

# Memorandum

To: ACEDAC Members

Date: Thursday, April 10, 2025

From: Carolyn Armanini, A/Manager Economic Development

File: #2681235

Subject: Retail Strategy Implementation: Zoning Changes for Enhancing Active Streets

Staff continue to work on implementing the City's [Retail Strategy](#) (2023), a policy document to guide City decision making around long-range commercial land use planning, strategic commercial area interventions, and proactive tenant retention and attraction. A key goal of the Retail Strategy is to identify key opportunities to enhance the retail experience in the city's unique commercial areas and to recommend how the City may leverage its tools in support of a strong retail commercial environment. Currently, staff are working on implementing two of the Strategy's recommendations and look forward to a discussion at the April 2025 ACEDAC meeting:

- Limit at-grade uses in core areas of Great Streets to 'active uses.'
- Amend the Sign/Business License Bylaw to encourage the visual connection between passersby on the street and interior uses to provide an engaging streetscape experience (e.g. limit opaque window treatments.)

The Retail Strategy defines *active retail uses* as optimal generators of street-level activity and vitality, including restaurants, retail and specialty food stores, specialty retail stores, arts culture and entertainment uses, and personal service-oriented businesses that generate frequent traffic. Other uses can be designed to be more 'active' (i.e., to better support street-level vibrancy), such as finance, insurance, and real estate offices. General office uses would not be considered active uses (e.g. professional, scientific, and technical services, business-to-business services).

The portions of Great Streets (main commercial corridors) that the Strategy recommends being designated for 'active uses' include:

- Columbia Street (Downtown) between Eighth Street and Fourth Street
- East Columbia Street (Sapperton): between Braid and Knox Streets
- Sixth Street (Uptown): between 5th and 7th Avenues
- Twelfth Street: between Nanaimo and Edinburgh Streets
- Ewen Avenue (Queensborough): between Gifford and Howes Streets

These commercial areas are not only the location of retail and services but also act as the heart of a neighbourhood. They should be vibrant and animated with active uses like cafes and shops located on the ground level of buildings and less active uses, such as offices, located on upper levels of buildings.

To support implementation of the Retail Strategy and Council's Strategic Priorities Plan, staff have been working to review land use regulations (e.g. Zoning Bylaw) and signage regulations to regulate active uses at the ground level.

## *Signage/Window Transparency*

The recently completed update on the Business Licence Bylaw incorporated a requirement around the treatment of storefronts and covering windows with frosting, decals, and other objects. This section built upon the existing requirement in the Sign Bylaw and sought to further clarify the expectation around transparent windows.

*Sign Bylaw*

*(10.8) Window Signs are permitted, provided that the total area of the signs, including all sign copy, logos, lifestyle graphics, images and decorative borders shall not exceed 20 percent of the area of windows and glazed areas of doors along street frontages of a building or business unit.*

*Business Licence Bylaw*

*(2.29) Unless otherwise permitted through a sign variance, every licence holder, with respect to the business for which their licence was issued, shall ensure that at least 80% of the sum of the area of all exterior windows and glass portions of glazed doors belonging to the business that are along street frontages remains unobstructed during the operating hours of the business. For clarity, obstructions include signage, graphics, decals, frosting, decorative railings or grillwork placed in front of or behind storefront windows or glazed doors, or any other manner of obscuring such that the interior of the premises is not visible from the exterior.*

*Active Land Uses – Zoning Bylaw*

The next piece of work involves a review of the Zoning Bylaw, which regulates land uses. Staff have developed a list that separates various commercial uses into 1) active uses (e.g. restaurant, clothing store), 2) not active uses (e.g. office), and 3) active if certain conditions are met (e.g. banks, municipal buildings). The 'not active uses' would be prohibited at grade (e.g. they would have to locate on second storeys or above). Additionally, the areas of commercial streets where non-active uses would be prohibited at grade is being proposed for discussion. Please see the attached for the list of active/non active uses and maps.

Another consideration is what types of buildings these regulations would this apply to. Two options are being considered, 1) having active uses at grade requirements apply to new commercial development only, and 2) having active uses at grade requirements apply to new development and existing buildings.

The Retail Strategy recommends exempting existing buildings from new regulations related to 'active' retail/commercial use(s). The consultants recommended this as a more conservative approach, recognizing it would be a slower change and apply only when redevelopment occurs. Older building stock can offer spaces that are more attainable for use by institutional and community service uses.

