

Report to Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

To: Chair and Members
Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee

From: Scott Mathers, MPA, P. Eng
Deputy City Manager, Housing and Community Growth

Subject: Downtown Plan: Phase 1 Background Study

Date: November 18, 2025

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Housing and Community Growth, the following actions **BE TAKEN** with respect to the development of the Downtown Plan:

- a) The above-noted staff report and attached Appendix: B related to the Downtown Plan: Background Study **BE RECEIVED** for information;
- b) Civic Administration **BE APPROVED** to further explore the feasibility and implementation of additional quick start actions as identified in Appendix 8 of the attached Downtown Plan Background Study (Appendix B), and other actions included in section 2.4 of this report, within approved budgets and resources;

It being noted that Civic Administration continues to review and implement actions within approved budgets associated with supporting the downtown area and development of the downtown plan.

Executive Summary

This report is being presented to Council for information purposes only. The intent is to provide Municipal Council with the Phase 1 findings, led through the work of the Canadian Urban Institute, as part of the ongoing development of the Downtown Plan. Phase 2 will involve further analysis, engagement and refinement based on the direction established through the phase 1 foundational work. Phase 2 will include the drafting of actions and initiatives that will be incorporated into the final Downtown Plan scheduled to be presented to Municipal Council in Q2 2026.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

This project supports the 2023-2027 City of London Strategic Plan and directly aligns with the following areas of focus:

Economic Growth, Culture, and Prosperity

- London encourages equitable economic growth and diversification.
- London is a destination of choice.
- London encourages the growth of local artistic and musical talent.
- London's Core Area (Downtown, Midtown, Old East Village) is a vibrant neighborhood and attractive destination

Housing and Homelessness

- The City of London demonstrates leadership and builds partners to increase quality, affordable, and supportive housing options.

Wellbeing and Safety

- London has safe, vibrant, and healthy neighbourhoods and communities.
- A well-planned and growing community.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- March 25, 2025 – Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee – Downtown Master Plan – Quick Start Actions
- March 25, 2025 – Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee – Appointment of Consultant RFP 2025-001 – Downtown Master Plan
- October 29, 2024 – Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee – Initiation of the Downtown Master Plan Project
- May 28, 2024 – Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee – 2023-2027 Implementation Plan: 2024 Update
- April 17, 2023 – Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee – Council's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan

1.2 Initiation of the Downtown Plan

The Terms of Reference for the Downtown Plan was approved by Municipal Council on November 5th, 2024. Subsequent to this approval, Municipal Council approved the successful proponent from RFP 2025-001, the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI), as the lead consultant to develop the new Downtown Plan.

2.0 Discussion and Consideration

2.1 Downtown Plan Process Update

The development of Phase 1 of the Downtown Plan is now complete. To date, this phase has involved comprehensive data analysis and spatial mapping, a review of planning and policy contexts, identification of common practices, and an assessment of strengths, barriers, and opportunities within the downtown area. Community engagement has been a key component throughout, contributing valuable insights that informed the research and analysis. The full Background Study is attached as Appendix B to this report.

Phase 2 of the Downtown Plan will involve further community engagement and focus on developing draft strategies, actions and initiatives. Proposed actions will be tested and refined in collaboration with both City staff and the community, alongside key downtown partners and organizations. Phase 2 will culminate in the delivery of the final Downtown Plan.

Development of the Downtown Master Plan remains on schedule to be completed by Q2 2026.

- | | | |
|--------------|---|---|
| • Oct 2024 | Approval of Terms of Reference by Council | ✓ |
| • Mar 2025 | Completion of Procurement Process | ✓ |
| • April 2025 | Project Kick-off | ✓ |
| • Nov 2025 | Delivery of Phase 1 – “Background Study” | ✓ |
| • Q2 2026 | Delivery of Phase 2 – “Downtown Master Plan” | |
| • Q2 2027 | Submission of Downtown Plan business cases to 2028-2031 Multi-Year Budget | |

2.2 Community Engagement

Continuous community engagement was a foundational element of the Phase 1 background Study. Early feedback from residents, businesses and key partners was crucial in helping to identify the existing conditions, challenges, and opportunities within the downtown area. This input informed the background study analysis, helping to

ensure the study reflects the real experiences and priorities of the downtown community.

Some examples of engagement in Phase 1 included the following:

- GetInvolved project website providing regular monthly updates on progress and engagement opportunities, including the ability to subscribe to a distribution list
- An online survey to share feedback, receiving over 2400 responses
- A public virtual downtown summit
- Curated engagements through 1-on-1 conversations, workshops, and focus groups with partners from the following:
 - Arts and Culture
 - Economic Development
 - Equity-Deserving Groups
 - Educational institutions
- Creation of a downtown advisory group consisting of business owners, developers, residents and community organizations

2.3 Summary of Initial Quick-Start Actions

At its meeting held on April 1, 2025, Municipal Council endorsed several quick start actions designed within existing budgets and resources to assist supporting the downtown area while the development of the Downtown Plan occurred. A summary and update of these quick start actions is included *Appendix A: Summary of Downtown Plan Quick Start Actions and Phase 1 Updates*.

2.4 Round 2 Quick Start Action recommendations

Through Phase 1, CUI identified ten additional Quick Start Actions that could be implemented while the Downtown Plan is being developed. These are identified in *Appendix 8: Quick Start Actions of the Downtown Plan Background Study (Appendix B)*. It is recommended that Civic Administration further explore the feasibility of implementing these actions.

Civic Administration has also identified four Quick Start Actions that should be explored in addition to those identified in Appendix 8 of the Background Study as follows:

Action 1: Initiation of the ‘Downtown Operations Team’ to help coordinate operational service delivery in the Downtown Area

- There is an opportunity to improve coordination between Service Areas in delivering operational services to the Downtown by implementing a new internal team focused on improving collaboration, coordination and multi-area service request resolution within existing budgets and resources.
- The Downtown Operations Team (DOT) members meet biweekly to improve operational coordination between the teams responsible for parking, bylaw enforcement, events and activations, construction management, beautification and decorations, cleanliness and graffiti on public property.

Action 2: Core Area dedicated CIR Response

- Starting in January, two dedicated CIR team members will be deployed specifically to the Core Area (Downtown, Old East Village, Midtown) on a more frequent basis to support Londoners, commercial businesses and patrons, and respond to concerns related to health and homelessness.
- As this new operational strategy develops, adjustments may be made to team composition, deployment model, and focus of efforts.

Action 3: London Police Service Phase 2 Open Air Substance Use Strategy

- Coordinated service delivery for High-acuity individuals that supports data driver identification of high-acuity individuals. Developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between partners to support secure information sharing and integrating wraparound services where possible: health, housing and social supports.

- Targeted enforcement with consideration for individual circumstances
 - Applied when individuals refuse services and continue public drug use
 - Grounded in an understanding of substance use complexities
 - Balancing accountability with compassion

Action 4: Core Area extension of free 1-hour on street parking

- As approved by Municipal Council on November 4th, 2025, the one-hour free on street parking initiative in the Core Area will be extended until December 31st, 2025, using existing, approved funding to support the continuation.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

Subject to the recommendations in this report, Civic Administration will continue to explore and implement quick start actions within existing approved multi-year budget and additional annual investments previously approved by Municipal Council, therefore there are no financial impacts or considerations aligned with the recommendations in this report.

Funding for development of the Downtown Plan, and the subsequent steps in the next project phase, were previously approved by Municipal Council as part of the 2023-2027 Multi-Year Budget. As of the writing of this report, the downtown plan project remains within the Council approved budget.

The Downtown Plan will serve as a long-term planning document to inform a variety of actions and initiatives. The detailed cost and identification of financial sources will occur through future Multi-Year Budgeting processes and subsequent approvals from Municipal Council.

Conclusion

Phase 1 of the Downtown Plan has established a foundational analysis, setting the stage for the development of actionable strategies in Phase 2. Civic Administration will continue to collaborate with the Canadian Urban Institute and key downtown partners and the community to refine priorities and advance development on actions that will ultimately guide coordinated efforts to support a vibrant, inclusive and resilient downtown.

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Appendix A: Summary of Downtown Plan Quick Start Actions and Phase 1 Updates

Action	Status	Phase 1 Update
<p>Action 1: London Police Service Priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Launch of new 'open air, public space drug strategy' - Expansion of the Community Outreach and Support Team (COAST) - Increased police visibility in the Core Area for renewed commitment to public safety 	Ongoing	<p>Teams of officers in collaboration with community partners deployed in the Core Area providing increased police presence assisting to provide pathways to support services while enhancing real and perceived public safety.</p> <p>Over 2,900 calls for service, mostly related to trespassing and drug-related concerns. Engagement with over 800+ individuals, approximately 760 referrals to over 12 agencies.</p>
<p>Action 2: Prioritized Municipal Compliance Deployment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beginning in spring 2025, Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEOs) will initiate a proactive 'boots on the ground' initiative including a regular downtown route, with the following goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Provide a visible presence in the Downtown for public and business/property owners o Immediately and proactively address damage such as broken windows, dumping on public streets and debris buildup on private property o Identify larger or systemic issues to work towards initiating continuous improvement projects in the Downtown, addressing the conditions, aesthetics and safety. - These resources were effectively re-allocated through streamlining the vacant building process, reducing both staff workload and administrative processing time significantly, providing staff with extra capacity to engage in new efforts. By implementing these new processes, staff are now better able to respond to problems more efficiently on a rotational basis through the Core Area. 	Ongoing	<p>'Boots on the ground' initiative has resulted in 848 vacant building and proactive untidy inspections as of October 2025, between Downtown and Old East Village. With each interaction, came visibility, and opportunity for the public to further engage with officers. A review of this initiative has started to find further improvements as part of the service area's continuous improvement initiatives.</p>
<p>Action 3: Transit-Oriented Development Community Improvement Plan (CIP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As part of London's commitment to the Housing Accelerator Fund, development of a new transit-oriented community improvement plan (CIP) is being introduced along the rapid transit links in London – this includes the downtown area. The proposed incentive will support accelerated development of new residential units and eligible office-to-residential conversions by providing \$15,000 per unit, subject to funding availability. - The Transit-Oriented Development financial incentive program is stackable with existing CIP programs that the City offers, including the recently approved Affordable Housing CIP incentives for highly supportive housing and affordable units, and the current Office-to-Residential grant in the Downtown CIP. 	Complete	<p>The Transit-Oriented Development incentive program was approved by Council in March 2025. Additional program funding has been allocated by Council in October 2025, and further program updates will be provided for Council approval in November 2025. The program is currently oversubscribed, with 5 of the 7 approved projects residing within the downtown area.</p>
<p>Action 4: Downtown Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Incentive Program to Address Vacancy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A new financial incentive program is currently in development to support the Core Area Vacancy Reduction Strategy (CAVRS). The 'Vacant Commercial Space Fit-out Grant', intends to provide an incentive to new 	Complete	<p>Council approved the 'Vacant Commercial Space Fit-Out Program' in April 2025. As the program is newly released, Civic Administration is proposing a review of the program in 2026, approximately one year after program launch. While no</p>

<p>targeted use business tenants that occupy vacant spaces in the Downtown CIP area, providing funding to complete eligible renovations to ready their space to open and operate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The 'Vacant Commercial Space Fit-Out' program is funded through the existing multi-year budget and does not require an additional source of funding or drawdown on the CIP reserve fund. - This program is intended to be presented to Municipal Council for approval in April 2025 and eligibility, terms and conditions, grant amounts, and program guidelines are currently being finalized by staff. 		<p>grants have been issued yet, there are currently 3 approved projects, and 3 more under review.</p>
<p>Action 5: Dundas Place Public-Access Washroom Hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewed in fall 2024, expansion and alignment between Victoria Park and Dundas Place public washrooms hours of operation started from 900am-900pm 7 days a week. The extension of hours at both locations is supported by approved funding provided through the 2023-2027 Multi-Year Budget. - As included in the report to Council on December 17, 2024, public access washroom hours are continually reviewed to ensure adequate availability to the public. 	<p>Complete</p>	<p>Dundas Place washroom hours adjusted in early 2025 to align with Victoria Park operations and are to remain in place, aligning with on-street events and use of spaces. The washrooms remain available on an extended basis during on-street activations and events on Dundas Place.</p>
<p>Action 6: Enhanced Downtown Activations and Beautification on Dundas Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starting in spring 2025, Dundas Place will have more consistent road closures for planned activations in the evenings from Thursday to Saturday and in the days on Sundays. - The Dundas Place Public Art Project is expected to add beauty to Dundas Place by September 2025 that will attract more residents and visitors to this culture and entertainment district. Through the City's Public Art and Monument Program, diverse artworks for Dundas Place fixtures, including banners, gateway marker kiosks, and planter/pole wraps will be created by local artists to be installed along the street. - The Downtown Loop Rapid Transit Shelter Artwork will include local artist public art into the design of four downtown loop shelter stops. The inclusion of public art is a great way to enhance the waiting experience of rapid transit riders and get the community involved. - Two downtown self-guided public art and monument tours have been launched by the City of London and London Arts Council this year (visit londonarts.ca/public-art-tour-downtown). These tours feature public artworks and podcast-style videos to guide participants on a historic tour of London from the experience of London's first inn keeper and entrepreneur to animate the City's downtown landmarks and legends. 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Dundas Place hosted several weekly events throughout spring and summer along with one-off activation programming. Results are under review for 2026 planning. New public art by local artists to be installed across Dundas Place in Spring 2026. Transit shelter artwork is currently being designed, to be installed late 2025 and into 2026.</p>
<p>Action 7: Support of CPTED Audits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipal Compliance successfully completed 80 CPTED audits in 2024 - For 2025, Municipal Compliance has committed to an additional 50 CPTED audits in the Core Area. - Coordinated Informed Response officers are receiving CPTED training, which will provide front-line staff with the information and knowledge to help provide supports to business and property owners in the Core Area through a customer service lens. CIR officers will not be performing formal audits as part of their duties. 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>As of October 2025, 8 CPTED audits have been completed within the Core Area, as by request. Municipal Compliance continues to proactively speak and engage with property owners about general improvements and safety.</p>
<p>Action 8: Return of the Core Area 1-Hour Free Parking Program</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>This parking incentive was operational from April 1st to October 31st.</p>

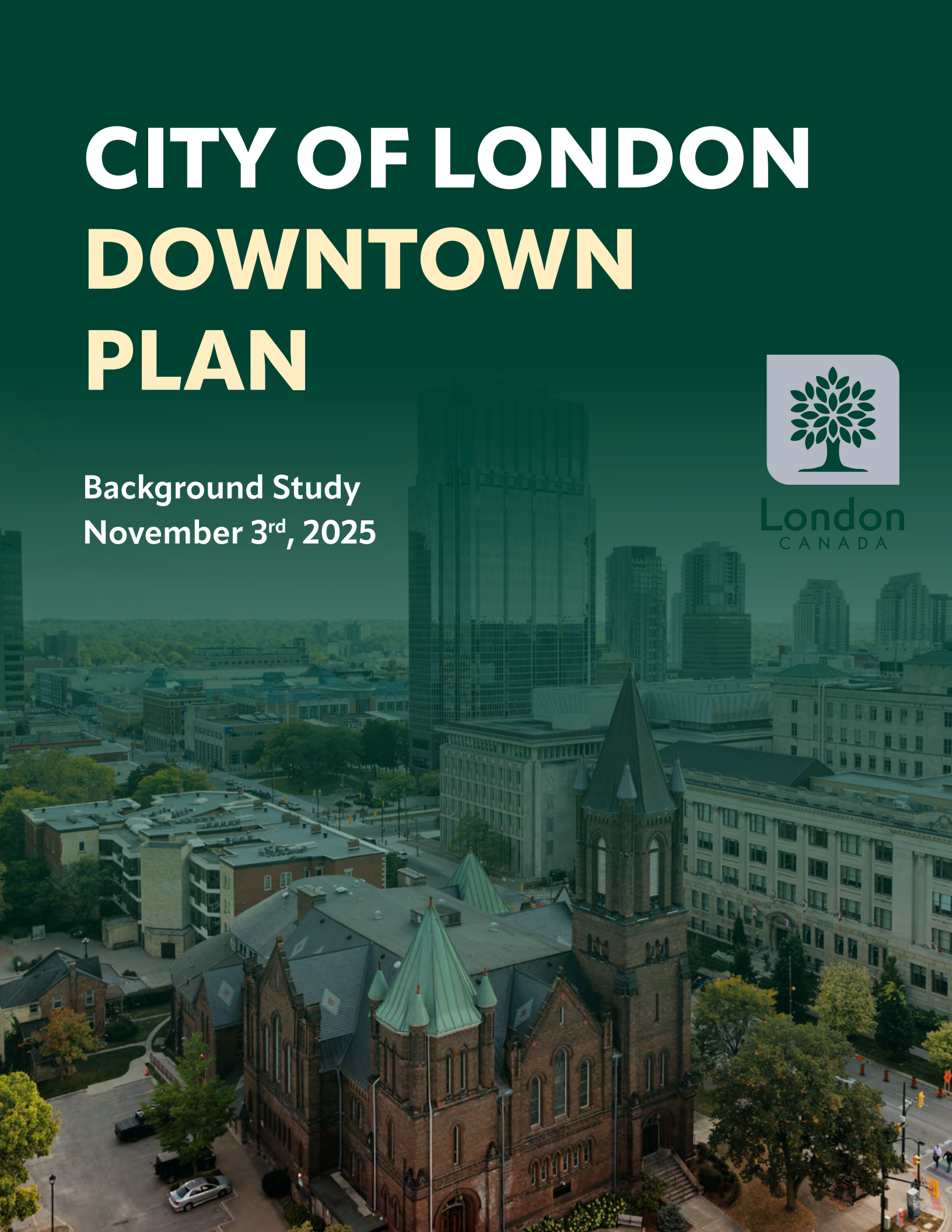
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starting on April 1st 2025, Parking Services will offer 1-hour free parking in Municipal Lots #1 and #2 in Old East Village, and 1-hour free on street parking in the Core Area through the parking services HONK app, until October 31st 2025, at a projected cost of \$181,875. - For 2024, the actual realized cost to offer 1-hour free parking in Municipal lots #1 and #2, and on-street in the Core Area was \$148,125 of the initial request from Council to redirect \$330,000 from the Economic Development Reserve Fund. This program concluded at the end of 2024. - When the 2024 parking programs concluded at the end of 2024, the funding that was not fully utilized, \$181,875, was returned to the Economic Development Reserve Fund. 		<p>Municipal Council, at its meeting on November 4th, 2025, resolved to continue this initiative until December 31st, 2025.</p>
<p>Action 9: Providing enhanced operations delivery in Downtown</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Road Operations, Park Operations and Solid Waste Operations continue to provide daily, weekly, and specialized as needed services at-or-above city-wide maintenance standards in the Downtown Area to meet the needs that are unique in this general area. 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Daily, weekly, and specialized maintenance continues at-or-above city-wide standards in the downtown area.</p>
<p>Action 10: Exploring service enhancement opportunities in the Downtown area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment and Infrastructure continue to work with downtown residents, businesses and property owners to best respond to changing service demands, such as waste collection patterns in the downtown area as infill and densification evolve the downtown streetscape. 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Efforts continue within the downtown area to support downtown London residents and businesses, and to respond to the unique needs of the downtown area.</p>
<p>Action 11: Dundas Place Traffic Management and Activation Enhancements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presented to Council on December 17, 2024, several approved changes will be established on Dundas Place in Spring 2025. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Additional loading zones for improved ease of access and to support local businesses with drop-off / pick-up opportunities o Additional bollards to improve compliance and increase clarity of appropriate parking/loading zones o Removal of Dundas Place turn restrictions to improve motorized vehicle access and egress 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Council approved changes implemented, including the review of loading zones and pick-up / drop-off areas. Turn restrictions removed to improve motorized vehicle access and egress. Staff continue to review and install bollards to assist with compliance, repairs are addressed as required.</p>
<p>Action 12: Additional Investment in Downtown Beautification and Cleaning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On November 22, 2024, Municipal Council amended the 2025 and 2026 operating budgets to include an investment of \$300,000, funded by the Economic Development Reserve Fund, to be allocated to the Downtown London Business Improvement Association (BIA) for the purpose of cleaning and maintenance on private property, such as graffiti removal, power washing, expanded cleaning (litter and sharps removal), and beautification and maintenance in support of member businesses and private property owners. 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Downtown London has expanded its beautification and cleaning program. The Clean Team provides daily cleaning maintenance in the downtown area, along with rapid response to emergency cleaning issues such as spills, litter and debris on private property. Over 1,650 storefronts have been power washed, and ongoing graffiti removal supports downtown businesses and property owners in maintaining a clean, welcoming and safe environment.</p>

CITY OF LONDON DOWNTOWN PLAN

Background Study
November 3rd, 2025



London
CANADA



CITY OF LONDON DOWNTOWN PLAN

BACKGROUND STUDY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Downtown Plan Background Study has been prepared to inform the development of a new Downtown Plan. The Downtown Plan will establish a strategic vision and policy roadmap to guide change in the City's core over the next decade, setting priorities for land use, mobility, economic development, public realm, cultural vitality, and environmental resilience. The Background Study provides the foundation for this work through a detailed review of existing conditions, planning frameworks, and common practices, combined with broad and extensive community engagement. The Study draws on a wide range of inputs, including:

- Research and analysis of demographic, economic, land use, mobility, and development trends
- Review of provincial, municipal, and downtown-specific planning documents to ensure alignment with existing policies
- Comparative practices from other cities that have implemented successful downtown strategies
- Extensive engagement with residents, businesses, community organizations, and institutions through surveys, one on one discussions, focus groups, public events, and online platforms

The report is organized into seven sections:

- 1. Introduction** – Project background, study area boundaries, recent history of downtown planning and investment, regional and city profiles, and the intent of the Downtown Plan
- 2. Downtown London Today** – A profile of current conditions, including demographics, economy and vacancies, mobility and transportation, urban form, character areas, arts and culture, landscape and ecology, heritage, public safety, and governance
- 3. Planning Context** – Review of the provincial framework, city-wide plans, cultural and public space policies, transportation and infrastructure initiatives, housing and homelessness strategies, and downtown-specific plans
- 4. Common Practices Review** – Lessons from other cities in housing, arts and culture, mobility and infrastructure, business vibrancy, environmental sustainability, and governance
- 5. Downtown Diagnostic** – An assessment of strengths, barriers, and opportunities that will shape the development of the Downtown Plan
- 6. Engagement Findings** – A summary of community input from in-person and virtual sessions, focus groups, one-on-one discussions, public events, and surveys
- 7. Preliminary Strategic Directions** – Early directions and priorities for the development of the Downtown Plan, focused on capital investment, programming and vibrancy, and urban governance

This Background Study represents four months of intensive research and engagement, consolidating the voices of the community alongside technical analysis. It highlights Downtown London's role as the city's economic, social, and cultural hub, identifies the barriers and challenges that must be addressed, and sets out opportunities to strengthen its vitality and resilience.

The findings of this Background Study will directly inform the next phase of work: the development of the Downtown Plan itself. Phase 2 will move from research and understanding to action, refining priorities, testing strategies through further engagement, and developing a detailed implementation framework.



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of London is situated on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron. We honour and respect the history, languages and culture of the diverse Indigenous people who call this territory home. The City of London is currently home to many First Nations, Metis and Inuit people today. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work and live in this territory.

The Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) works from coast to coast to coast and acknowledges the Indigenous peoples of all the lands on which we operate. We recognize the importance of these territories and the ancestral and unceded territories of all Inuit, Métis, and First Nations peoples. We reaffirm our commitment to building respectful relationships, deepening our understanding of local Indigenous communities, and reflecting on the harms and mistakes of the past in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

We also recognize that urban planning practices and policies have historically reinforced exclusionary and colonial systems. Today, city-building must confront these legacies and embrace approaches that prioritize equity, inclusion, and collaboration, creating cities that serve everyone.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Background Study has been prepared to support the development of a new Downtown Plan. Its purpose is to establish a comprehensive understanding of current conditions through both qualitative and quantitative research and analysis. The Study draws together a review of provincial, municipal, and downtown-specific planning documents; an analysis of demographic, economic, land use, and development data; and a review of common practices from other cities that have implemented downtown strategies relevant to Downtown London. The Background Study process also involved engagement with a broad range of participants, including residents, business owners, community organizations, and institutions. Input was gathered through surveys, interviews, focus groups, public events, and online platforms to ensure that diverse voices and perspectives were captured.

Together, this Background Study will inform the new Downtown Plan, which will serve as a guiding document outlining actionable strategies to shape and support the growth, vitality, and resilience of Downtown London over the next ten years.

Downtown London is the city's central core and plays an essential economic, social, and cultural role. It is home to a high concentration of businesses, institutions, and services, making it a critical centre of economic activity. Despite occupying a small share of the City's total land area, the Downtown generates a significant portion of London's property tax base. It is also a cultural destination, featuring theatres, galleries, and arts institutions that enrich the city's creative identity. Festivals, performances, and

year-round events attract both residents and visitors, while its public spaces and multiple transportation options reinforce its role as a primary gathering place. The strength of Downtown London has a direct influence on the wider city and region, shaping economic vitality, cultural identity, and investment confidence.

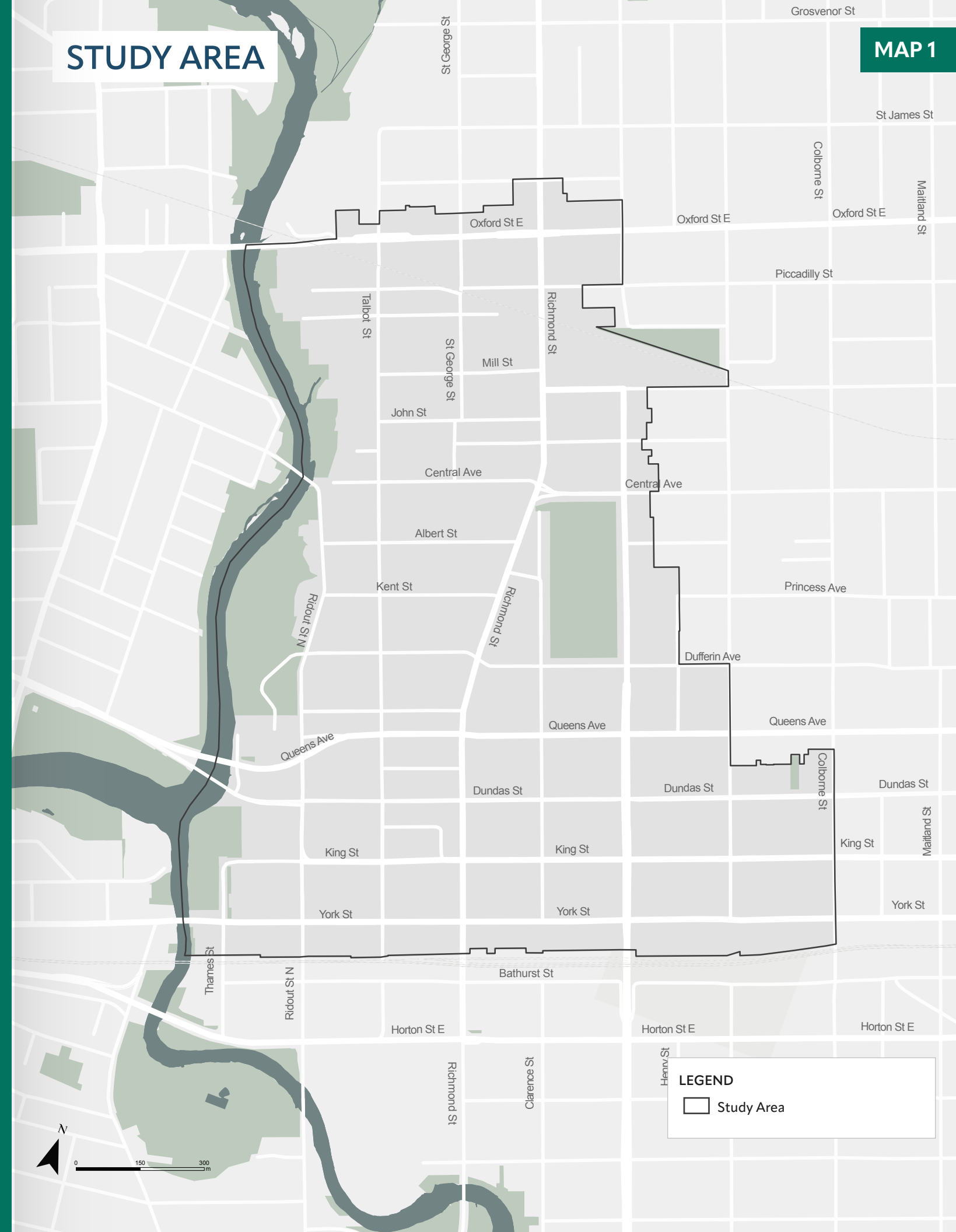
1.1 STUDY AREA

The Study Area for this Background Study is the area most commonly considered by Londoners to constitute 'Downtown London'. The Study Area is framed by the Thames River on the west; the Canadian National (CN) Railway rail corridor to the south; Oxford Street to the north; and established residential neighbourhoods to the east. This area is approximately two square kilometres extending across a fine-grained street network, anchored by Dundas Street and Richmond Street as its principal commercial corridors. The area includes a mix of historic streetscapes, civic spaces and parks, and modern high-rise office and residential developments.

Within the Study Area, land uses and development patterns are diverse but highly urban in character. The compact urban fabric of the Study Area supports a walkable environment and is well served by transit, including the new Rapid Transit loop. Large institutional and civic facilities, such as Victoria Park, Covent Garden Market, the Central Library, and Canada Life Place, serve as important focal points for community life, festivals, and visitor activity that contribute to the Downtown's role as London's primary employment and cultural hub.

STUDY AREA

MAP 1



1.2 RECENT HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LONDON

This section does not provide a comprehensive history of Downtown London but rather highlights key planning initiatives and investments that have shaped the area over time.

Downtown London has evolved through decades of strategic planning and investment. The concept of a defined "Downtown" emerged in 1984, and planning for the area was formalized in 1988 when London's Official Plan first referenced it. This shift spurred further efforts in the 1990s, including the introduction of the Downtown Design Guidelines and the Downtown Community Improvement Plan (CIP), which remains in effect today.

Completed in 1998, the Downtown Millennium Plan catalyzed a wave of investment in the core, including the Covent Garden Market, the John Labatt Centre (now Canada Life Place), and the Central Library, projects that remain important downtown assets today. This period of renewal continued into the early 2000s. In 2014, investment momentum carried forward with Fanshawe College's establishment of its School of Digital and Performing Arts, which brought higher education into the heart of Downtown.

In 2015, Our Move Forward – London's Downtown Plan was developed to guide planning and investment in the area. The Plan outlined a series of actions and transformational projects to support a vibrant and distinctive downtown neighbourhood. It included proposals to create Dundas Place with year-round programming, reconnect Downtown with the Thames River, enhance its multifunctional character, and strengthen

links to surrounding neighbourhoods. While not all the plan's policies were implemented, the transformation of Dundas Place was completed in late 2019.

In 2018, The London Plan was adopted as the City's Official Plan, introducing "place types", categories based on the intended character and function of an area to guide growth. The Downtown Place Type was envisioned as the City's highest-density, mixed-use area. This vision was reinforced by incentive programs offered through the Downtown CIP and, later, the Core Area CIP, established in 2021.

More recent planning initiatives include the 2019 Core Area Action Plan (CAAP), which sought to strengthen London's Core Area, encompassing Downtown, Richmond Row, and Old East Village, by improving safety and supporting both businesses and vulnerable populations. While the CAAP is no longer active, it informed and inspired several subsequent downtown initiatives and incentive programs now implemented through the Core Area CIP.

In recent years, in response to rising commercial vacancies, the City has adapted to changing market conditions by approving and incentivizing office-to-residential conversions, supporting a greater mix of uses and an expanding residential population Downtown. Other recent investments include the 2025 Harris Park restoration and the development of new affordable and market housing.



1.3 REGIONAL PROFILE

The London Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) encompasses both the City of London itself as well as the broader region including the City of St. Thomas and other smaller towns and villages in the surrounding area. It is the largest population centre in Southwestern Ontario, with 626,260 residents as of 2024, and the 11th largest CMA in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2025). The City alone accounts for over 75% of the CMA's population making it, by far, the largest city in Southwestern Ontario.

The London region has experienced strong population growth in recent years, increasing by 10% between 2016 and 2021, also making it one of Ontario's fastest-growing urban areas. This growth has continued post-pandemic with an additional 10% growth between 2021 and 2024, as the Region's relative affordability has continued to attract new residents from the Greater Toronto Area. This growth is

reflected across all age groups, most notably in the 65+ cohort, indicating an aging population alongside growth in both youth and working-age demographic cohorts.

Between 2016 and 2021, London's CMA labour force grew from approximately 253,000 to 269,000 workers, with the economy remaining anchored by health care and social services (15% of all employment), manufacturing (11%), retail trade (11.8%) and education (9%). The strongest growth was in construction (+20%), professional, scientific and technical services (+22%), and transportation and warehousing (+24%), reflecting diversification into knowledge-based and logistics sectors. Overall, London's CMA economy shows resilience with expanding professional and trade sectors, while service and cultural industries contracted (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Driven by its strong employment base, the London CMA recorded a GDP of more than \$30 billion in 2021, underscoring its role as a key economic region in Ontario (Statistics

Canada, 2024). The CMA's location along Highway 401 also connects it to 150 million consumers within a one-day drive, facilitating \$1.5 billion in daily trade and strengthening its position as a competitive hub for business and innovation (City of London).

1.4 CITY PROFILE

The City of London has a population of approximately 480,000 people. While it is a thriving urban centre with strong employment in advanced manufacturing, finance/insurance and post-secondary education sectors, its Downtown has faced challenges in recent years, including high office vacancy rates and a growing population of unhoused individuals.

Located at the heart of the broader London Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), the City serves as the primary centre of the region's economic, institutional, and cultural life. Although the wider metropolitan area is home to diverse communities and industries, London itself concentrates much of the region's employment, services, and activity.

The City also functions as Southwestern Ontario's hub for healthcare, education, and business services. London's healthcare sector includes over 100 companies, multiple hospitals, and the London Health Sciences Centre, which draws patients and more than 25,000 healthcare professionals to the city (City of London). This sector is supported by post-secondary institutions such as Western University and Fanshawe College, which together attract more than 88,000 students from across Canada and abroad, supporting over 24,000 education-related jobs (City of London). Collectively, these assets position London as the economic and institutional anchor of Southwestern Ontario.

London's strategic advantages further reinforce its economic base. Its proximity to productive farmland supports agri-food processing, while access to Highway 401 and well-serviced industrial lands sustains more than 500 advanced manufacturing firms, including 3M Canada, Trojan Technologies, and Starlim, among others. The City's relatively affordable office space and shorter commutes have also attracted investment in digital media, technology, and professional services such as finance, insurance, and corporate operations (London Economic Development Corporation).

Beyond its economic strengths, London serves as a regional anchor for recreation and culture. The City offers a diverse range of festivals, major event venues, and music spaces, and in recognition of this cultural vibrancy, it was designated Canada's first UNESCO City of Music. Numerous venues and institutions have established London as a key centre for music creation and performance. Large festivals such as SunFest and Rock the Park attract thousands of visitors from across the region each year.

London is also a centre for the performing and visual arts, with a rich mix of galleries, museums, and performance spaces. This cultural vitality is complemented by major sports facilities, food and drink establishments, retail, and hospitality services, all of which strengthen the City's appeal as a regional tourist destination. In 2024, tourism in London generated \$1.3 billion in GDP for Ontario and contributed more than \$630 million directly to London's economy, supporting 10,412 full-year jobs across the province, including 8,028 within the city itself (The Conference Board of Canada for Tourism London, 2024).



Figure 1 Regional Map

1.5 INTENT OF THE DOWNTOWN PLAN (IN-SCOPE VS. OUT-OF-SCOPE CONSIDERATIONS)

The Downtown Plan will serve as a strategic vision, roadmap, and policy framework to guide change in Downtown London. It will outline short-, medium-, and long-term actions within a 10-year horizon for downtown revitalization, including implementation steps, key performance indicators (KPIs), and high-level cost estimates.

The Plan's role must be understood within the broader context of existing municipal and community initiatives that influence Downtown. It is not intended to be a large-scale urban design exercise or a Secondary Plan under the Planning Act, nor will it duplicate existing Council-approved plans already underway. Based on its recommendations, an amendment to The London Plan may be required as part of Municipal Council's adoption of the final document.

In-Scope Considerations:

The Downtown Plan will:

- Establish a strategic vision and policy roadmap to guide future decisions affecting Downtown London.
- Define key priorities and directions for land use, mobility, the public realm, cultural vitality, economic development, and environmental resilience.
- Identify opportunities for policy alignment and recommend amendments to The London Plan or other municipal frameworks as needed.

- Provide high-level guidance for investment and reinvestment, including adaptive reuse, residential growth, and public realm enhancement.
- Clarify the role of governance, partnerships, and downtown management in realizing the vision.
- Reflect community priorities informed by engagement, research, and best practices.
- Provide actionable steps the City can take to implement the Downtown Plan.
- Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor and evaluate implementation and success.

Out-of-Scope Considerations:

The Downtown Plan will not:

- Function as a Secondary Plan or provide detailed parcel-level zoning, design, or engineering specifications.
- Duplicate or replace Council-approved plans and strategies (e.g., Health and Homelessness Whole of Community System Response, Mobility Master Plan).
- Deliver project-level designs, capital programs, or operational service plans.
- Serve as a comprehensive social services strategy; while it will acknowledge challenges such as housing affordability, homelessness, and public safety, it will not create stand-alone service delivery frameworks.
- Provide a short-term events or programming agenda.



2.0 DOWNTOWN LONDON TODAY

To provide a clear picture of Downtown London today, a detailed data and spatial analysis has been conducted. This analysis examines a number of factors that shape the Downtown's current context, including its population and demographics, economic activity and market conditions, mobility and transportation systems, urban form and development patterns, distinct districts and character areas, arts and cultural assets, landscape and ecological features, public safety and security conditions, as well as governance and management structures.

Together, these analyses establish an evidence-based understanding of Downtown London and how its strengths and challenges intersect.

2.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Understanding the demographic composition of Downtown London is essential for shaping effective planning strategies, policies, and investment priorities. Demographic patterns provide insight into who lives in the core, how they live, and what challenges and opportunities exist in the Downtown.

Population & Household Structure

Downtown London is home to 11,557 residents distributed across 6,841 households, with an average household size of 1.7 persons. This figure contrasts with the broader city, where larger households are more common (2.4 persons per household), particularly in suburban neighbourhoods. The prevalence of smaller households reflects the concentration of single adults, couples without children, and students, which is characteristic of many downtown cores in medium-sized Canadian cities.

Population growth in the Downtown has seen a steady increase over the past two decades with population and household counts from 2001 to 2024 indicating incremental but sustained increases. This increase signals continuing demand for downtown living, although this will likely be composed primarily of smaller households as opposed to larger households found in suburban areas of the city.

Age Profile

In line with the average household size, age distribution of downtown residents is heavily skewed toward young adults between the ages of 20 and 34. This demographic makes up the largest share of the downtown population and is overrepresented compared to the rest of the City. The prominence of this age group reflects the draw of the Downtown as a place for post-secondary students, recent graduates, and early-career professionals, many of whom are attracted by proximity to educational institutions, cultural amenities, nightlife, and employment opportunities.

Conversely, families with children and older adults are underrepresented in the Downtown. The proportion of children under 15 is comparatively small, and the share of residents aged 50 and above is noticeably lower than the city average. This would suggest that the Downtown is not currently seen as a 'family-oriented' neighbourhood by many, nor as a preferred retirement destination. Instead, it functions primarily as a hub for young and mobile populations.

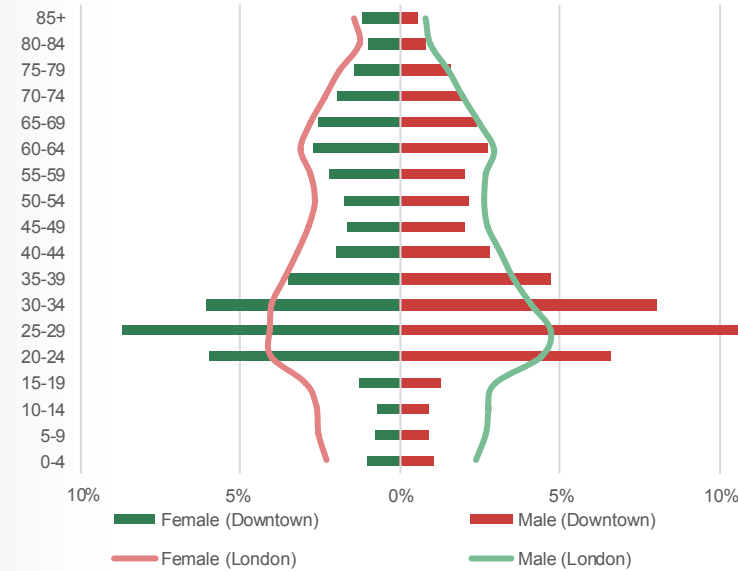


Figure 2 Population by Sex and Age

Source: Environics Analytics (2024)

Income and Employment

Despite strong population growth, income levels in the Downtown lag significantly behind city-wide averages. The median household income in Downtown London is \$61,479, compared to \$82,283 for the City as a whole. Nearly one-third of downtown households earn less than \$40,000 annually, and about half earn less than \$60,000. High-income households (those earning over \$125,000) are far less common in the core than in other parts of London.

Employment statistics also reveal structural weaknesses. While the labour force participation rate in Downtown is 66.3%, slightly higher than the overall city-wide rate of 62.7%, the unemployment rate is 11.5%, significantly higher than the rest of London (6.1%). This gap suggests that while many residents are willing and able to work, they face barriers to securing stable or adequately paid employment. These barriers may include a mismatch between qualifications and available jobs, over-reliance on service sector employment, or precarious forms of work.

Occupational data highlights this challenge. While 46.1% of residents work in white-collar jobs, a substantial share (40.2%) are employed in the service sector, with only 13.7% in blue-collar roles. The heavy reliance on service-industry jobs, often associated with lower wages and less stability, could assist in explaining the income gap and highlight broader concerns about economic vulnerability in the downtown population.

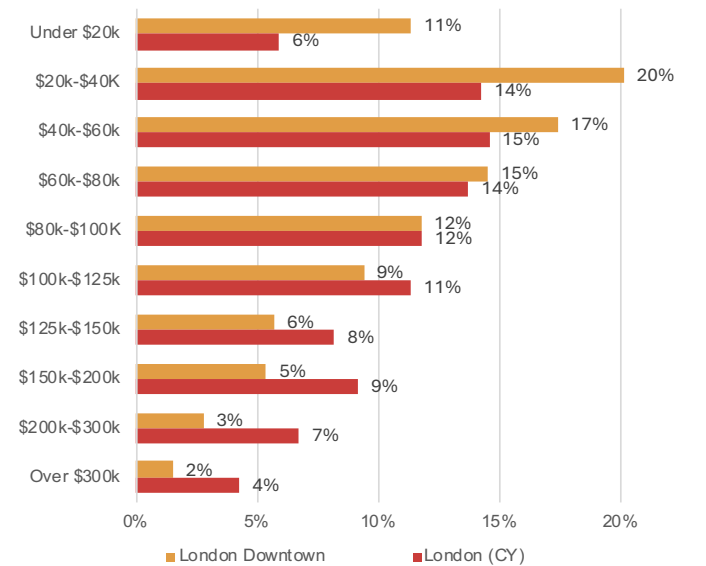


Figure 3 Household Income by Range

Source: Environics Analytics (2024)

Household Spending Patterns

Household expenditure data provides further insight into the financial realities of downtown households. Shelter and food dominate spending, with average annual outlays of \$12,971 on accommodation and \$9,768 on food. However, across most categories, including housing, food, transportation, and entertainment, downtown households spend below the national average, reflecting smaller household sizes, lower incomes,

and a younger population profile. The exceptions are education and health care, where spending is at or above national levels, underscoring the concentration of students and young professionals and their respective spending priorities.

The spending index also highlights the transitional character of downtown households. Investments in retirement and pensions are significantly lower than national norms, consistent with a younger population less focused on long-term financial security. At the same time, high education-related spending indicates households prioritizing training and credentials, often at the expense of discretionary categories such as entertainment. This paints a picture of a community where budgets are tightly focused on essentials and short-term priorities rather than leisure or long-term financial planning.

Education & Human Capital

Downtown London’s residents are highly educated with nearly 50% holding a university degree, while another 22.6% possess a college or trades credential. This educational profile is stronger than the city-wide average, underscoring the concentration of students, graduates, and knowledge workers in the Downtown.

