



Strategy for the Phased Removal of R1 (Single Unit Residential) Zoning in Priority Areas

December 2025



An aerial photograph of a waterfront park at sunset. A large crowd of people is gathered on a wooden deck and grassy area. In the background, there are trees, a church with a steeple, and a town with buildings. The sky is filled with colorful clouds from the setting sun.

**Prepared by the Town of Bridgewater
Community Development Department**

Town of Bridgewater
60 Pleasant Street
Bridgewater, NS B4V 3X9

December 2025

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Context for this Strategy	5
Housing Accelerator Fund	5
Housing Needs	7
Vision and Guiding Principles	8
Vision	8
Guiding Principles	8
R1 Zone in Bridgewater	9
Alternative Zones	11
Phased Approach	13
Phase 1: January 2026	13
Subsequent Phases	14
Conclusion	17



Executive Summary

The Town of Bridgewater, in response to its agreement with the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has agreed to implement a phased approach to removal of Single Unit Residential (R1) Zoning in priority areas within the Town. This strategy, mapping the first phase in the initiative, will see two areas transition to the R2 zone while establishing the timeframe and logistical context for future phases. These phases will occur as a series of map amendments to the Land Use By-law (LUB) and culminate in a text amendment removing the R1 zone in both the LUB and the Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS).

The strategy will operate through 3 phases, allowing for crucial upgrades to infrastructure required to facilitate new development throughout Town. Phase 1 will target two areas within Town to be rezoned from R1 to R2, granting an additional unit as-of-right. The selected areas comprise 283 properties within the current R1 zone. These areas were selected for inclusion in Phase 1 for current infrastructure capacity and proximity to core services and commercial hubs, providing opportunity for gradual increases to residential density to meet existing and future demand for housing options.

Impacts from this strategy are anticipated to be gradual, with uptake in development potential being borne out over the course of years to decades. The strategy aims to reduce barriers to the construction of different housing types, allowing residents and developers to adapt Bridgewater's neighbourhoods to shifting needs and demands.



Context for this Strategy

Housing Accelerator Fund

The Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) is a federal initiative designed to help municipalities implement innovative solutions to increase housing supply. The Town applied for funding to CMHC in September 2024 and received approval in December 2024. Allocation of funding is tied to initiative milestones as well as meeting a targeted number of building permits issued each year. The Town has been approved for up to \$3.3 million in funding if milestones are completed and a building permit target of 367 permitted housing units is achieved over the next three years. A minimum of 18 of the permitted housing units, or five percent, should be categorized as affordable units.

Background of the Initiative

Exclusive single-unit zoning creates multiple challenges for growing communities. It limits housing supply and diversity, making it difficult to meet the needs of changing demographics. Young professionals, single-parent households, seniors seeking to downsize, and people with modest incomes often struggle to find suitable housing in R1-dominated communities. This housing constraint affects essential workers including teachers, healthcare support staff, and service industry employees, impacting both individual quality of life and community economic vitality.

From an infrastructure perspective, low-density development patterns require more municipal investment per household, making service provision less efficient and costly. When development is geographically spread, the cost to provide water, sewer, roads, and other municipal services increases substantially on a per-household basis. Conversely, higher density development enables municipalities to maximize return on existing infrastructure investments while supporting walkable, transit-supportive communities.

The CMHC has identified the removal of single unit zoning as a key initiative for HAF funded communities as a means to address housing shortages, improve affordability, and promote more equitable and sustainable development patterns.



