

FINAL REPORT

10-YEAR DOWNTOWN HAMILTON REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

CITY OF HAMILTON

MARCH 2026



Cultural Spaces
People and Places



Hamilton

This report was prepared by Cultural Spaces, a firm based in Ottawa that is dedicated to envisioning human and natural spaces differently for a sustainable future. Specialized in strategies for sustainable urban environments, protected areas, and heritage conservation. We partnered with CVLNS an urban design and planning firm based in Winnipeg that emphasizes collaboration to devise creative and sustainable solutions to existing and emerging challenges.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Downtown Hamilton is the city’s shared civic heart and front door: a place where Hamiltonians from every ward come for culture, services, work, and public life—and where visitors form their first impressions of Hamilton. The strategy argues that when Downtown feels safe, clean, and welcoming, confidence rises citywide; when it struggles, the impacts ripple outward into investment decisions, civic pride, and Hamilton’s reputation.

The case for action is practical and citywide. Downtown concentrates major economic and civic value: the Urban Growth Centre (UGC) includes roughly **13,000 residents** and over **28,000 jobs**, while the broader Community Improvement Plan Area (CIPA) includes roughly **31,000 residents** and remains a centre for institutions and employment.

Downtown’s assessed value is substantial—estimated at **~\$5B** in the CIPA and **~\$3.5B** in the UGC—representing roughly **5.1%** of Hamilton’s **\$93.8B** total assessment base (2025).

At the same time, visible social pressures have intensified: the strategy notes homelessness rising from approximately **1,200 (2024)** to **2,000+ (2025)**, with roughly **600 shelter beds** currently operated by the City and partners, underscoring the need for coordinated, compassionate, and sustained responses alongside public-order improvements.

A strategy designed to appeal across Council priorities. The document is intentionally not a “silver bullet” plan; it is a delivery framework built around visible basics, measured outcomes, and phased implementation that lets the City **try, learn, and scale what works**.

It emphasizes:

- **Back-to-basics delivery** (cleanliness, lighting reliability, repairs, visible presence) to restore confidence quickly.
- **Fiscal discipline and leverage** by aligning and sequencing existing programs and capital, and using partnerships and external funding to multiply municipal dollars.
- **Accountability** through a public dashboard / State of Downtown reporting so Council and residents can see what is improving, where, and at what unit cost.

Vision and approach. The vision is a Downtown that is safe, green, and welcoming. It hosts tree-lined streets, lively plazas, active ground floors, shaded transit stops, that are a destination for visitors, support main streets and businesses, and offer a stronger resident base to sustain street life day and night.

Implementation is structured so near-term actions are clearer and more delivery-focused, while later actions remain adaptable as conditions change and evidence accumulates.

Seven priorities give Council a clear, balanced agenda. The strategy’s priorities are framed to combine public confidence, economic renewal, governance/accountability, and longer-term city-building:

1. Increase safety and well-being for all (care, presence, design, not enforcement alone)
2. Drive transformation through coordinated investments (reduce silos; make investments feel cumulative)
3. Enable future opportunities (housing, adaptive reuse, climate readiness, infrastructure readiness)
4. Protect main streets (stabilize corridors through reinvestment and visibility during disruption)
5. Support economic drivers (jobs, institutions, talent attraction, workforce mobility)
6. Set up a Downtown-focused governance model (clear accountability, faster coordination)
7. Retrofit Downtown (conversion and reuse of existing assets; modernize what already exists)

Five transformative initiatives illustrate what “serious” looks like—without overcommitting upfront. The strategy uses a small set of high-impact initiatives (e.g., a rent-to-own pathway pilot; strategic redevelopment proof points; an incentives/approvals “acceleration engine”; main street lift programming and design; and new/improved public spaces) to show how the priorities can combine into visible outcomes and build momentum with partners.

What Council is being asked to do:

1. **Adopt the Strategy as a learning-by-doing implementation guide.**
Approve this Strategy as a practical roadmap, designed to test, learn, and scale what works, rather than a fixed blueprint. Actions will be refined as evidence and conditions evolve.
2. **Direct immediate delivery of visible, trust-building actions in the first 1–3 years.**
Signal clear support to prioritize early wins, cleanliness, quick repairs, lighting reliability, visible presence, support to businesses and residents, and consistent activation, so Downtown shows measurable progress quickly.
3. **Begin now to build the 3–5 year pipeline of consequential projects and programs.**
Instruct City staff to advance the studies, partnerships, approvals pathways, and capital sequencing needed to unlock catalytic redevelopment, conversion/retrofit projects, permanent main-street transformations, and signature public spaces in the next term.
4. **Commit to a blended funding approach: reallocation, program review, prioritization, and partnerships.**
Endorse implementation on the basis that resources will come from aligning and concentrating existing spending, reviewing programs to reduce duplication and improve performance, prioritizing capital investments for cumulative Downtown impact, and leveraging institutional, private, and provincial/federal partnerships.
5. **Make this a City leadership commitment, from Council direction to City Hall execution.**
Pair adoption with a clear expectation of coordinated delivery across departments, with defined accountability, shared performance reporting, and a culture of responsiveness so every City function that touches Downtown contributes to visible improvement and sustained momentum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Strategy was shaped through the time, insight, and commitment of many individuals and organizations who care deeply about the future of Downtown Hamilton. We extend our sincere thanks to the residents, business owners, workers, property owners, community organizations, and institutions who shared their experiences and priorities, and who helped ground this work in the realities of daily life Downtown.

We offer specific thanks to the City of Hamilton's Economic Development team for providing leadership throughout the process, guiding engagement, convening partners, and coordinating input from City staff across departments. Their stewardship helped translate a wide range of perspectives into a practical strategy focused on implementation, measurable outcomes, and coordinated impact. We also acknowledge the support of the City's senior leadership, whose direction and participation helped ensure the work was informed by operational realities and aligned with the City's broader priorities and service delivery responsibilities.

We acknowledge and thank the many partners and City divisions who contributed their time, data, operational expertise, constructive feedback, and who were actively engaged in sharing their reality and imagining things differently. Revitalizing Downtown is not the responsibility of any single group. It requires sustained collaboration, shared accountability, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

This Strategy reflects that shared effort, and we are grateful to everyone who contributed to its development.



1 INTRODUCTION

Hamilton has always been a city built on hard work, resilience, and quiet determination. Forged in its industrial roots, it is a city that knows how to build, repair, and reinvent, not through pretension, but through perseverance. Its people have weathered change and challenge with a steady focus on possibility, turning setbacks into momentum and effort into progress. This character runs through the city’s streets and skyline: in the repurposed factories now alive with artists and entrepreneurs, in the cranes that mark new growth, and in the deep pride Hamiltonians take in their community. Hamilton’s strength has never been about show; it has always been about substance, the conviction that the city’s best days are still ahead, built by the same hands that shaped its past.

At the heart of that spirit are Hamiltonians themselves: resilient, caring, and deeply connected to one another. Through every challenge, from economic shifts to social pressures, the people of this city have responded with compassion and determination. They have built networks of mutual support, led grassroots revitalization efforts, and shown that care for community is one of Hamilton’s defining strengths. This reputation for empathy and perseverance continues to attract people who want to make a difference, people who see Hamilton not as a finished product, but as a shared project.

Before the pandemic, Downtown Hamilton was on a clear upward trajectory. New businesses were opening, cultural venues were flourishing, and long-vacant buildings were coming back to life. The energy was palpable: people were choosing to live, work, and invest Downtown. Yet the pandemic disrupted that momentum, exposing vulnerabilities that had long existed beneath the surface. Today, downtown faces serious challenges: empty storefronts, safety concerns, social pressures, and shifting work patterns that have reduced daily foot traffic. In many ways, the downtown is in crisis. But this moment also presents an opportunity; to rethink how the city, its partners, and its people can come together to restore confidence and vitality in the core.

Downtown Hamilton is the city’s shared civic heart: the one place where Hamiltonians from every neighbourhood come together for culture, services, work, and public life. When Downtown feels safe, clean, and welcoming, it strengthens pride and confidence across the entire city; when it struggles, the impacts ripple outward—shaping investment decisions, perceptions of safety, and Hamilton’s reputation. Revitalizing Downtown is therefore not just about buildings or events; it is about restoring a Downtown that Hamiltonians choose to use every day and that visitors experience as a compelling front door to the city.

The desire to rebuild and care for Downtown remains strong. Business owners, property developers, cultural organizations, residents, and community advocates are ready to act but they cannot do it alone. They need a City that is a true partner: one that listens, collaborates, and removes barriers to good ideas. Revitalization requires coordination, shared responsibility, and trust. The City must work hand in hand with all those who are willing to invest in, care for, and champion Downtown aligning resources, policies, and creativity to spark renewal that is inclusive, lasting, and visible in every block.

This report does not claim to offer a silver bullet or a single, definitive solution. Downtown revitalization is complex, dynamic, and deeply human work. Instead, this strategy lays out a “path forward”, a framework for action, learning, and collaboration. It invites decision-makers, business owners, community partners, and residents to focus on outcomes rather than perfection, to test ideas, measure impact, and adjust along the way. Progress will come not from avoiding risk but from the courage to experiment, to try new approaches, and to learn together. By embracing this mindset, Hamilton can continue to evolve, resilient, compassionate, and confident in its ability to shape its own future.



2 WHY WE ARE REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN

2.1. What is a Downtown?

Downtowns emerged historically as the geographic and functional cores of urban life. They were compact areas where commerce, governance, transportation, and culture intersected. They were designed for proximity and exchange, concentrating banks, department stores, theatres, and civic buildings within walkable distances. This concentration gave downtowns a symbolic role as the “front door” of the city, the place that represented its economic strength, civic pride, and collective identity.

By the mid-20th century, downtowns had evolved into concentrated centres of administration, finance, and professional services, structured around the conventional 9-to-5 workday. They

also accommodated a growing concentration of cultural and entertainment assets, including museums, art galleries, theatres, arenas, restaurants, and bars, that extended activity into the evening and supported regional tourism and leisure economies. The urban form of these downtowns was increasingly shaped by automobile dependency: roadway networks were designed for high-capacity movement, parking supply became a central planning consideration, and land-use patterns adapted to facilitate vehicle access. This functional model produced a distinct temporal pattern of high daytime activity associated with office employment, complemented by evening and weekend visitation linked to events and entertainment, but limited continuous residential presence or around-the-clock use.

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In recent decades, downtowns have been redefined as multi-functional urban ecosystems that combine employment, culture, education, residential life, and social services within a dense, walkable environment. This redefinition has guided planning policy and investment, seeking to create downtowns that are active throughout the day and inclusive of diverse users. However, this vision is now under pressure. Structural shifts, such as hybrid work models, e-commerce, and the visible concentration of social and housing challenges in central areas, have disrupted established assumptions about how downtowns operate and what roles they should play in urban life. The result is an ongoing transition, in which cities must reassess how to sustain vibrancy and economic relevance amid changing patterns of use.

The vitality of downtowns is closely tied to perceptions of safety, cleanliness, and opportunity. Post-pandemic shifts have challenged these conditions: hybrid work has reduced daily office populations, retail patterns

have changed, and social pressures have become more visible in central urban spaces. As a result, many downtowns now face a transition period and are no longer defined solely by traditional economic activity, but by their ability to adapt and diversify.

Resilient downtowns are those that have embraced flexibility and innovation. They invest in housing to broaden their population base, support small and creative businesses to sustain local character, and enhance public spaces to foster inclusion and belonging. Increasingly, revitalization strategies emphasize collaboration, bringing together municipalities, property owners, community organizations, and residents to align investments and coordinate outcomes. The downtown becomes not just a business district, but a platform for civic partnership and experimentation.

Downtowns remain the last truly shared civic spaces. They are physical environments where people from all walks of life can encounter one

Figure 1- Hamilton, Canada West. From the mountain painting 1854. Credit: Library and Archives Canada, R13133-393.



another in meaningful, spontaneous ways. They are the social commons of urban life, where difference, creativity, and commerce intersect in tangible form. Yet the context around them is shifting again. The emerging industrial revolutions in automation, artificial intelligence, green energy, and digital connectivity, are transforming how cities create and distribute value. As production becomes more decentralized and knowledge work more virtual, downtowns must redefine their function. Their future relevance will lie not only in economic output but in their capacity to cultivate human connection, creativity, and collaboration, qualities that cannot be automated or digitized. Reimagined downtowns can serve as the physical and social infrastructure of the next economy: places that bring people together to innovate, deliberate, and build shared prosperity in an increasingly complex world.

2.2. Downtown yesterday and today

Hamilton emerged in the early nineteenth century as a centre of manufacturing and administration, rooted between the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario. Its rapid industrialization in the mid-1800s, driven by the railways and British immigration, gave rise to a dense commercial and working-class core. By the early twentieth century, Hamilton's factories supplied textiles, steel, and metal goods nationwide, while its Downtown supported a vibrant mix of retail hubs, civic institutions, and residential neighbourhoods. It was particularly strategic during the World Wars, with many weapons and goods being produced in the city's local industries.

However, the city's heavy reliance on manufacturing, especially steel, meant that it was especially vulnerable to the shifting global markets, and as the reliance on steel and manufacturing decreased, the city experienced a period of decline. After the 1950s, suburban expansion drew residents away from the urban centre, and the closure of textile mills and light-manufacturing plants reduced downtown employment. This economic slump, coupled with the loss of residential populations and a consistent workforce, as well as aging infrastructure, marked the beginning of a long cycle of decline.

Following the World Wars, leaders at the City of Hamilton attempted to respond to the deterioration of downtown areas with mid-century urban-renewal strategies rooted in modernist planning principles. From the 1950s through the 1980s, Hamilton sought to rebuild the city centre into a cultural and economic hub. Efforts included the widening of King Street, the creation of a one-way street grid to manage congestion, and the clearance of older houses and buildings to make way for large civic and commercial projects.

In 1959, the city focused on redevelopment and renewal of a central downtown area with changes to City Hall and the Court House. The construction of Jackson Square in the 1970s was a keystone in the urban renewal project for Hamilton, with the creation of a mixed-use project retail mall. Further developments around Jackson Square and along main transport corridors like King, James, and Bay Streets included notable areas like Hamilton Place (built in 1973 as a multi-purpose arts centre), the Hamilton Art Gallery (1977), and the Copps Coliseum (opened in 1985 as a large-scale sports arena). Green spaces in the city core were also modified, with Gore Park dramatically altered in 1983 with the removal of all original trees from the area to make space for a new type of urban park. Transportation hubs, like the Rebecca Street bus terminal, were demolished and replaced by new centres in an attempt to improve access and alternative transport systems.

These projects embodied this redevelopment approach, with the intent to replace aging structures with cultural and commercial spaces which would draw people, encourage new

Figure 2- An artist's sketch of the Murray Jones Downtown Urban Renewal Plan, 1965.

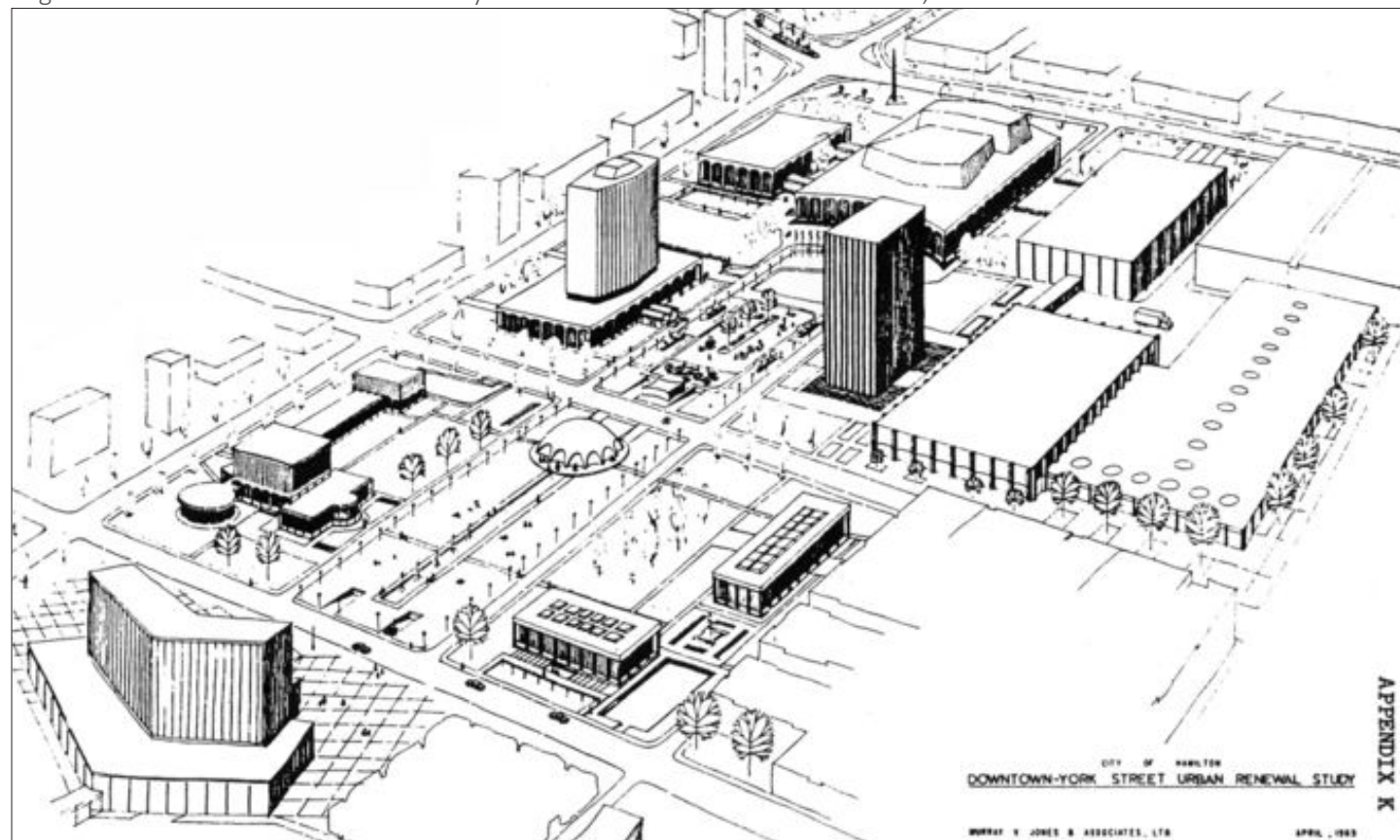


Figure 3- The intersection of King Street West and James Street, summer 1971. Credit: Phil Aggus.

investments, and restore civic pride. However, the large-scale changes and interventions succeeded mainly in demolishing entire blocks of historic buildings, displacing small businesses and erasing much of the local built urban fabric. The physical transformation was dramatic, but the hoped-for social and economic goals fell short, as the new monumental changes did not encourage residential growth or visitor interest in the downtown core as anticipated. This strategy takes the opposite approach: wherever possible, it treats Downtown’s historic fabric as an advantage, repairing, retrofitting, and adaptively reusing buildings to support today’s needs while maintaining character.

By the 1990s, the issues from Hamilton’s earlier renewal projects became more apparent as downtown continued to decline. Despite numerous projects and initiatives focused on revitalization attempts and investment, vacancy rates remained high and an ongoing lack of activity. Several local initiatives were instigated, such as the Downtown Hamilton Ideas Charrette (1996), Restore the Core (1997), and Core Heritage 2000, which revealed a growing desire for change. Residents and workers cited outdated infrastructure, parking challenges, high taxes, and a lack of coordinated planning, all of which had caused ongoing problems for a lively and engaging downtown.

Failure for these projects partly stemmed from the gap between planning intent and implementation. Projects were often designed separately, with limited integration between economic, social, and cultural goals. The emphasis on commercial and industrial redevelopment removed Hamilton’s downtown role as a residential and cultural centre. Moreover, as the steel industry declined through the 1980s–2000s, Hamilton lost major

employers, and with them, the stable working population that once sustained local businesses.

Before the pandemic, Downtown Hamilton was showing steady signs of economic recovery and renewal, supported by employment growth, decreasing office vacancies, and an increasingly vibrant street-level economy. According to the City’s 2019 *Downtown Office Vacancy and Employment Survey (PED20006)*, the Downtown Urban Growth Centre (UGC), bound by Queen Street, Victoria Avenue, Hunter Street, and Cannon Street, contained 26,305 jobs, marking a modest 0.7% increase (186 jobs) over the previous year. The density of jobs and residents reached 209 persons and jobs per hectare (pjh), reflecting progress toward Hamilton’s official plan target of 250 pjh by 2031. Most jobs were full-time (68.9%), followed by part-time (23.6%) and seasonal (7.5%), indicating a stable employment base in the city’s core.

The office market in late 2019 was in its strongest position in nearly a decade. The survey recorded 5.6 million sq. ft. of office space in the Downtown, of which 667,720 sq. ft. was vacant, an 11.9% vacancy rate, down 0.8 percentage points from 2018. This was the first time since 2011 that the vacancy rate fell below 12%, signalling improving economic conditions and renewed investor confidence. Most of the empty space was concentrated in a few large office towers, meaning smaller buildings and mixed-use properties were performing far better, with a “functional” vacancy closer to 7% if those large towers were excluded.

At street level, Downtown was visibly more active and appealing. The survey found a 9.9% commercial street-front vacancy rate, down from 10.4% in 2018. Some vacancies were temporary, caused by renovations or restorations, suggesting

an underlying trend of reinvestment and turnover rather than long-term decline. City staff noted “fewer vacancies across the board,” contributing to a more positive and vibrant public realm, with more active storefronts, pedestrian traffic, and signs of small-business confidence.

Taken together, these data show that Downtown Hamilton was on a clear upward trajectory immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Modest but steady job growth, rising employment density, and a tightening commercial real-estate market reflected increasing confidence among employers, investors, and residents. The combination of renewed investment, adaptive reuse, and consistent City monitoring positioned the core as a regional employment and service hub. The 2019 report painted a picture of a Downtown that, while still recovering from decades of economic transition, had entered a period of measurable improvement and cautious optimism, setting the stage for both the challenges and opportunities that would emerge in the years that followed.

Profile of Downtown today

Downtown Hamilton today reflects both the city’s enduring strengths and its complex urban challenges. Within the Downtown Urban Growth Centre (UGC), the heart of Hamilton’s core, the population is approximately 13,000 residents, while the broader Community Improvement Plan Area (CIPA) supports about 31,000 residents. The area continues to function as the city’s economic and institutional core, hosting over 28,000 jobs, a diverse range of businesses, and many of Hamilton’s most important civic, cultural, and educational institutions. Despite facing social and economic pressures in recent years, Downtown remains a vital centre of activity, creativity, and identity for the entire city.

The economic footprint of Downtown is significant. The combined assessed property value of the CIPA area is estimated at \$5 billion, while the UGC represents approximately \$3.5 billion. Together, the largest area accounts for



roughly 5.1% of Hamilton’s total assessment base, which stands at \$93.8 billion in 2025. Within the network of Hamilton’s Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), the Downtown Hamilton BIA and the International Village BIA together have an assessed value of about \$288 million, representing approximately 38% of the total assessed value of all BIAs citywide. This concentration of value underscores Downtown’s continued fiscal and economic importance to Hamilton, particularly in commercial and mixed-use properties that drive municipal revenues and local employment.

Demographically, Downtown Hamilton’s population skews younger and more diverse than the citywide average. A large proportion of residents are between 25 and 44 years old, reflecting the growing presence of young professionals, students, and newcomers drawn by relative housing affordability and proximity to services, transit, and culture. At the same time, Downtown also includes higher proportions of single-person and lower-income households, as well as residents facing housing precarity. This diversity is one of Downtown’s defining features, a blend of creative workers, long-term residents, newcomers, and vulnerable populations sharing the same urban space. The housing landscape is evolving rapidly: hundreds of new residential units were completed or under construction in 2024 and 2025, primarily in mixed-use and mid-rise developments along the LRT corridor and in adaptive reuse projects. These new homes represent early progress toward intensification goals and a partial response to housing demand pressures in the core.

At the same time, social pressures have intensified. The number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Hamilton has risen from approximately 1,200 in 2024 to over 2,000 in 2025, reflecting a deepening housing

and affordability crisis. The City and its partners currently operate roughly 600 shelter beds, including emergency, transitional, and low-barrier spaces, which meet only part of the need. Downtown remains the focal point of visible homelessness and social vulnerability in Hamilton, where housing instability intersects with public health, mental health, and addiction challenges. These conditions have heightened community concern and reinforced the need for coordinated, compassionate, and sustained action.

Despite these challenges, Downtown Hamilton continues to demonstrate resilience and potential. The growth in residential population, steady employment base, and enduring concentration of economic and cultural assets provide a foundation for recovery and renewal. The combination of historic architecture, creative entrepreneurship, and new investments in housing and infrastructure position the Downtown to play a leading role in Hamilton’s transition toward a more inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous future.

Downtown today is therefore a place of contrasts, a core rich in potential but burdened by visible inequities, a centre of economic productivity and civic pride that also bears the weight of the city’s most complex social issues. It remains Hamilton’s symbolic and functional heart, where the city’s economic vitality, creativity, and compassion converge. The path forward will depend on aligning investment, governance, and community partnerships to ensure that this heart continues to beat strongly for all who call Hamilton home.

Downtown Hamilton is not only a destination and employment centre. It is first and foremost a neighbourhood. A significant portion of Downtown households are renters, including single-person households, young workers, students, newcomers, and residents on fixed or

lower incomes. This matters for revitalization because renters experience Downtown differently than owners. They are often more exposed to housing-cost volatility, to maintenance conditions in older buildings, and to disruption from construction or neighbourhood change. When renters cannot find stable, well-maintained homes, Downtown loses the everyday population that sustains street life, supports local businesses, and strengthens safety through regular presence.

A Downtown strategy that is serious about revitalization must be serious about the lived experience of renters. This includes improving the quality and upkeep of the rental housing stock, strengthening pathways to affordability and stability, and ensuring that Downtown functions well for daily life, not only for events or visitors. Clean and safe streets, access to groceries and services, nearby green spaces, and a sense of belonging are not secondary issues. These are core conditions that shape whether residents stay, invest socially, and build community in the heart of the city.

2.3. Recent and current City initiatives

The City of Hamilton’s Cross-Departmental Downtown Revitalization Initiative Update (Report PW25053) provides a comprehensive overview of the City’s coordinated efforts to restore vitality, safety, and economic strength to the downtown core. The report emphasizes that a clean, safe, and vibrant downtown is essential to Hamilton’s civic identity and economic future. The initiative brings together multiple departments under a unified strategy focused on four key pillars: Beautification & Cleanliness, Tourism, Safety, and Economic Development.

The Beautification & Cleanliness pillar highlights

extensive service enhancements implemented since 2023, such as expanding litter collection to seven days a week, increasing street and bike lane sweeping, and launching a summer Downtown Clean Team. These actions are supported by new tools like a centralized graffiti-reporting system and a forthcoming public Graffiti Dashboard to promote transparency and community participation. The City has also stepped up enforcement around vacant and heritage buildings, property standards, and graffiti removal on private property, demonstrating a data-driven, proactive approach to maintenance and enforcement. Taken together, these efforts create a strong platform for a heritage-and-reuse approach: protecting buildings at risk, improving compliance and maintenance, and then pairing enforcement with incentives and streamlined pathways to bring buildings back into productive use.

