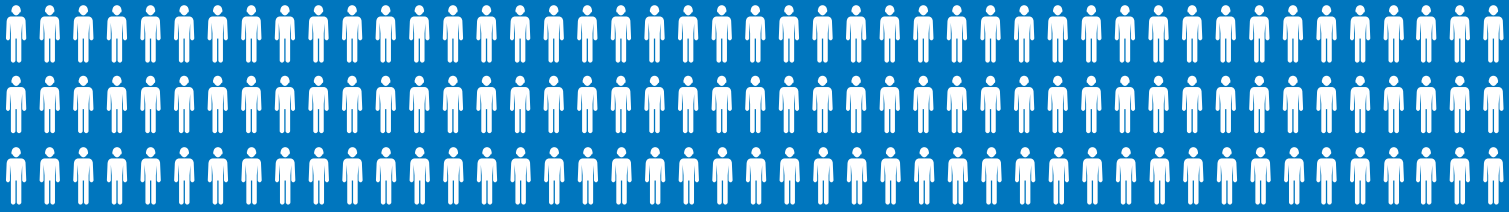
BC Covid-19 related deaths per million stands at 42.8 compared to the national rate of 245 per million.ⁱ

The CTR is prepared annually to explore how important trends or challenges are impacting our cities and communities. The CTR is a researched-based document that sets the stage for future action by identifying the local implications of broader national or global trends. The report focuses on examining complex topics in a format that is more accessible to the broader community. The CTR is intended to serve as a resource for City of Kelowna staff and Council, while informing residents, businesses and local community organizations about how key trends might impact our region. Given the high level of uncertainty surrounding the global health pandemic this report is by no means comprehensive, but instead highlights emerging trends surrounding the response to the pandemic.

The CTR is comprised of two key parts. First, the infographic highlights data from 2019 and 2020 to provide a snapshot of Kelowna's economic and demographic statistics through summer 2020. This year, the infographic provides additional data related to the impacts of the pandemic on the region and our economy highlighting transportation and tourism. The main part of the CTR explores a larger trend and investigates how it might impact our community, influence business practices, policies or service delivery. This year's CTR examines the role of cities in supporting both the immediate response as well as the long-term recovery from COVID-19 pandemic.

POPULATION

>>> 138,500



MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

unemployment rate >>> 7.6%



\$74,851
Up \$6,224 from 2019



2,068 UNITS

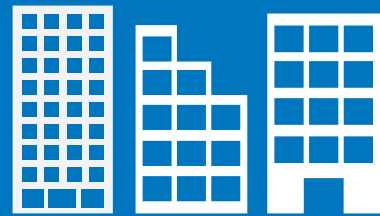
under construction across Kelowna



BUILDING

permits issued

FOR 702 UNITS



SALES OF HOMES OVER \$1 MILLION

up from 115 to 118

RENTAL HOUSING VACANCY RATE 2.7%



MEDIAN HOUSING COSTS



SINGLE HOMES ↑ 3%

\$705,000



TOWNHOUSES ↑ 5%

\$488,000



CONDOS ↓ 6%

\$334,450

greening our city

12.4%

CANOPY COVER IN THE URBAN CORE

◀◀◀ 29 hectares of undeveloped park land ▶▶▶

100-150 TREES PLANTED BY THE CITY ANNUALLY



COVID-19

«« 2020 impacts »»

AIRPORT PASSENGERS

decreased



57%

short term rental listings

↓ DOWN FROM 2,276 IN 2019 TO 1,827 IN 2020

BERNARD AVE

26 TEMPORARY PATIO LICENSES ISSUED



pedestrian activity up 85% from 2019

22% OF CANADIANS WORKING REMOTELY compared to 4% in 2016



11% of mortgages deferred across British Columbia

overnight visitor trips

1.25 MILLION, UP 7.5% FROM 2019



e-commerce sales increased by 99.3% from 2019

32% INCREASE IN BUSINESS CLOSURES

1549 closures in 2020 vs. 1177 in 2019

20-40% DROP IN TRAFFIC

compared to pre-pandemic levels



369 electric vehicles in 2019 compared to 184 in 2018



TRANSIT RIDERSHIP DOWN 50% compared to 2019



RAIL TRAIL TRIPS UP 25% FROM 2019

CITIES AND PANDEMIC RECOVERY

CHALLENGES EXPOSED BY THE PANDEMIC

The global pandemic has tested the resilience of the Canadian economy and presented significant challenges to cities across the country. In many ways the pandemic exposed and magnified various issues troubling cities prior to the global pandemic:

Community design and linkages to health outcomes: The way we design our communities impacts health, particularly for those citizens with underlying health issues.ⁱⁱ

Housing crisis: The pandemic has resulted in historic rates of mortgage deferrals, highlighting the importance of affordable housing in a community facing rising rents and housing affordability issues. Also, the challenges of physical distancing in homeless shelters reinforced the urgency of housing for people experiencing homelessness.

Rising economic inequality: Prior to the pandemic, cities were starting to incorporate equity in their city-building. The pandemic, however, spiked business closures, and the resulting unemployment impacted low-income and racialized communities the hardest, magnifying the structural conditions that contribute to economic inequality.ⁱⁱⁱ

Shifting to online services: To reduce the spread of the pandemic many institutions (e.g. libraries, City Hall) were temporarily closed, forcing organizations to accelerate efforts to provide online programming and services.

Need for safe and accessible public space: As cities encourage more people to live compactly: there is a greater role for green space in cities. The pandemic has amplified the need for public spaces as citizens look for places to engage with one another while respecting physical distancing guidelines.

While not a comprehensive list, the above highlights how the acute stages of the pandemic magnified several issues cities were already grappling with. For this reason, cities could leverage the short-term and long-term recovery to also address broader structural challenges. Moreover, cities can use the inflection point prompted by the pandemic to reconsider city-building priorities to advance a greener and more equitable future through the recovery.

ROLE OF CITIES IN PANDEMIC RECOVERY

Canada's five largest cities account for close to 50 per cent of national GDP, functioning as engines of economic and population growth.^{iv} Consequently, the way cities approach the pandemic recovery will largely determine how Canada emerges from the global crisis. A coalition of mayors is advocating for cities to move past "business as usual" through the recovery to address

TRANSPORTATION SECTOR REPRESENTS



53% OF KELOWNA'S COMMUNITY GHGS

generational challenges such as climate change, healthy community design, and economic inequality.^v

The investments and policies that are prioritized through the recovery will have profound impacts on future transportation behaviour, the form of economic development and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) impacts for decades to come. For example, if the recovery prioritizes transportation infrastructure such as highways, cities will be locking-in decades of new GHG emissions and entrenching carbon intensive transportation behaviours. For this reason, cities could shape recovery plans to accelerate transformation toward the economy of the future. For example, transportation investments in infrastructure could encourage walking and cycling to promote enduring behaviour change toward cleaner forms of transportation, creating a greener and more equitable city for all. Cities have the opportunity to make investments that will address some of the urgent risks associated with the pandemic, while simultaneously preparing for future health threats and taking action on climate.

2020 COMMUNITY TRENDS FOCUS

The CTR examines the role of city-building in the recovery process from three perspectives. The report explores How We Grow – considering the relationship between community planning and the recovery. Next the How We Build Healthy Communities looks at the relation between health and the built environment for all. The final section of the report How We Prosper explores opportunities to encourage economic success for all through the recovery.

Although we are in the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic it is important for cities to identify trends and consider how we can build back better as we look ahead to the long-term recovery. The decisions cities make will have a major impact on the global recovery and a cascading impact on our ability to tackle the climate crisis. The investments of today shape behaviours for decades to come.

HOW WE GROW

THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF OUR COMMUNITY INFLUENCES BEHAVIOURS AND PUBLIC HEALTH.