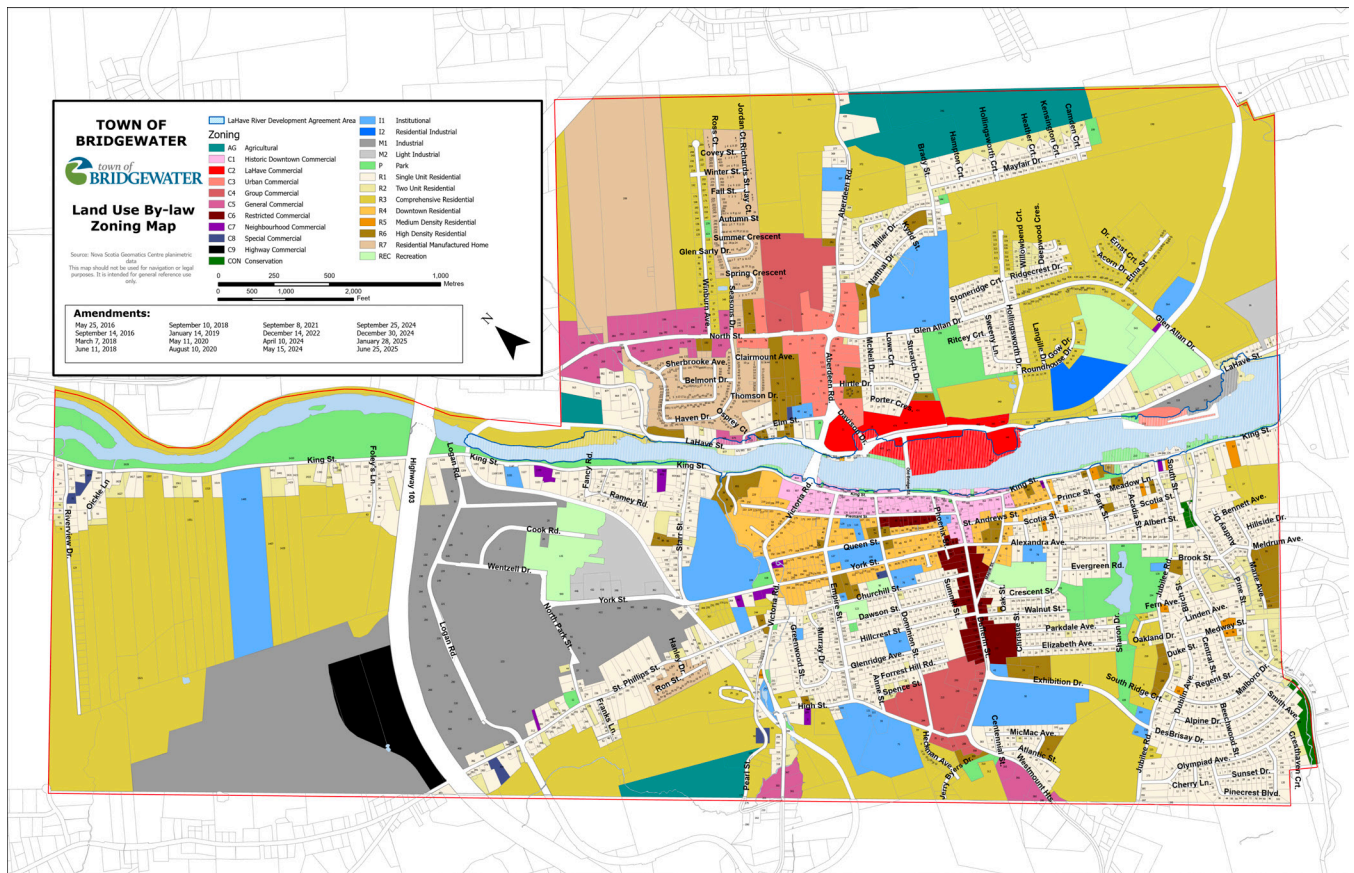


Figure 1. Zoning Map from the Land Use By-Law, October 2025

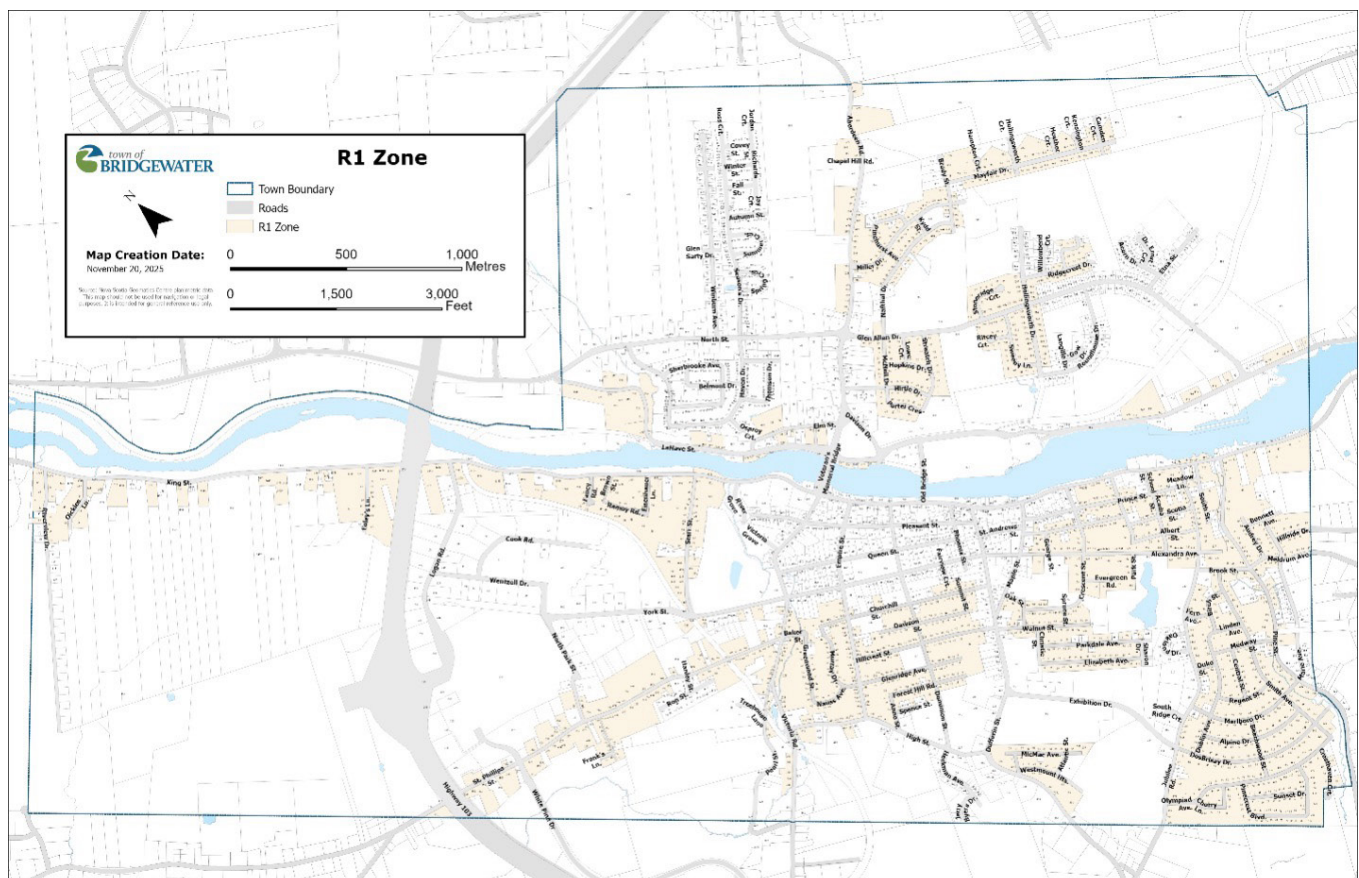


Figure 2. R1 Zoned Properties, December 2025



Housing Needs

Summary of Housing Needs Report

Bridgewater is currently experiencing housing challenges that mirror national trends. Median housing prices have increased by 69% from 2019 to 2022, while the median sale price of a home in Bridgewater increased between 2016 and 2021 by 99%, from \$136,000 to \$270,000. About 67% of local households earned an income below what would be needed to purchase the median home in 2022, creating an affordability gap for many residents. While there is a lack of accurate rental market data available for the Town, the data that is available indicates that approximately 46% of local renter households earned an income below what would be needed to afford the average rental unit.

By the end of 2022, Bridgewater faced a shortage of 245 units, with projections indicating the need for 450 new units by 2027 and 630 by 2032. The report suggests that, based on historical housing needs and preferences, 70% of these units must comprise 2 or more bedrooms. Data from 2021 showed that about 14% of Bridgewater's households lived in Core Housing Need, including 27% of renter households.

The top housing challenge that residents faced, based on the Municipality's public survey, was finding housing at a price they can afford as well as finding housing that is suitable for their households needs. Between the dramatically increasing cost of entry to homeownership and insufficient public and affordable housing inventory, this data highlights the need for an increase in the supply of affordable and diverse housing options. Key in responding to this challenge is recognizing the need for housing types that vary from the predominant style of single-unit dwellings in order to serve the needs of aging demographics, young people and single-person households. R1 zoning constitutes a barrier for the development of housing options that serve these populations and constrains development potential within serviced areas of town.

Infrastructure Constraints

Planning and Engineering staff have worked collaboratively to identify which areas may be prioritized for removal of R1 zoning. The transition to the removal of R1 zoning across Town must be informed by key infrastructure constraints which require the Town to plan near-term growth strategically prior to key capital improvements which will enable broader development potential across town.

The transition must be informed by crucial infrastructure capacity constraints which, at present, constrain the Town's ability to grow through new development. Bridgewater's 10-year capital plan sets out a schedule for these important upgrades, establishing a timeline within which development must be strategically aligned in order to avoid breaching capacity in wastewater infrastructure. Phases 2 and 3 will require coordination with ongoing capital projects to ensure capacity.