Under the Tourism pillar, the City is investing in placemaking, cultural programming, and public art to re-establish downtown as a cultural and entertainment hub. Initiatives include gateway enhancements, Hamilton’s “Year of Music” in 2026 timed with the JUNO Awards, and adaptive reuse projects like Magnolia Hall. Public art and pedestrianization pilots on key streets are also being introduced to animate downtown and improve its appeal for both residents and visitors.

The Safety pillar outlines a coordinated approach that includes the Encampment Response Team, housing outreach through BIAs, infrastructure repairs, and enhanced road safety measures. The Hamilton Police Service’s Core Patrol initiative employs data-driven, community-based policing to target visible disorder and improve perceptions of safety. These efforts are complemented by new safety infrastructure such as lighting upgrades and the Hostile Vehicle Mitigation pilot for large public events.

Finally, the Economic Development pillar tackles structural challenges such as rising office vacancies, hybrid work, and low storefront occupancy. Key programs include the Downtown Office-to-Residential/Hotel Conversion Grant, the permanent Graffiti Grant Program. Continuous engagement with BIAs, local businesses, and property owners remains central to aligning revitalization with investment and growth. The report concludes that sustained cross-departmental coordination is critical to achieving a cleaner, safer, more inclusive, and economically vibrant downtown, one that reflects Hamilton's values of equity, diversity, and accessibility while strengthening civic pride and resilience.

2.4. Downtown matters

Downtown Hamilton is the heart of the city's identity and the centre of its civic, cultural, and economic life. It is the place where Hamilton's history meets its future, where the city's industrial legacy, artistic creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit converge. A strong Downtown signals a strong Hamilton: it represents the city's collective ambition, its confidence, and its capacity to adapt. Downtown is not simply another neighbourhood. It is a shared civic asset that connects residents from every part of the city. It is where people gather to celebrate, to create, to learn, and to engage, a physical expression of Hamilton's care, diversity, and community resilience.

Downtown is one of Hamilton's most productive and impactful urban areas. It generates a disproportionately high share of employment, investment, and cultural activity relative to its geographic size. Within roughly two square kilometres, Downtown Hamilton accommodates more than 28,000 jobs, 13,000 residents, and a concentration of municipal, health,

and educational institutions that serve the entire region. It is home to some of the city's most significant cultural assets, including the Art Gallery of Hamilton, FirstOntario Concert Hall, and the Hamilton Public Library, as well as a growing network of creative industries, restaurants, and small businesses. This density of economic and cultural activity creates powerful multiplier effects. Every dollar invested Downtown returns value city-wide through tax revenue, visitor spending, and employment growth.

Downtown also anchors Hamilton's transit, infrastructure, and housing systems. It is the hub of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) corridor, linking east and west Hamilton and connecting future growth nodes. Investments in Downtown infrastructure, from utilities to green stormwater systems, strengthen the city's ability to absorb new residents and businesses without expanding its footprint. As Hamilton grows, the Downtown's capacity for intensification and adaptive reuse will be key to meeting housing targets under both provincial and federal mandates. This makes Downtown renewal not just a local goal, but a strategic necessity for managing growth sustainably.

Downtown's heritage, its historic main streets, landmark civic buildings, and fine-grained storefront fabric, is not just nostalgia; it is a core economic asset. Heritage places signal authenticity, reduce 'anywhere-city' sameness, and provide the adaptable building stock that can host new housing, small businesses, and cultural uses. Protecting and reusing heritage buildings is therefore a practical revitalization tool: it strengthens identity, supports tourism and local pride, and creates a distinctive environment that attracts residents, talent, and investment.

Downtown's renewal is an adaptation opportunity. Every time the City rebuilds a street, upgrades utilities, or improves a plaza, it can reduce heat stress, manage stormwater more safely, and improve comfort for pedestrians and transit users. These are not "extra" features: they protect investment, reduce service disruptions, and make Downtown a more reliable place to live, work, and run a business as extreme weather becomes more common.

Equally important are the social and qualitative dimensions. Downtown is where Hamilton's commitment to care, inclusion, and equity is most visible and most tested. It is home to vital social services, affordable housing, and community organizations that support vulnerable populations. When Downtown succeeds, it creates pathways to opportunity for residents across the city. When it struggles, the impacts ripple outward. Investing in safety, housing, and social cohesion Downtown therefore strengthens Hamilton's entire social fabric.

Finally, a thriving Downtown is central to Hamilton's image and competitiveness. It is what visitors experience first, what students and entrepreneurs consider when choosing where to live or work, and what investors look to as a measure of civic vitality. Research consistently shows that strong downtowns contribute to higher citywide property values, increased tourism, and greater business confidence. For Hamilton, revitalizing the Downtown is about more than urban renewal. It is about affirming the city's trajectory, attracting the next generation of residents and businesses, and ensuring that prosperity is shared.

Downtown Hamilton: the heart of the city and the front door to the region

Downtown Hamilton matters because it is the city's most concentrated expression of identity, function, and daily life. It is where Hamilton's civic institutions, cultural assets, employment, services, and public spaces converge within a walkable footprint. Downtown is also where the city's strengths and challenges are most visible at the same time: the creative energy of artists and entrepreneurs, the presence of key venues and institutions, and the lived realities of affordability pressures and social vulnerability. This concentration is not incidental; it is precisely what makes Downtown consequential. Decisions made Downtown about safety, cleanliness, public space, housing, and investment, shape how Hamilton feels about itself and how others judge its confidence and direction.

Downtown is more than a destination. It is a neighbourhood with hundreds of businesses and tens of thousands of residents, many of whom are renters, and whose quality of life depends on the basics being done well: clean sidewalks, good lighting, safe and dignified public spaces, reliable transit access, and everyday amenities. When these conditions are strong, Downtown becomes the foundation of citywide vitality: residents stay longer, businesses invest, visitors linger, and the city benefits from a stable, active street life that supports safety through regular presence. When these conditions weaken, Downtown loses the everyday activity that sustains local commerce and civic pride, and the challenges of vacancy, disorder, and disconnection become more acute.

Downtown also matters because it is one of Hamilton's highest-value and highest-impact geographies. It concentrates jobs, cultural venues, public institutions, and tax-generating

properties in a compact area, producing strong citywide return when investments are aligned and visible. In practical terms, Downtown is where improvements to public space, streets, and building reuse can generate outsized effects by supporting main street businesses, strengthening the visitor economy, enabling housing intensification, and improving mobility across the city. This is why revitalization must focus on coordinated, cumulative action: when investments in safety, maintenance, housing, streetscape, and programming reinforce one another, the lift effect multiplies.

Downtown is Hamilton’s front door. For Hamiltonians, it is where the city’s pride is tested, where people decide whether their city feels cared for, welcoming, and worth spending time in. For visitors, including many from the Greater Toronto Area, Downtown is often the first and most memorable experience of Hamilton. The opportunity is not to imitate Toronto’s scale or polish, but to distinguish Hamilton through authenticity: heritage streets and industrial character, independent businesses, strong cultural venues, and an easy-to-navigate, human-scale downtown that feels discovered rather than manufactured. A revitalized Downtown can be both a daily living room for Hamiltonians and an authentic urban destination for visitors, a place that strengthens citywide identity while supporting economic growth and social well-being.



3.1. Engaging Hamiltonians

As directed by Council, the project made a concerted effort to engage Hamiltonians from all walks of life, hearing from hundreds of residents, business owners, creators, service providers, and community partners across the Downtown and beyond. This process captured a meaningful cross-section of perspectives, revealing both the challenges and the aspirations that define Downtown today. While there are still voices yet to be heard, the City and project team remain firmly committed to continuing engagement, ensuring that future phases of the strategy reflect the full diversity and lived experience of Hamilton’s community.

The first phase of the Downtown Hamilton Revitalization Strategy placed engagement at the centre of its approach. From the outset,

the process was designed to reach a broad and representative cross-section of those who live, work, create, and invest in the Downtown. Beginning in early March 2025, the project team, led by Cultural Spaces in partnership with City staff, developed an engagement structure that could both capture diverse perspectives and allow for open, honest dialogue. The goal was to listen before planning, to understand the lived experience of Downtown from multiple viewpoints, and to establish the foundation for an authentic, shared direction.

Between March and June 2025, engagement unfolded across multiple platforms and settings. Nine thematic conversations were organized around key areas shaping Downtown life: Arts, Culture and Entertainment; Small and Mid-Size



Figure 4- Invitation to “Our Future Downtown” public consultation portal. Credit: City of Hamilton.

Businesses; Transportation and Mobility; Safety and Social Services; Downtown Marketing and Tourism; Housing; Commercial Properties; and the Urban Fabric and Public Realm. Each session brought together an average of fifteen participants, representing local businesses, cultural organizations, social agencies, property owners, and residents. Several of these sessions were co-hosted with external partners, including Business Improvement Areas and established social-service and housing networks. In total, hundreds of stakeholders contributed to this phase, offering a credible cross-section of those most invested in Downtown’s future.

Public consultation complemented these thematic discussions and was reported to Council on July 9, 2025. This included a series of open houses, interviews, and pop-up engagements, as well as an immersive field component in which the team conducted four extended visits, ten days in total, walking the streets, visiting local establishments, and conversing informally with residents and business owners. This hands-on approach allowed the team to

experience Downtown’s rhythms by day and night and to capture perspectives often missed in formal consultations. Feedback from these sessions reflected both pride and frustration: pride in Downtown’s creativity, diversity, and entrepreneurial energy, and frustration at perceptions of neglect, safety concerns, and slow municipal responsiveness.

A series of working-group meetings with City departments, senior leadership, and the Hamilton Police Service further deepened the dialogue. These sessions explored internal coordination, data requirements, and the City’s role as both regulator and partner in revitalization. Two online engagement tools were also launched: one for City staff to share ideas and align on internal roles, and another for external stakeholders to highlight their own initiatives to make Downtown more welcoming. Together, these digital platforms expanded reach and accessibility, ensuring that participation was not limited to those able to attend in person.

This first phase confirmed that Hamiltonians care deeply about their Downtown and want to be active participants in its renewal. Stakeholders consistently expressed a desire for better communication with the City, clearer priorities, and a sense of shared ownership in the revitalization effort. The engagement findings presented to Council in July 2025 highlight both the strength of local commitment and the urgency for the City to work hand-in-hand with residents, businesses, and institutions to restore confidence and momentum.

Following the presentation to Council, engagement entered a second phase focused on crafting the vision, principles, transformative ideas and early actions for the strategy. The project team reached out to the original stakeholders and partners to test emerging ideas and refine priorities. These discussions took place through a combination of in-person meetings, virtual meetings, and ongoing online feedback channels hosted on *Engage Hamilton*. The intent was to maintain continuity, strengthen relationships, and ensure that the strategy evolved collaboratively rather than being imposed top-down. This iterative engagement continues to reinforce the shared ownership of Downtown’s future and the collective responsibility for implementing meaningful, lasting change.

What we heard

Across all stages of engagement, one message was consistent: people care deeply about Downtown Hamilton. Residents, businesses, artists, community organizations, and service providers spoke with pride, frustration, and hope. They described Downtown as both a neighbourhood and a destination. It is a place that reflects Hamilton’s diversity, creativity, and resilience, but also one that faces significant challenges requiring sustained attention and coordinated action.

Stakeholders see Downtown as a living community, not just a commercial centre. It is home to tens of thousands of residents, many of them renters, creators, and small business owners, and the livelihood of hundreds of independent entrepreneurs. Renters and other residents have raised consistently the importance of the basics of daily life Downtown: the need for clean and well-lit streets, reliable building maintenance, and safer and more comfortable public spaces, especially near transit stops, main corridors, and civic destinations. Many residents and businesses described feeling that their quality of life depends on quick response to small problems, like graffiti, broken lighting, litter, damaged sidewalks, before they become defining features of the Downtown experience. Renters also emphasized the importance of everyday amenities like grocery options, accessible green space, places to sit and gather, schools, and inclusive community activity, because these needs cannot be met by a neighbourhood that is designed primarily around 9-to-5 workers or special events.

People value Downtown’s walkability, heritage buildings, and cultural energy, but they also want it to function as a complete neighbourhood. People also linked heritage to everyday livability: human-scale blocks that feel walkable, older buildings that can host independent businesses and cultural uses, and streets that ‘feel like Hamilton’ rather than interchangeable. For many, Downtown’s greatest strength is its sense of authenticity and human scale, the feeling that it belongs to everyone.

At the same time, participants voiced strong feelings of neglect and disconnection. Many described frustration with the visible deterioration of the public realm, the concentration of social challenges, and a perception that the City has not consistently prioritized the area. Stakeholders expressed a need for improved communication, clearer decision-making, and greater alignment between civic priorities and community-led efforts. They want a City that listens, responds, and acts, one that matches the care and investment that residents and businesses already demonstrate daily.

Throughout the consultations that followed the July 2025 Council presentation, participants also emphasized a desire for clarity and collaboration in shaping a shared vision. They want a revitalization strategy that is practical, inclusive, and transparent. The strategy must build confidence through visible progress and steady, coordinated effort. Discussions about draft principles revealed a strong preference for a “people-first” approach: maintaining and caring for what exists, encouraging initiative, improving safety and accessibility, and supporting those who contribute to the social and cultural fabric of Downtown.

Finally, there is a clear collective aspiration for Downtown to once again reflect Hamilton’s pride and potential. Stakeholders want a Downtown that welcomes everyone, where residents feel safe, where businesses can thrive, and where the City demonstrates leadership through partnership and presence. They recognize that transformation will not happen overnight, but they share a readiness to collaborate, experiment, and take ownership of the process. They also wish to see immediate action on critical matters as collective frustration has reached a peak.

2.3. Methodology

The methodology for the Downtown Hamilton Revitalization Strategy has been guided by a sustainability framework that considers the cultural, economic, social, and environmental dimensions of Downtown life as interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The work recognizes that Downtown is both a reflection of Hamilton as a whole and a vital contributor to its broader prosperity and identity. A strong, inclusive, and resilient Downtown supports the success of the entire city, just as the city’s overall health shapes the experience of its core. From this perspective, Downtown is understood not as a separate district but as a living expression of Hamilton’s collective ambition: a place where investments in culture, infrastructure, and community directly benefit residents citywide. Practically, this includes integrating climate adaptation into the same decisions that shape revitalization, streetscape design, public space renewal, building retrofits, and infrastructure sequencing, so resilience is delivered through everyday city-building. This framework ensures that the strategy integrates people, place, and prosperity in a coherent and balanced way.

This is an mission-oriented strategy that is different from a traditional planning document. It is intended to set a clear course for change by focusing on practical outcomes, measurable progress, and visible results. At its foundation lies the belief that good process is essential to good outcomes. Effective revitalization depends on process that is transparent, well-coordinated, and rooted in shared purpose, one that builds momentum and confidence. A sound process is neither so slow and fragmented that progress stalls, nor so reactive that opportunities are missed or decisions are made without lasting benefit. The direction provided through this

strategy is therefore one of balance: deliberate in design, but agile in execution to ensure that the City acts decisively while maintaining the discipline and collaboration required to deliver meaningful, long-term change.

To inform this work, the project team gathered and analyzed a comprehensive set of the most current and credible data available. Quantitative and qualitative information were brought together to describe Downtown’s realities from multiple perspectives. Demographic and socioeconomic data were reviewed to understand the people who live Downtown, their changing needs, and how they experience their community. Business and employment data were analyzed to assess the scale, diversity, and resilience of the local economy, alongside property and land-use records that reveal investment patterns and the structure of Downtown’s economic base.

In parallel with this local data analysis, the team looked at revitalization initiatives and strategies across Canada. This included examining approaches in Ottawa, Winnipeg, London, Montreal, Calgary, Victoria, Halifax, and Edmonton, cities that, like Hamilton, are addressing similar challenges in their downtowns. The review explored policies and projects related to a breadth of issues including homelessness and supportive housing, adaptive reuse and office-to-residential conversions, activation of entertainment and cultural districts, and the design and management of public spaces. These comparative insights provided valuable context for understanding how other municipalities are balancing economic development, social equity, and public realm renewal in post-pandemic environments.

The analysis of these external examples helped

identify transferable practices and innovative models that can inform Hamilton's path forward. While there are a range of ideas and solutions that can be gleaned on the entire scope of Downtown challenges, this analysis focused on a selection of critical solutions relevant to priorities for Hamilton. Lessons were drawn from both successful interventions and ongoing challenges.

The methodology also included a review of data related to safety, mobility, and accessibility, drawing on collaboration with municipal departments, the Hamilton Police Service, and social-sector partners. These datasets, paired with observations from a number of site visits, offered insight into how people move through and experience Downtown, and how perceptions of safety and maintenance align with measurable conditions.

Finally, recognizing that Hamilton's Downtown is as much a cultural hub as it is an economic one, data on arts, cultural activity, and tourism were analyzed to capture the broader creative and experiential economy and understand how Downtown's cultural life drives visitation, identity, and economic impact.

Together, these lines of inquiry have produced an integrated, multi-dimensional understanding of Downtown Hamilton's current reality. The resulting analysis not only identifies challenges but also defines opportunities for immediate, coordinated action.

Strategic Structure

The Downtown Hamilton Revitalization Strategy is organized around a clear and connected structure that moves from vision to implementation. Each level of this structure serves a specific function, and together they provide an organized and flexible framework for coordinated action.

The **Mission** defines the purpose of the Strategy and is a reminder of why this revitalization work is being done.

The **Vision** expresses the shared aspiration for what Downtown Hamilton should become over the next decade.

The **Principles** establish the values and operating standards that guide decision-making across the Strategy. They are particularly powerful when adopted within the municipal organization to focus attention, align resources, and improve coordination across departments. By providing a consistent framework for evaluating choices and setting priorities, the Principles help ensure that the City's actions are coherent, transparent, and responsive. Beyond City Hall, they serve as a shared reference point for stakeholders, enabling businesses, community organizations, and residents to work toward a common direction grounded in mutual understanding and accountability.

The **Levers** identify the key sectors and assets that have the greatest potential to influence change and generate a lift effect across the Downtown ecosystem. These include areas such

as arts and culture, housing and development, small business and entrepreneurship, mobility and public space, and the renewal of civic and cultural infrastructure. When investments are aligned within these interconnected levers, their impacts multiply.

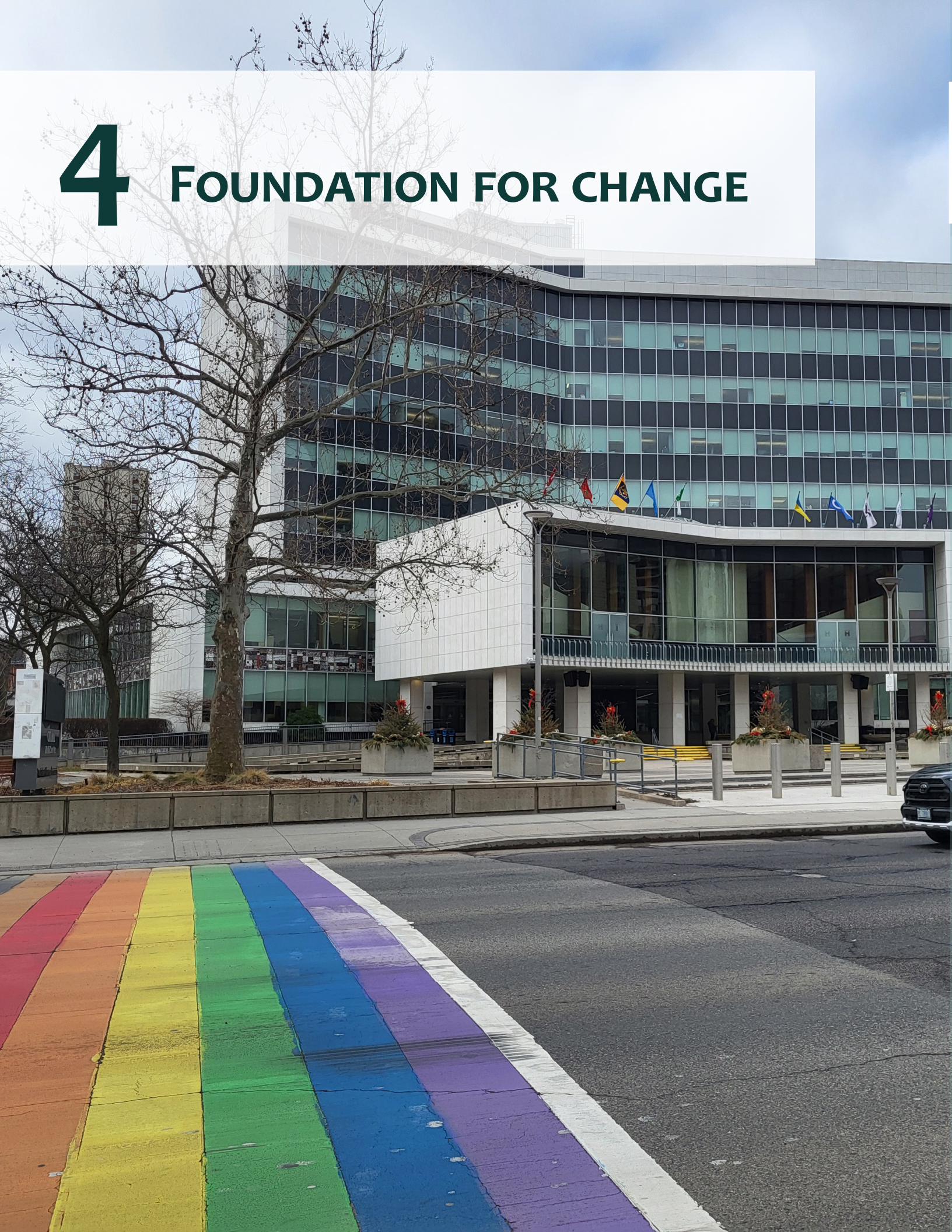
The **Priorities** translate this framework into a focused set of specific activities to be completed within three to five years. They concentrate resources and coordination where immediate results can be achieved and confidence restored, while laying the groundwork for longer-term transformation.

The **Transformative Initiatives** represent high-impact, cross-cutting projects combining these levers to produce visible and lasting results. They are efforts that can redefine how Downtown functions and feels.

The **Actions** operationalize the priorities through clear, implementable steps specifying leadership, partnerships, timelines, and potential cost. A set of proposed **Key Performance Indicators** offer measurable outcomes to ensure accountability and progress.

This structure ensures that the Strategy functions as both a directional framework and an implementation roadmap. It connects long-term ambition to short-term delivery, linking vision and evidence to tangible outcomes. By aligning values, levers, and initiatives within a coherent system, the Strategy provides Hamilton with a unified approach to revitalizing Downtown that recognizes its complexity, harnesses its assets, and directs collective effort towards sustainable citywide benefits.

4 FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE



Mission

Reignite Downtown’s potential by addressing its decline and transforming it into the authentic, renewed heart of the city.

Vision



Downtown Hamilton is a **safe, green and welcoming core** where tree-lined streets, lively plazas, exceptional artistic, cultural, food-related and entertainment venues, and shaded transit stops make it easy to walk, roll and linger day and night. **Mixed-income homes**—including a strong share of permanently affordable, especially to support Downtown’s work force, and non-profit housing—sit above active, transparent ground floors, bringing **more neighbours onto the sidewalks and eyes onto the street**. Storefronts are full, with a curated mix of local shops, markets and restaurants that spill onto parkettes and promenades, while music, art and festivals animate evenings and weekends. **Streets feel cared for**—well lit, clean and accessible—with ambassadors, outreach teams and businesses working together so everyone feels comfortable and supported. Frequent transit and seamless bike connections knit the district to the wider city, and clear wayfinding celebrates Hamilton’s arts, cultural and culinary scene. Downtown residents can build stable lives with access to daily needs, green space, and a welcoming community experience.

The exciting and **creative qualities of Hamiltonians are on full display** to attract visitors from outside the city and contribute to a positive reputation. Downtown is **home to venues, destinations, and businesses that are unique in the city**. The result is a Downtown where Hamiltonians of all ages and incomes choose to live, visit and invest—often, happily and for longer.

The following principles, when applied together, help guide decisions for maximum impact in revitalizing Downtown. They are a reminder of ‘why we are doing this’ as actions and initiatives are proposed and implemented. They help get action underway.

a. Address the basics

The building blocks of a thriving Downtown, namely the condition of public assets, safety, and cleanliness, are taken care of and prioritized.

This principle focuses the priorities on laying down strong foundations for everything else to be built on. The condition of sidewalks, parks, and other public assets and their ongoing maintenance are key to motivating people to come, to invest, and to get a positive impression of Downtown. Equally important is the feeling of safety which is balanced by urban design, the ongoing visible presence of City authority, enforcement of rules, and inclusive activities and events.

b. Generate value

Downtown generates social and economic value for Hamilton.

This principle focuses on Downtown having a purpose for its residents and for the city as a whole. Decisions lead to positive social and economic outcomes, including fewer unhoused individuals, accessible services, increased affordable housing, new creative hubs, diverse entertainment destinations, needed community assets, and a favourable business environment.

c. Invest in people

Resources are spent on supporting individuals, businesses, and the community.

This principle focuses on directing resources where they matter most to reinvigorate Downtown which includes supporting initiatives, activities, assets, and programmes that help people develop their full potential with positive ripple effects on Downtown.

d. Drive change

Decisions are made that lead to meaningful and desired change.

This principle emphasizes the commitment to change through leadership. This includes encouraging initiative, looking for authenticity in experiences and assets (i.e. it makes sense for Hamilton and its citizens), and the ability to make difficult, impactful and timely decisions.

e. Make it work

Take action and avoid waiting for the perfect circumstances.

This principle is an invitation to spend more time and resources on action and implementation than on policy design and process. The intent is to focus on impact and outcome so that change can occur. The context of action may not be perfect or ideal but it should not be a reason to stop, to avoid taking initiatives, and to try new things.

f. Be positive

How we communicate about, plan for, and intervene in Downtown reinforces positive change.

This principle requires a sustained and conscious effort to develop a positive narrative around Downtown and the city. This includes aiming for excellence, believing in the city’s identity, being assertive with talents and abilities, expecting the best, communicate City and partner successes, embracing change, and demonstrate how things are changing.

g. Fix it

Small and big issues are fixed in a timely manner without waiting for ‘the big project that’s coming’

This principle leads to action and supports a positive approach to decisions. If something is broken or not working, fix it before it becomes a negative. It encourages organizations and individuals to address the problems or let others who can address them perform. It also stresses the importance of not waiting or delaying before taking action, not always waiting for the ‘big project’ to be underway before addressing critical things, like sidewalks, city lights, roads, or graffiti.

h. Work together

A thriving city is the result of a diversity of citizens, organizations, public and private decision-makers working together.

This principle commits to a shared governance model where each of the private, public, individual and stakeholder contributors to a city’s fabric work together around a shared vision and these principles. Each contributes its strengths and leverages the other’s contributions. This includes considering private and public partnerships, measuring the public impact of private investments, and decentralizing action. The city as a whole owns Downtown and celebrates its urban experience.

i. Pride

Expect quality and keep things tidy.

This principle sets the expectation that anything being built, designed, or improved, whether by the private or public sector, should be something that Hamiltonians are proud of. Stepping into Downtown should feel comfortable, clean, and positively stimulating for the senses. It enhances the well-being of its residents. Downtown is where Hamilton welcomes visitors and like a home expecting guests, what can be experienced from the public realm is always clean and maintained.

