



# Planning Analysis

May 6, 2022



**PLAN  
AMHERST**

This report was prepared by  
UPLAND Planning and Design for  
the Town of Amherst.

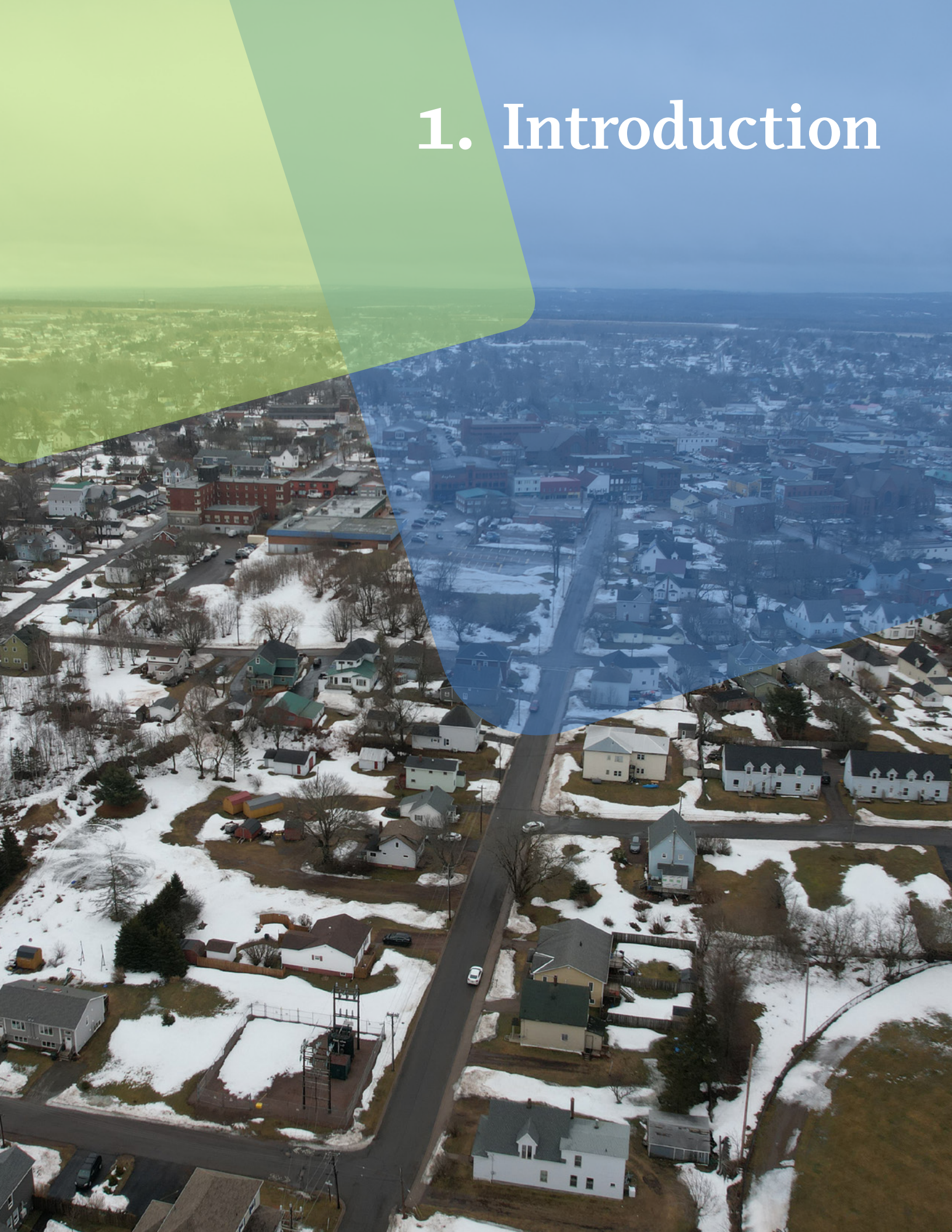
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# 1. Introduction



## 1.1 About this Report

In November 2021, the Town of Amherst initiated a process to comprehensively review and update its Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB). These planning documents play a significant role in guiding and managing growth and development in Amherst, and they establish policy and regulations about how, where, and under what circumstances growth and development can occur.

To create new planning documents, a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental characteristics of the town and community must first be established. This report provides information on those characteristics through a series of information sheets. While the report is long in terms of page numbers, the amount of written content has been kept to a minimum.

The data used in this report comes from sources including the Town of Amherst, Province of Nova Scotia, and Government of Canada. At the time of writing this report, only partial Statistics Canada data for the 2021 Census has been released (total population and demographic

profile), meaning the bulk of analysis has been completed using the 2016 Statistics Canada Census—data that is now out of date. Shifts in the real estate market and settlement patterns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have had significant influences on the housing market and workforce across Nova Scotia, and this trend is expected to be no different in Amherst. Additionally, some of the changes that have occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as a greater proportion of out-of-town residents working from home instead of coming into town for work, are difficult to quantify.

Where gaps in data exist, like those identified above, the project team will attempt to fill the gaps with anecdotal information collected from residents, community members, and stakeholders through community consultations.

## **1.2 About Plan Amherst**

The Town of Amherst has a long history of land use planning. The Town's existing MPS and LUB were adopted in 2005, and while they have served the Town and community well in the intervening years, new challenges and opportunities have emerged in the town, region, and province which are not adequately addressed in the current documents.

Like many towns and municipalities in Nova Scotia, issues of shifting housing preferences and needs, demographic and economic changes, and the risks associated with a changing environment and climate have heightened the need for appropriate land use planning in our communities. The primary objective of this project is to create a new set of planning documents that will establish a blueprint for growth and development in the Town of Amherst while helping to proactively address current and future challenges Amherst will face.



Plan Amherst Logo.

# **PLAN AMHERST**



### 1.3 Town Context

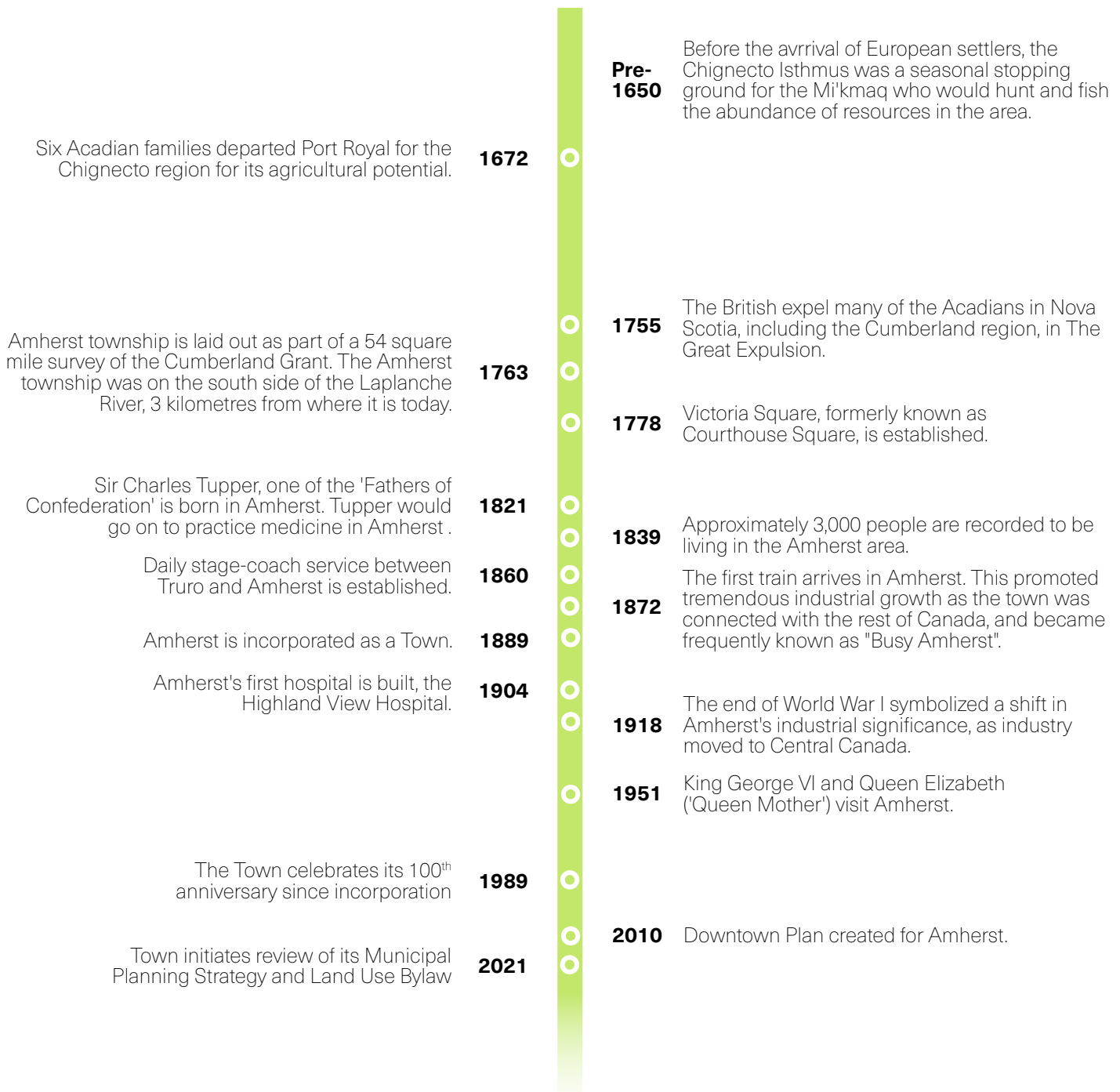
The Town of Amherst is located in northwest Nova Scotia, along the Cumberland Arm of the Bay of Fundy. The town encompasses an area of approximately 12 square kilometres.

Amherst is situated on the eastern side of the Trans Canada Highway (Highway 104) and is located just four kilometres east of the New Brunswick border. The town is approximately a one-hour drive from the Town of Truro and a two-hour drive from Halifax. In the other direction, Sackville and

Moncton are a 15-minute and 45-minute drive from Amherst, respectively.

The Municipality of the County of Cumberland surrounds the Town of Amherst, as well as the Town of Oxford, about 25 minutes away from Amherst.





## 1.4 Historical Timeline

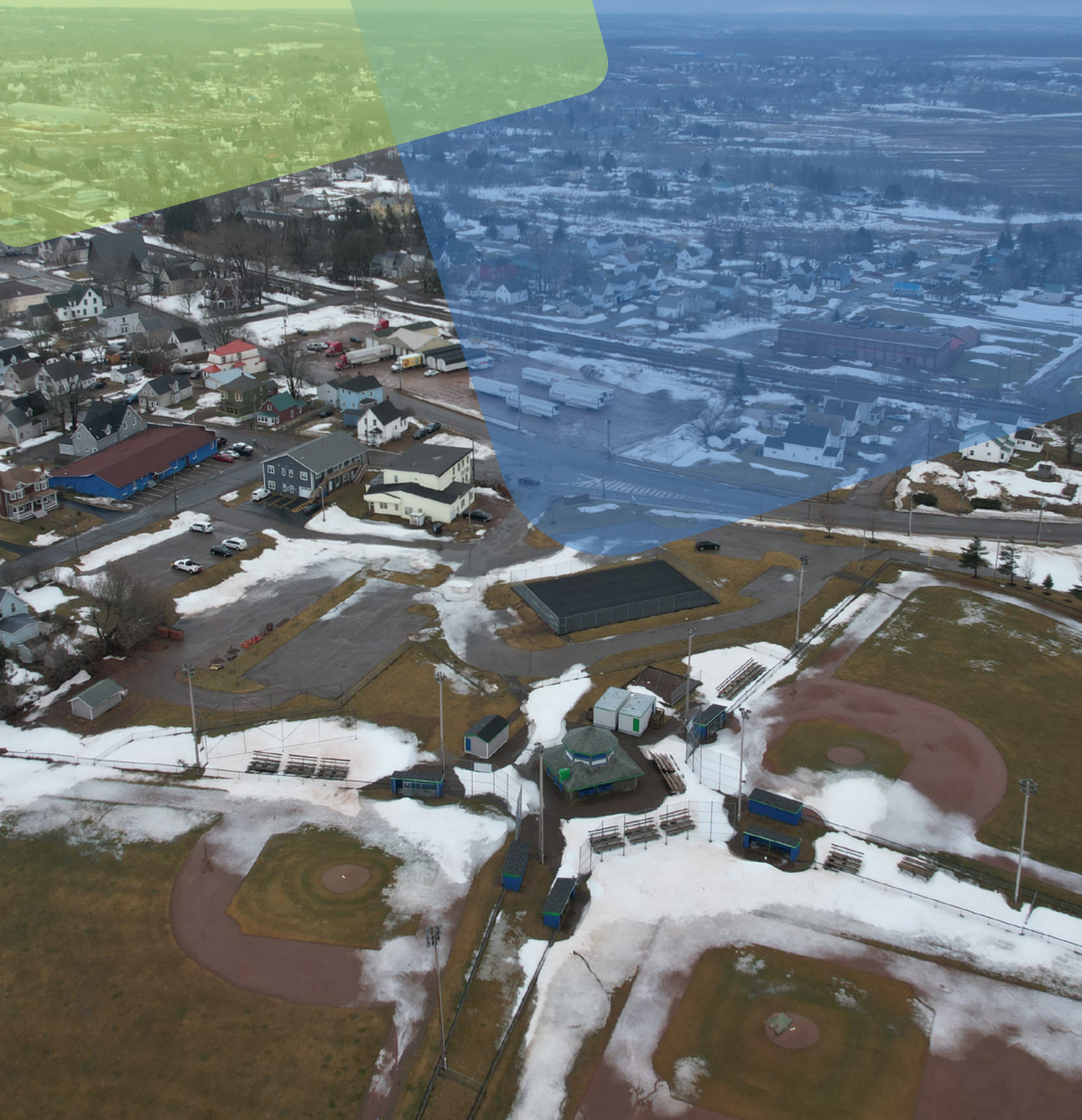
Before European settlers arrived, what is now Amherst was the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, who used the lands of the Chignecto Isthmus as a seasonal stopping ground. The land was rich in fish, fowl and other wildlife that allowed the Mi'kmaq to thrive.