Phase 1 will therefore consist of lands selected with these capacity constraints in mind and with sensitivity to timelines for overall wastewater infrastructure improvements established by the 10-year capital plan.



Vision and Guiding Principles

Vision

By 2032, Bridgewater will have transitioned away from exclusionary single-unit zoning to a community where diverse housing types are encouraged in walkable, serviced neighborhoods. Residents at all life stages will find suitable housing options. This transition will occur gradually, respecting neighborhood character while responding to market demand and infrastructure capacity.

Guiding Principles

- Smart growth is identified as a key planning principle within the Town's guiding planning documents, encouraging the maximization of existing municipal infrastructure while promoting equitable and affordable housing. Removing R1 zoning in priority areas directly supports these smart growth objectives by enabling more efficient land use patterns and housing diversity.
- Increasing density within Town to improve efficiency of municipal services, providing a greater return on capital investment and broadening the tax base.
- Selecting areas in proximity to commercial and service centres promoting compact, mixed-use environments, benefitting the downtown economy.
- Focusing the first phase of the transition within areas with strong transportation network accessibility, including proximity to transit, recreation and commercial areas, creating walkable neighbourhoods and a diversity of housing options for residents.
- Removing barriers to the development of new housing on serviced land, improving opportunity for homeowners to make decisions regarding their housing needs.
- Encouraging housing options such as Accessory Dwelling Units which promote aging in place, allowing Bridgewater residents to transition between housing types.



R1 Zone in Bridgewater

At present there are 1886 properties across town zoned R1. One thousand and five (1005) of these properties, constructed before 1975, have been eligible to add an additional unit, as per the LUB. This date represents the introduction of the first land use controls in Bridgewater, and at that time Council determined that dwellings constructed before this date “should enjoy a degree of latitude not extended to those constructed after the introduction of such controls”. Additionally, permitting these conversions was intended to diversify the older building stock and promote “aging in place” for Bridgewater’s aging population. Currently, these regulations create inequity where housing diversity depends on building age rather than infrastructure capacity or community needs. Pre-1975 properties can accommodate two units while newer properties cannot, regardless of actual capacity or suitability.