Principles



5 LEVERS OF CHANGE

5.1. What is a lever?

Levers are the key sectors, systems, and assets through which the City and its partners can influence the course of Downtown Hamilton’s revitalization. They represent the domains of action where focused investment and coordination can produce a lift effect to improve how Downtown looks, feels, and functions. Each lever reflects an essential part of the Downtown ecosystem: Aesthetics and Beautification; Connectivity and Transportation; Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment; Development Environment; Economic Opportunities; Main Streets; Public and Green Spaces and Assets; Public Safety; and Residents, Visitors, and

Workers. Together, these areas define the physical, social, and economic foundations of a thriving Downtown and serve as the mechanisms through which meaningful change can occur.

The levers are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Investments in one often strengthen outcomes in others. For example, improving Public and Green Spaces enhances Aesthetics and Beautification, supports Economic Opportunities, and contributes to Public Safety by increasing activity and visibility. Similarly, a strong Development Environment enables new housing and adaptive reuse, while Cultural Assets and Entertainment attract people and investment to support local businesses. By intentionally

aligning these levers, rather than approaching them as separate initiatives, the City can create a coordinated, systemic approach to revitalization. This integrated perspective ensures that progress in Downtown Hamilton is not incremental or isolated but cumulative, producing lasting benefits that extend across the entire city.

Each of the levers is accompanied by a check list to guide actions and to help ground the effective use if these levers. It answers this question: if we’re pulling this lever well, what should be true on the ground?

5.2. Aesthetics and Beautification



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Aesthetics and beautification are powerful levers of revitalization because they shape how people feel about, experience, and value Downtown. The visual quality of streets, buildings, and public spaces communicates confidence and care and it signals that a place matters. Clean, well-maintained, and visually engaging environments attract visitors, invite investment, and encourage people to spend time, not just pass through. In Downtown Hamilton, targeted investments in design, lighting, landscaping, and building façades can transform perceptions, strengthen safety, and enhance the daily experience for residents, workers, and tourists alike. Beautification also fosters civic pride and stewardship: when the environment is attractive and inviting, people are more likely to care for it and participate in its renewal. Beautification should treat heritage features, historic façades, masonry, signage patterns, and landmark streetscapes, as priority assets for care, lighting, and repair, because they are the quickest way to make Downtown feel distinctive and well looked-after. Beyond appearance, aesthetics are an expression of Hamilton's identity, its creativity, resilience, and industrial character, transforming the Downtown into a visible statement of the city's aspirations and values.

IMPACT

Increase in visitors, increase in spending, increase in sense of wellbeing, collective pride

CHECKLIST

- Streets and sidewalks are **consistently clean** (litter, gum, debris addressed on a predictable cycle)
- Graffiti is removed quickly**, and repeat hotspots are visibly improving
- Building frontages show **care and pride** (façades maintained, blank walls treated, lighting functional)
- Greenery is visible and maintained** (trees, planters, seasonal planting, watering plan)
- Public art is **protected, promoted, and legible** (wayfinding, lighting, maintenance)
- "Fix-it" issues are resolved quickly (broken furniture, cracked pavers, missing bins)
- Key arrival points and gateways feel **welcoming and coherent** (signage, lighting, cleanliness)

Example: Philadelphia, PA (United States) (Mural Arts Philadelphia)

Philadelphia's Mural Arts program is a strong example of beautification used as a city-scale revitalization tool because it is not treated as occasional decoration, it's treated as a repeatable public program with delivery capacity. Founded in **1984**, the initiative has produced **nearly 4,000 artworks** that transform public spaces through collaborative projects that involve artists and community partners. The key outcome here is scale and permanence: the cumulative volume of projects makes "care and pride" visible across many blocks, turning blank walls and neglected surfaces into civic assets.



Figure 5- Mural in Philadelphia. Credit: Beyond My Ken

5.3. Connectivity and transportation



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Connectivity and transportation are the structural backbone of Downtown vitality. A successful Downtown must be easy to reach, safe to move through, and pleasant to explore. Efficient transit systems, walkable streets, and cycling infrastructure connect people to jobs, services, and culture while reducing congestion and emissions. Transit stops are shaded/cool and safe during extreme weather; key walking routes have shade, drainage, and winter maintenance. The arrival of the LRT creates an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine Downtown’s mobility network, shifting from car-dominated corridors to multi-modal, human-centered streets that encourage economic and social activity. Strengthening east–west and north–south connections will enhance accessibility between neighbourhoods, institutions, and attractions, ensuring that Downtown serves as a true regional hub. Improving connectivity is not only about moving people efficiently, but about linking opportunity, accessibility, and inclusion in the heart of the city.

IMPACT

Increase in visitors, increase in spending, increase in services, increase in safety

CHECKLIST

- Downtown is easy to reach by **transit, walking, cycling, and car** (clear access, minimal confusion)
- Transit stops are **safe, lit, sheltered, and dignified** (seating, shade, cleanliness, visibility)
- Pedestrian routes prioritize safety: **crossings, curb ramps, sidewalk continuity**
- Cycling connections are continuous and protected where possible; bike parking is available
- Construction impacts are managed: **predictable detours, signage, safe routes maintained**
- Curb space is organized (loading, deliveries, drop-off, accessible parking)
- Wayfinding is clear for all users (including visitors): **routes to civic/cultural**
- anchors are legible**

Example: Montréal, QC (Canada) (Express Bike Network / REV)

Montréal’s Express Bike Network (EBN/REV) shows how a city can change core-area access by committing to a network that is coherent, legible, and continuous rather than scattered. The EBN is a **191-kilometre** protected bike network planned as **17 routes** that is **accessible year-round**, explicitly designed to connect points of interest with safe, efficient cycling infrastructure. The “numbers outcome” is important: the city can point to a defined network footprint and route count, which makes it easy to communicate progress and to close remaining gaps over time.

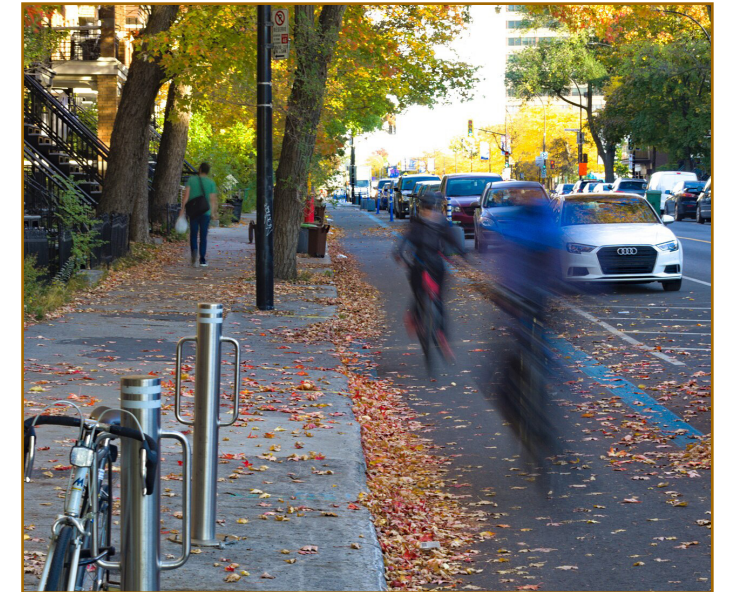


Figure 6- Montreal’s REV. Credit: JBouchez

Example: Toronto, ON (Canada) (Queens Quay revitalization: streetcar + cars + pedestrians)

Toronto’s **Queens Quay revitalization** is a strong “balanced” connectivity precedent because it deliberately restructured a major waterfront corridor to work for **public transit, cars, pedestrians, and cycling** at the same time, without turning it into a transit-only or car-free street. The project rebuilt **1.7 kilometres** of Queens Quay (Bay St. to Yo-Yo Ma Lane) into a “showpiece waterfront boulevard” with improved pedestrian, cycling, and transit facilities while still accommodating vehicle traffic.



Figure 7- Toronto’s Queens Quay. Credit: Natural RX

Mechanically, the design is explicitly multimodal and spatially legible. The corridor is therefore “place-first” in experience, with wide promenades, shade, and continuous walking/cycling, while remaining a functioning access route for transit operations and essential vehicle movement.

5.3. Connectivity and transportation

The map that follows highlights Downtown Hamilton’s current and projected transportation, transit, and connectivity network, the system that determines how people arrive, move through, and experience the core. It illustrates today’s key mobility infrastructure, including major corridors and downtown transit hubs, and it also points to the step-change that will come with the Hamilton LRT: a new rapid-transit spine running through the heart of the city that will reshape travel patterns, intensify activity around stops, and raise expectations for street design, wayfinding, and the quality of the public realm.

This map also reinforces a central implementation principle of the Strategy: bringing more people Downtown depends on two related conditions. First, Downtown must be easy to access by public transit and individual vehicles, with reliable day and night transit service and clear, predictable routes for drivers, deliveries, and pick-ups, especially during periods of construction and change. Second, once people arrive, Downtown must be enjoyable to be in: reducing friction and conflict between different road users, improving safety for walking and cycling, and making it easy to connect destinations on foot through comfortable routes, clear crossings, lighting, and wayfinding. The City is not starting from zero: the directions established in the Downtown Streets Plan, Hamilton’s Cycling Master Plan, the Vision Zero Action Plan, and the Complete, Livable, Better Streets Policy and Framework provide the policy foundation for a safer, more people-focused Downtown network. The opportunity through this Strategy is to align these tools with LRT delivery and main-street redesign so mobility supports experience, creating streets that function as both connectors and public spaces, and a Downtown where key civic, cultural, and commercial destinations feel seamlessly linked.

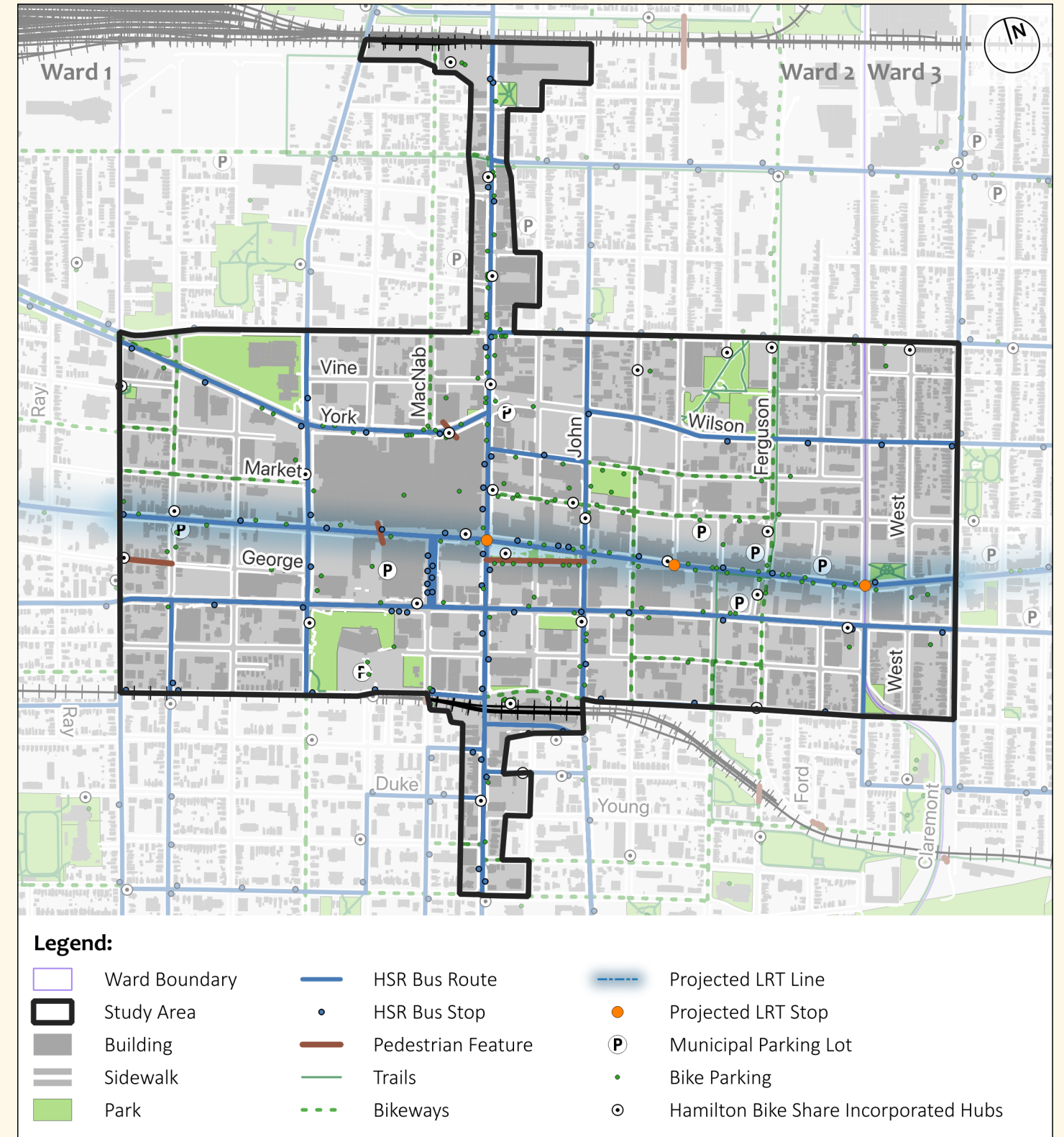
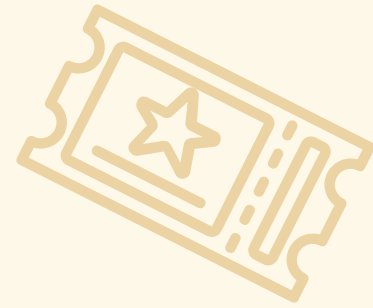


Figure 8- Map showing existing and proposed public transportation links. Credit: Cultural Spaces.

5.4. Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Culture and entertainment are the lifeblood of great downtowns. They generate energy, attract people, and define a city's character. Downtown Hamilton is home to many of the city's most important cultural and entertainment institutions and creative enterprises, including galleries, theatres, festivals, live music venues, and the arena. These assets are key to attracting visitors, residents, and talent, and to building a sense of belonging and civic pride. Investing in cultural programming, events, and spaces brings streets to life and supports the creative economy that fuels innovation and growth. Strengthening Hamilton's cultural ecosystem Downtown reinforces its identity as a creative, welcoming, and distinctive city, while supporting tourism, small business, and community cohesion.

IMPACT

ROI per \$, number of jobs

CHECKLIST

- There is a **reliable year-round rhythm** of events (not just one-off activations)
- Downtown has a clear **cultural "spine" or loop** connecting venues and public spaces
- Small and mid-size venues are supported (permitting ease, noise management clarity, promotions)
- Public spaces are programmed to be **inclusive and welcoming** (families, youth, seniors, newcomers)
- Cultural participation is visible across seasons (winter programming included)
- Partnerships with institutions are active (AGH, concert hall, library, colleges, local orgs)
- Culture strengthens night-time vibrancy **without excluding** residents and vulnerable populations

Example: Pittsburgh, PA (United States) (Cultural District)

Pittsburgh's Cultural District illustrates how clustering cultural activity can anchor downtown vibrancy after office hours. The district is described as a **14-square-block** area in the heart of Downtown that includes **over 90 retail shops, 50 dining establishments, seven theaters, eight public parks and art installations, and a dozen art galleries**. The outcome here is legibility and critical mass: the density of venues and supporting businesses creates a reliable reason to visit in the evenings and on weekends, and it makes downtown "easy to choose" as a destination.



Figure 9- Pittsburgh's Cultural District at night. Credit: Ronald C. Yochum JR.

5.4. Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment

The map that follows illustrates Downtown Hamilton’s arts, culture, and entertainment ecosystem, a network of venues and destinations where people experience live music, theatre, festivals, exhibitions, and nightlife, alongside the institutions and community anchors that make culture sustainable day to day. It highlights not only dedicated cultural venues and performance spaces, but also educational institutions, recreation and community centres, libraries, and places of worship, which often function as gathering spaces, hosts for performances and exhibitions, and sources of volunteer and community leadership. Together, these places create the conditions for a lively Downtown: a mix of programmed destinations and everyday “third places” that bring people into the core across different times of day and seasons.

The purpose of mapping these assets is twofold. First, it shows the existing concentration of experiences that makes Downtown Hamilton distinctive, an intensity of venues and community anchors within a walkable area that can be strengthened through better wayfinding, a coordinated calendar, and public realm improvements that connect people comfortably between destinations. Second, it helps identify opportunities to better support the creators who make Downtown’s culture possible: spaces for rehearsals and production, affordable and flexible venues, streamlined permitting for pop-ups and events, and partnerships with institutions that can provide stable programming and audience development. By treating these cultural destinations and community anchors as a connected ecosystem, the City and partners can strengthen Downtown’s identity, grow evening and weekend activity, and ensure that artists and cultural organizations have the conditions they need to thrive.

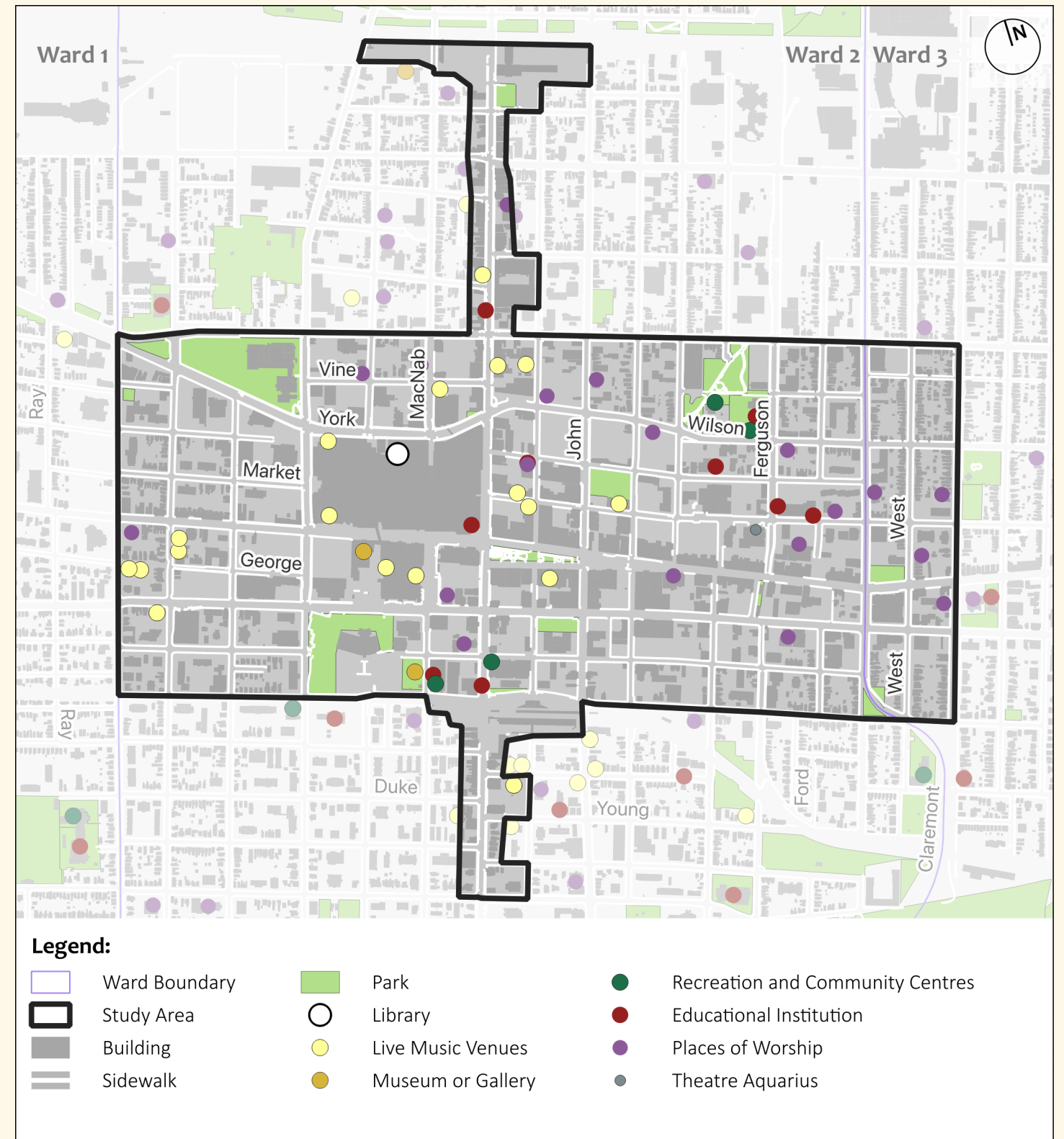


Figure 10- Map Showing Cultural Venues in Downtown Hamilton. Credit: Cultural Spaces

5.5. Development Environment



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The development environment determines how easily and effectively revitalization can occur. It includes the policies, approvals, incentives, and partnerships that shape what gets built and how. A streamlined, transparent, and flexible development framework can unlock private investment and accelerate transformation. Incentives and approvals reward building upgrades that reduce overheating, improve stormwater performance, and add resilience to older structures. Retrofitting should prioritize adaptive reuse of older and heritage buildings, streamlining approvals, clarifying requirements, and aligning incentives, so it's easier to convert and modernize existing assets while preserving Downtown's character. A supportive development environment ensures that public and private projects contribute to shared goals, creating a balanced mix of housing, employment, culture, and amenities. It also helps reduce risk and uncertainty, attracting the kind of long-term, quality investment that strengthens Downtown's foundation for generations.

IMPACT

ROI per \$, number of jobs

CHECKLIST

- The approval process is **predictable, transparent, and time-bound** (clear steps + timelines)
- Incentives are packaged into a clear "menu" and matched to desired outcomes
- Pre-consultation and zoning guidance reduce uncertainty for conversion and mixed-use projects
- Heritage assets are enabled (clear standards; incentives to renovate rather than demolish)
- Ground floors are treated as a priority (requirements and incentives for transparency/activation)
- Developers and non-profits can access a **single point of contact** (deal desk/concierge)
- The City actively manages catalytic opportunities (site readiness, partnerships, procurement pathways)

Example: Vancouver, BC (Canada) (Permitting and licensing reform: "Permitting and licensing is getting easier")

Vancouver focuses on the machinery of delivery, making approvals simpler, more transparent, and more predictable, rather than relying only on incentives. The City transformed how applicants interact with City Hall, with a stated goal that the system becomes simple, transparent, predictable, efficient, and seamless, including a more digital "one place" journey where applicants can explore requirements, upload drawings, receive feedback, apply, and track progress. The practical value is that this kind of reform directly reduces friction for small projects (tenant improvements, storefront changes) and larger redevelopment alike, exactly the kind of improvement a downtown revitalization strategy needs to unlock momentum. Vancouver pairs process improvements with policy moves that reduce the need for repeated, bespoke applications.



Figure 11- Vancouver City Hall. Credit: Jason Vanderhill.

Example: Chicago, IL (United States) (The Medallion (3121 N. Broadway): parking garage to mixed-use residential)

A parking structure can become "people space" when market conditions shift and the structure is adaptable. The Medallion was redeveloped from a 1920s-era (historic) parking garage into a 72-unit apartment building in Chicago's Lakeview neighbourhood. A key technical characteristic is that it wasn't just a light retrofit: a two-storey addition and rooftop deck added on top of the former garage turned this car-storage building into a modern residential asset. It is a practical "hybrid outcome" that's often what cities actually need: the redevelopment did not eliminate parking entirely, it retained a smaller parking supply while changing the primary use. Not every garage can become housing, but garages in walkable areas, especially those with good

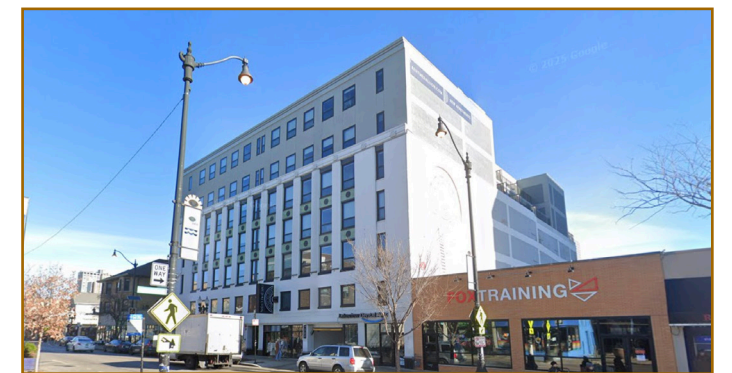


Figure 12- 3121 N. Broadway, Chicago. Credit: Google Street View, 2025

floor-to-floor heights, structural capacity, and strong location, can be candidates for conversion or partial conversion when demand for parking softens. This includes design contemporary parkades with conversion in mind.

5.5. Development Environment

The map that follows shows Downtown Hamilton’s three Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), Downtown Hamilton BIA, International Village BIA, and Hess Village BIA. It illustrates how they function as the organizing “main street districts” of the core. BIAs in Hamilton emerged as a practical partnership model: local businesses and commercial property owners formed area-based organizations to collectively invest in beautification, promotion, and advocacy, giving Downtown a stronger identity and a more coordinated voice. Hamilton’s first BIA was established in 1976 (the International Village), and the model has since become a cornerstone of how the City supports commercial districts.

While they are connected geographically and economically, each BIA has a distinct character and business mix. The International Village BIA describes itself as a hub for shopping, dining, entertainment, and financial/professional services, with a diverse membership of over 140 businesses. The Downtown Hamilton BIA, officially formed in 1982, is centred around the Gore Park heart of the city and represents over 350 businesses and 110 property owners. Its historic boundary has expanded over time to include additional Downtown streets. The newly established Hess Village BIA is centered in Hamilton’s iconic entertainment district, known for patios and nightlife, with organizing work showing 65 eligible property owners and businesses in the district and programming and initiatives that attract people to a restaurant,

entertainment, and personal-services-focused area. Together, these BIAs represent different “faces” of Downtown: civic and institutional core, mixed-use arts/entertainment corridor, and an emerging creative/community main street. They are connected by shared customers, shared mobility routes, and the reality that visitors experience Downtown as a network of districts rather than a single street.

These BIAs are also essential delivery partners for Main Street Lifts. They bring the capacity to organize and repeat what makes revitalization tangible: promotions, events and activations, storefront visibility, beautification and maintenance advocacy, business recruitment/retention, and real-time feedback on what is and is not working on the ground. They help translate City actions into lived experience, turning capital upgrades and policy changes into a Downtown that feels active, cared for, and legible to residents and visitors. In short, BIAs are critical to Downtown’s ability to thrive because they help give each district its identity, coordinate local momentum block-by-block, and ensure that improvements are reinforced through consistent programming and place management.