The discrepancy between high levels of education and relatively low incomes is notable and suggests that many residents are either at early stages of their careers, underemployed relative to their qualifications, or engaged in temporary and precarious work while pursuing further education. This signals the presence of a talented but underutilized workforce that could be better harnessed to strengthen Downtown’s economic base.

Immigration, Diversity, & Generations

The data analysis reveals that Downtown London is a gateway community for newcomers to Canada. The data shows that over half the total population of the Downtown (6,308 people) are first-generation or second-generation immigrants, a significantly higher proportion than the rest of the city.

Diversity measures reinforce this picture. Approximately 32% of downtown residents identify as visible minorities, slightly higher than the city-wide figure. The largest groups include South Asian, Black, Latin American, Chinese, and Arab populations. At the same time, the higher share of non-permanent residents, such as international students, highlights both opportunities and vulnerabilities. These populations contribute to vibrancy and global connectivity but may also contribute to challenges around housing affordability, turnover, and long-term community integration.

Household & Social Structure

Relationship status data offer additional insights into the Downtown’s social fabric. Out of the total population, over half of residents are single / never married or separated / divorced. This imbalance reflects the prevalence of young, mobile adults living independently or with roommates, rather than families or long-term household units. This suggests ongoing demand for smaller housing units, apartments, condos, and rental housing, rather than larger family-oriented dwellings. It also reinforces the importance of ensuring access to community amenities, recreational opportunities, and cultural programming that serve a younger, less family-centric demographic.

Trends in Population Growth

The chart illustrating population trends to 2034 show steady growth, though not explosive. The data indicates population growth resilience, even during economic downturns and the pandemic years. While growth is modest compared to suburban expansion, the ability of the Downtown to consistently attract residents demonstrates its enduring appeal as a place to live. This growth, however, has not necessarily been accompanied by corresponding increases in household incomes or economic opportunities, which remain lagging indicators.

Summary Analysis

The demographic profile of Downtown London reveals a complex, transitional community shaped by youth, education, diversity, and economic vulnerability. On the positive side, the Downtown has significant human capital advantages: its concentration of young, educated residents provides a

foundation for innovation, entrepreneurship, and cultural vitality. The area’s diversity further enriches its cultural life and international connectivity, making it an attractive destination for new immigrants and students alike. These factors, coupled with steady population growth, provide a strong basis for long-term downtown revitalization.

However, significant challenges are also present. The income and employment gap between downtown residents and residents of the broader city poses risks for social stability and the Downtown’s economic resiliency. A highly educated population that cannot find adequate employment in the Downtown may choose to relocate. Similarly, an overreliance on small households and transitional populations contributes to the creation of a more fragile residential base with high turnover and limited long-term stability.

Downtown London’s demographic profile is that of a young, diverse, and growing population with strong educational credentials but limited economic security. To that end, the opportunity lies in bridging the gap

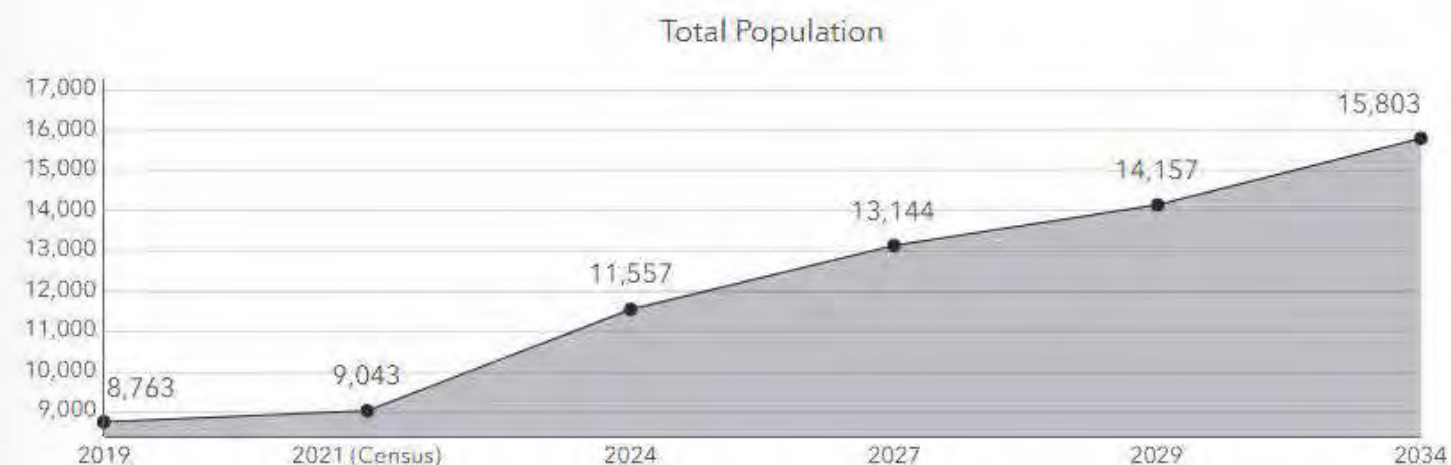


Figure 4 Population Projection

Source: Environics Analytics (2024)

between talent and opportunity, leveraging cultural diversity as an asset, and fostering a housing and employment environment that can sustain a broader mix of households and income levels.

2.2 ECONOMIC, MARKET & VACANCY PROFILE

Downtown London’s economy is shaped by its role as the City’s primary centre of employment, services, and cultural activity. At the same time, shifting retail dynamics, elevated vacancy rates, and car-dependent commuting patterns highlight structural challenges that are reshaping how the Downtown functions as a business and investment environment.

Downtown Retail Commercial Floor Space

Downtown London contains almost 2 million square feet of retail commercial space (retail stores, food and drink establishments, services etc.), including both occupied and vacant units. Non-food and beverage services (office space, health care, social services, financial services, personal care, etc.) account

for, by far, the largest users of space in the Downtown at 40% of users. This is followed by food and beverage services (i.e. cafés, restaurants, bars, etc.) at 22% and retail uses at 12%, while entertainment and recreational services account for approximately 8% of users. The remaining 18% of floor space is vacant.

This profile highlights a shift away from goods-based retail toward service- and experience-driven uses within the Downtown. This mirrors national and global trends where post-war retail trends and e-commerce has eroded demand for traditional retail uses in downtown formats, while urban downtowns increasingly rely on food, beverage, and entertainment to sustain foot traffic and economic vitality.

This orientation positions the Downtown as a social, cultural, and hospitality hub, but also introduces certain vulnerabilities. Heavy reliance on food and beverage makes the Downtown sensitive to economic cycles, consumer spending patterns, and shifting lifestyle trends. Furthermore, a lack of diverse retail anchors may limit the core’s ability to attract a broad cross-section of residents and visitors.

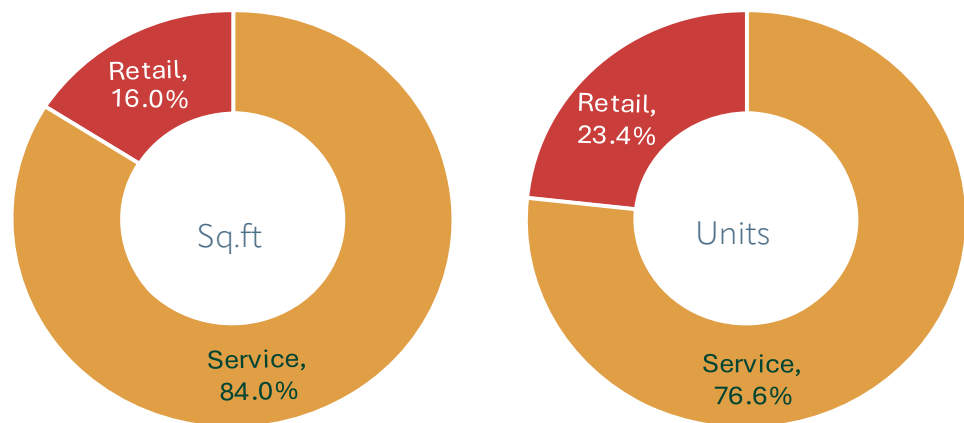


Figure 5 Retail VS Service Distribution

Source: Tate Research (2025)

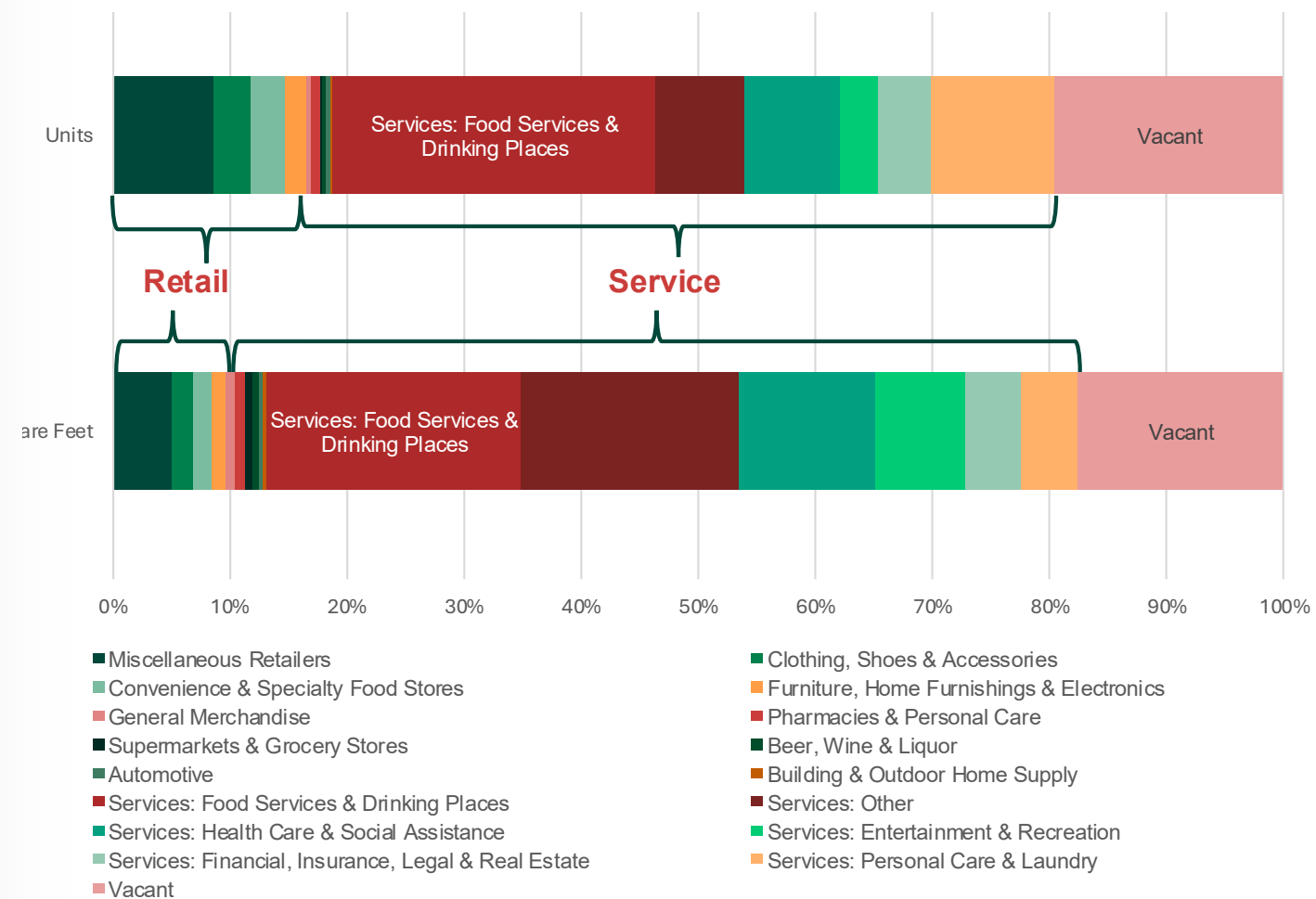


Figure 6 Distribution of Retail & Service Space and Units

Source: Tate Research (2025)

Spatial Distribution of Commercial & Retail Activity

Downtown’s business mix is varied with over 664 commercial retail units across 2 million square feet of retail commercial space. These include medical and professional services, recreation, over 100 retail businesses, and more than 180 food and drink establishments. Map 2 illustrates the distribution of businesses by category, with visible clusters that mark Downtown’s commercial/retail hubs.

While commercial uses are dispersed across the Study Area, they tend to cluster along key streets and intersections. A main commercial cluster is located around the intersection of Dundas and Richmond Streets, at the heart of the Downtown. Despite current vacancy challenges, this area still hosts the highest concentration of retail businesses supported by a denser urban fabric. Other important hubs are located on major arteries and intersections such as the northern portion of Richmond Street (known locally as ‘Richmond Row’) up to its intersection with Oxford Street. Each cluster offers a blend of services, shops, and restaurants.

Large retail destinations such as Covent Garden Market, and Citi Plaza (a large, enclosed shopping mall spanning two city blocks with significant vacancies) and large commercial spaces serve as potential anchors and attract people from across the city. Despite this diversity, Downtown London currently has only one grocery store, located on Oxford Street at its northern edge, limiting access to daily groceries for residents and workers.

Downtown London faces significant commercial vacancy challenges across both office and retail markets. According to the most recent available data, the overall office vacancy rate sits at 31.4%, comparable to 2024 but substantially above pre-pandemic levels (13.6% in 2019). Within this, Class 'A' office space records a much lower vacancy rate of 15.4%, down from nearly 20% in 2024. The data underscores that Class 'B' and 'C' office buildings in the Downtown account for most vacant space, many of which are described as economically and functionally obsolete, particularly along Dundas Street.

With respect to retail, there is approximately 350,000 square feet of vacant retail commercial space, representing a 17.6% vacancy rate, far higher than the typical healthy range of 5.0–7.5% yet nearly consistent with the vacancy rate of 17.4% in 2023. A street-level analysis shows that roughly one in five commercial units (19.6% of units) are vacant, with concentrations along Richmond and Dundas Streets, as well as in larger complexes such as Citi Plaza. Vacant retail units are predominantly medium-sized (1,000–4,999 square feet), though small storefronts and large-format spaces are also represented.

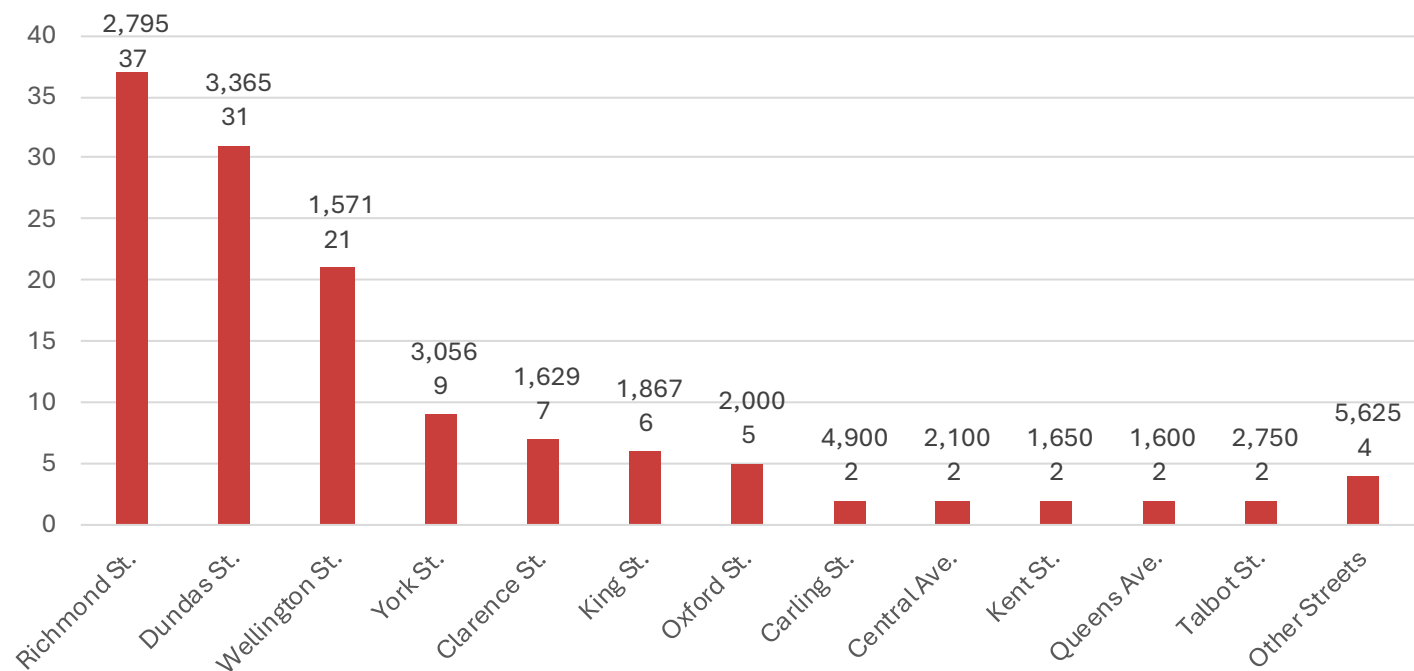
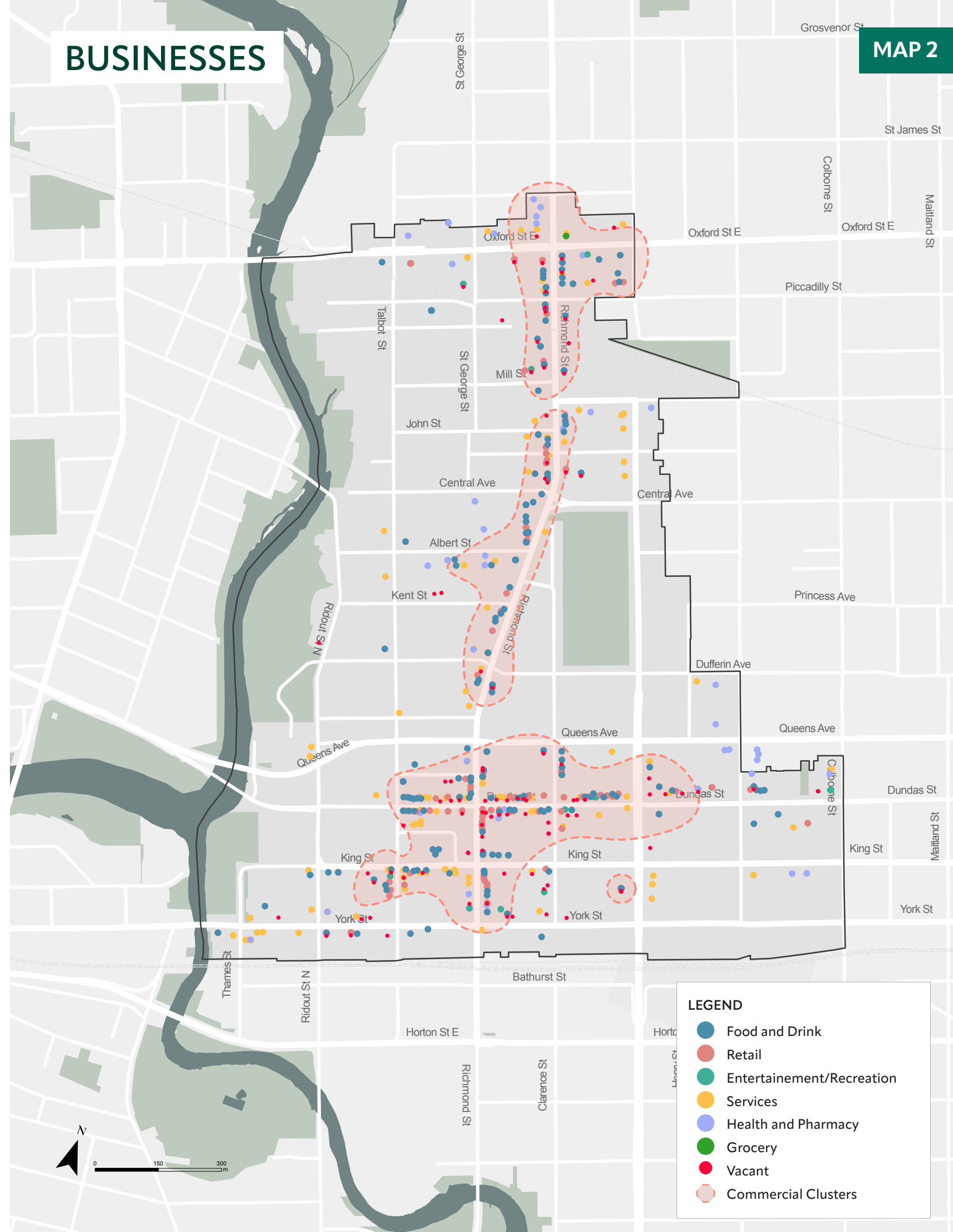


Figure 7 Average Unit Size (sq) and Number of Vacant Units by Street Location

Source: Tate Research (2025)

BUSINESSES



These conditions point to a Downtown in transition, contending with broader structural shifts. On the office side, the divergence between Class 'A' and Class 'B'/'C' space reflects a divided market: newer, amenity-rich spaces remain competitive, while older building stock faces obsolescence without major reinvestment or adaptive reuse. While current vacancies pose a significant challenge, they also present a major market opportunity for the adaptive reuse and redevelopment of Class 'B'/'C' buildings, particularly along Dundas Street.

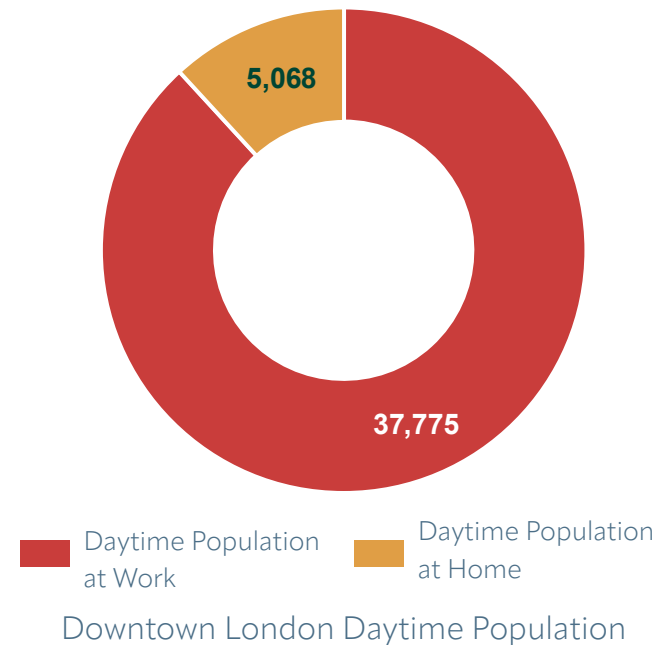
The retail vacancy picture is strong evidence of a Downtown that is no longer sustained by traditional retail alone. Elevated vacancy rates highlight the pressures that shifting consumer behavior, market expectations, and suburban commercial growth have placed on the Downtown. At the same time, the clustering of vacancies suggests opportunities for targeted corridor revitalization, particularly along Dundas and Richmond Streets, through coordinated strategies around cultural anchors, food and beverage, and/or residential intensification.

Place of Work & Commuting Patterns

While the resident population of the Downtown sits below 12,000 people, the daytime population of the Downtown swells by 3.5 times to nearly 43,000 people. This confirms the Downtown's ongoing role as a primary employment node in the city. The majority of those working downtown are based in offices (71%); with smaller populations working at usual places outside the home (12%); from home (7%); or with no fixed address (1%).

Commuting patterns highlight the strong role of private automobiles in the Downtown

and city as a whole, with over 85% of city residents employed Downtown using private automobiles to commute, and over 60% of downtown residents doing the same.



Source: Environics Analytics (2024)

This suggests that despite its centrality and compact form, residents and visitors to the Downtown remain highly car-dependent. This also suggests a significant number of downtown residents commuting outside of the Downtown to their place of employment.

These findings underline the Downtown's enduring economic significance but also highlight fundamental challenges. The large office-based daytime workforce supports restaurants, services, and cultural venues, contributing to the vitality of the core. However, the reliance on automobiles for commuting reflects a mismatch between Downtown's denser urban form and its mobility patterns and reflects a car-dominant culture in London and/or the perceived lack of viable alternative forms of transportation.

The modest share of workers commuting by transit, walking, or cycling suggests untapped opportunities to diversify transportation options. It should be noted that it is too early to see if the City's recent investments in the new Rapid Transit (RT) system looping through the Downtown and soon connecting east and south with high-priority transit will lead to a long-term shift in transportation patterns to and from the Downtown.

Summary Analysis

Taken together, the economic and market indicators show that Downtown London remains a vital but vulnerable centre of commerce and employment in the City. Its nearly two million square feet of commercial floor space is dominated not by traditional retail, but by services, and food and beverage establishments, underscoring a shift toward experience- and service-driven activity rather than goods-based commerce. While this helps sustain foot traffic and aligns with broader urban trends, it also exposes the core to cyclical risks tied to hospitality, leisure spending, and changing consumer patterns. The relatively small share of retail anchors and the high level of vacancies suggest a Downtown that is more reliant on lifestyle and cultural activity than on everyday shopping needs.

Vacancy data highlight the structural weaknesses in both office and retail markets. Office vacancy sits above 30%, with Class 'B' and 'C' buildings disproportionately affected by economic and functional obsolescence, particularly along Dundas Street. This split between competitive, amenity-rich Class 'A' spaces and struggling lower-grade stock signals a downtown office market at a crossroads, without reinvestment or adaptive reuse, much of the existing inventory risks long-term decline. Retail vacancy tells a

similar story, with almost 18% of space sitting empty and one in five units vacant, well above healthy benchmarks. Concentrations of vacancy along Richmond and Dundas Streets reinforce the perception of weak commercial corridors in what should be the Downtown's retail spine.

At the same time, Downtown continues to function as the City's primary employment hub, with a daytime population more than triple the number of residents at nearly 43,000. This concentration of jobs supports the service economy and keeps restaurants, cafés, and cultural venues active. Yet, commuting patterns illustrate that the Downtown remains highly car-dependent, with the vast majority of employees and residents relying on automobiles. This mismatch between urban density and mobility behavior has significant implications for the Downtown including traffic congestion; pressure on land for parking instead of development; reduced walkability, and weaker support for transit investment. It also can undermine the economic and environmental potential of a vibrant, compact downtown.

Overall, the economic and market profile suggests that Downtown London is at a pivotal moment. It retains the scale, employment density, and cultural appeal to remain the City's core, but is hampered by aging building stock, weak retail performance, and car-dependent commuting patterns. These vulnerabilities also point to opportunities for adaptive reuse of underperforming office space; targeted revitalization of high-vacancy corridors; and mobility investments that can all help reposition the Downtown as a more resilient, competitive, and accessible urban centre.

2.3 MOBILITY & TRANSPORTATION

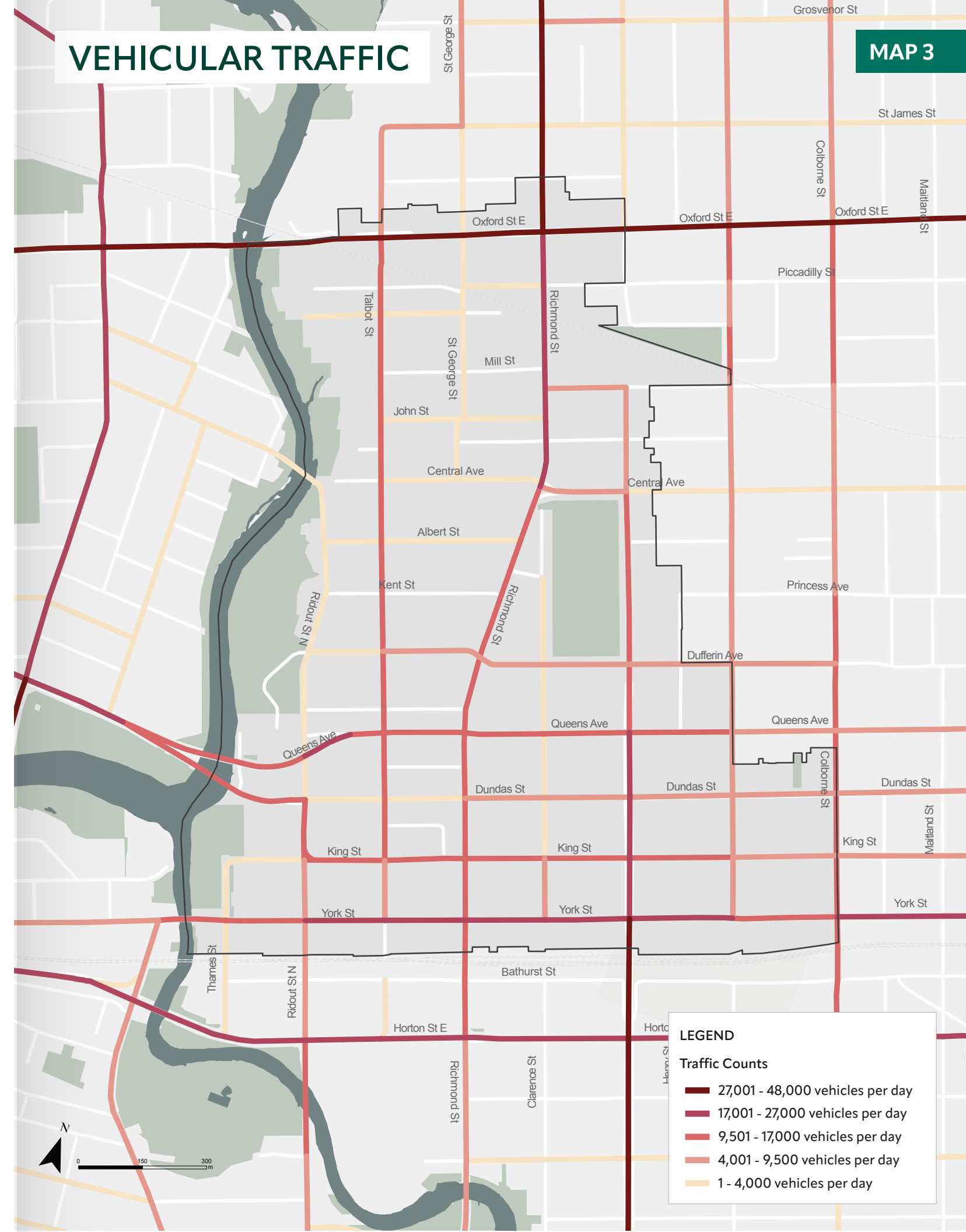
The following section provides an overview of the mobility and transportation systems that enable access to and movement within Downtown London. Mobility is a critical consideration in this area, which experiences high daily traffic volumes generated by a diverse mix of destinations, including major employment centres. Downtown is supported by an integrated network of roads, public transit, and active transportation routes, each described in the sections that follow.

Vehicular Circulation

As illustrated in Map 3, vehicular circulation in Downtown London is heavily concentrated on a network of major corridors, with traffic volumes ranging from under 4,000 to nearly 48,000 vehicles per day. The most heavily used routes include Richmond and Wellington Streets running north–south and Queens Avenue, Dundas Street, and York Street

running east–west, which serve as designated Civic and Rapid Transit Boulevards in the Official Plan, and link the Downtown to the broader city. Key gateways into the core are found at Richmond and Oxford Streets, the Dundas Street and Queens Avenue bridges across the Thames River, Wellington and Ridout Streets to the south, and King and York Streets to the east, which collectively channel much of the daily vehicle flow into Downtown.

Traffic volumes are highest in the southern portion of the Downtown, particularly below Victoria Park, where concentrations of commercial and civic destinations draw both vehicles and pedestrians. Richmond Street stands out as both a vital commercial corridor and a primary throughfare, accommodating some of the heaviest traffic while also supporting intense pedestrian activity. This overlap of high vehicular volumes and major pedestrian-generating uses highlights potential safety and circulation challenges.



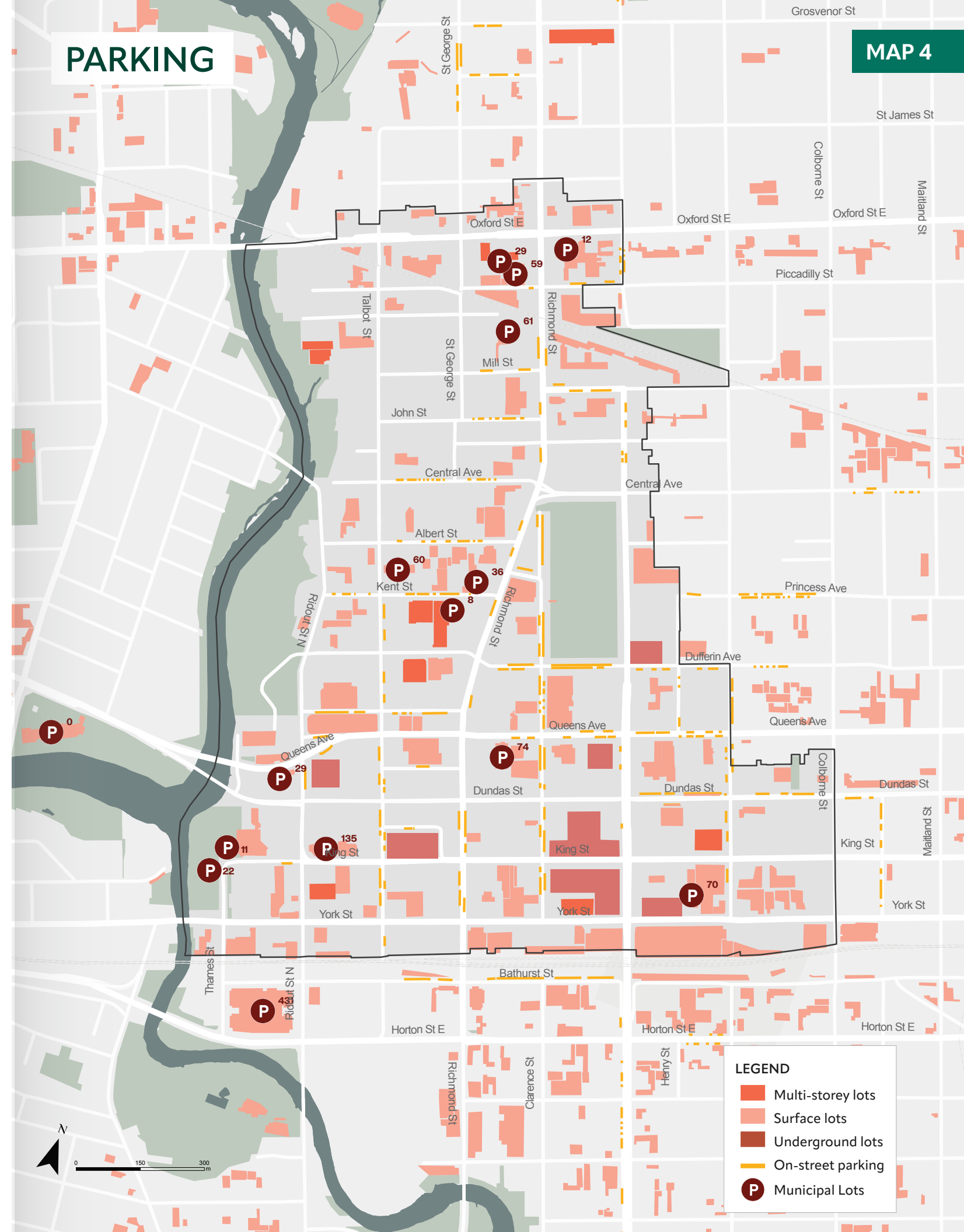
Parking

As shown in Map 4, Downtown London has an extensive supply of parking facilities, reflecting the City's reliance on private automobiles as a primary mode of travel. The supply is made up of on-street spaces, off-street surface lots, structured facilities, and underground lots both municipally and privately owned. Parking is broadly distributed across the Downtown, ensuring proximity to major commercial, institutional, and cultural destinations. On-street parking in the core of the Downtown is free for an hour to support business activity while pricing at municipal lots ranges from \$2.75 to \$4 for an hour. A large portion of the parking found in the Downtown is privately owned and managed resulting in varied pricing.

Surface parking lots form the majority of the inventory, ranging in size from small infill lots to large blocks south of York Street that sit just beyond the core and provide significant capacity for visitors. Municipal lots contribute more than 600 spaces, strategically

located near retail and service clusters, while on-street parking is concentrated on busy corridors such as Queens Avenue, Richmond Street, and Talbot Street. A smaller number of structured garages add further capacity, though they represent a limited share of the overall supply. Privately managed underground parking is available at major destinations including City Hall, Covent Market Garden, Citi Plaza, One London Place, RBC Place London, and the Ontario Court of Justice.

The prevalence of parking has important spatial and urban design implications for the Downtown. Large surface lots consume considerable amounts of valuable land in the core, interrupting the continuity of the built fabric and reducing opportunities for more active and intensive land uses. While they provide convenience for drivers and support downtown businesses, they also reinforce car dependency and limit the area's ability to fully realize its potential as a compact, lively, and urban environment.



Active Mobility Networks

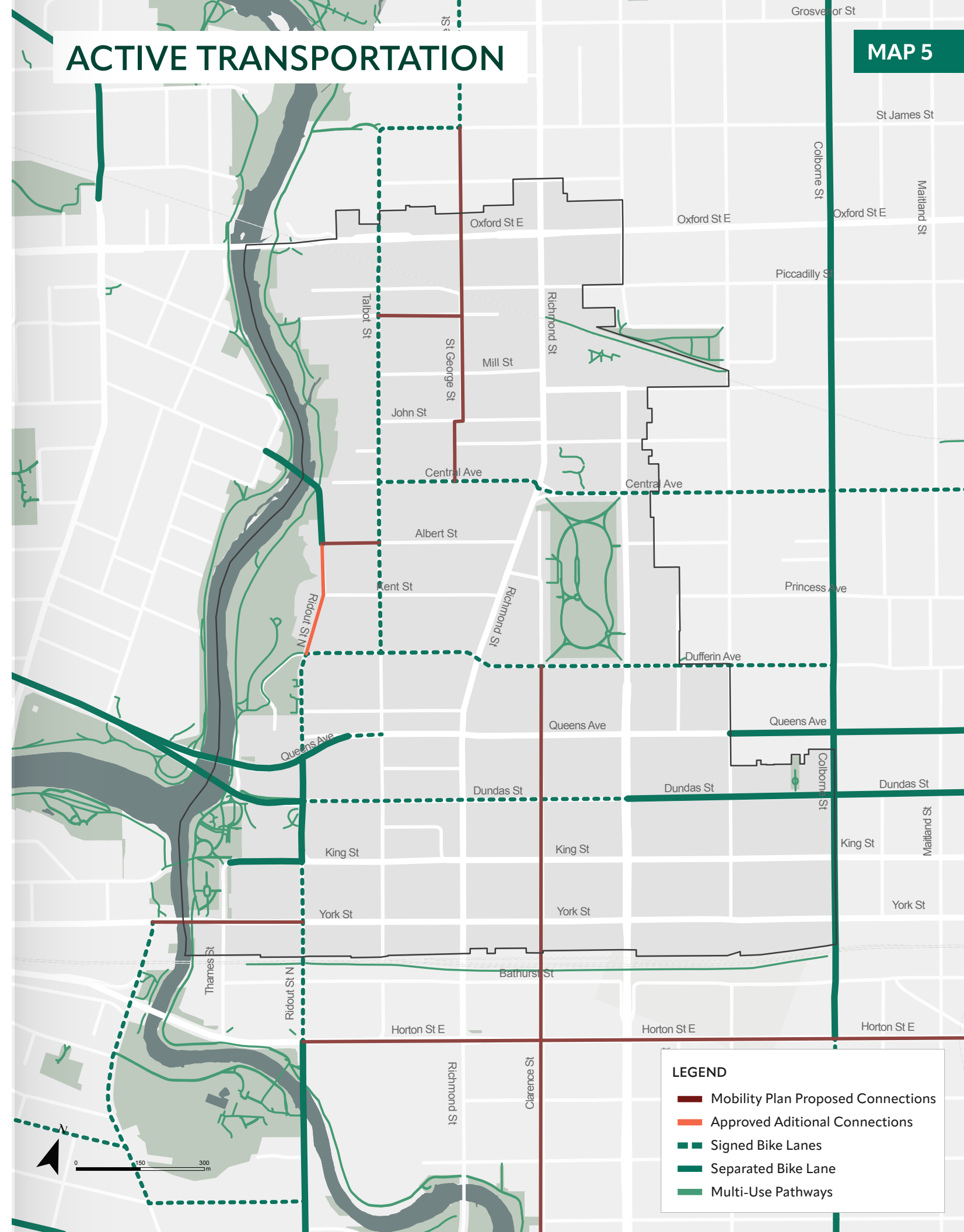
As illustrated in Map 5, Downtown London is served by a developing active transportation network that provides both commuting and recreational connections. The Thames Valley Parkway multi-use pathway is the most important active mobility connection to the Downtown, providing direct connections to other parts of the city through the city's extensive recreational trail system. On-street cycling routes are concentrated along Dundas Street, the main west-east artery, while north-south routes run primarily on Talbot and Ridout Streets with Colborne Street serving as an additional major route immediately east of the Study Area. Despite this foundation, the cycling network remains fragmented with a mix of protected and unprotected routes. Many routes are designated only with 'sharrows', signage, or painted lanes (shown as dashed lines on the map), offering limited amenity and safety when adjacent to high-traffic streets. The most significant gaps include a lack of continuous north-south

connections, limited coverage in the southern portion of the core, and missing links that would connect existing facilities into a more complete network. Approved projects on Ridout Street and upgrades to Colborne Street, along with proposed north-south corridors on Clarence and St. George Streets in the Mobility Master Plan (2025), will help close these gaps and strengthen cycling connectivity within the Downtown network.

The pedestrian network in the Downtown is more robust, with sidewalks on both sides of nearly all streets. This continuous network supports Downtown's higher rate of walking to work (17% compared to 5% city-wide) and reinforces its compact, mixed-use character. Still, opportunities exist to improve amenities and safety, particularly at intersections with high vehicular volumes and along major commuting corridors where pedestrians and cyclists converge.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

MAP 5



LEGEND

- Mobility Plan Proposed Connections
- Approved Additional Connections
- Signed Bike Lanes
- Separated Bike Lane
- Multi-Use Pathways

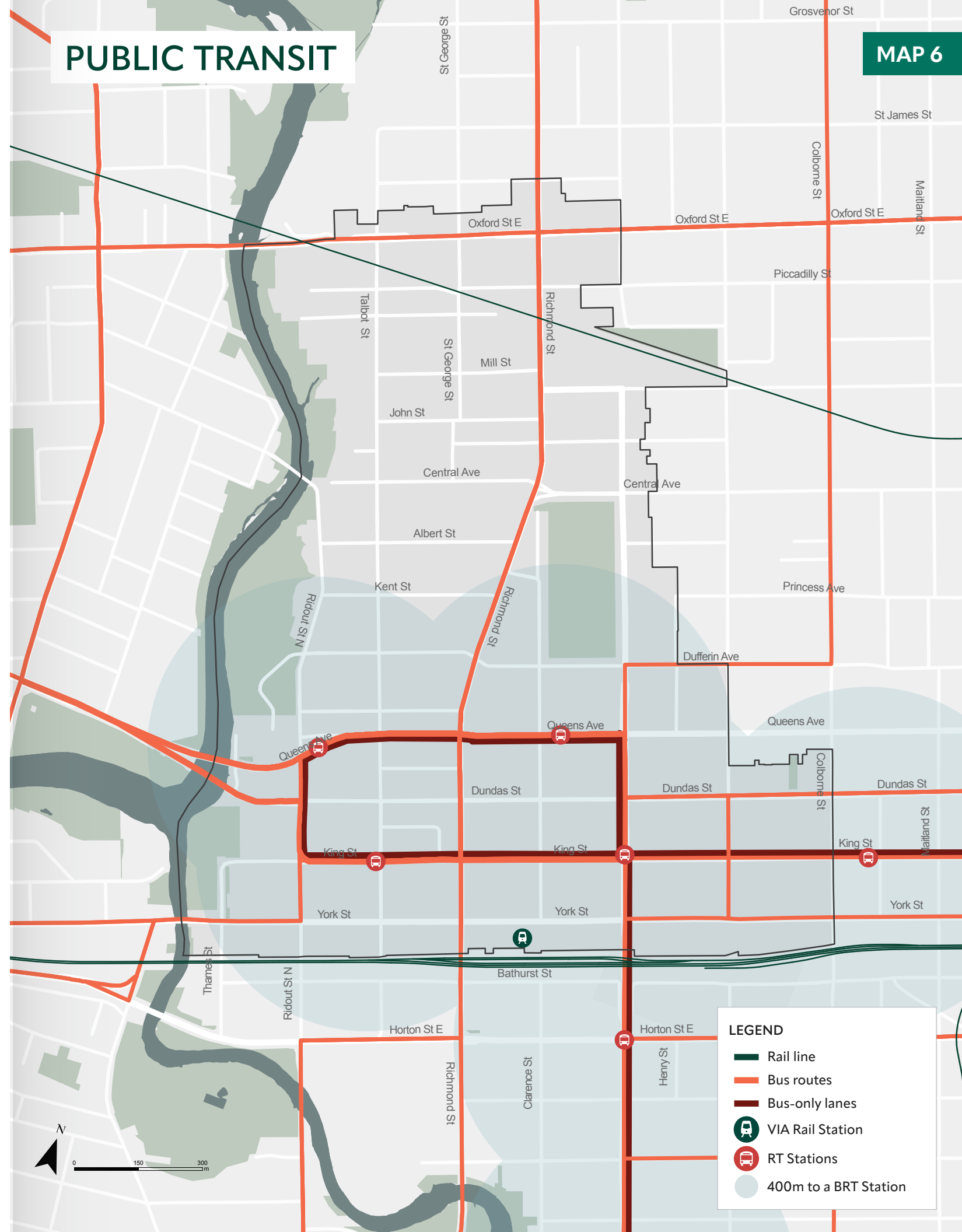
Public Transit

Public transit plays a central role in connecting Downtown London with the rest of the city and region. The core is served by a dense network of bus routes such as routes 1, 2, 7, 13, 15, 20, 90, and 106 running along Richmond, Wellington, Oxford, Dundas, King, and Queens, complemented by the Rapid Transit 'Downtown Loop', which incorporates dedicated bus-only lanes to improve service frequency and reliability. Several routes converge south of Queens Avenue, creating strong coverage around the busiest commercial and institutional destinations in the Downtown, while the northern portion of the Downtown have fewer stops and less frequent service, resulting in longer walking distances for residents and workers closer to Oxford Street. The integration of the Rapid Transit (RT) system, with multiple stations located within the Downtown, is intended to significantly enhance service frequency and reliability.

