

Recommendations for the Amendment of Amenity Space and Parking Requirements in the General Commercial (C1) Zone

Staff Report TOK202534

Meeting Date: April 14, 2025
Department: Planning and Development
Strategic Priority: Housing and Planning

FOR RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Council Advisory Committee: recommends that Council give First Reading to amendments to the Land Use Bylaw for in the General Commercial (C1) zone to:

1. Allow the Development Officer the discretion to waive amenity requirements of a project if it is within a 400 m route to a public open space, and
2. Remove parking requirements for residential units.

SUMMARY

Planning Staff have provided an additional review of amenity and parking requirements to provide options and recommendations to support residential development in the General Commercial (C1) zone. Language in the Municipal Planning Strategy speaks to providing flexibility in the regulation of amenity space and parking in the traditional downtown core commercial area, however the Land Use Bylaw applies a universal standard for amenity space but does offer a reduction of parking requirements. A review of comparable municipal units indicates that there are a range of options available; staff recommends waiving amenity requirements at the discretion of the Development Officer if a project is within a 400 m route to a public open space and removing parking requirements for residential units in the General Commercial (C1) zone.

BACKGROUND

A Request for Decision was brought forward in the spring of 2023 by then Councillor Zebian regarding amenity space requirements in the General Commercial (C1) Zone. His specific recommendation was that "...we amend this bylaw so that it does not apply to any pre-existing buildings in the Downtown Core. This will allow any potential Developers to convert some of the upper levels of these older buildings into more residential units."

A staff report was provided to the Council Advisory Committee in the fall of 2023 which reviewed a selection of other municipal units and concluded that "providing amenity space is a human-centric approach to housing and allows our housing to align with the social determinants of health by providing for social and environmental connection."

Section 5.7 on amenity space in the Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) provides some directions in the preamble:

However, in certain areas of Town it may not be economically viable to require that new multiple unit residential developments set aside large areas of land for recreation purposes. This is particularly true in the downtown area where lot sizes are small and land values are quite high. Given that the Town is actively seeking to attract multiple unit residential development to the downtown area, it is important that the amenity space provisions allow for some flexibility. Specifically, the Land Use By-law should allow the option of providing such space in the form of internal recreation facilities, such as exercise rooms, pools or balconies rather than outdoor amenity space at grade.

The recommendation from staff was to make no changes to the requirements in the Land Use Bylaw. The Council Advisory Committee voted against staff's recommendation but did not provide further direction at that time. Staff is now providing options and recommendations to facilitate further discussion on these issues.

Amenity Spaces in Historic Downtowns

Context: Older downtowns often have smaller lots, heritage buildings, and a fine-grain urban fabric, which can make standard amenity requirements challenging to provide.

Considerations:

- **Flexibility** is key. Rigid amenity space standards (e.g., minimum square footage per unit) may not be practical or necessary.
- **Public realm investments** (like parks, plazas, and parklets) can substitute for on-site private amenities in many cases.
- **Shared amenities** within buildings (like rooftop patios, community rooms, or fitness spaces) can work better than large private outdoor areas.
- **Cultural and social amenities** like public art, heritage features, and accessible seating can serve a dual purpose of amenity + placemaking.

Best Practice: Encourage amenity space through **performance-based guidelines** rather than hard numerical minimums. Prioritize **quality over quantity**.

Parking Requirements in Historic Downtowns

Context: These areas were developed before the car became dominant, so traditional parking ratios (e.g. 1–1.5 spaces per unit) are often out of step. Kentville has considered the nature of the downtown built-form by limiting parking requirements to 0.5 spaces/unit. There is a movement to reform parking standards by removing the requirement entirely for a growing number of communities in North America.

Challenges:

- Land is limited and expensive; parking takes up valuable space.
- Overparking can undermine walkability and affordability.
- Older buildings may not have room for structured parking.

Policy Shifts:

- **Eliminate or reduce minimums**, especially near transit, services, or main streets.
- **Incentivize car-sharing, walking, and cycling infrastructure** measures instead.
- Allow **cash-in-lieu of parking** contributions to fund public infrastructure.