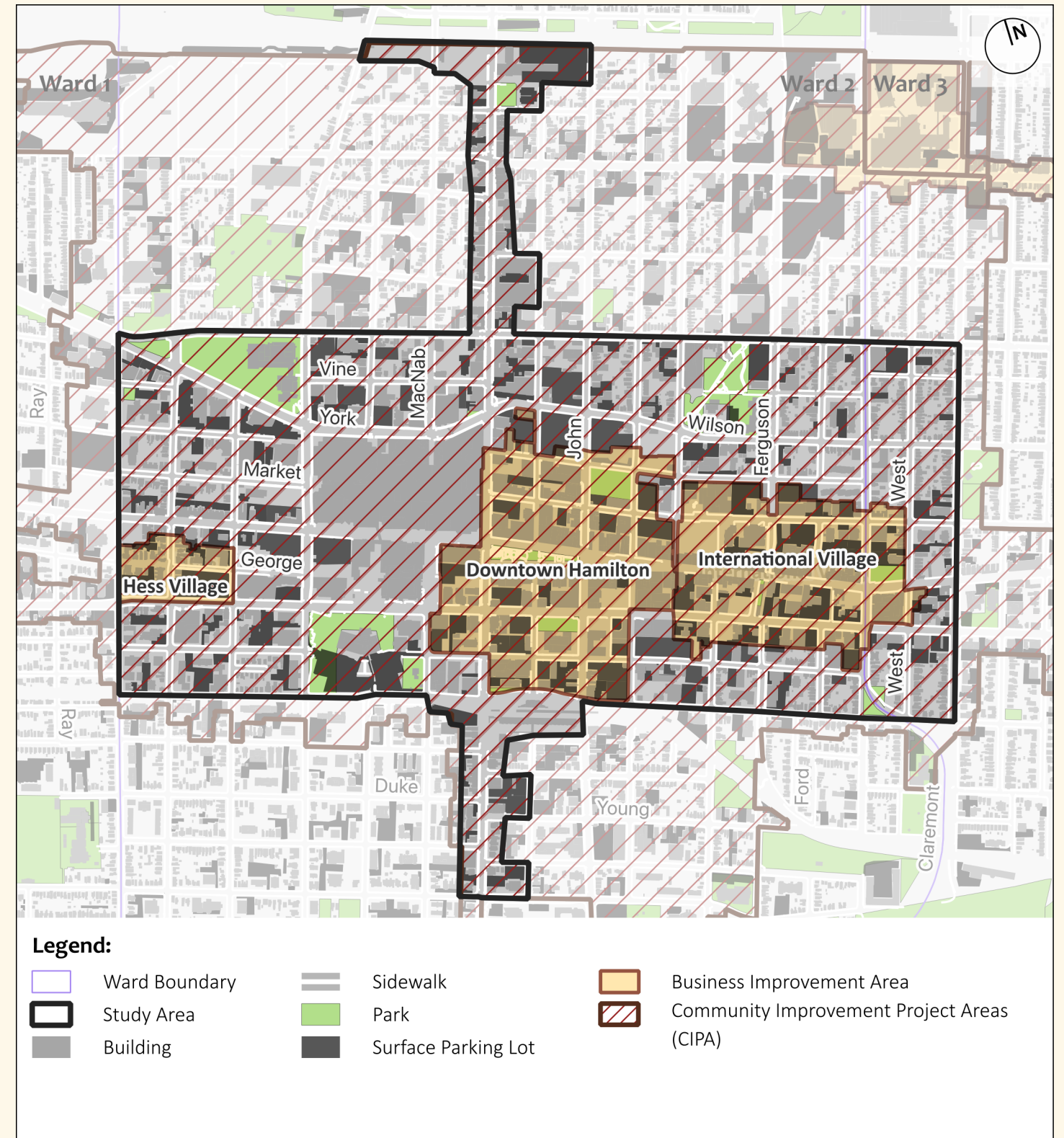


Figure 13- Map of the BIAs in Downtown Hamilton. Credit: Cultural Spaces.

5.6. Economic opportunities



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Downtown is a critical engine of Hamilton's economy, a place where ideas, innovation, and enterprise can converge. Creating the conditions for business growth and workforce development is essential to sustaining momentum. Economic opportunity as a lever focuses on nurturing Hamilton's economic base, from creative industries and health sciences to local retail and hospitality, to ensure that success is inclusive. Supporting entrepreneurship, small business resilience, and workforce attraction will help diversify Downtown's economy and maintain a steady flow of talent and investment. When Downtown's economy thrives, it creates value far beyond its boundaries, generating employment, tax revenue, and confidence in Hamilton's overall competitiveness.

IMPACT

ROI per \$, number of jobs

CHECKLIST

- Downtown supports **small business survival and growth** (tools for retention, not only attraction)
- Entrepreneur supports are visible (incubators, shared workspaces, mentorship, low-barrier pilots)
- Workforce needs are planned (mobility, amenities, childcare, daily services for workers)
- Target sectors have a clear pathway Downtown (creative, health/education, professional services, innovation)
- Office vacancy is addressed through a conversion pipeline and reinvestment strategy
- Visitor spending is supported through better experience design (safety, cleanliness, programming)
- The City tracks and reports on investment and leverage (public \$ → private/non-profit \$)

Example: Kitchener, ON (Innovation Arena / downtown innovation anchor)

Downtown Kitchener provides a useful example of how economic opportunity can be made tangible in the core through an institutional anchor paired with an innovation ecosystem. The University of Waterloo's Innovation Arena opened as a 90,000 sq. ft. facility in downtown Kitchener, including 20,000 sq. ft. of purpose-built lab space, and reports indicate UW's Velocity incubator is taking half the building. The outcome is visible: downtown becomes a place where new ventures are created and supported, not just a place to visit or work—strengthening daytime population and downtown identity.

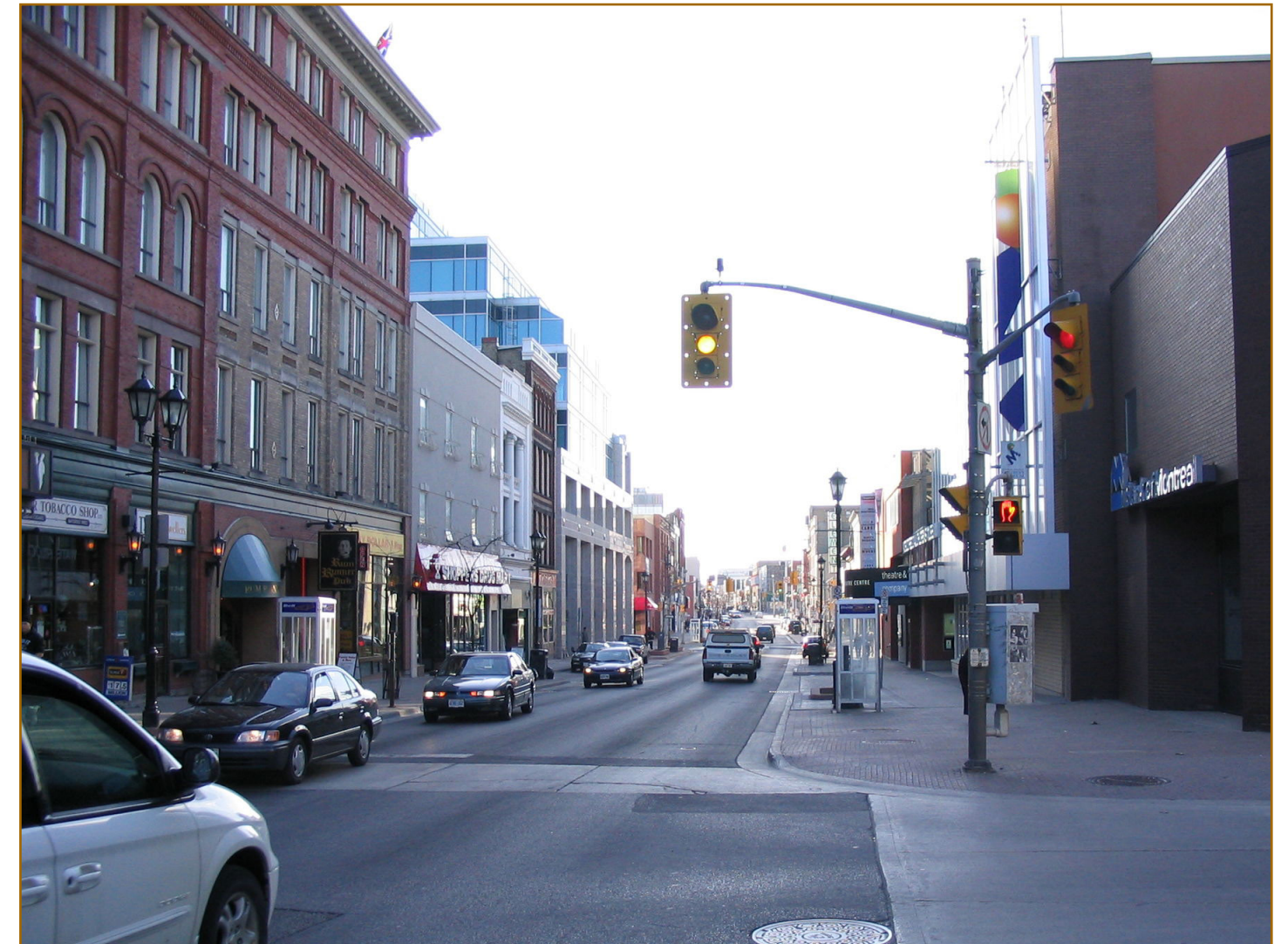


Figure 14- Downtown Kitchener. Credit: Lupin.

5.7. Main Streets



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Main streets are the public face of Downtown Hamilton, where commerce, culture, and community meet. They are the corridors that shape first impressions and daily experiences, lined with the small businesses and heritage buildings that define Hamilton's character. Strengthening main streets means protecting and enhancing their economic and social roles, particularly during periods of disruption such as LRT construction. Investment in façades, storefront programs, pedestrian environments, and business supports will ensure that main streets remain vibrant and resilient. Façade and storefront programs should be designed to support heritage-friendly repairs and upgrades—making it easier for owners to reinvest, reduce vacancy, and keep the character-defining fabric intact. A strong main street network makes Downtown legible, welcoming, and full of life, the kind of place where people choose to spend time, invest, and connect.

IMPACT

ROI per \$, number of jobs

CHECKLIST

- Priority corridors feel **active and continuous** (fewer dead zones, blank walls, empty storefronts, temporary and transitional uses of lots)
- Storefronts are attractive and legible (lighting, signage, transparency)
- Construction mitigation protects business visibility (wayfinding, safe access, temporary design fixes)
- Streets invite lingering: seating, shade, safe crossings, patios where appropriate
- Vacancy is actively managed (pop-ups, curated recruitment, landlord engagement)
- Main streets support daily needs retail (grocers, pharmacies, services) alongside destination uses
- The City + BIAs coordinate promotions and activation with a predictable calendar

Example: London, ON (Canada) (Dundas Place “flex street” transformation)

London's Dundas Place shows how a city can convert a conventional downtown commercial corridor into a place-first main street that is designed to be programmed, to support local business visibility, and to build confidence even while major works are underway. Dundas Place is London's first flexible street, a curbsless corridor with mid-block crossovers that can close to vehicle traffic for events and activations but remains open to vehicles when not being programmed.

London treated disruption as part of delivery rather than a side effect. The City invested in construction support, including pedestrian navigation maps on site, an advertising plan (billboards, buses, radio), and even creating a project-specific blog and social media presence to keep the community informed and businesses visible. Dundas Place demonstrates that a main street lift is not only capital design—it is a corridor program combining (1) a flexible, programmable street form, (2) visible, block-by-block public realm upgrades, and (3) strong communication/wayfinding that protects access and confidence



Figure 15- Downtown London. Credit: Mosbo6

5.8. Public and Green Spaces and Assets



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Public and green spaces, together with civic and community assets such as libraries, community centres, and sports facilities, are essential to creating a Downtown that is both livable and memorable. These spaces are where public life unfolds: where people gather, rest, learn, play, and connect. Parks, plazas, recreation facilities, and cultural venues improve health and well-being, foster inclusion, and provide opportunities for creativity and shared experience. Strengthening these assets through investment, renewal, and programming ensures that Downtown Hamilton serves all residents, families, youth, seniors, and visitors alike, and contributes to the uplift effect for other investments in the area. Linking these places through green corridors, pedestrian routes, and active transportation networks can create a cohesive system of civic spaces that amplifies Hamilton’s social and environmental resilience. Parks and plazas function as cooling and refuge spaces; green infrastructure reduces runoff and flooding impacts. Beautiful, accessible, and well-programmed public and community spaces are a visible sign of collective care and investment, transforming Downtown into a welcoming, dynamic, and inclusive civic heart.

IMPACT

Increase sense of well-being, stronger community ties

CHECKLIST

- Downtown has **places to pause**: seating, shade, greenery, comfort, washrooms where feasible
- Parks/plazas are safe and well managed (lighting, sightlines, maintenance, programming plan)
- Public spaces are programmed regularly (markets, performances, civic gatherings)
- Civic assets (library, arenas, halls, community facilities) are integrated into the “Downtown experience”
- Green connections link key anchors (micro-parks, planted corridors, comfortable walking routes)
- Spaces are designed for all ages and abilities (accessibility, families, seniors, youth)
- Maintenance and operations are funded and clear

Example: Winnipeg, MB (Canada) (The Forks)

Winnipeg’s Forks is a standout example of public space success because it combines design with a durable stewardship and operating model. The Forks reports over 4 million visitors annually, more than 1,200 people working on-site, an economic contribution of over \$235 million per year, and is financially self-sufficient for operations (not relying on government funding to operate). These figures matter because they show what sustained management and programming can achieve: a public space that functions as a year-round downtown anchor with measurable visitation and economic impact.



Figure 16- Downtown Winnipeg. Credit: Lorie Shaull

Halifax, NS (Canada) (Stillwell Beergarden) (Spring Garden Road “vacant lot” activation)

Stillwell’s Spring Garden Road beer garden shows how a gap site on a prime corridor can be turned into a seasonal destination with relatively light, temporary infrastructure. The beer garden opened on the corner of Spring Garden Road and South Park Street, operating from a longtime empty 4,800 sq. ft. lot between local businesses, an explicit example of a vacant lot being reimagined as an active public-facing use. The project demonstrates how temporary uses can shift the feel of a street: an underused parcel becomes a place that draws people to linger, supports nearby commerce through increased foot traffic, and adds “eyes on the street” in an area that otherwise reads as a dead zone.

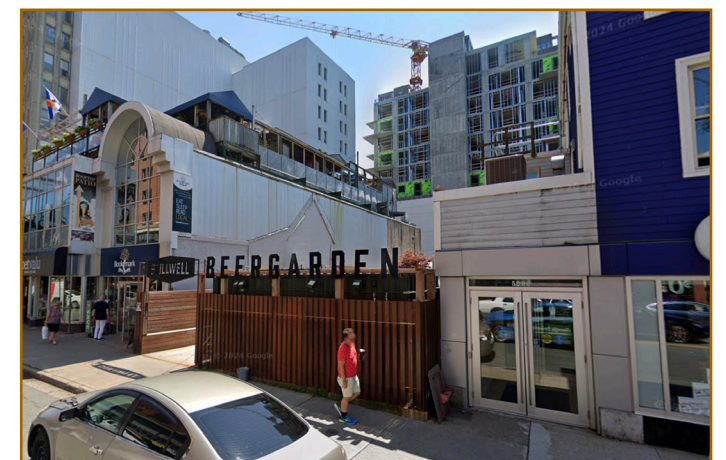


Figure 17- Beergarden, Halifax. Credit: Google Street View

5.9. Public Safety



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Public safety is the foundation of every thriving Downtown, the condition that makes all other forms of renewal possible. A sense of safety is created not only through enforcement, but through care, presence, and design. Clean, well-lit, and active public spaces, supported by coordinated social services, community outreach, and inclusive programming, help reduce vulnerability and build trust. By integrating public safety with social well-being, urban design, and maintenance, Hamilton can create an environment where people feel comfortable and connected throughout the day and night. A safe Downtown is not only one that prevents harm, it is one that invites participation, fosters dignity, and restores confidence in the heart of the city.

IMPACT

Increase sense of well-being and safety, confidence in investments, decrease in violent events

CHECKLIST

- Safety is addressed through **presence, care, and design**, not only enforcement
- Outreach teams and service partners are coordinated, visible, and supported
- Hotspots are managed with a consistent plan (lighting + programming + maintenance + response protocols)
- Rules are enforced predictably (e.g. property standards, vacant buildings, nuisance issues)
- People feel safe at night on key routes and around transit stops (measured by perception surveys)
- Public spaces are activated so there are **“eyes on the street”**
- Safety communications are balanced (show improvements, avoid stigma, share progress transparently)

Example: Washington, DC (United States) (DowntownDC BID ambassador / place management model)

DowntownDC is a useful example of how perceived safety and comfort can be strengthened through visible, trained, non-police presence as part of a broader downtown management system. The BID describes its district as a 140-block area that includes 530 commercial properties, 30+ hotels, and 2,000+ residential units—a scale that makes the case for consistent “care and presence” services beyond municipal enforcement alone. The ambassador role is framed as welcoming visitors, providing information, serving as “eyes and ears,” and supporting a safer, more orderly environment.



Figure 18- Pennsylvania Avenue, WashingtonDC. Credit: AgnosticPreachersKid

Example: Ottawa, ON (Canada) (Shepherds of Good Hope + Ottawa Inner City Health harm-reduction and stabilization model)

Ottawa’s work with Shepherds of Good Hope treats visible disorder and crisis downtown as a health and stabilization problem as much as an enforcement problem. Shepherds operates crisis and housing programs in the ByWard Market area and partners closely with Ottawa Inner City Health to deliver pragmatic, evidence-based supports that reduce harms in public spaces while improving safety and dignity for everyone. Two concrete program elements are particularly relevant to downtown safety: a Managed Alcohol Program (MAP) and supervised consumption and treatment services integrated into a broader service ecosystem.



Figure 19- Ottawa’s Byward Market. Credit: Trappy at the English Wikipedia

5.10. Residents, Visitors and Workers



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Downtown’s vitality depends on the experience of the people who live, work, and visit there every day. A healthy and welcoming core offers a balance of housing, employment, recreation, and community life, supported by a strong network of public amenities such as libraries, cultural venues, community centres, and parks. These assets make Downtown livable and magnetic, ensuring that residents feel rooted, workers feel supported, and visitors feel drawn to return. Strengthening everyday experiences, from walkability and cleanliness to cultural events and public gathering spaces, builds a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Investing in the comfort, accessibility, and inclusion of all users helps Downtown Hamilton function as the civic heart of the city, where economic vitality and community well-being reinforce one another.

IMPACT

Dynamic mixed environment, economic opportunities

CHECKLIST

- Stable, well-maintained housing, especially rental housing, supports resident retention
- Daily needs are accessible (groceries, services, amenities within walking distance)
- Public realm is clean, lit, and comfortable for everyday use
- Workers can reach Downtown easily (transit, cycling, walking, curb management)
- Visitors experience Downtown as welcoming and legible (wayfinding, programming, safety)
- There are “third places” (indoor/outdoor) for community life beyond spending money
- Residents—including renters—have a voice in governance and feedback loops

Example: Vancouver, BC (Canada) (Downtown residential foundation and reporting discipline)

Downtown Vancouver provides a strong illustration of how a large resident base can stabilize downtown vitality beyond the 9-to-5 cycle, and how consistent reporting helps manage downtown as a system. Downtown Van’s State of Downtown 2025 report highlights 140,938 people living in the Downtown district, 130,000 people working, and 106 million visits in 2024, alongside 8,000 businesses including 1,000 storefront businesses. These numbers show the structural advantage of a downtown that is both lived-in and visited at scale, supporting street life across more hours and providing a stable customer base for services and retail.



Figure 20- Vancouver Downtown Skyline. Credit: David Zhang

Example: Austin, TX (United States) (Joint Use Parking Agreement - shared access across public garages)

Austin’s Joint Use Parking Agreement is an example of how structured parking can function as a shared resource rather than being dedicated to a single user group. The agreement explicitly authorizes a tenant (and the tenant’s employees, patrons, customers, vendors and other invitees) to use multiple parking garages “on a non-exclusive basis” and “on the same terms and conditions as [they] are available to the general public” which is the heart of shared parking: the garage stays public-serving, but a private use is supported through defined rights.



Figure 21- One Texas Centre. Credit: LoneStarMike



6 PRIORITIES

The priorities identified in the Strategy are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of Downtown’s specific conditions, its history of renewal efforts, and the many voices that have shaped its present and future. They reflect both analysis and insights gained through extensive engagement with hundreds of residents, business owners, community organizations, and institutional partners. Stakeholders consistently expressed a desire for visible progress, better coordination, and a renewed sense of shared purpose while emphasizing the need for the City to remain open, responsive, and collaborative. These priorities are therefore built on a commitment to listen and act: to transform feedback into direction, and direction into measurable outcomes.

They also acknowledge Downtown’s long history of repeated cycles of investment and decline, recognizing that lasting change depends on the City’s ability to sustain effort and align its tools over time. The Strategy focuses on activating the levers that drive change, the key sectors and assets such as arts and culture, housing, small business, mobility, and public infrastructure that together generate a positive lift effect when strategically reinforced. Additionally, it is particularly sensitive to target certain segments

of the population that can be supported to maintain or establish a relationship with Downtown, particularly youth, the members of the arts and culture community, small and mid-sized businesses, and young entrepreneurs and workers in emerging economic driving industries. Informed by these levers and by the City’s capacity to guide and convene, the priorities focus attention where the greatest collective impact can be achieved. They translate vision into near-term, coordinated action, ensuring that progress in Downtown generates confidence and benefit across the entire city.

Each of the priorities carries equal importance. Their implementation will vary in scale and timing. Some will require additional planning, design, or partnership development before they can advance, while others can be implemented quickly to demonstrate visible results and build momentum. The Strategy encourages a balance between careful preparation and agile execution. Innovation should be pursued proactively, with the City and its partners ready to seize opportunities as they arise, testing new approaches, learning from early outcomes, and scaling what works to accelerate Downtown’s transformation.

1 Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all

Improving safety and well-being is foundational to Downtown Hamilton’s revitalization. This priority focuses on creating an environment where everyone, residents, workers, visitors, and vulnerable populations, feels secure and supported. It builds on partnerships with community agencies, businesses, and law enforcement to address both real and perceived safety issues through coordinated action. Efforts include improving maintenance and cleanliness, expanding outreach and support services, and enhancing public spaces to foster activity and natural surveillance. By combining prevention, care, and design, this priority aims to restore confidence and ensure that Downtown is experienced as a welcoming place for all.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Safety and well-being are fundamental to restoring confidence in Downtown Hamilton as a place to live, work, invest and visit. This priority responds to concerns about public order, cleanliness, and social supports by combining community outreach, design improvements, and coordinated municipal action to make the core feel welcoming and cared for. This priority directly improves daily life for Downtown residents, including renters, by making routes, parks, and main streets more comfortable and predictable, day and night.

Examples of scope of action: Street outreach, visible police presence, public realm maintenance, community activation.

2 Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments

Revitalization requires collective action. This priority emphasizes the alignment of public, private, and institutional investments to generate visible, lasting change. It calls for the City to act as both a leader and convener by coordinating infrastructure upgrades, incentive programs, cultural projects, and redevelopment efforts so they reinforce one another. By breaking down silos and sequencing projects strategically, the City and its partners can multiply their impact. The goal is to use every investment, whether in housing, streetscapes, or culture, to leverage others, creating a compounding effect that accelerates Downtown’s transformation.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Downtown’s challenges cannot be solved by any one actor and success depends on aligning the investments and actions of many. This priority addresses the fragmentation of past efforts by coordinating City, institutional, and private investments to create visible, cumulative impact across the core. Coordinated investment should prioritize projects that residents experience every day, cleaner streets, better lighting, and improved public spaces, because these are the conditions that retain renters and other residents to stabilize Downtown.

Examples of scope of action: Capital alignment, public realm enhancements, joint planning, investment tracking, heritage/cultural anchor projects.



Enabling future opportunities

Downtown must be ready to seize emerging opportunities and adapt to new economic, technological, and social realities. This priority focuses on creating the conditions for long-term resilience and growth by ensuring flexibility in land use, zoning, underground infrastructure readiness, climate change adaptation, and investment readiness. It includes identifying underutilized sites, promoting adaptive reuse, and supporting initiatives that attract new residents, businesses, and talent. The City's role is to prepare the groundwork, through clear policy direction, proactive partnerships, and infrastructure planning, so that Downtown is positioned to capture future waves of innovation, investment, and community-led activity.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Downtown must be ready to adapt to a rapidly changing economy, climate and urban environment. This priority ensures that policy, land use, and infrastructure decisions today create flexibility for new housing, creative industries, and emerging business opportunities that will sustain the core in the decades ahead. Downtown's future competitiveness depends on housing stability and livability, so enabling opportunities also means ensuring rental and non-rental housing quality, affordable pathways, and complete-neighbourhood amenities.

Examples of scope of action: Adaptive reuse, heritage-compatible adaptive reuse readiness, underground infrastructure renewal, innovation hubs, policy readiness, heat mitigation (shade, trees, cooling), green stormwater infrastructure, resilient transit stops and walking routes, and retrofit standards that reduce overheating and flood risk.



Protect the main streets

Hamilton's main streets, namely King, James, Main, and York, are the backbone of Downtown's identity and economic life. This priority focuses on preserving and strengthening these corridors as vibrant, mixed-use streets that sustain small businesses, cultural venues, and civic activity. It calls for reinvestment in building maintenance, storefront improvements, and the public realm to enhance appearance, accessibility, and walkability. Protecting the main streets also means retaining their authenticity, supporting long-standing businesses and creative entrepreneurs who give Downtown its character. These corridors must remain active, safe, and attractive for people at all times of day and across all seasons.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Hamilton's main streets are the spine of its civic and commercial life but are under visible strain from vacancy and disinvestment. This priority aims to stabilize and renew these corridors through reinvestment, business support, and streetscape improvements that preserve their character and sustain their role as vibrant public places. Main streets must serve residents as well as visitors by supporting daily needs retail and services that make it easier for Downtown renters and other residents to live locally and remain in the neighbourhood.

Examples of scope of action: Façade renewal, public realm enhancements, storefront activation, heritage preservation.



Support the economic drivers

Downtown's revitalization depends on its ability to sustain and grow its economic base for the benefit of the city as whole. This priority focuses on reinforcing the sectors and anchors that generate jobs, attract investment, and bring people to the core, including education, healthcare, government, culture, and professional services. It seeks to align municipal tools and incentives to retain major employers, support innovation, nurture the next generation of opportunities, and attract new businesses. It recognizes that a strong Downtown economy requires more than office space: it depends on reliable transportation connections, access to services, and a built environment that supports both business operations and the daily needs of employees. Collaboration with institutions and private developers will be critical to strengthening Downtown as a centre of enterprise and opportunity. By supporting its economic drivers, Hamilton ensures that Downtown remains both a regional hub and a generator of citywide prosperity.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Downtown's renewal depends on maintaining a diverse and resilient economic base that can adapt to new patterns of work and mobility. This priority addresses the transportation, service, and infrastructure needs of employers and workers while nurturing opportunity across sectors. Supporting economic drivers includes making Downtown workable for the workforce who lives here, through reliable mobility, affordable housing options, and amenities that support everyday life.

Examples of scope of action: Workforce mobility, business support, incubator environment, infrastructure investment.



Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model

Coordinating revitalization requires governance structures that are dedicated, empowered, and accountable. This priority establishes the foundation for a Downtown-focused administrative model that aligns City departments and external partners around shared objectives. It calls for clear leadership, transparent decision-making, dedicated budgets, and mechanisms for ongoing communication with stakeholders. This model will ensure that Downtown receives consistent attention, resources, and follow-through. Effective governance will make revitalization a continuous, coordinated effort, not a one-time initiative.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Effective revitalization requires leadership and accountability focused squarely on Downtown because of its specific circumstances around safety, major city assets, social and economic challenges, development ecosystem, economic value, and impact on the city as a whole. This priority responds to past gaps in coordination and the need for responsiveness by establishing a dedicated structure within the City to align departments, track progress, and sustain collaboration with partners over the long term. A Downtown governance model should formalize resident input, including renter perspectives, so that day-to-day quality-of-life issues are tracked and resolved consistently.

Examples of scope of action: Dedicated office, leadership committee, budgetary priority, progress reporting.

7 Retrofit Downtown

This priority addresses the need to adapt Downtown’s physical and economic fabric for a changing future. It focuses on retrofitting buildings, infrastructure, and spaces to support new uses and meet contemporary needs, from office-to-residential conversions and green retrofits to reimagining underused public assets. The goal is to evolve the current physical fabric to make it more permeable between private and public space, enhance the access to green spaces, seamlessly connect the different sections of Downtown, remove obstacles to public and private functions, and capitalize on existing space for more relevant uses for residents, businesses, innovators, and artists. By modernizing what already exists rather than relying solely on new development, Hamilton can retain Downtown’s character while preparing it for the next generation of residents, businesses, and experiences.

WHY IS THIS A PRIORITY?

Much of Downtown’s building stock and infrastructure were designed for a different era and need reinvestment to meet contemporary needs. This priority focuses on modernizing existing assets through adaptive reuse, green retrofits, and infrastructure renewal, to support new residents, businesses, and public life while preserving Downtown’s character. Retrofitting must include improving existing rental housing stock and adaptive reuse that adds stable homes and resident-serving ground floors, not only new development.

Examples of scope of action: Building conversion, reinventing spaces, green retrofit, public space renewal, green retrofits that improve comfort during heat events, flood-resilient building upgrades, and resilience features for key civic/community assets.



7.1. Transformative Initiatives

To translate the Downtown Strategy into visible results, a set of five transformational initiatives illustrate how the City can pursue its priorities through action-driven, high-impact projects. These examples are designed to test, refine, and scale approaches that align municipal effort with private sector partnerships, focusing investments where they can have the greatest effect. Each initiative is conceived as a catalyst for renewal, addressing the key priorities identified in this strategy, from strengthening main streets and improving housing options to enhancing public spaces and enabling economic opportunity. Together, they demonstrate how coordinated, strategic actions can accelerate transformation.

The initiatives include a strategic rent-to-own program, the redevelopment of strategic locations, incentivizing to accelerate transformation, main street lifts, and the creation of new and improved public spaces.

Strategic Rent-to-Own Initiative

This initiative explores the creation of a pathway to ownership for specific sectors by leveraging municipal and private investment. This approach addresses the need for housing affordability and population stability, helping more residents live, stay, invest, and actively shape Downtown.

Levers: Development Environment and Residents, Visitors, and Workers



Priorities: Retrofit Downtown and Enable future opportunities.



Description: The pilot could target two priority sectors: arts and culture professionals and entrepreneurs and STEM graduates, groups whose creativity and enterprise contribute directly to Downtown’s renewal. By offering rent-to-own opportunities tied to specific housing and workspace projects, the initiative helps to stabilize the residential base while cultivating a community of creators, innovators, and professionals. It would help free up capital from these groups to invest in their creations and ideas, and have an impact on the city as a whole. This approach supports the rejuvenation of Downtown through artistic expression and business creation, positioning Hamilton as a city that invests in the people who shape its future.

Public investments would be focused on strategic buildings located in areas identified for catalytic impact, properties where the introduction of new residents, studios, or small enterprises can shift perceptions, stimulate foot traffic, and attract complementary private investment. These could include new buildings as well as adaptive reuse of older commercial or civic buildings, located near incubators, educational institutions, or the health sector’s emerging employment cluster, ensuring alignment with broader economic development priorities. Each project should be “climate-ready by design,” integrating comfort measures as part of the core scope, not as optional extras. Examples of locations include on King Street, the former John A. MacDonald secondary school.

The initiative’s impact comes from combining targeted public capital with sector-specific recruitment, using housing and workspace as tools to accelerate renewal and attract talent that will help sustain Downtown’s transformation over time.

What it would look like: Strategic Rent-to-Own would create a visible pathway for people who shape Downtown’s culture and economy, artists, makers, entrepreneurs, and early-career workers, to put down roots in the core. In practice, it would look like one or two Downtown buildings where residents can rent at a stable rate while building equity over time, paired with ground-floor or shared spaces that support creative work and small enterprise. The result is not only housing; it is a stronger Downtown community: more neighbours who stay longer, invest locally, and bring “eyes on the street” to main corridors. It would show, in a tangible way, that Hamilton is investing in people and making Downtown a place where talent can build a future.

Done well, the initiative would produce a recognizable cohort of people who become ambassadors for Downtown through their daily presence and their contribution to street life. It would also create a model that can be replicated with partners: non-profit housing providers, mission-aligned developers, institutions, and potentially employers. The public benefit is stability and belonging; the economic benefit is an enlarged base of residents who support local businesses and strengthen the Downtown’s identity.

How we get there: Start with a pilot sized to succeed: a single building or a portion of a building (e.g., 10–25 units) in a location where added resident activity will have a catalytic effect on a key street or node. The City’s role is to convene a delivery partnership, secure a workable funding stack, and define the program rules (eligibility, equity pathway, affordability protections, resale/exit terms, and anti-speculation safeguards). The pilot should be paired with clear supports such as tenant education, financial coaching, and an operating partner with experience in affordable housing management.

The first year is about design and de-risking: selecting a site, confirming partners, and getting programme governance approved. Years 2–3 are about delivery and proof: opening the pilot, recruiting the cohort, and tracking outcomes (retention, resident satisfaction, local spending, and quality-of-life improvements). Once the model works, scale it through additional buildings and partners, using what was learned to refine program terms and expand eligibility.

Strategic Rent-to-Own Initiative

Two examples

Boston, MA (United States)— “Renting to Own” (Mayor’s Office of Housing)

Boston’s “Renting to Own” is framed as a **city-enabled pathway from renting to ownership** for low- and moderate-income renters, using either purpose-built “rental-to-homeownership” units or **new financing tools** that let renters start building equity over time. What makes it useful as an inspiration is that the City treats rent-to-own as a **structured civic pilot** rather than a one-off private real-estate product: the City shapes the rules, selects partners, and uses pilot projects to learn and scale.

Mechanically, Boston **solicits proposals** and selects partner teams (often a consortium of developers, lenders, and service providers) to test models that create clear pathways from renting to buying. The City can provide **gap financing** based on demonstrated need and the availability of funds, and it is explicitly designed so **multiple proposals may be selected**, which is important because it allows comparison and learning rather than “betting everything” on one approach.



Figure 22- Rent-to-own in Boston

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: start with a pilot building and a partner consortium, and treat eligibility, protections, coaching/supports, equity pathway, and resale terms as core program design—just as important as the building itself.

Glasgow, Scotland (United Kingdom) — LIFT Open Market Shared Equity (OMSE)

Glasgow promotes the Scottish Government’s OMSE shared equity pathway as a **programmatic, government-backed route to ownership** for first-time buyers and priority groups (including some social housing tenants). It’s not quite identical to rent-to-own, but it is similar and demonstrates the mechanics of a structured ownership pathway that can be targeted to specific groups and geographies.

Mechanically, the buyer purchases the majority share (typically **60–90%**) and the government holds the remaining share under a shared equity agreement. Government support is described as **10–40%** of the valuation or sale price (whichever is lower) and the government receives the **same percentage back when the property is sold**. The buyer has “complete title,” while the government’s share is protected through a legal security, and in many areas buyers can increase their share over time (“staircasing”).



Figure 23- Glasgow city skyline. Credit: Paul Harrop

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: design rent-to-own as a structured equity program with clear eligibility and safeguards (anti-windfall rules, transparent exit/resale terms), and scale through multiple partners while preserving program integrity.

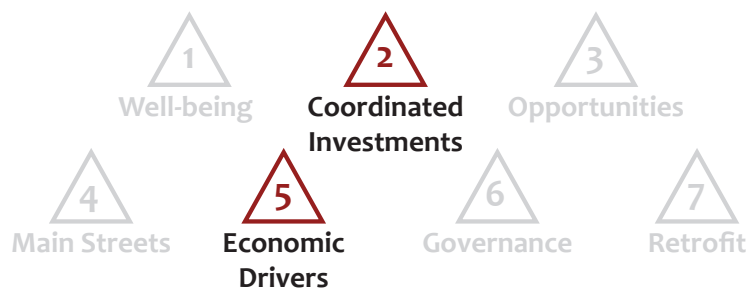
Redevelopment of Strategic Locations

Targeting underutilized or high-visibility properties, including through City intervention, this initiative seeks to demonstrate how redevelopment can act as a catalyst for surrounding investment. These sites are chosen for their ability to signal confidence in Downtown, improve the built environment, and attract complementary private development.

Levers: Development Environment, Economic Opportunities, and Aesthetics and Beautification



Priorities: Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments and Supporting economic drivers



Description: These sites, such as vacant lots, vacant and outdated commercial blocks, or publicly owned parcels, represent opportunities to showcase what revitalization looks like when public and private investments align. The initiative could identify a City role to intervene and would prioritize projects that blend residential, cultural, and employment uses, ensuring each redevelopment contributes to Downtown’s vibrancy and identity. Through design excellence, visible construction activity, and integrated partnerships, it sends a clear message of confidence to residents and investors alike. Examples of locations include Jackson Square.

The impact of this initiative comes from strategic visibility and momentum. Redeveloping even a few key sites can change the way people perceive the trajectory of Downtown, setting off a cycle of reinvestment. By coupling and coordinating these projects with infrastructure improvements such as streetscape renewal, active transportation links, or nearby public space upgrades, the City ensures that redevelopment generates both economic and community returns. It provides a model for how catalytic redevelopment can unlock wider transformation, accelerating the shift from planning to implementation.

What it would look like: Redevelopment of Strategic Locations is about choosing a small number of highly visible sites that can change how people perceive Downtown’s trajectory, places that currently signal stagnation, vacancy, or missed opportunity. When transformed, these sites become “proof points” that Downtown is moving again: mixed-use redevelopment that brings new housing, active ground floors, and a stronger public realm. The impact is not only the building itself; it is the message it sends. A single well-designed catalytic project can unlock confidence across surrounding blocks, encourage reinvestment, and become a new anchor for activity.

In Hamilton’s context, this initiative should explicitly connect redevelopment to public benefit: better public spaces around key civic and cultural anchors, stronger main street environments, and new uses that increase daily life (homes, services, cultural/creative space). Done well, it produces construction momentum that people can see, and it sets a new standard for design quality, ground-floor activation, and civic pride.

How we get there: The first step is disciplined selection: identify 1–2 sites with maximum visibility, strong leverage potential, and feasible control or partnership conditions (ownership, land assembly, or the ability to influence outcomes). Next, run a “readiness sprint” rather than a long study: confirm constraints, test market interest, define preferred development options (2–3), and select the City’s role as a facilitator, co-investor, land contributor, or procurement lead. The deliverable is a Council-ready business case with a clear procurement path (RFEOI/RFP), partnership model, and risk management approach.

Then move quickly to market. Issue a competitive process that is explicit about outcomes: active and transparent ground floors, mixed-income housing components where feasible, high-quality public realm edges, and commitments to maintenance and programming. Align municipal capital improvements around the site (lighting, sidewalks, plaza upgrades) so redevelopment feels like a coordinated lift, not an isolated project. In parallel, build a communications plan that treats the redevelopment as a public confidence project: frequent construction updates, visible milestones, and a clear story about how the project benefits the city.

Redevelopment of Strategic Locations

LOCATION	OWNERSHIP	RELEVANT POLICY	USES	OPPORTUNITIES		INTENSITY		POTENTIAL
				PRIORITIES	TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVES	GRADE	YEARS	
Summer's Lane and Commonwealth Square	Public	Hamilton Parks Master Plan; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Community	Retrofit Downtown	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Revitalization	3- 5 years	Initiate comprehensive redesign of Summer's Lane and Commonwealth Square- daylighting all or a portion of Summer's Lane and revitalizing Commonwealth Square and Irving Zucker Sculpture Court. Revitalization could include new public art (sculptural) commission(s) or loans as well as programming to activate/animate
Jackson Square	Publicly owned land; Privately owned building	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- commercial - community	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Revitalization	5 + years	Major redevelopment opportunity that could include residential (office conversion), commercial, and community elements (outdoor space connected to the investment in TD Coliseum's). Improved connectivity with other key elements of Downtown
John Rebecca Park (76 John St. N)	Public	Hamilton Parks Master Plan; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Community	Retrofit Downtown	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Activation	1-3 years	Recognizing the significant investment made to development John Rebecca Park, the City and BIA should develop a programming and activation strategy to animate the park on an interim basis while adjacent sites are developed/redeveloped.
Frank A. Cooke Terminal	Public	Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- commercial	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Revitalization	3- 5 years	Opportunity to repurpose for a public asset that fills gap connection between City Hall, Confederation Square, Jackson Square and Gore Park
11 Ferguson Ave. N	Public	Hamilton Parks Master Plan; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Commercial- community	Support the economic drivers	Main street lifts	Temporary use/ transitory use	1-3 years	Property can be strategically adapted to provide interim pedestrian access to businesses on King St. E during LRT construction
27 Hess St. S	Private	Hamilton Parks Master Plan; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Commercial- community	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Temporary use/ transitory use	1-3 years	Temporary use that fits with the district, e.g. Beer Garden
33 and 35 Hess St. S	Private	Hamilton Parks Master Plan; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Commercial- community	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Temporary use/ transitory use	1-3 years	Temporary use that fits with the district, e.g. Beer Garden
City Hall Municipal Parking Lot	Public	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- community	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Revitalization	5 + years	Major redevelopment opportunity that could include residential (office conversion), commercial, and community elements. New Provincial legislation around HST exemptions and DC deferrals could support redevelopment.

Redevelopment of Strategic Locations

LOCATION	OWNERSHIP	RELEVANT POLICY	USES	OPPORTUNITIES		INTENSITY		POTENTIAL
				PRIORITIES	TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVES	GRADE	YEARS	
77 James St. (City Centre)	Private	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan;	Residential- commercial	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Strategic rent-to-own initiative	Revitalization	3- 5 years	Major redevelopment opportunity- through private and public collaboration. New Provincial legislation around HST exemptions and DC deferrals could support redevelopment.
155 King William St. (Hamilton Police Central Station)	Public	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- community	Enabling future opportunities	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Revitalization	5 + years	Adaptive reuse of building or new structure
Hamilton GO Station	Public	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- community	Enabling future opportunities	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Revitalization	5 + years	Adaptive reuse
134 Cannon St. E (Cannon Knitting Mills)	Private	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- commercial - community	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Revitalization	5 + years	Major redevelopment opportunity
81 Bay St. N (former Sir John A. MacDonald High School)	Public	Ontario Regulation 374/23 (and Development Charges Act); Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Community	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Revitalization	3- 5 years	Potential community facility (future Salvation Army); Reg. 374/32 and the Development Charges Act are prescriptive in the range of uses/services that the City could use the site for if it were acquired under 4 (1) (a) of the Reg.; Recreation / Child Care and Early Years Programming / Public Health / Library / Policing / Long-term care
284 King St. E (Denninger's Foods of the World)	Private	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- commercial	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Revitalization	3- 5 years	Significant redevelopment opportunity. Potenti into a mixed-use residential project that potentially re-incorporates Denninger's as a ground floor tenant
293 King St. E	Public	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- commercial - community	Enabling future opportunities	Main street lifts	Temporary use/ transitory use	1-3 years	Property can be strategically adapted to provide interim pedestrian access to businesses on King St. E during LRT construction. Provides mid-block through connection to Jarvis St. and rear lane access to buildings on the north side of King St. E

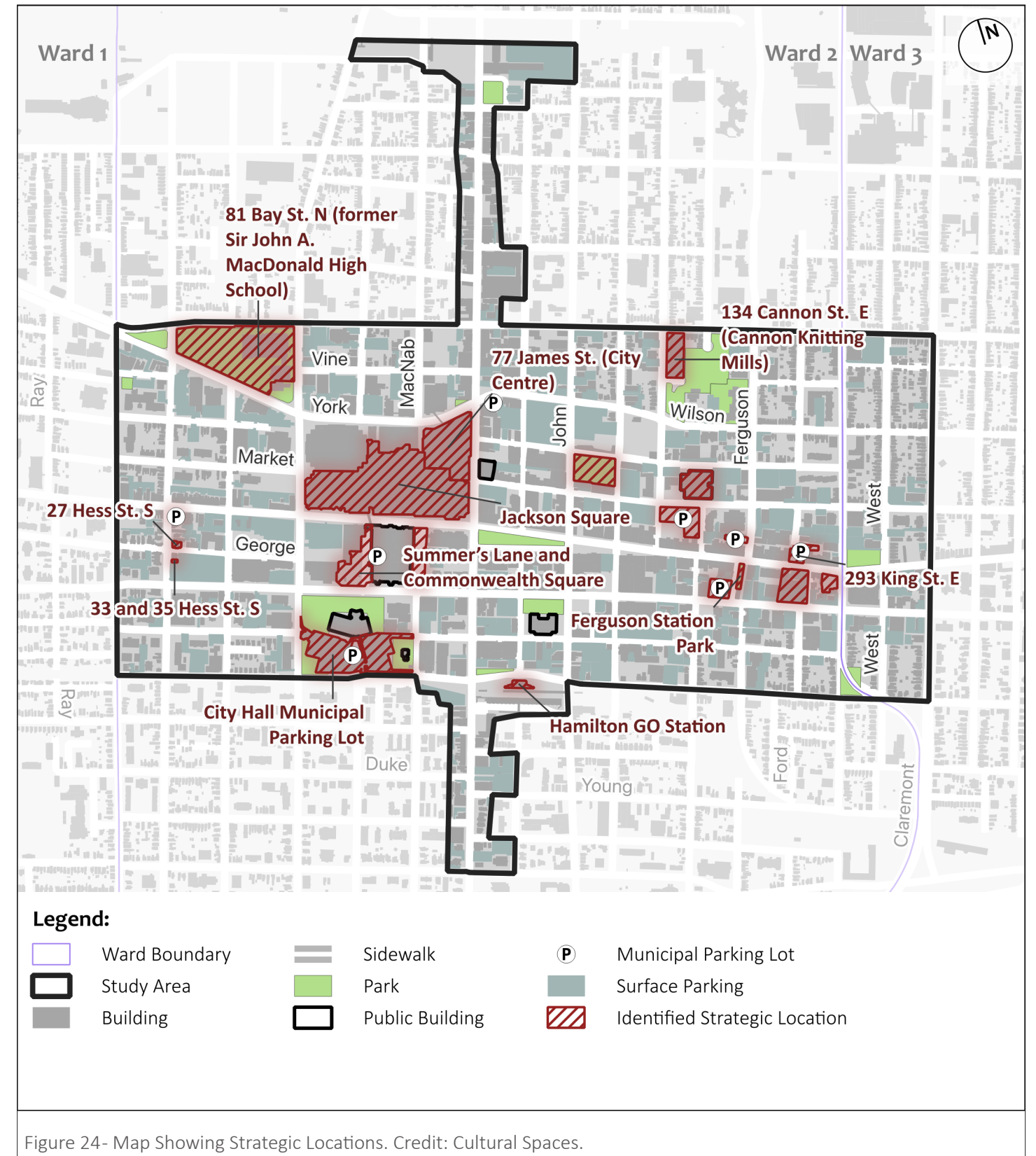
Redevelopment of Strategic Locations

LOCATION	OWNERSHIP	RELEVANT POLICY	USES	OPPORTUNITIES		INTENSITY		POTENTIAL
				PRIORITIES	TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVES	GRADE	YEARS	
322 and 328 King St. E	Private	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- commercial	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Revitalization	3- 5 years	Vacant lot on southside of King St. S. at Wellington St. S. Gateway potential to Downtown Hamilton
140 King William St. (Municipal Parking Car Park 5)	Public	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Revitalization	3- 5 years	Mixed-Use Residential redevelopment opportunity. New Provincial legislation around HST exemptions and DC deferrals could support redevelopment.
Ferguson Station Park	Public	Hamilton Parks Master Plan; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Community	Protect the main streets	Main street lifts	Temporary use/ temporary use	1-3 years	Property can be strategically adapted to provide interim pedestrian access to businesses on King St. E during LRT construction; Opportunity to implement design refinements and enhanced programming to activate and improve safety
171 Main St. E (Municipal Parking Car Park 7)	Public	Housing for Hamilton CIP; Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- commercial	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Incentivizing and supporting to accelerate transformation	Revitalization	5 + years	Mixed-Use Residential redevelopment opportunity
Southwest corner of Hess St. St. and King St. W (Municipal Parking Car Park 74)	Public	Revitalizing Hamilton's Commercial Districts CIP; Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan; Urban Hamilton Official Plan	Residential- commercial - community	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Revitalization	5 + years	Mixed-Use Residential redevelopment opportunity

Redevelopment of Strategic Locations

The map that follows identifies a set of strategic locations where targeted action can unlock the potential of Downtown Hamilton. These locations range from small-scale opportunities, such as activating a parkette, improving a key corner, or adding seating, lighting, and public art, to larger sites where redevelopment, adaptive reuse, or major public investment could reshape activity patterns and confidence in the core. Together, they illustrate how Downtown revitalization is built from both “everyday” places that improve comfort and neighbourhood life, and catalytic projects that signal long-term commitment and attract further investment.

Not every strategic location will move at the same pace. Some interventions can begin quickly through programming, temporary installations, and community-led activation, creating immediate reasons to visit and linger through art, events, and improved public spaces. Other sites require more time, coordination, and partnerships across the City, institutions, property owners, and the development community. Both scales matter: small moves build trust and momentum, while larger transformative projects deliver the housing, services, jobs, and civic spaces that Hamiltonians need. The purpose of identifying these strategic locations is to focus effort where it can create the greatest cumulative impact, strengthening neighbourhood life today while preparing the ground for consequential change over the years ahead.



Redevelopment of Strategic Locations

Two examples

Halifax, NS (Canada)— Cogswell District Redevelopment

Halifax’s Cogswell project is a strong example of a strategic site being treated as city-making, not just redevelopment. It converts 16 acres of road infrastructure at the entrance to downtown into a pedestrian-friendly mixed-use neighbourhood by reinstating the urban street grid and creating development blocks that can support new residential and commercial uses—explicitly reframing a traffic-centric zone into a connected district where people can live, work, and play.

Mechanically, it’s delivered as a packaged transformation: restored street grid, development blocks, dedicated cycling lanes and multi-use trails, new parks/open spaces, a reimagined transit hub, a significant central urban square. That combination matters: the project does not rely solely on a single building or a single developer. It creates the physical conditions and parcels that enable multiple investments to follow.



Figure 25- Halifax’s Cogswell project. Credit: A Disappearing Act

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: pick 1–2 highly symbolic sites and treat them as “proof points” by packaging streets, public realm, and development readiness together—so the site visibly signals confidence and unlocks surrounding reinvestment.

Birmingham (United Kingdom) — Big City Plan (City Centre Masterplan)

Birmingham’s Big City Plan is a city-centre masterplan that shows how strategic sites land best when they’re part of a coordinated multi-project program rather than isolated interventions. It sets clear, quantified objectives (e.g., new floorspace, new jobs, a more walkable city centre, new/improved public spaces, enhanced walking/cycling routes, new homes) and organizes delivery through five “areas of transformation.”

Mechanically, the plan functions as a unifying frame that helps the city coordinate public realm projects, movement improvements, cultural positioning, and development across a long horizon—so that strategic projects reinforce each other. It explicitly includes priorities like giving streets back to pedestrians and valuing heritage and cultural assets as part of the transformation logic, which is the same kind of “identity + function” blend Hamilton is aiming for.



Figure 26- Redevelopment in Birmingham. Credit: Voice of Calm.

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: treat strategic redevelopments as part of a small set of defined Downtown “transformation areas,” with measurable targets and sequenced delivery, so each site contributes to a cumulative Downtown lift rather than a stand-alone project.

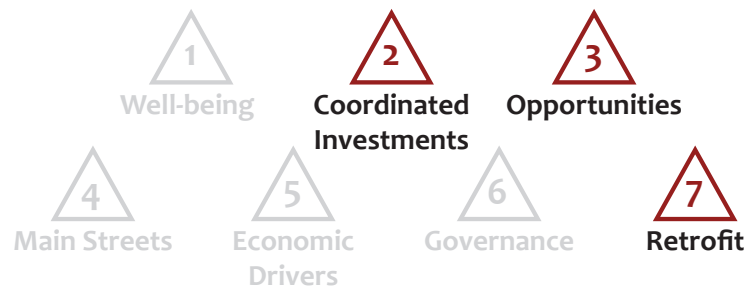
Incentivizing and Supporting to Accelerate Transformation

This initiative focuses on creating or adapting incentive tools and coordinating the impact of multiple stakeholders that accelerate private and not-for-profit sector participation in Downtown renewal. It targets current business operators, developers, investors, social service delivery groups, entrepreneurs, and other shapers of the physical and economic fabric of Downtown. Whether through bylaws, programmes, grants, tax mechanisms, zoning changes, development charge relief, or coordination of delivery of key activities, the goals are to facilitate resource investments, support the core social services, and manage the concentration of services that deliver public value for Downtown and the City as a whole.

Levers: Economic Opportunities, Development Environment, and Public Safety



Priorities: Retrofit Downtown, Enable future opportunities, and Drive transformation through coordinated investment.



Description: Its impact stems from aligning incentives and roles with outcomes. By encouraging the kinds of investments that strengthen Downtown’s economic base and social cohesion, the City can accelerate transformation without overextending public resources. The initiative also helps strengthen the presence of the services and infrastructure required to accompany the transformation of Downtown as well address the concentration of certain services that can become obstacles to that transformation. In doing so, it signals that Hamilton is prepared to partner meaningfully with the private and not-for-profit sector to turn potential into financial and social returns for both the partner and the city as a whole.

What it would look like: This initiative is the “acceleration engine” of the strategy: a clear set of incentives, supports, and process improvements that make it easier for property owners, businesses, developers, and non-profit partners to invest in Downtown. It would look like a simple, legible “Downtown Transformation Incentives Suite” with one front door—so proponents don’t have to navigate multiple departments and unclear rules. It would also look like faster decisions, better coordination across approvals, and a transparent way to track what investments are happening and what outcomes they generate.

For the public, the impact would be visible in faster storefront improvements, reduced long-term vacancy, more building reinvestment, and more projects moving from intention to construction. For the City, it creates a practical way to align incentives with outcomes: not “subsidies,” but targeted tools that unlock housing, improve main streets, and support the services and amenities needed for a complete Downtown neighbourhood.

How we get there: Start by consolidating and clarifying what already exists: produce a single “deal menu” of incentives and approvals, publish the eligibility criteria in plain language, and assign a Downtown deal desk or concierge function to guide proponents. Run a one-year pilot incentive cycle focused on a few priority geographies (key blocks and nodes) so the results are concentrated and visible. Pair incentives with performance expectations (e.g., façade transparency, maintenance commitments, ground-floor activation, accessibility improvements).