	Number of Lots	Number of Dwellings
Pre-1975	1,005	1,036
Post-1975	740	735
Undeveloped	141	
Total	1,886	1,771

Of the pre-1975 properties in town, 60 (approximately 6%) are known to have two-units, and many remain single-units despite conversion allowances. This indicates that removing R1 zoning is unlikely to trigger immediate mass conversions, as many properties have been eligible for conversion for decades but have not converted. This suggests that zoning reform will enable gradual, market-driven housing diversification rather than sudden neighborhood transformation.



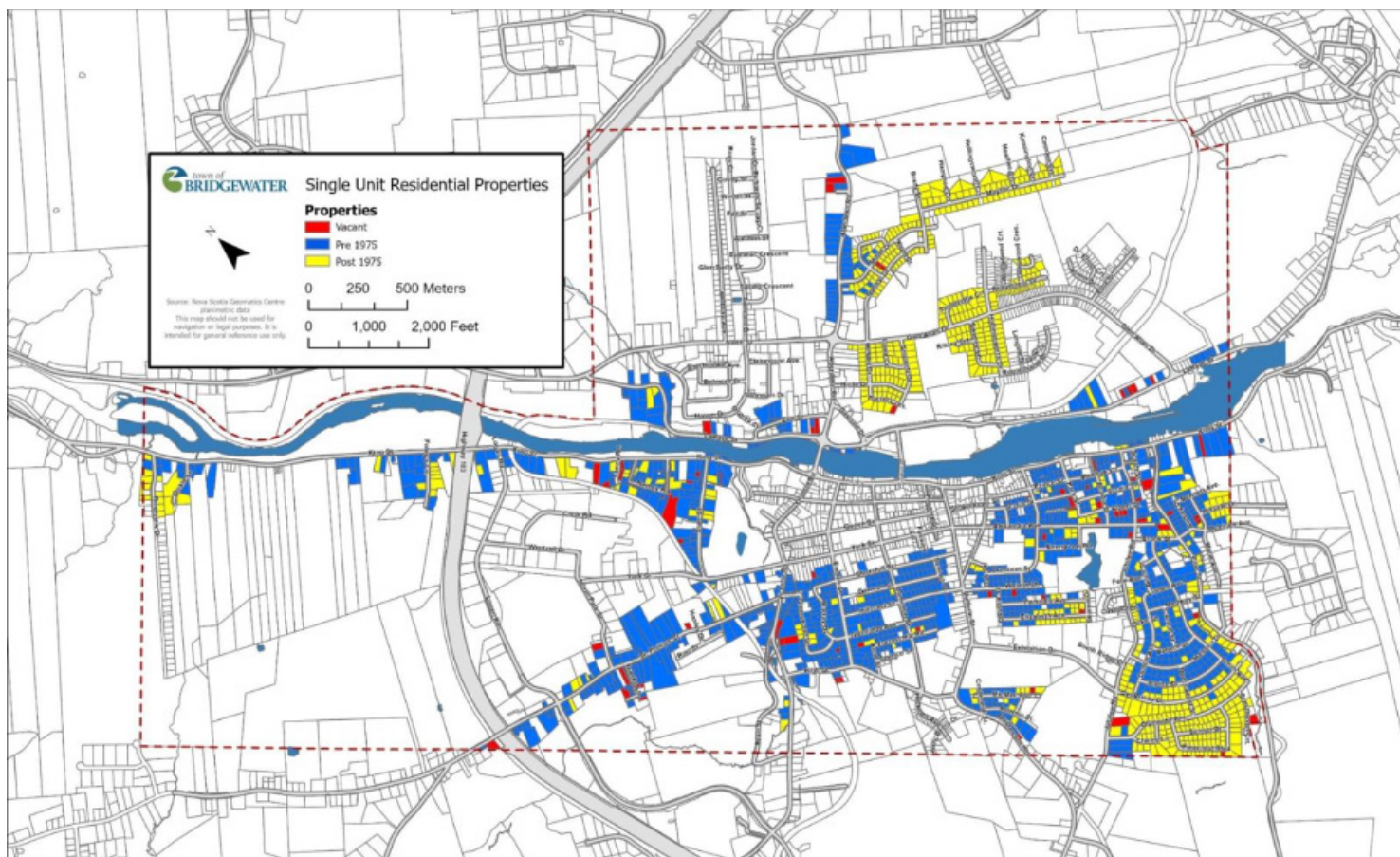


Figure 3. Single Unit Residential Properties, Vacant, Pre and Post 1975, Town of Bridgewater, June 2025



Alternative Zones

The Town's Municipal Planning Strategy includes, within its Low Density Residential Designation, both R1 and R2 zones. The MPS acknowledges a growing demand for diverse housing options while signaling long standing interest in single unit dwellings. In transitioning from R1 to R2 in priority areas, the Town will maintain much of the character of its built form while allowing gentle forms of density to develop in response to growing demand.

Replacing R1 with R2 zoning will require no changes to the MPS, retaining the Low-Density Residential Designation through this phase of the transition.