Best Practice: Adopt a **context-sensitive approach**: lower or zero parking minimums, particularly for smaller units or affordable housing, and prioritize **mobility over storage**.

Summary

For historic downtowns, the goal is to support **compact, people-friendly environments** where you don't need to drive everywhere or sacrifice livability for density. That means:

- **Amenity space** policies that support vibrant, shared experiences.
- **Parking policies** that acknowledge and support non-car-oriented lifestyles.

DISCUSSION

While the language in MPS Section 4.7 suggests flexibility, Section 4.1.3 of the Land Use Bylaw applies the same standard for all areas of town. The current amenity compromise for the General Commercial (C1) zone was to focus on amenity space within structures, but such requirements may still affect the affordability of units and the viability of projects. The investments the Town has made in its downtown area can provide accessible amenity alternatives for prospective developers.

In the examples provided by the comparative towns, the threshold for number of units before amenity space varied between 3 and 8 (Amherst and Yarmouth). The amount of amenity space also varied somewhat between towns based on a per square foot basis. Antigonish offered the most novel approach of the bunch by allowing on-site amenity space requirements to be waived where nearby amenity space was available.

Options:

Amenity Space:

1. Status Quo Requirements
2. Waive amenity requirements at the discretion of the Development Officer if a project is within a 400 m route to a public open space.
3. No amenity requirements for developments consisting of up to 8 units (vs. 3 as per current requirements)
4. Allow cash-in-lieu for amenity space

In terms of parking, the current Land Use Bylaw requirements demonstrate a higher level of compromise by asking for 50-60% fewer parking spaces than other residential development. Section 4.2.9 also provides cash-in-lieu provisions for parking in the C1 zone. As with amenity space, parking requirements impose an additional financial burden on potential developers and in some cases are entirely infeasible when structures take up the entire lot area. While several of the comparative towns required a lesser amount of parking requirement (.25/bedroom is currently the lowest ask), Kentville may wish to consider the traditional compact urban form in its downtown and look to eliminate the requirement entirely.

In the past, a higher priority was placed on ensuring adequate on-site parking and amenity space above unit availability and affordability. With the current housing climate and emphasis on creating a variety of housing options, it may be worth reconsidering reducing or eliminating these requirements.

Options:

Parking:

1. Status Quo Requirements
 2. No parking requirements for developments consisting of up to 8 units
 3. Reducing residential parking requirements in the C1 zone
 4. Removing residential parking requirements in the C1 zone.
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Respectfully submitted,

Darren Shupe, Director of Planning and Development
Town of Kentville

Attachments:

1. Maps of C1 Zone.
2. Proposed Amendments
3. Comparison of Parking and Amenity Requirements in Similar Municipalities.

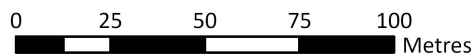
Attachment 1: Maps of C1 Zone

General Commercial (C1) Zone

Downtown Core, Kentville

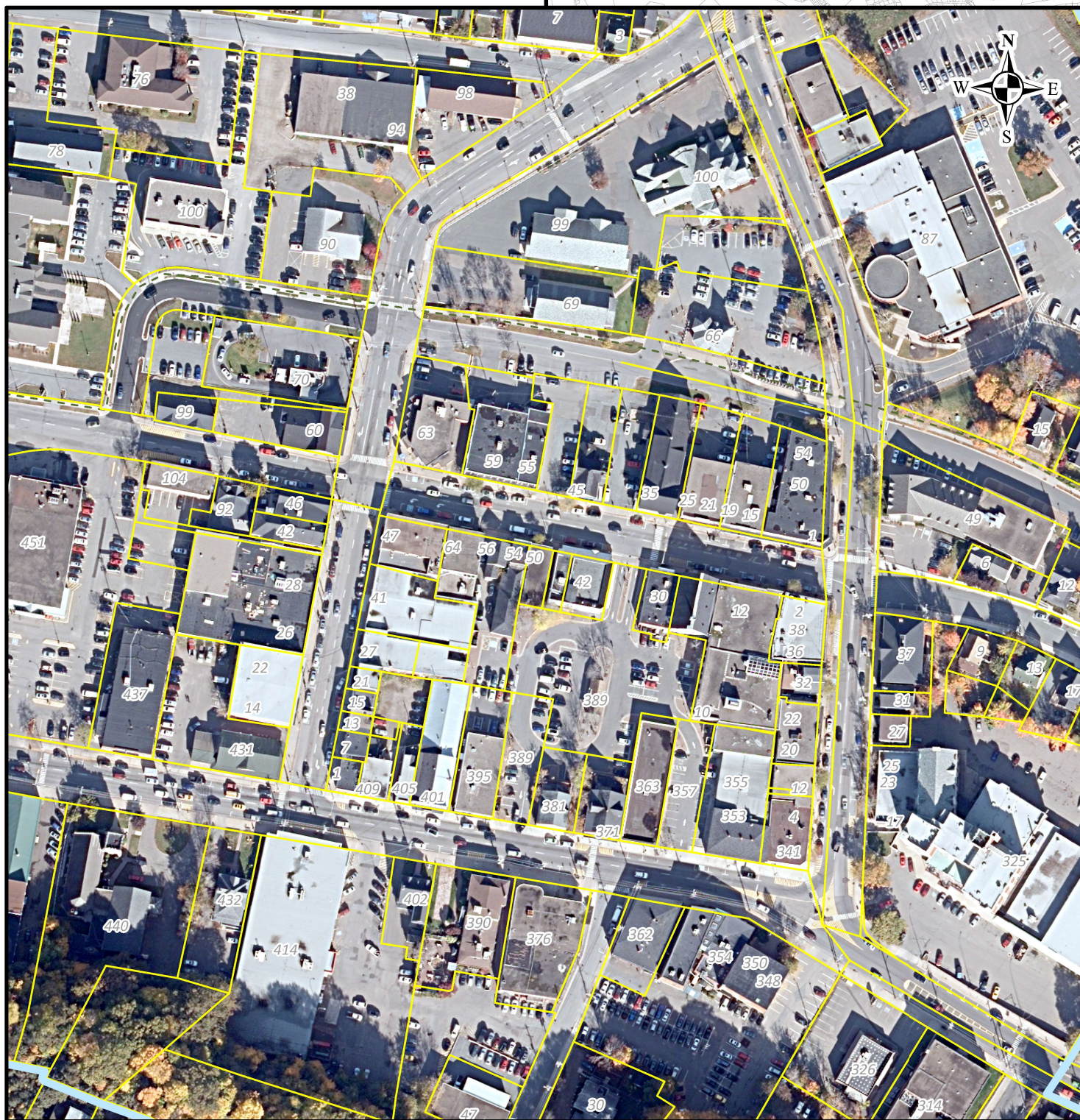
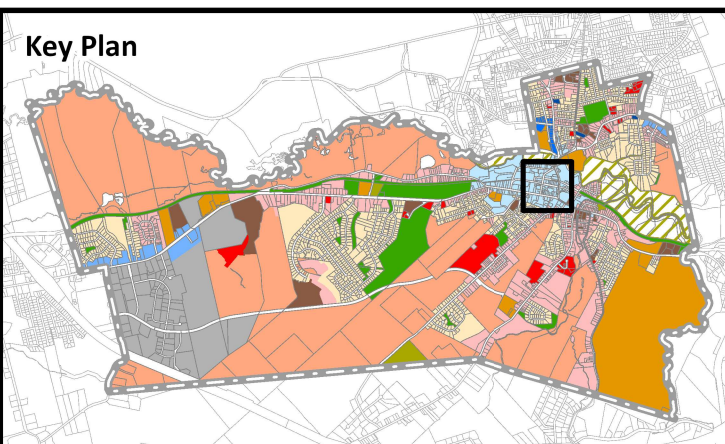
 Property Lines