Following the arrival of the Acadians, who used their knowledge in dike-building to create swaths of arable land, the population in and around Amherst began to grow. By the mid-1700s, Amherst was emerging as a significant centre in Nova Scotia, and thanks to the

extension of the railway service in 1872, the town experienced unprecedented industrial growth.

The legacy of Amherst's history is still evident today—the protected dike lands, the railway, the many red sandstone buildings, and the town's industrial core.

# 2. Demographics





## 2.1 Census Subdivisions

Statistics Canada divides the country into smaller areas to report census information. Nova Scotia is first divided into 18 "census divisions" which make up the 18 counties in the province. For example, the Cumberland County Census Division covers all of Cumberland County. The

Cumberland County Census Division is further broken down into five census subdivisions, including one for the Town of Amherst and another for the Town of Oxford. Following their amalgamation and dissolution, the former Towns of Parrsboro and Springhill

were into subsumed into Census Subdivisions A and B, respectively.

Census subdivisions are broken down to even finer levels of detail; however, data for many census products are not often available to the public at these levels.

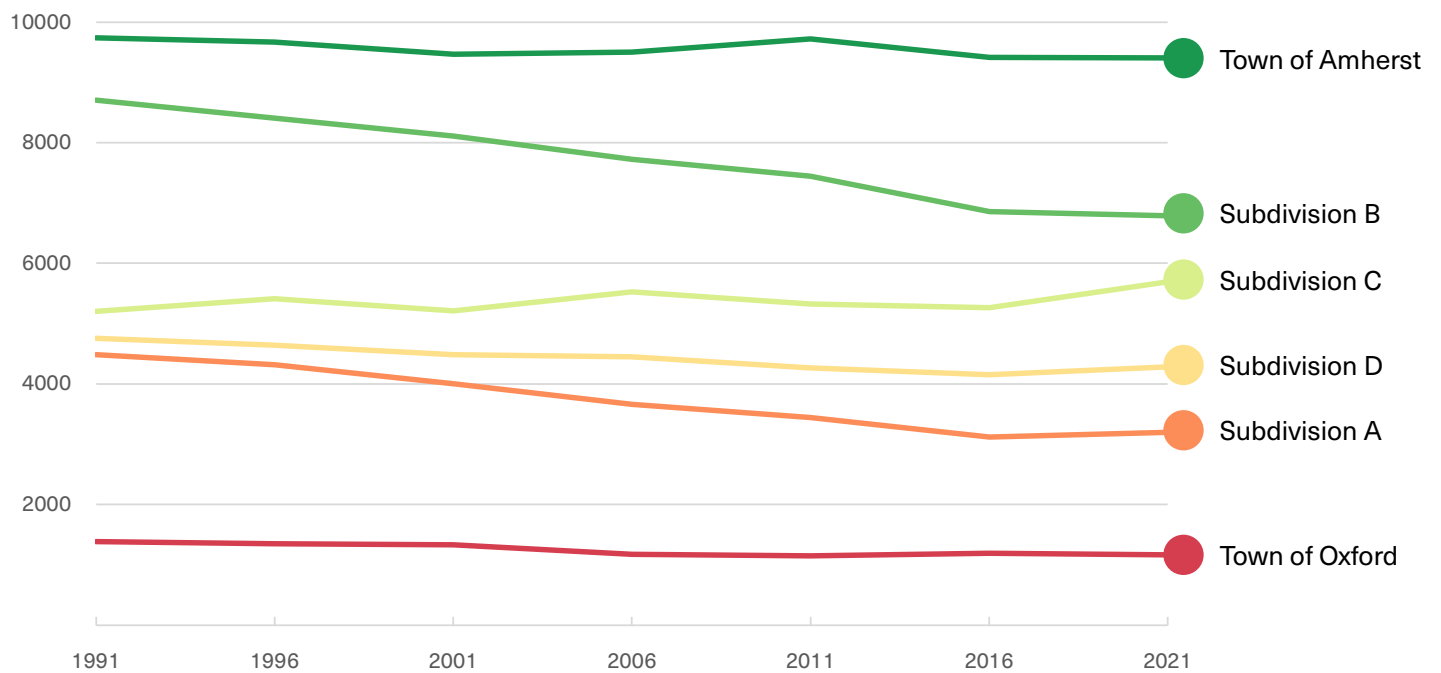


Figure 1. Population change in Cumberland County (1996-2021). (Source: Statistics Canada)

	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	1996-2021 Change	2016-2021 Change
<b>Nova Scotia (P)</b>	909,282	908,007	913,462	921,727	923,598	969,383	6.6%	5.0%
<b>Town of Amherst (CSD)</b>	9,669	9,470	9,505	9,717	9,413	9,404	-2.7%	-0.1%
<b>Town of Oxford (CSD)</b>	1,352	1,332	1,178	1,151	1,190	1,170	-13.5%	-1.7%
<b>Subdivision A (CSD)</b>	4,316	4,000	3,662	3,446	3,120	3,201	-25.8%	2.6%
<b>Subdivision B (CSD)</b>	8,408	8,106	7,722	7,448	6,859	6,786	-19.3%	-1.1%
<b>Subdivision C (CSD)</b>	5,412	5,216	5,525	5,325	5,268	5,694	5.2%	8.1%
<b>Subdivision D (CSD)</b>	4,647	4,481	4,454	4,266	4,155	4,283	-7.8%	3.1%
<b>Cumberland County (CD)</b>	33,804	32,605	32,046	31,353	30,005	30,538	-9.7%	1.8%

(Source: Statistics Canada)

## 2.2 Population Change

The Town of Amherst's population has remained relatively stable for the past 25 years, especially compared to other census subdivisions in Cumberland County. Since 1996, the town's population has decreased by 2.7%, and the town even experienced marginal population

growth between 2006 and 2011.

Of the census subdivisions in Cumberland County, Subdivision C had the largest percentage growth between 1996 and 2021—5.2%. Subdivision C completely surrounds the Town of Amherst and partially surrounds the Town

of Oxford, suggesting growth between 1996 and 2021 is related to the high level of services and amenities available in these areas of the county.

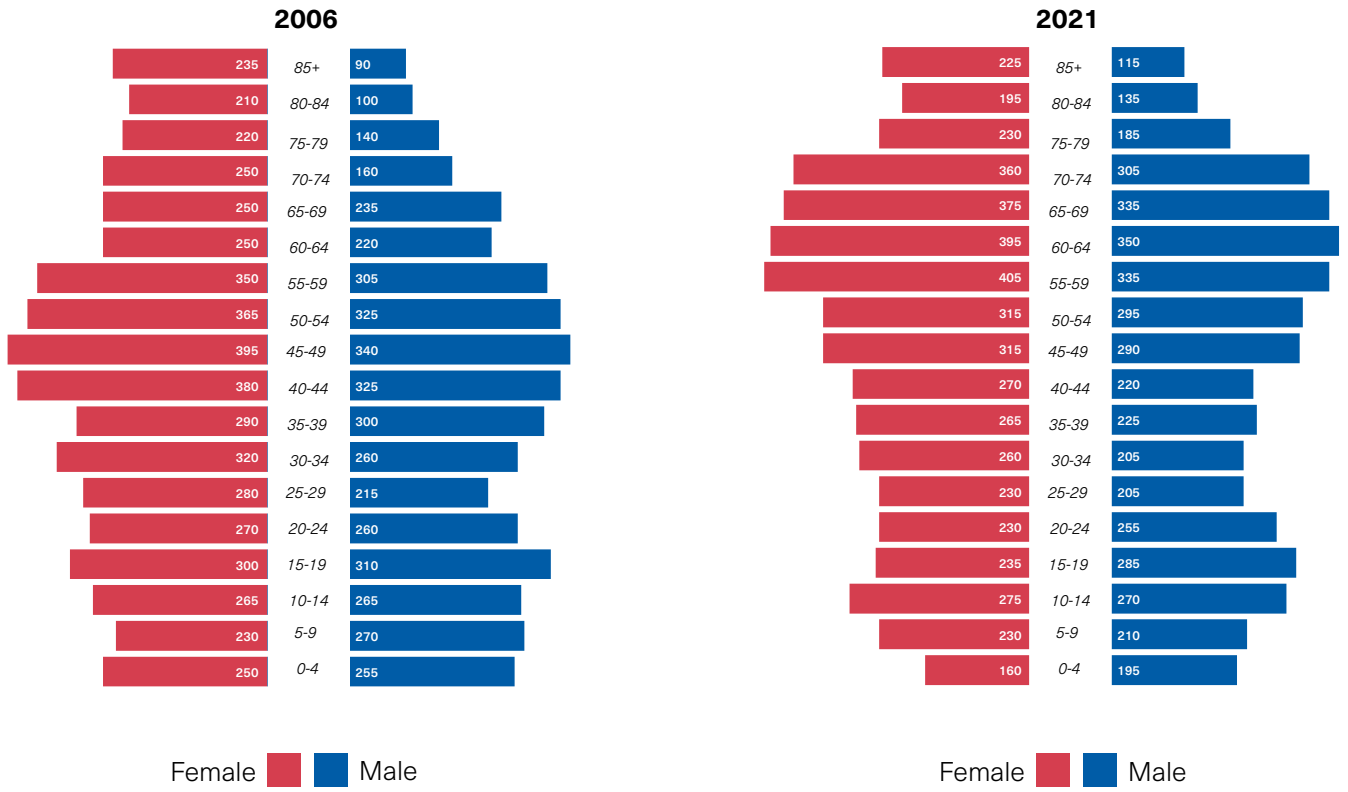


Figure 2. Population Pyramids for the Town of Amherst, 2006 and 2021. (Source: Statistics Canada)

### 2.3 Population Pyramids

Population pyramids show how a population is distributed by cohorts (5-year age groups), and they can be compared to subsequent or previous years to understand how a population is changing.

Under ideal circumstances, population pyramids are shaped like a pyramid—with a strong working age population to support the services and economy on which others depend, and a large base of youth and young people to renew the population. The population

pyramids above, however, show many cohorts over the age of 55 are growing, while many below the age of 55 are shrinking. These patterns would suggest the town is attracting older residents—potentially from the county—but youth and young families are not moving or staying in Amherst.