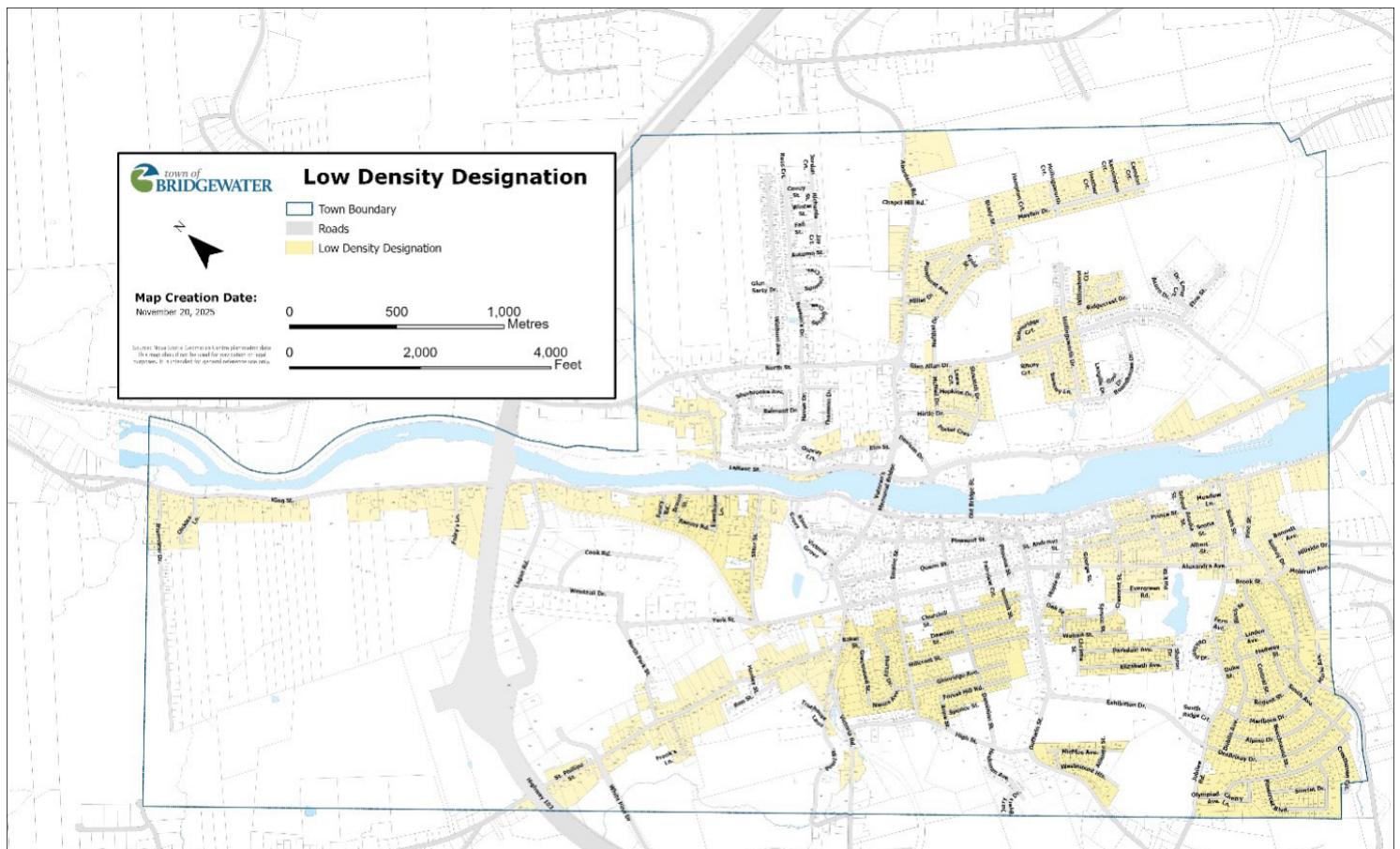


Figure 4. Town of Bridgewater's Future Land Use Map, Low Density Designation

The R2 Zone represents the most appropriate replacement for R1 zoning in most areas. From the MPS: “The Two Unit Residential (R2) Zone is established to set aside land which may accommodate semi-detached dwellings, single unit dwellings and the conversion of buildings established before August 27, 1975, to three units. The provision of two-unit dwellings helps to provide alternatives to single unit dwellings at different price points to help meet different housing needs. Two-unit dwellings are typically more efficient than single unit dwellings in terms of land use, material consumption and the use of municipal infrastructure.”

Policy R-17 permits the following as-of-right in R2 Zone:

- Single unit dwellings
- Two unit dwellings
- Residential conversions of pre-1975 dwellings to maximum three units

Transition from the R1 to R2 zone will create opportunities within targeted areas for gentle increases in density, providing as-of-right options for residents to diversify the housing typology within Bridgewater. In concert with other initiatives within the Town’s HAF agreement – specifically pre-construction grants for affordable housing and fast-tracked plans for accessory dwelling units – this initiative will act to remove barriers for the construction of new housing types within core areas of town while maintaining much of the traditional built form of the area.

Features	R1 Zone	R2 Zone
One Unit	All properties	All properties
Two Unit	Not permitted	All properties
Two Unit (pre-1975 Conversion)	All properties	All properties
Three Unit (pre-1975 Conversion)	Not permitted	All properties
Minimum Lot Size	650m ²	650m ²
Height Limit	10m	10m
Front Yard Setback Minimum	6m	6m
Rear Yard Setback Minimum	4m	4m
Side Yard Setback Minimum	1.5m	1.5m
Flankage Yard Setback Minimum	3m	3m



Phased Approach

The Town is cognizant of the need to balance multiple priorities and constraints while making major changes to its zoning code. The phased approach to the transition is intended to deliver both substantive progress on the initiative while allowing sufficient time for the delivery of key wastewater upgrades upon which new development will be reliant. This strategy will provide an overview of the three phases through which the transition from R1 zoning will transpire.