The physical structure of our community influences behaviours and impacts public health. For example, most people living in suburban areas rely on a car to leave their local neighbourhood and drive to busy big box retail (e.g. Costco or Orchard Park Mall) for many of their day-to-day needs, causing increased GHG emissions, and equity challenges. The pandemic spotlighted how this form of development also results in neighbourhoods that lack resiliency, providing citizens with very little in the way of local supports, services or amenities in times of crisis. The lack of local shops and services available is of greater importance during the pandemic as citizens turn to crowded big box stores while public health authorities urge Canadians to avoid large crowds as much as possible. We need to examine how we plan and build complete communities, not only to ensure resiliency in times of crisis, but to also support the transition to equitable, low-carbon neighbourhoods.

THE 15-MINUTE CITY

A number of cities are exploring how elements of the “15-minute city” could be implemented as a way to enhance equity and to create a more resilient city during times of crisis.^{vi} The pandemic highlighted the value of neighbourhoods where all citizens are within a short walk or cycle to essential day-to-day needs. This form of development allows people to avoid traveling out of their neighbourhood to a handful of crowded big box stores for every trip. Also, with services and amenities a short walk away, neighbourhoods can become less car dependent and will be better positioned to adopt the low-carbon lifestyle required to tackle climate change. The concept of the 15-minute city reinforces the city’s Imagine Kelowna direction of working toward complete communities. This approach to community planning embraces the potential of urban living to reduce car dependency, improve resiliency and create dynamic local neighbourhoods with a high quality of life.

The pandemic outbreak is more about connectivity than density, highlighting the challenges associated with large scale regional destinations (Hamidi, Sabouri & Ewing, 2020)

This approach of 15-minute cities or complete communities can’t be implemented in all areas. Lower density urban areas and suburban neighbourhoods will be challenged to become



complete communities. Simply put, low-density car captive communities don't have the densities required to sustain local services and amenities in walking or cycling distance. As a result, these car dependent areas tend to reinforce the reliance on driving to larger employment or big box retail areas. By creating a network of complete communities, cities will be better positioned to realize the quality of life benefits associated with local services that are within a short walk or cycle.

Complete communities require a level of density to sustain local services and reduce reliance on large-format commercial uses. It is the same level of density that allows communities to prioritize more equitable forms of transportation such as walking and cycling. However, density alone is not enough. Cities will need to take direct, and concerted action to support significant behaviour shifts. For instance, developing connected networks of protected bike lanes and streets that are pleasant for walking are key measures needed to encourage more walking and cycling.

At the same time as density increases, a greater proportion of people will live in apartments and townhouses making neighbourhood parks even more important to ensure equitable access to public space for recreation and gathering. These public spaces are also valuable assets during the pandemic as more Canadians look to parks as safe spaces for physically distanced gatherings with friends and family. Overall, the call for complete

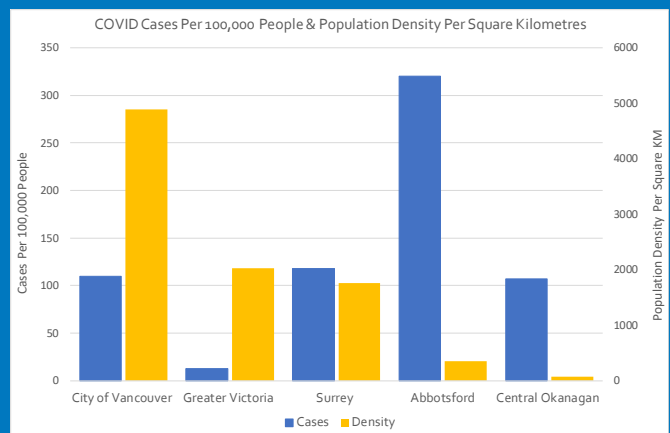
communities and the 15-minute city magnifies the importance of public space and local services to support more equitable and resilient communities in the future.