Regional transportation is provided by VIA Rail whose station at York and Richmond Streets is within a 10-minute walk of major downtown destinations and the RT corridor and is complemented by numerous regional bus services that operate at various locations in the Downtown.

Current usage reflects the importance of transit to downtown mobility: 18% of residents commute by transit compared to just 7% city-wide, supported by a high concentration of stops (47 within the core). Despite these advantages, challenges remain. London Transit's Voice of the Customer survey highlights concerns around safety, reliability, and travel times, all of which affect user confidence.

PUBLIC TRANSIT



LEGEND

- Rail line
- Bus routes
- Bus-only lanes
- VIA Rail Station
- RT Stations
- 400m to a BRT Station

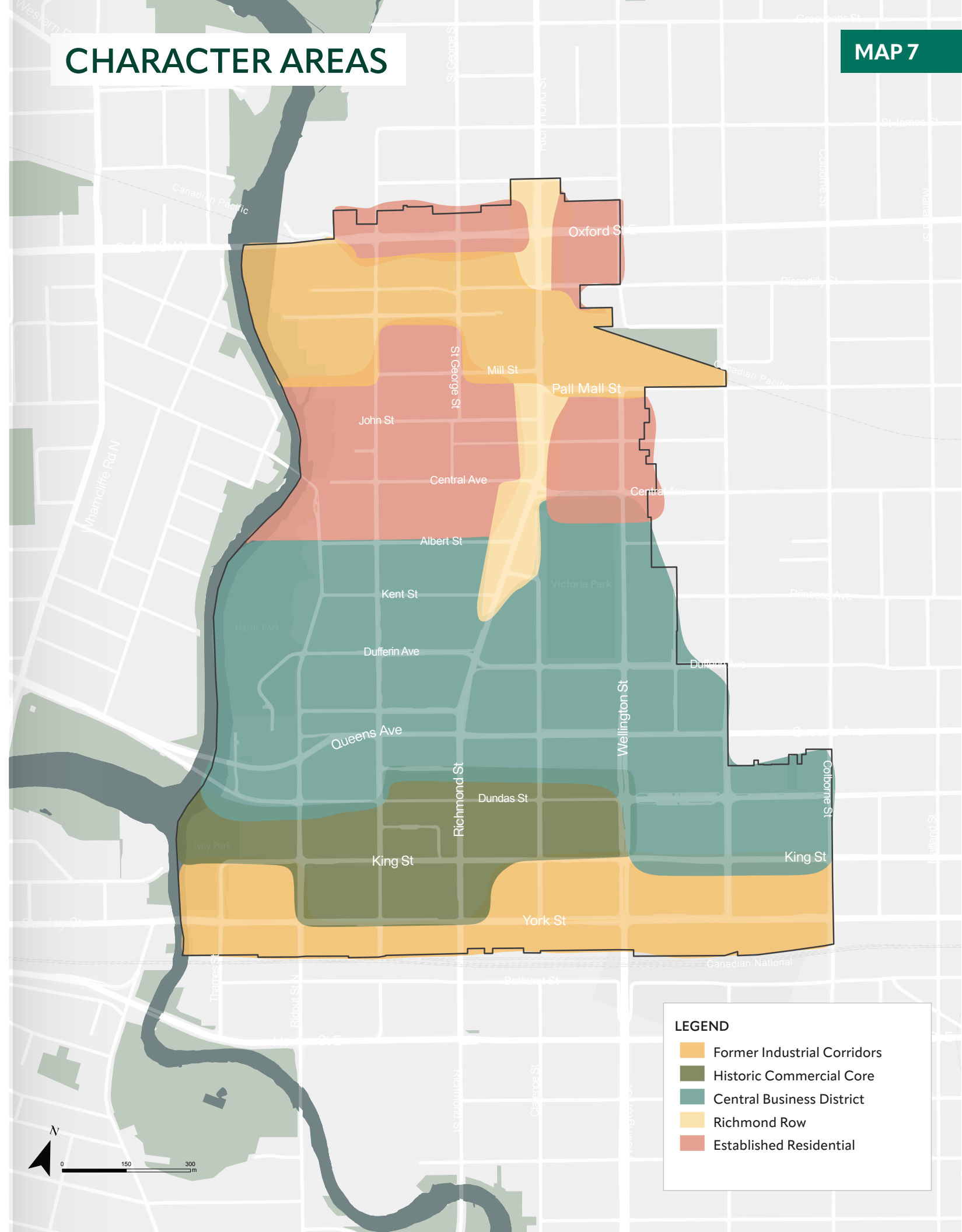


2.4 URBAN FORM CHARACTER AREAS

For the purposes of analysing the built form of Downtown London has been organized into five character areas that represent different built forms and urban characteristics of the core. Analysing the Downtown through the identification of 'character areas' provides a framework for understanding how distinct patterns of land use, built form, and public space interact to shape the urban experience. This approach reveals the spatial diversity within the core and supports more nuanced, place-specific strategies for guiding revitalization and investment.

Each character area is presented by its predominant architectural styles, building forms, and land uses. These areas are:

1. Former Industrial Corridors
2. Historic Commercial Core
3. Central Business District
4. Richmond Row
5. Established Residential



CHARACTER AREAS

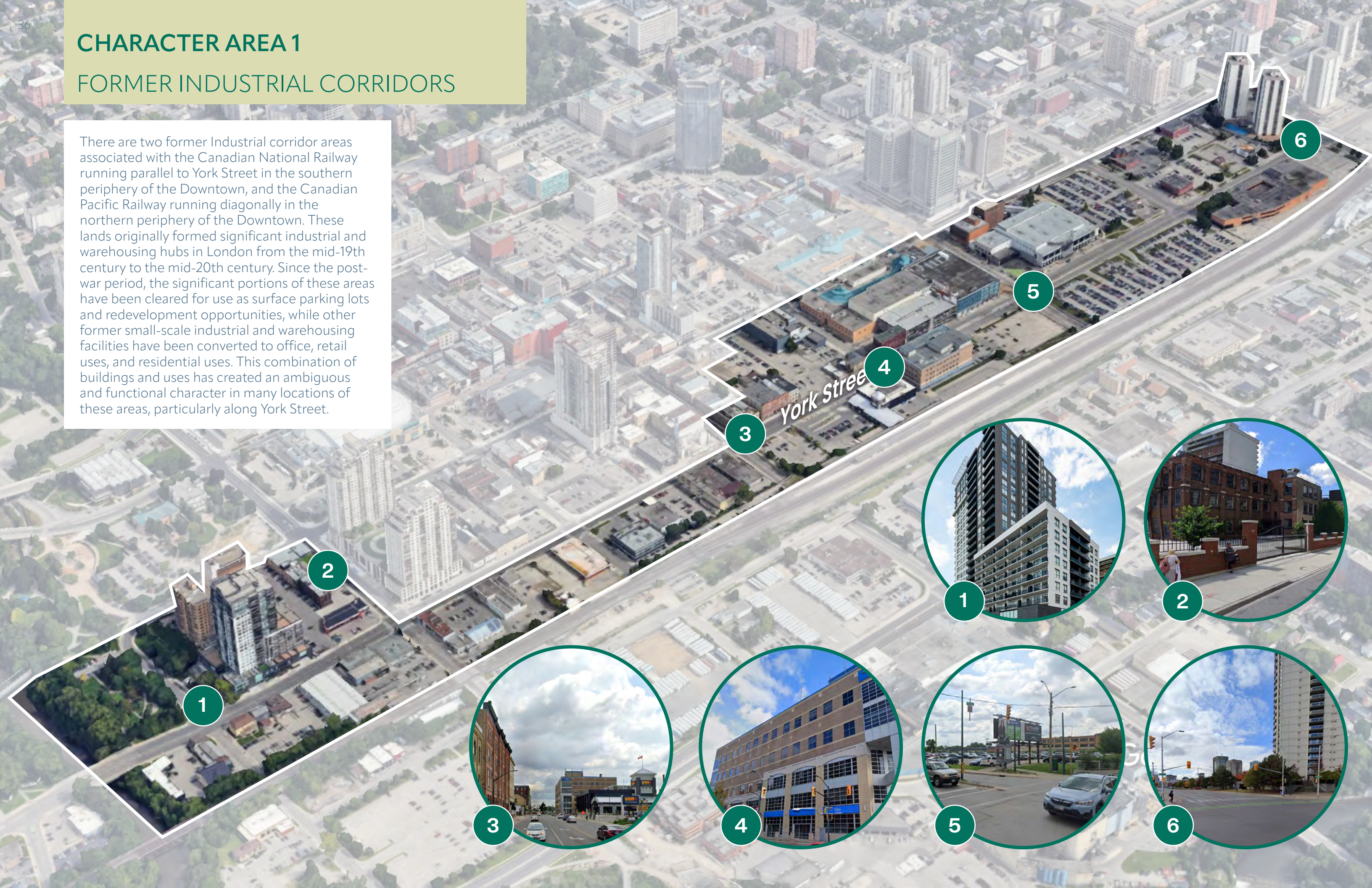
LEGEND

- Former Industrial Corridors
- Historic Commercial Core
- Central Business District
- Richmond Row
- Established Residential

CHARACTER AREA 1

FORMER INDUSTRIAL CORRIDORS

There are two former Industrial corridor areas associated with the Canadian National Railway running parallel to York Street in the southern periphery of the Downtown, and the Canadian Pacific Railway running diagonally in the northern periphery of the Downtown. These lands originally formed significant industrial and warehousing hubs in London from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century. Since the post-war period, the significant portions of these areas have been cleared for use as surface parking lots and redevelopment opportunities, while other former small-scale industrial and warehousing facilities have been converted to office, retail uses, and residential uses. This combination of buildings and uses has created an ambiguous and functional character in many locations of these areas, particularly along York Street.



2

1



3



4



5



6



1



2



4

3

5

6

York Street

CHARACTER AREA 1

FORMER INDUSTRIAL CORRIDORS



Oxford Street W

Talbot Street

Richmond Street

1

2

3

4

5



1

2

3

4

5

CHARACTER AREA 2

HISTORIC COMMERCIAL CORE

The historic commercial core area of the Downtown extends from the Thames River in the west to Wellington Street in the east and is centred around Richmond and Dundas Streets, considered by many Londoners as the heart of Downtown. This area is characterized by the densest urban fabric and the largest and most complete 19th and early 20th century streetscapes and buildings including London's oldest building, the Middlesex County Court House (1826). This area also contains many more recent major public investments including Dundas Place, Canada Life Place, the Covent Garden Market Building, and the Central Library as well as recent high-rise residential developments.



CHARACTER AREA 3

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

The Central Business District character area crosses the midsection of the Downtown and includes the vast majority of the Downtown's mid- and high-rise buildings, a combination of office and residential towers primarily dating from the mid-20th century to the present day, while smaller collections of older building stock including single detached houses and some small scale mixed-use commercial buildings as well as surface parking lots. The area is also characterized by the presence of significant public institutions and public spaces including City Hall, Victoria Park, St-Peter's Basilica, the Grand Theatre, St-Paul's Cathedral, the Ontario Court of Justice, Museum London, and Harris Park.



CHARACTER AREA 4 RICHMOND ROW

The Richmond Row character area is a linear commercial corridor running from approximately Kent Street in the south to Oxford Street in the north. This commercial corridor is characterized by many small-scale mixed use commercial buildings from the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as some more modern residential developments. The area is colloquially known as 'Richmond Row' and is a popular nightlife destination lined with a combination of boutique shops, bars, and restaurants. While not as dense as the Historic Commercial Core, the Richmond Row corridor is a pedestrian friendly street with a village atmosphere.

Oxford Street E

Richmond Street

Central Avenue

Figure 8 Commercial facade



Google Earth

CHARACTER AREA 5 ESTABLISHED RESIDENTIAL



The Established Residential Character Areas are found on both the western and eastern portions in the northern half of the Downtown. These areas are primarily characterized by their collections of 19th and 20th century single detached dwellings and mature vegetation, ranging from modest worker's cottages to the grander residences of historically prominent London families. These are interspersed with more modern recent mid- and high-rise residential development.



2.5 URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Development activity in Downtown London offers a lens into how the Core is evolving. Permit activity, planning applications, and the vacant land inventory together highlight shifts in the built environment, housing growth, ongoing investment, and future opportunities for infill and intensification.

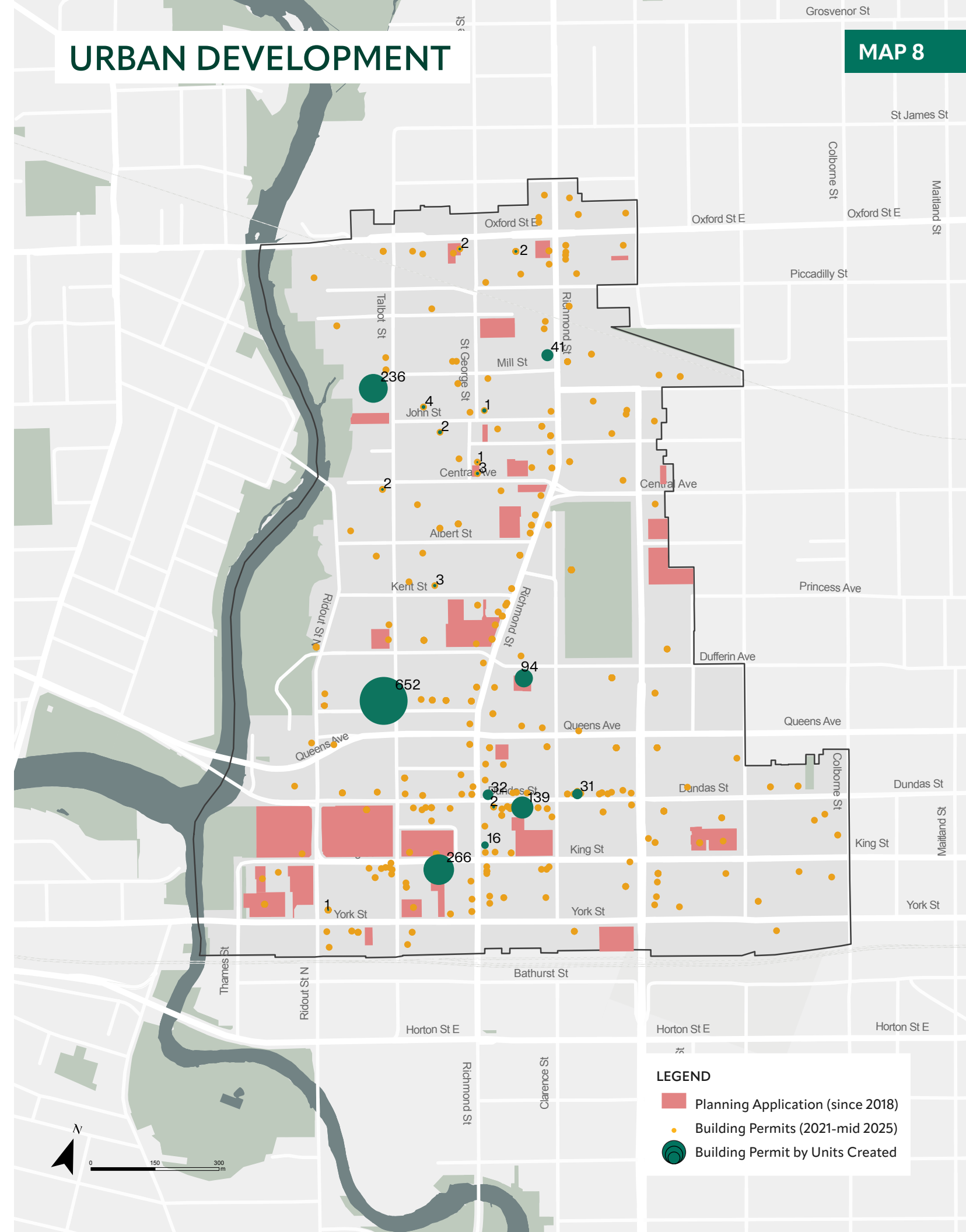
Building permits offer insights into the volume and nature of the work occurring in the Downtown. Since 2021, a total of 568 permit applications have been recorded in Downtown London. The annual number of applications has remained relatively stable, ranging from 112 in 2023 to 124 in 2024, with an average of 128 applications per year between 2021 and 2024. Spatially, applications are most concentrated along major roads and commercial corridors, particularly Dundas Street and Richmond Street, where the urban fabric is most dense. In terms of work type, approximately half (50%) of applications relate to alterations, with interior fit-ups being a frequent category. Signage permits represent 22% of all applications, largely concentrated along Dundas and Richmond Streets, a significant commercial cluster. Installations account for 19% of applications, including utility and tent installations. The remaining 9% consist of additions, new building constructions, and demolitions.

Permit activity also provides insight into proposed housing growth in Downtown London. Between 2021 and mid-2025, building permit applications have included a total of 1,539 new units, the majority concentrated

in a small number of projects. Four large apartment complexes account for 1,293 units, while three conversion projects from other uses represent an additional 214 units. The concentration of new units in a small number of large projects indicates that Downtown's housing growth is being driven by major investments rather than incremental infill. Conversion projects highlight the shifting dynamics of the Downtown with changing need for offices and growing residential demand. New building constructions account for 84% of the proposed units, while alterations account for 16%. Almost all (94%) of the proposed units are in apartment buildings. Most applications for these new units are located in the core of the Downtown south of Victoria Park, with additional projects on Talbot Street and Richmond Street. The vast majority of new unit applications were submitted in 2024, with little to no activity recorded in 2022 or 2023, demonstrating a potential recent interest in residential development. This uptake is also supported by recent investments in the Rapid Transit system that can continue to support high density housing growth near the Downtown Loop, south of Victoria Park. These new housing developments account for a large proportion of construction value in the area, with large new apartment buildings reaching construction values up to \$250 million. Several other developments, including building conversions, have significant construction values, demonstrating important construction investments within the Downtown.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

MAP 8



This new developments and construction activity will further bolster the Downtown’s strong assessment value, which already stands at over \$2.34 billion (2025).

In addition to building permits, planning applications provide further insight into the level of development interest in Downtown London. Since 2018, numerous applications have been submitted, with notable concentrations south of Dundas Street and around Ivey Park. These patterns suggest that development activity is extending beyond the traditional retail core into areas adjacent to the heart of Downtown. Applications include site plan approvals, zoning by-law amendments, and official plan amendments, indicating that, alongside individual building permits, larger-scale development and investment are also taking place in the core.

While permits and planning applications capture recent and proposed development, opportunities for future growth are also evident in the City’s Residential Vacant Land Inventory, which tracks vacant parcels with potential for development. Some of these sites are already subject to planning applications, while others remain undeveloped with no active proposals. Many are identified as “Potential Development”

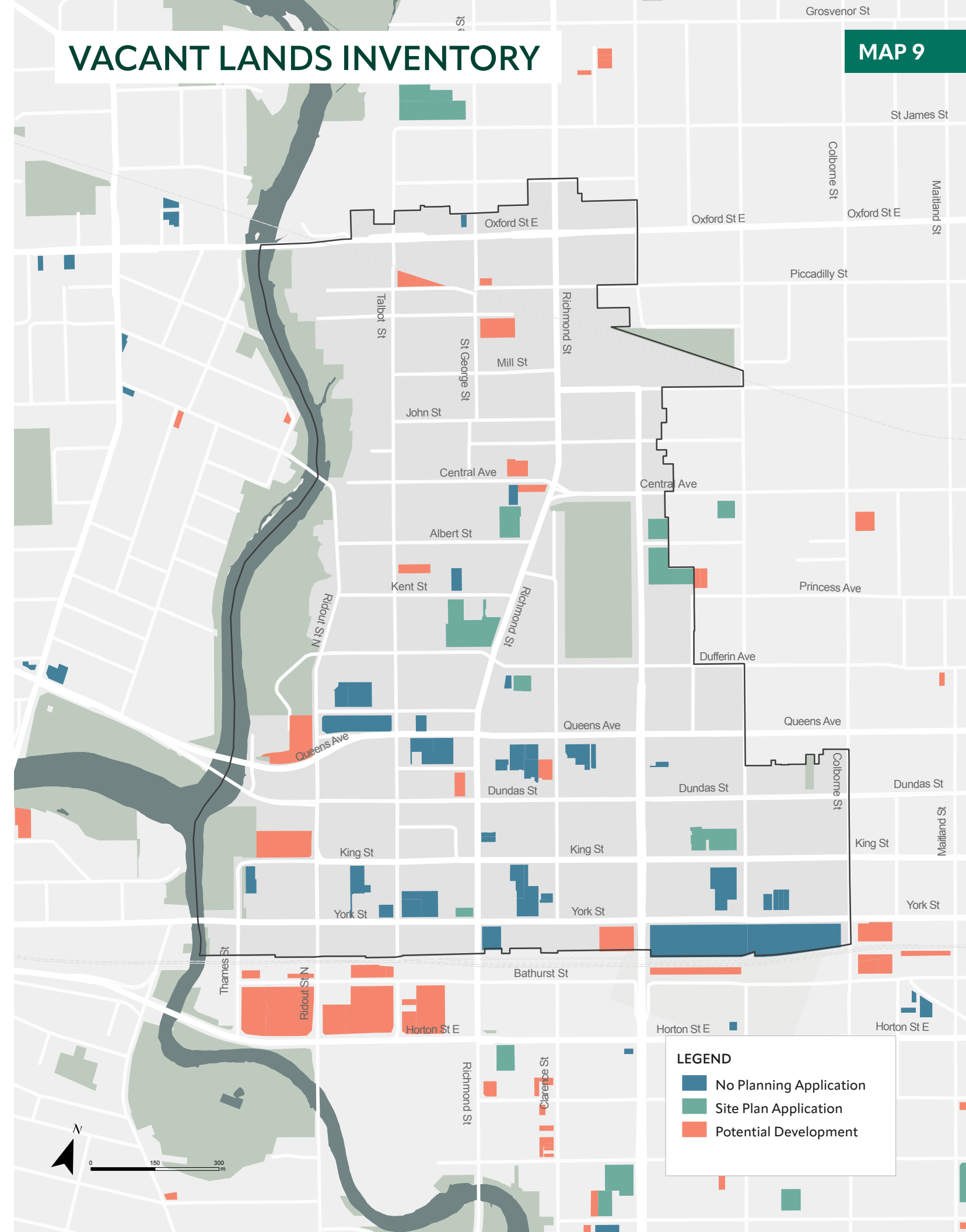
areas, including surface parking lots and underutilized properties with capacity for higher residential density. These sites represent key opportunities for infill and intensification, complementing ongoing development activity and supporting the continued evolution of Downtown as a residential neighbourhood.

The inventory also includes vacant parcels that are not currently subject to applications and are not identified as “Potential Development.” These sites create visible gaps in the urban fabric but also represent longer-term opportunities for growth and reinvestment.

Overall, building permits, planning applications, and the Residential Vacant Land Inventory together provide a snapshot of Downtown London’s current development landscape. While activity remains concentrated along certain corridors and driven by major projects, substantial opportunities for infill and redevelopment persist—underscoring Downtown’s ongoing transformation and long-term potential.

VACANT LANDS INVENTORY

MAP 9



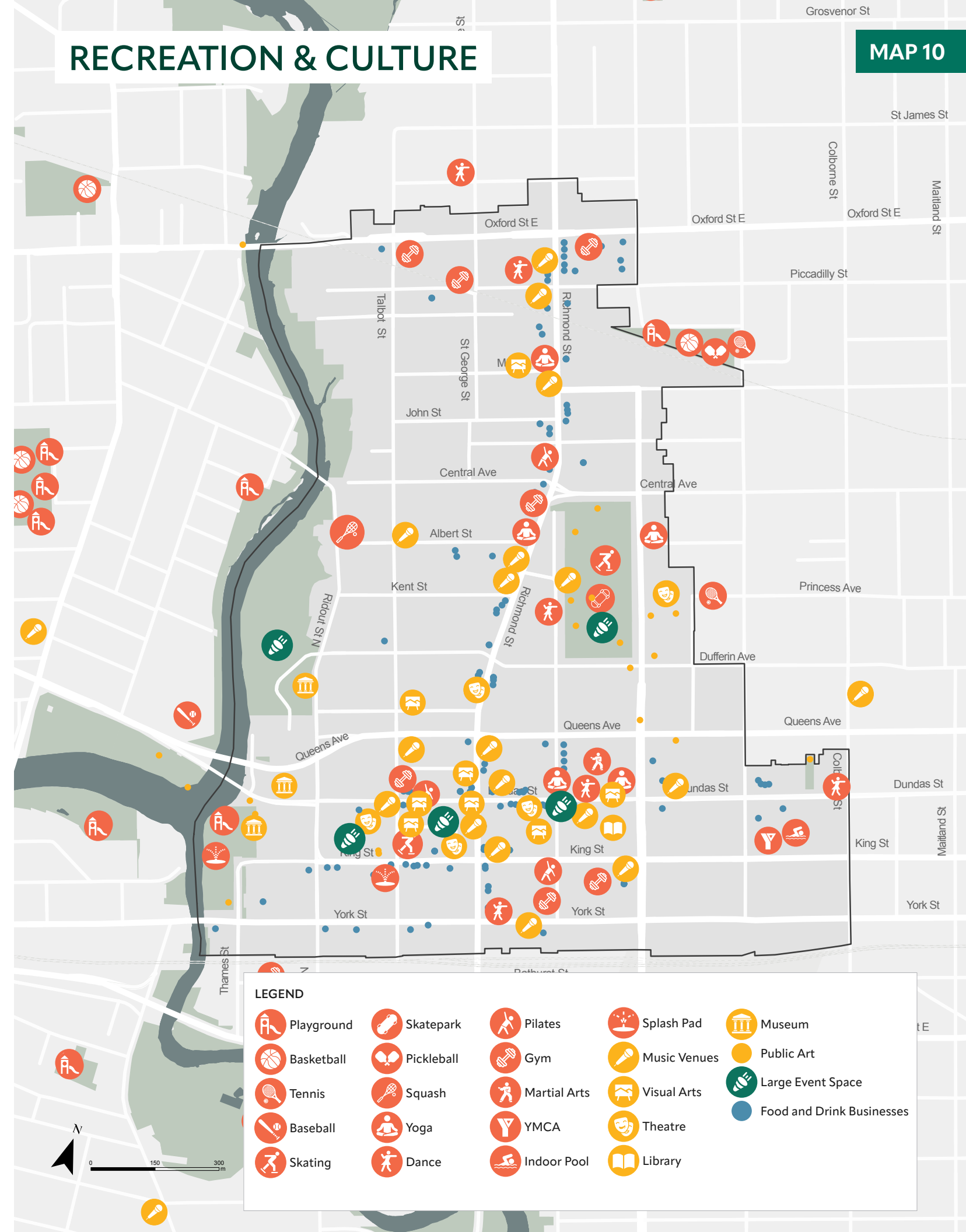
2.6 ARTS, CULTURE & RECREATION

As illustrated in Map 10, Downtown London contains a rich mix of cultural, recreational, and social amenities that establish it as the city’s primary centre for arts, events, and leisure. Cultural assets are highly concentrated along Dundas and Richmond Streets, where numerous music venues, theatres, and visual arts spaces reinforce London’s designation as Canada’s first UNESCO City of Music. Together with major event spaces, these venues hosted more than 800 events in 2024, attracting approximately 1.18 million attendees (Downtown BIA).

Anchors such as Museum London and a range of public art installations further strengthen Downtown’s cultural identity, while Victoria Park and Harris Park serve as central gathering places for annual festivals and community events. Recreational amenities are distributed throughout the core and include a playground, skatepark, ice pads, and the Central Library. Alongside public facilities, a

significant share of recreation is provided by private operators—more than 25 specialized studios offer fitness, dance, yoga, and Pilates, complemented by larger institutions such as the YMCA, which provides an indoor pool and community facilities.

Food and drink establishments further enrich the Downtown experience, reinforcing its role as both a cultural and social destination. Map 10 highlights the highest concentration of cultural and recreational amenities in the southern portion of Downtown, particularly around the Richmond–Dundas intersection and Covent Garden Market. This clustering of arts, culture, dining, and recreation fosters a vibrant and dynamic environment that attracts residents and visitors alike, while also underscoring the need for more inclusive, publicly accessible recreation opportunities across Downtown.



MAP 10

2.7 LANDSCAPE & ECOLOGY

As illustrated in Map 11, Downtown London's natural environment provides important ecological, recreational, and aesthetic value within an otherwise dense urban setting. Downtown is situated at the forks of the Thames River, benefiting from a corridor of riparian greenspace that integrates the natural system directly into the city's core. Prominent parks such as Harris Park, Ivey Park, and Victoria Park anchor this network, offering large areas of tree canopy and open space that support recreation, urban cooling, and biodiversity.

Downtown, there are an estimated 4,600 trees distributed through parks, streets, and smaller open spaces. However, the distribution is uneven as the northern portion of the Downtown, with its more residential character, contains a greater share of tree canopy and larger parks, while the central and southern core, home to the highest concentrations

of commercial activity, have fewer tree-lined streets and lack large-scale open space. This imbalance highlights the need for strategies to expand canopy coverage and integrate green features into the more intensely built-up parts of the Downtown, where increasing tree canopy can be challenging.

Environmental risks are also present in the Core. The western periphery of the Downtown lies within the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority's regulated floodplain. The most vulnerable area is Harris Park, given its low elevation, though flood risk extends into adjacent non-park lands in the northwest corner of the Study Area. These conditions emphasize the dual role of the river corridor as both an ecological asset and a hazard zone that requires careful management.



2.8 BUILT CULTURAL HERITAGE

Map 12 illustrates the spatial distribution of Downtown London's built cultural heritage, capturing the extent of designated and listed heritage parcels, historic sites, and formally recognized Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs). The map reflects the layered development history of the Downtown, from its 18th-century origins as the City's first settlement to its evolution as the commercial, cultural, and civic heart of London.

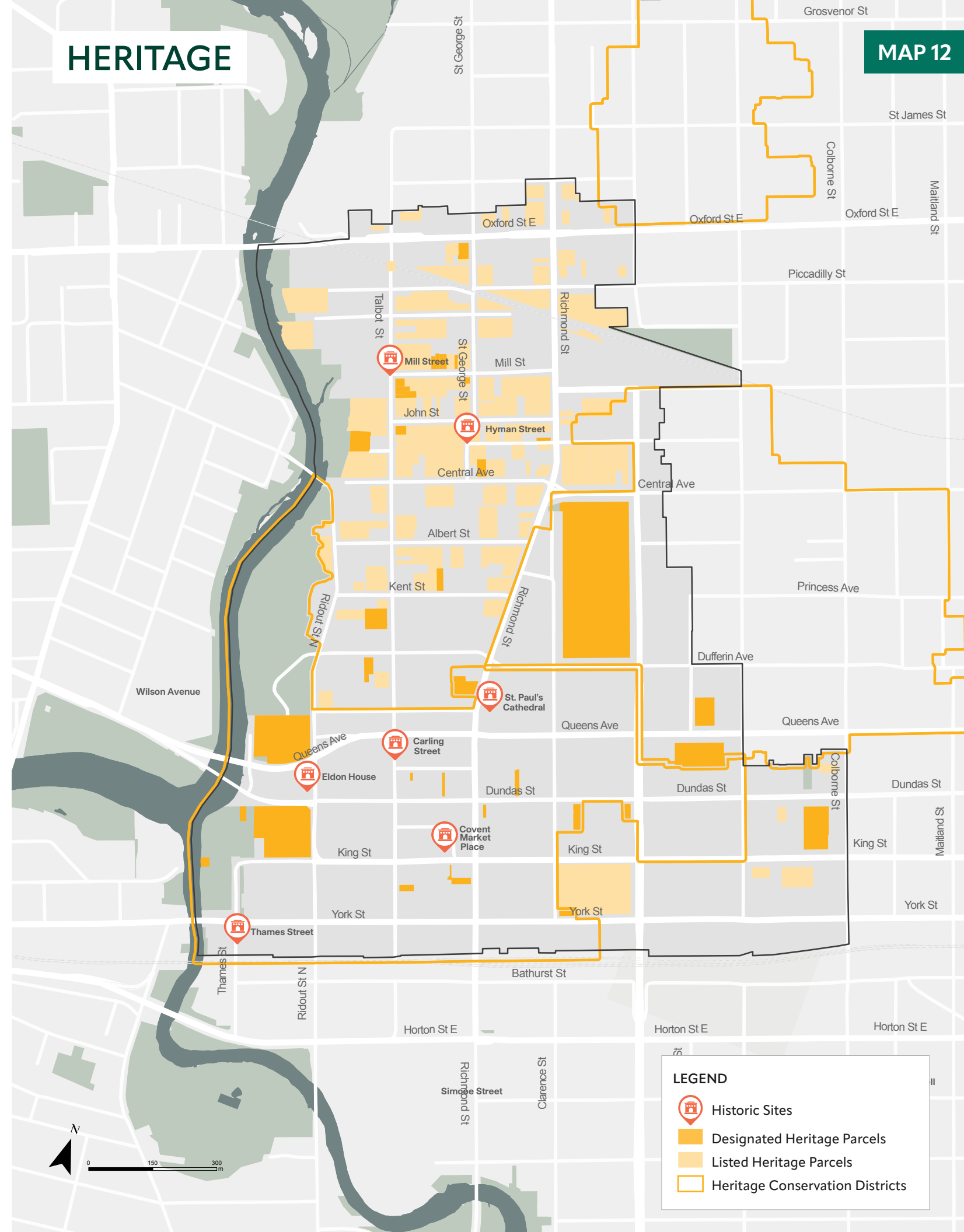
The map identifies two designated Heritage Conservation Districts within or adjacent to the study area, the Downtown HCD, emphasizing historic commercial and industrial structures, and the West Woodfield HCD, which preserves the residential character east of the Core. In addition, dozens of designated and listed heritage parcels are dispersed throughout the Downtown, with notable concentrations along Richmond Street, and the residential areas west of 'Richmond Row'. Prominent historic sites, including Eldon House, Middlesex County Court House, and St. Paul's and St. Peter's Cathedrals, anchor the City's early civic, religious, and cultural identity. Collectively, these layers illustrate that heritage assets are densest in the northern and central portions of the Downtown, extending westward toward the Thames River and south toward the former industrial lands.

The pattern of heritage resources revealed by Map 12 highlights the depth and diversity of Downtown London's built form. The close alignment between historic parcels and key commercial corridors underscores the enduring role of heritage buildings as active contributors to the downtown economy.

Along Richmond and Dundas Streets, 19th- and early 20th-century façades define the public realm and provide fine-grained architectural rhythm that distinguishes the core from newer suburban areas. These concentrations also coincide with areas of high pedestrian activity, reinforcing the relationship between heritage character and street vitality.

To the north and east, the transition into the West Woodfield HCD marks a shift from commercial to residential heritage, characterized by intact streetscapes, mature trees, and late-Victorian houses. This continuity offers a tangible link between the downtown's working and living environments and represents an opportunity for heritage-based neighbourhood integration.

Heritage parcels frequently overlap with zones of redevelopment interest identified in previous maps. This overlap indicates both a constraint and an opportunity: while conservation requirements may limit some forms of intensification, heritage character can be leveraged as a catalyst for investment, particularly through adaptive reuse programs and incentive tools such as Community Improvement Plans. The concentration of heritage properties near key public spaces including Victoria Park, Covent Garden Market, and the Forks of the Thames, also reinforces the role of heritage in shaping downtown's visual identity and tourism appeal.



2.9 COMMUNITY WELLBEING & SAFETY

Community wellbeing and safety are foundational to the vitality, equity, and health of any downtown environment. Beyond reducing risk or harm, a sense of wellbeing and safety reflects how connected, welcome, and supported people feel in shared urban spaces. In Canadian cities, perceptions of safety and community wellbeing directly influence patterns of residential choice, business investment, tourism, and overall urban life. A downtown that feels secure and cared for encourages activity, foot traffic, and economic confidence, while one perceived as unsafe risks disinvestment and social withdrawal.

Downtown London is no exception, the conversation around safety and community wellbeing remains central to its long-term revitalization and achieving the City's vision for the Downtown. This section examines community wellbeing and safety in Downtown London through the lens of both data and place, considering patterns of police calls for service; spatial characteristics of crime and disorder; and the social and built environment that shape how people experience Downtown. The intent is to provide an understanding of trends and their implications for design, programming, and management of the Downtown, rather than to assess the effectiveness of operational or enforcement initiatives of the City, London Police Service, or the multitude of partner agencies and organizations supporting community wellbeing and safety in the Downtown.

Patterns of Crime & Disorder

Based on data provided by the London Police Service (LPS) between 2020 and 2024, calls

recorded for service in Downtown London fell into four major categories: criminal; disorder; public wellness; and traffic incidents. While the Downtown represents only about 2.7% of London's total population (11,557 residents out of 422,324), it accounts for a significantly higher share of calls in several categories reflecting the area's role as the City's commercial, entertainment, and institutional core, where large numbers of residents, workers, and visitors converge daily (with the daytime population of the Downtown swelling to nearly 43,000 people or about 10% of the City's population).

Criminal incidents include offences under the Criminal Code such as drug-related activity, violent and property crimes, and weapons-related offences. Downtown London accounts for roughly 7% of all person-crime calls, and 13% of all drug-related calls citywide with incidences being most concentrated along the Richmond–Dundas corridor and adjacent areas.

Disorder incidents, including disputes, liquor infractions, and trespassing, are also prominent in the Downtown. Though not always criminal, these visible forms of disruption strongly influence perceptions of safety and order. Recurrent nodes of disorder calls suggest that specific addresses or clusters of businesses in the Downtown experience repeated activity, highlighting opportunities for targeted interventions, business engagement, and urban design responses that support both more effective management and activation in the Downtown.

Public wellness incidents, such as welfare checks, mental health crises, overdoses, and suicides, represent another major portion of downtown calls. "Check welfare" calls are the most frequent, followed by mental health and medical emergencies, patterns that underline

the Downtown and surrounding area's role as a service centre for individuals experiencing housing insecurity, addiction, and mental health challenges.

Finally, traffic-related calls, including impaired driving, collisions, and enforcement, tend to cluster at key intersections such as Richmond and Oxford Streets, where vehicular, transit, and pedestrian movements intersect most intensely

While these patterns highlight areas of concentrated demand on public safety systems, they also correspond with high-activity environments that define the core of London's civic, social, and economic life. In this sense, calls for service signal not only areas of stress, but also zones of vitality within London's urban system (i.e. in general, there is a direct relationship between the density of people and activity and the frequency of incidents and interventions that occur in dynamic, high-use environments such as downtowns).

Spatial Patterns & the Built Environment

Spatial analysis of incident data reveals that the most active zones correspond closely with areas of dense commercial activity, nightlife, and transit use in the Downtown. This reinforces that Downtown's wellbeing and safety challenges are not uniform across the Downtown, but are often concentrated at specific intersections, nodes, and uses and are shaped by both the built form of the Downtown, and the intensity of its uses.

Physical features such as narrow and dimly lit alleyways, surface parking lots, and vacant or poorly lit storefronts, can exacerbate perceptions of insecurity, especially at night. Conversely, areas with strong 'eyes on the

street', transparent façades, and active ground-floor uses tend to feel safer and more inviting, even when activity levels are at high or low points. These insights highlight the role of urban design in shaping both perceived and actual safety in the Downtown. Design measures such as enhanced lighting; clear sightlines and transparent ground floors; well-programmed public spaces; and year-round activation are critical to enhancing perceived and actual safety and wellbeing.

Social & Wellness Context

Downtown and surrounding area's concentration of social and health services is a cornerstone of citywide wellbeing, ensuring essential supports are accessible where they are most needed. However, their proximity within a compact geography also means that visible homelessness, substance use, and mental health crises are more apparent than elsewhere. Public wellness calls to the London Police Service reflect this intersection between social need and public space, where issues of addiction, mental health, and poverty are most visible. These are not conditions solvable through design or enforcement alone, but through sustained inter-agency coordination between urban planning, housing, public health, policing, and outreach services. Alignment of the Downtown Plan with the City's Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan, emphasizing prevention, partnership, and dignity as foundations for urban revitalization will be important.

Perceptions of Safety

While call data provides measurable indicators of community wellbeing and public safety, public perception often diverges from statistical reality. Many downtowns experience a 'perception gap', where visible signs of

disorder such as loitering, graffiti, or litter heighten fear of crime even when actual risk is modest. Local media has regularly reported that residents and business owners increasingly view safety as a concern, particularly during evening hours. These perceptions can affect business performance, property investment, and the vibrancy of public life. Perception, however, is highly responsive to environmental cues: lighting, cleanliness, visibility, and social activity.

Institutional Context & Collaboration

Community wellbeing and safety in Downtown London is a shared civic responsibility that depends on coordination among police, social services, outreach teams, municipal departments, and local businesses. The Police Services' Community Foot Patrol Section, consisting of approximately 22 officers, plays a central role in maintaining visibility, engagement, and responsiveness in the Downtown. Programs such as Project LEARN (Liquor Enforcement and Reduction of Noise) and RIDE initiatives complement this approach during peak activity periods.

The effectiveness of safety strategies depends as much on collaboration and outreach as on enforcement. Partnerships with organizations such as the Downtown London BIA, London Cares, and Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) are essential to connecting individuals in crisis with services and maintaining a sense of care in the public realm. Regular cross-agency briefings, data-sharing, and coordinated response protocols should continue to evolve as part of the Downtown Plan's implementation framework.

Summary Analysis

Community wellbeing and safety in Downtown London reflect the convergence of social conditions, urban design, and concentrated human activity rather than any single cause or trend. The data indicate that incidents, whether criminal, disorderly, or wellness-related, are most prevalent in areas of high foot traffic, nightlife, and social service access, particularly along the Richmond-Dundas corridor. This geography mirrors the very characteristics that make downtowns vibrant: density, diversity, and continuous movement.

As such, the challenge is not simply to reduce incidents but to design and manage the urban environment so that vitality and vulnerability can coexist within a framework of safety, dignity, and inclusion. Perceptions of safety hinge as much on visible signs of care and stewardship (e.g. cleanliness, lighting, activation, and public presence), as they do on enforcement and social supports (e.g. police and by-law enforcement, social services and community outreach, and public health services). The Downtown Plan will need to incorporate these elements through direction on design, management, and policy recommendations that strengthen both the Downtown's 'hardware' (i.e. physical form) and its 'software' (i.e. social systems).