Scale: 1:2,000

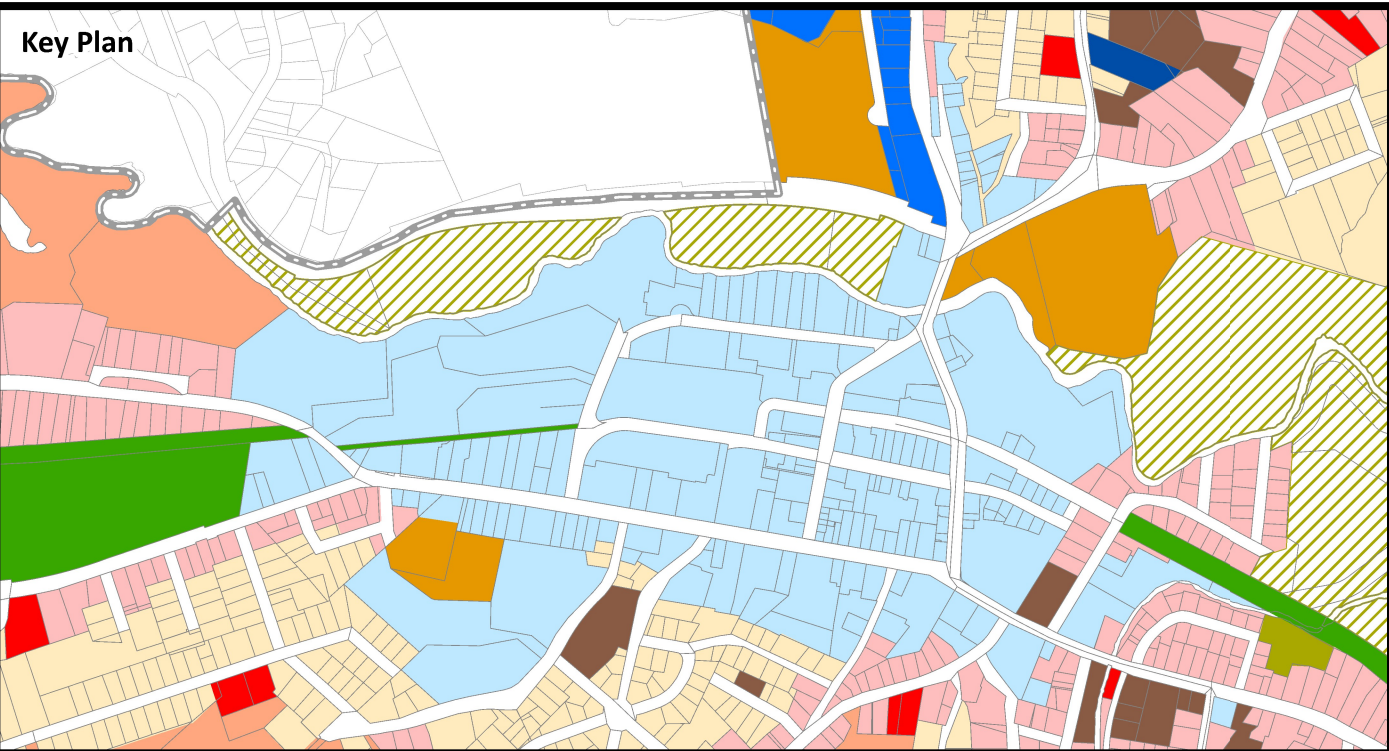


This map is a graphical representation of property boundaries which approximate the size, configuration and location of parcels. Any interpretation of this map must be confirmed with the Municipality in which the property is situated. To receive further clarification about the use of this Planning Document inquiries may be made to the Town of Kentville's Planning and Development Department.


Property Source: Nova Scotia Property Records Database (NSPRD), Compliments of the Nova Scotia Geomatics Centre (NSGC), Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, 160 Willow Street, Amherst, Nova Scotia, Canada




