



City of London
Budget Committee
300 Dufferin Ave, 2nd Floor
London Ontario
N6A 4L9

January 25, 2024

Budget Committee Meeting, January 29, 2024 - Multi-Year Budget 2024-2027 - Downtown London (London Downtown Business Association)

Dear Mayor Morgan and City Councillors,,

Downtown London appreciates the significant effort, time, and thought put forth by City Council and Administration to formulate the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, and the supporting Multi-year budget. Understanding there will be significant pressures on the City to fund these business cases detailed in this Budget, Downtown London strongly believes that specific business cases that include investing in London's downtown and core area renewal, as well as improving safety and security will result in the greatest impact and return on the City's investment. This is not to say Downtown London is not supportive of many other City Business Cases that would also positively impact the core, such as the Budweiser Gardens Expansion, Downtown Parking Strategy, Central Library and Covent Garden Market Facility/Parking upgrades and repair, to name some. However, understanding the significant budget constraints on the City, Downtown London tried to identify just three priority areas which include:

- **Business Case #P-42 - 5 Year Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Review**
- **Business Case #P-44 - Core Area Initiatives**
- **Business Case #P-28 - Public Safety and Infrastructure Modernization**

Downtown London remains committed to the work that we have carried out and accomplished with the City of London as we leverage Downtown London's BIA member-assessed levy (of 2M\$) with the future City investments outlined in these business cases above, as we continue to make progress and advance our mutual goals for our downtown.

The Core Area Action Plan, endorsed by City Council in late 2019, has made some tactical wins and short-term improvements in downtown. However, it has not fully addressed the issues that downtown faces related to the continued pressures of health and homelessness, nor does it address the negative impacts of the COVID pandemic that soon followed after this plan's endorsement. Furthermore, the pandemic delayed the implementation of some Core Area Action Plan programs and initiatives, with many starting in 2021 and 2022 giving just one-two years to implement and achieve results.

Since 1998's *The Millennial Plan* the City, Downtown London BIA and its partners have made key investments in London's downtown which has attracted more private sector investment and drove uplift to almost triple the commercial tax assessed property values in downtown. However, according to the City of London's Tax Office, there is evidence that tax assessment value is stalling and leveling out in London's downtown area. No one would have predicted the significant impact the COVID pandemic would have had on our downtown, both during the active months of the pandemic, and in the recovery that followed.



Notwithstanding, the investments made over the past 25 years have put downtown in a better position now than it would have been if these investments had not been made. Much has changed since 1998, not to mention even since the start of the pandemic.

This is why Downtown London fully supports the multi-year budget requests in **Business Case #P42 - Community Improvement Plan Review and #P44 - Core Area Initiatives** as critical investments needed to provide bridging initiatives to sustain and not erase the progress made from previous City, BIA, and private sector investments. It will also be imperative to create a new downtown strategy and implementation plan that takes into account not only the downtown office to housing conversion incentives recently announced by the Mayor; but will also need to include the right mix of business and public space amenities, job opportunities and a variety of cultural, family friendly and recreational provisions downtown to attract a diverse and growing population downtown. Additionally, Downtown London also supports the budget request for **Business Case #P-28 - Public Safety and Infrastructure Modernization**. Downtown London is eager to work with our municipal and community partners to deliver quality solutions for our downtown that support the Business Cases and Actions further detailed below.

Business Case #P42 - Community Improvement Plan Review

The 2024-2027 budget requests that Downtown London particularly supports and directly benefits our members and downtown revitalization, with some of these actions that can be further leveraged with our BIA levy. These include:

- Initiative #3 - Amend the Upgrade to Building Code Loan Program offered in Downtown and Old East Village to increase the forgivable grant portion to 75% for residential units and 50% for commercial units created above the ground floor - \$500,000
- Initiative #5 - Amend the Core Area Safety Audit Grant Program to consider community visual impact - \$250,000
- Initiative #6 - Amend the Rehabilitation and Redevelopment Tax Grant to increase the grant value for Level 2 (existing) properties - \$500,000
- Initiative #10 - Amend CIPs to add energy upgrades and climate change adaptation measures - \$600,000
- Initiative #13 - Provide an interior and exterior building improvement grant program for business tenants - \$500,000
- Initiative #14 - Enhance the Core Area CIP programs to encourage commercial occupancy options identified in the Core Area Vacancy Reduction Strategy - \$3,025,000
- Initiative #17 - Amend the Downtown Project Area to add 206 Piccadilly Street - \$100,000

By supporting these initiatives in **Business Case #P42 - Community Improvement Plan Review**, City Council will be supporting the tools needed to address core area vacancies, create more attractive storefronts, more mixed-use development, and housing options attracting more residents and improve the quality of life, visual appeal, and public realm of downtown.