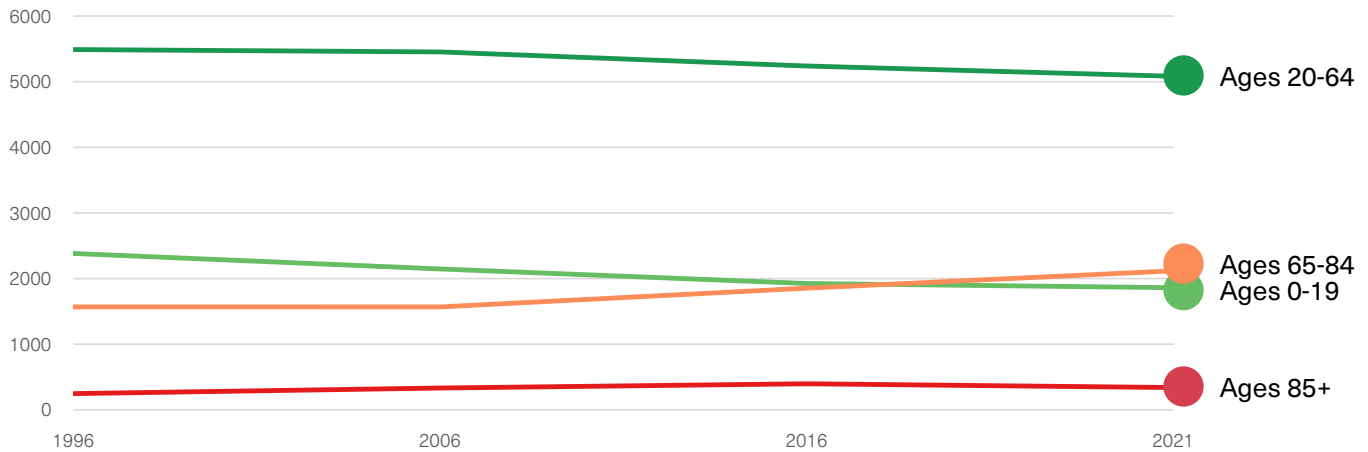


Figure 3. Population Change for Town of Amherst for different age groups, 1996 to 2021. (Source: Statistics Canada)

	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	1996-2021 Change
<b>Youth (0-19 years old)</b>	2,385	2,250	2,145	2,015	1,925	1,860	-22.0%
<b>Working Age (20-64 years old)</b>	5,485	5,405	5,455	5,655	5,235	5,080	-7.4%
<b>Senior (65-84 years old)</b>	1,565	1,550	1,570	1,630	1,850	2,115	35.1%
<b>Elderly (85+ years old)</b>	245	285	330	410	395	340	38.8%

(Source: Statistics Canada)

## 2.4 Population Change

The graphics above further show the growth of the town's senior (65-84 years old) and elderly (85+) population compared to the working age (ages 20-64) and youth (0-19 years old) populations. Between 1996 and 2021, the elderly population grew by 38.8%, and the senior

population grew by over 35%. The rate at which the senior population grew was larger than the rate of decline of the youth population (-22.0%). Because of this trend, 0-19 year olds make up a smaller proportion of the total population in 2021 than 65-84 year olds.

These changes in demographics, especially an ageing population, impact the needs of the town. Older residents tend to look for smaller and alternative housing forms (e.g., seniors home) which are closer to the services they need (e.g., groceries, healthcare, etc.).

# 3. Economy



## 2016 Economic Indicators Town of Amherst

Median Total Household Income  <b>\$46,677</b> <small>per year</small>	Workforce Participation  <b>56.7%</b> <small>population aged 15+ in the workforce</small>	Unemployment  <b>11.6%</b>
Self-employment  <b>7.6%</b>	Work from Home  <b>4.0%</b>	No Fixed Workplace  <b>8.7%</b>

(Source: Statistics Canada)

## 2016 Economic Indicators Cumberland County

Median Total Household Income  <b>\$49,883</b> <small>per year</small>	Workforce Participation  <b>54.0%</b> <small>population aged 15+ in the workforce</small>	Unemployment  <b>11.4%</b>
Self-employment  <b>11.8%</b>	Work from Home  <b>8.0%</b>	No Fixed Workplace  <b>10.7%</b>

(Source: Statistics Canada)

### 3.1 Economy & Labour Snapshot

The tables above provide a snapshot of the town's and county's economic indicators.

Relative to the whole of Cumberland County, median household income is lower in Amherst by approximately \$3,000 annually, while a greater

proportion of the town's population aged 15 and over participate in the economy.

As a regional service hub with many services and amenities, residents of Amherst are more likely to have a 'traditional' place of work—that is, their workplace

is fixed such as an office or shop. Whereas in the county, residents are more likely to have no fixed workplace address or work from home.



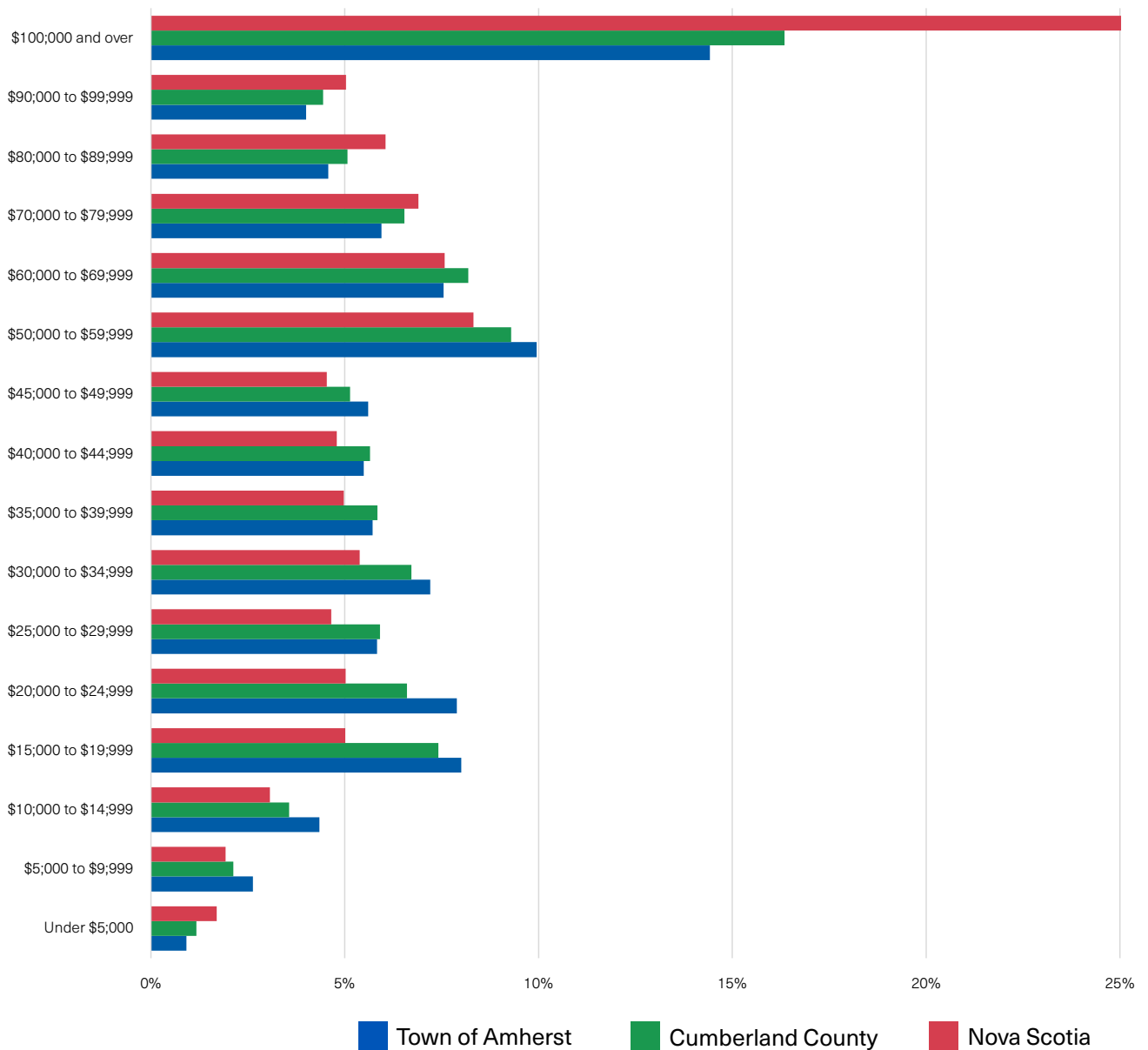


Figure 4. Before-tax household income in 2016. (Source: Statistics Canada)

### 3.2 Income

Mentioned previously, the median household income in the Town of Amherst is lower than that of the county. The town is overrepresented compared to the county and the province for most income brackets for before-tax household income below \$60,000. However, for

before-tax household income brackets over \$60,000, Amherst is underrepresented.

In Amherst, there are large differences in household income levels between one-person households and two-or-more person households.

The median income for a one-person household in Amherst is \$24,192, while the median income for a household with two or more people is \$61,254. These statistics are important to consider especially when looking at housing, services, and cost of living for those in the town.

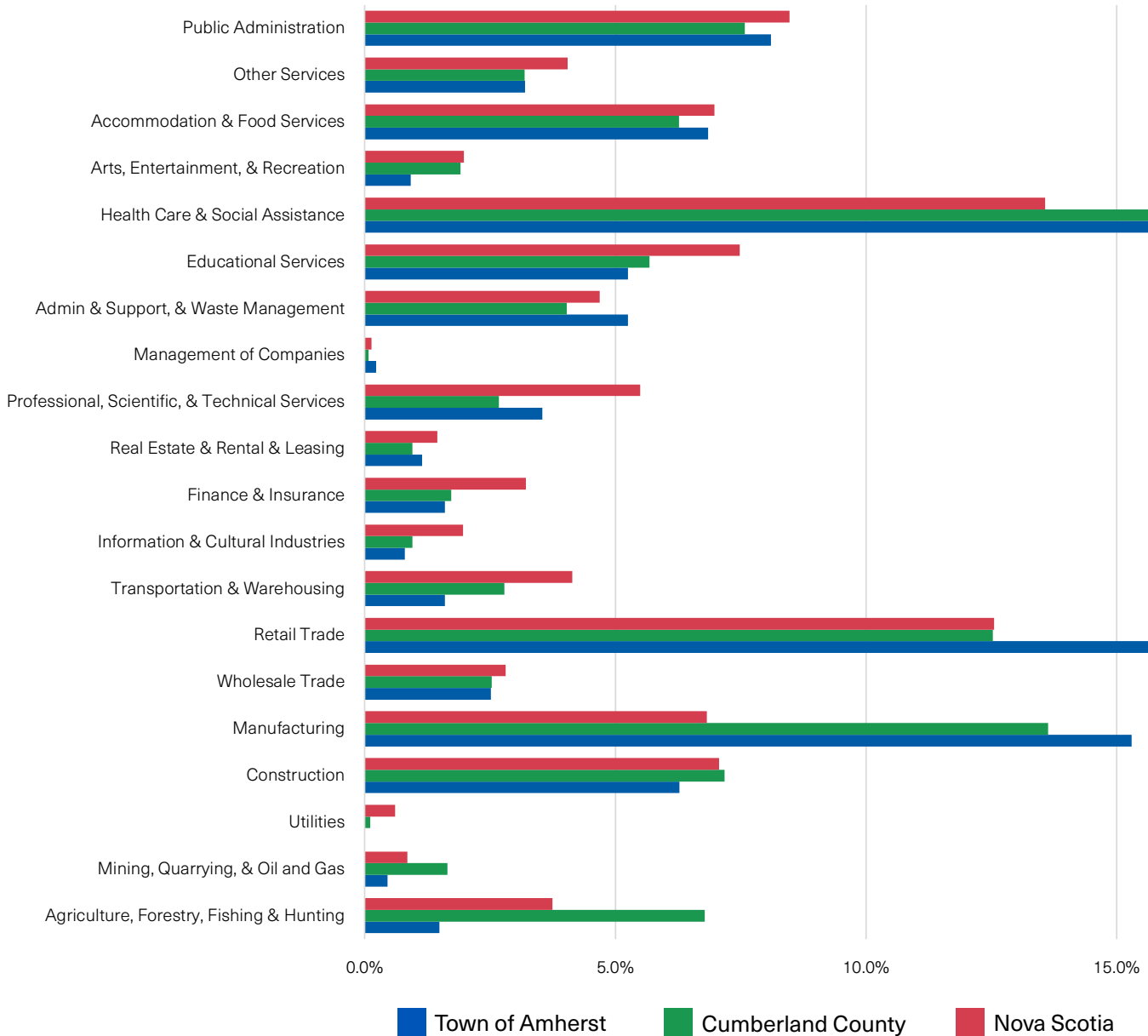


Figure 5. Sectors of employment based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) in 2016. (Source: Statistics Canada)

### 3.3 Economic Sectors

The graph above depicts the industries in which town, county, and provincial residents are employed as a percent of the total workforce.

As an urban municipality, the town's workforce is underrepresented in industries

such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting; and mining, quarrying, and oil and gas compared to the county's and province's population as a whole. However, with the town's strong industrial and commercial core, industries such as manufacturing, retail trade, and wholesale

trade contribute to these industries' strong representation in Amherst. Healthcare also employs a significant proportion of the population (~16%)—likely influenced by the presence of the Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre just outside of the town's boundary.



### 3.4 Major Employers

The map above identifies some of the major employers within the Town of Amherst. According to the 2019 Economic Dashboard Report prepared for the Town, there are 11 employers that employ 100 people or more; these 11 employers are mapped above.

Given the Town's industrial history, its central location in the Maritimes, and a strong rail and road network, Amherst is an ideal location for major employers that service the town, region, and beyond. Key industrial employers include IMP Aerostructures, Weston Bakeries, Emerson

Packaging, and Gordon Food Services. 'Big-box' retailers, including Sobeys, Walmart, and Atlantic Superstore, are also significant employers.