Key Plan



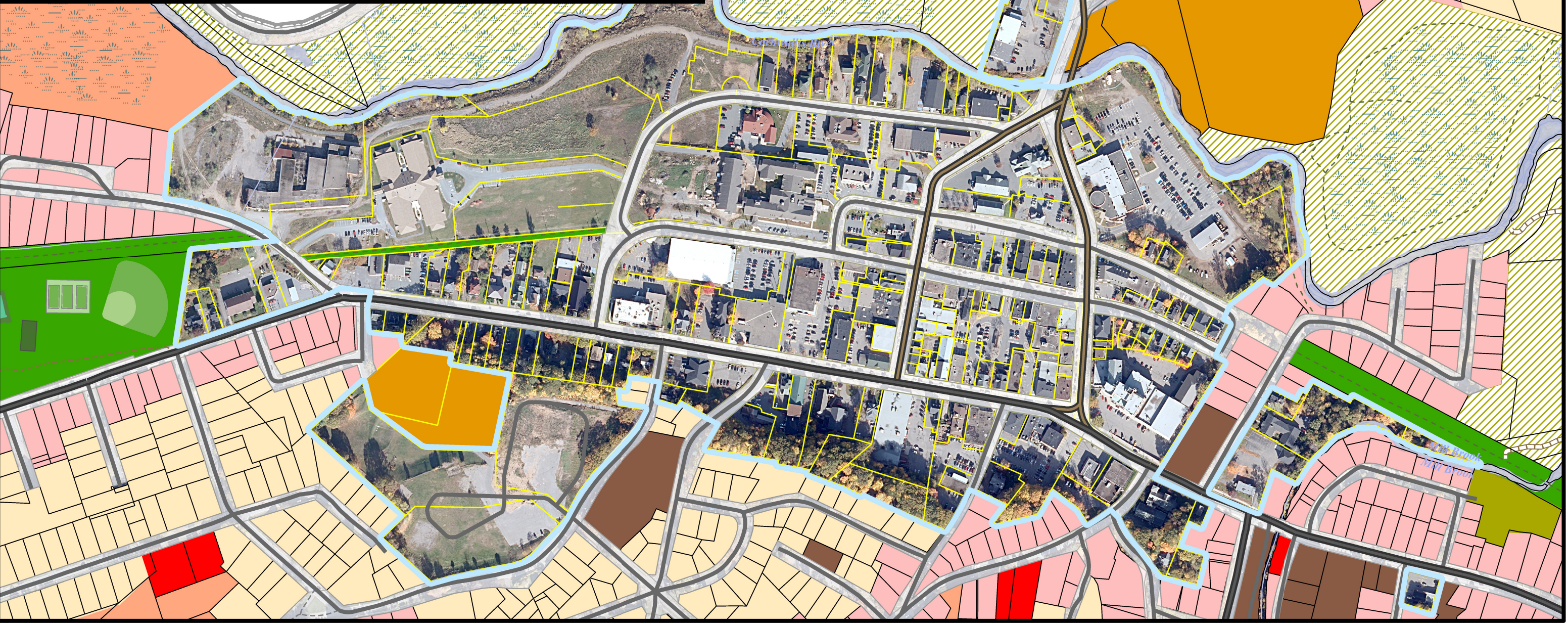
General Commercial (C1) Zone Downtown Core, Kentville

 General Commercial (C1) Zone Boundary

 Property Lines

0 25 50 75 100

Metres



Attachment 2: Proposed Amendments – Land Use Bylaw

4.1.3 Amenity Space (proposed amendments in red)

- a) **With the exception on the General Commercial (C1) Zone**, all new Multi-Unit Developments containing four or more dwelling units shall provide On-Site Indoor or Outdoor Amenity Space in accordance with the following requirements: Bachelor and One Bedroom 200 ft² per unit 18.58 m² per unit Two bedroom Three or more bedrooms 225 ft² per unit 20.90 m² per unit 255 ft² per unit 23.69 m² per unit
- b) Amenity space may include decks, balconies, gardens, landscaped open space, gyms, pools and other
- c) Useable outdoor recreation amenity space shall be located in the side or rear yards and the recreation space must be usable space, meaning it shall be cleared, levelled, and grassed or otherwise landscaped to create an attractive outdoor recreation space for the amenity of the residents on the lot.
- d) Amenity space shall be waived for all residential conversions.
- e) **In the General Commercial (C1) Zone, amenity requirements at the discretion of the Development Officer may be waived if a project is within a 400 m route to a public open space.**