DENSITY AND THE LINK TO COVID RATES

Although high-density urban areas would seem to be at a greater risk for COVID-19 due to a perceived inability of residents to effectively physically distance, emerging research indicates there is limited association between population density and COVID-19 rates.^{vii} In fact, the City of Vancouver, one of the most densely populated areas of the province, has lower per capita rates of COVID-19 than less densely populated areas of the lower mainland such as Surrey and Abbotsford. The adjacent graph illustrates that population density is a poor predictor based on five different local health areas in British Columbia.

Emerging research indicates the spread of COVID-19 is impacted by many different factors. The most powerful tool for combating the spread of the virus remains physical distancing, and more broadly, adherence to public health guidelines. Other reports indicate the greatest risk factors for the virus were areas with high concentrations of low-income households and large household sizes.^{xxi} Further, the proportion of a population employed in jobs where



Source: BC Centre for Disease Control and BC Online Health Atlas

it is difficult to comply with physical distancing guidelines is also known to increase risk for community outbreaks of COVID-19. Other factors such as international tourism are important in global pandemics such as COVID-19. Lastly, researchers have noted that larger metropolitan areas with high levels of regional connectivity could be at a higher risk for spreading the virus based on the interactions and movement of people between different cities in a region.^{xxii}

HOW WE BUILD HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

PRIORITIZE A GREENER, HEALTHIER AND MORE EQUITABLE ECONOMY.

The pandemic has created significant health impacts for the broader population, but emerging reports are demonstrating that “vulnerable populations” are likely to be disproportionately impacted.^{viii} Recent statistics have shown that racialized populations have experienced more negative impacts in the form of wage losses and unemployment and are experiencing more negative health outcomes if they contract COVID-19.^{ix} These trends align with previous research on the social determinants of health that have shown that various social and economic factors have a strong correlation to individual and population health. For example, in Canada there is a strong relationship between health and income, with lower levels of socioeconomic status, racialized populations, and people living with disabilities generally at a higher risk for negative health outcomes.^x

Within many cities, service delivery is traditionally designed to provide equal access on a per capita basis. For example, every 10,000 residents should have access to 2.1 hectares of parks, ignoring the fact that access to parks may be far more important in terms of quality of life for certain populations (e.g. communities without backyards). Another example is how cities often design transit systems to provide similar levels of service

throughout the city without acknowledging that areas with a greater concentration of residents living in poverty would likely be more transit dependent. In low-income communities’ public transit plays a significant role in providing access to community services, employment, education and general day-to-day quality of life. An equity framework acknowledges that vulnerable populations such as people living in poverty, seniors, and people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by how cities plan, prioritize and deliver services and infrastructure. As cities structure their long-term plans for a recovery it is critical policies and investments acknowledge and infuse equity instead of equality moving forward.

ROLE OF PUBLIC SPACE

Cities are recognizing how access to public space (e.g. roadways, sidewalks and parks) can play a key role in both the immediate response to the pandemic and support a greener and healthier recovery. To meet the immediate needs of the community, cities are re-purposing public property to provide safe spaces for citizens to gather. Cities are limiting vehicles in larger parks to make it easier for citizens to be active via walking or cycling while maintaining physical distancing rules and also promoting improved air quality. Kelowna, Victoria and Vancouver all implemented temporary measures such as road closures and one-way paths to make large Citywide parks such as Knox Mountain, Beacon Hill Park and Stanley Park safer for recreation



during the pandemic. Public spaces are also important in providing safe spaces for gathering and community cohesion, especially in communities with more people living in apartments without private yards.