Phase 1: January 2026

Two priority areas have been identified by staff for the implementation of phase 1 removal of R1 zoning. This phase will see 283 properties, situated in areas where infrastructure capacity is least constrained, rezoned from R1 to R2. The selection of these lands has been made with consideration of both local suitability and total infrastructure capacity.

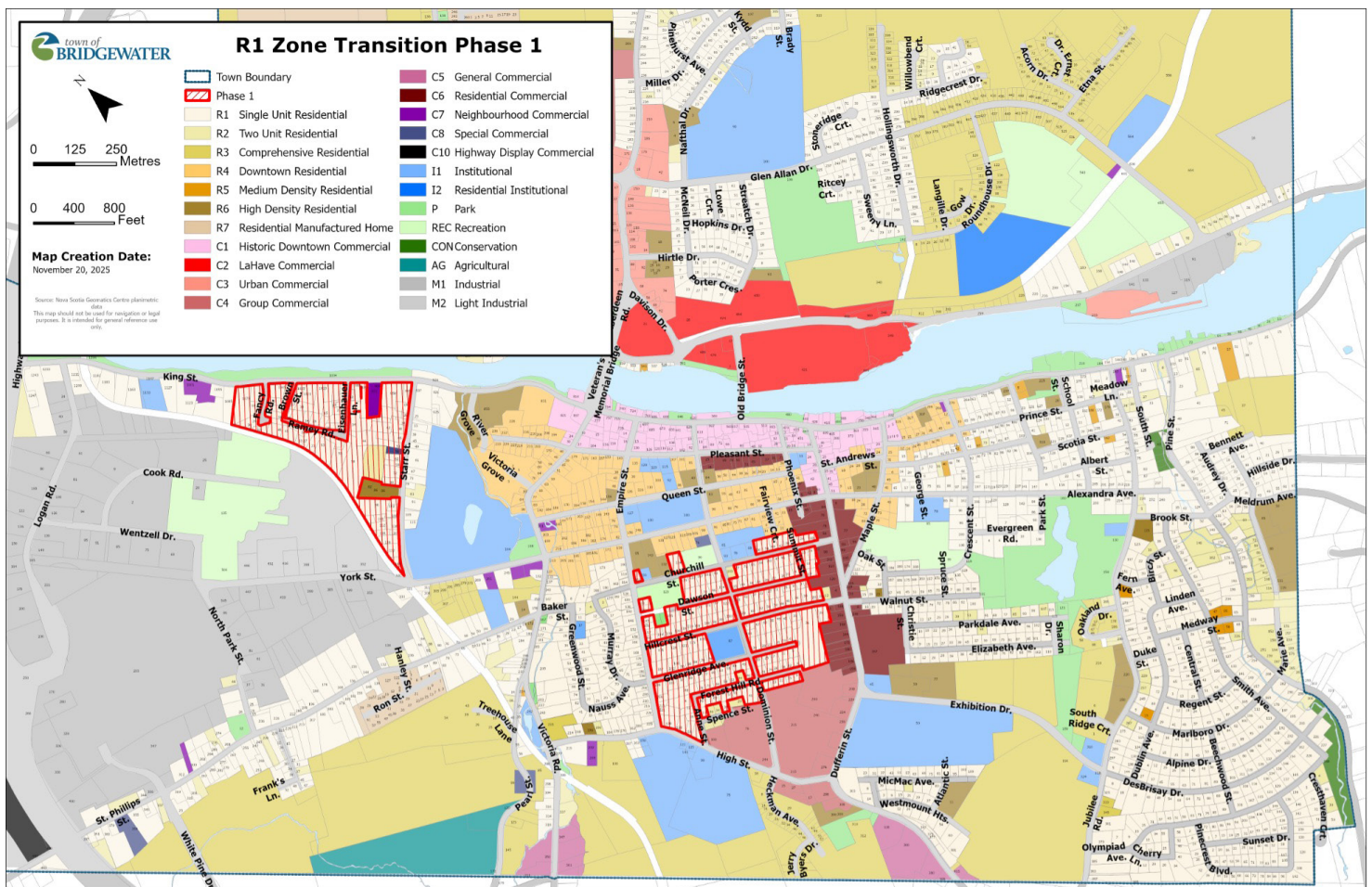


Figure 5. Map indicating Phase 1 areas for transition to R2, outlined in red

One parcel, situated within the town centre and bounded by Empire Street, Dufferin Street, High Street and York Street, was selected for its walkability and proximity to core Town services – including transit, schools and commercial hubs. This area – one of the most central residential neighbourhoods in Bridgewater – is well suited to support new gentle density.

The other parcel, located along King Street to the north of the Brookside Cemetery, has been selected for its suitability for additional development, owing to recent improvements to the sewer capacity. This area is situated close to downtown amenities highlighted above and is located near major employment hubs.