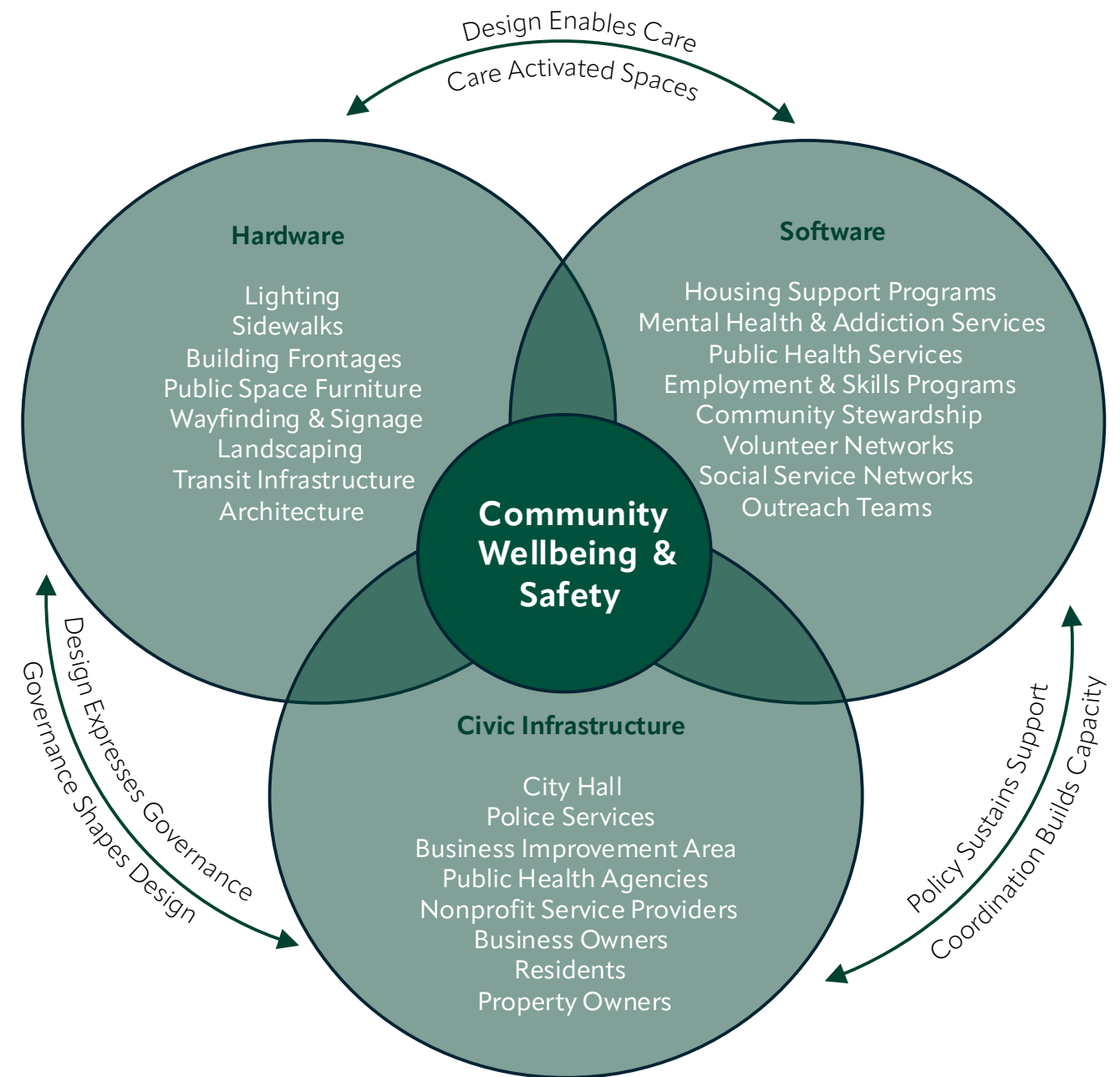


Figure 9 Community Wellbeing & Safety Conceptual Diagram

2.10 GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

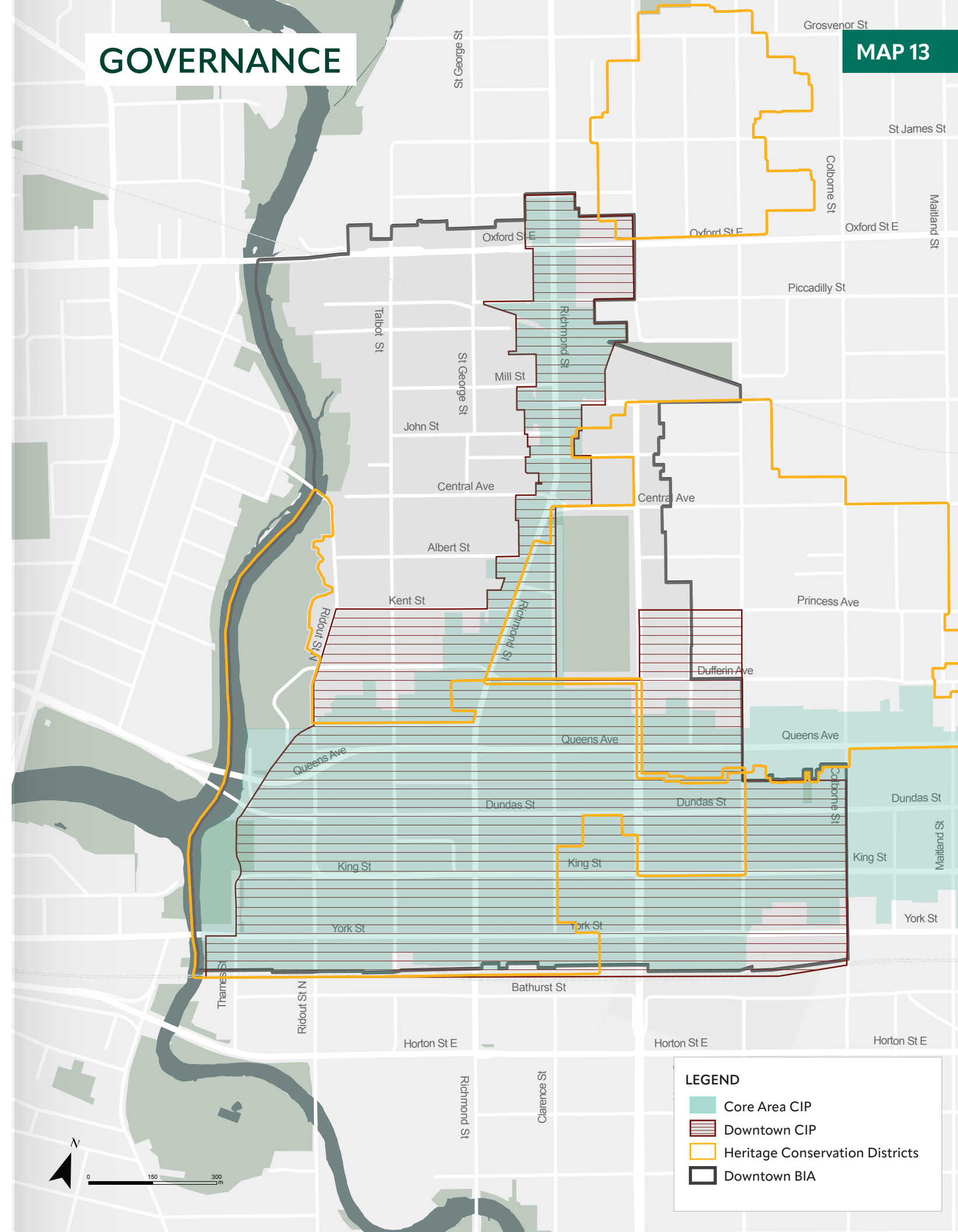
Planning is not just about the physical layout of a space, but also about how those spaces are managed. Downtown London is shaped by a layered system of organizations and policy tools each with its own goals and objectives, funding model, and administrative framework. Map 13 illustrates the multiple governance and policy frameworks that shape Downtown London outside the Official Plan and Zoning By-law. The boundaries show where different strategies, programs, and management tools apply. Taken together, these overlapping geographies reveal how the Downtown is supported by a layered set of tools aimed at a combination preservation, economic development, and business vitality. Heritage boundaries highlight areas where historic buildings and streetscapes are preserved; community improvement plan boundaries show where the City provides incentives and infrastructure support to businesses and property owners; and the BIA boundary shows where businesses collectively fund improvements, marketing, and programming.

The concentration of multiple boundaries along Dundas and Richmond Streets underscores their importance as the cultural and commercial heart of Downtown. At the same time, the multi-layered governance structure presents challenges. Overlapping designations may create complexity for property owners, businesses, and developers who must navigate different sets of rules, incentives, and expectations, which can cause

confusion or slow the pace of investment. In addition, each governance body has its own priorities, heritage emphasizes preservation, CIPs emphasize reinvestment, and the BIA emphasizes business vitality. Without coordination, these objectives can sometimes work at cross-purposes rather than reinforcing each other.

Another challenge is capacity and resources. Governance organizations such as the business improvement area boards and heritage advisory committees often operate with limited budgets and staffing. This can limit their ability to implement, monitor, and sustain initiatives. The result is that promising programs risk under-delivery without additional support.

Research and literature on urban governance highlights several principles that can be applied in Downtown London. First, governance should be streamlined and coordinated, with approval processes simplified or better aligned across organizations. Strong collaborative mechanisms are needed to bring together stakeholders across organizations to monitor progress, coordinate investment, and resolve conflicts. Shared performance metrics, such as reduced vacancy rates, heritage building reuse, or increased business activity, could help align diverse actors around common goals. Governance must be adaptive and flexible enough to respond to evolving economic, demographic, and cultural conditions.



3.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

To support the development of the Downtown Plan, a comprehensive review of the City of London’s existing plans, policies, staff reports, and budget documents has been conducted along with relevant provincial planning documents. This review provides critical insight into the current regulatory and planning landscape shaping Downtown London and clarifies how the Downtown Master Plan can align with, build upon, and advance ongoing initiatives.

The analysis serves multiple purposes: it summarizes the planning and regulatory environment and highlights key opportunities where the Downtown Plan can support previous action and guide future development.

In total, 41 documents were reviewed. This section does not provide an exhaustive summary of all plans reviewed but rather highlights the most pertinent plans and policies that help establish the regulatory context that shapes Downtown London today. This summary synthesizes the most relevant and pertinent plans, particularly those that directly affect Downtown London or intersect with major policy areas such as housing, transportation, public space, and economic development. For a full list of reviewed documents, see Appendix 1; for a summary of all plans and their implications analyzed in this section, see Appendix 2.

3.1 PROVINCIAL PLANNING CONTEXT

The Downtown Plan is not intended to be a statutory planning document and is therefore not subject to the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS, 2024) or the requirements of the Planning Act. However, the PPS is referenced to inform and guide the

development of this Plan. The PPS recognizes Downtowns as strategic growth areas and outlines several policy directions. The following provincial policy areas provide key guiding principles that relate to Downtown areas:

1. Intensification and Strategic Growth Areas

- Downtowns are identified as priority areas for growth, where development should focus on intensification and a compact built form that makes efficient use of land, services, and infrastructure
- Growth should support the development of complete communities, with a mix of uses and housing options

2. Transit-Supportive Development

- The downtown is a focal point for transit investment and should be planned to support transit-oriented development
- Policies should enhance active transportation, reduce reliance on personal vehicles, and ensure integration between land use and transportation networks

3. Housing Supply and Affordability

- Downtowns must contribute to achieving the city’s housing targets under the province’s housing supply obligations
- Planning must support a range and mix of housing types, including affordable and supportive housing, in walkable, transit-connected areas

4. Economic Development and Mixed Use

- Downtowns are economic engines and cultural hubs; planning should support job creation, investment attraction, and business retention
- Downtowns must promote a diverse mix of land uses, including retail, office, cultural, institutional, and residential uses that contribute to a vibrant downtown core

5. Climate Resilience and Green Infrastructure

- Climate adaptation strategies must be considered, such as green infrastructure, urban tree cover, and flood mitigation measures, and policies should reduce greenhouse gas emissions through compact development, sustainable mobility, and energy-efficient design

6. Cultural Heritage and Public Spaces

- The protection of built and cultural heritage resources is required under provincial policy.
- Downtowns should contain high-quality public spaces and should recognize Indigenous heritage and cultural identity.

3.2 MUNICIPALITY-WIDE PLANS

The London Plan (2016) - serves as the overarching policy framework for all planning within the City of London. Adopted by Council and approved by the Province in 2016, it is now in force as the City’s Official Plan. The London Plan emphasizes growing inward and upward to reduce the costs of growth,

create walkable communities, revitalize urban neighbourhoods and business areas, protect agricultural lands, and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and energy consumption.

Unlike most Official Plans that rely on land use designations, The London Plan introduces Place Types, which define the character and function of areas based on the type of place envisioned. The Downtown and Transit Village Place Types support the broadest range of uses and the most intense forms of development in the city, with Downtown permitting the greatest building heights. Rapid Transit Corridors connect Downtown with the Transit Villages, accommodating a mix of moderate-intensity urban development along key transit routes.

The London Plan identifies 18 steps to achieve the vision for Downtown London. Downtown is designated as the highest-priority area for intensification, allowing for greater building heights and density than elsewhere in the city. This policy direction provides a foundation for the new Downtown Plan to promote transit-oriented, infill development and to implement strategies that foster vibrant, mixed-use neighbourhoods.

City’s Strategic Plan (2023-2027) - Approved by Council in April 2023, the City of London’s Strategic Plan establishes a clear vision, mission, and set of values, along with eight Strategic Areas of Focus that guide decision-making and service delivery over a four-year period. Informed by extensive community input, the plan reflects a strong commitment to accountability, inclusion, and long-term resilience.

The eight Strategic Areas of Focus are:

1. Reconciliation, equity, accessibility, and inclusion;
2. Housing and homelessness;
3. Wellbeing and safety;
4. A safe London for women, girls, and gender-diverse and trans people;
5. Economic growth, culture, and prosperity;
6. Mobility and transportation;
7. Climate action and sustainable growth; and,
8. A well-run city.

While the Strategic Plan provides a citywide vision and framework, many of its priorities have direct implications for Downtown London. From housing and homelessness to economic development, mobility, and culture, the Downtown plays a critical role in advancing several of the City's strategic objectives. The Strategic Plan acts as a unifying framework that shapes more detailed initiatives, such as the new Downtown Plan, ensuring alignment with citywide goals and values. There are clear opportunities for the Downtown Plan to lead the implementation of key priorities, including expanding housing options and enhancing cultural vitality in the core.

2024–2027 Multi-Year Budget - outlines the City's financial plan over a four-year horizon, aligning municipal investments with the priorities set out in the 2023–2027 Strategic Plan. Approved by Council in 2024, the budget serves as a financial roadmap for implementing strategic initiatives across the city, including several with a direct Downtown focus.

Key Downtown-related investments include funding for transit infrastructure, public realm enhancements, arts and culture, safety, parking improvements, and financial incentives to stimulate growth and revitalization. Business Case P-44 – Core Area Initiatives requested \$17 million across 10 actions; however, only two were funded:

- \$3.6 million to enhance the Coordinated Informed Response Program; and
- \$434,000 to complete a new Downtown Plan.

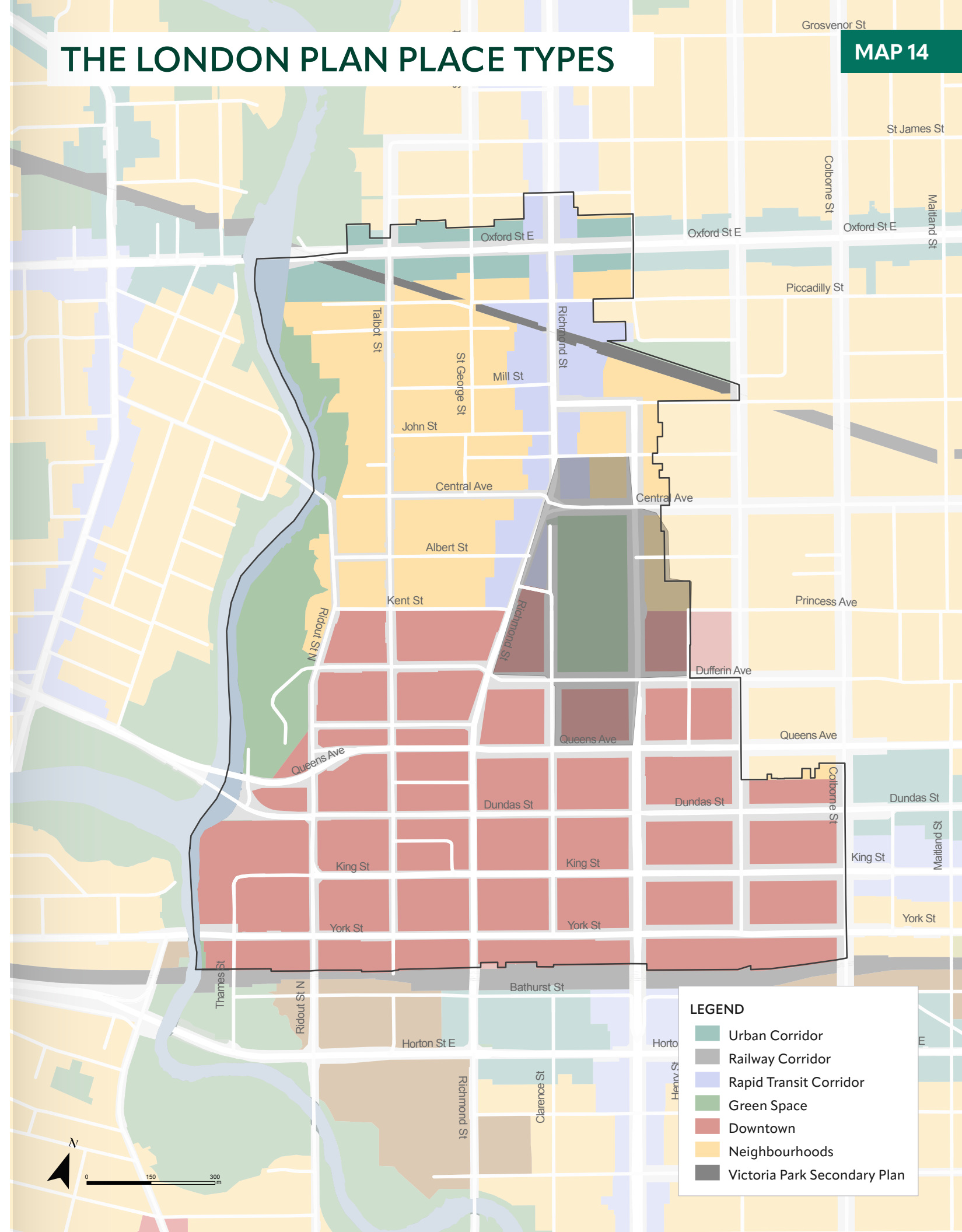
Together, these allocations total \$4 million in Downtown investment. The budget also identified \$420,000 for the "Welcome to the Heart of London" tourism project, though this was not funded through the municipal budget. Instead, the project received \$320,000 through a FedDev grant to advance a welcoming and visually cohesive downtown streetscape. For a detailed list of Downtown incentives, see Appendix 3.

3.3 CULTURAL & PUBLIC SPACE POLICIES AND PLANS

The Parks & Recreation Master Plan (2019) - presents a vision to enhance life for all Londoners through accessible, inclusive, and high-quality parks, programs, sports services, and public facilities. This Plan aims to improve the quality of life for all Londoners through the provision of parks, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities that are welcoming and accessible for all. The Plan addresses barriers to access and aligns

THE LONDON PLAN PLACE TYPES

MAP 14



LEGEND

- Urban Corridor
- Railway Corridor
- Rapid Transit Corridor
- Green Space
- Downtown
- Neighbourhoods
- Victoria Park Secondary Plan

parks, recreation programs, sport services, and facilities with the evolving interests and requirements of Londoners. An update to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is currently underway to reflect the rapid growth of London's population in recent years, and any draft materials created as part of this review will be considered in the creation of the Downtown Plan.

Victoria Park Secondary Plan (2024) - provides policy direction for how future development will relate to adjacent buildings and lots to Victoria Park. The plan provides comprehensive built form and land use directions that consider how future development should relate to the park and enhance the surrounding context while simultaneously ensuring the conservation of the cultural heritage resources in the area. At a high level, the plan reasserts Victoria Park's continued use as a city-wide destination for recreation, relaxation, and events.

Our City, Our Culture: London's Cultural Prosperity Plan - positions culture as a key driver of economic growth, civic identity, and quality of life in London. It emphasizes the central role of culture in shaping a city's sense of place and links culture with identity, tourism, and vibrancy. Key topics include investing in culture and animating London

through the arts, honouring Indigenous and First Nations, preserving heritage and celebrating culture, and investing in shared creative spaces. The Cultural Prosperity Plan report highlights the positive economic and social impact of the cultural sector; namely, culture and tourism contribute to a combined \$740 million in economic output, 8,000 tourism-related jobs, and 7,700 cultural jobs. The cultural sector alone generates \$746 million annually, as of 2023, reinforcing culture's essential role in London's economy and identity. The report outlines Old East Village, the Market at Western Fair District, and Downtown as cultural anchors and tourism hubs that would benefit from further cultural investment. The Cultural Prosperity Plan report also outlines key funding tools for the downtown, including the Community Arts Investment Program (CAIP) (\$750,000 in 2018), managed by the London Arts Council, which supported renovations, events, and operations and the Community Heritage Investment Program (CHIP) (\$74,000 in 2018) for heritage-specific support.

Music, Entertainment, & Culture District Feasibility Study (2017) - explores the feasibility of establishing Music, Entertainment, and Culture Districts in London to enhance cultural vibrancy and

economic growth. The study outlines actions to support cultural districts, including potential bylaw amendments regulatory streamlining, and measures to balance cultural activity with residential quality of life. The study proposes three categories of cultural districts, with Downtown hosting the most intensive activities under broader permissions and recommends phased implementation within existing budgets.

3.4 TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE POLICIES & PLANS

The City of London has a number of transportation and infrastructure-related plans and policies that directly implicate or address the downtown. It is critical that the Downtown Plan addresses the regulatory and policy frameworks identified and maintained in these plans.

SmartMoves Transportation Master Plan (2013) - outlines a long-term strategy to transform the City's transportation system by 2030, focusing on sustainability, inclusivity, and economic growth. Key features include reducing car dependency by introducing rapid transit (RT) corridors, enhancing public transit, and investing in active transportation infrastructure such as cycling and walking networks. The plan emphasizes integrating land use with transportation to support growth, prioritizes park-and-ride facilities to encourage transit use, and proposes strategic road network improvements. Key recommendations from the 2013 TMP related to Downtown highlight its role as a central node supporting population growth. The Downtown Plan can support the updated Rapid Transit network and related roadway improvements, incorporate targeted

transportation demand management (TDM) measures to promote active travel, and ensure that all active transportation modes, particularly connections to the Rapid Transit system, are supported with appropriate infrastructure.

Draft Mobility Master Plan (2025) - replaces the 2013 TMP and sets a long-term vision through 2050 to create an integrated, multimodal transportation network that is safe, accessible, equitable, and environmentally sustainable. Building on the SmartMoves framework, the plan aims to increase walking, cycling, and transit trips while reducing car dependency, with a target of 32.5% of all trips made by active and sustainable modes by 2050. Key focus areas address urban growth, transportation gaps, climate goals, and equity, with an emphasis on improving road safety, transit reliability, and connectivity. The plan recognizes downtown as a major destination but also highlights growing travel demands to other city hubs and supports directing nearly half of new development toward infill within the city's built boundary.

The plan has significant implications for the Downtown and for the development of a new Downtown Plan. It positions downtown as a targeted growth area with strong potential to support a shift to sustainable transportation modes, particularly transit, walking, and cycling. While no major road projects are planned within the core, proposed improvements include new rapid transit corridors, transit-friendly streets, and an expanded cycling network with enhanced pedestrian connections. Notably, strategy P6 highlights the Clarence Street Connector, an enhanced pedestrian corridor linking Harrison Park (near Wellington Street Thames River crossing) to Victoria Park. The plan also calls





for expanding the Downtown Wayfinding Plan to improve navigation, integrating streetscape enhancements, advancing Vision Zero safety measures, and expanding active transportation amenities such as bike racks and lockers. These priorities present opportunities for the Downtown Plan to align with and support sustainable mobility goals, enhance the public realm, and strengthen multimodal connections throughout the downtown core.

Conceptual Framework for Regional Transportation in London (2021) - outlines conceptual strategies to improve mobility and accessibility into, around, and within the city and the region. The framework responds to the Province of Ontario's 2020 report on regional transportation, titled *Connecting the Southwest: A Draft Transportation Plan for Southwestern Ontario* which places strong emphasis on connecting regional and urban transit systems. The framework identifies both a need for a centralized, multi-modal hub in Downtown London that can integrate city buses, VIA Rail, regional buses, and future rapid transit routes as well as secondary hubs in nearby transit village nodes. The framework highlights the economic and social benefits of better transportation access, particularly for lower-income individuals and rural

residents, and emphasizes the importance of pedestrian-friendly connections between transit nodes. The Conceptual Framework for Regional Transportation in London provides a foundation for how regional coordination and transportation infrastructure could support downtown's accessibility, vibrancy, and economic growth.

Cycling Master Plan (2016) - is a roadmap for the planning and design of cycling infrastructure, as well as programming to promote cycling as a form of active transportation. In it, the City sets out a plan for a city-wide cycling network as well as the policies, cost estimates, and programming for its implementation. The plan proposes several bike paths and cycling lanes in the Downtown. It also recommends securing bicycle parking in the Downtown for employers and employees and prioritizing the Downtown for a winter cycling network.

Climate Emergency Action Plan - This plan provides an overview of the City of London's commitment to climate action, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapting for a changing climate. The plan identifies three main climate hazards that are likely to become more extreme due to climate change. These hazards, all of which impact

the city's Downtown, are flooding, extreme heat events, and severe storms. The plan also outlines the City's GHG emission reduction target of reducing annual city-wide emissions by 55% by 2030, the majority of which are from the energy consumed for transportation and buildings.

3.5 HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS POLICIES AND PLANS

The Whole of Community System Response to Health and Homelessness in London - is an initiative that aims to address London's health and homelessness crisis in a collectively coordinated, equity-focused way. The plan is people centered and housing centric, and focuses on delivering low barrier healthcare, housing services, and other referral services through 24/7 service hubs. The plan is built around five critical foundations: workforce development, system governance, standards of care, shared systems, processes and supports, and centralized data and management. Engagement for this plan included three summits that convened more than 200 individual leaders, representing more than 70 local organizations. The plan features two holistic elements: a network of 24/7 care hubs that provide direct referrals to housing, and the rapid creation of supportive housing units. The approach includes an Indigenous-led response, and is funded by a \$25 million anonymous donation, that was matched to total \$37.6 million as of 2025.

Hubs Implementation Plan (2023) - is a strategic implementation roadmap for the development and rollout of the network of 12-15 community hubs mentioned in the Whole of Community System Response to Health and Homelessness in London. A strategy and accountability table co-designed five core

system components to guide the response: hubs, encampments, housing, workforce development, and systems foundations. The plan outlines a clear implementation approach for each of these areas.

Health & Homelessness Response: Community Encampment Plan - focuses on ensuring the dignity, safety, and well-being of individuals living in encampments. It aligns with the City's Housing Stability for All: The Housing Stability Action Plan (2019-2024) which outlines a roadmap to build 3,000 new affordable units in the next ten years to meet current and future needs. Grounded in a human rights-based approach, The Health & Homelessness Response Plan works in coordination with the Coordinated Informed Response (CIR) team and aims to provide individuals in encampments with access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation facilities, fire safety resources, waste management, harm reduction supports, food and food safety, and social services. Two types of outreach are detailed in the plan: transactional outreach, which offers short-term wellness checks and basic needs, and transformational outreach, which provides deeper case management with a pathway to housing. Oversight is provided by the Encampment Implementation Table, a Health and Safety Working Group that creates and monitors standards, and an Operations Working Group that coordinates and delivers services. A comprehensive health and safety framework underpins the strategy.

The City of London is also the recipient of federal Housing Accelerator Funds (HAF). As of 2023, London's approved application for HAF provides a housing target of 2,187 additional units between 2024-2026 for eligibility of up to \$74,058,143 under the HAF. This includes approximately \$28 million

for plan initiatives and financial incentives; \$20 million for investments in affordable housing; \$12.3 million for investments in housing-related infrastructure; and, \$13.6 million for investments in community-related infrastructure that supports housing. In 2024, after the first year of HAF funding, the City of London exceeded the Housing Supply Growth Target of permits for 3,184 new units issued in one year as the City issued 3,341 permits for new units. In March 2025, the City of London received an additional \$7.391 million for a commitment to an additional 184 units.

3.6 DOWNTOWN FOCUSED PLANS

Downtown London has been shaped by a series of plans and policies over the past 30 years that have guided its growth, revitalization, and strategic direction. Many of these documents remain in effect today, providing a strong foundation for the development of the new Downtown Plan. The upcoming plan will build on the momentum of previous efforts while aligning with and integrating into the City's existing policy and regulatory frameworks.

Downtown Millennium Plan (1998) - was developed in response to declining property values in Downtown London from 1992 to 1996, which reduced tax revenue citywide. It aimed to reposition downtown as a vibrant cultural, entertainment, residential, and commercial hub through municipal investments, city projects, and partnerships. The plan focused on eight strategic directions: transportation and parking, entertainment and culture, parks and recreation, economic renewal, residential development, culture and heritage preservation, safety and beautification, and infrastructure. Major public investments such as Covent Garden Market, Central Library, and Budweiser Gardens (now Canada Life Place) successfully spurred private reinvestment in the Downtown. Before the plan's release, financial incentives like the Façade Improvement Loan Program and redevelopment grants, introduced through the 1996 Downtown CIP, supported adaptive reuse and new development, helping to set the stage for the Millennium Plan's vision. Through the implementation of the plan, the Millennium Plan laid the foundation for sustained downtown investment by leveraging public investment to attract private growth.

Our Move Forward: London's Downtown Plan (2015) - was developed as a new guiding document for Downtown. The plan focuses on a vision for London's Downtown as a vibrant destination and a unique neighbourhood. The plan includes nine core values, six strategic directions, and 10 major transformational public realm projects.

The six strategic directions are:

1. Make Dundas Street the most exciting place in London
2. Reconnect with the Thames River
3. Forge connections with the downtown neighbourhoods
4. Green our Downtown
5. Build a great neighbourhood: meeting the needs of residents
6. Create the buzz: enhancing Downtown's unique image

The plan emphasizes public-private partnerships, celebrates cultural identity, and the need to improve physical infrastructure connections. The plan calls for coordinated investment, updated incentive programs, and potential new governance structures to align funding, implementation, and oversight with downtown priorities over successive Council terms. Our Move Forward provides insight into the values and priorities that have shaped past downtown planning, such as public realm enhancements, public safety, and economic development. The new Downtown Plan can focus on building upon these foundational improvements, shifting focus toward more targeted, smaller-scale initiatives that address current challenges and conditions.

Core Area Action Plan (CAAP) (2019) - identifies the needs and goals of London's Core Area - encompassing Downtown, Richmond Row, and Old East Village - and presenting 71 actions aimed at revitalizing the Core Area. Short, medium, and long-term actions are guided by four key needs:

1. Supporting vulnerable populations
2. Improving safety
3. Fostering business success
4. Attracting more people to the core area

Although the CAAP has concluded, the Core Area Safety Audit Grant Program remains active through the 2021 Core Area CIP and will continue until 2027. The comprehensive set of actions outlined in the CAAP provides valuable context for the new Downtown Plan, highlighting recently implemented actions and incentives. The scope of the CAAP was largely focused on supporting vulnerable populations and improving safety, leaving space for actions and initiatives in the new Downtown Plan to address other priorities while maintaining alignment with existing policies and strategies.

Prior to the 2021 Core Area CIP, the 1996 Downtown CIP was established to stimulate private-sector investment and foster economic development in Downtown London. The 1996 CIP focused on improving streetscapes, supporting heritage preservation, and encouraging mixed-use and residential development. This CIP was amended in 2021 to include performance measures, success indicators, and targets to evaluate the effectiveness of its loan and grant programs. The CIP's financial tools - such as tax increment grants, façade improvement loans, and residential development grants



can be strategically aligned with the new Downtown Plan's goals, integrating emerging priorities like climate resilience and social equity into ongoing development efforts.

Downtown Wayfinding Plan (2023) -

sought to further support the Downtown and the visitor experience. Phase 1, which was successfully completed in August 2024, included the installation of large destination markers and smaller finger posts in several locations downtown. The additional phases of the plan included further signage, pedestals, gateway markers, and banners. These additional installations would connect users and identify key transportation nodes such as the VIA Rail station and the Downtown Loop (Rapid Transit). The next phases of the Downtown Wayfinding Plan, budgeted at \$685,000 under the Mayor's Multi-Year Budget (case P-44 – Core Area Initiatives), were not funded for 2024–2027, delaying the plan's implementation until it can be deliberated again in the next budget cycle. However, the Downtown Plan can build upon the successes of this plan, acknowledging any alignment between future implementation and the new Downtown Plan.



4.0 COMMON PRACTICES REVIEW

To inform the development of the Downtown Plan, 62 plans and policies from 37 different cities across Canada, the United States, and internationally were reviewed to identify key themes and common strategies. These plans and policies included downtown plans, COVID-19 recovery plans focused on the downtown, economic development plans, and downtown-focused transportation plans. COVID-19 recovery plans were reviewed with the specific focus of understanding quick actions to revitalize and reinvigorate downtown activity. This review had two main purposes: first, to understand how other places have addressed challenges similar to those faced by Downtown London and identify the types of policies and strategies they have pursued; and second, to highlight widely used practices from around the world and assess their relevance to the London context.

This section presents notable examples of strategies, policies, and initiatives drawn from downtown plans, related documents, and associated actions. These initiatives are organized into six key themes for their potential relevance to Downtown London: housing; arts, culture, and innovation; mobility and infrastructure; vibrancy and business success; natural assets and environmental sustainability; and collaboration and governance. Each theme was carefully identified based on the wide-ranging review of plans and selected for its pertinent relevance to London. Within each theme, examples are provided that are both relevant and feasible for London.

For a full list of downtown plans reviewed, see Appendix 4. For a summary of commonalities across all plans, see Appendix 5.

4.1 CASE STUDY THEME 1 – HOUSING

Downtown London, like many other cities across Canada, are seeing a growing need to expand housing options in downtown. Increasing the number of people living downtown helps reduce vacancy, sustains local businesses, and adds to the overall vitality of the core. The following examples highlight different approaches cities are taking, from converting vacant buildings into housing to acquiring existing units to preserve affordability.

Building Conversion: Sierra Place (Calgary, AB, 2022), 230 Queen Street (Ottawa, ON, 2025), Manoir Lafontaine Hotel (Montreal, QC, 2023) and Travelodge (Dartmouth, NS, 2022)

Downtown London's high office and commercial vacancy rates present a unique opportunity to convert underused buildings into housing. Building conversions are a sustainable solution that reduce construction waste and make efficient use of existing infrastructure. By increasing the housing options and boosting a growing residential population in Downtown, the increased daily foot traffic will help support local businesses and services, contribute to increased vibrancy, address high office vacancy rates, and strengthen the area's long-term vitality. Two examples of building conversions in Calgary and Ottawa highlight this trend. While building conversions are often viewed as costly and lengthy, both of these conversions occurred in less than a year.

In 2022, supported by City of Calgary office-to-residential incentives, the 10-storey and 95,000 square foot Sierra Place office building in downtown Calgary, which was formerly the

headquarters of Dome Petroleum and had been vacant for years, was converted into 82 units of deeply affordable supportive housing. The project cost a total of \$28.5 million and received support from multiple levels of government; including \$5.5 million from the City of Calgary, \$2 million from the Province of Alberta, and \$16.6 million from the federal government. Local organizations also held a fundraiser to help raise additional funding for the project. In downtown Ottawa, the old Capitol Movie Theatre and the building's unused office space at 230 Queen Street have been converted into transitional housing for asylum seekers with 100 rooms and 140 beds. Converting the space cost \$5.6 million, and the City of Ottawa is holding the building under a 10-year lease.

Central city shopping centres and hotels in Montreal and Dartmouth have also been converted into affordable housing, serving students, women-led households, Indigenous and other populations that are most likely to be in housing need. The former Manoir Lafontaine Hotel in Montreal was redeveloped by the nonmarket developer Interloge into 93 homes, with \$16.8 million in funding assistance from the Quebec provincial government, and \$5.6 million from the City of Montreal. In Dartmouth, a former hotel in the north end of the city is being redeveloped into supportive housing, known as the Overlook. The federal government is providing \$6.5 million through the Rapid Housing Initiative to purchase the former Travelodge on Windmill Road, while the Nova Scotia government is contributing \$3.5 million toward the acquisition and has committed \$1.5 million annually to ongoing support services. The project will provide 65 affordable, safe, and comfortable housing units for the community's most vulnerable residents, including five units for respite care for those recently released from hospital.



Figure 10 SierraPlace, Calgary

Source:GGA-Architecture

Supporting Acquisitions of Central City Apartments to Retain Affordability: Right of First Refusal (Montreal, QC)

Acquisition of existing downtown apartment buildings, either directly by municipal governments or by nonmarket providers such as co-ops, community land trusts, public and non-profit housing providers is one mechanism to preserve affordability of existing housing. The federal government maintains a federal acquisition fund to support these efforts, helping to prevent the loss of affordable units by enabling timely purchases of at-risk properties. Several cities and provinces, such as Toronto, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia, have recently launched acquisition funds to support their acquisition of land and property.

One such program is the Right of First Refusal program in the City of Montreal. Adopted in 2018, Montreal's Right of First Refusal or By-Law on Pre-Emptive Rights allows the City of Montreal to purchase designated properties such as rooming houses and small apartment buildings before they are sold on the private market. When a property in these zones is listed for sale, the City has 60 days to match any offer and acquire it. This tool, which allows the City to purchase the building before other buyer within the next 10 years after the notice is given, helps preserve affordable housing in areas like Downtown where the loss of low-cost units is most severe. As of early 2023, Montreal had registered 101 low-cost rooming houses across nine boroughs for the right of first refusal in an attempt to preserve affordability. In 2024, the City announced plans to acquire 30 residential buildings, totaling more than 700 dwelling units, in the Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood. Applying this approach in Downtown London could

help maintain affordability and support a diverse, thriving community as the area grows.

Many downtown plans include strategies for adaptive building reuse, including reimagining office space and encouraging residential development. For example, Downtown Winnipeg's CentrePlan 2050, which includes vacancy taxes to activate vacant properties, Seattle's Downtown Activation Plan, which identifies the possibility to waive or modify development standards to facilitate office to residential conversions, and the DC Downtown Action Plan, which proposes changing the residential height limits to improve conversion feasibility.

4.2 CASE STUDY THEME 2 – ARTS, CULTURE & INNOVATION

Arts and culture play a vital role in enhancing downtown vibrancy, driving tourism, and contributing to local economic success. For London, a city with a UNESCO City of Music designation, dozens of local arts and culture institutions, and a pool of talented artists, capitalizing on arts and culture to foster collaboration is a unique opportunity for Downtown London.



Figure 11 Bloor Street Culture Cooridor
Source: Sierra Potvin

Bloor Street Culture Corridor (Toronto, ON, 2014)

In 2014, 12 (now 19) of Toronto's Bloor Street Cultural Institutions created the Bloor Street Culture Corridor, a multi-organizational partnership that works collaboratively to help attract more visitors to the area. By formalizing the group and collaborating on marketing, programming, and knowledge-sharing, the aim was to encourage visitors to spend more time in the area and establish it as a key cultural destination. The organization shares a website, social media, and a mobile app to promote exhibitions at its member institutions. In 2016, the corridor secured designation as an official City of Toronto cultural corridor. This designation supports the promotion and development of the area as a cultural destination, and while it does not carry direct financial impacts, it enhances the profile of the corridor and its institutions, which together generate more than \$629,500,000 in economic impact each year.

Ottawa Arts Corridor and Entertainment District (Ottawa, ON, 2025)

The Ottawa Art Gallery (OAG), in collaboration with the City of Ottawa, spearheaded the Ottawa Arts Corridor project to embrace the power of art and culture downtown. The arts corridor is expected to have significant value and impact for the City of Ottawa as it aims to transform downtown Ottawa into an art and cultural destination, and increase visitation and economic activity. With over 13 members including museums, galleries, and theatres, the corridor links key arts and culture businesses through shared programming and activations and collaborative marketing. Part of the corridor's offerings includes a digital walking tour,

highlighting a mix of galleries and museums, street art, and historic landmarks. The corridor invites arts and culture businesses to activate their spaces by promoting walking and cycling through artistic interventions, transforming open spaces into community hubs with art markets, performances, and interactive installations, and by utilizing vertical spaces for art installations. Expanding beyond an arts corridor, a key action in A Living Capital: Downtown Ottawa Action Agenda is the reation of a framework for an Arts, Culture and Entertainment (ACE) District in Downtown, which is now underway in partnership with Bloomberg Associates.

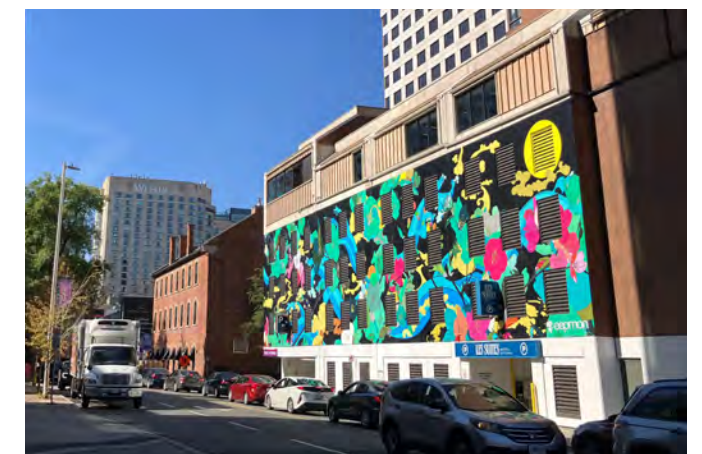


Figure 12 Ottawa Art Gallery
Source: Jennifer Barrett

Activating the Cultural Mile (Chicago, IL, 2025)

Chicago's Activating the Cultural Mile is a student-developed plan that responds to a call for solutions to create a thriving Downtown for the next 20 years. It reenvision Chicago's business district as a creative district that includes a pedestrianized street full of art spaces with year-round programming. One of its core messages is that young people are

essential to downtown revitalization, with the plan including strategies to retain families and children as part of a long-term population growth approach. Another key component of the proposal includes establishing a Cultural Mile Creative Residency program, offering live-work housing and professional development opportunities for artists. The plan also envisions creating subsidized housing in converted office spaces to foster a more inclusive and affordable downtown. While the plan is not operationalized and is aspirational in nature, it serves as a strong example of how arts and culture can be embedded within downtown planning. It also demonstrates how cities can leverage their student populations not only to support the current vitality of the downtown, but also to help shape its future.

Anchor Institutions: University of Calgary Office Conversion (Calgary, AB, 2023)

Anchor institutions such as universities and colleges with a downtown presence draw thousands of people into the core, driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic

growth. This has proven successful in Calgary: announced in 2023, the University of Calgary and the City of Calgary partnered to convert an underused downtown office tower to house the School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape (SAPL). This project will feature design studios, classrooms, a robotic fabrication workshop, an exhibition gallery, and a community-focused design justice lab. The conversion is supported by up to \$9 million from the City's Downtown Post-Secondary Institution Incentive Program, which aims to increase economic activity, vibrancy, and safety while also reducing downtown office vacancy.

Other downtown plans that incorporate arts and culture incubation include Make it Kitchener 2.0, which proposes expanding access to affordable creative spaces to foster cultural vibrancy and Downtown Halifax's Vision 2030, which identifies the need to designate downtown as a cultural district. While not identified in a plan, the City of Gatineau is renting a parking lot in its Downtown and has converted it into a programmed public space (Place Laval) in the summer months.



Figure 13 River Hall, Calgary

Source: Jérôme Glad

Place-Based Development and Programming: River Hall (Calgary, AB, 2024)

River Hall is a temporary outdoor boardwalk and food venue in Calgary's west downtown, created on a former municipal parking lot to address the lack of neighborhood amenities and test ideas for future development of the riverfront. The City of Calgary, in partnership with Aire Commune Productions and guided by the Downtown Strategy team, helped create and oversee the space. Conceived and delivered in less than a year, the space was designed as an "urban living room" — inclusive, welcoming, and oriented toward the Elbow River to connect with natural surroundings and active transportation routes. Anchored by food and drink offerings, colorful design, and flexible infrastructure for events, River Hall quickly became a lively, year-round gathering place. Its six-week pilot in summer 2024 attracted over 5,000 visitors, hosted 20 events with local artists and partners, generated \$85,000 in sales, and proved financially successful for all participating vendors. The initiative is an integral part of Calgary's Downtown Strategy, contributing to the vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and economically active core while testing the potential of river-facing commercial activity. The project demonstrated the potential of river-facing commercial activity, strengthened community ties, and paved the way for an expanded 2025 season, validating the city's "place-led development" approach for the site's long-term future and more permanent development potential.