Having the active at grade use requirement apply to existing buildings and new development is another option. This sets a stronger message for the desire for active streetscapes, would likely see the change occur in a shorter timeframe, but does have the potential for more impact on property owners as a result of changes to who would be eligible to lease or occupy ground level commercial units. It's important to note that existing businesses that are not considered an active use to be able to continue (e.g. they would be 'grandfathered'), but if the use was discontinued for a period of six months, any subsequent business/tenant would become subject to the requirements.

We will review and discuss this work at the upcoming meeting and looking forward to committee member feedback.

# Refining Active Uses In Zoning Bylaw

**Consider...**  
focusing on what  
uses do not meet  
the test of 'active  
use'

Active Use – permitted at grade	Conditional – permitted at grade with conditions	Non-Active Use - not permitted at grade
Accessory Recycling Return Centres	Animal grooming and daycare facilities	Animal Boarding
Amusement arcades	Animal hospitals and veterinary clinics	Business and professional offices (e.g. medical, dental, legal, temp employment office, general office)
Antique stores, thrift stores, consignment stores	Audio recording studios	Car washes
Cafés or restaurants, excluding drive-thrus	Banks	Catering establishments
Clothing and garment design/fabrication	Childcare	Clubs and lodges
Cottage breweries	Fitness studios	Commercial & private schools
Drapery and furniture upholstery shops	Government offices and institutions (educations/judicial), museums, art galleries, civic buildings, concert halls	Funeral parlours
Hotel	Insurance and real estate offices	Vape stores?
Jewelry manufacturing	Non-profit community serving use, including offices	Wholesaling
Libraries	Public utilities	
Personal service establishments: hair salons, nail salon, dry cleaning, optical stores, florists, shoe repair, etc.	Studios (artist, display, radio, recording, television)	
Printing, publishing and bookbinding	<b>CONDITIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Front of house, reception or other customer focused active uses must be located at the front of the building along the street frontage</li> <li>• No office component may occupy more than 25% of the ground level window frontage (e.g. banks, insurance office)</li> </ul>	
Public assembly and entertainment use		
Retail stores, including cannabis and pharmacy		

# Defining Priority Commercial Areas

## Consider...

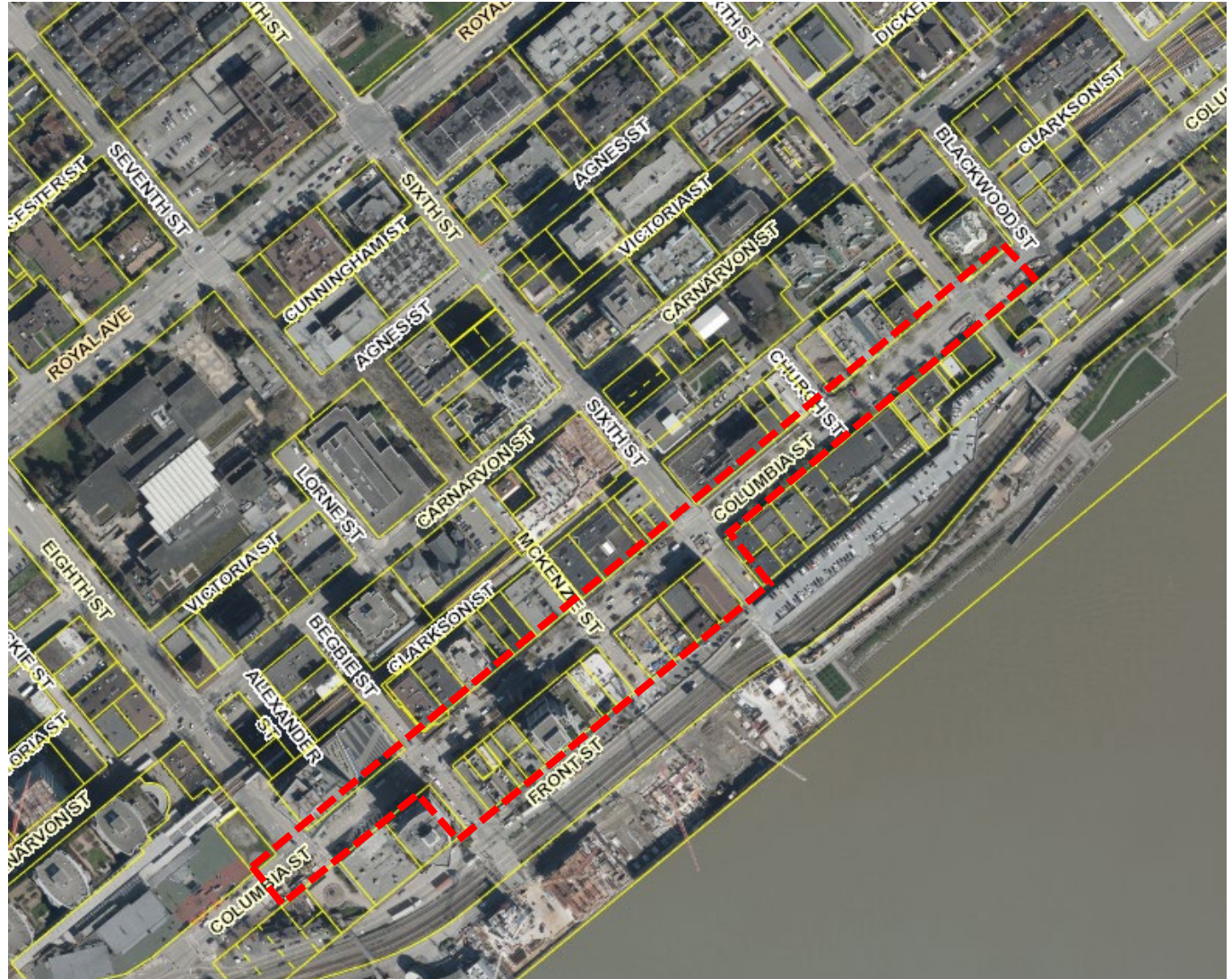
Are these the areas where active uses should be required?





