



City of London  
Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee  
300 Dufferin Ave, 2nd Floor  
London Ontario  
N6A 4L9

November 19, 2023

**Subject: 2023-2027 City of London Strategic Plan: Core Area**

Downtown London (DTL) was pleased to see City Council's endorsement to create an area of focus on London's downtown and core area in the City of London's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan which states that ***London's Core Area (Downtown, Midtown, Old East Village) is (will be) a vibrant neighbourhood and attractive destination.*** We also thank City staff for including and inviting Downtown London staff to contribute our input into the November 21st SPPC report, which provides the tactical supports and high-level implementation goals that will cascade from this report, and the business case that will follow through the City's Multi-year Budget process.

Although it is not clearly stated in the staff report, we continue to recommend the first order of operations for City Staff is to lead and work with the community and Core Area partners to complete important foundational work before implementing the actions laid out in this report. This includes creating a parental and visionary strategy and plan which examines the current external and internal environment, social, economic and cultural conditions, the human geography of the core, as well as the present state of affairs of the Core Area, and establish the overarching endstate, goals and high-level metrics that we envision over the next 15-20 years. Additionally, each district that makes up the Core Area - Downtown, Midtown, and Old East Village, are very distinct, requiring separate but complementary sub-strategies to collectively contribute to the Core.

A long-term strategy for what the City now calls the Core Area does not exist, and downtown has not had an updated visionary plan since 1998's Downtown Millenium Plan. Creating a coherent strategic blueprint, informed by the syllabus of existing City and community plans, will ensure the City, businesses, residents, commercial stakeholders, development community, and other partners are collectively working towards common end goals. This strategic road map will also ensure we are not putting tactics ahead of strategy by developing ad hoc initiatives that only react or respond to the current state of affairs of the Core Area; or sets unrealistic expectations that transformational public realm projects or "build it and they will come" approaches will revitalize our downtown. These past approaches have not set the Core Area up for long-term success nor has it provided a longer term outlook that goes beyond a term of City Council.

Additionally, our downtown and core area challenges and opportunities are vastly different than they were before the COVID pandemic. That said, in the absence of a longer term strategy, short-term and tactical approaches will still be required in the Core for the interim, until the Core Area Strategy, Health & Homeless initiatives and other City and community plans and strategies begin to be implemented and results seen.

We also request with the forthcoming Multi-year Budget Business Case for the Core Area, that City Council endorse the investments needed to avert downtown commercial tax assessment melt. According to the City of London's Taxation Office, there is evidence that London's downtown tax assessment value may now be stalling. **For 2023, it is estimated that the City will incur over \$3.2 Million in tax reductions as commercial assessment values in downtown decrease. According to the City's Taxation Office, downtown tax assessment valuation is expected to continue to decrease into 2024.** This we believe is due to increasing commercial vacancies and an inability to attract and secure commercial and business investment largely due to the Core Area's current state and the impacts of health and homelessness, lack of foot traffic, and only a modest return of office workers.

We also ask that City Council endorse an investment to establish a dedicated and accountable Core Area Business Unit at City Hall that will be responsible for creating and implementing the important foundational work, highlighted above. This department should be championed by a Director level or higher to create and implement a Core Area long-term visionary plan (15+ years), as well as staff resources accountable for day to day core area service delivery. Again this request is not clearly laid out in the staff report, but we request that City Council and Administration prioritize this ask, as there currently is **no City department fully accountable to the Downtown and the Core Area like we see in Calgary, Kitchener, Brampton, Hamilton, and other Cities that are committed to investing into the long term revitalization of their downtowns and core areas.** These Cities have publicly stated and successfully leveraged their significant core area investments to attract as much as a twenty-fold increase in private sector investment.

<https://renx.ca/investment-innovation-renaissance-kitchener-development>

<https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/city-council-approves-downtown-plan-with-200m-investment>

<https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/calgary-s-ongoing-downtown-revitalization-efforts-to-receive-a-5m-funding-boost-from-the-province-1.6244515>

<https://www1.brampton.ca/EN/City-Hall/Downtown-Brampton/documents/downtown%20brampton%20investments.pdf>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/entertainment-downtown-hamilton-winning-proposal-1.5653371>

**When a City's Downtown and Core Areas are operating at their fullest economic, cultural, environmental and social potential it has ripple effects across the rest of the city and proven capabilities to be the most fiscally productive area of a city, providing even greater returns on investment for City Hall.** This in turn creates more opportunities to fund many other municipal and public infrastructure and services across the entire city.

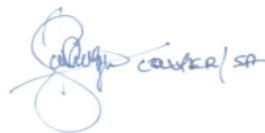
 [Urban3: The Value of Downtown](#)

Now more than ever we need City Council's strong and steadfast commitment to restore civic and business confidence, pride and hope in our Downtown. **Now is a critical time for City Council and City Hall Administration to do things differently for our Downtown and the Core Area than what has been done in recent years.** This is a time to regroup, refocus and develop a more-fulsome vision and plan and fully commit to its implementation for the next 15 years and more to reverse the downward spiral of the heart of our city.

Sincerely,



Barbara Maly  
Executive Director, Downtown London



Scott Andrew Collyer  
LDBA Board Chair