Other measures include piloting expanded sidewalks and open-street measures to provide new or expanded public spaces that also make it easier for people to comply with physical distancing guidelines to slow the spread of COVID-19. These measures also make it easy for people to walk and cycle, supporting regular daily physical activity in a safe, physically distanced environment. Cities such as Montreal have temporarily re-allocated vehicle lanes and parking spaces to create capacity for a new network of protected bike routes, recognizing cycling is a practical way for the city to move people, especially given the challenges of reduced service of buses and subway during the pandemic. By reallocating roadway space from cars to walking and cycling there is an opportunity to create safer streets and encourage long-term behaviour change that will reduce GHG emissions and create momentum toward a healthier low-carbon city. Many of these initiatives of re-purposing space also provide a more equitable configuration of public space, creating places that can be accessed by all in the community regardless of vehicle ownership. As cities reconfigure how streets are used, urban areas can become healthier places that can be used by people of all abilities and also areas with lower levels of localized air pollution due to reduced traffic. Although many of these public space initiatives are currently pilot projects to serve the

immediate needs during the pandemic, there is an opportunity to review how projects could become permanent to support a healthy, equitable and low carbon recovery in the longer term.

EQUITY & TRANSPORTATION POVERTY

Many people have transport disadvantages, but if they have economic means they can overcome these barriers and it does not affect their ability to get to work or school, to grocery shop or go about their daily lives. However, where someone is economically disadvantaged and faced with a transport disadvantage they are then characterized as being in transport poverty. Approximately one million Canadians live in transport poverty, highlighting the connection between transportation and equity. The City of Kelowna is currently working with UBC Community Planning students and Interior Health to conduct an equity analysis for Kelowna.^{xi}



HOW WE PROSPER

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES AND PROMOTE PHYSICAL DISTANCING GUIDELINES.

Although cities are largely focused on the immediate challenges of making their communities safer during the pandemic, planning efforts are also underway for long-term economic recovery. International organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are calling for a new approach around what constitutes a “successful” economic recovery.^{xii} A recent OECD report coined the term “people-centred recovery”, encouraging cities to prioritize policies and investments that improve human health, the livability of cities and promote climate action through GHG reductions.^{xiii}

The pandemic has prompted an inflection point for cities. The planning for the recovery provides cities with the choice of a recovery that ushers in a green economy by investing in areas such as energy efficient retrofits, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and sustainable transportation, or a recovery that doubles down on the status quo (e.g. highways, parkades,

and auto-oriented development). As Canadian cities look ahead to securing their share of \$3.3 billion in federal stimulus funding, prioritizing low carbon investments that also make our cities more equitable and inclusive could promote a recovery that enhances well-being and quality of life in the long-term. By taking this approach, every dollar invested in the recovery can be leveraged to advance a range of different city-building priorities, while positioning cities to make the shift to an economy of the future that is greener and more resilient.

In order to be resilient in the face of future crisis, recent research suggests recovery efforts should prioritize a greener, healthier and more equitable economy. Recent reports identify the importance of prioritizing investments in infrastructure that will reduce GHG emissions and create enduring behaviour change.^{xiv} For example, many cities are looking at deep energy retrofits of existing building stock that improve energy efficiency and reduce GHGs while creating employment in the green economy and lowering operating costs for occupants. Other examples include investments in protected bike lane projects as opposed to traditional roadway expansion projects to generate economic activity, while encouraging healthier, low-carbon transportation options. Instead of building new roads and locking in decades of new GHG emissions, the recovery response could create a greener, healthier and more equitable city.



A University of Massachusetts study, which evaluated job opportunities created by 58 infrastructure projects in 11 U.S. states found that cycling projects create a total of 11.4 local jobs for each \$1 million spent, while roadway projects generate just 7.8 jobs per \$1 million.^{xv}

Other opportunities include creating nature-based solutions such as investments in parks and green infrastructure to create jobs which will also enhance climate resiliency and provide much needed public space during the pandemic. Green infrastructure includes natural assets as well as designed and engineered elements that have been created to mimic natural functions.^{xvi} For example, green infrastructure includes parks that provide recreation spaces and act as stormwater detention to limit flooding during major rain events. Green spaces such as linear parks also create microclimates that reduce risks of extreme heat in the summer. The pandemic recovery presents an opportunity for cities to make investments that make our cities safer and more resilient to this pandemic and other events, while advancing climate action efforts.