# 4. Housing



## 2016 Housing Indicators Town of Amherst

Median Shelter Costs: Rental Dwelling  <b>\$728</b> <small>per month</small>	Dwellings Needing Major Repairs  <b>12.2%</b>	Households Who Own Their Dwelling  <b>59.7%</b>
Median Shelter Costs: Owned Dwelling  <b>\$750</b> <small>per month</small>	Housing Un-affordability  <b>27.9%</b> <small>Spend more than 30% of income on shelter</small>	Subsidized Housing  <b>17.3%</b> <small>Renters with some form of housing subsidy</small>

(Source: Statistics Canada)

## 2016 Housing Indicators Cumberland County

Median Shelter Costs: Rental Dwelling  <b>\$675</b> <small>per month</small>	Dwellings Needing Major Repairs  <b>12.4%</b>	Households Who Own Their Dwelling  <b>76.3%</b>
Median Shelter Costs: Owned Dwelling  <b>\$626</b> <small>per month</small>	Housing Un-affordability  <b>19.8%</b> <small>Spend more than 30% of income on shelter</small>	Subsidized Housing  <b>20.7%</b> <small>Renters with some form of housing subsidy</small>

(Source: Statistics Canada)

### 4.1 Housing Snapshot

The tables above provide a snapshot of the town's and county's housing situation as of 2016, the most recent period this data was released. Compared to living in Cumberland County, living in Amherst is more expensive for renters and owners. A significant proportion

of the town's residents rent their dwelling (40.3%); sharply higher than in Cumberland County (13.7%).

Nearly 30% of owners and renters (with an income) spend 30% or more of their income on housing. However, this is unevenly

distributed among renters and owners. Nearly 50% (48%) of all renters in the town spend 30% or more of their income of shelter, whereas only 14.4% of owners spend 30% or more of their income of shelter, indicating a need for more affordable rental options in Amherst.

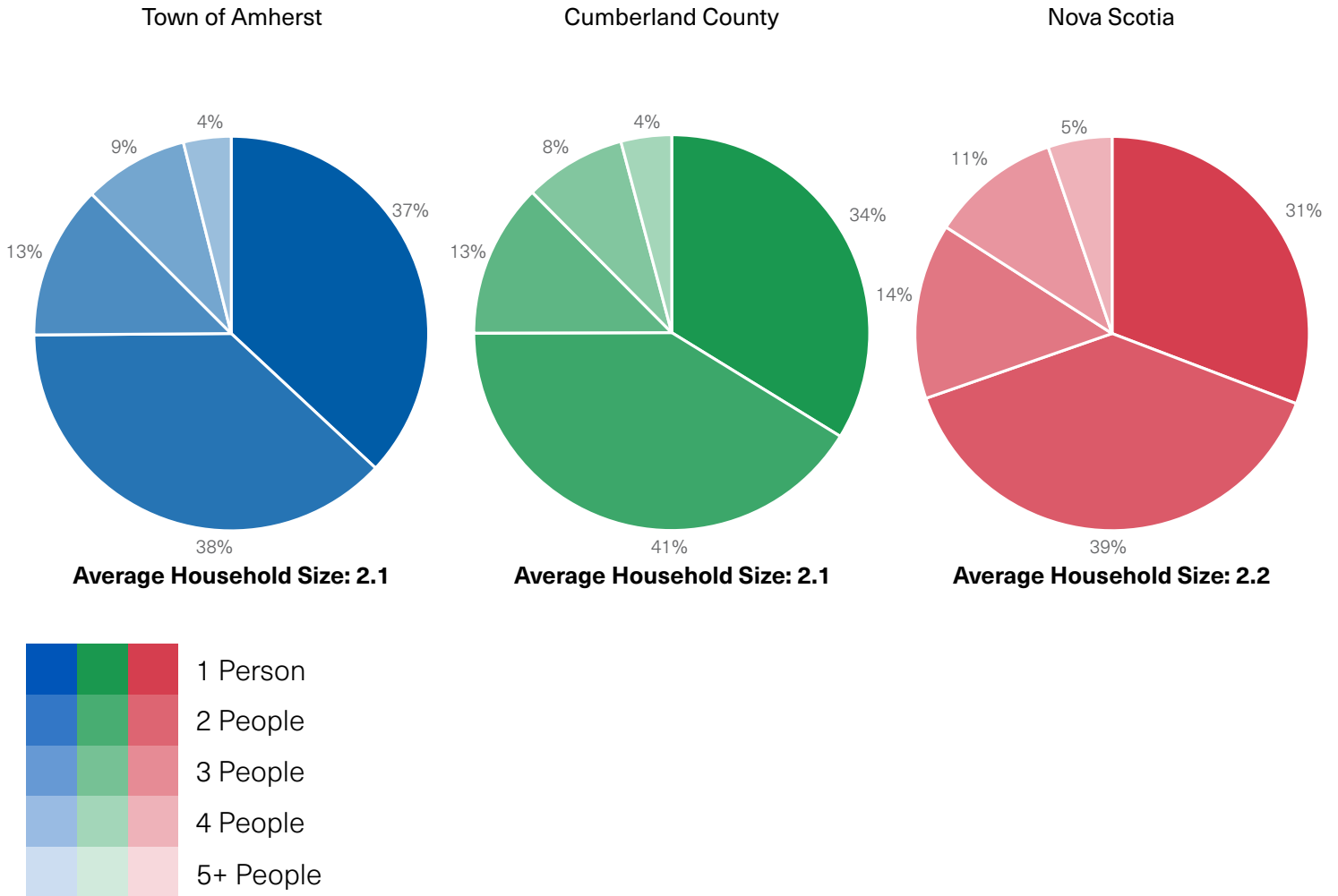


Figure 6. Household size in 2021 (Source: Statistics Canada)

## 4.2 Household Size

The size of households in Amherst are similar to the size of households in Cumberland County and across the province. The majority of households in Amherst are one- (37%) and two-person (38%) households. Only 25% of households in Amherst have three or more individuals

living in them, contributing to a small average household size of 2.1 people per household.

Between 2006 and 2021, the average household size in Amherst decreased from 2.2 to 2.1 people per household. Correlated with demographic

data that shows an ageing population, this data would suggest that shrinking household sizes are partially explained by young families leaving the town while older couples may live apart in assisted living facilities or become widows or widowers.

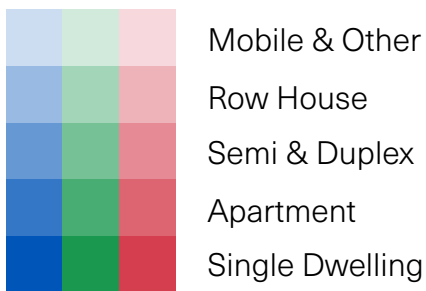
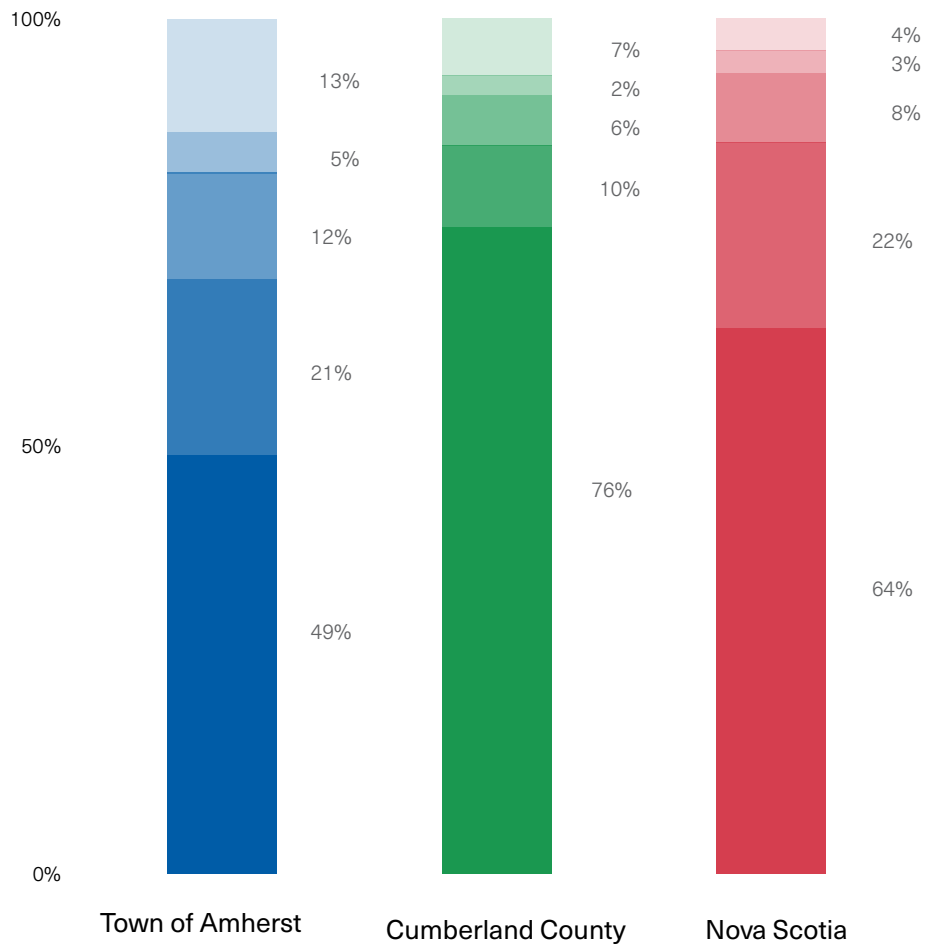


Figure 7. Household types in 2021. (Source: Statistics Canada)



### 4.3 Dwelling Types

Amherst has a unique housing stock in terms of the types of dwellings that are available. Only 49% of the housing stock is made up of single dwellings, which is relatively low compared to Cumberland County (76%) and the Province of Nova Scotia (64%). As a relative comparison,

73% of dwellings in the Town of Oxford are single dwellings. A large portion of Amherst's housing stock is apartments (21%)—though, there are no apartments over five stories—semi-detached dwellings and duplex dwellings (12%), and mobile dwellings (13%).

There were 110 more occupied private dwellings in 2021 compared to 2016 in Amherst, including 20 more row houses and 80 more apartments in building shorter than five stories.

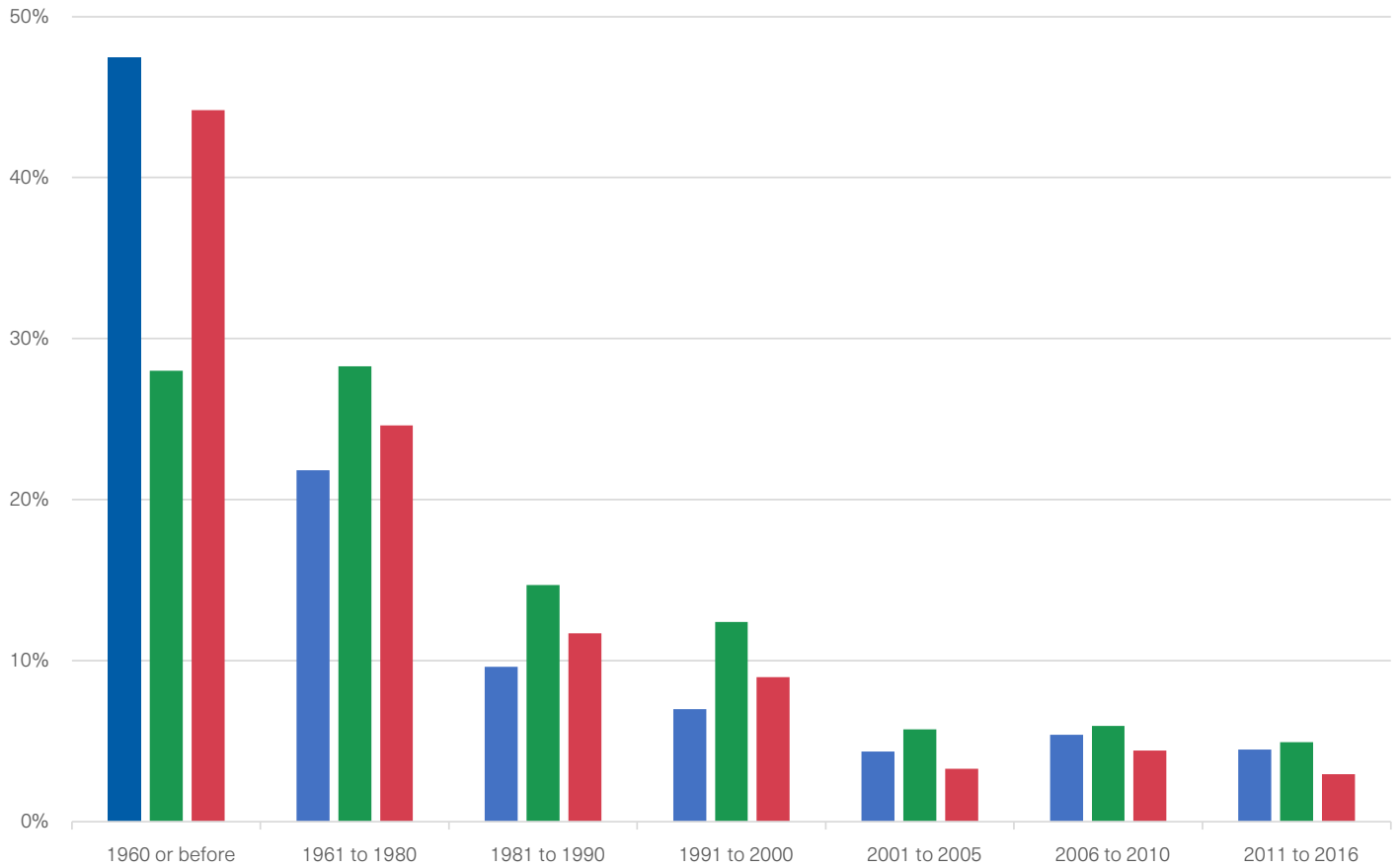


Figure 8. Age of housing construction in 2016.  
 (Source: Statistics Canada)