Next, build measurement into the program from the beginning: track application volumes, decision timelines, dollars leveraged, and the before/after impact on targeted streets. Use those results to refine the incentive suite for years 2–5, including any needed policy changes or program reviews. As the suite matures, align it with provincial and federal funding streams (e.g. housing, retrofit, climate) so the City’s dollars are used primarily to unlock larger external investments.

Incentivizing and Supporting to Accelerate Transformation

Two examples

Calgary, AB (Canada) — Downtown Development Incentive Program

Calgary’s Downtown Development Incentive Program is a clear example of using incentives to unlock adaptive reuse at scale—especially office-to-residential conversions. The City describes the program as funding conversions of underutilized office space into residential (and other uses such as hotels, schools, and performing arts) and reports that it supports 21 conversion projects, transforming 2.68 million square feet into 2,628 new homes (plus hotel/hostel uses).

Mechanically, Calgary runs the program through time-bounded intake windows (i.e., defined periods to apply rather than an always-open process), and multiple reports describe a simple incentive structure: up to \$75 per square foot for office-to-residential conversion, capped at a maximum per project (commonly cited at \$15M). The key operational point is that proponents can do the math: they know whether a conversion can work before they spend months in uncertainty.



Figure 27- Downtown Calgary. Credit: AceYYC

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: build a clear “deal math” incentive with defined eligibility, intakes, and public reporting (units created, square footage converted, leverage). Use it to create a pipeline rather than one-off exceptions.

Dublin (Ireland) — Living City Initiative (LCI)

Dublin’s Living City Initiative is a tax incentive scheme designed to encourage people to live in historic inner-city areas and regenerate commercial districts. It’s useful because it deliberately supports both residential refurbishment/conversion and commercial refurbishment, including tax relief options that apply to rented residences, which aligns closely with Hamilton’s need to improve rental housing quality and stabilize Downtown life.

Mechanically, LCI provides tax relief for residential works either as income tax relief (owner-occupied) or as capital allowance (for rented residences), and it also enables accelerated capital allowance for commercial property refurbishment/conversion. Importantly, it applies within mapped Special Regeneration Areas, which concentrates impact geographically rather than diluting it across the entire city.



Figure 28- Downtown Dublin. Credit: Krochmal

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: treat incentives as a targeted package (housing + commercial), apply them to priority areas/blocks, and design them to upgrade the lived experience of renters while also improving ground-floor vitality.

Main Street Lifts

Designed to rejuvenate Downtown’s commercial corridors, Main Street Lifts emphasize storefront improvements, cultural activation, and small business support. By combining streetscape upgrades, marketing initiatives, and targeted incentives, this effort strengthens Downtown’s identity and restores confidence in its retail and hospitality economy.

Levers: Main Streets, Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment, and Public and Green Spaces and Assets



Priorities: Protect the main streets, Increase safety and well-being, and Support economic drivers



Description: As construction of the LRT reshapes the urban landscape, this initiative focuses on supporting the hundreds of small businesses directly affected by disruption, helping them remain viable and visible through coordinated marketing, temporary improvements, and access programs. It also positions Downtown as a destination for Hamiltonians, a place where entertainment, food, retail, and services combine

to create a vibrant, inclusive, and memorable experience.

Its impact comes from reinforcing the identity and resilience of Downtown’s main streets. By combining façade renewal, storefront improvement programs, streetscape enhancements, and cultural activations, Main Street Lifts strengthens the unique character of each corridor while ensuring businesses can thrive during and after major infrastructure projects. A key component includes the temporary redesign of King Street during LRT construction by flipping the front to the back where possible, improving signage and pedestrian access, and maintaining continuous business visibility. Each project should be “climate-ready by design,” integrating shade, stormwater management, and comfort measures as part of the core scope, not as optional extras. These actions not only preserve commercial activity but also test new public space configurations.

The initiative also presents an opportunity to redefine Main Street’s role within the Downtown network by shifting it from a high-speed transportation corridor to a true urban street that prioritizes people, place, and experience. Through temporary and permanent design interventions, the corridor can be reimaged with wider sidewalks, improved crossings, new landscaping, and active frontages that invite people to linger rather than pass through. This transformation can also enhance connectivity between major civic and cultural landmarks such as City Hall, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, and the FirstOntario Concert Hall, improving the quality, comfort, and safety of public spaces while unlocking new opportunities for cultural programming, tourism, and private reinvestment. It will further strengthen Main Street’s

relationship with James Street, reinforcing it as a north–south cultural and commercial spine. Together, the two corridors can form a connected and complementary system of activity where Main Street becomes a space for movement, gathering, and commerce, and James Street remains a social and cultural destination that draws people deeper into the Downtown core.

This initiative can also serve as a model for how Hamilton supports local businesses during major city-building projects, demonstrating that economic growth and urban transformation can go hand in hand with community care and continuity.

What it would look like: Main Street Lifts is the initiative that makes Downtown feel alive again at street level. It would look like targeted corridors, especially along King, James, Main, and York, where storefronts are improved, sidewalks feel comfortable, lighting is reliable, and there is a steady rhythm of activity. The initiative is not only about beautification, it is about survival and confidence. Helping businesses remain visible and viable during disruption (including LRT construction) and positioning main streets as places people choose to linger, not just drive through, sends a message of resilience and public benefit.

In practice, Main Street Lifts would deliver a visible “corridor effect”: a few blocks that change quickly enough that residents and visitors can feel the difference. Storefront upgrades, pop-up occupancy, patios and parkettes, better wayfinding, and regular programming would combine into a single experience. Over time, pilots become permanent street transformations: safer crossings, wider sidewalks, trees and shade, and a ground-floor environment that is lively day and night.

How we get there: Begin with focus: choose 2–3 priority blocks where conditions are ripe for quick improvement and where success will be highly visible. Deploy a packaged set of supports: micro-grants for storefront improvements, a fast permit pathway for patios and temporary installations, coordinated cleaning and graffiti response, and a consistent programming calendar. Work with BIAs and property owners to fill gaps with pop-ups and short-term activations. Make it easy for businesses to participate and make it obvious to the public that the street is changing.

Then use what works to inform permanent capital design. Collect data on foot traffic, vacancy, and merchant sentiment during pilots, and convert those lessons into a permanent streetscape plan aligned with major infrastructure sequencing. Treat the main streets as Downtown’s living room: prioritize comfort, safety, and experience. By Year 3–5, aim to have at least one corridor segment moving from temporary interventions into permanent rebuild, signalling that Main Street Lifts is not only programming, it is city-building.

Main Street Lifts

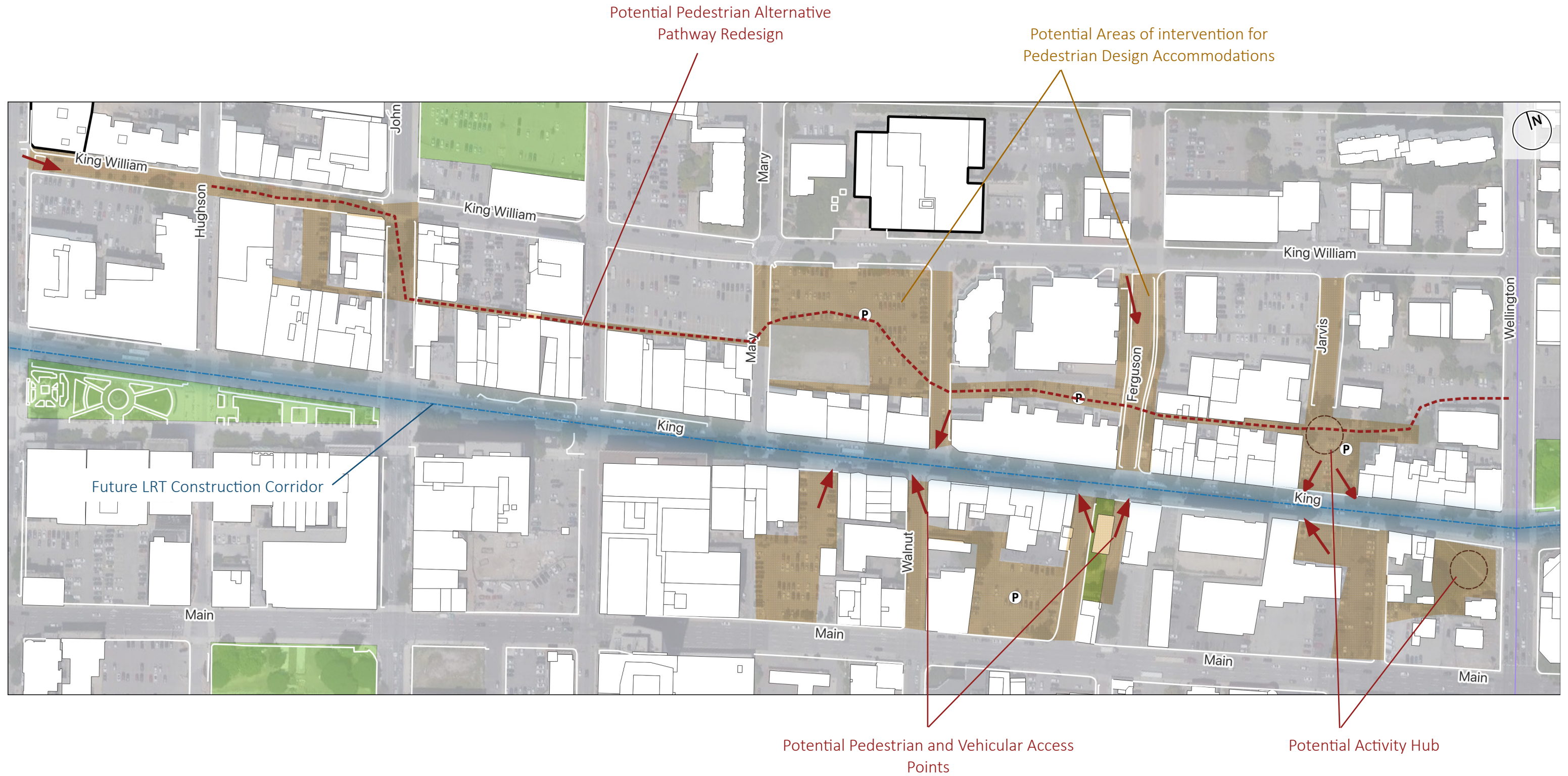


Figure 29- Illustration for the interim redesign potential along the proposed LRT on King Street during construction phase to maintain access and enjoyment of businesses. Credit: Cultural Spaces

Main Street Lifts

Two examples

Denver, CO (United States) — 16th Street Mall Reconstruction (Downtown “main street” rebuild)

Denver’s 16th Street Mall reconstruction is a strong “Main Street Lifts” precedent because it treats a signature downtown corridor as a confidence and experience project, not just an infrastructure job. The City frames the work around improving the downtown experience with safer, more comfortable public space and “new spaces and places for people to enjoy,” while keeping the corridor’s role as a central spine for downtown activity front and centre.

Mechanically, Denver delivers the transformation block-by-block and phase-by-phase, with clear milestones and a strong emphasis on transparency during disruption. The City publishes dashboards and regular updates showing which blocks are under construction, which are complete, and what’s coming next—creating steady “reopening moments” and maintaining trust with businesses and the public throughout a multi-year rebuild.



Figure 30- Denver. Credit: Erica Chang

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: treat Main Street Lifts as a corridor delivery program with phased, visible wins—pair capital work (or major disruption like LRT) with a public-facing progress rhythm, clear wayfinding and access, and ongoing activation. Use a simple dashboard and block-by-block completion to build momentum, demonstrate seriousness, and keep businesses and residents aligned even before the full corridor transformation is finished.

Oslo (Norway) — Car-Free Liveability Programme

Oslo’s Car-Free Liveability Programme shows a programmatic approach to making a city-centre feel safer, more comfortable, and more active by systematically prioritizing people over cars. The programme’s stated aim is to give streets back to people, more benches and free seating, more culture and activity, better cycling conditions, better public transport, and fewer cars in the city centre.

Mechanically, Oslo advanced through pilot trials and progressive change. A widely cited operational move was removing on-street parking: one account describes six pilot trials beginning in 2017 and the removal of about 300 spaces initially, rising to 700 spaces removed for private cars by 2019, freeing space for pedestrian priority, city life, and a more connected pedestrian network.



Figure 31- Oslo. Credit: Richard Mortel

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: treat main streets as a livability program, not a one-off project, use pilots, remove friction in the curb lane, add comfort infrastructure, and steadily connect pedestrian-friendly segments so the “corridor effect” is continuous.

Creation of Public Spaces

The creation and renewal of public spaces aim to restore Downtown’s role as Hamilton’s shared civic realm, a place for gathering, creativity, and everyday life. Investments in plazas, green areas, and flexible public venues will improve livability, safety, and accessibility, while fostering a sense of belonging.

Levers: Public and Green Spaces and Assets, Aesthetics and Beautification, and Connectivity and Transportation



Priorities: Retrofit Downtown, Enable future opportunities, Residents, visitors, and workers, and Increasing the sense of safety and well-being.



Description: Downtown Hamilton’s most pressing challenges include a lack of true, attractive public spaces that invite people to gather, linger, and connect. While Downtown hosts many civic institutions and key cultural assets, it has relatively few green and open spaces where residents, workers, and visitors can relax, enjoy art, or experience community life. This initiative envisions a renewed network of parks, plazas, and pedestrian spaces that not only provide daily amenity but also express Hamilton’s identity, its creativity, inclusiveness, and resilience. Each project should be “climate-ready by design,” integrating shade, cooling canopy, water features where appropriate, permeable surfaces, rain gardens as part of the core scope. These spaces are where public art, performance, markets, and festivals can flourish, turning Downtown into a stage for shared experiences and civic pride.

Its impact lies in creating a true heart for the city, a place that both Hamiltonians and visitors can claim as their own. By strategically investing in the design and programming of public spaces, the City can elevate the Downtown experience, ensuring that green areas, gathering places, and pedestrian corridors are beautiful, safe, and accessible. Examples of locations include the site of the current Frank A.Cooke terminal, the context of Gore Park, the areas surrounding the Art Gallery.

These spaces can also serve as tourism anchors, linking major attractions such as the Art Gallery, FirstOntario Concert Hall, and Gore Park, and drawing people from across the city and beyond. In doing so, this initiative transforms Downtown into a showcase for Hamilton’s culture, creativity, and community spirit, a civic environment that embodies the city’s past achievements and future ambitions, and that proudly presents Hamilton to the world.

The creation of public spaces amplifies the success of the other transformational initiatives. Great streets and plazas support Main Street Lifts by increasing pedestrian activity and inviting investment in storefronts; they enhance redevelopment projects by improving the context and value of nearby properties; and they provide the settings where arts, culture, and entrepreneurship can thrive. Together, these initiatives form a mutually reinforcing ecosystem where public investment in spaces and infrastructure unlocks private energy, strengthens social connections, and establishes Downtown as both the heart of Hamilton and the city’s most powerful expression of shared purpose and pride.

What it would look like: This initiative restores Downtown’s role as Hamilton’s shared civic realm by creating and renewing public spaces where people can gather, linger, and feel proud of the city. It would look like a small network of upgraded plazas, parkettes, and streetside spaces, connected to cultural and civic anchors, where seating, shade, greenery, lighting, and programming make it comfortable to spend time throughout the day and across seasons. These spaces become the “stages” of Downtown life: markets, performances, winter lighting, public art, and everyday moments.

The most important shift is that public spaces become managed and programmed, not simply built. A successful public space is a combination of design and operations: maintenance, safety, activation, and clear responsibility. When this is done well, the spaces support everything else, main streets thrive, perceptions of safety improve, and Downtown becomes a destination for Hamiltonians and visitors alike.

How we get there: Start by identifying 2–3 priority public-space sites where modest interventions can quickly improve daily experience and where programming can begin immediately. Launch a tactical phase first: temporary seating, shade, lighting enhancements, small landscape improvements, and a consistent event rhythm. Use this phase to learn what draws people, what times and formats work, and what operations are required to keep spaces clean and comfortable.

With that evidence, move into permanent design and delivery. Develop a capital concept for at least one signature space and pair it with a clear management model (who maintains, who programmes, how issues are reported, and how the space remains welcoming). Align the public space upgrades with nearby private reinvestment and main street improvements so the impact is multiplied. By Year 3–5, the goal is to have at least one highly visible public space project under construction or delivered, with programming that demonstrates the space is not only new but truly used and loved.

Creation of Public Spaces

Two examples

Montréal, QC (Canada) — Quartier des Spectacles / Place des Festivals

Montréal's Quartier des Spectacles is a strong reference because it pairs public space design with a durable governance/operations model. The Partnership is described as hosting 50+ festivals and events per year (including many outdoor events) and providing cultural activity programming throughout the year while preserving and enriching cultural assets, positioning the district as Montréal's cultural heart and a tourism destination.

Mechanically, the model is not "build a plaza and hope it works." It's about infrastructure, coordination, stewardship. Public investment supports equipment and infrastructure that make outdoor programming feasible and reliable, and the Partnership functions as a coordinating entity that sustains a consistent rhythm of activity and helps manage the public realm as an event-ready district rather than an occasional venue.



Figure 32- Montreal's Place des Arts. Credit: art_inthecity

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: public spaces succeed when they are designed and operated as an ecosystem: physical upgrades, a year-round programming engine, clear stewardship responsibilities.

Barcelona (Spain) — Superblocks (Superilles)

Barcelona's Superblocks are a useful reference because they show how cities can create meaningful public space by changing how streets function. Superblocks are described as roughly 400m x 400m units where the objective is to prioritize people over cars and recover space for community use, supporting accessibility, biodiversity, sustainable mobility, and social cohesion.

Mechanically, implementation is tied to a broader mobility framework and uses an incremental approach. Early experimentation through tactical urbanism, temporary, lower-cost interventions are used to test transformations before making them permanent. This is important for Hamilton because it shows a realistic pathway: you don't need to wait for major land acquisition or full reconstruction to begin creating better public spaces.



Figure 33- Barcelona. Credit: R Hauschulz

Transferable lesson for Hamilton: start by reallocating street space tactically (seating, greenery, slow-street pilots), measure use and comfort, then build permanent public spaces where the pilots prove demand, especially along a connected Downtown "heart loop."

Creation of Public Spaces

Potential Pedestrian Pathway Design

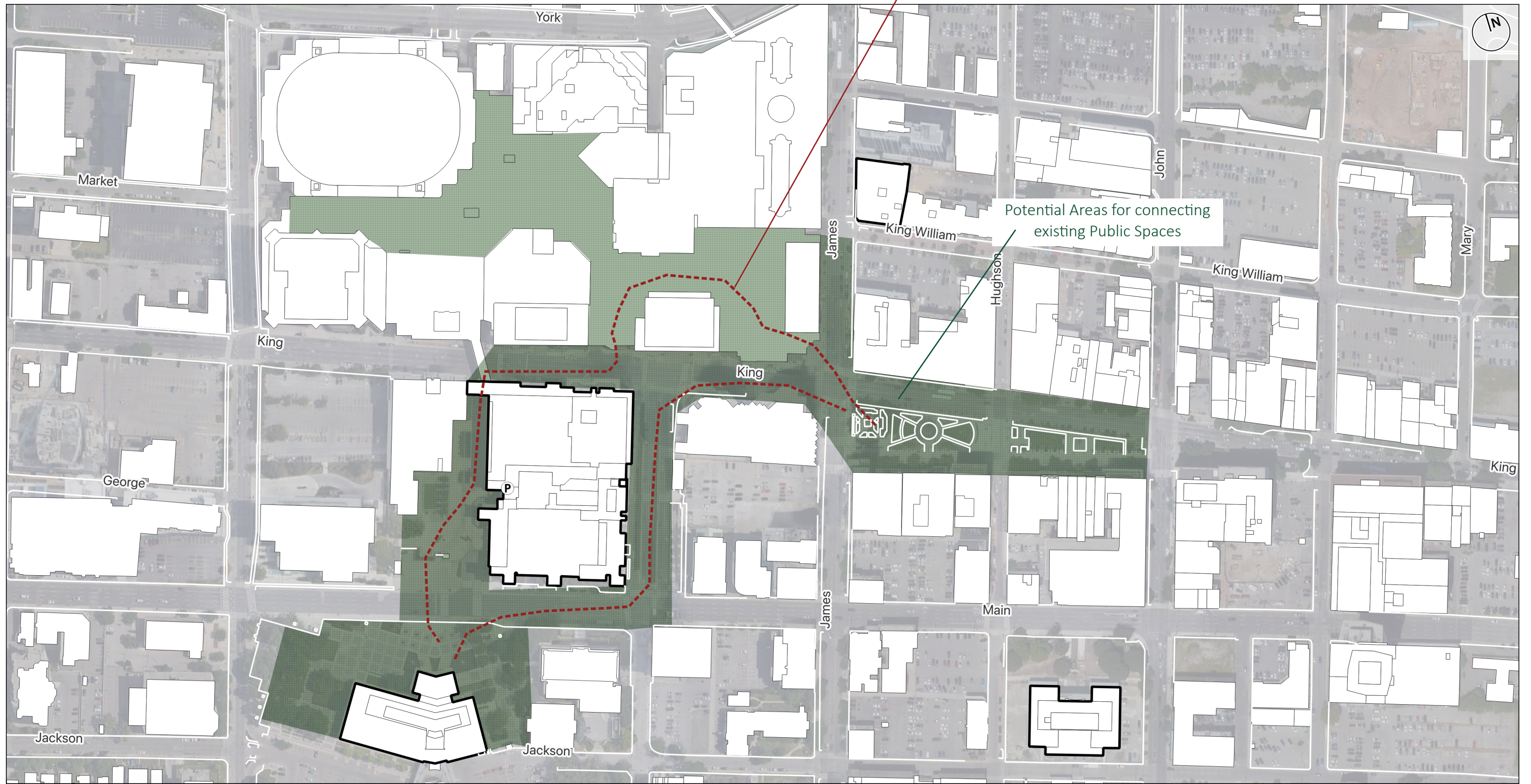


Figure 34- Illustration for the potential to strengthen public and green spaces Downtown. Credit: Cultural Spaces

7.2. Actions on the Priorities and Initiatives

The Actions represent the most direct and measurable expression of this Downtown Revitalization Strategy, the practical steps that turn priorities and transformational initiatives into reality. Each action is linked to one or more of the identified priorities and transformational initiatives, ensuring that efforts are coordinated, mutually reinforcing, and aimed at delivering tangible outcomes. While priorities define *what must be achieved*, and initiatives show *how change can be catalyzed*, actions define *what will be done*. They identify who leads, what partnerships are required, and what success looks like in the near term. Costing is assessed based on a tiering system and is indicative of effort. These are estimates that guide the reader in determining whether additional funds may be required and at what level. They also align with what might expect to be in an operational budget or require another approach.

Some actions identified are already underway within the City or with partners; the purpose of this plan is to connect them, strengthen coordination, and report results in a cohesive way so that individual efforts combine into a clear, cumulative impact Downtown.

The Strategy emphasizes a one- to five-year timeframe for implementation to generate early momentum, build public confidence, and demonstrate visible progress. Immediate action during this period, especially in the first year, is crucial to show that Downtown Hamilton can move decisively from planning to doing by advancing projects, improving the physical environment, and strengthening civic trust through consistent, transparent delivery. Within this window, actions are designed to be achievable, scalable, and adaptable, ensuring that early wins contribute to long-term transformation. With these priorities and immediate action, significant results can be achievable within that timeframe.

Beyond the five-year horizon, the Strategy recognizes that economic and social conditions will evolve, requiring a reassessment of priorities, resources, and partnerships. New challenges and opportunities, such as demographic shifts, technological change and investment cycles, will inevitably shape Downtown's trajectory. This plan commits to an adaptive approach, where success is continuously measured, lessons are incorporated, and the next phase of actions builds upon proven results. This ensures that Downtown revitalization remains dynamic, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of Hamiltonians.

How to Implement the Actions

Implementation of the actions should be approached as a practical guide rather than a fixed blueprint. The first three years provide the clearest direction and should be treated as the priority delivery window for building trust, learning, and momentum; actions further into the future will be refined as conditions change and results are measured.

Many actions are already underway within the City; this Strategy provides the framework to align and connect that work through the shared **Principles** and **Priorities** so it delivers coordinated, cumulative impact Downtown.

In carrying out each action, the City and partners should apply the full set of Strategy **Principles** as a consistent lens, focus effort on the agreed **Priorities**, and deliberately use the **Levers** to align programs, investments, and partnerships so individual actions reinforce one another.

LEGEND

#	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
	Action to undertake	Description of intent and key elements to consider	What are we trying to achieve	What should we get out of the action	1 of 5 initiatives	1 of 9 levers being activated through the action	Which top priority to revitalize Downtown is being addressed	Which complementary priority is being addressed	Lead internal department	Internal and external partners	\$ = operational budget/ under 100K \$\$ = minor additional funds/ 100K- 250K \$\$\$ = effort level additional funds/ 250K - 500K Transformation = investment level additional funds/ 500K	Identifies the type of funds, from operational to capital	Determines whether cost is known through operational costing, estimated through experience, or new and unknown requiring study.	

ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
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PREPARATORY YEAR (2026) INITIATED ACTIONS

1	Setup a downtown clean and quick fix surge pilot programme and fund	Dedicate resources to keeping downtown clean with increased frequency; Target 3 priority micro-zones at Gore Park/AGH/City Hall axis, TD Coliseum, JamesSt section, KingSt section; Rapid response fix it and clean up teams; City cleans everything; graffiti removal, public furniture fix, litter; public infrastructure repairs	Assess the amount of effort and resources required to maintain Downtown clean and attractive day and night	Data that can help design a Downtown Service standard	Main street lifts	Aesthetics and Beautification	Protect the main streets	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Economic development	Public works, bylaw, BIAs	\$	Operational	Costed	2026-2029
2	Create a Downtown Service Hub and ambassador pilot programme	Maintain existing DT issue reporting portal under the leadership of Economic development and in partnership with key departments; concierge service for range of City services and response; establish an ambassador programme for wayfinding, issue reporting, guidance for help for range of visitors, residents, businesses; coordination with waterfront for greater cohesion; coordination between services and police for best response.	Coordinate City services for quick and efficient response	Understand the stress on specific departments; Build trust with residents and businesses; first hand data collection	Main street lifts	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Protect the main streets	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Economic development	Public works, Tourism and Culture Division, Hamilton Police Service, Public Health, outreach organizations	\$	Operational	Costed	2026-2029

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
3	Roll out a storefront and visibility grants and design options for main streets affected by the LRT	Focus on the main streets and preparing them for the LRT changes; establish the design options to be applied during construction that will allow access through parallel streets/ back alleys on King St; support an effort to make the area attractive before and during. Climate change resilience should be a core requirement in the options.	Protect the main streets in anticipation of the LRT project, during construction, and for a quick recovery.	During construction design options are ready for implementation	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Protect the main streets	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	LRT Office, BIAs, Planning, Transportation Planning, cultural and entertainment groups	\$	Incentive/Grant	Costed	2026-2027
4	Design a financial model for a rent-to-own pilot programme	The financial model options should consider the parameters included in the 10 year strategy, scope out the current market, and take into consideration City budget realities. This will help anchor an artist and entrepreneur population Downtown that can actively contribute to its vibrancy and economic activity.	Identify the preferred financial models to put in place a rent-to-own pilot	Financial model options are ready for a pilot to be developed	Strategic rent-to-own initiative	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Enabling future opportunities	Support the economic drivers	Economic development	Corporate Corporate Real Estate Office Office and assets, Entrepreneurship groups, cultural and entertainment groups,	\$	Policy	Costed	2026-2027
5	Pilot “Animate the Downtown” micro-grants and improvements, especially on York Boulevard, James Street, and John Rebecca Park	Work with partners to deliver on ongoing activation programmes within targeted areas, including by considering bylaw exemptions (e.g. sound, licenses, assembly, event spaces) and accelerated review processes, align with the Night Time Economy project, enhance the connections with the waterfront and waterfalls. Physical improvements need to incorporate climate change resilience strategies.	Establish the foundation for Downtown as a destination day and night	Investments in space animation and permanent essential improvements	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Protect the main streets	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	BIAs, Public Works, community groups	\$	Incentive/Grant	Costed	2026-2029
6	Create and maintain a Downtown dashboard and report	The dashboard will report on actions, priorities, impacts, and challenges.	Build trust and establish partnerships	Assess progress on key indicators	All	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	City IT, BIAs	\$	Operational	Costed	2026-2036
7	Review the governance and programme delivery for Downtown	The effort aims to identify the key departments involved in shaping downtown, the types of activities and programmes they deliver downtown, and how much of their resources are invested specifically downtown.	Identify the key players, needs, and opportunities	Foundation to identify options	All	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	City Manager’s Office	Economic development	\$	Policy	Costed	2026-2027

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
8	Establish an interim city and partners table	The table would have the mandate to create the mechanism for operating a Downtown agency and for establishing a relationship with partners.	Develop the terms of operations and governance of a Downtown Office	Foundation to create a dedicated Downtown Office	All	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	City Manager's Office, BIAs, Chamber of Commerce, community groups	\$	Operational	Costed	2026-2027
9	Identify revitalization opportunities in strategic locations	Building on the locations identified in the 10-year strategy (revitalization, activation, redevelopment), develop a financial, Corporate Real Estate Office, and Facilities understanding of the short term opportunities. Opportunities need to incorporate climate change resilience benefits for the Downtown as a whole.	Set the course for long term strategies that meet the city's needs and leverage private sector investments	Strategic recommendations for uplift investments	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Retrofit Downtown	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	Corporate Real Estate Office and Facilities, Placemaking and Public Art	\$	Policy	Costed	2026-2027
10	Launch a review of bylaws and Official Plan policies that apply Downtown, including to support new uses, facilitate a more nimble process, help pilot initiatives and permit meanwhile uses	Identify the types of bylaws and policies that apply, their enforcement, their relevance, and the modifications required to support the revitalization of Downtown through new, temporary, and transition uses. Apply a night time lens. Guided by the principles and priorities of the 10-year strategy.	Strengthen and adapt the regulatory tools to Downtown's reality.	List of bylaws and Official Plan policies to strengthen and adapt.	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Bylaw services	Economic development, Planning and Procurement	\$	Policy	Costed	2026-2027
11	Review incentive programmes to target the right projects for the times	Incentive programmes should support the types of projects that align with the residential and commercial projects required to revitalize Downtown, including dealing with vacant properties/ lots, adaptive reuse, climate change resilience, heritage conservation, and attracting residents/ visitors/ businesses	Stimulate the right projects to revitalize Downtown	Align financial incentives with priorities	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Enabling future opportunities	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	Planning	\$	Policy	Costed	2026-2027
12	Build the internal capacity to undertake major site rehabilitation and development projects	The revitalization of Downtown depends in part on addressing the rehabilitation, development, retrofit, of major sites where a City involvement will be required. These include John A. MacDonald School, the Police Headquarters, Jackson Square, City Centre, Commonwealth Square and other large sized locations such as parking and vacant lots. The internal capacity to interact with developers and address the complexities of large scale projects is essential.	Stimulate the right projects to revitalize Downtown	Internal capacity to coordinate large transformative projects	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Enabling future opportunities	Corporate Real Estate Office	Economic development	\$	Operational	Costed	2026-2027

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
YEAR 1 (2027) INITIATED ACTIONS														
13	Operate a storefront and visibility grants for main streets affected by the LRT	Focus on the main streets and preparing them for the LRT changes; support an effort to make the area attractive before, during and after, day and night	Protect the main streets in anticipation of the LRT project, during construction, and for a quick recovery.	Businesses are supported to continue to operate despite disruption	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Protect the main streets	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	LRT Office, BIAs, cultural and entertainment groups	\$	Incentive/Grant	Costed	2027-2036
14	Implement the preferred design option to ensure access and enjoyment of main streets affected by the LRT	Based on the preferred design option, implement the plan in anticipation of the LRT project. The design option for the area will support the ability for businesses to operate and thrive, will have considered road design, streetscape design, congestion mitigation, “rear door access”, and other elements that affect the aesthetics, wayfinding, visitor and business owner access, delivery access, parking, and overall viability of businesses. Build on direction from the Downtown Streets Plan, the Vision-Zero Action Plan and Complete Livable Better Streets Policy and Framework.	Protect the main streets in anticipation of the LRT project, during construction, and for a quick recovery.	Businesses are supported to continue to operate despite the disruption	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	LRT Office, Planning, Transportation Planning, Public Works, BIAs	\$\$	Capital	Unknown	2027-2036
15	Design a “rent-to-own” pilot programme	Based on the financial model options, scope out the current market, and take into consideration City budget realities. Identify pilot sites. This will help anchor an artist and entrepreneur population Downtown that can actively contribute to its vibrancy and economic activity.	Develop the funding and management mechanics of a “rent-to-own” programme	Terms and strategy for a City led “rent-to-own” programme	Strategic rent-to-own initiative	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Enabling future opportunities	Support the economic drivers	Economic development	Corporate Corporate Real Estate Office Office and Facilities, Housing Secretariat, Entrepreneurship groups, cultural and entertainment groups,	\$\$	Policy	Unknown	2027-2028
16	Map out activation spaces and profiles	Complete a map of public spaces (parks, streets, parking lots, parkettes) and profiles to align with needs from arts, culture, entertainment sectors and BIAs. Includes day and night time uses.	Have a complete picture of all public spaces and their potential in activating Downtown	Map of public spaces and their activation profile	Main street lifts	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Support the economic drivers	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	GIS, Placemaking	\$	Policy	Costed	2027-2028

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
17	Map out the public realm that is critical to “quality of life lifting” and its profile	With a large population of renters, shared amenities in the public realm are important. Identifying those locations, the needs they serve, and the population that uses them, helps align improvements with positive impact for those using them. Includes placemaking infrastructure. Build on direction from the Downtown Streets Plan.	Improve the public realm.	Improvements to the public realm are aligned with the needs of residents.	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Retrofit Downtown	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Planning	Economic development	\$	Policy	Costed	2027-2028
18	Implement a cyclist and pedestrian safety first design for key Downtown streets	Downtown as an active neighbourhood and a destination for entertainment and culture is particularly sensitive to traffic conflicts. Redesigning traffic patterns to ensure the safety of pedestrian and cyclists first makes it safer for residents and visitors alike to live, stay and enjoy Downtown amenities. Build on direction from the Downtown Streets Plan, Hamilton’s Cycling Master Plan, the Vision-Zero Action Plan and Complete Livable Better Streets Policy and Framework. These should prioritize aligning with other initiatives to make Downtown livable and attractive, such as cultural and arts projects, activation of key locations, and main street	People come more frequently and spend more time Downtown	People feel safer walking and cycling	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Connectivity and Transportation	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Enabling future opportunities	Transportation Planning,	Planning, Tourism and Culture Division	\$	Operational	Costed	2027-2036
19	Explore parking options with the private sector, in new development, and in strategic locations	Parking needs to be provided for residents, workers, and visitors alike. The loss of parking lots to development is an opportunity to redesign the approach to parking Downtown. This considers a range of options including partnerships with the private sector to operate public parking, the inclusion of public parking in development projects, and transitioning/ interim parking structures.	Manage transition from individual vehicles to other modes of transportation	Parking continues to be provided in strategic locations	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Connectivity and Transportation	Retrofit Downtown	Enabling future opportunities	Transportation Planning,	Planning, Corporate Real Estate Office	\$	Operational	Costed	2027-2028
20	Identify the needs and opportunities to stabilize and incentivize everyday retail and services	Residents need to have access to essentials and to a range of services for a diverse population, including groceries, pharmacies, clinics, child-care, sports and community facilities, and expanded hours of operations..	Maintain resident population	Tools can be developed to stabilize and incentivize	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Protect the main streets	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	BIAs	\$	Policy	Costed	2027-2028

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
21	Explore the feasibility of a Downtown Office	Develop options and mechanisms to meet the objective, including if relevant terms of reference, key policies, agreement frameworks and budget.	Focus the City's attention to Downtown issues	Best option to deliver on the 10 year strategy	All	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	City Manager's Office	Economic development	\$	Operational	Costed	2027-2028
22	Expand coordinated Downtown outreach teams	Strengthen the capacity for the joint police and outreach teams, including the MCCRT, COAST, SIT, and RIST resources, to operate more frequently and for longer hours. This includes increasing the number of team members and their budget.	Provide the right services and intervention	A well-resourced team to address safety, security, mental health and homelessness issues	Main street lifts	Public Safety	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	Corporate Corporate Real Estate Office and Facilities	\$\$	Operational	Costed	2027-2028
23	Audit lighting and safety conditions in priority areas to determine scope of improvements, including temporary / construction hoarding lighting	Identify priority areas Downtown in relation to entertainment, transportation, and main streets and ensuring the systematic use of temporary lighting when necessary. Consider functional improvements (e.g. architectural and seasonal improvements, light based public art)	Determine where and how to improve safety and placemaking through lighting.	Improved lighting in priority areas	Main street lifts	Public Safety	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Protect the main streets	Public Works	BIAs, Community Safety and Well-Being, Tourism and Culture Division, Placemaking,	\$	Operational	Costed	2027-2028
24	Launch a "Downtown is Ours" programming initiative that promotes the inclusive use of spaces for arts, culture, sports and entertainment	This programme is aimed at promoting Downtown as an attraction by offering a hub of information on all cultural, artistic, and sports related and entertainment activities, a cohesive brand, and facilitating the animation of public spaces. Align with the City's Tourism Strategy. Coordination with waterfront and peripheral areas with shared interests.	Promote Downtown as an arts, culture, and entertainment destination day and night	Activation of Downtown through arts, culture and entertainment	Main street lifts	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Support the economic drivers	Protect the main streets	Economic development	Tourism and Culture Division, Placemaking, Corporate Communications	\$	Partnership/ Leverage	Estimated	2027-2028
25	Develop partnership frameworks for catalytic projects	Policy, programme, and terms of reference for City partnerships to develop strategic locations, pending Governance review.	Facilitate strategic investments	Framework for partnerships in unlocking the potential of strategic locations	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Enabling future opportunities	Corporate Real Estate Office	Economic development	\$	Policy	Costed	2027-2028

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
26	Convene a summit of emerging industries representatives to identify needs and incentives	The summit aims to convene representatives and leaders to understand the needs that a City can provide for, including space, infrastructure, services, and incentives. The ultimate purpose is for Downtown Hamilton to play a role in making Hamilton attractive for these industries so that they grow and remain.	Understand the potential for emerging industries to set up Downtown	Data on real property and employee support needs for emerging industries	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Support the economic drivers	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	BIAs, Chamber of Commerce	\$	Operational	Costed	2027-2028
27	Create a Downtown opportunity site inventory, including redevelopment readiness studies for municipal and strategic private locations	The inventory would refine the data collected in the 10-year strategy, provide detailed profiles for each location, and describe the conditions to facilitate redevelopment. It can lead to an invitation for ideas from developers.	Accelerate appropriate priority development	Locations and conditions for redevelopment are identified.	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Retrofit Downtown	Corporate Real Estate Office	Economic development	\$	Operational	Costed	2027-2028
28	Identify priorities for reinvestments and uses for major Downtown infrastructure and public assets, including Commonwealth Square, Main Street, the Frank A. Cooke Terminal, the Hamilton GO Centre	Significant investments are required for water treatment, energy transportation, communication, and urban design changes. Identifying the priorities within the broader context of planned projects, needs, and forecasted growth, can help streamline investments and support long term revitalization projects. Design and management options should be part of that exercise. Links to CityHousing Hamilton and Art Gallery of Hamilton.	Focus on critical infrastructure to support revitalization	Alignment of investments	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Retrofit Downtown	Economic development	Planning, Public Works, CHH, AGH	\$	Operational	Costed	2027-2028

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
29	Demonstrate a late-night downtown Hamilton myRide zone in collaboration with major events; if successful, pilot an overnight downtown myRide zone	Support overnight travel needs for shift workers in hospitality, tourism, and healthcare sectors and gather insights for any future HSR overnight service. Support a vibrant late-night and overnight downtown with enhanced public transit service	Bolster the attractiveness of downtown’s late-night and overnight activities by providing safe and direct transit connections within the area.	Residents, visitors and workers have an affordable and direct late-night / overnight transit service to travel between downtown amenities.	All	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Enabling future opportunities	HSR	Community Safety and Well-Being	\$\$\$	Operational	Costed	2027-2036
30	Update and implement the direction from the Economic Development Action Plan that supports Downtown revitalization	The EDAP already includes pillars that are aligned with the revitalization of Downtown. A review of actions, especially as they relate to entrepreneurship and arts and culture, to ensure relevance may be required.	Coordinate the implementation of various plans	Alignment and leveraging of actions	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Support the economic drivers	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	Tourism and Culture Division, Planning	\$	Policy	Costed	2027-2028
31	Explore the City’s approach to urban design and the public realm	With the number of physical changes required in Downtown, and to accompany the eventual retrofit of significant components, an internal discussion on the City’s approach to defining and coordinating action on aspects of the urban environment that affect the public realm, would help articulate a vision for all aspects of the public realm, including open spaces, heritage structures, parkades, streets, façades. Build on direction from the Downtown Streets Plan.	Articulate the City’s role and expectations in a cohesive design	Awareness and recommendations	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Retrofit Downtown	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	Planning, Transportation, Tourism and Culture Division	\$	Policy	Costed	2027-2028

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
ACTIONS INITIATED BETWEEN YEAR 2 AND 4 (2028 - 2031)														
32	Design a Downtown Service Standard	Based on the data collected over 3 years of piloting, identify the issues and opportunities, recommend next steps.	Cleaner and attractive Downtown	Have a Service Standard adapted to Downtown's needs	Main street lifts	Aesthetics and Beautification	Protect the main streets	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Public Works	Economic development, Public works, bylaw, BIAs	\$	Policy	Costed	2028-2029
33	Implement a Downtown Service Standard	Apply the standard adapted to Downtown.	Cleaner and attractive Downtown	Operations and resources are appropriate	Main street lifts	Aesthetics and Beautification	Protect the main streets	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Public Works	Economic development, Public works, bylaw, BIAs	\$\$	Operational	Estimated	2029-2036
34	Assess the results of the one-stop shop and ambassador pilot programme	Based on the data collected over 3 years of piloting, identify the issues and opportunities, recommend next steps.	Understand the impact of the pilot	Determine continuation	Main street lifts	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Protect the main streets	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Economic development	Public works, Tourism and Culture Division, Hamilton Police Service, Public Health, outreach organizations	\$	Policy	Costed	2028-2029
35	Consolidate the functions of the one-stop shop and ambassador programme under the dedicated coordination unit	Based on the programme review, assign the functions to the dedicated coordination unit /potential Downtown Office with the required resources	Focus on Downtown needs and issues	Maintain a single point of contact	Main street lifts	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Protect the main streets	Dedicated coordination unit	Economic development, Public works, Tourism and Culture Division, Hamilton Police Service, Public Health, outreach organizations	\$\$	Operational	Estimated	2029-2036
36	Implement a "rent-to-own" pilot programme	Based on the terms of the programme and the properties identified for the pilot, implement the recommendations.	Have a "rent-to-own" pilot programme that people can apply for.	An operational "rent-to-own" pilot programme	Strategic rent-to-own initiative	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Enabling future opportunities	Support the economic drivers	Economic development	Corporate Corporate Real Estate Office Office and assets, Entrepreneurship groups, cultural and entertainment groups,	\$\$	Policy	Unknown	2029-2036
37	Assess the results of the "Animate the Downtown" pilot programme	Based on the data collected over 3 years of piloting, identify the issues and opportunities, recommend next steps.	Understand the impact of the pilot	Determine continuation	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Protect the main streets	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	BIAs, Public Works, community groups	\$	Policy	Costed	2028-2029

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
38	Consolidate the functions of the “Animate the Downtown” programme under the coordination unit	Based on the programme review, assign the functions to the coordination unit with the required resources. The activation spaces and public realm maps serve to guide the programme review and expansion if required.	Focus on a nimble and targeted funding programme to address the needs and opportunities of Downtown	Seize opportunities for animation and permanent micro-improvements	Main street lifts	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Protect the main streets	Support the economic drivers	Downtown Office	BIAs, Public Works, community groups	\$\$	Operational	Estimated	2029-2036
39	Provide and promote a catalogue of activation spaces and their profiles to the arts, culture, sports, and entertainment sector	Complete a map of public spaces (parks, streets, parking lots, parkettes) and profiles to align with needs from arts, culture, entertainment sectors and BIAs. This includes details on permitted uses, time of use, and engagement of Special Events Advisory Team.	Engage the community in activating spaces day and night	Animated Downtown	Main street lifts	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Support the economic drivers	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	Planning, SEAT, Tourism and Culture Division	\$	Policy	Costed	2028-2036
40	Enhance/ improve 3 priority locations in the public realm that are critical to “quality of life lifting”	With a large population of renters, shared amenities in the public realm are important. Identifying those locations, the needs they serve, and the population that uses them, helps align improvements with positive impact for those using them.	Improve the public realm.	Improvements to the public realm are aligned with the needs of residents.	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Retrofit Downtown	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Planning	Economic development	\$\$	Policy	Estimated	2028-2031
41	Explore and develop targeted funding programmes to stabilize and incentivize everyday retail and services	Residents need to have access to essentials and to a range of services for a diverse population, including groceries, pharmacies, clinics, child-care, sports and community facilities.	Maintain resident population	Tools can be developed to stabilize and incentivize	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Protect the main streets	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	BIAs	\$\$	Incentive/Grant	Estimated	2028-2036
42	Prepare the launch of the coordination unit/potential Downtown Office	Based on the options explored, allocate the resources and identify authorities to implement the preferred option.	Establish a coordination unit	A coordination unit	All	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	City Manager’s Office	Economic development	\$	Operational	Costed	2028-2029
43	Launch the coordination unit/potential Downtown Office	Based on the options explored, allocate the resources and identify authorities to implement the preferred option.	Establish a coordination unit	A coordination unit	All	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	City Manager’s Office	Economic development	\$	Operational	Costed	2029-2036

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
44	Support coordinated Downtown outreach teams	Strengthen the capacity for the joint police and outreach teams, including the MCCRT, COAST, SIT, and RIST resources, to operate more frequently and for longer hours. This includes increasing the number of team members and their budget.	Provide the right services and intervention	A well-resourced team to address safety, security, mental health and homelessness issues	Main street lifts	Public Safety	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	Corporate Corporate Real Estate Office and Facilities	\$\$	Operational	Costed	2028-2036
45	Implement the recommendations of the audit on lighting and safety conditions in priority areas	Following the audit, implement the recommendations	Improve safety through lighting.	Improved lighting in priority areas	Main street lifts	Public Safety	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Protect the main streets	Public Works	BIAs	\$	Operational	Costed	2028-2036
46	Enhance a "Downtown is Ours" programming initiative that promotes the inclusive use of spaces for arts, culture and entertainment	This programme is aimed at promoting Downtown as an attraction by offering a hub of information on all cultural and entertainment activities, a cohesive brand, and facilitating the animation of public spaces. Enhance it by expanding on the partnerships.	Promote Downtown as an arts, culture, and entertainment destination	Activation of Downtown through arts, culture and entertainment	Main street lifts	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Support the economic drivers	Protect the main streets	Economic development	Tourism and Culture Division	\$	Partnership/ Leverage	Estimated	2028-2031
47	Establish a major initiatives unit to manage the opportunity site inventory, the redevelopment readiness studies, and the frameworks	Consolidate under one roof the capacity to implement the results of the inventories and studies to lead to major projects being unlocked.	Redevelop strategic locations	Ability for the City to actively unlock the potential of strategic locations	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Enabling future opportunities	Corporate Real Estate Office		\$	Operational	Costed	2028-2029
48	Explore establishing an innovation hub	As a result of the recommendations of the summit, consider the relevance of consolidating Downtown the services and assets tied to emerging industries.	Supporting emerging industries in choosing to set up Downtown	Report on alignment of interests between emerging industries and the opportunities Downtown	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Support the economic drivers	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	BIAs, Chamber of Commerce	\$\$	Partnership/ Leverage	Unknown	2028-2029
49	Explore the creation of a arts, culture, and entertainment district	Downtown is concentrating many of the City's cultural and entertainment assets. Exploring the creation of a district would strengthen a brand for Downtown and also better focus the City's planning and design tools to maximize the benefits from a district. Align with the Tourism Strategy and direction on districts and precincts. This includes strategies to develop and protect live venues and nightlife.	Downtown is a destination for arts, culture, sports, and entertainment day and night	Recommendations on a district	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Support the economic drivers	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	Tourism and Culture Division, Planning	\$	Policy	Costed	2028-2029

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
50	Implement priority projects for reinvestments for major Downtown infrastructure and public assets, including Main Street, the Frank A. Cooke Terminal, the Hamilton GO Centre	Significant investments are required for water treatment, energy transportation, communication, and urban design changes. Identifying the priorities within the broader context of planned projects, needs, and forecasted growth, can help streamline investments and support long term revitalization projects.	Focus on critical infrastructure to support revitalization	Alignment of investments	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Retrofit Downtown	Economic development	Planning, Public Works, Tourism and Culture Division	\$	Operational	Costed	2028-2036
51	Pilot bylaws and policies that apply to Downtown	Identify the types of bylaws and policies that apply, their enforcement, their relevance, and the modifications required to support the revitalization of Downtown. Guided by the principles and priorities of the 10-year strategy.	Strengthen and adapt the regulatory tools to Downtown's reality.	List of bylaws and policies to strengthen and adapt.	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Bylaw services	Economic development, Tourism and Culture Division	\$	Policy	Costed	2028-2031
52	Design incentive programmes to target the right projects for the times	Incentive programmes should support the types of projects that align with the residential and commercial projects required to revitalize Downtown, conserve heritage assets that define the City, maintain the Downtown's character, and attract quality buildings. This includes dealing with vacant properties/ lots, conversion projects, adaptive reuse, and attracting residents/ visitors/ businesses.	Stimulate the right projects to revitalize Downtown	Align financial incentives with priorities	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	Planning	\$	Policy	Costed	2028-2029
53	Pilot incentive programmes to target the right projects for the times	Based on the design of programmes, pilot on specific types of projects to demonstrate the viability of the strategy	Stimulate the right projects to revitalize Downtown	Align financial incentives with priorities	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Development Environment	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	Planning	\$\$\$	Incentive/Grant	Estimated	2029-2036
54	Develop a Downtown Quality Urban Environment Framework	By consolidating the information from the opportunity sites inventory, the transportation priorities, the priority reinvestment projects, priority public realm enhancements, design guidelines, parking options, and other aspects of the urban fabric, a plan that addresses how the public realm can tie all of this together would help give cohesion and quality to Downtown. Build on direction from the Downtown Streets Plan.	Enhance the quality of the public realm	Guidance on design that affects the public realm	All	Aesthetics and Beautification	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	Transportation, Planning	\$	Operational	Costed	2028-2031

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
ACTIONS INITIATED AFTER YEAR 5 (2032)														
55	Enhance/ improve another 3 priority locations in the public realm that are critical to “quality of life lifting”	With a large population of renters, shared amenities in the public realm are important. Identifying those locations, the needs they serve, and the population that uses them, helps align improvements with positive impact for those using them.	Improve the public realm.	Improvements to the public realm are aligned with the needs of residents.	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Retrofit Downtown	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Planning	Economic development	\$\$	Policy	Estimated	2032-2036
56	Enhance a “Downtown is Ours” programming initiative that promotes the inclusive use of spaces for arts, culture and entertainment, including the creation of additional Downtown festivals	This programme is aimed at promoting Downtown as an attraction by offering a hub of information on all cultural and entertainment activities, a cohesive brand, and facilitating the animation of public spaces. Enhance it by expanding on the partnerships.	Promote Downtown as an arts, culture, and entertainment destination	Activation of Downtown through arts, culture and entertainment	Main street lifts	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Support the economic drivers	Protect the main streets	Economic development	Tourism and Culture Division	\$	Partnership/ Leverage	Estimated	2032-2036
57	Pilot 5 top recommendations from the innovation hub report	As a result of the recommendations of the report, consider the relevance of consolidating Downtown the services and assets tied to emerging industries.	Supporting emerging industries in choosing to set up Downtown	Tangible evidence of support for an innovation hub	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Economic Opportunities	Support the economic drivers	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	BIAs, Chamber of Commerce	\$	Operational	Costed	2032-2036
58	Pilot 5 top recommendations from the creation of an arts, culture, and entertainment district	Downtown is concentrating many of the City’s cultural and entertainment assets. Exploring the creation of a district would strengthen a brand for Downtown and also better focus the City’s planning and design tools to maximize the benefits from a district.	Downtown is a destination for arts, culture, sports, and entertainment	Outline of a district	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Cultural Assets, Activities, and Entertainment	Support the economic drivers	Enabling future opportunities	Economic development	Tourism and Culture Division	\$	Policy	Costed	2032-2036
59	Phase the implementation of priority projects for reinvestments for major Downtown infrastructure and public assets, including Main Street, the Frank A. Cooke Terminal, the Hamilton GO Centre	Significant investments are required for water treatment, energy transportation, communication, and urban design changes. Identifying the priorities within the broader context of planned projects, needs, and forecasted growth, can help streamline investments and support long term revitalization projects.	Focus on critical infrastructure to support revitalization	Alignment of investments	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Retrofit Downtown	Economic development	Planning, Public Works	\$	Operational	Costed	2032-2036

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
60	Implement by-laws that apply to Downtown	Identify the types of bylaws that apply, their enforcement, their relevance, and the modifications required to support the revitalization of Downtown. Guided by the principles and priorities of the 10-year strategy.	Strengthen and adapt the regulatory tools to Downtown's reality.	List of bylaws to strengthen and adapt.	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Set up a Downtown focused governance and administrative model	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Bylaw services	Economic development	\$	Policy	Costed	2032-2036
61	Implement incentive programmes to target the right projects for the times	Incentive programmes should support the types of projects that align with the residential and commercial projects required to revitalize Downtown, conserve heritage assets that define the City, maintain the Downtown's character, and attract quality buildings. This includes dealing with vacant properties/ lots, conversion projects, adaptive reuse, and attracting residents/ visitors/ businesses.	Stimulate the right projects to revitalize Downtown	Align financial incentives with priorities	Main street lifts	Development Environment	Enabling future opportunities	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	Planning	Transformational	Policy	Costed	2032-2036
62	Implement a Downtown Public Realm guidance	By consolidating the information from the opportunity sites inventory, the transportation priorities, the priority reinvestment projects, priority public realm enhancements, the parking options, and other urban fabric aspects, a plan that addresses how the public realm can tie all of this together would help give cohesion and quality to Downtown. This includes attention paid to gateway entry points to Downtown, their identification and enhancement.	Enhance the quality of the public realm	Guidance on design that affects the public realm	All	Aesthetics and Beautification	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	Urban Design, Public Works, Planning, Transportation,	\$	Operational	Costed	2032-2036
63	Explore a multi-year Downtown Capital Programme	Setting up a bundled set of streets/parks/facilities delivered as one coherent package, not scattered projects	Maintain the quality of Downtown assets	Predictable funding	All	Aesthetics and Beautification	Retrofit Downtown	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	Planning, Public Works, Urban Design	\$\$\$	Operational	Costed	2032-2033
64	Invest in scaling up conversion projects	Office to housing conversions are an important factor in offering housing options. Additionally, certain types of large buildings can be converted to other needed uses in a shorter time than building new.	More housing and commercial opportunities	Incentive for a priority	Incentivizing to accelerate transformation	Residents, Visitors, and Workers	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Increase the sense of safety and well-being for all	Economic development	Planning	Transformational	Incentive/Grant	Unknown	2032-2036
65	Invest in public asset retrofit projects	Investing in public asset projects is a show of civic pride, provides residents with needed quality infrastructure, and can also stimulate private sector development	City pride	Public assets are cared for	Redevelopment of strategic locations	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Retrofit Downtown	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	Planning, Public Works	Transformational	Capital	Unknown	2032-2036

	ACTIONS	DESCRIPTION AND KEY ELEMENTS	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	LINKED TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVE	KEY LEVERS	PRIMARY PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY	LEAD	PARTNERS	COST TIER	COST TYPE	COST CONFIDENCE	YEARS
66	Invest in creating a new invigorated public space	Through an understanding of reinvestments in priority projects, there is an opportunity to imagine a new invigorated public space that builds on existing assets (e.g. Gore Park, City Hall) and expands the offer of green spaces, public assets, and needed “quality of life lifting” assets.	City pride	New public asset	Undertaking the creation of public spaces	Public and Green Spaces and Assets	Retrofit Downtown	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	Planning, Public Works	Transformational	Capital	Unknown	2032-2036
67	Launch a “Main Street First” investment programme to prioritize Main Street, King Street, James Street, York Boulevard	The programme would prioritize projects to densify and improve the streets, strengthening their role as Main Streets and providing residents and visitors with services, amenities, and housing.	Affirm the role of Main Streets in defining the social and economic identity of Downtown	Incentives to develop and rehabilitate.	Main street lifts	Main Streets	Protect the main streets	Driving transformation through shared and coordinated investments	Economic development	BIAs	Transformational	Incentive/Grant	Unknown	2032-2036



8 MOVING FORWARD

8.1. Leadership

Delivering on the Downtown Hamilton Strategy requires bold, sustained leadership that is civic in scope, collaborative in spirit, and focused on results. The City must take a driving role in coordinating efforts, aligning policies, and investing strategically to demonstrate confidence in the Downtown’s future. But true transformation will only be achieved through partnerships that bring together the strengths of the private sector, the not-for-profit community, and the academic and cultural institutions that shape Hamilton’s identity. Support and investment from the provincial and federal governments are also essential to realize large-scale projects in housing, infrastructure, and public space renewal. This shared approach to

leadership ensures that revitalization is not only well-managed, but also deeply inclusive. It should be built on cooperation, trust, and a shared belief in Downtown Hamilton as the civic heart of the city’s next chapter.