# Downtown

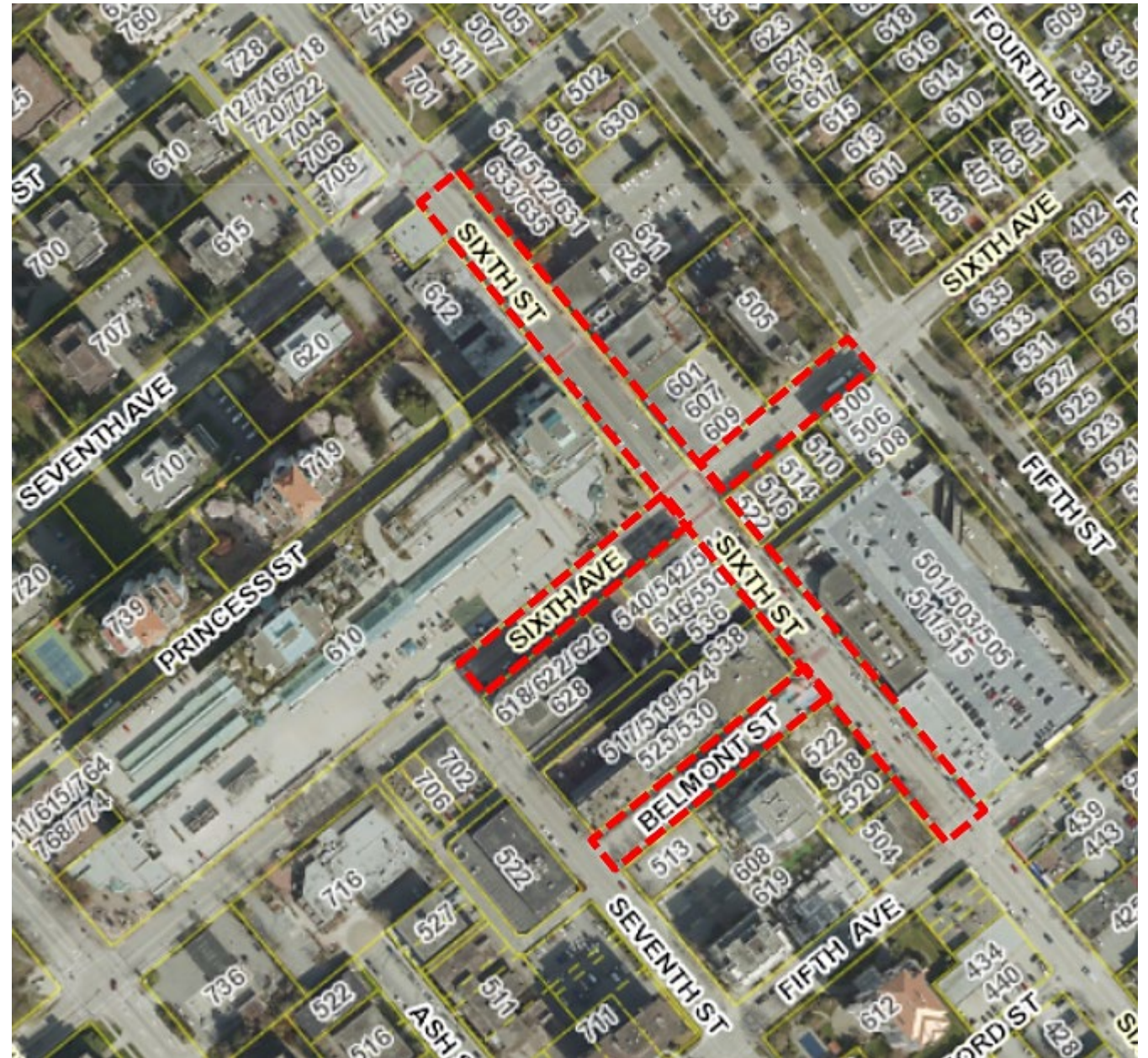
- Columbia Street - Eighth to Fourth Street
- Front Street Mews