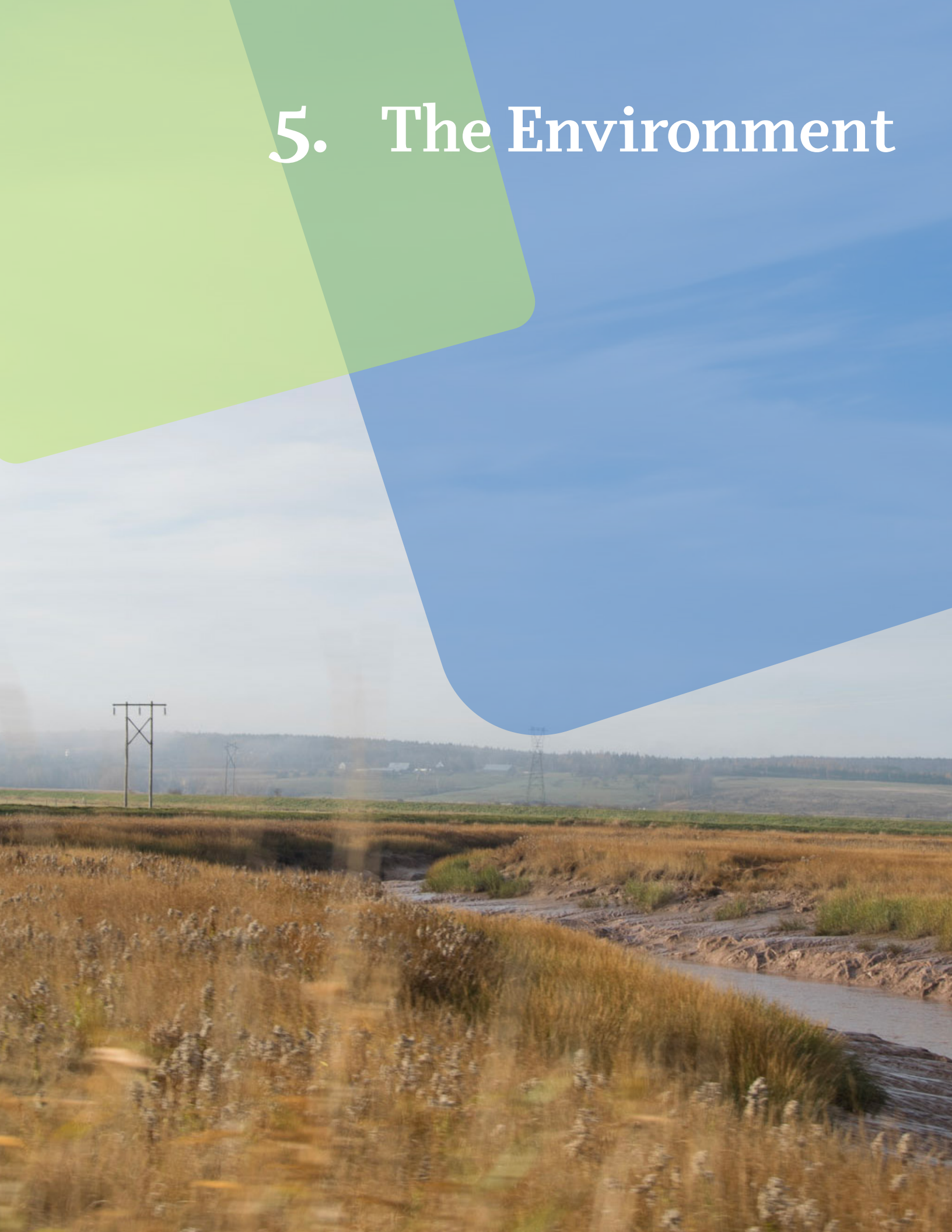
- Nova Scotia
- Cumberland County
- Town of Amherst

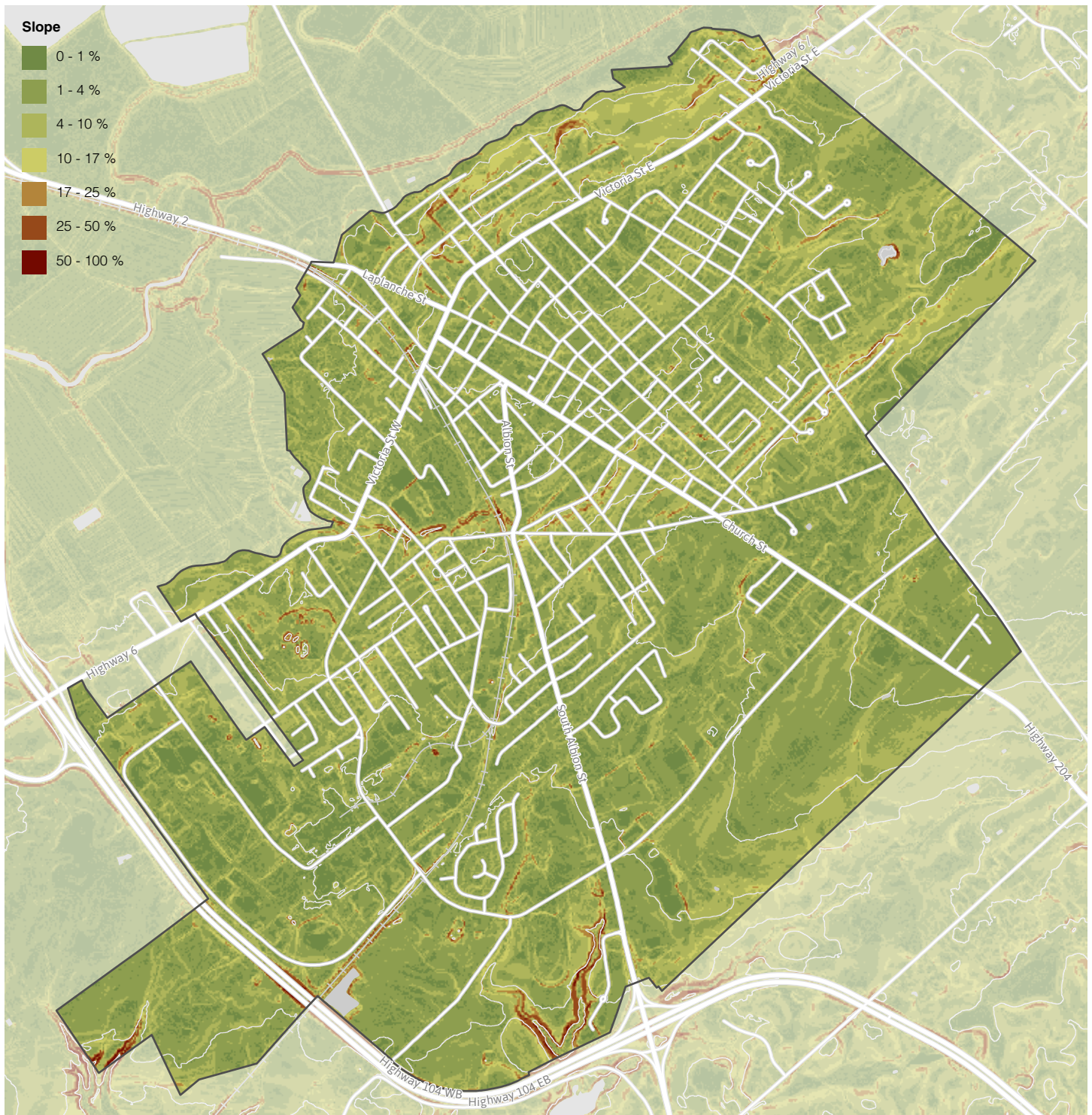
#### 4.4 Housing Stock

Much of the housing stock in Amherst was built in 1960 or before (47%). Conversely, only 14% of Amherst's housing stock was built after 2000. Although the housing stock is generally older, only 12% of the housing stock is in need of major repairs.



# 5. The Environment





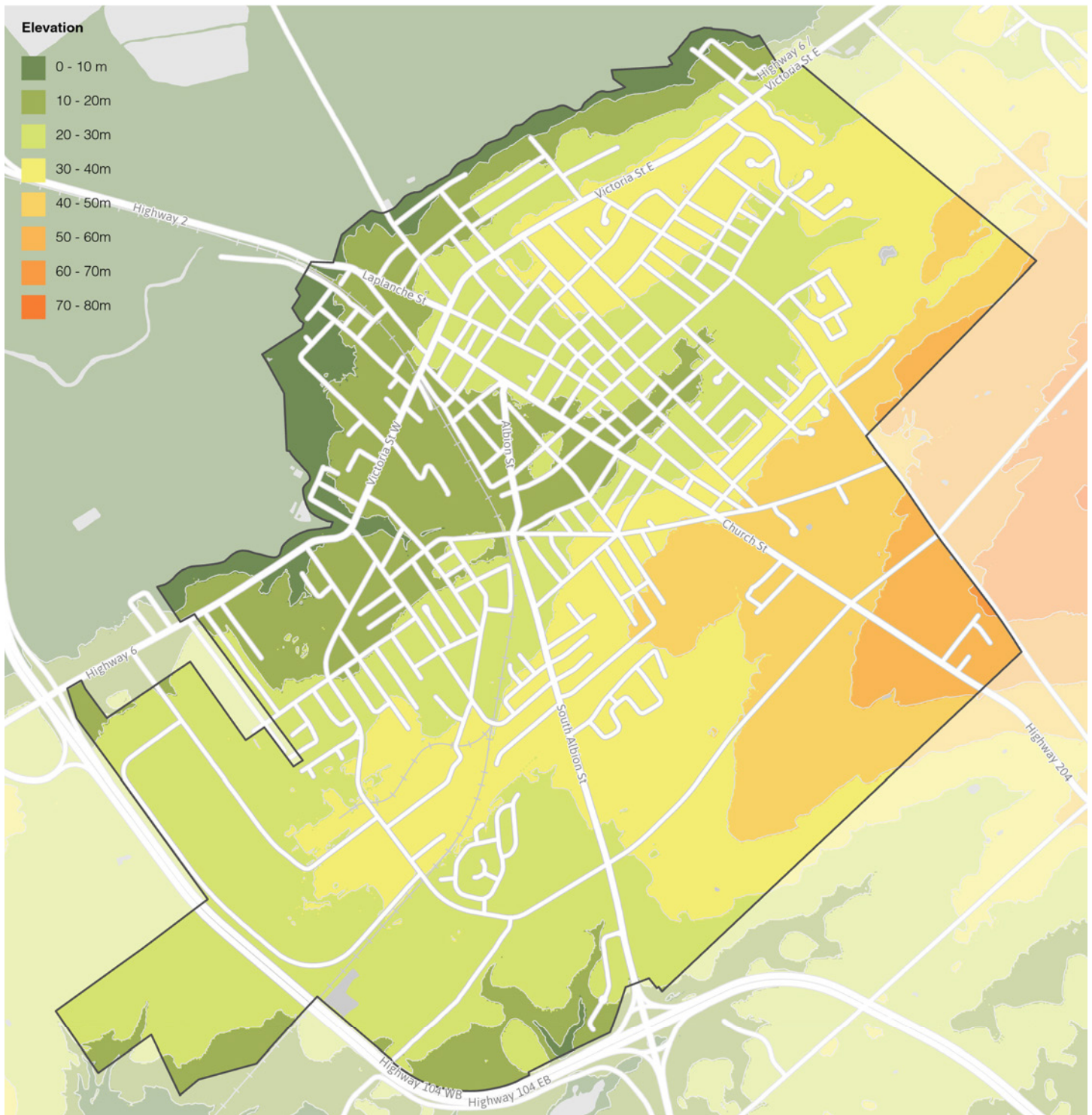
## 5.1 Slope

Slope is an expression used to describe the steepness of land. For example, a slope of 20% is equal to one metre of vertical distance for every five metres of horizontal distance (1/5), and a slope of 100% is equal to one metre of vertical distance for every one metre of horizontal

distance (1/1). Slope can also be expressed as an angle. For instance, a slope of 100% is equal to a slope of 45°.