Subsequent Phases

The Town of Bridgewater, while committed to the transition away from R1 zoning, recognizes the importance of a phased and strategic approach in order to align development with infrastructure upgrade timelines. Subsequent phases of the R1 zoning transition will correspond with

While many of the concerns regarding wastewater capacity can be improved through planned upgrades established in the Town's 10-year Capital Plan, the additional concern of absolute capacity within the wastewater treatment plant requires the delay of the 3rd phase until Bridgewater's wastewater treatment facilities are upgraded to allow for greater total capacity.



Phase 2: September 2027

Phase 2 of this strategy will be initiated after completion of the necessary infrastructure upgrades as identified in consultation with the Engineering department. The LUB map amendments for this change will be brought to Council in September 2027. Lands have been selected for this phase through collaboration between the Community Development and Engineering departments, while acknowledging the potential need for redefinition according to changes in the progress of capital infrastructure plans.

Secondary areas have been selected due to probable near-term completion of relevant wastewater upgrades, as well as proximity to commercial, service and transportation hubs. Phase 2 will demonstrate substantial progress towards the goal of eliminating R1 zoning across town.

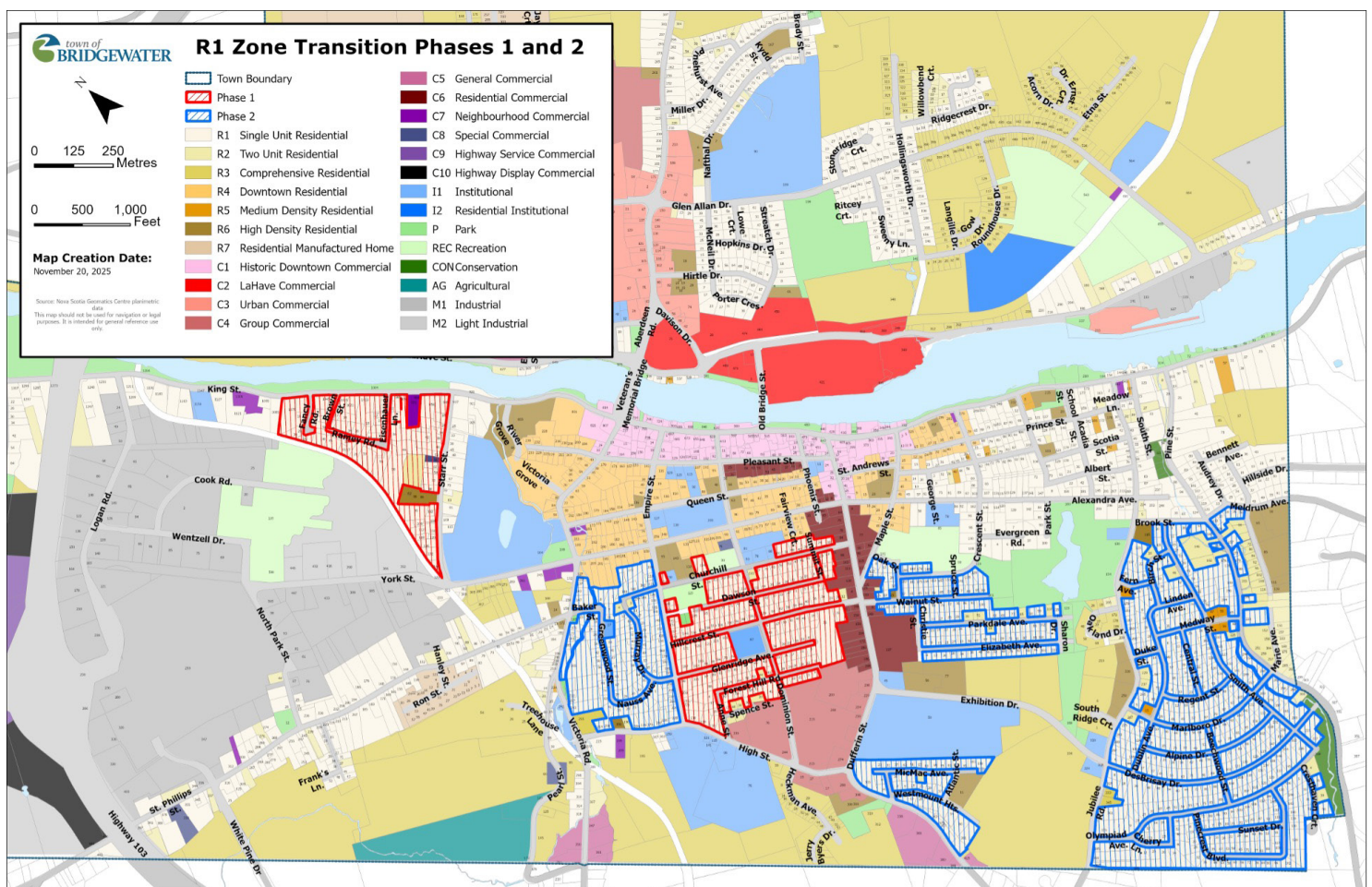


Figure 6. Map indicating Phase 2 areas for transition to R2, outlined in blue

Phase 3: June 2031

Phase 3 will see the remaining lands zoned R1 throughout Town rezoned to R2. This phase will be contingent upon the completion of upgrades to Bridgewater's wastewater treatment plant, expected in 2031, providing necessary capacity for broad future growth. Lands situated on the north-east side of the LaHave River will require substantial wastewater upgrades, and therefore are best reserved for the final phase, expected to be initiated in 2031 upon the completion of the upgrades to the treatment plant. This final phase will include text amendments to the LUB and MPS in order to remove the R1 zone.