# Uptown

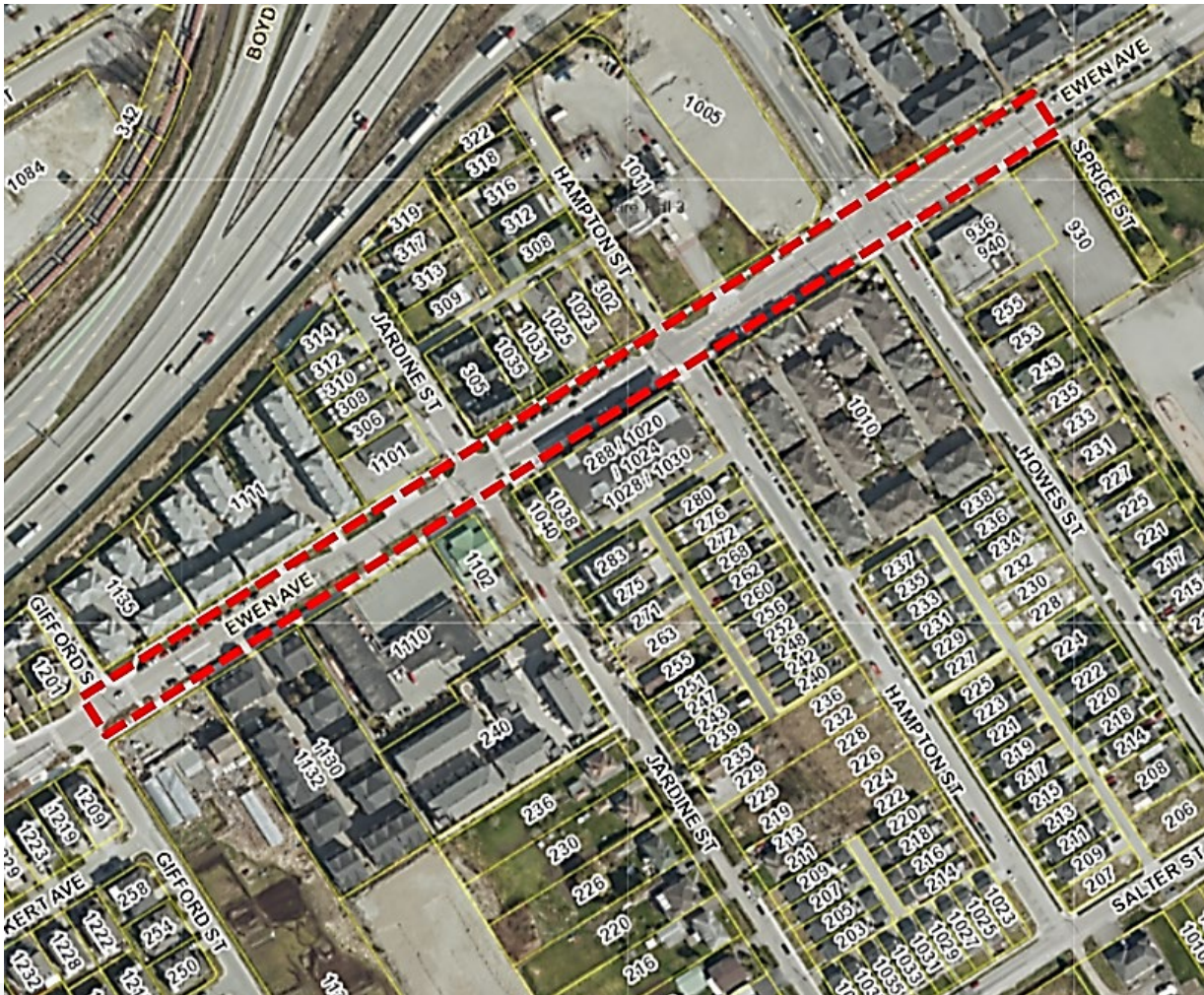
- Sixth Street - Fifth Avenue to Seventh Avenue
- Sixth Avenue – Fifth Street to Seventh Street
- Belmont Street