DEEP ENERGY RETROFITS

Building energy retrofits present a major opportunity to create jobs, save energy, improve home comfort, and reduce GHG emissions. In Kelowna, there are roughly 20,000 homes built before 1980 that offer the best opportunity for deep energy retrofits which could translate into energy savings of 40-80 per cent. Deep energy retrofits are typically actions that improve the energy efficiency of existing buildings by up to 80 per cent. The City is currently working on a retrofit strategy to identify areas of the city that would be the best candidates for retrofit programs and partnerships.^{xvii}



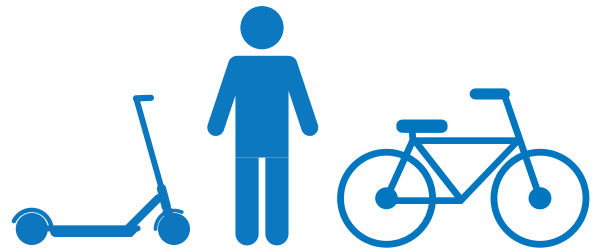
CHANGING HOW WE DO BUSINESS

The pandemic has challenged certain sectors of the economy more than others, specifically retail, tourism and the food and beverage sectors have all experienced major disruptions and job losses. Across Canada we have seen record levels of unemployment, business closures and decreased consumer spending.^{xviii} In order to support local economic activity, cities need to think creatively about how to allow businesses to remain operational in a way that promotes compliance with physical distancing public health guidelines to keep citizens safe. Many cities are shifting how space is allocated on main streets from moving cars and parking to various uses for people (e.g. patios, expanded sidewalks, and temporary road closures). This approach provides more space for people to patronize businesses in safer outdoor patio areas, supporting local business and rebalancing the role of streets to serve as public spaces. Cities are demonstrating that city-building responses to the pandemic allow for win-win opportunities to support local businesses and add public space (e.g. open streets) to create more livable urban environments.

Another trend emerging through the pandemic relates to the long-term role of the bricks and mortar office. Recently, several major companies such as Shopify and REI signaled a permanent shift away from large corporate headquarters as they embrace greater levels of remote working and online collaboration tools to maintain productivity and reduce in person contact during the pandemic.^{xix} Other local organizations such as UBCO and FortisBC have pivoted to a hybrid of remote and in-person working during the pandemic to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This shift to remote working could also allow employers to expand their geographic reach for new hires, improving their ability to attract the best candidate with less concern for place of residence.

At the same time, the shift to remote working allows cities to significantly decrease peak-hour traffic flows, reducing GHG emissions associated with transportation and curbing demand for roadway expansion. For example, daily global emissions were down by 17 per cent on average as a result of behaviour changes and reduced emissions associated with the transportation sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.^{xix}

BERNARD PEOPLE TRAFFIC UP 85%



FROM LAST YEAR

2020 Data retrieved from blocks that were closed to vehicles for Bernad Ave Pilot using City of Kelowna Eco-Counters.

Through the pandemic Canadians have embraced teleworking with 22% of Canadians working from home up substantially from only 4% in 2016 Census. The remote working response also addresses the acute need to reduce the concentration of people within office environments allowing for improved physical distancing and slowing the spread of COVID-19. Overall, by changing the way we do business we can create opportunities to put our cities on a path to lower GHGs and create a safer and more resilient community during the pandemic.

THE REMOTE WORKING OPPORTUNITY

To reduce the spread of COVID-19 many businesses and individuals made the shift to remote working in 2020. Kelowna saw a big change in traffic patterns as a result of the shift to remote working and online learning. In Kelowna there was a 20-40 per cent drop in traffic on key arterials from March to June 2020, demonstrating potential for teleworking and other demand management strategies to defer roadway expansion and reduce GHGs. Staff estimates indicate that for every citizen who works from home there is a reduction of roughly 1.5 tonnes of GHG annually and a societal benefit of \$25 per person each day based on time saved, fuel savings, and emissions reductions.