These CIP investments will increase tax assessment value in downtown, enabling London's downtown to operate to its fullest economic, cultural, environmental, and social potential with ripple effects across the rest of the city to fund other City services and capital investments. Municipal investments in the core also facilitate a denser and intensified areas where people can live, work, shop, dine and play, countering the negative impacts that urban sprawl has on climate change.

Finally, it will provide a signal to private sector investors and developers that the City of London is investing in the renewal of its downtown, is open for business, and it will allow the City to further leverage it to attract the strategic private sector investment they are pursuing to achieve renewal goals set out in a long-term downtown strategy.

Business Case #P44 - Core Area Initiatives

Downtown London is particularly supportive of the following actions because they have direct benefits to our members, residents, visitors, downtown renewal and with some actions that can be further leveraged and complemented with our members' levy investment. These include:

Operational

- Action #1 - Implement a Core Area Business Support Program that includes Core Area Vacancy Reduction strategies and related Community Improvement Plan 5-year review recommendations - \$2,480,000
- Action #3 - Additional resources to the Core Areas Enhanced Maintenance Program to maintain high cleanliness and maintenance standards in public spaces - \$800,000
- Action #4 - Additional Core Area Activation Program to support events throughout the core area - \$1,525,000
- Action #5 - Develop a Core Area Business Growth and Attraction Program working with economic partners and the Core Area Business Improvement Associations (BIA) - \$3,845,000
- Action #7 - Complete a new Downtown Master Plan - \$434,000

Capital

- Action #8 - Enhance public spaces to provide a community amenity for residents and visitors to the core - \$2,000,000
- Action #9 - Implement Core Area Action Program to support events throughout the core area - \$1,000,000

By supporting **Business Case #P44 - Core Area Initiatives**, through the actions highlighted above, City Council and its partners like the Core Area BIAs and others, can continue to build on their investments, as well as the outcomes and learnings from past shorter-term plans such as the *Core Area Action Plan* and *Our Move Forward*. These past plans will also help inform the longer term downtown strategy (Action # 7) and foundational work needed to ensure the longer-term view and commitment to downtown renewal, sustaining through 2050 and beyond.

It also shows residents and businesses City Council's strong commitment to downtown stabilization and renewal, enhancing more civic pride and confidence in the city and their downtown, attracting more visitors, residents, jobs, and private sector investment downtown.



In addition, it will allow the City of London the opportunity to be a transformational leader, creating an exceptional downtown and a powerful and memorable city identity. The identities of many mid- to large-sized cities around the world are defined and distinguished by their downtowns.

Finally, these investments will further demonstrate London's commitment in meeting climate change targets by investing in the intensification of our core, accommodating increased density with highly urban, mixed-use, transit-supportive forms of development, thereby minimizing urban sprawl and car dependency.

Business Case #P28 - Public Safety and Infrastructure

Downtown London is very supportive of the London Police Services' budget request and with City Council approval of this budget, we are investing in measures that will help alleviate the safety and security burdens and the negative impacts it currently has on London's downtown. They will contribute significantly to downtown's revitalization by supporting downtown main street and office employers' safety and security needs, create a more welcoming downtown environment, bring more feet to the street, attract tourists, jobs and investors.

Finally, we have the opportunity to change our identity from the top three most dangerous cities in Ontario to the safest community in the province with new investments required by the London Police Services to modernize their services and infrastructure. Downtown London is very supportive of Core Area Foot Patrol and enhancing these services and other LPS services that improve their response times when our members are dealing with safety and security issues.

It is a proven fact that City investments in their downtown pays significantly more return on investments than anywhere else in a city and helps to attract more private sector investment [CUI/IDA- The Value of Investing in Canadian Downtowns](#); [IDA Value of U.S. Downtowns & City Centres](#); [APA People Centric Places & Downtown Economic Vitality](#). Active, safe downtowns not only attract investment within their boundaries but can have a positive impact on areas outside of the core. Recognizing downtown revitalization can take a time period that extends beyond the single term of municipal council, continued perseverance is required as we build upon some of the accomplishments achieved in recent years and continue the momentum in the transformation of the economic and cultural heart of London.

Downtown London, its board of directors, and our 1400+ members look forward to our continued work with the City on our shared vision for a vibrant and prosperous downtown.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara Maly".

Barbara Maly
Executive Director - Downtown London

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Andrew Collyer".

Scott Andrew Collyer
Board Chair - London Downtown Business Association