The slopes in Amherst are mostly gently sloping lands that descend from the higher elevations along the town's eastern boundary.

The steepest slopes in Amherst are found along sections of the watercourses in the town, including the Dickeys Brook.



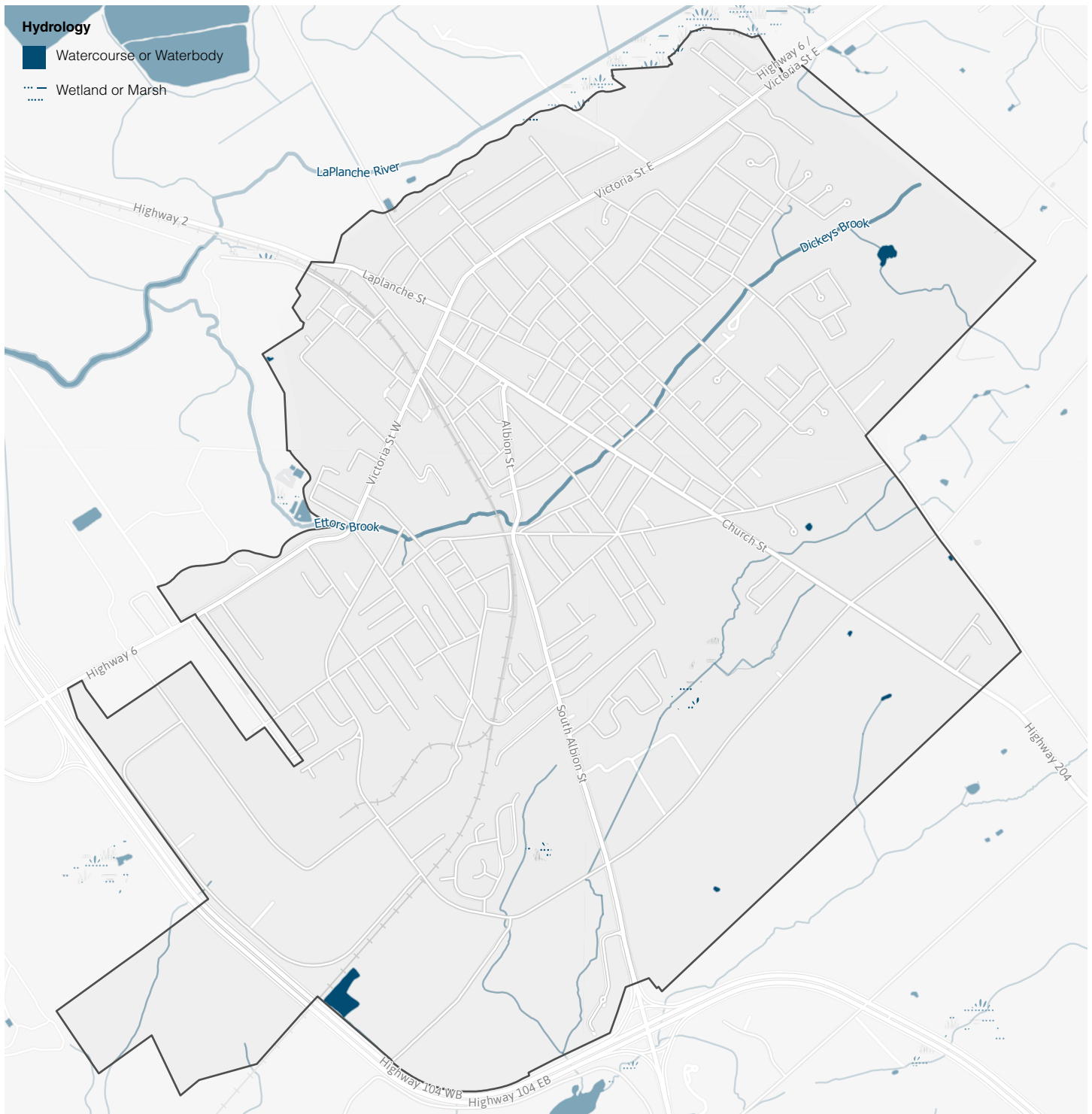
## 5.2 Elevation

Elevations in Amherst range from near sea level (zero metres) up to 80 metres above sea level on the eastern edge of the town. The upper elevations in Amherst are characterized by limited development (along Robert Angus Drive) and cleared grasslands (along Highway 204

and Willow Street).

Elevation in the town descends in a west-northwest direction, with the lowest elevations on the western and northern sides of the town's boundary. These areas meet the Chignecto Isthmus, the low-lying area of land between

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The isthmus is at or near sea level and is characterized by marshlands, wetlands, and watercourses.

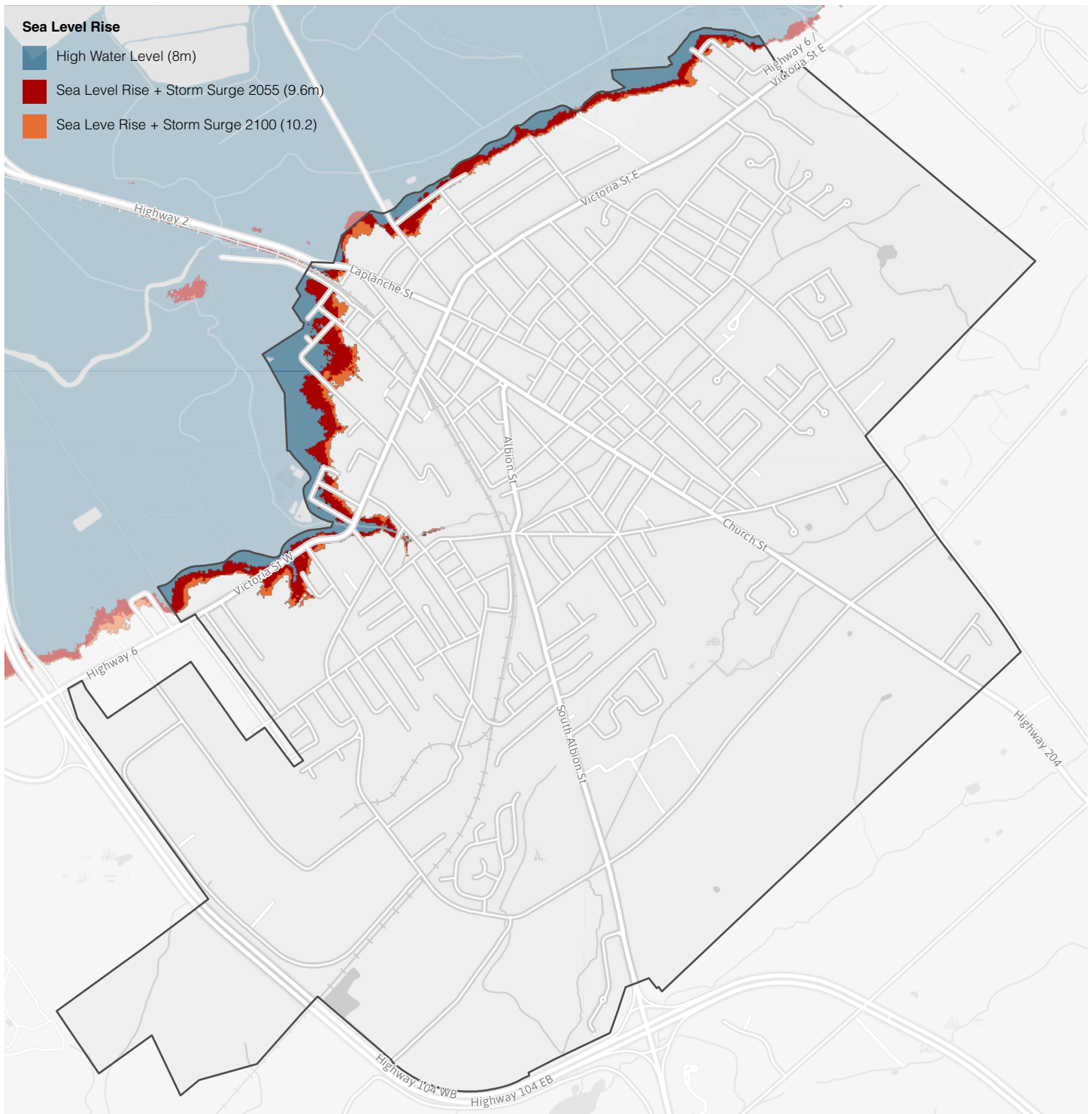


### 5.3 Hydrology

With its proximity to the Bay of Fundy, several small watercourses flow through Amherst; the largest of which is Dickey's Brook. Dickey's Brook flows through the centre of Amherst, joining with Ettore's Brook outside of the town's boundary.

Dickey's Brook is a much-loved community asset, and development has been built relatively close to its bank. This has, however, created concerns for the town and community as climate change may result in more frequent high-precipitation events and subsequent flooding.

As recently as 2015, a major rainfall event resulted in Dickey's Brook cresting and flooding beyond its banks.



## 5.4 Sea Level Rise

Although Amherst is not a coastal town, its proximity to the Bay of Fundy and Chignecto Isthmus makes the town susceptible to the impacts of sea level rise. A 2012 report prepared by the Town indicates that by 2100, during a large storm event at high tide flood waters could reach 10.2

metres in elevation.

The Chignecto Isthmus is currently protected by a series of dikes, developed in the 1600s and redeveloped in the 1950s, that prevent floodwaters from reaching inland. However, with sea level rise and climate change

expected to result in more instances of flooding, there are talks underway between the Provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Government of Canada to reconstruct the dikes to a standard that is necessary to protect the areas inland.

# 6. Land Use

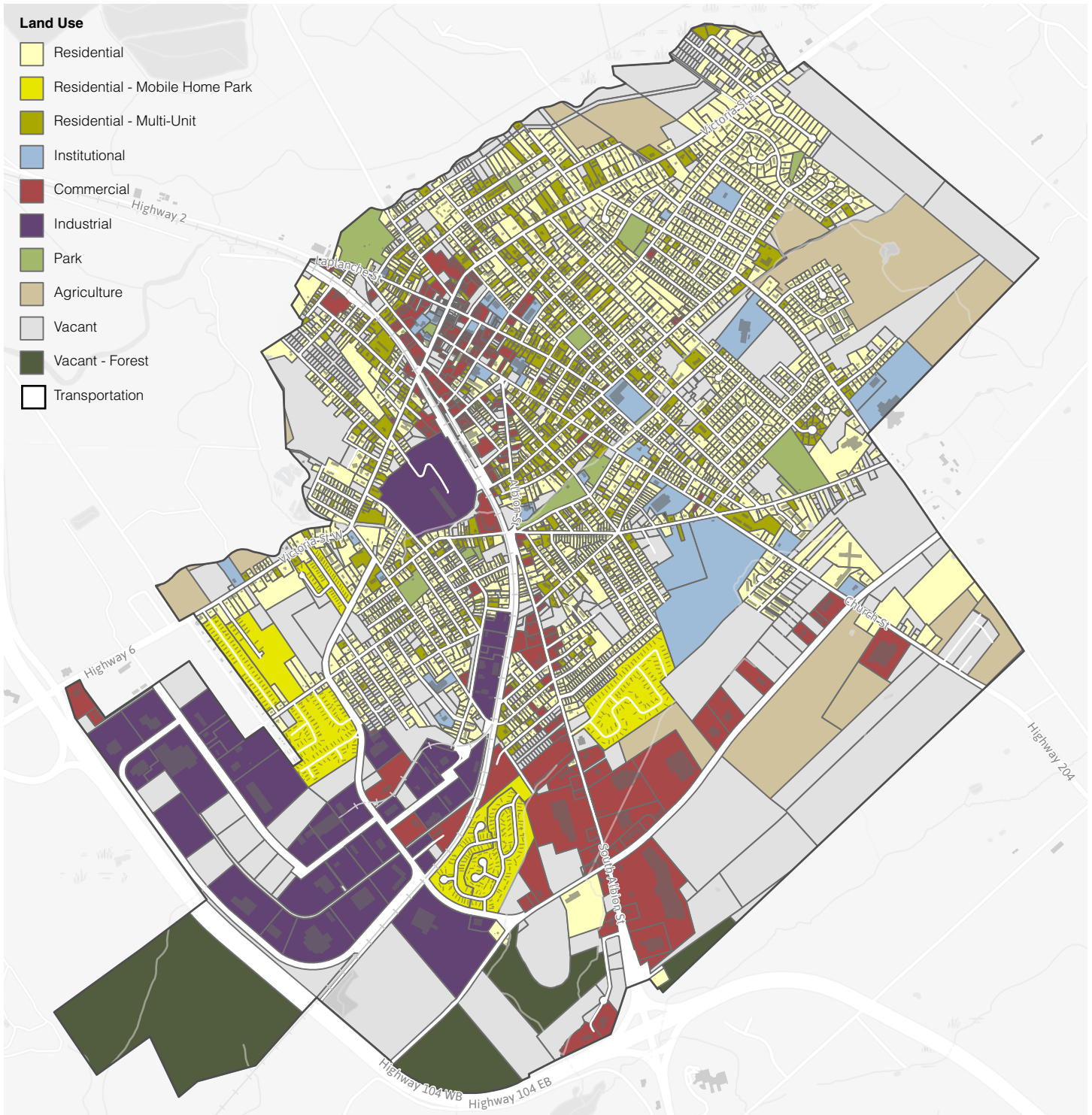


## 6.1 Land Use Planning

There are tools available to municipalities in Nova Scotia to guide and manage growth and development—particularly, the Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw. While a municipal planning strategy outlines the blueprint for the municipality —included within the vision, goals, and policies—the Land Use Bylaw establishes the legal requirements and regulations for development.