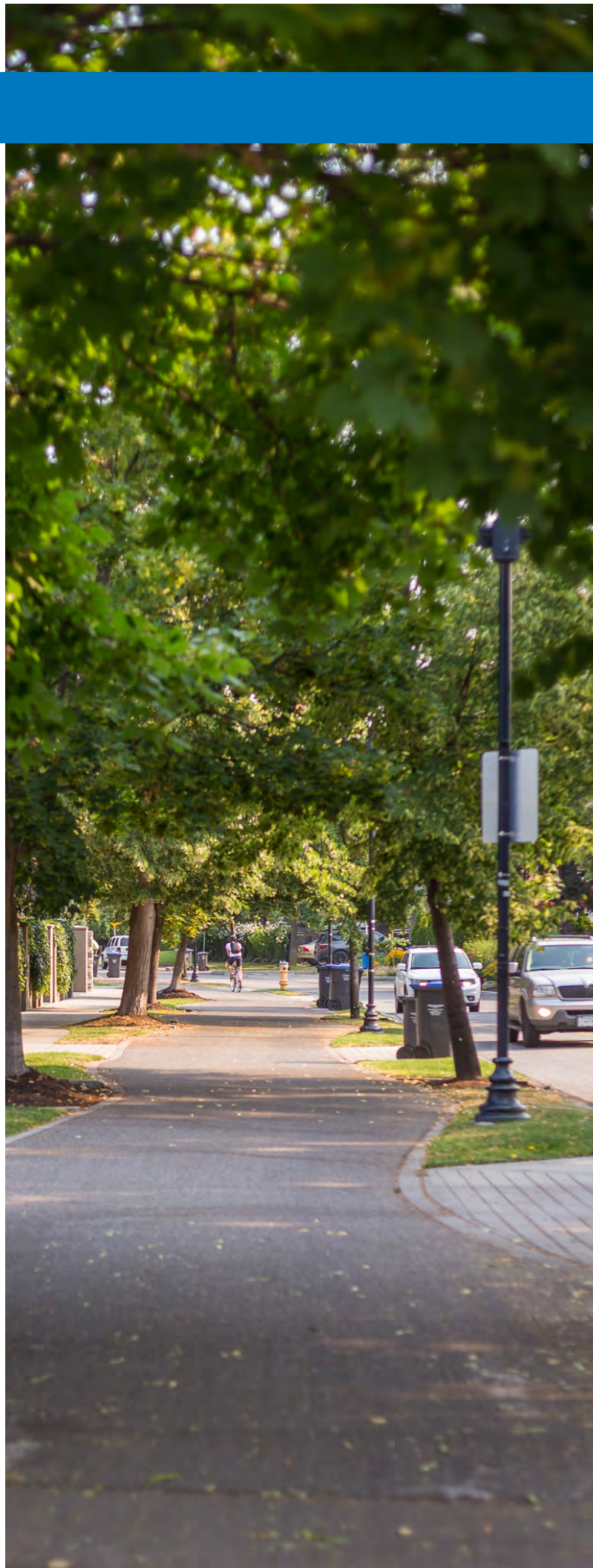
CONCLUSION

THE IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON CITIES IS A DEVELOPING STORY, HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR CITIES TO KEEP ADAPTING.

The question of how the pandemic will impact our cities remains a developing story, highlighting the need for cities to remain nimble and adapt amid such unprecedented events. As Kelowna works closely with public health to navigate the acute phase of the pandemic, there is an opportunity for city-building efforts to promote a people-centred recovery and advance Imagine Kelowna's objectives.

In the short-term and long-term, Kelowna can advance Imagine Kelowna goals related to creating great public space, embracing diverse transportation options and building a more equitable community, while reinforcing public health and climate action objectives. As Kelowna starts to look ahead to the recovery we have the choice of being bold or returning to a business as usual approach.

The City of Kelowna could operationalize many of the ideas and approaches described in this report as new master plans are developed, capital planning decisions are made, and new funding partnerships are formed. As investments are made and projects are prioritized there is an opportunity to create a city that is greener, more inclusive and healthier than the one that existed prior to the pandemic.



Notes

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