Effective leadership in this context means moving from management to direction, where the City serves as the orchestrator of coordinated action rather than a passive administrator of projects. It requires clear decision-making authority, alignment of departmental mandates, and an ability to act quickly and flexibly in partnership with others. Leadership also demands accountability through the transparent measurement of outcomes,

continuous communication with the public, and a commitment to learning from both successes and setbacks. By institutionalizing collaboration and maintaining a consistent focus on outcomes, Hamilton can turn vision into action and establish Downtown revitalization as a model for how cities lead systemic, long-term change.

Moving the Strategy forward also requires a culture change within the City itself, one that recognizes Downtown’s distinct needs and complexities and adapts to meet them. Revitalizing the core is not business as usual: it demands integrated thinking across departments, openness to experimentation, and a willingness to take calculated risks. City staff and leadership

must share an understanding of Downtown as a complex ecosystem, where social, economic, and physical factors intersect and where timing, collaboration, and coordination are everything. Building this internal culture that is proactive, responsive, and empowered, is essential to sustaining momentum and achieving the full promise of a revitalized Downtown Hamilton.

The Role of the Province

The Province of Ontario has a critical role to play in the revitalization of Downtown Hamilton, both as a partner in investment and as a steward of the legislative and policy frameworks that shape how cities grow, house people, and create opportunity. The transformation of Hamilton's core aligns directly with provincial objectives for economic development, housing delivery, infrastructure optimization, and community well-being. A strong, prosperous Downtown contributes to regional competitiveness, attracts talent, supports innovation, and reduces infrastructure costs by maximizing existing urban assets.

To move the Strategy forward, the City should work with the Province on shared priorities and measurable outcomes. Key opportunities for collaboration include:

- Housing and adaptive reuse: partnering on funding tools and regulatory flexibility to enable the conversion of underused commercial spaces into new homes, particularly through the *Strategic Rent-to-Own Initiative* and the *Retrofit Downtown* program.
- Infrastructure and transit alignment: ensuring that *Main Street Lifts* and public realm improvements are coordinated with LRT construction and provincial transit investments to minimize disruption and maximize long-term benefits.
- Economic development and innovation: leveraging the Province's programs in entrepreneurship, post-secondary collaboration, and health innovation to strengthen Downtown's role as a centre for research, culture, and business growth.
- Public safety and community well-being: partnering on integrated responses to homelessness, mental health, and addiction, ensuring provincial health and housing systems work in concert with municipal service delivery and strengthening the funding sources for the integrated units.
- Cultural and tourism investment: supporting arts, heritage, and public space renewal projects that position Downtown Hamilton as a cultural destination for Ontario and beyond.



The Role of the Federal Government

The Government of Canada is a crucial partner in the revitalization of Downtown Hamilton, particularly in advancing the national priorities of housing affordability, climate action, inclusive economic growth, and infrastructure renewal. Federal policies and programs can directly enable the City's objectives by providing the financial tools, regulatory flexibility, and long-term support necessary to implement complex, integrated urban transformations.

Downtown Hamilton embodies the challenges and opportunities faced by many Canadian cities including aging infrastructure, housing pressures, economic transition, and the need to build resilience in the face of climate and social change. Investing here is therefore both a local and national opportunity: a demonstration of how federal urban policy can help reimagine the heart of a mid-sized city.

The City could seek the support of the federal government that builds on existing programs while advocating for tailored solutions. Priority areas for partnership include:

- Housing and affordability: leveraging programs under the *National Housing Strategy* and *Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)* to accelerate housing delivery through adaptive reuse, affordable rent-to-own models, and mixed-income developments.
- Infrastructure and public realm renewal: securing federal funding for sustainable transportation, energy efficiency, green stormwater systems, and climate-resilient infrastructure through programs such as the *Green and Inclusive Community Buildings Fund* and *Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program*.
- Cultural and heritage investments: aligning with federal priorities for cultural tourism, and creative sector development to strengthen Downtown Hamilton as a cultural and economic hub.
- Inclusive economic growth: partnering with federal economic agencies and innovation programs to attract investment in clean technology, creative industries, and health innovation sectors anchored in the Downtown core.
- Social and community resilience: coordinating with federal agencies to support community safety, mental health, and newcomer integration programs that foster inclusion and well-being in the urban core.



The Role of the Private and Not-for-Profit Sectors

The private and not-for-profit sectors are indispensable partners in achieving the revitalization of Downtown Hamilton. While the City provides leadership, coordination, and vision, it is the creativity, capital, and commitment of these sectors that turn plans into tangible outcomes. Downtown renewal depends on shared ownership of the city’s future where businesses, developers, community organizations, and institutions act not only in their own interests, but as contributors to a collective urban transformation. These sectors bring agility, innovation, and the ability to test new approaches that complement the City’s long-term planning and investment.

For the private sector, the opportunity lies in strategic co-investment and place-based innovation. Developers, property owners, and investors can align with City priorities by focusing on projects that deliver multiple benefits, such as housing, employment, and public realm improvements, while advancing environmental and social outcomes. BIAs, small enterprises, and major employers can help animate Downtown streets, provide essential services, and shape a vibrant local economy. Collaboration can take many forms: public-private partnerships for redevelopment and infrastructure, participation in the *Main Street Lifts* initiative to strengthen business resilience, or private sponsorships that enhance public spaces and cultural programming. The City’s role is to create a stable, predictable, and responsive environment that gives the private sector confidence to invest, innovate, and stay committed to Downtown Hamilton’s long-term success.

For the not-for-profit sector, leadership means championing community, culture, and inclusion. Hamilton’s social service organizations, housing providers, arts institutions, and community groups are already embedded in the fabric of the Downtown. Their knowledge and networks are vital for addressing complex issues, from homelessness and mental health to cultural participation and social equity. The City can strengthen collaboration by supporting long-term operating partnerships, shared facilities, and co-designed programs that leverage local expertise. The *Strategic Rent-to-Own Initiative*, for example, offers opportunities for community-based organizations to provide affordable, creative live-work solutions; similarly, cultural and social organizations can activate public spaces through inclusive programming that builds pride and connection.

Together, the private and not-for-profit sectors bring balance and sustainability to Downtown renewal. Private capital accelerates growth and redevelopment, while the not-for-profit community ensures that revitalization remains equitable and grounded in local needs. By fostering ongoing dialogue through structures such as a *Downtown Partnership Council* and creating mechanisms for co-investment and shared outcomes, Hamilton can harness the strengths of both sectors. In doing so, the City will build not only new buildings and businesses, but also trust, collaboration, and a resilient civic ecosystem.

PARTNER	PRIMARY ROLE	KEY RESPONSIBILITIES	STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES
City of Hamilton	Lead and coordinate the overall Downtown Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drive implementation through a dedicated Downtown Office and governance framework Align departmental mandates, budgets, and policies Foster a culture of collaboration, flexibility, and responsiveness Measure progress and communicate results transparently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish cross-departmental project teams Integrate Downtown outcomes into corporate performance plans such as a state of Downtown report Act as catalyst for partnerships and funding alignment
Provincial government	Policy and investment partner enabling transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align provincial infrastructure, housing, and economic programs with Downtown objectives Co-invest in major projects that deliver regional benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner on housing conversions, LRT coordination, and infrastructure upgrades Collaborate on economic development and workforce initiatives
Federal government	National partner advancing housing, climate, and inclusive growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide capital and funding for housing, green infrastructure, and cultural projects Align federal economic and social programs with local priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access National Housing Strategy and Green and Inclusive Buildings Fund Co-invest in cultural and public realm renewal
Private sector	Co-investor and driver of economic vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver development, investment, and business activity aligned with Strategy priorities Participate in coordinated infrastructure, housing, and streetscape projects Support Downtown vitality through business innovation and property reinvestment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate through public-private partnerships and BIAs Contribute to Main Street Lifts and Redevelopment Initiatives Sponsor cultural and public space improvements
Not-for-profit sector	Champion of community, culture, and social equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide social, cultural, and housing services that strengthen Downtown’s livability Engage marginalized and creative communities in co-designing spaces and programs Support inclusion, well-being, and civic participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner in the Strategic Rent-to-Own Initiative and public space activations Operate shared community or cultural facilities Participate in a Downtown Partnership Council to inform implementation

8.2. Measuring Outcomes

Revitalizing Downtown Hamilton requires not just action, but accountability and learning. Measuring outcomes ensures that investments, financial, human, and political, translate into real improvements in how people experience the Downtown. Tracking outcomes builds trust, guides course correction, and demonstrates progress toward the shared vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient core. To be effective, measurement must go beyond counting projects or dollars spent; it must assess changes in conditions, such as safety, vitality, economic resilience, and civic pride. Outcome measurement is therefore not a final step but an integral part of implementation.

The City should adopt a results-based framework that links each priority to a set of quantifiable and qualitative indicators, tracked regularly

and reported publicly. These indicators should combine data from multiple sources, including municipal records, business and community surveys, social statistics, and spatial analysis, to reflect both performance and perception. Progress can then be summarized annually through a Downtown Dashboard or State of the Downtown Report, allowing decision-makers and partners to see what’s working, where challenges remain, and how resources should be adjusted.

The following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) provide an initial set of tools to guide the monitoring of impact. The first table is a general set of indicators that can be wholistically applied. Frequency of data collection is assessed based on the need to demonstrate regular and quick improvements which sets momentum. Progress can be measured through a reliable baseline data set for each indicator.

OVERARCHING KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		
MEASUREMENT	INDICATORS	FREQUENCY
Place condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleanliness score in priority zones (audit) Graffiti removal time (median days) Lighting uptime (% of lights functioning) + median repair time 	Quarterly
Downtown vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ground-floor vacancy rate (priority blocks) Foot traffic index (3–5 counters / manual counts) Event/activation days (#) and attendance 	Quarterly
Safety & well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of safety (resident/visitor pulse survey, day vs night) Calls for service / incidents in priority zones (trend, not raw counts only) 	Quarterly
Investment & delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> of projects in pipeline (conversion, redevelopment, incentives) Private-public money leverage ratio (where applicable) Average time-to-decision for permits/incentives in Downtown 	Quarterly

The following economic and demographic KPIs track whether Downtown is becoming more active, investable, and livable over time. Together, they measure both value creation (investment, jobs, assessment growth) and neighbourhood success (population, housing stability, and affordability) to support transparent reporting and course correction as the Strategy is implemented.

MEASUREMENT	INDICATORS	FREQUENCY
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessed value: amounts, YoY, amounts/ha Building permit value: amounts by type Ground-floor vacancy rate (main streets and priority corridors) Net new businesses (and mix) Job numbers and in office presence % Conversion progress: number of projects; sq ft converted 	Annually
Demographic/ Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population level, profile, growth Net new housing units (completions) Renter share (%) and rental stock change Residential turnover % renters spending >30% income on shelter Household mix: 1-person / families 	Annually

The following sets of KPIs can be adjusted as further analysis into departmental programmes, initiatives, and implementation plans identify the exact indicators and the data available.

MULTI-YEAR OPERATING PILOTS KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		
ACTION	INDICATORS	FREQUENCY
Action 1 — Downtown clean & quick-fix surge pilot (2026–2029)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleanliness audit score (by micro-zone; target: upward trend) • Median response time for “fix-it” requests • Number of fixes completed (benches, sidewalk hazards, street furniture) per month • Graffiti: median removal time (days) in pilot zones • Cost per cleaned block / per fix completed (unit cost to design the future service standard) • Heat comfort on key blocks (shade availability at noon; simple audit on priority blocks) • Flooding nuisance reports in pilot zones / downtown hotspots (trend; seasonal comparison) • Number of at-risk buildings stabilized in pilot zones (secured / orders complied / brought to code) 	Quarterly
Action 2 — One-stop shop + ambassadors pilot (2026–2029)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of contacts handled (business/resident/visitor) + top request types • Issue closure rate • Median time from report to resolution • Perception of helpful presence • Repeat issue hotspots (should shrink over time) • Heritage/adaptive reuse inquiries and public realm/climate comfort issues (e.g., shade/shelter, drainage, cooling places) • Number of referrals / escalations to partner departments for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building standards / at-risk properties • shade/shelter at stops or public realm comfort fixes • temporary use permits / activations 	Quarterly
Action 5 — “Animate the Downtown” micro-grants + improvements (2026–2029)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of activations delivered (by location/season) • Attendance (counts) + dwell time (observational or counter-based) • Business sentiment on activation days (% reporting positive impact) • Foot traffic uplift on activation days vs baseline • % of activations recurring (repeatability is the point) • % of activations delivered in “high-comfort” locations (shade/shelter available or provided; seating present) • Heat comfort at top activation sites (shade availability at noon on summer dates) 	Quarterly
Action 6 — Downtown dashboard & report (2026–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dashboard published on schedule • Number of KPIs updated with current data (data completeness) • Number of departments contributing data (institutionalization) • Evidence of use: number of decisions/council items referencing dashboard • Heritage KPI coverage included for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at-risk buildings stabilized • adaptive reuse pipeline/output • façade/repair permit value • Climate-adaptation KPI coverage included for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • canopy/shade route baseline • shade and shelter transit stop upgrades • green stormwater features added • flooding nuisance hotspots trend 	Quarterly

SHORT-DURATION PILOTS / DESIGN WORK KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		
ACTION	INDICATORS	FREQUENCY
Action 3 / 13 — Storefront & visibility grants (design 2026–2027; operate 2027–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of grants issued + amounts deployed + average time from application to approval • Number of storefronts improved • Vacancy changes on target blocks • Business survival / retention rate among grant recipients (annual) • Private match leveraged • \$ value of façade/repair permits on target blocks • Share of storefront improvements that are heritage-compatible (e.g., repairs/restoration vs replacement) • Number of storefront improvements with comfort upgrades (shade elements, weather protection, seating, greening planters where permitted) 	Quarterly
Action 4 — Rent-to-own: model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial models completed, Council/leadership endorsement • Number of potential sites screened and shortlist produced • Number of candidate sites assessed for retrofit viability (including resilience factors like overheating risk / flood exposure where relevant) • Number of sites within priority corridors/nodes (to reinforce Downtown vitality and “eyes on the street” goals) 	Quarterly
Action 15 — Rent-to-own: program design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner(s) secured and governance/eligibility rules approved • Funding stack identified • Program safeguards finalized anti-windfall resale rules, affordability protections, participant supports/coaching 	Quarterly
Action 36 — Rent-to-own: implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of units enrolled / delivered • Participant retention rate • Participant profile targets met (artists/entrepreneurs/STEM if used) • Cost per unit supported and leverage ratio • Resident satisfaction and neighbourhood participation (e.g., % reporting they use downtown businesses/services weekly) • Number of units delivered through adaptive reuse of older buildings 	Quarterly
Action 7 / 21 / 42–43 — Governance / Downtown Office feasibility to launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance review delivered on schedule (Action 7) • Interim partners table established + meeting cadence (Action 8) • Decision milestone: preferred model selected (Action 21/42) • Downtown Office launched with resourcing (Action 43) • Post-launch: number of cross-department issues resolved and cycle time reduction 	Completeness

SHORT-DURATION PILOTS / DESIGN WORK KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		
ACTION	INDICATORS	FREQUENCY
Action 9 / 27 — Opportunity site inventory and readiness studies (2026–2028)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of sites profiled with standardized data fields • Number of sites with readiness study completed (zoning, constraints, economics) • Number of market soundings / developer conversations • Number of sites moved to procurement stage (RFEI/RFP readiness) • Site inventory includes fields for: • heritage status / heritage potential and adaptive reuse viability • flood/overland flow exposure and heat-risk considerations (where relevant) • ability to integrate green stormwater and shade/greening in the public realm edge • Number of sites prioritized for adaptive reuse (not only redevelopment) 	Completeness
Action 10 / 51 / 60 — Bylaw review to pilot to implement (2026–2027; 2028–2031; 2032–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of bylaws identified for modification (Action 10) • Number of pilot exemptions/process changes launched (Action 51) • Permit / approval cycle time for meanwhile uses (median days) • Compliance outcomes (e.g., fewer repeat nuisance complaints) without simply increasing enforcement volume • By 2032+: full implementation adopted (Action 60) + measured changes in permitting time • Approval timeline for adaptive reuse / heritage-related permits (median days) • Number of “temporary use” approvals enabled for: • vacant lots / gap sites (markets, patios, beer gardens, pop-ups) • building reuse pilots (short-term occupancy, pop-ups in vacant storefronts) • m² of green stormwater features enabled through standards/pilots (e.g., allowance for planters, permeable treatments, rain gardens in pilots) 	Completeness/ quarterly

MEDIUM-TERM “BUILD THE SYSTEM” ACTIONS (2027–2031) KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		
ACTION	INDICATORS	FREQUENCY
Action 22 / 44 — Expand / support coordinated outreach teams (2027–2028; 2028–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hours of coverage • Number of engagements and referrals to services/housing • Number of repeat high-acuity calls in priority zones • Perception of safety in surveyed locations 	Quarterly
Action 23 / 45 — Lighting audit to implement improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit completed and priority list produced (Action 23) • Number of fixtures upgraded / added in priority zones (Action 45) • Lighting uptime (%) and median outage repair time • Perception of nighttime safety at target nodes 	Completeness/ quarterly
Action 16 / 39 — Map activation spaces & publish catalogue (2027–2028; 2028–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map/catalogue delivered and updated annually • Number of bookings/uses of catalogued spaces • Number of partners using spaces (arts/orgs/BAs) • % of activations happening in priority spaces • % of catalogued spaces with comfort attributes identified (shade, shelter, seating, washrooms, access to power/water) • Number of “cooling places” included in the catalogue network (libraries/ community spaces/shaded plazas) mapped and signed 	Completeness/ Annually
Action 17 / 40 / 55 — Identify “quality of life lifting” public realm + improve sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority public realm nodes identified with user profiles (Action 17) • Number of sites improved (3 sites in 2028–2031; another 3 in 2032–2036) • User counts and dwell time • Resident satisfaction with those spaces • Maintenance burden (work orders) • Tree canopy / shade coverage change at improved sites • m² of permeable/green stormwater features added at improved sites (rain gardens, planters, permeable paving) • Heat comfort proxy improvement at improved sites • Flooding nuisance reports in/near improved sites 	Completeness/ Annually
Action 18 — Pedestrian/ cyclist safety-first design (2027–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of corridors redesigned / treatments implemented • Collision rates involving pedestrians/cyclists in Downtown • Mode share proxy: bike counts / walking counts • Perception of safety while walking/cycling 	Annually
Action 20 / 41 — Everyday retail & services stabilization (2027–2028; 2028–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps analysis completed (grocery/pharmacy/clinic/childcare) • Number of businesses recruited/retained in target categories • Resident access metric: % within 10-minute walk of essentials • Commercial churn rate on priority blocks • Storefront vacancy change on corridors with high heritage fabric • \$ value of façade/repair permits on heritage main-street stock 	Completeness/ Annually

LONG-HORIZON CAPITAL / TRANSFORMATIONAL ACTIONS (2032–2036) KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		
ACTION	INDICATORS	FREQUENCY
Action 63 — Multi-year Downtown Capital Programme (2032–2033)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital programme approved (yes/no) \$ committed and number of projects bundled % delivered on schedule and on budget Resident-facing outcomes: condition ratings, public realm satisfaction 	Annually
Action 64 — Scale conversion projects (2032–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of conversions initiated / completed Number of net new housing units from conversion Office vacancy trend Cost per unit enabled and leverage ratio 	Annually
Actions 65–66 — Public asset retrofits + new invigorated public space (2032–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project milestones: concept, funding, procurement, construction start, opening Annual visitors/users of upgraded assets Event/program days hosted Perception of pride / place quality Number of “cooling places” delivered or designated through upgraded assets + mapped/signed status Heat comfort improvement at flagship public spaces m² of permeable/green stormwater features delivered at these sites number of public assets retrofitted that are heritage/historic buildings \$ invested in heritage-sensitive retrofit components 	Annually
Action 67 — “Main Street First” investment programme (2032–2036)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> amounts deployed into priority streets and number of projects supported Vacancy rate on those corridors Foot traffic trend Private leverage ratio \$ value of façade/repair permits on main-street heritage building stock Storefront vacancy change on corridors with high heritage fabric Tree canopy / shade coverage change on priority main street blocks (<i>corridor-level</i>) % of priority transit stops along main street corridors upgraded with shade and shelter Heat comfort proxy on priority blocks 	Completeness/ Annually



9 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to support Council and City leadership in adopting this Strategy as an actionable roadmap. They emphasize starting immediately with visible, trust-building steps, committing to a learning-by-doing approach, and putting in place the leadership, coordination, and funding discipline required to sustain momentum over the next three to five years.

To that end, we recommend:

1) Adopting the Strategy as an iterative framework to guide change

Council should adopt the Strategy with the explicit understanding that Downtown revitalization requires experimentation, iteration, and course correction. Implementation should be structured around “test–learn–scale” cycles: launch pilots, measure outcomes, adjust quickly, and expand what works. This approach reduces risk by avoiding over-commitment to unproven interventions, while creating a disciplined way to learn in public, improve performance, and build credibility through evidence rather than promises.

2) Starting immediately with visible “small steps” that rebuild trust and momentum

Early implementation should prioritize actions that residents and businesses can see and feel within weeks and months, cleanliness, quick repairs, lighting reliability, and a visible, helpful presence on the street. These early wins are not cosmetic; they are foundational signals that the City is present, responsive, and serious about care. Delivering consistent, place-based improvements in targeted priority zones will build public trust, strengthen partnerships, and create the conditions needed for more complex interventions.

3) Beginning now to prepare the 3–5 year pipeline of consequential actions

While delivering near-term wins, the City should simultaneously initiate the planning, governance, and partnership work required to unlock larger outcomes within three to five years, such as catalytic redevelopment, conversion and retrofit projects, permanent main street transformations, and signature public spaces. The Strategy should be operationalized through a sequenced implementation roadmap that clearly identifies what must be ready by the end of Year 1 and Year 3 to enable the next wave of capital projects and policy shifts, ensuring momentum is sustained beyond the initial phase.

4) Committing to a blended funding approach: reallocation, programme review, prioritization, and partnerships

Implementation should proceed on the basis that funding will come from a combination of (a) reallocating existing resources toward Downtown priority zones, initiatives, programmes, and operations, (b) reviewing and refining programmes to improve performance and reduce duplication, (c) prioritizing capital sequencing so planned investments deliver visible cumulative impact downtown, and (d) leveraging partnerships with BIAs, institutions, the private sector, and provincial/federal programs to multiply municipal investment. This funding strategy should be transparent and tracked, including how dollars shift, what leverage is achieved, and what outcomes improve as a result.

5) Making revitalization a City leadership commitment, from Council direction to City Hall execution, owned by every department

Council should adopt the Strategy as a clear call for City leadership: not only a policy direction, but an organizational commitment that must be carried through by City Hall’s senior leaders and delivered by staff across departments. It should adopt the Principles in this report as the foundational tool to achieve expected results. Downtown revitalization will only become real if it is treated as a shared corporate priority, embedded into departmental work plans, day-to-day decision-making, and performance expectations. This requires senior management to align teams, remove internal barriers, and actively coordinate delivery across every function. Every staff member who touches the Downtown, through maintenance, approvals, enforcement, programming, customer service, or capital projects, should understand their role in restoring care, confidence, and pride in the city’s heart. Consistent leadership, clear accountability, and a culture of responsiveness are the conditions that turn a strategy into visible change.

APPENDIX A: SOURCES

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APPENDIX B : FIGURE CREDITS

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- Figure 4. Invitation to "Our Future Downtown" public consultation portal. Credit: City of Hamilton.
- Figure 5. Beyond My Ken (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Isaiah_Zagar_mural_1016_South_Street_Philadelphia.jpg), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>
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- Figure 12. 3121 N. Broadway, Chicago. Credit: Google Street View, 2025
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