Above all, however, land use planning is a collaborative process where citizens, business owners, community and civic leaders, and elected officials can work together to build a vision for their community.

Just as land use planning is enabled and required under the *Municipal Government Act*, the Act also establishes what *can* be regulated. This includes the size and location of buildings, the ways land may be used, landscaping, signage, among others. Land use planning cannot regulate many things such as taxation, land ownership, people, and the way roads and highways are used.



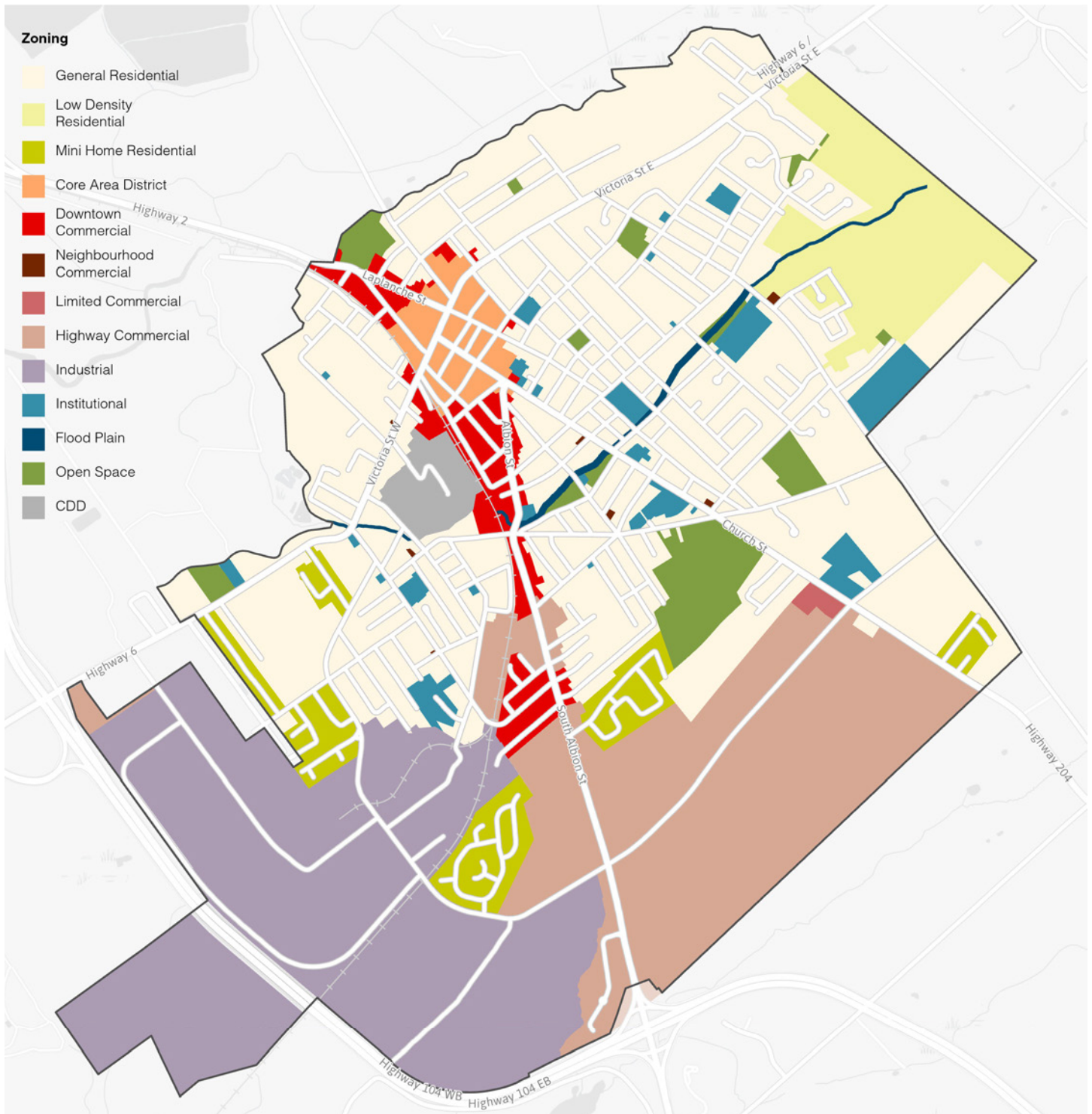
## 6.2 Current Land Use

Amherst exhibits a diversity of land uses including residential, industrial, commercial, institutional, and agricultural and forestry uses. There is also a large supply of vacant land—land with no buildings or dedicated to only parking—especially, on the town's periphery.

Industrial uses make up the majority of land uses in the southwestern corner of the town, especially along Tupper Boulevard and Tantramar Crescent. Conversely, commercial land uses are concentrated along South Albion Street, Robert Angus Drive, and in downtown.

Residential uses make up a significant portion of land use in Amherst, especially in the northeast corner of the town. The majority of properties in this area are used for residential purposes, including multi-unit residential uses.



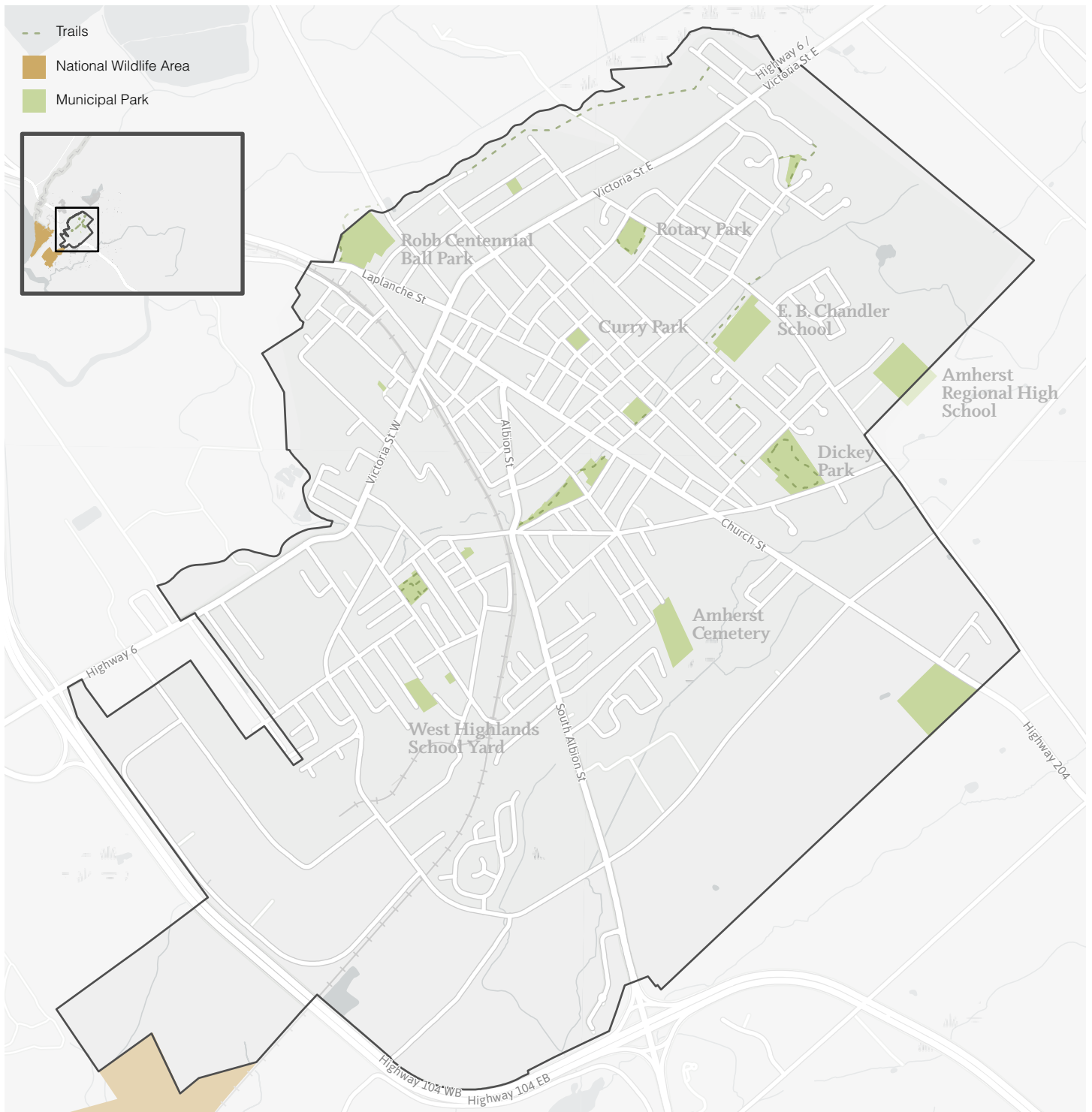


### 6.3 Current Zoning

The majority of land area in the town is dedicated to residential development—the General Residential Zone, Low Density Residential, and Mini Home Residential. These zones promote different forms and densities of residential development across Amherst.

A significant portion of the town is also dedicated to commercial development. The Highway Commercial areas, along South Albion Street and Robert Angus Drive, are juxtaposed with the Downtown Commercial and Core Area District which have smaller commercial storefronts.

In the southern portion of the town, industrial development is prioritized, especially along Tupper Boulevard and Tantramar Crescent.

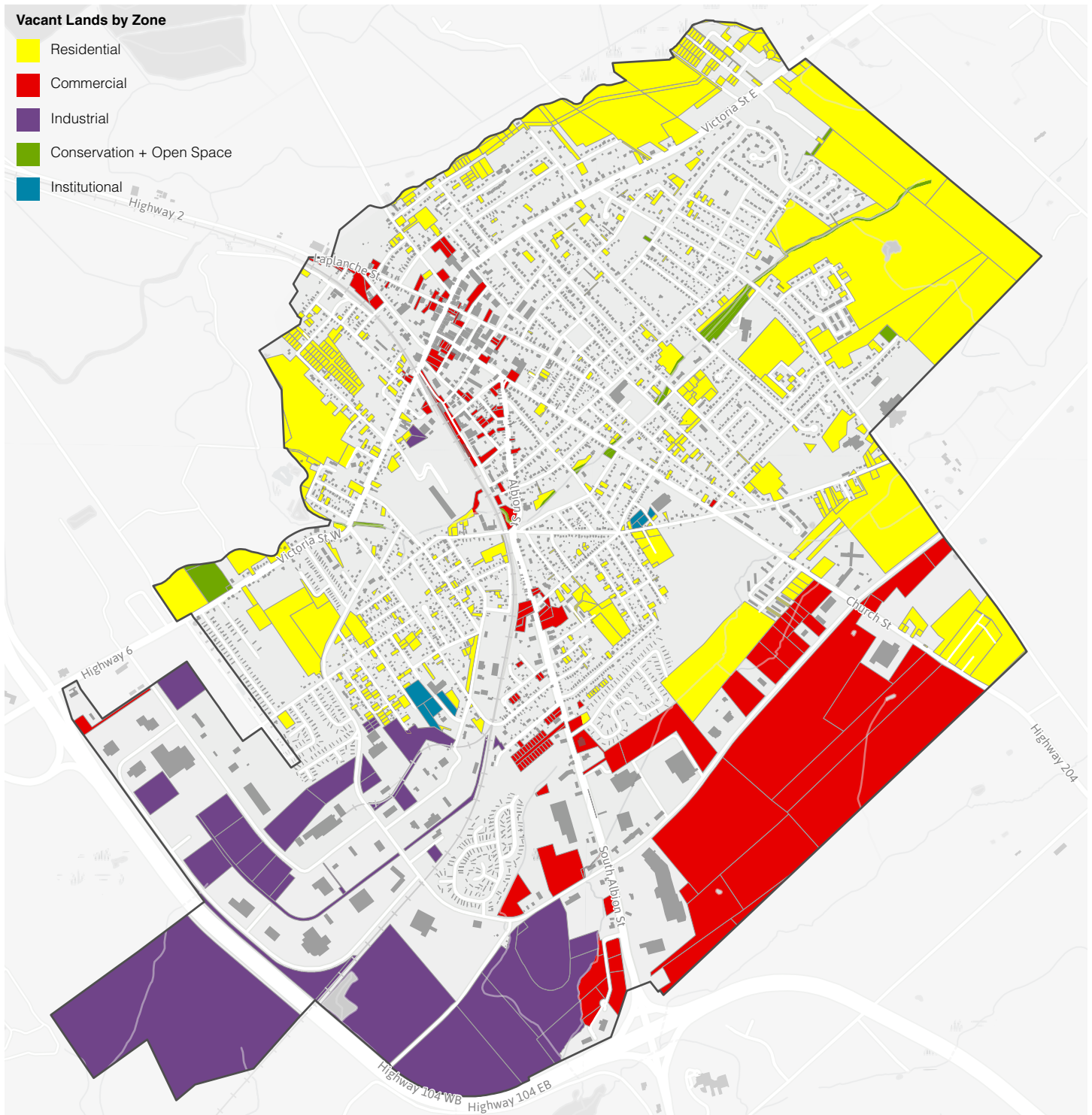


## 6.4 Parks and Green Spaces

There are numerous municipal parks in Amherst. Dickey Park, a much-loved green space, is centrally-located and has a walking loop, greenspace, and a splash park. The Amherst Cemetery, Robb Centennial Ball Park, and Rotary Park are important community assets.