4.3 CASE STUDY THEME 3 – MOBILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Downtown London, like many city centres, faces ongoing challenges offering a variety of accessible and affordable ways of getting to and around downtown. This includes frequent public transportation, safe bike lanes, ample sidewalks as well as parking availability and cost. Testing new transit routes, investing in active transportation (walking, biking, scooting) infrastructure including secure bike parking as well as smart vehicle parking solutions such as real-time data tracking, wayfinding tools, and improved infrastructure can enhance accessibility, ease congestion, and contribute to a better downtown experience.

EXactpark (Oakville, ON, 2021)

In 2021, Oakville installed 1,200 eXactpark sensors around the eight-block downtown commercial district. These sensors are embedded in the pavement under parking spaces and track data such as occupancy, duration, turnover, availability, and cost. Municipalities can access granular data, while drivers can use an app to find parking and apply filters like "paid," "accessible," or "walking distance". The sensor system was enhanced by the installation of wayfinding signs that show drivers where parking spaces could be found and areas of less parking availability. Since these additions, Oakville has been successful in shifting drivers from areas of high demand to other underutilized spaces, support ease of parking and reducing drive-around time. After wayfinding signage installation, data showed that peak occupancy on Randall Street, a previously underutilized parking zone, increased by over 20%, while other overutilized areas decreased in occupancy.

Multimodal Transit Hub: Union Station Denver Colorado (Denver, CO, 2010)

In 2010, construction began on an ambitious project to transform Denver's Union Station into a multimodal transit hub located in lower downtown Denver, Colorado, on approximately 50 acres. The project was led by the Denver Union Station Project Authority (DUSPA), a nonprofit public benefit corporation formed to finance and implement the redevelopment.

The \$487.7 million project preserved and restored the station's historic architecture while integrating light rail, commuter rail, Amtrak, and bus services into a single intermodal hub designed to improve regional mobility. Delivered through a design-build contract, the project included a surrounding transit-oriented district with residential, retail, and office space, a hotel, restaurants, and public plazas. The station officially opened in 2014 and has since become a central feature of downtown Denver, spurring additional development in the city center and surrounding neighborhoods. Today, Denver Union Station stands as a successful example of a public-private partnership creating a landmark multimodal transit district that enhances mobility, economic growth, and community vibrancy.

Mobility is an essential consideration in Downtown Plans; for example, Cleveland's Reimagining Downtown includes efforts to improve downtown parking by installing digital on-street parking meters, making parking more convenient and efficient.



Figure 14 Union Station, Denver

Source: Noah Sandoval

4.4 CASE STUDY THEME 4 – VIBRANCY & BUSINESS SUCCESS

Downtown vibrancy and business success are closely linked, with active storefronts, creative programming, and strong local enterprises helping to attract people and sustain economic life. Many downtowns, Downtown London included, continue to grapple with high vacancy rates, shifting retail trends, and the need for new approaches to draw visitors and support entrepreneurs. Programs that lower barriers for small businesses, encourage pop-ups and cultural activations, and foster collaboration between Cities, nonprofits, and landlords demonstrate how short-term interventions can create long-term impacts for downtown economies

Vacant to Vibrant (San Francisco, CA, 2023)

San Francisco's Vacant to Vibrant is a city-supported program, managed by the nonprofit SF New Deal in partnership with the City's economic development department. It places short-term small businesses, cultural groups, and markets in large, otherwise empty downtown storefronts. The initiative aims to address post-pandemic retail vacancies, attract foot traffic, and revitalize underused commercial spaces. Launched in 2023 as a tactical response to unusually high downtown retail vacancy, the program has expanded through 2024–25.

The City and SF New Deal partner with landlords willing to offer short-term, reduced-rent leases for vacant spaces. Entrepreneurs, artists, and other creatives can apply for space through a curated selection process, and pop-ups launch for 3–6 months, ranging from retail and cafés to galleries and cultural programs. Businesses receive marketing help, small grants, and operational guidance. Successful pop-ups are encouraged to transition into longer-term leases.

The program has resulted in the rapid activation of multiple storefronts, increased pedestrian activity, generated positive media coverage, and renewed public interest in downtown areas. Approximately 60% of pop-ups transitioned to permanent leases, resulting in a strengthened local business ecosystem, reduced perception of blight, and demonstrated proof-of-concept for creative interim use of vacant properties. It is funded by a combination of municipal COVID-19 economic recovery funds, philanthropic grants, and partnerships with property owners. The project also incorporates nonprofit partners to manage applications, match tenants with spaces, and provide business support.

Edmonton's Downtown Retail Project (Edmonton, AB, 2023)

Launched in 2023, Edmonton's Downtown Retail Project (also known as the Retailer Incentive Program) is aimed at revitalizing downtown commercial corridors. The program offers financial and operational support to new retailers to fill empty storefronts, reduce launch risk, and stimulate downtown activity. Retailers apply through a public process and the selected retailers are evaluated for fit, viability, and alignment with downtown revitalization goals. Program staff work with landlords to secure short-term storefronts, negotiating reduced rent or other concessions to reduce tenant entry costs. Approved participants receive up to \$250,000 each (to offset build-out and initial operation's needs), plus three months of rent relief and marketing or promotional assistance. Once businesses have launched, the program monitors outcomes like foot traffic, business performance, and lease retention potential. The Edmonton Downtown Business Association (EDBA) administers the program, acts as convener, and supports both retailers and landlords. The project was funded by the City of Edmonton's Downtown Vibrancy Fund. Between 2022 and 2024, the City invested \$14 million in 126 projects under this fund, supporting downtown revitalization efforts.

Through the program, several new retailers entered downtown spaces (e.g., Good Goods Co., The Growler, Consign Design) increasing the number of active storefronts, and some of which later secured longer-term leases. However, some business closures also highlight the need for continuing demand and business supports.



Figure 15 City Studio Artist Lodge, Vancouver
Source: City Studio

City Studio (Vancouver, BC, 2010)

Since 2010, the City of Vancouver has operated CityStudio, a formal collaboration with local post-secondary institutions (SFU, UBC, etc.) that embeds students and faculty into city planning. Through course-based studio projects, students co-design, prototype, and implement urban placemaking or sustainability projects. In the 12 plus years of the initiative, CityStudio has delivered nearly 200 tangible civic projects, leveraging more than 96,000 student hours. These include parklets, bike-repair stations, public seating, and green installations—boosting street vibrancy, business-customer engagement, and fostering a culture of innovation.

Square Peg (Kitchener, ON, 2024)

Square Peg is a retail pop-up space designed to showcase and support emerging and active retail talent while activating the Kitchener downtown core. The space is located in a city-owned building at 220 King Street W., directly adjacent to Kitchener City Hall and is operated by the City's

Downtown Development Team. Square Peg offers entrepreneurs short-term, low-risk opportunities to test concepts and connect with customers without the commitment of a permanent storefront. Additionally, Square Peg hosts year-round pop-ups and special initiatives like the Square Peg Micro-Market, which rotates dozens of local small businesses through the space. Square Peg serves as a key example of a City-led initiative, in a City-owned building, that supports vibrancy, business success, and local economic development in the centre of the downtown.

4.5 CASE STUDY THEME 5- NATURAL ASSETS & ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

London's rich network of parks, rivers and green spaces, many just steps from Downtown, offers opportunities to build upon and expand amenities such as playgrounds, trails, riverfront retail and gathering spaces to further strengthen sustainability, livability and community well-being.

Waterloo Park Redesign (Waterloo, ON, 2019)

In 2019, Waterloo Park underwent an \$11 million revitalization with the goal of improving environmental sustainability and community enrichment. Using water as a central motif, the Silver Lake waterfront was transformed for play, relaxation and connection to the water. Included in the redesign were four main water features including fountains, a splash pad, and sculptural misters. Sustainability goals were achieved by adding solar lighting, and by reducing and mitigating the impact of storm water runoff using native planting, naturalized areas, and permeable paving.

Downtown Greening (Edmonton, AB, 2024)

In 2024, construction began on Warehouse Park, the transformation of a parking lot in Downtown Edmonton into a public park. A wide range of amenities include green space, play and sports areas, a night-time lighting feature, and pedestrian walkways. All season use is an important aspect of this park, and winter-specific amenities include a warming zone with fireplaces and a covered pavilion. This project is identified in the Capital City

Downtown Plan as an important catalyst project for downtown rejuvenation, and is funded by the Capital City Downtown Community Revitalization Levy, which captures the increase in property tax revenue that results from new development and rising property values within a designated area.

A number of Downtown Plans place significant emphasis on environmental sustainability. For example, Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan includes a strategic move to create "a green network for a healthy environment" with actions and policies that include:

- The Green Alley Project, which transforms downtown alleys into ecological corridors by restoring natural hydrology, supporting stormwater infiltration, and creating green, people-focused spaces.
- Enhancing the pedestrian connection between downtown and the river to improve access to natural areas.
- Collaborating with First Nations and urban Indigenous populations to explore the inclusion of culturally appropriate amenities in downtown parks that meet community needs and celebrate Indigenous history



Figure 16 Waterloo Park, Waterloo
Source: Crystal Fountains

Other Downtown Plans that include environmental sustainability actions include Boston's Plan: Downtown, Downtown Winnipeg's CentrePlan 2050, and Edmonton's Downtown Action Plan.

4.6 CASE STUDY THEME 6 – COLLABORATION & GOVERNANCE

Strong governance and collaboration models are essential drivers of downtown development. In several cities including Cincinnati, Calgary, and Winnipeg, dedicated development corporations have played a central role in revitalizing and supporting downtown areas in the long term. In addition to spearheading and funding development projects, these organizations can be leveraged to act as one-stop-shop development concierges that work to minimize red tape for private investors. While not all cities have a development corporation, there are lessons and models from these examples that can be applied in various investment initiatives.

Cincinnati Center City Development Corp (3CDC) (Cincinnati, OH, 2003)

Cincinnati Center City Development Corp (3CDC) is a non-profit, real estate development and finance organization focused on revitalizing Cincinnati's urban core. While 3CDC is not a City agency, it often works in partnership with the City of Cincinnati and the private sector. The organization was founded in 2003 with the renovation of a public square and has since played a role in over \$2 billion in development projects in the city's core. 3CDC is funded through multiple streams; while most of the funding comes from corporate and

philanthropic support, funds are also received from Cincinnati's tax increment financing (TIF) districts where tax revenue is reinvested in eligible projects, and through commercial revenue streams such as parking revenue and events. Notable community driven successes include the development of seven major public spaces such as parks and performance venues, 460 units of affordable housing, and 345 shelter or supportive housing placements. The organization has bought and transformed hundreds of vacant buildings and lots into mixed use commercial and residential developments, totaling over 2 million square feet of commercial space and thousands of market rate apartment units.

Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC) (Calgary, AB, 2007)

The Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC) is an arm's length subsidiary of the City of Calgary, funded through a community revitalization levy (CRL). The CRL functions by capturing the increase in property tax revenue that results from new development and rising property values within a designated area; in this case Calgary's Downtown Core. The CMLC was created in 2007 to kick start revitalization in Calgary's East Village River District. The initial project of revitalizing 504 acres on downtown's east end, including East Village and the Culture and Entertainment district, proved successful. Indeed, after subsequent projects that were leveraged in the area, property value assessments in the district rose from approximately \$300 million to \$1.1 billion over a span of 10 years.



Figure 17 CMLC, Calgary
Source: Jennifer Barrett

Winnipeg Centre Venture (Winnipeg, MB, 1999)

Established in 1999, CentreVenture Development Corporation is an arms-length agency of the City of Winnipeg that provides leadership in planning and delivering downtown projects and initiatives. CentreVenture's mandate is to support private-public cooperation and innovative partnerships to ultimately encourage new retail, entertainment, housing and commercial ventures, along with public sector investment in public spaces, amenities and services. This has led to over 20 redevelopment projects of underutilized properties. A second part of their mandate includes acting as a downtown concierge service for those embarking on development projects in the downtown, providing current market information, guiding investors through downtown development, and connecting them to available supports and programs.

Downtown Winnipeg CentrePlan 2050 includes a goal of improving Downtown governance and implementation as one of five main goals in the plan. One such action is to create a downtown "concierge" role to streamline the process of development and redevelopment.

5.0 DOWNTOWN DIAGNOSTIC

The Downtown Diagnostic distills Downtown London's key strengths, barriers, and opportunities to identify where conditions can be leveraged or require attention. The accompanying Spatial Opportunity and Constraints Map illustrates these dynamics spatially, offering insight into how opportunities and challenges overlap and where strategic intervention may have the greatest impact.

5.1 STRENGTHS, BARRIERS & OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS

This section provides a summary of findings that offer an overview of Downtown's current strengths and assets, as well as some barriers and challenges that may be limiting its potential. Together, this information is used to identify potential opportunities to address in the Downtown Plan, and the areas where action will have the greatest impact, while recognizing that additional learnings will come in Phase 2 of this project. Importantly, this analysis and the identified priorities establish the foundation to develop the Downtown Plan. Therefore, the list of opportunities does not represent the final actions that will appear in the London Downtown Plan but rather provides a basis for further exploration, partner engagement, and testing in Phase 2 – the development of the Plan.

Public Spaces, Events & Infrastructure

Strengths & Assets:

Downtown London has benefited from major public investments in the 1980s, late 1990s (Millennium Plan), and more recently through Our Move Forward: London's Downtown Plan, resulting in key cultural assets, public spaces,

and event infrastructure. Notable projects include Museum London, Covent Garden Market, Market Lane, Dundas Place, Canada Life Place, Rotary Square, Jubilee Square, and the relocated Central Library. Market Lane and Dundas Place offer a flexible, shared-street design that supports patios, performances, and festivals, while Covent Garden Market has anchored the community for over two decades as a hub for food, goods, and seasonal farmers' markets. The Forks of the Thames, Harris Park, Ivey Park, Peace Park, and Victoria Park provide essential green and gathering spaces, supporting both recreation and large-scale events that draw thousands of visitors - many from outside the core.

Barriers & Challenges:

Engagement and research in Phase 1 revealed a number of barriers related to public space and infrastructure, including accessibility concerns (whether real or perceived) on Dundas Place (uneven surfaces, lack of a curb to buffer pedestrians from cars) as well as limited seating, shade, and protection from the weather. Aging park infrastructure and the strain on trees and greenspace from event use were identified as barriers to hosting more events or expanding existing ones. Additionally, aside from the playground at Ivey Park and specific family-focused events, engagement revealed that family-friendly spaces and amenities are limited, with few permanent recreational options for children. While large events attract people, there are fewer activities and destinations that support consistent, everyday use of public spaces. Additionally, limited opportunities for commercial activity in public spaces, such as food or refreshment kiosks, reduce the types of animation and activation that can occur outside of major events. It is also currently a challenge to find space for waste

collection services that do not interfere with the pedestrian experience. Often, garbage is placed at the curb near restaurants or in high-traffic areas, and large waste and recycling bins can block the passage of pedestrians on sidewalks in certain locations.

Opportunities & Considerations:

- Expand activations on Rotary Square with large events and explore continued connection to Covent Garden Market and Canada Life Place. Use this opportunity to test alternate spaces for large events to reduce impact on Victoria and Harris Parks and conflicts between passive greenspace for local residents and events that draw large crowds, while also better meeting the increased demand from event organizers and a growing population
- Build on the success of the summer farmers' market to explore further opportunities to provide access to fresh food and support local growers in the Downtown
- Increase new amenities and family-friendly programming to offer experiences for families and expand upon existing playgrounds and play spaces. Leverage regional draw of special events to encourage repeat visits, support local businesses, and showcase Downtown as a year-round destination

- Activate the riverfront (near the Forks of the Thames and Ivey Park) for recreation, programming to better connect Downtown to the riverfront and highlight the river's ecology
- Engage Indigenous communities in riverfront naturalization and downtown programming
- Identify opportunities for more ongoing 'playful' activities (games, music) and small commercial activities in public spaces (e.g. snack or refreshment stands) to encourage more regular use and lingering. This may include exploring opportunities to amend existing bylaws governing the use of public space for commercial and recreational activity
- Enhance lighting at building edges and sidewalks to increase perception of safety and encourage walking
- Need for more year-round activation of public space for all-season visits and connecting spaces for a more integrated experience
- Identify areas for smaller public spaces or pocket parks to enhance livability and offer 'pause' spaces throughout Downtown
- Consider role of educational and anchor institutions and local organizations to enhance public space through collaborative initiatives, artwork or programming

Transportation & Mobility

Strengths & Assets:

London is diversifying its transportation options with investment in a Rapid Transit system to be operational by 2027-28, investment in bike lanes as part of infrastructure improvements, and completion of a new Mobility Master Plan (2025). The newly developed RT system supports a mode shift towards more accessible and sustainable transportation options providing more frequent access Downtown. The presence of VIA Rail and the VIA Rail station in the Downtown is a major asset for regional transportation into and out of London, re-enforcing London's importance to Southwestern Ontario and its connection to the Greater Toronto Area.

Barriers & Challenges:

Downtown faces some transportation and mobility challenges, including limited transit frequency, especially in the evenings, and concerns about safety, comfort, and reliability that can discourage ridership. Congestion is a recurring issue, both during large events and due to uncoordinated regional bus services and limited curb space for drop-offs happening in various locations in the Downtown. Navigating Downtown is further complicated by shared use of streets by multiple transportation modes, inconsistent signage, and unclear traffic patterns, which contribute to perceptions of safety risks. Parking is also perceived as a challenge, with difficulties using existing technology, short time limits, and limited availability for longer visits to Downtown.

Opportunities & Considerations:

- Explore technological solutions to perceived parking challenges, including apps showing available spots and lot locations
- Monitor Rapid Transit uptake once operational to assess ridership trends and potential schedule modifications
- Promote existing regional bus routes and train travel (VIA Rail) to enhance accessibility to the Downtown from regional destinations
- Develop a Downtown transportation hub to strengthen regional linkages
- Evaluate how the new Mobility Master Plan affects access to Downtown, including improved travel from the east and south, planned development from the west and north, and active transportation use including secure bike parking
- Address transportation equity by enhancing ease and access to all modes including late night transit service, well-lit transit stops, and on-demand stops, such as when riders can request a stop between dedicated stops during late night routes
- Expand public safety education about Dundas Street and the presence of tactile paving (e.g. brick band) that provides visual delineation between the road and signals the edge of the sidewalk for the visually impaired
- Improve connection to and integration of the Thames Valley Parkway (TVP) to the Downtown

Arts, Culture & Institutional Uses

Strengths & Assets:

Downtown hosts a vibrant ecosystem of arts and culture organizations, including galleries, museums, studios, performance spaces, and concert venues, which provide employment, creative opportunities, and a diversity of experiences ranging from theater productions to small music shows. London's UNESCO City of Music designation further elevates its cultural profile. Alongside historic theaters, the remodeled St. Paul's Anglican Church now offers a performance and events venue and maintains a long-term vision of becoming a larger Creative Hub to support London's music and cultural industry through music incubation and skills development. The City, the BIA, and local arts and cultural organizations have a strong history of investing in and delivering diverse programming year-round, making Downtown a destination for residents and visitors alike.

Barriers & Challenges:

Arts and culture in the Downtown face pressures from declining investment, particularly for smaller organizations and venues, as well as limited sustained funding for events and programming. The existing culture plan is nearly thirteen years old, considered by some to be outdated given changes in visitor and audience attendance and challenges in Downtown post-COVID, thus reducing its effectiveness in guiding future priorities and initiatives. At the same time, changes at Fanshawe College, including a reduction in programs at the downtown campus due to international student restrictions, present risks to maintaining a consistent student presence and activity in the core.

Opportunities & Considerations:

- Expand existing public art programs (Public Art and Monument Program, through the Public Art and Monument Policy) to provide opportunities for further beautification with consistent or increased funding.
- Leverage the UNESCO City of Music designation to attract other sources of revenue (private, philanthropic), investment from other levels of government (provincial and federal), and events attraction
- Support the development of the proposed St. Paul's Cathedral Creative Hub concept to attract investment and become a key destination
- Leverage Tourism London, the Downtown BIA, and myLondon app to increase promotion of downtown cultural events
- Increase daytime programming to activate streets during peak pedestrian hours (weekday lunch hour)
- Identify concentrations of arts and cultural organizations and creative industries to define a portion of Downtown as a creative district and target new creative uses and collaborations in this location including creatives spaces, programming and public art



Economic Development

Strengths & Assets:

Downtown London is home to major anchor employers such as TD Bank, Canada Life, and government offices which are supported by a significant inventory of office space that includes Class 'A', 'B' and 'C' buildings, many of the latter dating from the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries. Non-employment uses have also been shown to be viable in Downtown London, including TAP Centre for Creativity and Fanshawe College's downtown campus, which offer a proof-of-concept for educational and creative uses in the Downtown should funding be sustained. Fanshawe's adaptive reuse of a commercial building in Downtown remains a positive example of downtown revitalization and one that has been demonstrated in other cities with success (e.g., University of Calgary). In addition, Downtown includes almost two million square feet of occupied and vacant retail commercial space, much of it in small storefronts under 5,000 square feet that can support independent businesses. Downtown also benefits from London's broader employment base in insurance, advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences, and a growing tech sector. Downtown London also offers a wide variety of restaurants that reflect both long-standing establishments as well as new food options that represent the new cultural diversity of London.

Barriers & Challenges:

The successful and sustained economic development of Downtown faces barriers due to an overreliance on office towers and daytime workers, which can create revenue risks if office values decline or workplace patterns shift. Data demonstrates that the majority of retail spaces are dominated by personal services (healthcare, personal care, financial services, etc.), and food and beverage establishments. While these uses contribute to activity in the Downtown, they leave the area reliant on lifestyle and leisure activity, and less able to depend on serving everyday shopping needs. Further, many commercial spaces, especially in older and historic buildings, have seen little investment and face high vacancy rates. Owners may struggle to meet modern standards and code requirements, putting buildings at risk of obsolescence. Together, these factors limit the ability to fully leverage building stock in Downtown and diversify its economic base.

Opportunities & Considerations:

- Engage large, anchor employers in large office to identify private investment to enhance Downtown as a business hub and as an employee attraction and retention strategy
- Expand affordable and flexible office and storefront space to incubate businesses and support growth, including meanwhile and collaborative lease models
- Promote adaptive reuse of historic buildings for educational and creative uses to generate new activity Downtown
- Repurpose Citi Plaza for entertainment, community events, youth activities, or temporary uses.
- Work with London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC) to support the growth of the tech sector Downtown
- Work with LEDC, Small Business Centre (SBC) and the new Economic Development Plan (2026) to identify growing industries and employer needs and match to downtown commercial space offerings
- Expand the integration between Richmond Row and Dundas Place for retail, events, and experiences using wayfinding, programming or other visible links (e.g. lighting, sidewalk treatment, art)
- Identify targeted revitalization strategies that consider locations of cultural anchors, food and beverage establishments, and residential intensification

Housing, Development & Land Use

Strengths & Assets:

Downtown London's development community is largely made up of local companies with a strong understanding of the city and a demonstrated commitment to its core. London has seen a significant increase in purpose-built rental housing, strengthening the foundation for housing diversity. This growth is supported by \$153 million in total infrastructure investments, including \$24 million in provincial investment in wastewater infrastructure, which has unlocked capacity for more than 17,000 new residential units, including thousands anticipated in the Downtown. The City has also advanced a successful incentive program to convert under-utilized offices into housing, with three projects completed or underway. The success of the incentives program for office to residential conversions is demonstrated by the oversubscription to the program. In addition, municipally owned and leased storefronts, such as the Dundas Place Storefront, provide essential services like public washrooms and a visible street-level presence for staff to respond to Downtown needs, while also demonstrating alternative uses for ground-floor retail spaces.

Barriers & Challenges:

Downtown faces a high office vacancy rate, particularly in Class 'B' and 'C' buildings, creating pressure to reconsider how these spaces can be adapted or reused. Planned investments in new office space, such as the City Hall campus project, risk compounding existing vacancies rather than addressing them. Large properties like Citi Plaza remain underutilized, with design features that limit their contribution to a vibrant streetscape. Additionally, the lack of everyday destinations

such as a grocery store, a downtown primary school, and downtown daycare options were noted as challenges for downtown residents.

Opportunities & Considerations:

- Leverage incentives and knowledge gained from conversions to support other adaptive re-use including housing or other uses
- Evaluate economic incentives for Downtown to ensure they are competitive with other areas of the city with a focus on the portion of Downtown south of Dufferin Avenue and Victoria Park
- Explore the opportunity for more municipal ownership or tenanted Downtown spaces, including new office space for municipal staff, and increase street-level activation of those buildings to curate uses and reduce vacancies
- Collaborate with the BIA, LEDC, the London Chamber of Commerce, SBC and other partners to identify appropriate uses and locations for temporary or semi-permanent ground floor and upper storey uses to fill buildings, lower vacancies, bring street-level activity and drive re-investment in older building stock including arts and cultural uses, 'third spaces', coworking, educational uses, rehearsal space, temporary activations, and community uses
- Use the potential City Hall campus project and the need to increase office space for City staff to incorporate more municipal office space in the downtown core to test new uses and revitalize underutilized areas
- Promote urban living to grow the downtown population, demonstrate the market for new housing, and attract new amenities and services catering to residents



Social & Community Context & Equity

Strengths & Assets:

Downtown London is home to a diverse and growing population, with about one-third of residents being first-generation Canadians and 32.3% identifying as visible minorities. Over half are not permanent residents, and nearly two-thirds are young, ethnically diverse singles. Seniors and retirees also make up a notable share, creating a wide range of household types and interests that can support downtown retail and activities. Newcomers, in particular, have expressed excitement about Downtown, often participating as organizers, business owners, and attendees of events, and tend to hold more positive perceptions than some long-time residents. Alongside this growth, collaborative efforts such as the Coordinated Informed Response (CIR) team are working to address challenges related to homelessness, drug use, and vandalism through community-based approaches to street-level issues and de-escalation. The CIR approach includes transactional outreach such as short-term wellness checks and basic needs, as well as transformational outreach to provide deeper case management including housing and supportive services. The CIR team includes City of London staff, London Police Services and community outreach agencies

including London CARES and 519Pursuit. London Police are active in the Downtown including enforcement to restrict public drug use and to work in collaboration with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Thames Valley to provide outreach and connect individuals with supports. In parallel to these efforts, the private and philanthropic sector has mobilized \$36.7 million through the Fund for Change, supporting five supportive housing projects and two community hubs as part of a broader "Whole of Community Response" to health and homelessness. Based on the completion of supportive housing units to date, early results have shown promising outcomes for vulnerable individuals, the majority (more than 80%) of which have remained housed and are receiving wrap around supports.

Barriers & Challenges:

Downtown is experiencing increasing social pressures, with many individuals presenting complex needs that require coordinated, multi-sector responses. Visible public drug use and a growing unhoused population contribute to perceptions of safety concerns, while also outpacing available housing and support solutions. In addition, there is limited visible Indigenous engagement in Downtown public spaces and planning processes, creating barriers to advancing reconciliation and building a more inclusive and equitable core.

Opportunities & Considerations:

- Engage newcomers in programming and activations by working with community organizations to understand participation barriers and support inclusive approaches
- Include Indigenous representation through programming and cultural opportunities by collaborating with Indigenous-led partners to inform approaches and participation
- Increase engagement with Downtown's large share of predominantly young, ethnically diverse singles who are digitally savvy, highly social, and spend much of their disposable income on dining, entertainment, fitness, and technology. Increase offerings for seniors and other household types to integrate residents into Downtown life and grow the retail sector
- Identify ways to attract retail and services to reflect the diversity of downtown residents to help enhance cultural vibrancy and attract a broader audience
- Enhance and evaluate operations of the Coordinated Informed Response team, track indicators of success and challenges, and engage in a community of practice to understand the successes and challenges of other similar models and share solutions and practices
- Sustain funding for the Whole of Community Response and the Fund for Change to support vulnerable community members many of whom call Downtown home



Built Form & Physical Characteristics

Strengths & Assets:

There is a concentration of historic and heritage buildings, particularly around Richmond and Dundas Streets, where many 19th- and early 20th-century structures and streetscapes remain intact. Distinct features such as narrow lots and varied façades give the area a unique, human-scaled character that stands in contrast to the large-format, monotonous façades of mid- to late-20th-century development.

Barriers & Challenges:

Much of the building stock in Downtown is aging and requires updates to meet current standards and support ongoing use. Building conditions can also limit flexibility for new uses adaptation. At the street level, retail vacancies, poorly maintained or boarded-up spaces, visual barriers such as bars or shuttered storefronts, and an abundance of surface parking lots create a streetscape that often feels unwelcoming or underutilized outside of major events.

Opportunities & Considerations:

- Identify opportunities, including funding, to renovate historic buildings to showcase architectural character
- Engage local developers to strengthen investment potential by reviewing existing Community Improvement Plan (CIP) incentives and the geographic boundaries of incentives.
- Integrate design excellence for public facilities into budgets through a percent-for-public-art requirement in new development projects, with particular focus on engaging and high-quality ground-floor design in areas of new residential development to support vibrant street-level activity
- Improve gateways and physical entry-ways to the Downtown at major entrances (along major streets) to create a sense of identity in, and arrival to the Downtown. This includes expanding upon the gateway to the Downtown from the river and Harris Park through improved physical characteristics and placemaking
- Increase green infrastructure and tree canopy in the southern portion of the Downtown to both increase climate resilience and help support a more pleasant and comfortable pedestrian experience

Municipal Operations & Jurisdiction

Strengths & Assets:

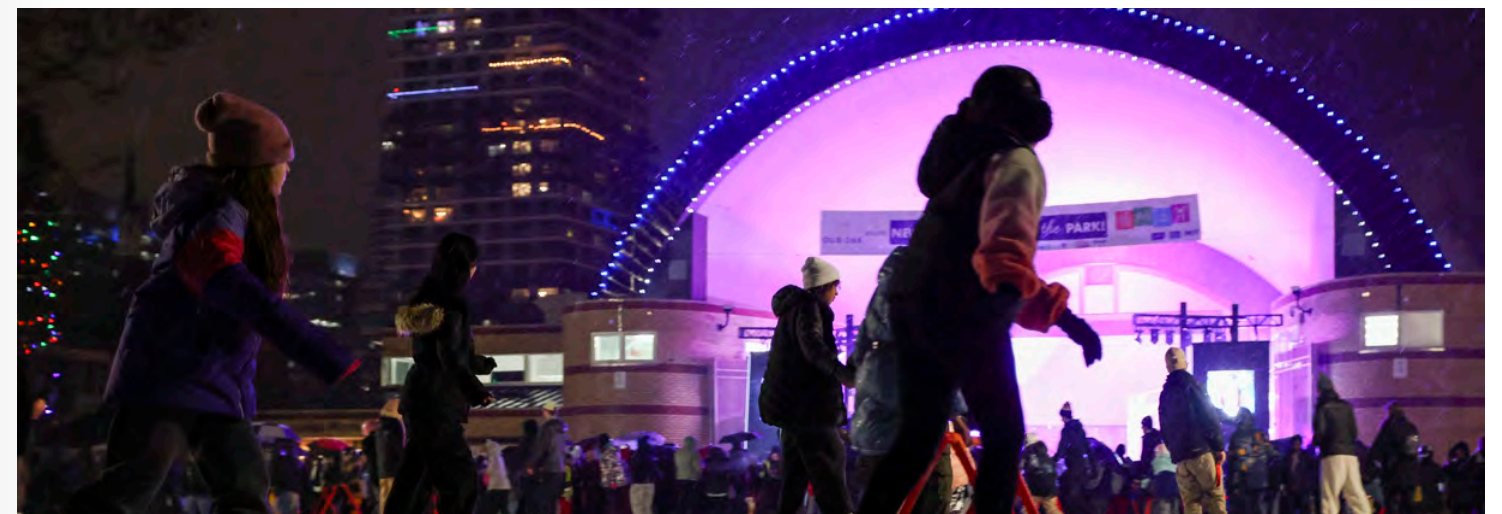
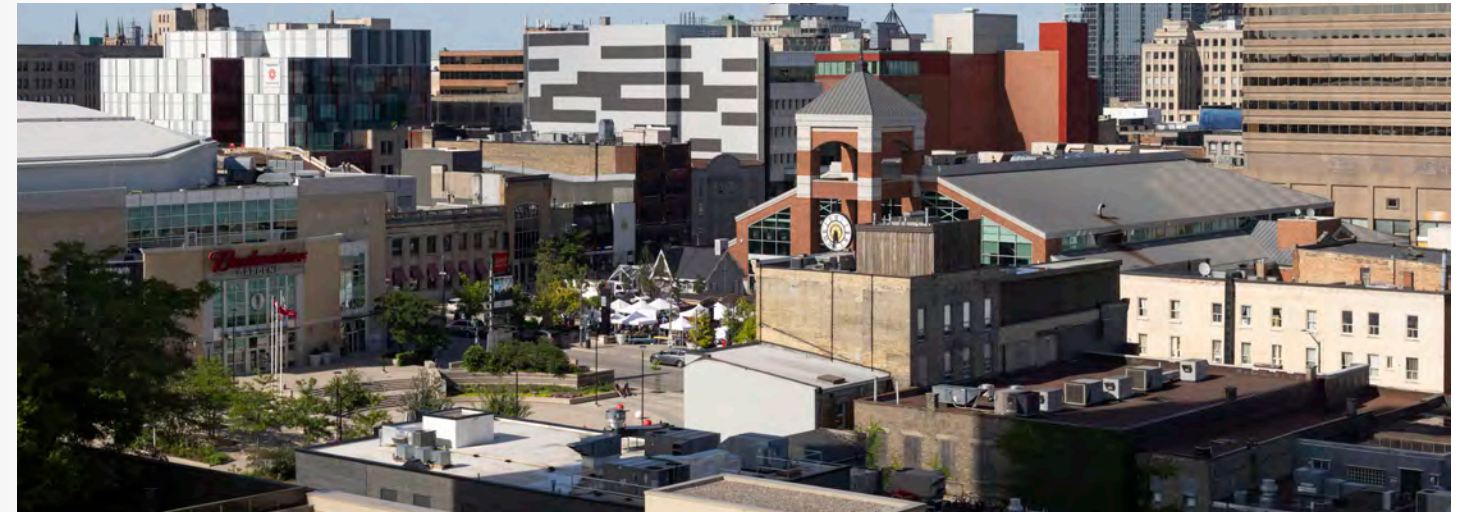
A number of departments at the City of London staff are working collaboratively to address overlapping challenges in the Downtown including public safety concerns, cleanliness, events logistics, infrastructure and housing. These include the Coordinated Informed Response (CIR) team, events and operations, parks, road planning and community development. A number of downtown organizations offer events and activities to draw residents and visitors to the Downtown.

Barriers & Challenges:

Jurisdictional challenges between department mandates and authority over spaces (roads, parks, events, venues, etc.) can limit coordination of service delivery in the Downtown. Overlapping plans and initiatives across departments can create fatigue over the number of plans and inconsistencies in implementation and decision-making, affecting how services and investments are delivered. Limited tracking and reporting of outcomes further reduces clarity on the impact of downtown initiatives. Overlapping designations (Downtown, Core Area, heritage districts, BIA boundaries, etc.) create complexity for property owners, businesses, and developers who are required to follow the policies, incentives, and expectations based on overlapping boundaries. In addition, each governance body has its own mandates, creating confusion when it comes to identifying priorities.

Opportunities & Considerations:

- Highlight municipal efforts in Downtown to encourage public support for building maintenance, cleanliness and public space upkeep and beautification
- Communicate the importance of Downtown for revenue generation (property tax), tourism, economic development and as the cultural identity of London and Southwestern Ontario
- Establish a cross-departmental team or leadership structure to reduce siloes and lead initiatives in Downtown
- Consider a collaborative operational team to trouble shoot challenges in Downtown on a consistent basis as new city initiatives and development continue
- Explore public-private partnerships to help set priorities and implement investments



5.2 ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES SPATIAL ANALYSIS

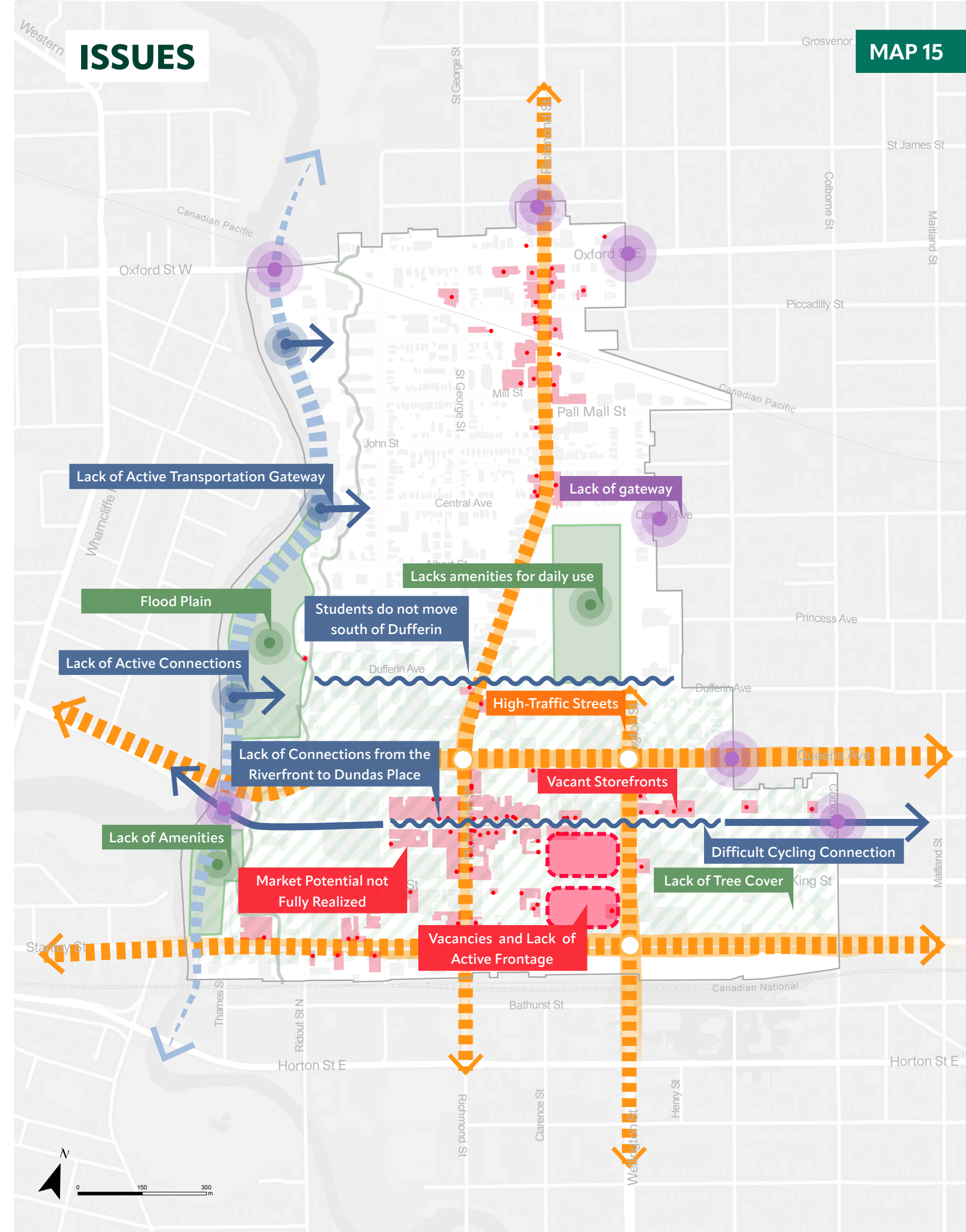
This Study identifies a range of interrelated issues that shape how the City's core functions and evolves. These issues illustrated on Map 15, represent challenges that currently hinder Downtown's performance but also define opportunities for transformation. They include gaps in mobility, land use, amenities, and public identity, many of which can be addressed through coordinated design, investment, and policy action. Understanding these underlying issues provides a foundation for developing strategies that enhance accessibility, livability, and the overall vitality of Downtown London.

Spatial Analysis: Identified Issues

The analyses contained in this Report have identified a number of spatial and functional issues within the Downtown including:

- The need for better active transportation gateways and continuous connections between the Thames River, Dundas Place, and surrounding neighbourhoods. Incomplete cycling infrastructure and high-traffic streets discourage safe and convenient bike travel.
- High vehicular traffic volumes along key corridors such as Richmond, King, and Wellington Streets create potential barriers to pedestrian comfort and place-making.
- Poor perceptions of the southern half of Downtown, reflecting social and functional divides within the core.
- Underperforming amenities such as the Forks of Thames and Covent Garden Market with significant additional potential to act as major downtown destinations.
- Vacant or underperforming storefronts, particularly around the Citi Plaza complex, undermining retail continuity and street vibrancy.
- Limited daily-use amenities in Victoria Park and low tree canopy coverage in the southern portion of the Downtown, reducing the Downtown's attractiveness as a livable district.
- Persistent safety and cleanliness concerns, linked to visible homelessness, addiction, and social disorder, which contribute to negative perceptions of the Downtown.
- High office and retail vacancy rates that signal economic fragility and undermine market confidence.
- An aging building stock and deferred maintenance that limit adaptability and reinvestment potential.
- Fragmented governance and overlapping mandates among City departments, institutions, and business associations, creating confusion and inconsistent coordination.
- "Plan fatigue" among stakeholders and a recognized need for stronger leadership, accountability, and sustained collaboration to guide Downtown renewal

Collectively, these issues form a spatial pattern concentrated in the southern portion of the Downtown, particularly along Dundas Street and radiating outward toward the riverfront and the southern downtown edges.



Spatial Issues Analysis

The issues identified in the Downtown Plan can be grouped into four overarching themes: mobility and access, urban form and land use, amenities and public realm, and social and economic vitality.

Mobility & Access – Downtown London’s transportation network is dense but remains heavily car-oriented. Earlier analyses identified that a large majority of trips to and from Downtown are made by private vehicle, contributing to congestion and limiting pedestrian comfort. Missing gateways and incomplete cycling connections reinforce this problem. Incomplete pedestrian and cycling routes make it difficult to move comfortably and safely between key destinations, particularly between the Thames River and Downtown. High-traffic streets such as Queens Avenue and Wellington Streets can act as physical and psychological barriers to walking and cycling, while wide intersections and limited crossings can reduce accessibility. Public transit coverage is limited, particularly during evenings and weekends, while parking is often perceived as expensive, confusing, or insufficiently integrated with wayfinding. These mobility challenges create inequities in access and limit the Downtown’s appeal for non-drivers, particularly students, seniors, and lower-income residents.

Urban Form & Land Use – Analyses highlight several land-use issues, including vacant storefronts, surface parking lots, and underperforming retail nodes. These conditions interrupt the urban fabric and weaken the continuity of the public realm. Around Citi Plaza and along Dundas Street, underused frontages contribute to an inconsistent pedestrian experience and diminish the perceived sense of safety. Analyses also identified that market potential in some parts of Downtown has not been fully realized, reflecting possible economic and regulatory barriers to development and redevelopment. Much of the building stock is aging, with limited accessibility and high costs for modernization, which restricts opportunities for adaptive reuse and small-scale reinvestment. Deferred maintenance, outdated infrastructure, and fragmented land ownership, combined with a significant concentrations of land holdings held by singular landlords providing only minimal ongoing property maintenance and reinvestment, further constrain redevelopment potential and contribute to a sense of stagnation in some blocks of the core.

Amenities & Public Realm – A recurring issue found through the analyses is a lack of amenities that support daily life. The lack of

amenities like grocery stores, pharmacies, and daily recreation spaces diminishes Downtown’s appeal for residents and workers alike. Limited tree canopy and green space, particularly in the southern portion of the Downtown, contribute to urban heat and reduce comfort during warmer months. The absence of strong gateways or identifiable entry points further weakens the Downtown’s sense of identity. Together, these factors signal a need for a more complete and inclusive public realm that balances destination-oriented spaces and amenities with everyday functionality, while conveying a cohesive image for downtown. Cleanliness and maintenance are also consistent concerns raised through consultation. Public spaces and streetscapes outside of major event areas are often perceived as unkempt or under-maintained, while inconsistent lighting and upkeep reduce comfort and perceived safety, especially during evening hours.

Social & Economic Vitality – Social patterns within the Downtown reveal divides between different user groups and subareas. Observations from consultations with student communities that “students don’t go south of Dufferin” reflect both perception and reality, that certain areas are seen as less safe, less active, or lacking attractions that draw people. Economic issues such as storefront vacancies and uneven retail performance compound these perceptions, and can contribute to reduced foot traffic and diminished sense of safety in the evening.

Analyses also identify broader structural issues affecting Downtown’s vitality, including high office vacancy rates, declining retail diversity, and weak market confidence. Safety concerns and visible social challenges, including homelessness, addiction, and inadequate support infrastructure, affect

perceptions of security and deter investment. These social and economic dynamics are deeply intertwined: perceptions of reduced safety reduces visitation; declining activity weakens business performance; and economic stagnation in turn reinforces the visible symptoms of social distress.