# Queensborough

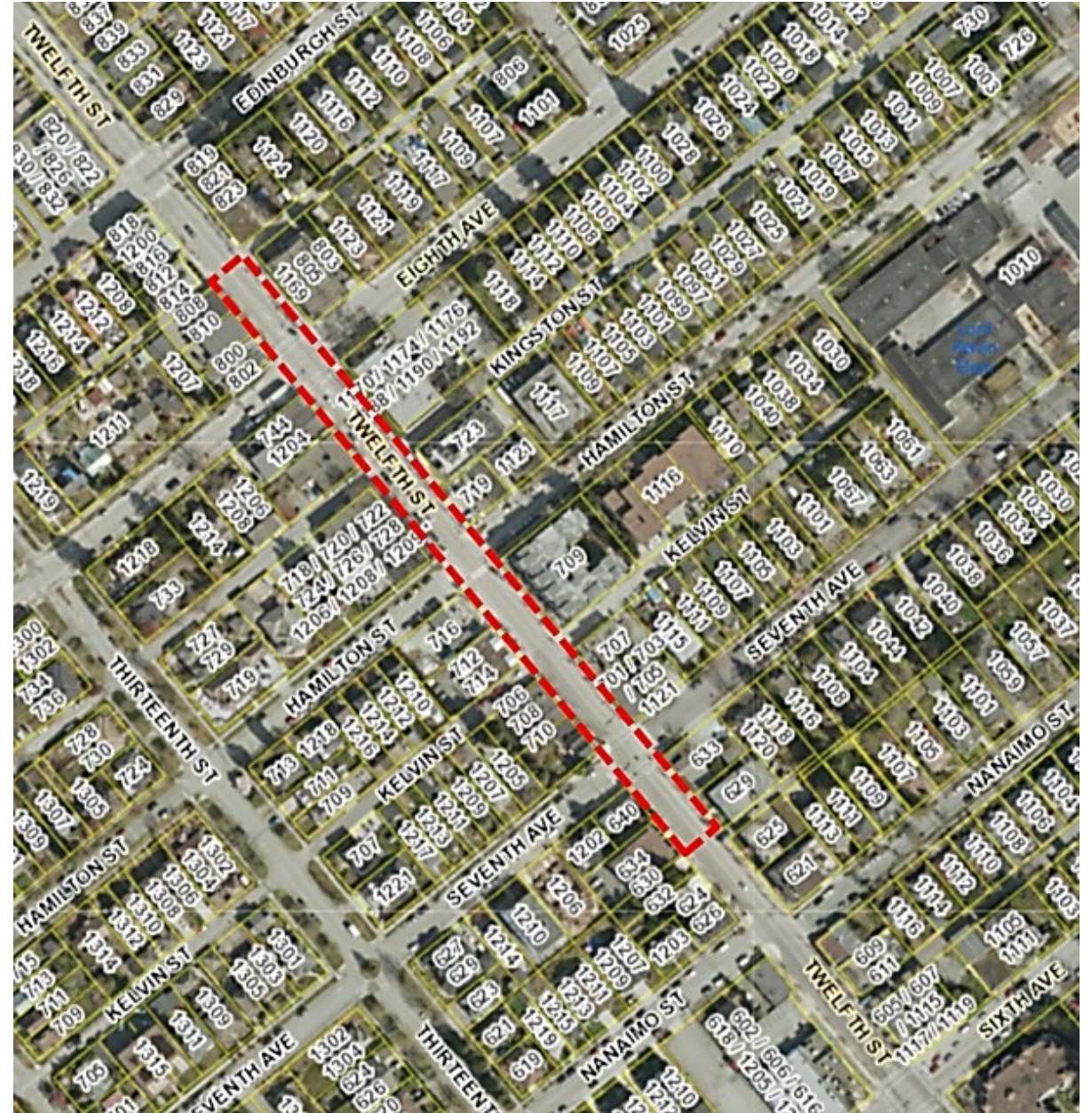
- Ewen Avenue - between Gifford Street and Sprice Street
- Mercer Street – between Blackley Street and Ewen Avenue





# Upper Twelfth

- North of Eighth Avenue and south of Seventh Avenue
- Lower Twelfth to be considered as planning work evolves





# Sapperton

- Braid to Sherbrooke Street
- Alberta to Keary Street