There are also parks and green spaces associated with institutional uses in Amherst. The high school, junior high school, and the Spring Street Academy all have parks that the community uses.

The spatial distribution of parks and green spaces in Amherst is skewed towards the northern half of the town. There are fewer parks and green spaces on the south side of Amherst, and where they do exist, they are generally smaller in size.



## 6.5 Land Use Availability

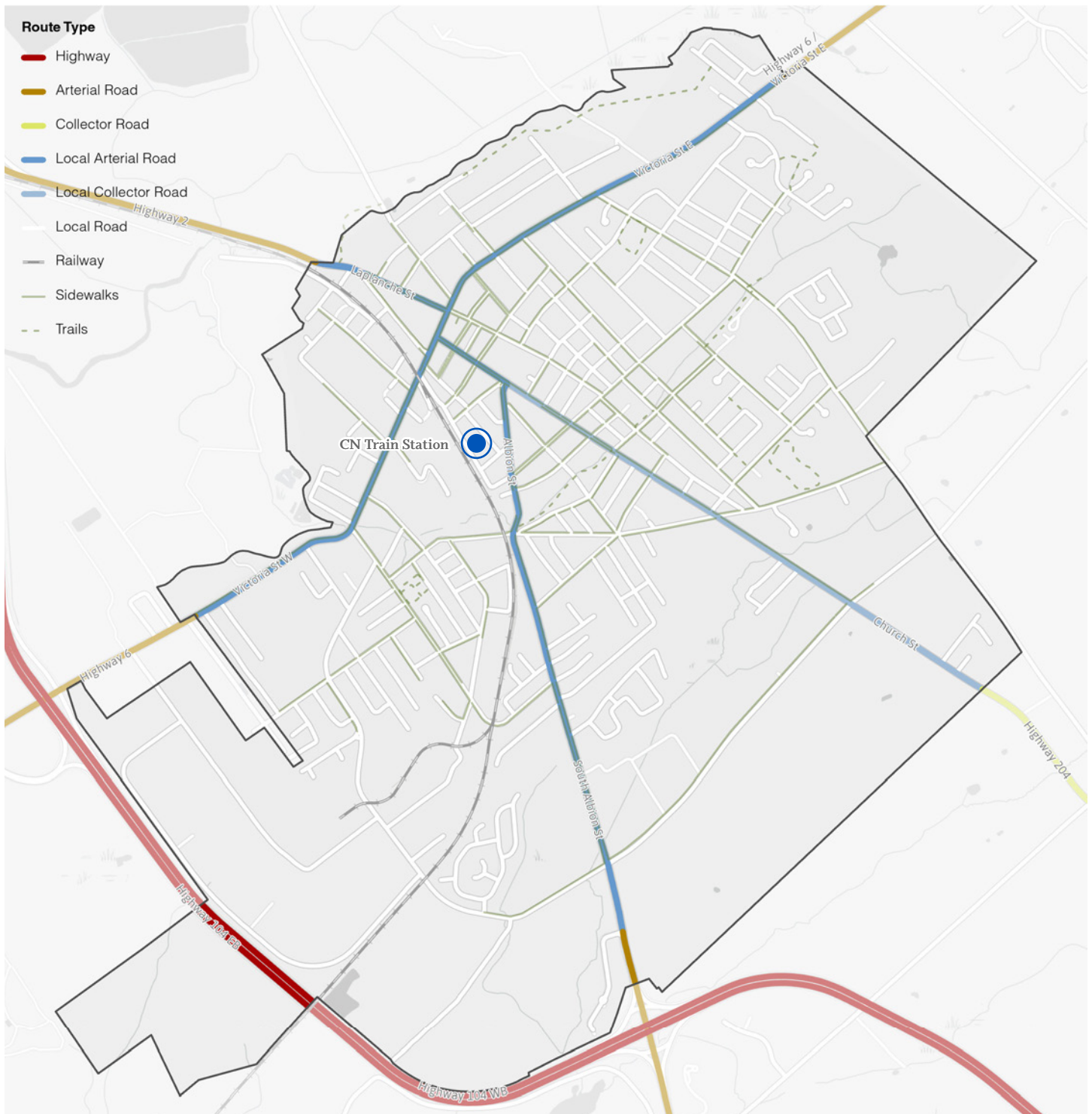
By examining current land use and existing land use zoning, land use availability can be determined. Planning can help to allocate certain lands for particular kinds of development (e.g., industrial development) if there is a need in the community.

The map above identifies vacant, forested, or land used for agriculture to measure land availability. However, it is important to note that access constraints, ownership, or environmental constraints may cause limitations for development on some of these lands

There are over 1,500 acres of vacant land within residentially-zoned areas, while there are approximately 630 acres of vacant land that are zoned for commercial purposes. Over 620 acres of industrially-zoned land remain vacant.

# 7. Servicing





## 7.1 Transportation

Amherst is supported by both a strong transportation network within the town as well as outside of the town's boundary.

Within Amherst, a series of local and arterial roads allow residents and community members to access amenities and services

throughout the town. Church Street, South Albion Street, and Vitoria Street create a strong 'spine' for transportation. Many of these streets are owned by the Town and are supported by a series of sidewalks for pedestrians to move throughout Amherst.

The town also directly abuts Highway 104, a section of the Trans Canada Highway, connecting Amherst with the rest of Nova Scotia and Canada. Similarly, CN rail lines run directly through Amherst with a CN stop along Station Street.

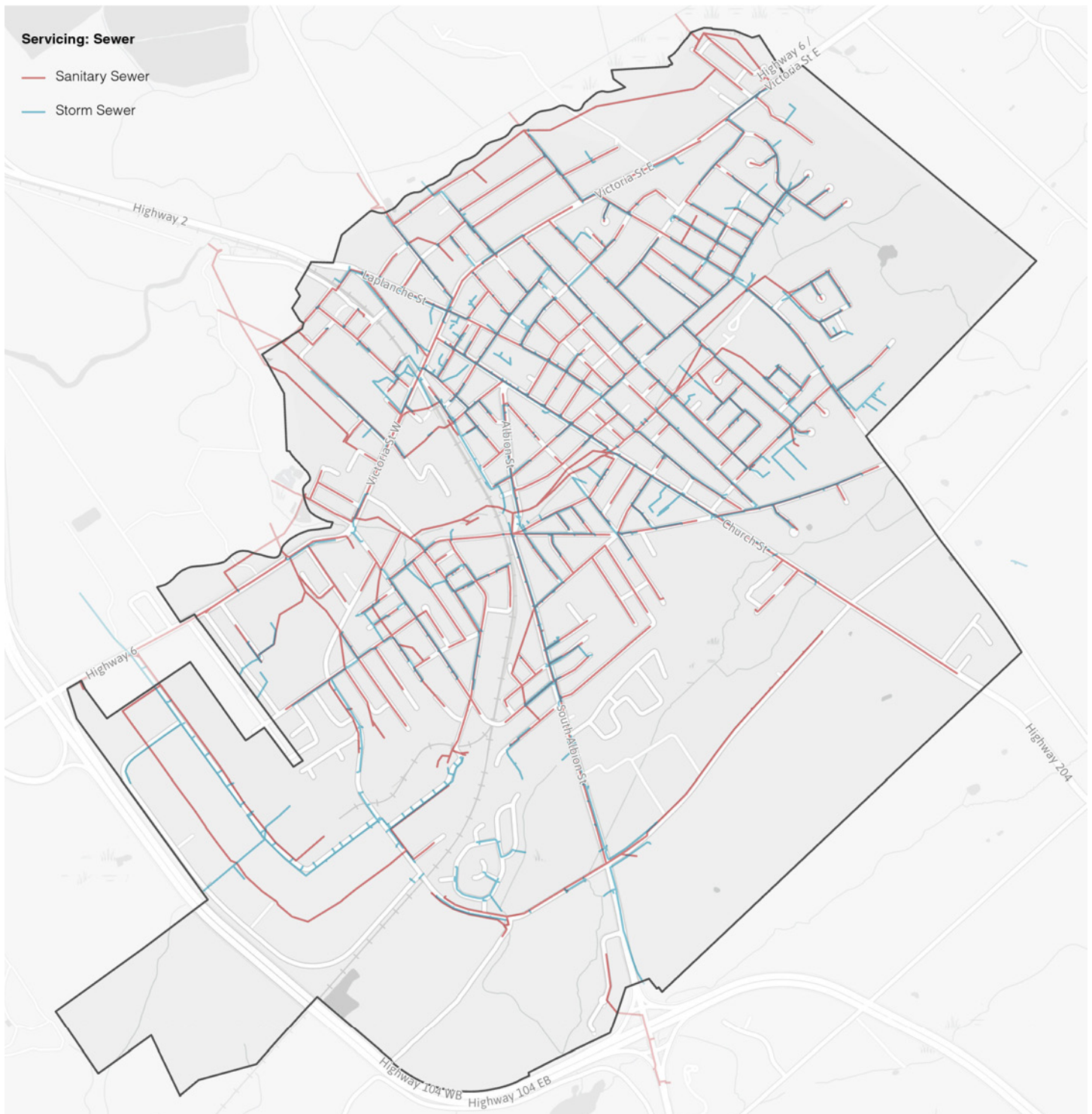


## 7.2 Drinking Water

The Town of Amherst gets its drinking water from the North Tyndall Wellfield—a series of four drinking water wells 15 kilometres north of the town. The North Tyndall Wellfield is a protected wilderness area, and significant development is not permitted in order to protect this water source.

Water is pumped from the North Tyndall Wellfield to the town and distributed to the community through a series of underground pipes. Almost every street in Amherst is serviced by the Town's drinking water system.

The pipes also extend beyond the town's boundary and serve properties within Cumberland County, including the Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre.



### 7.3 Wastewater and Stormwater

Wastewater from the Town of Amherst is treated at a Waste Water Treatment Facility (WWTF) outside of the town's boundary. The WWTF was built in 2012 along the LaPlanche River, where waste is pumped from the town to the facility and is treated and discharged into the river.

The Town's wastewater system is also supported by a stormwater management system. This system is comprised of a series of underground pipes that convey stormwater (e.g., rain, melted snow, etc) to natural areas where the water makes its way back into the water table. The stormwater

system also includes, informally, the many parks and natural areas in the town. These areas help to collect and absorb precipitation as it falls, easing pressure on 'traditional' stormwater infrastructure—underground pipes, culverts, and storm grates.



## 7.4 Natural Gas

The Town of Amherst is one of a few communities in Nova Scotia with natural gas services, including the Towns of New Glasgow, Stellarton, and Oxford, and the Halifax Regional Municipality. The town is located next to the Maritimes and Northeast Pipeline, a natural gas

pipeline that runs from Goldboro, NS, to Massachusetts, giving the town access to natural gas. This service is distributed by Heritage Gas, a company with the sole authority to do so in Nova Scotia.

While many residential streets in Amherst have access to natural

gas, many do not, especially in the southwestern portion of the town. Heritage Gas will consider expansions into new areas, provided the revenue generated by an extension will cover any associated costs, such as the cost of infrastructure and labour.