Implications for the Downtown Plan

The issues identified throughout the Background Study carry significant implications for how the Downtown Plan should be framed, structured, and implemented. They define the underlying conditions that the Plan must respond to, the relationships it must clarify, and the priorities it must balance. Collectively, these implications emphasize that the challenges facing Downtown London are not isolated problems but interconnected issues spanning physical design, land use, mobility, environmental conditions, and organizational capacity.

Connectivity as a Foundational Principle

– One of the most consistent findings is the fragmentation of connections within and around the Downtown. Physical barriers such as high-traffic corridors, limited crossings, and disjointed cycling routes weaken continuity within and through the Downtown. The Plan will need to consider connectivity as a foundational organizing principle, not limited to transportation infrastructure but encompassing how people navigate, experience, and understand the Downtown as a whole. This includes attention to legibility, wayfinding, and the alignment between major movement corridors and the destinations they serve. How well these systems integrate will influence the Downtown’s accessibility, identity, and long-term success.



Land Use Performance & Urban Form –

Patterns of underutilized parcels, vacant storefronts, and uneven market activity point to an urban core that functions inconsistently across its geography. The Plan must take into account these variations in market strength and built form, recognizing where redevelopment pressures are strong and where conditions may require more gradual change. Land use decisions will need to be informed by an understanding of how density, use mix, and design quality collectively shape perception and activity. Importantly, the implications are not only physical but economic: ensuring that the Downtown's built form supports a diverse, adaptable, and resilient economy will be a central consideration.

Quality & Distribution of Amenities & Public Realm Assets –

The limited availability of everyday amenities and the uneven quality of public spaces have implications for the Downtown's attractiveness as a place to live, work, and gather. The Plan will need to evaluate the distribution and accessibility of key amenities, identifying where gaps in service provision or public space quality are most significant. Issues of shade, seating, tree canopy, and comfort all affect the usability of streets and public spaces and, by extension, the perception of safety and inclusivity. The Plan's approach to the public realm will need to consider both the physical and social dimensions of comfort and belonging.

Reframing the Riverfront as a Resilient Public Asset –

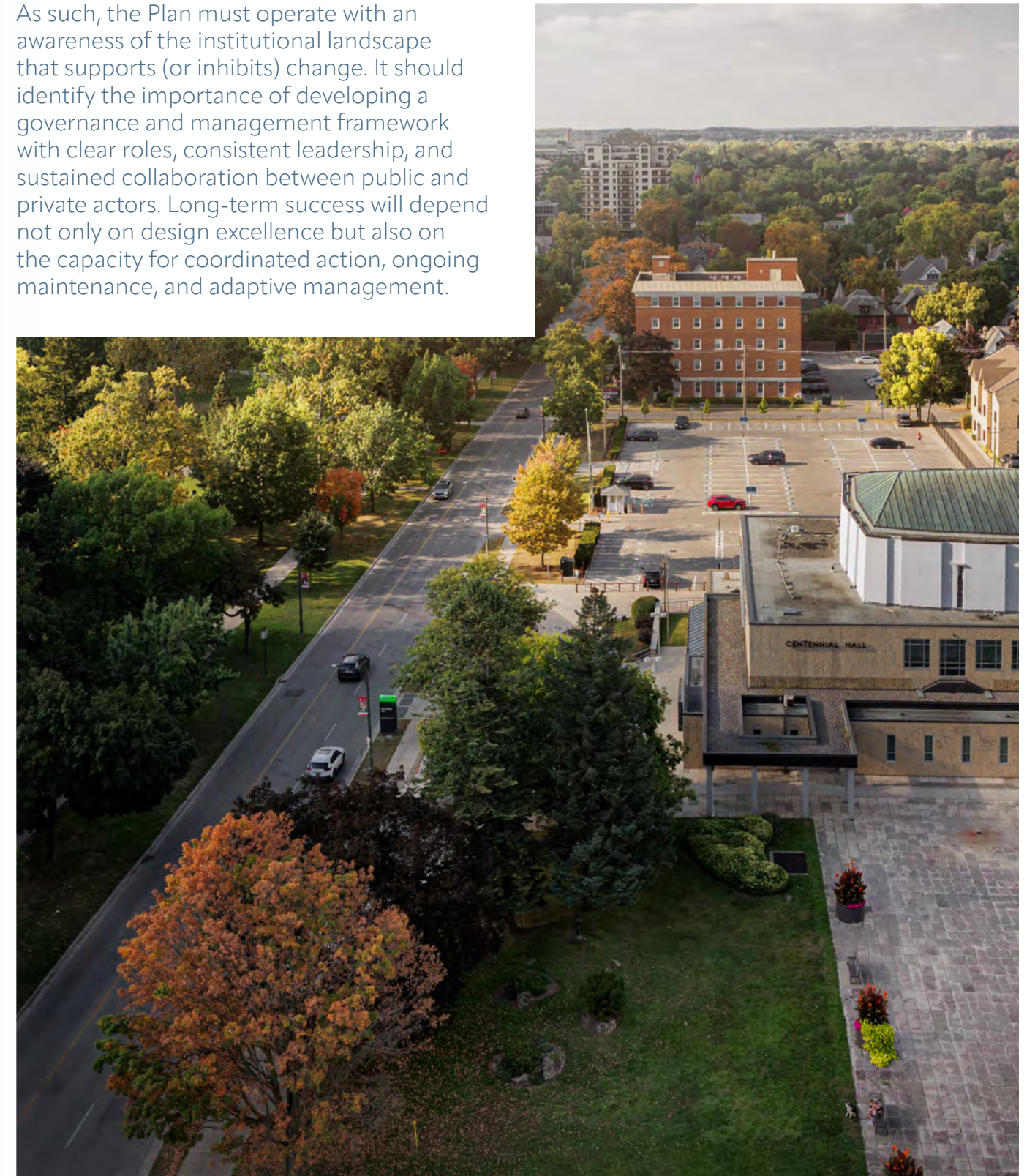
The Thames River is both a defining natural feature and a spatial challenge in the Downtown due to its steep slopes and floodplain. The Plan should embrace this issue by reframing the riverfront as a resilient landscape, a place where ecological restoration, flood protection, and

activation and public access can coexist. Environmental sensitivity, adaptive design, and risk awareness will need to inform all long-term planning decisions involving the Thames River corridor and its adjacent lands. Integrating green infrastructure and habitat enhancement would strengthen the Downtown's ecological network while creating an attractive destination.

Social & Economic Dynamics – Analyses have also highlighted social and economic divides within the Downtown, including uneven activity levels between specific areas of the Downtown and varying perceptions of comfort and safety. These patterns suggest that the Plan must be attentive to inclusivity, diversity of uses, and the relationship between the daytime and evening economies. A balanced and socially sustainable downtown will depend on understanding how demographic trends, housing choices, and public life intersect. The Plan will need to provide a framework for fostering vitality and belonging across different user groups and times of day. The Plan must also respond to deeper systemic issues, such as social vulnerability, homelessness, and addiction, that influence perceptions and functionality. While these extend beyond urban design, the Plan can help create conditions that support coordination among social services, community partners, and public spaces to strengthen social infrastructure and public confidence.

Governance & Management – Beyond physical planning, analyses have also identified implications for how the Downtown is governed, managed, and coordinated. Fragmented responsibilities among municipal departments, property owners, institutions, and business associations can dilute accountability and slow implementation.

As such, the Plan must operate with an awareness of the institutional landscape that supports (or inhibits) change. It should identify the importance of developing a governance and management framework with clear roles, consistent leadership, and sustained collaboration between public and private actors. Long-term success will depend not only on design excellence but also on the capacity for coordinated action, ongoing maintenance, and adaptive management.

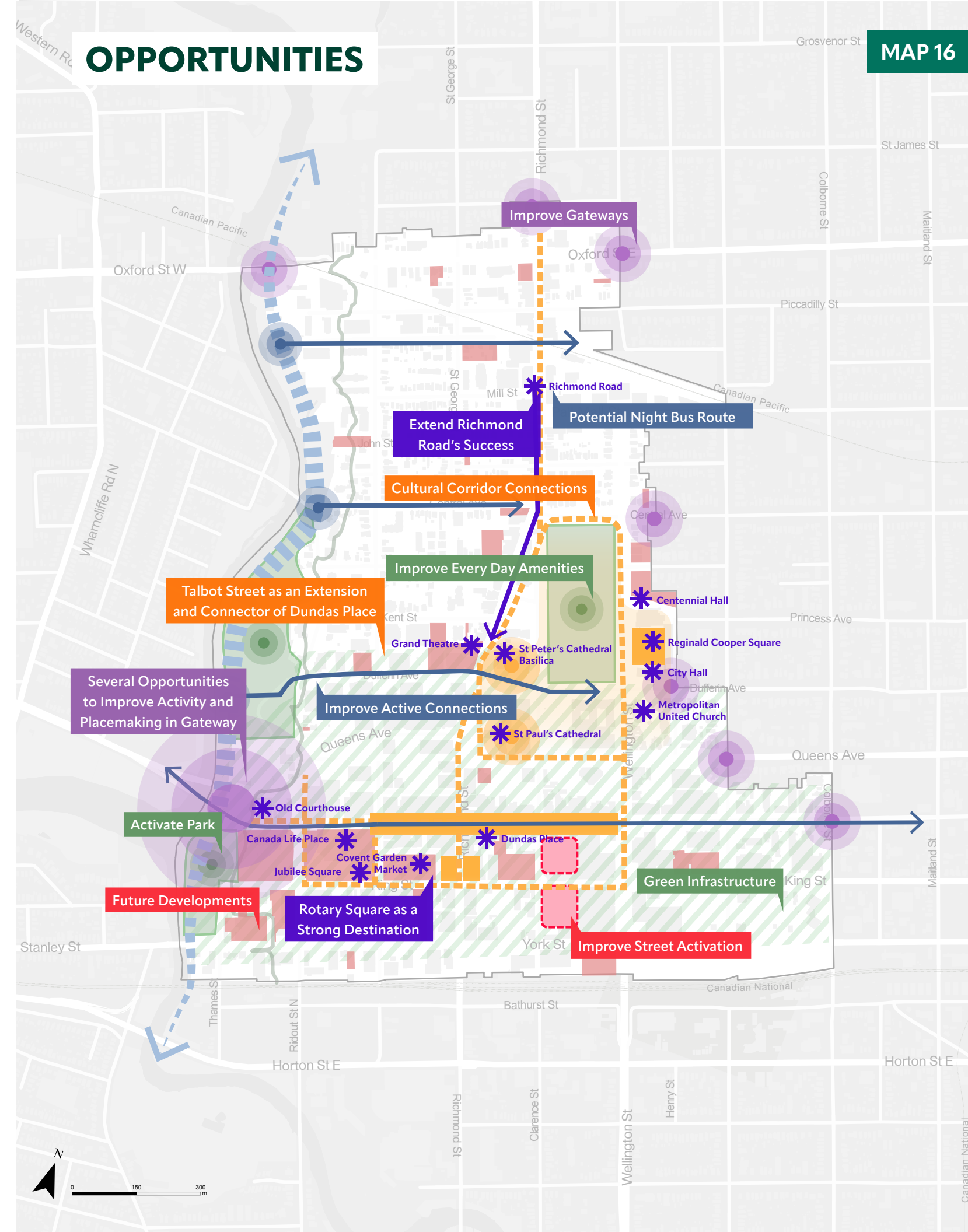


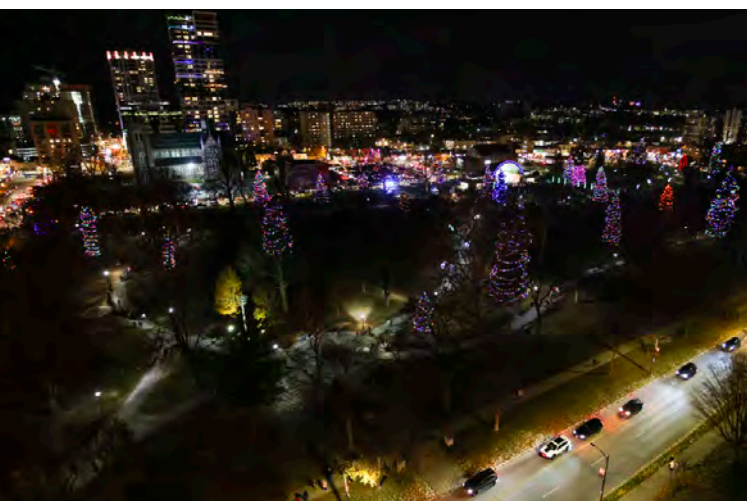
Spatial Analysis: Identified Opportunities

The analyses contained in this Study have identified a number of spatial and functional opportunities within the Downtown including:

- A concentration of strong anchors and destinations such as Dundas Place, Covent Garden Market, Canada Life Place, the Thames River, and multiple cultural and civic institutions.
- Significant redevelopment and infill areas with potential for mixed-use intensification, particularly around Citi Plaza, along York Street, and on multiple surface parking lots.
- A well-established network of parks, public squares, and open spaces form a solid foundation for strengthening the Downtown’s public realm and green infrastructure connections.
- Existing mobility corridors connecting the riverfront, transit hubs, and major destination spaces and facilities (e.g. Dundas Place, Victoria Park, etc.) form a strategic framework for strengthening pedestrian and cycling connectivity across the Downtown.
- Existing cultural venues and event spaces reinforce the Downtown’s role as London’s civic and entertainment core and serve as key anchors for its public identity.
- The presence of major educational institutions such as Fanshawe College’s Downtown Campus and nearby Western University, along with their student populations, offers opportunities to strengthen Downtown’s identity as a hub for learning, innovation, and emerging entrepreneurship.
- Downtown’s UNESCO City of Music designation, combined with its concentration of galleries, theatres, and performance venues, creates opportunities to grow London’s creative economy and cultural tourism profile.
- A growing base of new residential development, including multiple high-density rental and mixed-use projects under construction or approved since 2021, signals market confidence and will expand Downtown’s permanent population and customer base.
- The continued investment in the City’s Rapid Transit (RT) system, and Downtown’s proximity to VIA Rail and regional transit hubs, provide a strong platform for enhanced accessibility and sustainable mobility.
- The Forks of the Thames, Harris Park, and Ivey Park present major underused riverfront assets with potential for recreation, ecological enhancement, and year-round public programming.
- Existing incentive tools such as the Core Area and Downtown Community Improvement Plans, and programs like the Vacant Commercial Space Grant and Office-to-Residential Conversion Grant, offer policy and financial mechanisms that can support continued reinvestment and adaptive reuse.

The spatial pattern shown in the map reveals overlapping opportunity zones where cultural activity, open space, and redevelopment potential coincide, particularly in the central and western portions of the Downtown adjacent to Dundas Place and the Thames River.





Analysis of Spatial Opportunities

The identified opportunities fall into five interrelated themes: place identity and destinations, urban intensification, public realm and green infrastructure, mobility and connectivity, and partnerships and activation.

Place Identity & Destinations – Downtown London already contains a strong framework of civic and cultural destinations that anchor its identity. Destinations such as Dundas Place, the Covent Garden Market, Canada Life Place, the Grand Theatre, Museum London, Victoria Park, and the Thames River corridor together form a unique combination of civic, recreational, and cultural / entertainment assets. The opportunity lies in enhancing the visibility, activation, and integration of these anchors, ensuring they function as a coordinated system rather than isolated nodes. The strength of the Downtown's cultural infrastructure and event programming provides a strong base for the Plan.

The Downtown's identity is further reinforced by its role as a UNESCO City of Music, positioning London to grow as a cultural destination within Ontario and Canada. The presence of local arts organizations, creative businesses, and small performance venues presents multiple opportunities for a cohesive creative cluster that combines production, performance, and public gathering. Strengthening connections between cultural and civic assets can help reinforce Downtown as both the symbolic and experiential heart of the City.

Urban Intensification & Redevelopment Potential – Numerous underutilized parcels and surface parking areas represent opportunities for new mixed-use and residential development. These sites,

particularly along York Street, Queens Avenue, and around Citi Plaza, offer the potential to expand the Downtown's residential base and strengthen its retail and service offerings. The pattern of opportunity illustrates that many potential redevelopment sites are near existing activity hubs, allowing new development to fill gaps, strengthen connections, and add density in ways that can build on the Downtown's strengths (e.g. heritage buildings and streetscapes; existing compact and walkable urban form) rather than replace them. The presence of civic and education institutions, with their stable long-term ownership / tenancy models, capacity for partnership and coordination, and adaptable building stock, provides for unique (re) development, programming, and business development opportunities. Further, vacant or aging office buildings, particularly Class 'B' and 'C' stock, offer additional opportunities for adaptive reuse into residential, educational, or creative industry spaces, following successful examples in cities such as Calgary and Winnipeg.

Public Realm & Green Infrastructure – Analyses have highlighted several corridors and spaces where the public realm can be enhanced to form a continuous green network. The Thames River and its adjacent parklands and open spaces remain the Downtown's most significant natural asset. Opportunities exist to improve connections between the riverfront and key civic spaces such as Victoria Park and Dundas Place. Continuing to strengthen these linkages facilitates the establishment of a more coherent system of green and public spaces that supports recreation, environmental performance, and community wellbeing. This Report also identifies the potential to expand the tree canopy, introduce smaller "pause spaces" and pocket parks, and better integrate

urban greening into streetscapes to enhance comfort and reduce heat. Collaboration with Indigenous partners in riverfront naturalization, programming, and storytelling presents additional opportunities to advance reconciliation and cultural inclusion while strengthening environmental stewardship.

Mobility & Connectivity – While the issues analysis identified disconnections in the transportation network, the opportunity analysis illustrates where these can be bridged or better aligned. Corridors such as Dundas, Ridout, and Wellington Streets emerge as structuring routes for active mobility, linking major destinations and open spaces. The presence of transit routes and cycling corridors near the Downtown's edges also offers potential to improve first- and last-mile connectivity. Overall, the Downtown's compact scale and fine-grained street network provide a strong base for fostering active mobility and accessibility across modes. Ongoing investment in the Rapid Transit network and the Thames Valley Parkway creates a strategic opportunity to integrate active transportation with regional and intercity transit systems. These projects will enhance Downtown's function as a regional mobility hub, connecting residents, visitors, and workers through sustainable travel options.

Partnerships, Institutions & Activation – The presence of educational, cultural, and civic institutions within, and adjacent to, the Downtown creates significant opportunities for partnership-based development and activation. Collaboration with postsecondary institutions, local organizations, and the private sector could strengthen the Downtown's role as both an innovation hub and a social gathering space. Opportunities also exist to build on the Downtown's active

programming culture, expanding events, festivals, and arts initiatives that animate public spaces and reinforce the Downtown's inclusive character.

This Study further highlights additional opportunities to enhance cross-sector coordination and governance capacity, drawing on successful North American governance models where dedicated development corporations have helped streamline investment and implementation. Locally, existing incentive programs (such as the Core Area CIP and Vacant Space Grant) can be used strategically to support incremental change. The growing residential base, young population, and student communities present further opportunities for entrepreneurship, nightlife, and cultural programming that reflect Downtown's evolving demographic diversity.

Implications for the Downtown Plan

The opportunities analyses illustrate several overarching implications for how the Plan should be framed. They collectively emphasize that Downtown London's future success depends less on developing major new facilities and spaces and focusing more on strengthening the relationships among existing assets and investments and building capacity around what already works.

Building from Strength – The Plan will need to recognize that the Downtown's key civic anchors, including Dundas Place, the Central Library, Covent Garden Market, the Thames River, and Victoria Park, already provide a robust framework for growth and identity. The implication is not to necessarily reinvent these assets, but to align future investments, programming and activation, and mobility networks around them. A coordinated approach will be essential to reinforce the

Downtown's character as the cultural, social, and symbolic heart of the city. This approach also includes building on Downtown's existing policy and funding ecosystem, such as Community Improvement Plans and grant programs, to support incremental revitalization and adaptive reuse.

Supporting Balanced & Strategic Growth

– Opportunities for redevelopment suggest that the Plan should view growth as a tool to achieve broader goals rather than an end in itself. Understanding where intensification will deliver the most benefit, whether through reinforcing existing commercial nodes, expanding residential density, or repurposing vacant lands, will be crucial. The Plan must also consider how new development can enhance the quality of the public realm, strengthen connections and residential areas, and contribute to housing and economic diversity. There is also potential to leverage institutional and public-sector landholdings for phased redevelopment or co-location of community facilities, encouraging investment in ways that reinforce Downtown's stability and resilience.

Framing a Connected Public Realm Network

– The presence of strong open spaces and green corridors implies that the Downtown's future can be structured around a clear and connected public realm framework. The Plan should approach this network as a unifying structure that ties together the Thames River, civic spaces, and mobility corridors. This framework can also integrate ecological and cultural dimensions, linking environmental restoration with Indigenous storytelling, and social programming with urban greening, to create spaces that serve both ecological and community purposes.

Integrating Partnerships and Governance

– The opportunities analyses also point to the importance of collaboration and coordination.

Many of the identified opportunities, such as cultural activation, institutional expansion, and redevelopment, depend on cross-sector partnerships and sustained organizational leadership. The Plan will need to acknowledge governance and management as enabling conditions, ensuring that implementation responsibilities are clearly defined and supported over time. Examples from comparable cities demonstrate the value of coordinated downtown entities or that manage investment, programming, and communication with a long-term focus, an approach that could inform London's implementation strategy.

Reinforcing Downtown's Role in the City's Identity

– Finally, the opportunities analyses identified the need to reinforce the Downtown's symbolic role as London's civic and cultural heart, and its practical role as a connector between neighbourhoods, institutions, and the River. The Plan must treat identity-building as a central objective, one that reflects both heritage and contemporary urban life. This involves recognizing the Downtown not only as a place of economic activity but as a living, evolving expression of the City's collective identity. Expanding opportunities for inclusive cultural expression, community participation, and locally driven entrepreneurship will be key to maintaining Downtown's vibrancy and relevance as the city continues to grow and diversify.



6.0 WHAT WE HEARD – ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

This section provides an overview of the engagement activities for Phase 1 of the development of the Downtown Plan from April to August 2025, outlining who was engaged and how input was collected as well as summarizing key take-aways from a range of engagement approaches. This section also highlights the range of tools and formats used to ensure broad and inclusive participation across different groups.

An online public survey was available on the City of London's 'Get Involved' website from June 10 to August 22, 2025, gathering feedback on priorities and perceptions of Downtown. The survey was advertised through postcards with QR codes, posters, a social media campaign, and through direct outreach.

Additional comments were gathered through the Get Involved London platform, while social media was used to share engagement opportunities and collect public feedback. Targeted outreach by the Project Team involved in-person and virtual meetings and conversations with organizations and representatives from the cultural, economic, educational, religious, social service, tourism, governmental, and business sectors, among others. Some participants included City of London staff, the Chamber of Commerce Board, the Downtown London BIA, key cultural institutions such as London Museum and TAP Centre for Creativity, Tourism London, Western University, Fanshawe College, and the London Development Institute. A Downtown London Advisory board was also established and consulted throughout Phase 1. In addition, consultations were led by Divercities, a project partner dedicated to inclusive and accessible community engagement. Throughout Phase 1, Divercities

held conversations with various organizations and groups including Young London, Black Community Employment & Empowerment Services (BCEES), London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership, London Cross Cultural Learner Centre, Queer Intersections, and others.

Outside of targeted conversations, the Consultant Team participated in two in-person public events. The first was at the Sunfest at Victoria Park with around 150,000 attendees. Festival goers of all ages spoke with the project team about their favourite places, experiences, aspirations, and concerns related to the Downtown. The second in-person engagement was at Storybook Gardens, which allowed for more specific conversations with many families including children and what their needs and wants are for Downtown London.

6.1 THE STATISTICS

In total, 4,251 individuals engaged with the Downtown Plan in some capacity including 2,405 survey responses, and 1,438 website comment submissions and social media comments.

See below for a breakdown of each method of engagement:

Online survey

As of August 23, 2025 approximately 10,000 people had visited the City of London's Downtown Plan website. Of those, almost 4,000 had engaged with content by viewing photos, downloading documents, exploring key project pages and FAQs, and using interactive tools. The online survey received 2,405 responses to date.

In-person engagement at events

At Sunfest, 80 people engaged with the Consultant Team by sharing their thoughts, identifying their favourite places Downtown, and learning more about the project.

At Storybook Gardens, 80 people were engaged, the majority of whom were parents and their children.

One-on-One Discussions & Focus Group

Numerous targeted one-on-one meetings and focus groups were held with participants across various sectors to gather in-depth feedback and perspectives on Downtown London. In total, 120 people were engaged.

Website & Social Media

Social media and website engagement opportunities generated approximately 1,100 individual comments.

London Advisory Group

As part of the engagement plan, a London Advisory Group was set up in June 2025 to help provide consistent feedback through the entire plan creation. Each member of the Advisory Group was engaged with as a one-on-one and then as a group in June and July 2025. There are currently 10 advisory members and they were chosen as they represent key downtown partners from a variety of industries covering landowners, business owners, residents, arts and culture, and other non-profits. The goal is to have bi-monthly meetings throughout the project.

Downtown Summits

Two Downtown Summits – one in-person and one virtual – were held to gather public

feedback on the Downtown Plan and begin to identify opportunities for further exploration in the second phase of work to come – the development of the Downtown Plan. The September 18 in-person Summit brought together 60 key Downtown partners and the October 2 virtual public engagement session had 57 participants with over 100 live questions and comments (and 338 social media comments on the invitation post).

6.2 FINDINGS & THEMES

The following section outlines five key themes identified during Phase 1 when combining all forms of engagement. These themes reflect what was heard from the public and other key parties. They capture the lived experiences of many participants, though not all perspectives will align as some people asked for more of a certain investment, while others preferred resources be directed elsewhere. This summary represents what participants chose to highlight. While the Consultant Team sought to engage a broad range of voices, further engagement will take place in the remainder of Phase 1 and in Phase 2.

While these themes do not align explicitly with the data analysis and Strengths, Barriers & Opportunities section, they include overlapping themes based on the focus of engagement, discussions and sector-specific focus groups:

1. Mobility, Parking, and Infrastructure
2. Events, Culture, and Experience
3. Community Health and Safety
4. Public Spaces and Natural Environment
5. Governance, Leadership, and Investment

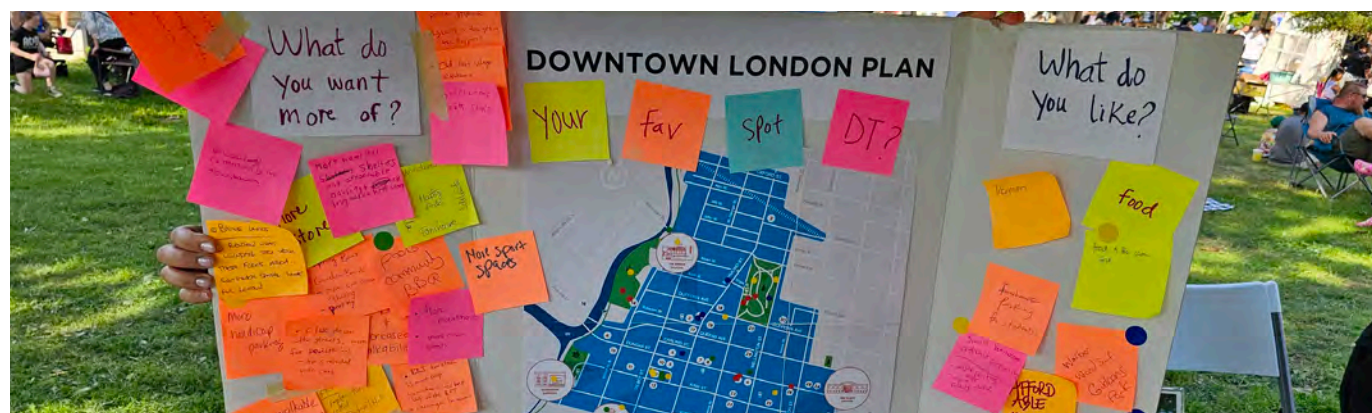


Figure 18 Storybook Gardens Engagement

Source: Canadian Urban Institute

Mobility, Parking & Infrastructure

“Affordable parking needs to be part of any plan. Currently with the expensive parking I only go Downtown once a year unless parking for special events at Victoria Park.” – Get Involved Website Response

“Downtown is way too car-centric for anyone to feel safe walking or biking. There also doesn't seem to be enough designated biking/walking routes to get downtown from other parts of the city, especially the north side (ie. Richmond, Adelaide, Highbury - some of the most unfriendly active mobility roads in the city).” – Survey Response

Parking availability, cost, and convenience were raised as some of the top barriers to visiting Downtown. The two-hour limit and reduced on-street parking have created frustration for both customers and businesses. While there is support for transit, participants emphasized the need for improved frequency, coverage, and accessibility, as well as better integration with walking and cycling infrastructure. Youth and low-income individuals also noted unaffordable transit passes. Construction was described as constant, with requests for faster project completion, clearer signage, and better access management. Suggestions included subsidizing parking for key cultural and event venues, providing more clear, real-time parking information, and free or discounted youth transit passes and other equity-deserving groups.

Key Points:

- Perceived lack of available, affordable parking Downtown, especially after removal of on-street parking for the Rapid Transit system
- Two-hour parking limit restricts time spent Downtown for visitors, shoppers, and business patrons
- Parking is expensive and confusing — people do not know where public lots are or the rates
- London is car-centric and public transit is inadequate for desired use (i.e. delays, safety concerns at stops and on buses after hours) to shift behaviour to less car use

- Limited accessibility of sidewalks and building entrances, including obstacles such as uneven surfaces, steps, or lack of automatic doors and ramps, which can pose challenges for people using mobility devices, older adults, and families with strollers
- Calls for improved bike infrastructure (i.e. lockers)
- Continuous construction impacts access to Downtown, with calls for better communication on alternate routes



Events, Culture & Experience

“For London to thrive as a community, more attention and resources need to be given to culture and the arts. London's UNESCO designation ... provides an ideal foundation for a thriving performing arts culture, but we are failing to capitalize on this opportunity.” – Get Involved Website Response

“As a lifelong resident of London ... I would love to see more support and attention given to London's vibrant arts community. In particular ... Western's faculty of music, London Symphonia, and the Amabile Choirs have been woven into London's cultural heritage for decades and yet many residents and visitors are unaware.” – Get Involved Website Response

It was commonly heard that while Downtown hosts a number of great events and festivals, and has a strong selection of restaurants, there is a lack of sustained investment to support these events and build on their momentum. Another challenge is that increased costs, due to recent tariff increases, are putting pressure on restaurants and retail businesses, who are already struggling with declining clientele and increased costs. Over the past seven years, with COVID-19 adding to the challenges, there has been a noticeable decline in new retail in the Downtown, with most new openings focused on entertainment, dining, or services. Many people shared that there are not enough

family-friendly options or everyday activities to draw people Downtown beyond special occasions. There was also concern about the lack of amenities and things to do that would encourage people to stay longer, rather than just coming in for a specific purpose and quickly leaving again. High vacancy rates and low foot traffic were common concerns. This has led to a sense that some areas of Downtown are inactive and underutilized.

Some conversations indicated there is a need to better capitalize on the City's UNESCO City of Music designation, viewing it as an underused asset. While there is a strong presence of local artists and creative talent,

some feel there is a lack of commitment to investing in arts and culture, particularly when it comes to smaller and more diverse arts organizations. This lack of support limits the potential of the sector and its ability to contribute more fully to Downtown's vibrancy. The untapped potential to celebrate Indigenous culture through public art was another prevalent theme. Reducing event costs, streamlining permitting, and providing logistical support were suggested to empower both established and grassroots organizers. It was also suggested to leverage local key institutions such as the London Central Library for their platforms for cultural programming, storytelling, and community learning.

Key Points:

- Strong selection of events and festivals, but lack of sustained, ongoing investment to maintain momentum
- Not enough family-friendly options or everyday activities; visits to Downtown are often "in and out" for special events
- Decline in new retail; new openings are mostly dining, entertainment, or services.
- Store vacancies create inactive streets

- Dundas Place is underutilized and needs more year-round programming
- Restaurants and retail are facing increased costs due to tariffs
- Under-leveraged UNESCO City of Music designation and lack of cohesive cultural strategy
- Need for more public art, including celebrating Indigenous culture
- Need to launch a public education campaign to shift perspective on the Downtown and to spotlight different services, businesses, and community assets
- Use storytelling initiatives to share and elevate refugee and immigrant narratives
- Event hosting costs and permitting processes are prohibitive, especially at Victoria Park
- There is a need for a central directory or event calendar to create more seamless communication about what is going in the Downtown
- Establish more "third spaces" that are accessible and inclusive for youth especially



Community Health & Safety

"On the whole, I do not come downtown except to work because of the lack of safety. I think that the City has built and maintains the infrastructure, but it is the social issues that are happening and so visible downtown that needs to be addressed in order to bring people back downtown." – Survey Response

"As a parent I no longer feel confident of the safety of my children downtown. They are teenagers and they are forbidden from going downtown even as a group. I would not feel comfortable as a woman to walk alone downtown at night any longer. If we want to improve downtown we first need to take a look at the homelessness and open use drug issues downtown." – Survey Response

One of the most frequently raised concerns was the sense of safety in the Downtown, tied to the visible impacts of mental health, addiction, and homelessness crises. Many identified this as the number one issue facing the area, noting that they feel nervous or scared to go Downtown, often due to a fear of witnessing a crisis or concerns for their own safety. While there is empathy for those experiencing homelessness, there is also a growing perception that behaviours are escalating, which adds to the discomfort. A visible police presence was noted to be lacking in key areas like Dundas Place and underpasses. Public washrooms were described as difficult to access and maintain, often needing to remain closed for safety reasons. It was also noted that vulnerable groups such as youth, families, LGBTQ+ individuals, and newcomers feel unsafe in the Downtown, especially after dark, at transit stops, and on poorly lit streets.

Looking ahead, participants emphasized the need for upstream investment in supportive housing, mental health, and addiction services, along with strategies to integrate formerly homeless individuals into the community. It was also suggested to utilize available and vacant spaces in the Downtown to support families, newcomers, and unhoused individuals, when possible.

Key Points:

- Homelessness, mental health, and addictions are the most visible and urgent Downtown issues
- Safety concerns, both real and perceived, deter people from visiting
- People are empathetic toward homelessness but see behaviours as escalating
- Perceived lack of visible police or foot patrol in key areas
- Public washrooms often closed for safety reasons; need for safe, accessible facilities
- Desire to "put our best foot forward" during major events by managing visible crisis impacts
- Calls for more non-police emergency supports (e.g., street-level information officers)
- Access to affordable food in the form of a downtown grocery store

Public Spaces & Natural Environment

“Shaded park benches on Richmond St. and along Oxford ... Maybe a series of chess boards with seats in Victoria Park and Gibbons Park ... Perhaps some shaded benches along the river ... How about some gazebos in the four corners of Victoria Park?” – Get Involved Website Response

The abundance of natural assets in the Downtown such as the river and surrounding parks and green spaces was highlighted. However, many of these spaces are aging and not well-suited to support large events. There is a noticeable lack of outdoor recreation opportunities, comfortable, abundant and shaded seating areas, and limited public space overall—beyond Covent Garden (Rotary Square), Victoria Park and Harris Park. By some, Victoria Park is perceived as unsafe due to encampments and drug activity, and Harris Park serves as flood water retention thereby limiting its use at certain times of the year. As the number of residents in Downtown continues to increase, access to and availability of public space and outdoor amenities will continue to be important. Some expressed a desire to “naturalize” key gateways to Downtown to create more welcoming, attractive public spaces.

Key Points:

- Abundant natural assets (river, parks) but aging infrastructure
- Limited public event-ready space; Harris Park provides space for large events but serves as a flood water retention area
- Lack of outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities like shaded seating.
- Desire to naturalize gateways to create more welcoming, attractive entrances to Downtown.
- Connection between Downtown and Thames River is underdeveloped



Governance, Leadership & Investment:

“There is a lack of diversity in businesses downtown, with those that do open only operational for a short period before shutting down. More monetary and other incentives for business owners would help them choose downtown as a place to set up shop...” – Survey Response

“The economic decay of the core is paramount to all its problems. There are precious few reasons to choose the core as opposed to outlying shopping areas. The open drug addiction and vagrant dumping from other cities is driving away prospective shoppers and restaurant goers.” – Survey Response

Many participants perceive a leadership gap in Downtown revitalization, with no single body accountable for coordinating strategy and delivery. Suggestions included appointing a high-level “Downtown Czar,” creating a clear economic development mandate, and improving collaboration across city departments, local organizations, and private sector partners. Incentive programs were seen as insufficient, with calls for more aggressive tax and development tools to encourage investment and fill vacancies. Streamlining permitting and clarifying heritage requirements were identified as important steps to reduce barriers for businesses and event organizers.

Key Points:

- No clear organizational mandate for a Downtown economic development strategy; need for stronger City leadership on Downtown economic development
- Lack of perceived coordination between City, BIA, arts, and business communities
- Proposal for a “Downtown Czar” with authority over investment attraction, marketing, and measurable results
- Calls for more proactive engagement with City Council and more visible presence of City staff in Downtown - in Downtown

offices, restaurants, and commercial establishments

- Need for stronger financial tools: reduce development charges, offer Tax Increment Grants
- Heritage designations are perceived as inconsistently applied and costly for owners
- Red tape and complex permitting deter events and new businesses

For detailed discussion and analysis of the engagement findings, please see Appendix 6.

6.3 ENGAGEMENT NEXT STEPS

As of the completion of this study, additional engagement is underway and will continue into Phase 2 of the work including:

- Additional engagement with industry professionals and key partners
- Public Virtual summit
- Further in-person engagement

7.0 PRELIMINARY STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this section is to highlight the preliminary strategic priorities that will shape the development of the Downtown Plan. Through the creation of this Background Study a set of preliminary strategic directions has emerged to guide the next phase of work. These directions reflect the insights of Londoners and other actors, are grounded in research and data, are reflective of the current regulatory and policy frameworks, and point to the areas where targeted action may have the greatest and most strategic impact.

The following priorities provide a framework for the development of more detailed actions in the next phase, ensuring that the Plan builds directly on the findings of this Background Study and responds to the aspirations and challenges identified throughout research, data analysis, and engagement. The three preliminary strategic directions are:

1. Capital Assets & Physical Investment:

Advancing key physical interventions and maximizing the value of London's existing capital and physical assets

2. Programming & Vibrancy Investment:

Fostering placemaking, animation, activity, and experiences that strengthen downtown's role as a destination

3. Governance & Management:

Aligning and simplifying policies, management structures, and partnerships to support coordinated and effective downtown development

Together, these directions provide a clear structure for further exploration in Phase 2 and will guide the design of practical, actionable strategies to support a more vibrant, resilient, and inclusive Downtown. For a list of preliminary Quick Start Actions,

actions the City can take in the short term, please refer to Appendix 8.

7.1 CAPITAL ASSETS & PHYSICAL ASSET INVESTMENT

Downtown London has benefited from past capital investments that introduced key cultural institutions such as Museum London and the Central Library, created flexible public spaces like Dundas Place, Market Lane, Jubilee Square, and Rotary Square, improved transportation through the Rapid Transit system and cycling lanes, and established key destinations such as Canada Life Place and Covent Garden Market. More recent infrastructure renewal projects in the core began in 2018 with Dundas Place and York Street Phase 1, followed by Richmond Street in 2019, the Dundas TVP Connection, the Downtown Loop, and Central Avenue Improvements, with York Street still underway. Once complete, these efforts will have rebuilt 25 blocks (over five kilometres) of downtown streets and replaced more than two kilometres of combined sewer dating back to the 1800s, supporting future growth and improving the health of the Thames River. At the same time, research and engagement highlighted aging infrastructure, barriers to accessibility, underutilized and vacant office space, vacant storefronts, and pressures on green space and heritage properties.

The next phase will further explore how to address these challenges and how targeted investment and small-scale interventions that focus on both the renewal of existing assets and the creation of new ones - including those owned or operated by both the City and private partners - that support residential growth, adaptive reuse, family-friendly amenities, and active riverfront connections

can help capitalize on previous investments and support overall downtown vitality. Strategic capital investment, both public and private, is also central to ensuring Downtown's built form, transportation network, and public spaces remain resilient, attractive, and functional for a diverse Downtown population.

7.2 PROGRAMMING & VIBRANCY

Downtown London benefits from a strong foundation of cultural anchors, festivals, and public events coupled with a population that values the importance of arts and culture in the Downtown. This results in the Downtown being host to large events and activities, such as Sunfest and the London Knights, that draw Londoners into the Downtown. Yet while these major events and institutions create moments of excitement, research and engagement also showed fewer opportunities for the kind of everyday programming - small-scale activities, cultural offerings, and family-friendly amenities - that sustain vibrancy year-round. Many strong efforts are already underway, particularly on and around Dundas Place, but gaps such as under-supported cultural programming and limited day-to-day activations constrain the Downtown's ability to feel lively and welcoming outside peak times.

Sustained cultural vitality is also critical for economic development, as it supports business creation and retention, strengthens the daytime population of residents and workers, and helps position Downtown as a multi-use neighbourhood rather than a predominantly commercial core. In this way, London reflects a broader trend across Canada, where downtowns are shifting away from being central business districts toward becoming complete 24/7 neighbourhoods.

7.3 GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

Downtown London is shaped by a layering of policies, programs, municipal plans and conservation districts, and organizations, including heritage designations, community improvement plans, the Downtown BIA, and multiple City departments, each with its own mandates, funding models, and objectives. This structure reflects a commitment to the Downtown and its preservation, reinvestment, and business vitality, but it also creates challenges. The current system of governance and management for the Downtown can lead to overlapping priorities, which, coupled with limited resources, can make coordination difficult. Addressing these challenges may require clearer structures, stronger partnerships, shared accountability, and more direct decision making to align efforts across organizations, departments, and policy objectives. Strengthening governance in this way is essential to ensuring that investments in public space, culture, housing, wellbeing, and economic development reinforce rather than compete with one another, and that the full impact of physical and programming investments can be realized.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This Background Study represents the culmination of four months of detailed research, data analysis, and engagement with a wide range of participants. The primary purpose of this study is to consolidate and present the key findings of this work, highlighting the strengths that underpin Downtown London, the barriers that must be addressed, the opportunities that can be leveraged, and the preliminary directions that can guide the next phase of the Downtown Plan. Together, these insights establish a strong foundation for the development of the new Downtown Plan.

The next phase of work will build on this foundation, moving from research and understanding to the creation of actionable strategies and implementable steps. Phase 2 will involve refining priorities and potential actions, and testing and refining them through further online and in-person engagement. This process will culminate in the development of a Downtown Plan, which will include a detailed implementation plan and costing estimates, the establishment of a reporting framework with measurable indicators, and an assessment of the return on investment of plan implementation.

Every element of this next stage will be rooted in the comprehensive research and analysis presented in this background study. The findings, lessons, and perspectives gathered to date will ensure that the Downtown Plan will be able to define clear priorities, align actions with community aspirations, and chart a practical, measurable path toward a more vibrant, resilient, and inclusive Downtown London.



CITY OF LONDON DOWNTOWN PLAN

Downtown Plan



Canadian
Urban
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RE:PUBLIC
Urbanism

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Oosterbaan Strategy



ARUP

divercities



LEADING MOBILITY

Carolyn Whitzman

Jim Yanchula

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: PLANNING DOCUMENT INVENTORY

List of all plans and policy documents reviewed as part of the planning context analysis. This list includes all plans and documents summarized in this section as well as plans reviewed for context but not included in the summary portion of this document.

- Downtown Concept Report, 1984
- Core Area and the Downtown Community Improvement Plans, 1996 and 2021
- Downtown Millennium Plan, 1998
- State of the Downtown Reports, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2019
- Downtown Plan Background Study, 2010
- Downtown Heritage Conservation District Plan, 2012
- London's Cultural Prosperity Plan, 2013
- SmartMoves2030, 2013
- London Music Strategy and City of London Special Events Policy, 2014
- Music, Entertainment and Cultural District Strategy & Special Events Policy, 2015
- Our Move Forward: London's Downtown Plan, 2015
- The London Plan and the relevant Downtown Place Type policies, and the implementing Z.-1 Zoning By-law, Downtown boundary, and the relevant Downtown Area (DA) zone regulations, 2016
- City of London Cycling Master Plan Executive Summary, 2016
- Cycling Master Plan, 2016
- Staff Report: Music, Entertainment and Culture District Feasibility, 2017
- Parking Strategy for Downtown London, 2017
- Music, Entertainment and Culture District Strategy Amendments and Implementation Status Update, 2018
- Our City, Our Culture – London's Cultural Prosperity Plan Report, 2018
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan, 2019
- Core Area Action Plan, 2019
- Safe Cities London Action Plan, 2021
- Core Area CIP and Financial Incentives Program Guidelines, 2021
- Staff Report: MAP Update for Alternative Work Strategies, 2021
- A Conceptual Framework for Regional Transportation in London, 2021
- Core Area and the Downtown Community Improvement Plans
- Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), 2022
- Staff Report: Core Area Action Plan – One-Time Program Enhancements, 2022
- Municipal Council's Strategic Plan 2023–2027
- Core Area Land and Building Vacancy Reduction Strategy, 2023
- Core Area Action Plan Review, 2023
- Staff Report: Core Area Action Plan 2022 Review, 2023
- Corporate Asset Management Plan, 2023
- Hubs Implementation Plan, 2023
- Downtown Wayfinding Plan, 2023
- Staff Report: November 2024 Strategic Plan Progress Report, 2024
- 2024–2027 Multi-Year Budget, Adopted 2024
- Victoria Park Secondary Plan, 2024
- Mobility Master Plan (MMP), 2025
- Richmond Row Masterplan, 2025
- Downtown Plan: Quick Start Actions, 2025
- Master Accommodation Plan (MAP)
- Rapid Transit Master Plan, 2017
- Whole of Community System Response to Health and Homelessness in London

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS OF REVIEWED PLANS

The following table provides a high-level summary of all of the plans and policies reviewed in [Section 3: Planning Context](#). This table lists each plan, identifies its type of regulatory document, and provides a high-level summary along with key implications and opportunities for the downtown. As such, the table provides an “at a glance” overview of the planning context.