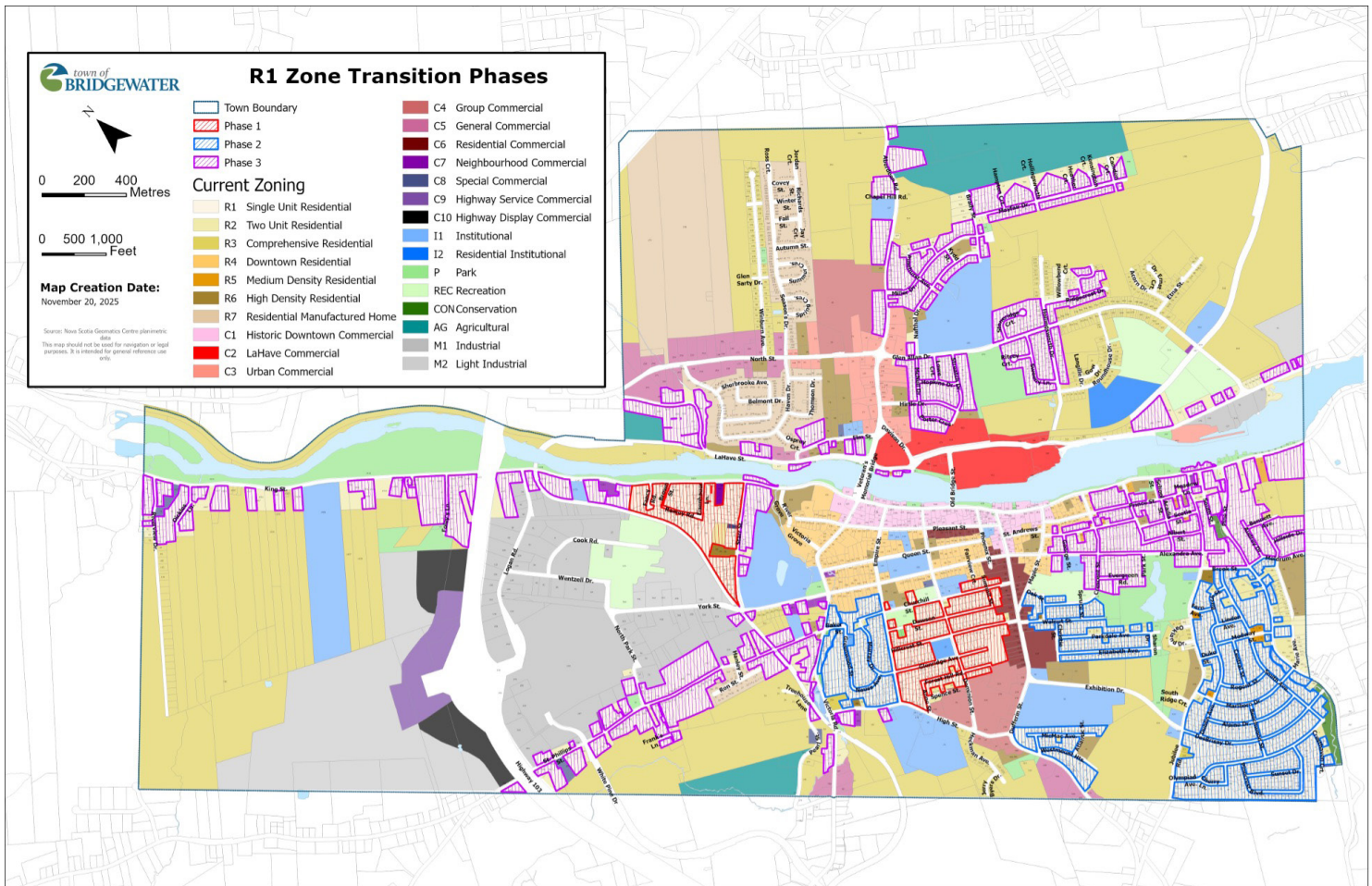


Figure 7. Map indicating Phase 3 areas for transition to R2, outlined in purple



Conclusion

At present, R1 Single Unit Residential Zoning constitutes a barrier to residential growth within Bridgewater's existing neighbourhoods. With an aging population, the Town must take action to diversify its housing types, allowing more opportunity for additional housing units within its serviced core. Gentle increases to housing density will allow residents to age in place, while meeting demand for new housing that has accrued over the past decade.

While committing to this transition away from R1 zoning, the Town acknowledges the severity of its existing wastewater capacity constraints. It is crucial to coordinate the changes to the zoning code with infrastructure upgrades as identified in the 10-year capital plan.

Delivery of this transition through a 3-phase approach will allow sufficient time for these important upgrades while providing a clear and equitable approach to delivering change across Town.

By committing to the transition from R1 zoning, Bridgewater will invite residents and developers to improve housing choice, provide accessible and appropriate housing options and improve the social fabric and infrastructure efficiency through small increases to residential density.