6.2.4 Special Provisions for Residential Uses

- a) An existing building, or parcel of land, at the time of the adoption of this Bylaw, in the General Commercial (C1) Zone may be converted to permit Multi-Unit Residential and may, except for properties having frontage on portions of Main Street, Aberdeen Ave, Cornwallis Street, Webster Court, Webster Street, River Street, Station Lane and Justice Way and more specifically shown on Appendix “B”, include ground floor Residential Dwelling Units.
- b) **The Development Officer may waive amenity space requirements if a project is within a 400 m route to a public open space.**

4.2 Parking and Loading

4.2.1 General Requirements

- a) For every building or structure to be erected or enlarged, or for which application for a development permit involving a change of use is made, off-street parking having unobstructed access to a public street shall be provided and maintained in accordance with Table 4.2;
- b) ~~Notwithstanding Section 4.2.1(a) minimum parking requirements shall be waived in the General Commercial (C1) Zone for all new development, excluding any residential component. In this instance, only the minimum off-street vehicular parking spaces for the residential component of the development shall be required;~~
- b All off-street parking shall be provided on the same lot as the use of building for which it is required;

- c) Notwithstanding Section 4.2.1(b), in any Commercial/Industrial zone, off-street parking for Commercial purposes may be located on a different lot than the use or building in question provided that the parking area is not located more than 300 ft (91.44 m) away from the subject building, and the land owner provides written notice of a shared parking arrangement to the Development Officer; and
- d) Minimum off-street parking requirements shall not apply to any use which was established before the effective date of this By-law.

4.2.8 Parking Requirements in Commercial General (C1) Zone Notwithstanding the provisions of Part 4.2.2, Table 4.2, parking in the Commercial General (C1) Zone shall be provided according to the following schedule:

Table 4.5 Commercial General (C1) Zone Parking Requirements

Residential Uses	0.5 spaces per unit
All C1 Uses	1 space per 400 ft ² (37.16 m ²) of floor area

Attachment 3: Comparative Municipal Units

	Parking	Amenity
Amherst	1-3 units at 1 parking space/unit; >3 at 1.25/unit	7.1.4 Amenity Space Requirements In any zone, a development permit for a building containing 3 or more units shall provide 20 m2 per unit of amenity space and is subject to the following requirements: (a) Amenity space may include a combination of balconies, indoor recreation rooms, saunas, sun decks, patios, tennis courts, swimming pools as well as any landscaped open area with a finished grade of less than 8%. (b) Where a dwelling unit is provided with a balcony at least 6 m2 in floor area, the 20 m2 amenity space requirement shall be waived. (c) Amenity Space shall not include any parking areas, hallways, foyers, utility rooms, or laundry areas.
Antigonish	1 parking space/unit, plus 0.25 spaces/bedroom over one in the unit, plus 0.25 visitor parking spaces per unit	8.3.1 o) Amenity area requirements for Multi-Unit Dwellings may be reduced or waived at the discretion of the Development Officer if a project is within an accessible 400 m route to a public open space.
Bridgewater	0.5 vehicle spaces per dwelling / rental unit; 0.5 bicycle space per dwelling / rental unit; Cash-in-Lieu of Parking option	4.1.7 All new multi-unit residential developments containing five or more dwelling units shall provide on-site amenity space in accordance with the following requirements: between 15-30 m2/bedroom
Truro	Multiple Unit Dwelling (three units or more); Converted Dwelling (three units or more) - bachelor 0.25 spaces/bedroom; one or more bedrooms 0.25 spaces/unit + 0.25 spaces/bedroom	A development that includes three or more dwelling units shall be required to provide amenity space in accordance with the following requirements...
Yarmouth	For every building or structure to be erected, occupied or enlarged, or where there is a change in use to a building or structure in any residential use, one (1) on-site parking space shall be provided	No amenity requirements for developments consisting of up to 8 units; Developments consisting of more than eight (8) units per lot shall only be considered through the Development Agreement process.
Kentville	4.2.8 Commercial General (C1) Zone Parking Requirements- Residential Uses 0.5 spaces per unit;	4.1.3 a) All new Multi-Unit Developments containing four or more dwelling units shall provide On-Site Indoor or Outdoor Amenity Space in accordance with the following requirements...