Plan, Policy, Report	Type	Summary	Implications/ Opportunities
Downtown CIP, 1996	Planning tool	This CIP was established to stimulate private-sector investment and foster economic development in Downtown London. The CIP focused on improving streetscapes, supporting heritage preservation, and encouraging mixed-use and residential development.	The CIP’s financial tools—such as tax increment grants, façade improvement loans, and residential development grants—can be strategically aligned with the new Downtown Plan’s goals, integrating emerging priorities like climate resilience and social equity into ongoing development efforts.
SmartMoves Transportation Master Plan (TMP), 2013	Municipal Plan	This Plan sets out a vision to transform London’s transportation system by 2030 through expanded rapid transit (RT), improved active transportation networks, and better integration of land use and mobility.	The Plan identifies downtown as a central node supporting population growth and recommends supporting the updated RT network along the north-south line in the Richmond/Wellington corridor and an east-west line in the Oxford/Dundas corridor and related roadway improvements, incorporating targeted transportation demand management measures, and ensuring active transportation connections to RT are supported with appropriate infrastructure.

Our Move Forward: London's Downtown Plan, 2015	Guideline Document	<p><i>Our Move Forward: London's Downtown Plan</i> aims to achieve a vision for London's Downtown that is a vibrant destination and unique neighbourhood. The plan highlights the existing planning framework, works within a set of 9 core values, sets out 6 strategic directions, and lists 10 major transformational public realm projects. The plan calls for public-private partnerships, the celebration of cultural identity, infrastructure improvements, and coordinated investment with updated governance.</p>	<p><i>Our Move Forward</i> provides insight into the values and priorities that have shaped past Downtown planning, such as public realm enhancements, public safety, and economic development. The new Downtown Plan can focus on building upon these foundational improvements, shifting focus toward more targeted, smaller-scale initiatives that address current challenges and conditions.</p>
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The London Plan, 2016	Municipal Plan	This serves as London's Official Plan, guiding growth with a focus on inward and upward development, creating walkable communities, revitalizing urban areas, and protecting farmlands. It designates "place types" instead of traditional land uses, with Downtown identified as the highest-density, mixed-use area. The plan allows a broad range of uses Downtown, promotes mixed-use buildings, limits new surface parking, and emphasizes pedestrian-friendly development. Downtown is also a Protected Major Transit Station Area, supporting higher density.	<i>The London Plan</i> designates Downtown as the highest-priority zone for intense development, allowing for greater building heights than other areas. This framework offers opportunities for the new Downtown Plan to focus on transit-oriented, infill development, and implement strategies that foster vibrant, mixed-use neighborhoods.
City of London Cycling Master Plan, 2016	Municipal Plan	The Plan provides a roadmap for developing cycling infrastructure and promoting cycling as active transportation, including a city-wide cycling network, supporting policies, cost estimates, and programming.	The Plan proposes new bike paths and lanes in the downtown, prioritizes the area for a winter cycling network, and recommends secure bicycle parking for employers and employees.

Music, Entertainment, and Culture District Feasibility Study, 2017	Municipal Plan	The 2017 <i>Music, Entertainment, and Culture District Feasibility Study</i> explores the feasibility of establishing Music, Entertainment, and Culture Districts in London to enhance cultural vibrancy and economic growth.	The study proposes three categories of cultural districts, with Downtown hosting the most intensive activities under broader permissions
Our City, Our Culture – London's Cultural Prosperity Plan Report, 2018	Strategic Plan	London's <i>2018 Cultural Prosperity Plan Report, Our City, Our Culture</i> , positions culture as a driver of economic growth, civic identity, and quality of life. It emphasizes investing in the arts, honouring Indigenous culture, preserving heritage, and supporting creative spaces. The report identifies Downtown, Old East Village, and the Market at Western Fair as cultural hubs, and described available funding tools like the Community Arts Investment Program and the Community Heritage Investment Program supporting local initiatives.	The reports focus on culture as a catalyst for economic growth, civic identity, and quality of life creates opportunities for the Downtown Plan to embed arts, heritage, and creative expression into the core's revitalization. Building on downtown's role as a designated cultural hub, the plan can strengthen connections to nearby cultural districts and leverage funding programs to animate public spaces, celebrate Indigenous and local heritage, and support creative industries in the heart of the city.

Core Area Action Plan (CAAP), 2019	Neighbourhood/ Action Plan	<p><i>The Core Area Action Plan (CAAP)</i> identifies the needs and goals of London's Core Area, presenting 71 actions aimed at revitalizing London's Core Area—encompassing Downtown, Richmond Row, and Old East Village. These short, medium, and long-term actions were focused largely on supporting vulnerable populations, improving safety. It introduced programs like the Core Area Ambassador initiative, urban revitalization, and beautification projects. Though the CAAP has ended, several of its actions continue through the 2021 Core Area CIP.</p>	<p>The comprehensive and operational set of actions outlined in the CAAP provides valuable context for the new Downtown Plan, highlighting recently implemented actions and incentives. The scope of the CAAP was largely focused on supporting vulnerable populations and improving safety, leaving space for actions and initiatives in the new Downtown Plan to address other priorities.</p>
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2019 London Parks and Recreation Masterplan	Municipal Plan	<p>This Plan aims to enhance life for all Londoners through accessible, inclusive, and high-quality parks, programs, sports services, and public facilities. It focuses on creating welcoming spaces that foster community, active living, and equitable access. Key goals include expanding family-oriented recreation, improving inclusion, connecting people to nature through beautification and trails, and ensuring safe, well-maintained spaces. The Plan promotes a mix of active and passive design, winter-friendly features, and climate-resilient landscaping to meet the needs of an aging, diverse population.</p>	<p><i>The Parks and Recreation Master Plan's</i> emphasis on accessibility, inclusion, and high-quality public spaces creates opportunities for the Downtown Plan to integrate more green and recreational amenities that foster community connection, support active living, and attract diverse users year-round. Leveraging existing downtown parks and strengthening connections to the Thames River and its trail network can help position the riverfront as a central recreational and cultural asset in the city's core.</p>
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Core Area CIP, 2021	Planning Tool	<i>The Core Area CIP</i> is required to implement the actions identified in the Core Area Action Plan pertaining to grant programs that provide financial assistance to property owners. These are The Core Area Safety Audit Grant Program, The Core Area Boulevard Café Grant Program, and The Core Area Sign Grant Program.	Similarly to the <i>Downtown CIP</i> , the <i>Core Area CIP's</i> financial incentives can be strategically aligned with the Downtown Plan's renewed vision.
Conceptual Framework for Regional Transportation in London, 2021	Municipal Plan	This Plan outlines strategies to improve mobility and accessibility within the city and region, with a strong focus on connecting regional and urban transit systems.	The Plan identifies the need for a centralized, multi-modal hub in Downtown London to integrate city buses, VIA Rail, regional buses, and future rapid transit routes.
City of London's Climate Emergency Plan, 2022	Municipal Plan	The Plan outlines the City's commitment to climate action by reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapting for a changing climate.	The Downtown Plan should consider how planning decisions can address the three main climate risks identified in the Plan, which are flooding, extreme heat events, and severe storms. Planning decisions should also advance the City's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the majority of which come from the transportation or building sectors.

City of London Strategic Plan, 2023-2027	Strategic Plan	This Plan focuses on eight strategic priorities: reconciliation, equity, and inclusion; housing and homelessness; wellbeing and safety; economic growth and culture; mobility and transportation; climate action; and effective city governance. The plan also includes a Vision, Mission, and Values, each providing clear direction for the city's priorities over the next four years.	This Plan acts as a unifying framework that shapes how more detailed plans such as a Downtown Plan are developed and implemented, ensuring alignment with citywide goals and values. There are opportunities for a new Downtown Plan to lead in advancing some of these key goals, such as increasing housing and increasing cultural activity.
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Whole of Community System Response to Health and Homelessness in London and Hubs Implementation Plan, 2023	Planning Policies	<p><i>The Whole of Community System Response to Health and Homelessness</i> is an equity-focused plan to address London's homelessness crisis through 24/7 care hubs offering low-barrier health, housing, and referral services. Grounded in five system foundations and shaped by input from over 70 organizations, the plan includes an Indigenous-led response, a network of 12–15 hubs, and rapid supportive housing development. Backed by \$35 million in funding, the initiative is guided by a strategic implementation plan that also addresses encampments, workforce, and system supports.</p>	The Downtown Plan can support the <i>Whole of Community System Response to Health and Homelessness</i> by supporting the integration of care hubs, supportive housing, and related services into the Downtown.
Downtown Wayfinding Plan, 2023	Strategic Plan	<p><i>The Downtown Wayfinding Plan 2023</i>, aimed to enhance the downtown visitor experience through destination markers, finger posts, and other signage connecting key sites and transportation nodes, with Phase 1 completed in 2024.</p>	While later phases remain unfunded, the Downtown Plan can build on its successes to expand wayfinding opportunities in the core.

2024-2027 Multi-Year Budget	Municipal Plan	<p>This budget was adopted by Council in 2024 and serves as a financial roadmap that aligns with the priorities set out in the <i>2023–2027 Strategic Plan</i>. Many budget items focus on the Downtown area, emphasizing investments in transit infrastructure, public realm improvements, arts and culture, safety and parking improvements, and financial incentives to drive growth and revitalization.</p>	The planned investments outlined in this budget provide insight into how municipal funding supports Downtown initiatives, while also highlighting the broader planning and budgeting context that will inform the development of the new Downtown Plan.
Victoria Park Secondary Plan, 2024	Secondary Plan	<p>The <i>Victoria Park Secondary Plan</i> aims to support more sustainable city and community development by guiding how future growth relates to existing buildings, nearby neighbourhoods, Downtown, and the park itself. It provides detailed land use and design directions that enhance the area while protecting cultural heritage. The plan reaffirms Victoria Park's role as a city-wide hub for recreation, relaxation, and events.</p>	This Plan reinforces the role of Victoria Park as a key community and city-wide hub. A Downtown Plan has the ability to strengthen Victoria Park's role as a vibrant, accessible hub, a new downtown plan can boost economic activity, encourage community engagement, and promote sustainable growth.

<p>Health & Homelessness Response: Community Encampment Plan, 2024</p>	<p>Planning Policies</p>	<p>London's <i>Health & Homelessness Response: Community Encampment Plan</i> focuses on the dignity, safety, and well-being of people living in encampments. Aligned with the city's housing strategy, it uses a human rights-based approach to provide essential services like water, sanitation, harm reduction, food, and outreach. The plan includes both short-term (transactional) and long-term (transformational) outreach.</p>	<p>There are opportunities for the new Downtown Plan to support and advance the <i>Community Encampment Plan</i>; particularly in supporting existing efforts regarding access to essential services and integrating compassionate, human rights-based approaches into the core's public spaces.</p>
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<p>City of London Mobility Master Plan, 2025</p>	<p>Municipal Plan</p>	<p>The <i>2025 Mobility Master Plan</i> sets a vision to 2050 for an integrated, multimodal transportation network that is safe, accessible, equitable, and sustainable. It aims to build on the existing RT projects and increase walking, cycling, and transit trips to 32.5% of all trips while reducing car dependency, with a focus on road safety, transit reliability, connectivity, and directing nearly half of new development toward infill within the city's built boundary.</p>	<p>The plan positions downtown as a targeted growth area with potential to support a shift to sustainable transportation, emphasizing new rapid transit corridors, transit-friendly streets, an expanded cycling network, and improved pedestrian connections.</p>
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APPENDIX 3: DOWNTOWN INCENTIVES

This document shares all downtown incentives as identified in the 2024-2027 multi-year budget.

Initiative	Status	\$	Funding source	Geographic Focus	Notes
Core Area Construction Dollars Program	2020-2023	\$100,000 injected into local economy each year	Municipal (CAAP)	Downtown London BIA + Old East Village BIA	Aims to support businesses during periods of downtown infrastructure work by distributing shopping vouchers redeemable at participating local businesses.
Façade Improvement Loan	Active in 2025	Covers 50% of the improvement costs, up to a maximum of \$50,000	Municipal (Downtown CIP)	Downtown	Offers financial support for enhancing building exteriors, covering upgrades to windows, doors, brick repairs, painting, lighting, and signage attached to the façade.
Core Area Safety Audit Grant Program	Active in 2025	Grants up to 50-percent of the total cost of the property modifications undertaken to implement the safety improvements, up to a maximum of \$10,000 per property	Municipal (Core Area CIP)	Core Area	
The Core Area Boulevard Café Grant Program	Ended in 2023	Offsets administrative and licence fees related to the operation of a boulevard café	Municipal (Core Area CIP)	Core Area	Waives both application and licensing fees for sidewalk or boulevard cafés located on City-owned property within the Core Area.

Core Area Sign Grant Program	Ended in 2023	Offsets administrative and license fees related to sign permits, including the encroachment of signs on a City street or road allowance	Municipal (Core Area CIP)	Core Area	Provides grants to support signage improvements to enhance streetscapes and help businesses within the Core Area stand out and attract visitors.
Upgrade to Building Code Loan	Active in 2025	Covers 50% of the improvement costs, up to a maximum of \$200,000	Municipal (Downtown CIP)	Downtown	
Rehabilitation and Redevelopment Tax Grant	Active in 2025	Refunds a portion of the municipal tax increase resulting from the rehabilitation of an existing building or the construction of a new one. A percentage of this tax increase is refunded to the property owner annually for a 10-year period.	Municipal (Downtown CIP)	Downtown	Reimburses property owners for a portion of the municipal tax increase resulting from the rehabilitation of an existing building or the construction of a new one.
Office-to-Residential Conversion Grant	Active in 2025	Maximum grant is \$35,000 per unit	Federal Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF), Downtown CIP	Downtown	For conversions of vacant Class B or C office buildings into residential units.
Residential Development Charges Grant	Active in 2025	A grant equal to a rebate of residential Development Charges (DCs) is offered for each new residential unit constructed	Municipal (Downtown CIP)	Downtown	

Vacant Commercial Space Fit-Out Grant Program	Active in 2025	Covers 50% of the improvement costs, up to a maximum of \$50,000	Municipal (Core Area CIP), total budget of \$975,000	Core Area	Aimed at revitalizing vacant commercial spaces within the Core Area.
Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Per-Unit Forgivable Loan Program	Active in 2025	\$15,000 per residential unit for eligible developments near major transit routes	Primarily funded through the federal Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF), Transit Oriented Development Community Improvement Plan	All of London	Forgivable loan per residential unit to developers and property owners for constructing new housing or converting office spaces to residential units near major transit routes.
Property Damage Grant	2024-2025		\$1.16 million in funding secured by the Downtown London Business Improvement Area (BIA) from the City of London for all 3 grants	Downtown London BIA	
Safety and Security Grant	2024		\$1.16 million in funding secured by the Downtown London Business Improvement Area (BIA) from the City of London for all 3 grants	Downtown London BIA	

Facade Improvement and Beautification Grant	2024		\$1.16 million in funding secured by the Downtown London Business Improvement Area (BIA) from the City of London for all 3 grants	Downtown London BIA	Supported BIA member businesses and property owners within the Downtown area and covered facade enhancements such as painting, signage refresh, storefront upgrades, and exterior beautification.	
Additional Residential Unit (ARU) Loan	Active in 2025	The lesser of \$45,000 or the cost of the eligible works for any ARU type at any rent		Municipal	All of London	Offers financial assistance to property owners to help offset the costs of creating new additional residential units.
Community Arts Investment Program (CAIP)	Active in 2025	\$850,000 yearly		Municipal	All of London	The City provides this funding to the London Arts Council, which administers CAIP and distributes grants to artists, collectives, and organizations, used to provide grants to individual artists, artist collectives, and nonprofit arts organizations to support the creation, production, and presentation of artistic work.

Creative sector initiatives	2023-2027	\$700 000 total	Municipal (Multi-year budget)	All of London	This includes: promote and develop major events, build a creative sector incubation business case, create a team of creative sector entrepreneurs and professionals to assist the incubation hub, develop new mentorship and training opportunities for artists and creatives, explore and attract investment in the creative sector, pursue investments from higher level of governments to create a creative sector incubation hub.
Community Heritage Investment Program (CHIP)	Active in 2025	Grants of \$76,000	Municipal	All of London	The City of London provides funding to the London Heritage Council to administer the Community Heritage Investment Program (CHIP) and distributes grants of \$76,000 to museums, heritage professionals, and ethno-cultural organizations celebrating their heritage to all of London.

APPENDIX 4: LIST OF PLANS AND POLICIES REVIEWED

This appendix shares a list of all plans that were reviewed and consulted as part of the review of common practice in downtown planning.

Canadian Cities:

Brampton, ON:

- Pathway to Economic Recovery and Growth, 2020

Calgary, AB:

- Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan: Roadmap to reinvention, 2021

Durham, ON:

- The Regional Municipality of Durham Report: Regional Recovery Framework and Action Plan, 2020

Edmonton, AB:

- Downtown Action Plan, 2025
- A Jurisdictional Review of Canadian Downtowns: Revitalization Themes and Lessons for Edmonton, 2025
- Downtown Action Plan, Bylaw 21122 Entertainment District, 2025
- Downtown Investment Plan: Coordinated Investment Actions for Downtown Edmonton, 2024
- Downtown Vibrancy Strategy, 2021
- Edmonton Economic Action Plan, 2021

Gatineau, QC:

- Étude sur l'attractivité et la diversification économique du centre-ville de Gatineau, 2023 (Study on the attractiveness and economic diversification of downtown Gatineau, 2023)

Halifax, NS:

- Downtown Halifax: Vision 2030, 2024
- Downtown Halifax: State of the Downtown, 2023
- People. Planet. Prosperity: Halifax's Inclusive Economic Strategy 2022-2027
- COVID-19 Economic Response and Recovery Plan, 2020

Kitchener, ON:

- Make It Kitchener 2.0: A Strategy to Guide Economic Recovery and Growth, 2020

Mississauga, ON:

- Mississauga Downtown Movement Plan: Technical Report, 2024
- COVID-19 Recovery Framework, 2020

Moncton, ON:

- City of Moncton Downtown Core Community Improvement Plan, 2017

Montreal, QC:

- Agir pour l'avenir du centre-ville de Montreal: Strategie centre-ville 2030, 2024 (Acting for the future of downtown Montreal: Downtown Strategy 2030, 2024)
- Montreal Centre-Ville: Strategic Plan for the Enhancement of Open Spaces, 2024
- Notre centre-ville, source de fierte, 2022 (Our Downtown, a source of pride, 2022)
- Relancer le centre-ville de Montréal dans un environnement en profonde mutation: Stratégies pour tirer des nouveaux modes d'organisation du travail et du consommation du centre-ville, 2022 (Reviving Downtown Montreal in a Profoundly Changing Environment: Strategies for Leveraging New Ways of Organizing Work and Consumption in the Downtown, 2022)
- Agir maintenant pour préparer la relance: Mesures de soutien économique 2021 (Act now to prepare for recovery: Economic support measures, 2021)

Oakville, ON:

- Transitioning to COVID-19 Interim Recovery Plan, 2021

Oshawa, ON:

- Plan 20Thirty – Action Plan for Continued Downtown Revitalization, 2022

Ottawa, ON:

- A Living Capital: Investing in a Dynamic Future for Downtown Ottawa, 2024
- Ottawa Nightlife Economy Plan: Report to Finance and Corporate Service Committee, 2023
- Ottawa's Destination Stewardship Plan, 2022
- Bridge to the Future: Final Report from the Task Force for a Resilient Recovery (2020)

- National Capital Core Area Plan, 2005

Regina, SK:

- Downtown Regina Vision Plan, 2023

Saskatoon, SK:

- City Centre and District Plan: Ohtannah, "the collective heart" of Saskatoon, 2024

St. John's, NL:

- Healthy City Strategy, 2021

Toronto, ON:

- Sidewalks to Skylines: A 10-Year Action Plan for Toronto's Economy (2025-2035), 2025

Vancouver, BC:

- Places for People: Downtown Public Space Strategy, 2020

Victoria, BC:

- Victoria 3.0: Recovery Reinvention Resilience 2020-2041, 2022

Windsor, ON:

- Strengthen the Core: Downtown Windsor Revitalization Plan, 2024

Winnipeg, MB:

- CentrePlan 2050, 2024
- Downtown Recovery Framework, 2021

American Cities:

Boston, MA:

- Plan: Downtown, 2023

Chicago, IL:

- Central Area Plan Engagement Findings, 2024
- Central Area Plan, Existing Conditions and Trends Report, 2024

- Central City Recovery Roadmap, 2021
- Forward Together: Building a Stronger Chicago, 2020

Cleveland, OH:

- Reimagining Downtown Cleveland, 2023

Detroit, MI:

- OUR! Detroit east riverfront: A Shared Vision for Detroit's East Riverfront, 2017

Houston, TX:

- Returning to the Office, 2021

Miami, FL:

- The Future of Downtown Miami, 2021

New York City, NY:

- Making New York Work for Everyone, 2022

Philadelphia, PA:

- Respond, Restart, Recharge, Reimagine: An Equitable and Inclusive Economic Recovery for Philadelphia, 2020

Pittsburgh, PA:

- Downtown Revitalization Vision: Creating a Neighborhood for All in Downtown Pittsburgh, 2024

Seattle, WA:

- Downtown is You: Downtown Activation Plan, 2023

Washington, D.C., DC:

- Downtown Action Plan, 2024
- DC's Comeback Plan: 2023-2027 Economic Development Strategy, 2023
- State of Downtown, 2022
- Our City, Our Spaces! A Materials, Tools, and Equipment Library for Neighborhood-Led

Activities in Washington, DC, 2021

International Cities:

- Amsterdam, Netherland:
- The Amsterdam City Doughnut: A Tool for Transformative Action, 2020

Barcelona, Spain:

- Barcelona Nature Plan 2021-2030, 2021

Glasgow, Scotland:

- Glasgow's City Centre Recovery Plan 2022-2024, 2021

Limerick, Ireland:

- Limerick Development Plan 2022-2028, 2022

London, UK:

- London Recovery Programme, 2020
- Oxford Street District: Framework, 2021

APPENDIX 5: COMMONALITIES AND COMMON THEMES ACROSS PLANS REVIEWED

1. Reimagine Office Space and Encourage Mixed-Use Downtown Development

- Downtown Winnipeg CentrePlan 2050: Introduce vacancy taxes to activate vacant properties, create a Downtown “conciierge” role to streamline process of development/re-development, update zoning by-laws to allow mixed-use development, encourage mixed-use developments on main streets, design streets to support mixed-use development (focus on placemaking, accessibility, connectivity, mode choice).
- Edmonton Downtown Action Plan: Maintains a goal of reducing vacant offices.
- Seattle Downtown Activation Plan: Presents regulatory changes to make it easier to convert underutilized office space to housing, identifying potential changes to waive or modify development standards to facilitate office to residential conversions. This includes waiving design review for converting existing buildings and the potential to update zoning to enable vertical mixed-use neighborhoods with housing, schools, childcare, community spaces, and retail.
- Downtown Halifax Vision 2030: Explores office conversion incentives from other cities.
- DC Downtown Action Plan: Proposes changing residential height limits to improve conversion feasibility, providing development grants to help the market repurpose office buildings and pursue catalytic development projects, and ensuring incentive programs and tax abatements are in place and fully funded in the District budget.
- Edmonton Downtown Investment Plan, 2024: Promotes that flexible zoning can facilitate successful office-to-residential conversions and other mixed-use developments.
- Reimagining Downtown Cleveland, 2023 and Downtown Action Plan, 2025: Identifies crafting an ecosystem of third places, where employees, residents, and remote workers can gather, including parks, coffee shops, community spaces, and other diverse commercial assets.

2. Enhance Mobility and Connectivity

- Downtown Winnipeg CentrePlan 2050: Outlines improving connections between downtown and surrounding neighbourhoods by increasing and improving pedestrian crossings, building an active transportation bridge, creating a new community park to improve connectivity and access to multi-use greenspace.
- Downtown Halifax Vision 2030: Prioritizes mass transit and the pedestrian experience over single-occupant vehicles in response to rising downtown housing costs and as an equity investment by improving connections to other city areas. Key actions include accelerating BRT development with priority on lines linking downtown to high-population neighborhoods, extending transit hours, creating a free and frequent downtown transit loop, implementing pedestrian-first design, establishing a comprehensive bike network, and developing a transit hub/terminal in downtown.

3. Support Culture and Cultural Events

- Downtown Halifax Vision 2030: Identifies the need to establish itself as the undisputed capital of Atlantic Canada for arts, culture, and entertainment by building new venues, including an outdoor event space; activating downtown with year-round events by leading or supporting event creation and providing financial and administrative support; and designating downtown as a Cultural District.
- Make it Kitchener 2.0: Collaborate with industry and education partners to position the city as a global leader in creative industries by expanding access to affordable creative spaces and investing in arts, culture, events, and main street businesses to foster cultural vibrancy.
- Seattle Downtown Activation Plan: Hire a Director of Citywide Special Events and a Creative Economy Manager, bring festival events to Downtown, increase murals and art installations, and support community-driven activations and cultural celebrations in the downtown.

4. Commit to an Inclusive and Holistic Approach to Addressing Homelessness and Improving Public Safety

- Reimagining Downtown Cleveland, 2023 and Downtown Action Plan, 2025: Increase visible, uniformed presence with an emphasis on unarmed Neighborhood Safety Specialists, expand capacity for co-deployment so that police responses are accompanied by the Crisis Intervention Team, and provide transportation to area treatment facilities for those in need.

5. Local Economic Development on Main Streets

- Sidewalks to Skylines - A 10-Year Action Plan for Toronto’s Economy (2025–2035): Create a Main Street Resiliency Fund and commercial replacement policy to support businesses affected by construction and development; develop a BIA strategy to support growth and create new BIAs for business communities outside the core; boost BIA-led public space investments; support local animation and business innovation; and, expand CaféTO participation.

6. Climate Resilience and Equity

- Plan: Downtown Boston, 2023: Identifies the need to create more housing and business opportunities for BIPOC communities in the downtown. It supports climate resilience and sustainable development by encouraging ongoing building performance upgrades and renovations through Boston’s Retrofit Resource Hub, incentivizing investment in green infrastructure, and providing design guidelines to help achieve this goal.
- Reimagining Downtown Cleveland, 2023 and Edmonton Downtown Action Plan, 2025: Identifies the need to apply a racial equity lens to the implementation of the plan’s strategies.

- Downtown Winnipeg CentrePlan 2050: Identifies that road rights-of-way should incorporate green infrastructure such as trees and stormwater features to support climate resilience. The plan calls for developing grant programs to support the installation of green infrastructure, exploring the construction of reed beds and floating wetlands along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, considering green infrastructure options when assessing municipal infrastructure projects, testing green infrastructure solutions wherever possible, and planting micro forests.

7. Supporting Newcomers and Indigenous Communities

- Winnipeg CentrePlan: Calls for applying the Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Strategy to help foster a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable downtown and to reflect Indigenous history in historical markers, public spaces, and place names Downtown.

8. Residential Development and Housing

- Calgary Downtown Plan, 2021: The plan outlines the goal of increasing residential units and supporting amenities, incentivizing new high-density residential developments and office conversions, and reviewing density bonus systems, including provisions for non-market housing.
- Winnipeg CentrePlan: The plan calls for working with federal and provincial governments on initiatives to address the housing crisis, including creating taxes on vacant buildings and surface parking lots, and partnering with the private sector, such as CentreVenture, to assemble strategically located properties to meet downtown housing targets.
- Plan: Downtown Boston, 2023: The plan proposes accelerating the permitting of income-restricted housing by prioritizing and simplifying the review and approval process, and exploring a vacancy tax on properties purchased without being occupied or leased.
- Plan 20Thirty: Downtown Oshawa Revitalization, 2022: The plan calls for working with post-secondary institutions to connect the student population to housing opportunities in Downtown, and developing strategies with external partners to support international attraction for both housing and employment in Downtown Oshawa.

APPENDIX 6: DETAILED ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

Detailed Engagement Findings

Approximately 2,665 individuals and groups were engaged for Phase 1 through a custom survey, one-on-one conversations, or focus groups. These discussions used a common set of questions to guide the conversation with some variation based on the format and the sector or expertise of the participants. This section highlights some of those questions and provides more detailed summaries specific to the relevant engagement tool.

Get Involved Downtown London Survey

As part of the Downtown London Public Survey, participants were asked a series of identification questions to help ensure that they survey obtained varied experiences of Londoners of different locations, genders, racial identities, abilities, etc. The questions were optional, but 72% of the respondents opted in to answer. As of August 23, 2025, the results indicate the following:

- Out of the 1358 respondents who answered this questions, 60% noted that they identified as female, 36% as male, and 4% provided different responses (1% preferred not to share)
- 12% of respondents identify as a racial person or a visible minority (7% preferred not to share)
- 3% of respondents identify as Indigenous, Metis, or Inuit (4% preferred not to share)
- 15% of respondents identify as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community (6% preferred not to share)
- 12% of respondents identify as a person with disability according to the Human Rights Commission definition of a disability
- 21% of the respondents speak a language other than English at home (2% preferred not to share)
- 72% of respondents indicated that they are currently employed (5% preferred not to share); and
- 42% of respondents provided that their income before tax was over \$100,000. The next highest income indicated was between \$50,000-100,000 at 28%, 15% made below \$50,000 and 15% preferred not to share

Outside of the identification questions, Londoners were asked general questions about their experiences being in and moving around the Downtown. See Appendix 7 for a full list of the survey questions. Some of the key findings from the question responses include:

- Majority of survey respondents go Downtown for shopping, dining, beauty / wellness:

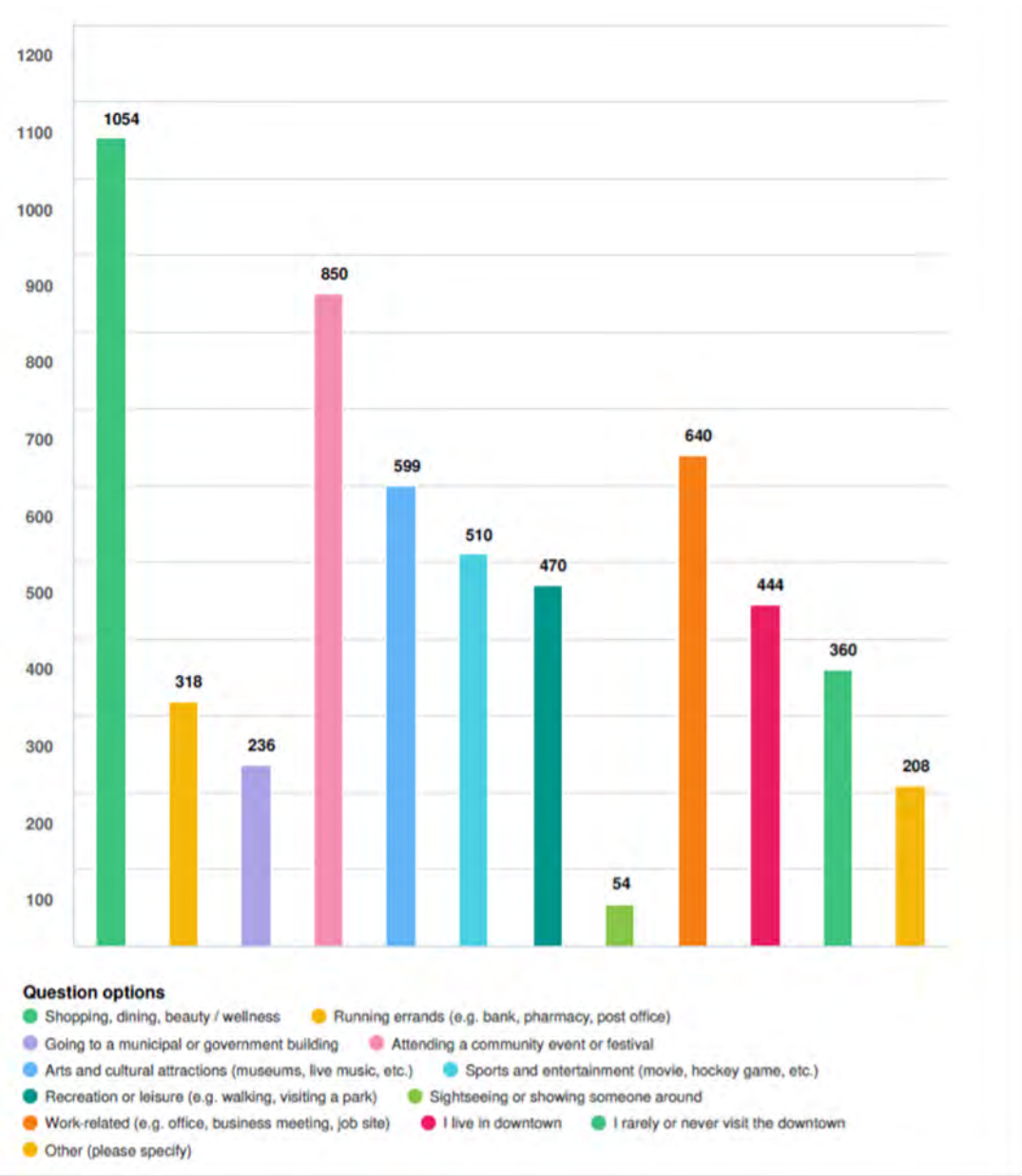


Figure 1 Reasons for Downtown Visits

- Events, cultural and sports activities are noted as the most successful aspect of Downtown:

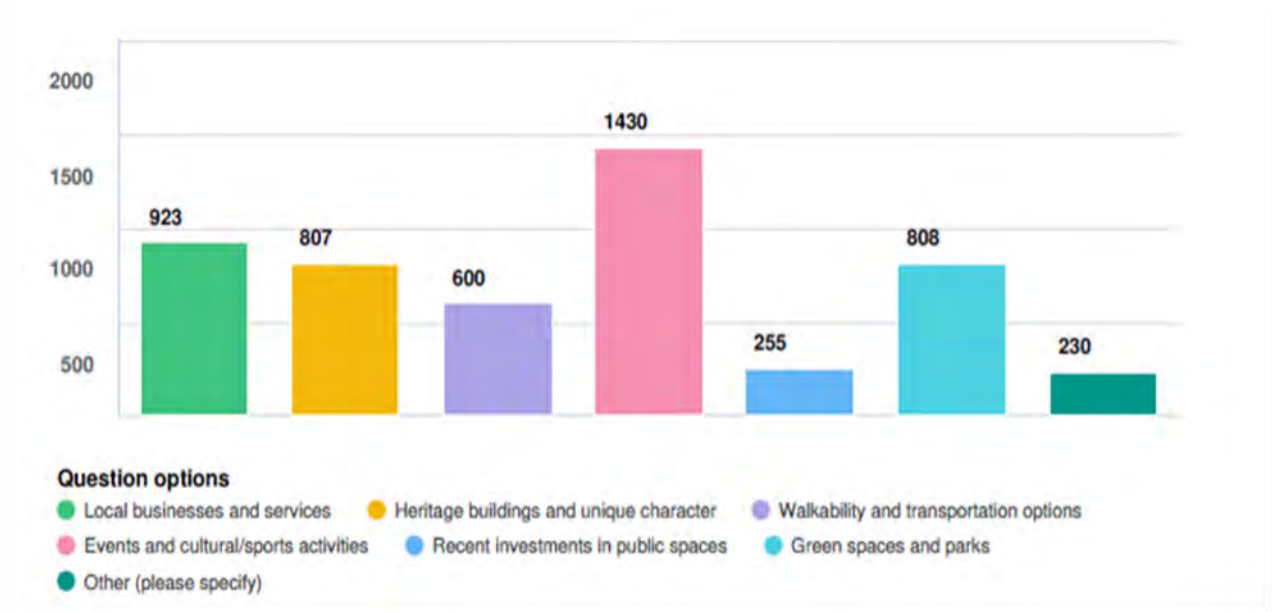


Figure 2 Most successful aspects of Downtown

- The two greatest challenges in the Downtown were empty storefronts or lack of businesses, and public safety:

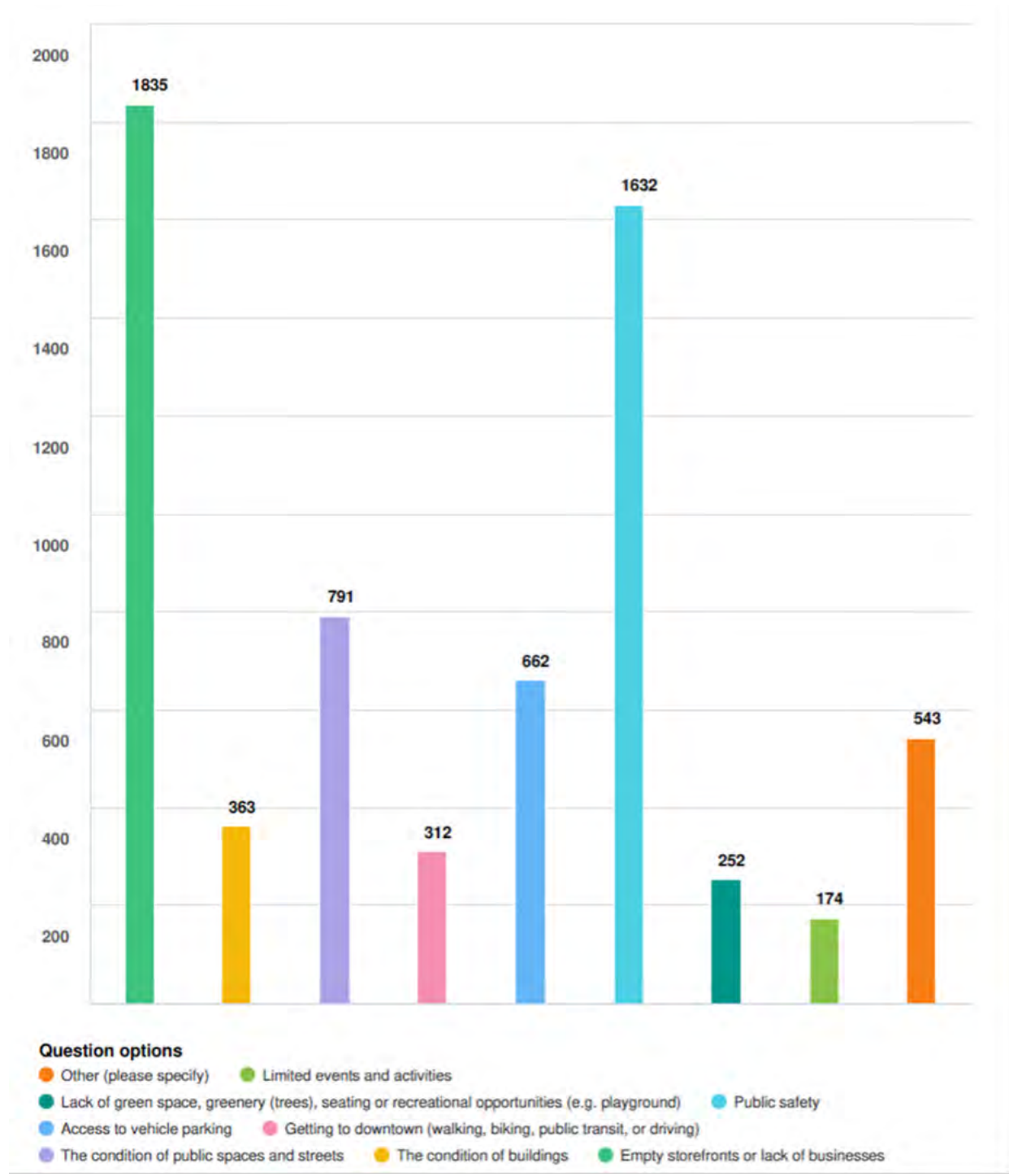


Figure 3 London Downtown Challenges

- Downtown is important to the residents of London and the surrounding areas because of the arts and culture attractions (museums, live music, etc.), sports, entertainment and events (festivals, movies, hockey game, etc.), and concentration of services and amenities (retail stores, banks, health and wellness, restaurants):

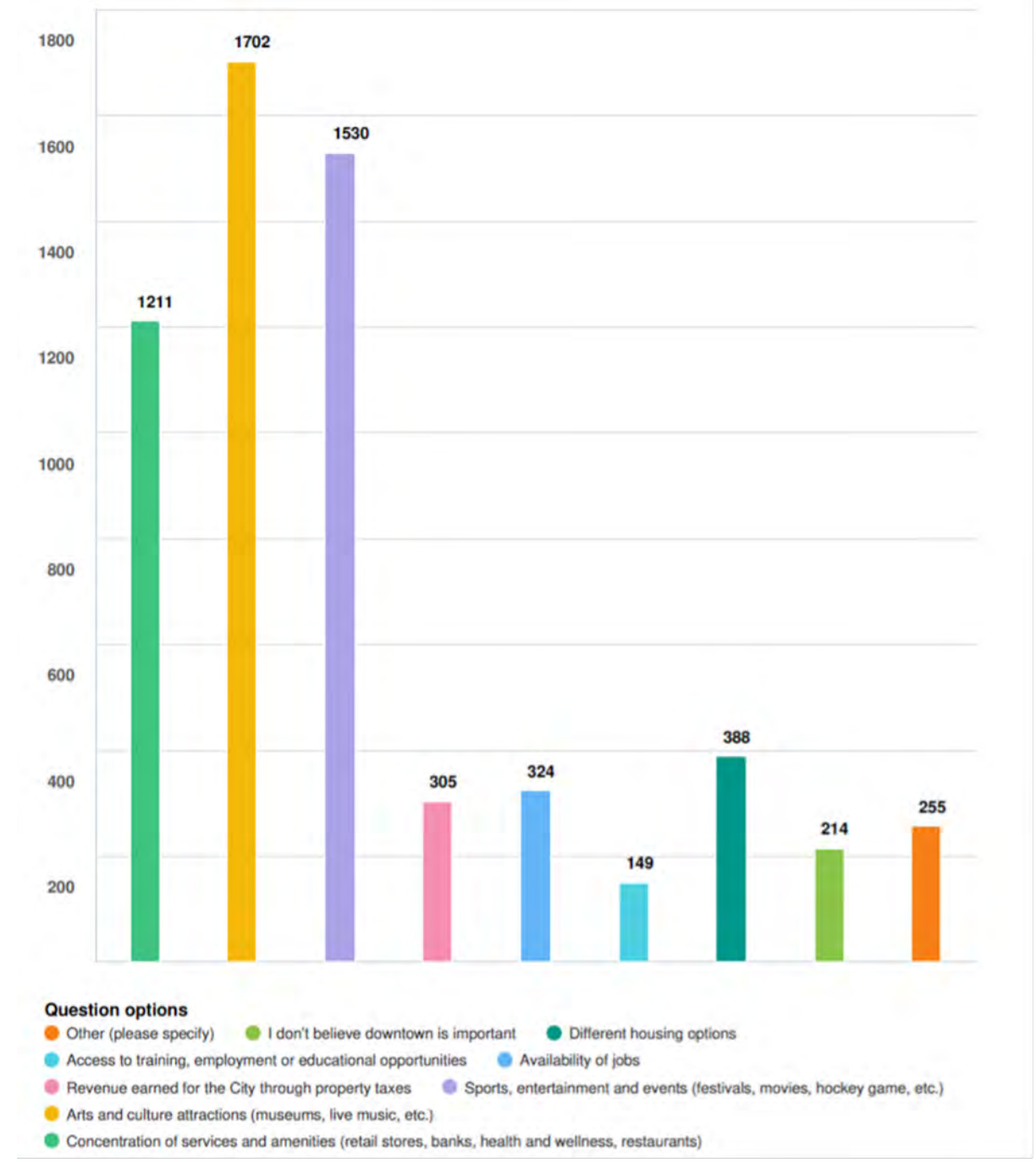


Figure 4 Reasons for the Importance of Downtown

- More services (health and wellness, recreation) would encourage people to come Downtown more. The next two highest scoring categories to attract residents were better transit or better access to Downtown, and more family-friendly attractions:

Table 1: Services and Amenities Ranking Table

OPTIONS	AVG. RANK
Food and beverage	3.20
Entertainment and sporting events	3.47
Arts and Cultural attractions	3.89
Amenities (green spaces, parks etc.)	4.18
Shopping (Clothing, goods)	4.31
Family-friendly attractions	4.38
Better transit or better access to downtown	4.89
Services (health and wellness, recreation)	4.98

- Participants were also asked to identify if they were Downtown residents, broader London residents, businesses owners/managers, or non-London residents. See Figure 5 for a breakdown of the answers:

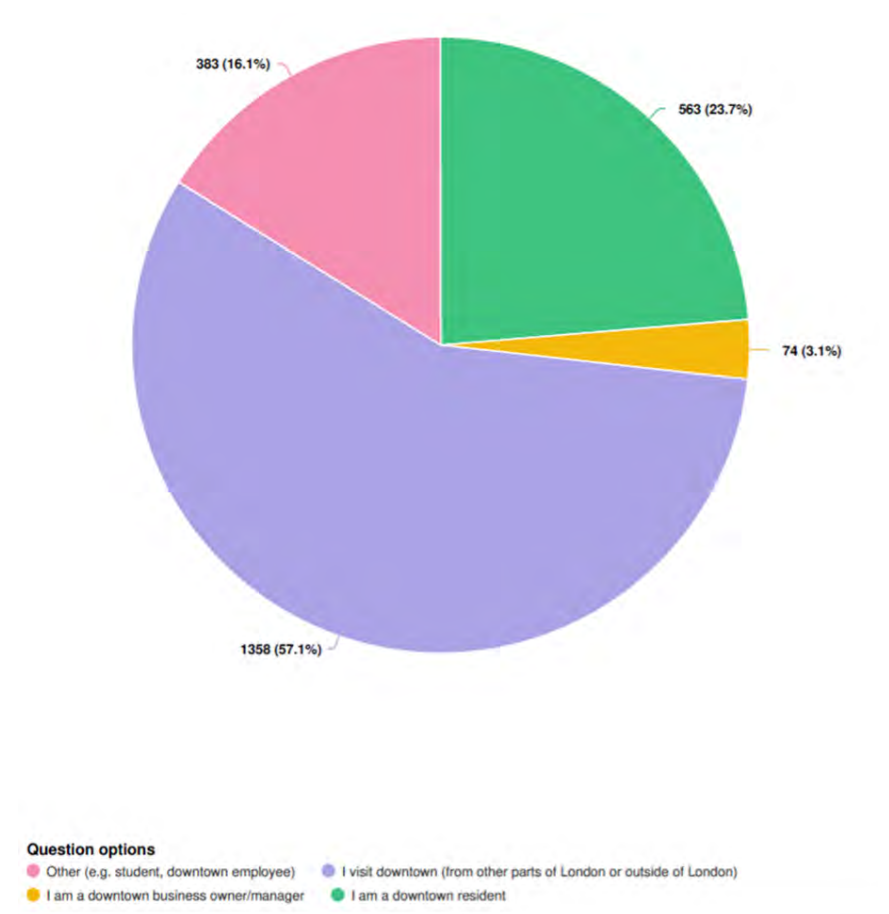


Figure 5 Primary Identity Question

Some of the main outcomes include:

- When asked what business owners and managers need for their businesses to remain sustainable and to grow, the three main responses included physical improvements to Downtown, more foot traffic in Downtown, and more customers:

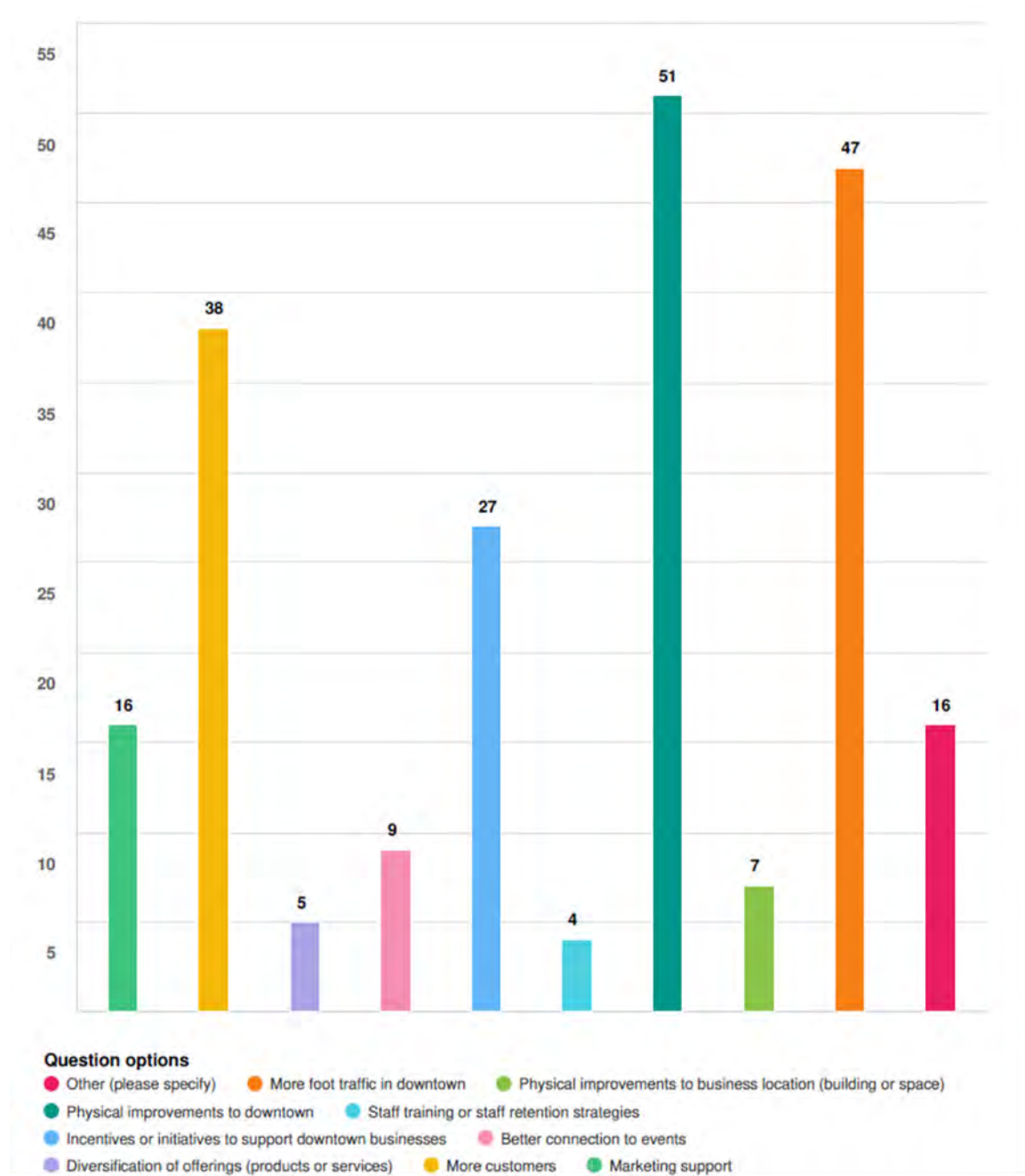


Figure 6 What London Downtown Businesses Need

- When London Downtown residents were asked why they moved to the Downtown, the majority answered walkability, proximity to and availability of businesses, amenities, events, entertainment, and work:

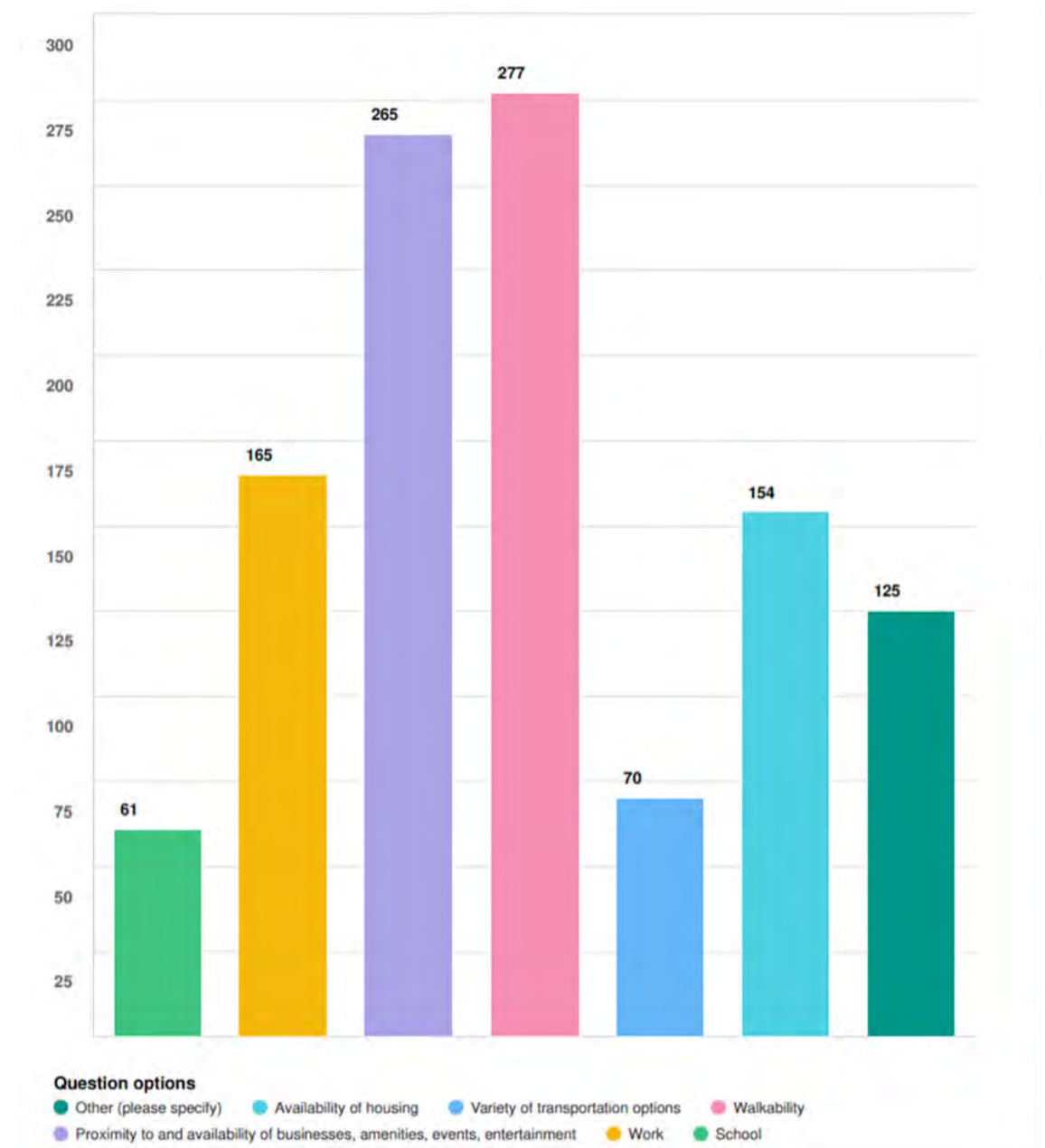


Figure 7 Why Residents Move Downtown

Public Events Engagement

The Consultant Team was at two different public engagement events: Sunfest and Storybook Gardens. They engaged with 160 people total. For both events, a tri-fold board with a map of Downtown London was used. Three questions were posted on the board:

- What is your favorite spot Downtown?
- What do you already like about the Downtown?
- What do you want more of in the Downtown?

Participants had an option to use sticky notes and dots to interact with the board and provide their input. Cards with QR codes leading to the Get Involved website and the public engagement survey were also provided.



Figure 8 London Downtown Plan In-Person Engagement

At the Sunfest Festival in Victoria Park, the team engaged with a wide range of participants, including children, older adults, students, Indigenous community members, people from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, Downtown residents, other London residents, and visitors. Overall, participants expressed enthusiasm for making Downtown London a better place for everyone, with one person noting they want "London to be a kind, respectful, clean and safe place to live."

People said they enjoy the variety of food Downtown, Sunfest and other events at Victoria Park, the availability of parks and green spaces, and the walkability for those living nearby. In contrast to more general engagement responses, the Thames River was not often mentioned as an asset used as part of people's Downtown experience. Students from nearby schools also said they often do not know what is happening Downtown.

When asked what they would like to see more of, and their suggestions for improvements, participants mentioned:

- Trail improvements, more protected bike lanes, and greater walkability (referencing Winnipeg's strategy as an example)
- Increased density and community-oriented spaces
- More spaces for sports activities
- A greater diversity of retail and shopping options
- More homeless shelters, wraparound services, and affordable housing
- Pedestrian-only streets used more frequently
- Better street maintenance
- A return to two-hour free parking and more accessible parking for different mobility users
- Bigger festivals
- More police presence
- A shift in mindset from "small city" to "mid-sized and growing"
- A review of the RT project to assess success and implementation

August 2nd Storybook Gardens

At the Storybook Gardens event, the majority of participants were families with young children. Parents highlighted what they enjoy about the area when they are in the Downtown, including the Central Library London, Victoria Park, local festivals, Covent Garden Market, and the Thames River. They also shared several concerns about visiting Downtown. Parking was described as a significant issue for families, making trips inconvenient and costly. Many noted a lack of kid-friendly activities, explaining that they used to visit more often before having children, but now feel there is little to draw them Downtown with young kids. Safety was also a major concern, with

parents expressing discomfort about exposing their children to visible drug use or people passed out in public spaces. Ongoing road closures and construction, which some felt are constant, were seen as another barrier to making the trip Downtown.

When asked, what would help mitigate some of these challenges, they offered the following suggestions to make Downtown more family-friendly:

- Provide more information on where to park, parking availability, and how to navigate the area
- Add more shaded benches for parents and children to rest
- Create biodiversity education programs around the Thames River
- Expand bike lanes and improve bus service
- Improve accessibility for people with different mobility needs
- Offer more accessible public washrooms that do not require customers to make a purchase
- Invest in a large wading pool or splash area for children within the Downtown core

One-on-One Discussions and Focus Groups

The Consultant Team carried out a targeted engagement plan that identified key partners and actors as part of the arts and culture, local business, economic development, and equity-deserving communities. Participants were outreached to and engaged via either a one-on-one conversation (virtual or in-person when possible), and/or as part of a focus group. Feedback from each set of consultants or topic-area is detailed below. Many of the comments are taken verbatim from feedback and include a combination of challenges and proposed solutions.

Arts and Culture Discussions

The Consultant Team met with various of organizations and partners in the arts and culture sector and gathered valuable feedback that has been summarized into the following themes:

Arts, Culture, and Creative Infrastructure

- Downtown London's cultural anchors such as Museum London, Covent Garden Market, TAP Centre for Creativity, and other arts venues were described as vital assets for attracting residents and visitors
- London's UNESCO City of Music designation was seen as a significant opportunity to expand cultural identity, but members stressed it must be backed by programming, promotion, and investment in both large institutions and grassroots organizations
- Participants highlighted a funding imbalance. Major institutions receive consistent support, while smaller organizations and emerging artists struggle to access resources despite contributing heavily to vibrancy

- Suggestions included strengthening a "ladder of support" to help smaller groups scale up, embedding arts and Indigenous storytelling in public spaces, and learning from other municipalities such as Burnaby, Hamilton, and Markham that have integrated arts into infrastructure and long-term planning

Events and Programming

- A strong appetite exists for more consistent Downtown programming such as live music, art crawls, seasonal activations, and festivals to sustain activity between major events
- Many organizations rely on partnerships to deliver events. While collaboration creates scale, it leaves few independent activations thriving on their own
- Barriers include insurance, permitting processes, and weather risks, which disproportionately affect small and mid-sized organizers
- Participants emphasized the importance of quick wins through visible cultural activations to build public confidence and maintain momentum

Safety, Access, and Perception

- Safety, both real and perceived, was repeatedly identified as a barrier to cultural participation, particularly for evening events
- Concerns included visible drug use, disruptive behaviour, and limited willingness among residents to stay Downtown after dark
- Accessibility challenges were also raised. Parking is costly and confusing, and public transit is seen as inadequate for reliable event access
- Suggestions included expanding foot patrols, improving parking wayfinding, and piloting shuttles or other last-mile solutions to better connect residents to cultural venues

Governance and Leadership

- Several groups noted a lack of cohesion among downtown cultural and business organizations, with too much emphasis on individual mandates rather than collective impact
- London's cultural leadership was described as fragmented, with smaller organizations feeling excluded from decision-making processes
- Participants called for stronger coordination and communication across institutions, the City, and community partners. Some pointed to other cities that implement five-year cultural and business plans with transparent evaluation cycles

Investment and Sustainability

- Participants emphasized that cultural vibrancy requires reliable, sustained investment not only in major venues but also in grassroots initiatives that animate public spaces and neighbourhood-level programming
- Arts organizations described funding precarity, with limited operating support and reliance on project-based grants, sponsorships, and rentals
- Calls were made for renewed investment models, including better mechanisms for sharing risk between the City, cultural institutions, and private partners
- Members also cautioned that without deliberate reinvestment, London risks losing the local talent and smaller organizations that contribute to its cultural identity

Advisory Group Conversations

The advisory members consist of business owners, developers, residents, and community organizations who discuss opportunities and challenges for London's Downtown. The conversations in Phase 1 so far have centered around consistent themes related to retail, housing, safety, mobility, culture, and governance:

Retail and Business Climate

- Advisory members noted that Downtown retail has not kept pace with resident needs. Many storefronts feel uninviting, with outdated signage, bars on windows, and a general lack of upkeep
- Hours of operation remain oriented toward 9–5 office workers, even as their presence has declined. Rising costs and limited parking options further discourage visits
- There was agreement that Downtown needs a more curated, resident-focused retail mix, with emphasis on unique and local offerings
- Ideas included incubators with flexible rent structures, mentorship programs, and support for market vendors to transition into permanent shops
- Advisory members also suggested creating bakery or brewery "trails" and improving cross-promotion among businesses

Housing and Development

- Developers emphasized that rental housing is driving growth, as condo financing is more difficult in London. Downtown incentives were viewed as essential, but current CIP/DC policies were criticized as disincentives compared to suburban projects
- Residents stressed that more everyday amenities are needed to support a growing residential base — particularly grocery stores, bakeries, schools, and family-friendly spaces
- Advisory members agreed that strengthening the residential population is key to sustaining retail, cultural life, and a sense of community Downtown

Public Realm and Riverfront

- Advisory members saw the Thames River and surrounding assets (Harris Park, Museum London, Labatt Park) as underused. Historically, the riverfront supported canoeing, paddle boats, and ferries, and there is interest in restoring these recreational uses by addressing dam issues
- Ideas for reactivation included kiosks, trails, small-scale retail, and cultural or Indigenous storytelling. Comparable examples cited included Saskatoon, Providence and Cincinnati
- The riverfront was described as a unique opportunity to anchor both recreation and reconciliation in Downtown

Security, and Perception

- Safety, both real and perceived, was repeatedly identified by advisory members as a primary barrier to Downtown activity outside of large events
- Concerns included visible drug use, repeat petty crimes, and a lack of consistent enforcement.
- Suggested responses included expanded police foot patrols, improved by-law enforcement, advocacy for bail reform, and continued progress through supportive housing initiatives such as Indwell and London Community Foundation's Fund for Change

Arts, Culture, and Events

- Advisory members highlighted Downtown's strong arts and culture presence — galleries, Museum London, and live music venues contribute to vibrancy
- London's UNESCO City of Music designation was seen as an important asset that could attract investment and strengthen programming
- Calls were made for more consistent programming, such as seasonal festivals and regular live music nights, to sustain activity beyond major events
- Investment in both large venues and smaller, grassroots cultural spaces was viewed as critical for economic and community resilience

Transportation and Access

- Advisory members raised frustrations with RT implementation, which removed parking and loading zones and created challenges for business deliveries
- Parking was described as costly, confusing, and restrictive, particularly with two-hour limits.
- Public transit was criticized as inadequate, while traffic congestion during major events further limited accessibility
- Proposed solutions included park-and-ride systems, Downtown shuttle/trolley services, real-time parking availability apps, and more coherent active transportation infrastructure

Governance, Leadership, and Investment

- Advisory members expressed concern that multiple past plans and siloed City processes have led to fragmented outcomes and limited effectiveness
- Clearer accountability, better communication with businesses, and more consistent enforcement were identified as priorities
- The investment climate remains uncertain. While organizations such as London Community Foundation, Canada Life, Libro, and local developers continue to play a role, the risk of disinvestment from major property owners persists
- Some suggested the idea of a bundled development corporation model to reduce speculation, consolidate ownership, and encourage coordinated reinvestment

Economic Development Conversations

Various groups including small businesses, London Downtown BIA, real estate developers, landowners and others, were consulted through Phase 1. Below is a group of themes discussed when asked the question of what they saw as challenges and solutions for the Downtown.

Safety, Homelessness, and Social Issues

- Homelessness remains highly visible, with businesses reporting theft, anti-social behaviour, and impacts on customer activity
- Views on solutions varied between stronger enforcement and expanded social supports.
- Some noted gradual improvements, while others emphasized persistent challenges on main streets like Dundas Street
- Suggestions included more visible City action on safety and cleanliness, private sector involvement in shelter solutions, and incentives to help formerly homeless residents integrate into the community

Economic Development Strategy and Leadership

- A lack of clear strategy and strong connection between the City and private sector was noted
- Calls were made for visible leadership, including a dedicated "Downtown Czar" reporting to the Mayor, to focus on investment attraction, marketing, and measurable results
- Trust in government and tax concerns remain barriers. Heritage designation processes were described as inconsistent

Investment, Incentives, and Tax Policy

- Existing incentive tools such as DC reductions and TIEG programs were seen as less effective since restructuring
- Participants called for stronger tools, including tax increment grants, vacancy taxes for long-term empty properties, and policies that penalize neglect while rewarding reinvestment
- Efficient and transparent use of public funds, tied to measurable development outcomes, was emphasized

Office, Commercial Space, and Land Use

- Downtown office vacancy is around 30% and rising, compared to much lower levels elsewhere.
- Priorities included filling existing buildings, redeveloping unviable sites, and advancing new construction where feasible
- Participants described Downtown as in "crisis" for 25 years, citing safety issues, boarded-up buildings, graffiti, and a loss of major tenants
- Insurance companies are raising rates, financing is difficult to secure, and retail rents have collapsed
- Downtown is going through a cycle of tenant losses leading to declining assessments and tax revenue

Parking, Transportation, and Rapid Transit (RT)

- Parking is perceived as costly, limited, and inconvenient, with cultural resistance to paying for it.
- Businesses cited frustration with RT lane removal of parking and loading zones
- Suggestions included moving RT off King Street, expanding subsidies tied to cultural assets, and improving communication about parking availability and pricing
- Calls were made for policies that balance convenience with affordability to support Downtown businesses

Urban Planning and City Assets

- Ideas included relocating City Hall to Citi Plaza to improve staff presence Downtown
- Ensure Canada Life Place continues to anchor events, while planning for a future replacement facility
- Participants encouraged learning from other cities' successful Downtown strategies

Culture, Events, and Public Life

- Groups emphasized the need for more consistent programming, easier access to event spaces, and seed funding for grassroots events
- Cultural activities and businesses were described as fragmented, with opportunities to better coordinate and create defined districts or neighbourhood identities
- Regular cultural events and pop-ups were seen as critical for sustaining vibrancy and supporting retail

Small Businesses and the Local Climate

- Business owners highlighted persistent challenges with safety, drug use, theft, and construction disruptions. It was voiced that clustering services such as the supervised consumption site Downtown has worsened business viability
- Concerns also included high insurance costs, barriers to parking and access, and a lack of clear communication with City staff
- Retailers called for stronger coordination during construction, more affordable rents, and better information about vacancies and opportunities
- The Small Business Centre emphasized the need for investment in marketing, support for pop-ups and e-commerce, and programs to attract diverse and established retailers

Equity-Deserving Group Consultations

Diversity consulted nine London-based nonprofits, either in-person or virtually during the last two weeks of June 2025. These organizations support a wide range of equity-deserving communities, including:

Children, youth, families, and seniors (Boys & Girls Club, Young London)

- Black communities and entrepreneurs (BCEES)
- Refugees and newcomers (LCCLC, LMLIP)
- 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals (Queer Intersections)
- People facing barriers to employment, including those experiencing poverty or disability (Pathways Employment Help Centre)
- People living with mental health challenges, addictions, and housing insecurity (Indwell)
- The broader nonprofit and social enterprise sector (Pillar Nonprofit Network)

The work of the organizations engaged includes frontline programming (e.g., housing, food support, employment training, youth recreation), policy and systems advocacy, community building, and cultural events. All organizations consulted maintain a physical or programmatic

presence Downtown, hosting meetings, events, or delivering services there.

In their calls and focus groups, the organizations focused on the following themes:

1. Safety and Perception of Safety

- Broad concern about safety and perception of safety in the Downtown core, particularly related to homelessness, drug use, vandalism, inadequate lighting or emergency supports
- Vulnerable groups (e.g. youth, families, LGBTQ+ individuals, newcomers) feel unsafe, especially:
 - After dark
 - At transit stops
 - On poorly lit streets
- Lack of accessible, non-police emergency supports:
- Safety concerns negatively impact:
 - Event attendance and programming after dark
 - Public willingness to visit or work Downtown
 - Newcomers' first impressions of the city
- Suggestions include:
 - Public emergency call buttons and street-level information officers (non-police similar to programs run in San Francisco)

2. Homelessness, Mental Health, and Addictions

- Mental health, homelessness and addictions were described as the most visible and urgent Downtown issue
- These issues were framed as both a humanitarian crisis and a barrier to community participation
- Impacts include:
 - Greenspaces like Victoria Park are perceived as unsafe or unusable due to encampments and drug activity
 - Decreased Downtown engagement

- Strong calls for upstream investment:
 - Supportive/affordable housing
 - Mental health services, addiction support, and better coordination among providers
 - Prevention and early intervention

3. Transportation and Accessibility

- Public transit seen as essential but problematic:
 - Infrequent service and delays, especially from outer / peripheral neighbourhoods to the Downtown core
- Overflowing buses
- Safety concerns at stops and on vehicles after hours
 - High cost for youth and low-income residents
 - High parking costs and limited accessible parking Downtown are also ongoing barriers.
- Strong interest in:
 - Expansion of rapid transit (especially west and north routes)
 - More covered bus shelters
 - Calls for improved walkability, bike infrastructure (e.g. lockers), and pedestrian-friendly design (e.g. automatic crossings).

4. Public Services and Amenities

- Identified needs include:
 - Clean, accessible public washrooms
 - Green spaces with shelter and seating
 - Access to affordable food (e.g. Downtown grocery stores)

5. Support for Entrepreneurs, Small Businesses, and Nonprofits

- Key challenges:
 - Construction disruptions, high rent, property speculation, and lack of support
 - High vacancy rates affect vibrancy and economic stability
- Recommendations include:
 - Rent relief for small businesses during construction
 - Operational funding for nonprofits
 - Subsidies and shared infrastructure for racialized, newcomer, and youth entrepreneurs
 - Strengthened partnerships between local businesses and community organizations
 - Affordable access to space for events and services

6. Utilization of Downtown Buildings

- Commercial vacancy fuels a sense of disconnection and erodes vibrancy
- Strong interest in revitalizing underused and vacant properties to meet community needs
- Suggested strategies include:
 - Redevelopment of heritage buildings for public benefit (while continuing to preserve and honour their historical significance and status)
 - Mixed-use developments that integrate affordable housing with ground-floor services, social enterprises, or nonprofits
 - Suggested use of underutilized spaces (e.g., Citi Plaza, vacant storefronts) for creative programming and cultural activation
- Emphasis on using available space to support families, newcomers, and unhoused individuals while enhancing service access and economic inclusion

7. Representation, Belonging, and Downtown Identity

- Strong desire for more inclusive planning in Downtown revitalization efforts, and greater representation of equity-deserving groups

- Key priorities include:
 - Affordable spaces and business support for newcomer and minority entrepreneurs
 - Community-driven decision-making models (e.g., public idea submission and implementation)
- Emphasis on storytelling and public education to foster inclusion and pride in Downtown:
 - Storytelling initiatives to elevate refugee and immigrant narratives (e.g., “Voices of Downtown London”)
 - Launch public education campaigns to shift perceptions and spotlight Downtown’s services, businesses, and community assets
 - Leverage institutions like the Central Library as platforms for cultural programming, storytelling, and community learning
- Events and festivals:
 - Support for more arts and culture programming that reflects London’s full diversity.
 - Recognition that flagship events like Sunfest and Covent Garden Market are valued assets, but could offer more innovation, variety, and cultural breadth year-over-year

8. Event Coordination

- Current issues:
 - Disjointed communication between City, nonprofits, and businesses makes it harder to coordinate events
- Suggestions:
 - Centralized, coordinated event promotion (and inclusion of nonprofits in planning)
 - Better wayfinding and shared Downtown maps

9. Youth Needs

- Need for accessible, inclusive “third spaces” where people, especially youth, can gather safely outside of commercial or institutional settings
- Improved access to arts, culture, and recreation programming

- Free or discounted youth transit passes
- Greater inclusion of youth voices in planning and decision-making

Action Suggestions and “Quick Wins”:

1. Transit and Transportation

- Provide free or discounted transit passes for youth and low-income riders
- Add covered bus shelters and more bike parking (including secure lockers)
- Offer one-hour free municipal parking

2. Public Realm and Activation

- Clean up Downtown streets and remove graffiti more regularly
- Install automatic pedestrian crossings
- Increase decorative murals, pop-up events, and car-free days
- Promote Downtown’s arts and cultural scene with support for diverse storytelling, public art, and festivals
- Enhance connectivity between Downtown and the Thames River through improved urban design, walkable pathways, and public realm investments
 - Building on earlier initiatives like Back to the River

3. Safety Improvements

- Increase access to public washrooms
- Add emergency call buttons and visible safety infrastructure Downtown

4. Economic Inclusion and Business Support

- Provide financial compensation or rent subsidies to small businesses affected by construction
- Support minority entrepreneurs through subsidized space and business development resources
- Repurpose vacant commercial spaces for social enterprises, pop-up shops, creative programming, cultural activation, or community use

5. Nonprofit Capacity and Partnerships

- Coordinate Downtown programming to include nonprofit events and increase collaboration with nonprofits.

- Offer core funding and operational subsidies to youth- and equity-focused nonprofits
- Facilitate partnerships between nonprofits and local businesses (e.g., for employment, service delivery)

6. Education and Public Awareness

- Launch a storytelling/public awareness campaign (e.g., “Voices of Downtown London”) to highlight diverse experiences
- Coordinate event calendars between the City and nonprofits for easier community participation
- Use libraries, parks, and vacant space to host events, exhibitions, and community learning opportunities
- Improve public knowledge of existing resources, services, and businesses Downtown via directories and digital tools

Key Themes, Community Priorities, and Needs:

1. Safety and Perception of Safety

- Broad concern about safety and perception of safety in the Downtown core, particularly related to homelessness, drug use, vandalism, inadequate lighting or emergency supports
- Vulnerable groups (e.g. youth, families, LGBTQ+ individuals, newcomers) feel unsafe, especially:
 - After dark
 - At transit stops
 - On poorly lit streets
- Lack of accessible, non-police emergency supports:
- Safety concerns negatively impact:
 - Event attendance and programming after dark
 - Public willingness to visit or work Downtown

Educational Institution Consultations

Phase 1 gathered feedback from different educational institutions in the City of London. Below is a summary of key findings from those conversations:

Commitment to Downtown

Institutions reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining a presence Downtown, with a range of programs currently offered, including hospitality, arts, and continuing education. While some programs are being phased out, most will remain. Significant investments have been made in facilities with City support, and institutions intend to continue maximizing their Downtown footprint. For example, Fanshawe has invested in state-of-the-art facilities and continues to operate a Downtown campus with a broad mix of programs, with an enrollment of roughly 1,200 students. Fanshawe also plans to adapt with more domestic programming and stronger ties to London’s growing tech, gaming, and digital media sectors.

Student Experience

Students value the Downtown campus and its facilities but raise concerns about safety (especially for evening classes), food access, and parking costs. International students often express initial hesitation about safety, though they adjust with time and support from security programs. Affordable food and grocery options remain limited.

Community Role

Educational institutions position themselves as strong Downtown partners, hosting dual-credit programs, community events, and collaborations with local employers. Student-run initiatives contribute to street life, and partnerships with local organizations demonstrate interest in shared use of space. Fanshawe’s student-run restaurant on Dundas and partnerships with groups such as Youth Opportunities Unlimited illustrate this role in activating the Downtown core.

Supports Needed from the City

Institutions emphasized the importance of investments in safety, transit, and infrastructure; support for new residential development and a Downtown grocery store; and continued collaboration to ensure Downtown campuses remain attractive destinations for learning and community life.

APPENDIX 7: CITY OF LONDON DOWNTOWN PLAN – SURVEY

About the Downtown Plan

Our Downtown is changing and growing quickly, and a new Downtown Plan will be created to help the City of London plan for the long-term future of Downtown. Please share your input that will help inform the development of the Downtown Plan. The survey should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. The survey is open from **June 2nd, 2025 to August 22nd, 2025.**

For any questions or issues, please email: dmp@london.ca

Demographic questions

If you are willing, please consider telling us a bit about yourself. *required*

- Okay, sure.
- No, thanks.

As part of our commitment to building healthy and safe communities, the City of London is collecting demographic data on a voluntary basis from individuals who participate. Collecting demographic information is essential to ensure the City is reaching a wide range of Londoners and delivering information in a way that is equitable. It also helps the City understand and address gaps in participation and gives us a more complete picture of who is being represented in the planning process. All information collected will be pooled together and would not be used to identify an individual person. Providing this information is completely optional. [You may skip any question.](#)

1. Postal Code:

2. What is your age group?

7-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44
45-54	55-64	65+	Prefer not to share	

3. I identify as:

Female	Male	Transgender		
Gender non-conforming		Prefer not to share		

4. Do you identify as a racialized person or a visible minority?

- Yes

- No
- Prefer not to share

5. Do you identify as Indigenous: First Nations, Metis, or Inuit?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to share

6. Do you identify as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to share

7. Based on the Human Rights Commission definition of a disability, do you identify as a person with disability?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/not sure
- Prefer not to share

8. Is your primary language at home a language other than English?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to share

9. What is your annual household income, before taxes?

- Under \$50,000
- \$50,000-\$100,000
- Over \$100,000

- Prefer not to share

10. Are you currently employed?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to share
- Please enter any other information you would like us to know about your identity.

QUESTIONS FOR ALL:

1. Thinking of your last three times you were in Downtown, what were they for? (Select up to three):

- Shopping, dining, beauty / wellness
- Running errands (e.g. bank, pharmacy, post office)
- Going to a municipal or government building
- Attending a community event or festival
- Arts and cultural attractions (museums, live music, etc.)
- Sports and entertainment (movie, hockey game, etc.)
- Recreation or leisure (e.g. walking, visiting a park)
- Sightseeing or showing someone around
- Work-related (e.g. office, business meeting, job site)
- I live in Downtown
- I rarely or never visit the Downtown
- Other (please specify)

2. What do you think are some of the key strengths of our Downtown today? (Select up to three)

- Local businesses and services
- Heritage buildings and unique character
- Walkability and transportation options
- Events and cultural/sports activities

- Recent investments in public spaces
- Green spaces and parks
- Other (please specify)

3. What are your three favorite places in Downtown London? (For example, restaurants, parks, or streets like Dundas Place)

4. How do you feel about the following aspects of Downtown (on a scale: Excellent, Good, Average, Poor, Very Poor):

- Diversity of entertainment (things to do)

Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
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- Diversity of businesses and services (most of my daily needs could be met Downtown)

Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
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- Activities for a range of ages or households (families, adults, seniors, students)

Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
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- Quality of streets, sidewalks, and public spaces (not including greenspace such as parks)

Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
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- Greenspace or parks including the riverfront

Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
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- Public transportation to Downtown

Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
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- Access to Downtown by car (as passenger or driver including on-demand such as Uber)

Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
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- Biking or walking to Downtown

Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
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If you rated any aspect as "poor" or "very poor", please expand on why and what could be To support in the development of the Downtown Plan, the following Quick Start Actions have been identified. These actions allow for immediate implementation while the Downtown Plan is being developed:

APPENDIX 8: QUICK START ACTIONS

To support in the development of the Downtown Plan, the following Quick Start Actions have been identified. These actions allow for immediate implementation while the Downtown Plan is being developed:

1 - Evaluate expanding the place-making mandate of Dundas Place to other strategic locations in the Downtown. Additional opportunities exist in Downtown for placemaking. Utilizing existing resources, the Dundas Place team can activate additional locations to increase vibrancy, attract new visitors, and diversify current programs. Possible locations include Victoria Park, Ivey Park, Golden Jubilee Square and Rotary Square.

Rationale: The existing programming and placemaking on Dundas Place and Market Lane has proved successful in bringing individuals to Downtown and activating otherwise under-utilized spaces. Through trial and error, the team at Dundas Place has identified successful approaches in Downtown that could be scaled or replicated in other locations to increase attendance, encourage individuals to visit multiple locations in Downtown, and test new programming to cater to under-served audiences such as residents or youth/students.

2 - Support patios and signage in Downtown to promote economic activity and vibrant streets. Assess the number of patios and new signage issued over a 24-month period and identify opportunities to streamline processes, improve communications and awareness of signage-related incentives, offer concierge services, target certain streets or areas of Downtown to create a clustering effect, or reduce fees to encourage more patios and generate more economic activity in Downtown. Consider a temporary, seasonal staff secondment to implement.

Rationale: A key aspect of activating Downtown is creating activity on the street that extends outside of storefronts, especially in the warmer months. Evaluations of patio programs have demonstrated an economic uplift for businesses and increased foot traffic from patios. Dundas Place was designed with consideration of patios and other activations. The City waived patio fees as a COVID relief program resulting in uptake in patios. An evaluation of patio and signage applications including outreach to recipients would identify opportunities to support more businesses and more visual signs of economic activity.

3 - Activate Rotary Square with moveable bistro chairs, tables and shade devices. The addition of moveable tables and chairs and small shade devices on Rotary Square will signal the completion of the square and the flexibility of patrons to make use of the space. In the long-term, stationary sunshades could be added once the positioning of temporary moveable furniture determines the ideal location of such elements while considering flexibility for use of the space for events and markets. Additional activation features, such as a stage for performances, as well as informal activities such as chess or other games could be added to enliven the square.

Rationale: The completion of the rebuild of Rotary Square provides an opportunity to refresh the informal use of the space. Currently the picnic tables are stationary and there is little shade in the warm months. Consider funding sources to purchase moveable bistro chairs and tables along with shade devices to support more casual use of the square and activation of the exterior

of the market to drive visitor attraction. This would also serve to offer more comfortable seating and shade in Downtown – a need that was communicated by individuals during engagement sessions. A limited number of bistro chairs and tables have been placed at various spots along Dundas Place for a positive outcome. Adding additional activation creates a vibrant space that encourages visitors to explore, linger, shop, and share with others about their positive experiences.

4 - Evaluate the 'Vacant Commercial Space Fit-out Grant' at the one-year mark (spring 2026) to identify uptake and opportunities for more enrollment. Evaluation should consider additional outreach and discussion with the business community, criteria adjustments, or new eligibility for current businesses with an existing lease period of not less than two years to update their space or add enhancements that would allow for expansion of services or product offerings.

Rationale: The 'Vacant Commercial Space Fit-out Grant' was created in spring 2025 to help businesses move into vacant downtown spaces by funding eligible renovations to support business incubation. Evaluation at the one-year mark can be used to assess eligibility criteria, uptake and potential updates to the program.

5 - Work with the City's Public Art and Monuments Program to enhance Dundas Place with projection artwork. Identify existing funding source(s), including a collaboration with a local arts organization or education institution to curate new projection artwork in Downtown. Package and promote the new projections as an experience in Downtown.

Rationale: Projection artwork has been tested at events such as Nuit Blanche as well as in other cities to brighten streets and Downtowns in the evenings and as part of a Winter Strategy. A small amount of funding would offer the opportunity to expand the program with more curated artists. Using projections in the Downtown can serve two purposes: 1) to highlight and support local artists including partnerships with local organizations and educational programs; 2) to brighten Downtown streetscapes making them feel more lively, illuminating dark areas to support feelings of safety, and highlighting architectural character. This is also an opportunity to initiate a stronger relationship with student organizations to help create student-friendly initiatives around the core.

6 - Identify coordinated information and staff between Dundas Place, Tourism London and Downtown London BIA for readily available information to visitors at a central location. To maximize impact, utilize the front space of Dundas Place to celebrate and provide information about the Downtown, such as a business directory, events listing, map, and historical information about the Downtown, and consider mirroring this on the myLondon app for Downtown. Information could be tailored to specific populations such as youth/students and Downtown residents, or organized around special event themes. This staff position could also be identified for other roles in activating Downtown.

Rationale: Based on engagement, the Dundas Place location office (179 Dundas Street) has the potential to offer information to visitors in addition to providing a public restroom. The space is centrally located and has a desk for information but no staff to act in this role. Conversely,

while Tourism London offers information, its doors are often locked and its location less central. Collaboration between Tourism, the City and the BIA to identify a role and position for this person at Dundas Place would fill the need for a one-stop location for visitors to receive information in a central place. Providing information about and celebrating the Downtown will help people (re)discover the interesting and unique sights and experiences in the Downtown.

7 - Test alternate venues to activate the core of Downtown including collaboration between the City, Covent Garden Market and Canada Life Place to support large-scale events.

Consider connecting Covent Garden Market and Canada Life Place with use of the parking lot at Canada Life, Golden Jubilee Square, Rotary Square and Talbot Street. As 2026 is London's 200th Anniversary, this could serve as an opportunity to test a location for a large event. Additional elements to consider include a road closure on Talbot Street between Dundas and King or York Streets, more programming on Golden Jubilee Square and the parking lot adjacent to Canada Life Place, and linking events to other public spaces such as the riverfront, RBC Place, and Victoria Park.

Rationale: The growth of events that have exceeded the capacity of current locations combined with the need to preserve the greenspace and tree cover in Victoria Park suggests that alternate locations are needed for large events in the Downtown. This approach helps activate other areas of the Downtown and makes greater use of existing spaces, distributing events more evenly throughout the core. Linking events across the Downtown will create more pedestrian traffic and encourage visitors to get to know more of Downtown London, including more economic activity.

8 - Enhance and communicate parking information and evaluate alternatives to the Honk app. Due diligence by staff to identify technology solutions for parking and wayfinding (app, digital signs, etc. including review of current commitments to the Honk app) to create ease of parking and efficiency to avoid frustration from drivers and lessen congestion caused by cars circling the Downtown looking for parking. Interim measures include exploring opportunities to link or create an API feed to Parkopedia, with the appropriate disclaimers, for efficiency purposes; and provide a digital map of all public and private parking lots offering hourly parking with rates including street parking in a user-friendly format on the City's website.

Rationale: The Honk app has been identified as challenging to use causing frustration for drivers in the Downtown. Other cities have piloted digital tools that enable a driver to identify parking by proximity to a final destination, cost and duration thus minimizing the time a driver must spend looking for parking and providing assurance of available parking before one arrives in the Downtown.

9 - Identify a regional bus or transportation depot/designated drop-off to consolidate opportunities for regional travel and additional drop-off points on Clarence Street with consideration for proximity to London Transit stops and access to VIA Rail. Continue discussions with regional providers to explore coordinated solutions and confirm interim steps with staff as part of planning for a long-term mobility hub under consideration by the City for 2027+.

Rationale: The arrival of several bus services since the closure of the Greyhound Bus service has resulted in uncoordinated regional bus services and the use of limited curb space for drop-offs happening in various locations in the Downtown. Coordination of drop-offs offer reliability for customers and ease of movement between transportation options (London Transit buses, VIA Rail).

10 - Pilot late night buses. Pilot (free) late night bus service to encourage use and test ridership patterns (consider for large events or strategic times to encourage more visits to Downtown).

Rationale: Through our engagement, we heard that buses that stop running at 11 pm or midnight especially on weekends significantly limits the ability of young adults and others who rely on public transit, such as service workers, to get home safely and inexpensively.

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Photo Source

City of London, 2025

CITY OF LONDON DOWNTOWN PLAN

BACKGROUND STUDY



Canadian
Urban
Institute

Institut
Urbain du
Canada

RE:PUBLIC
Urbanism

tate research

Oosterbaan Strategy



ARUP

divercities

LEADING MOBILITY

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