

DRAFT

# OUR MOVE FORWARD

## LONDON'S DOWNTOWN PLAN

MARCH 2015







Ivey Park located at the Forks of the Thames.

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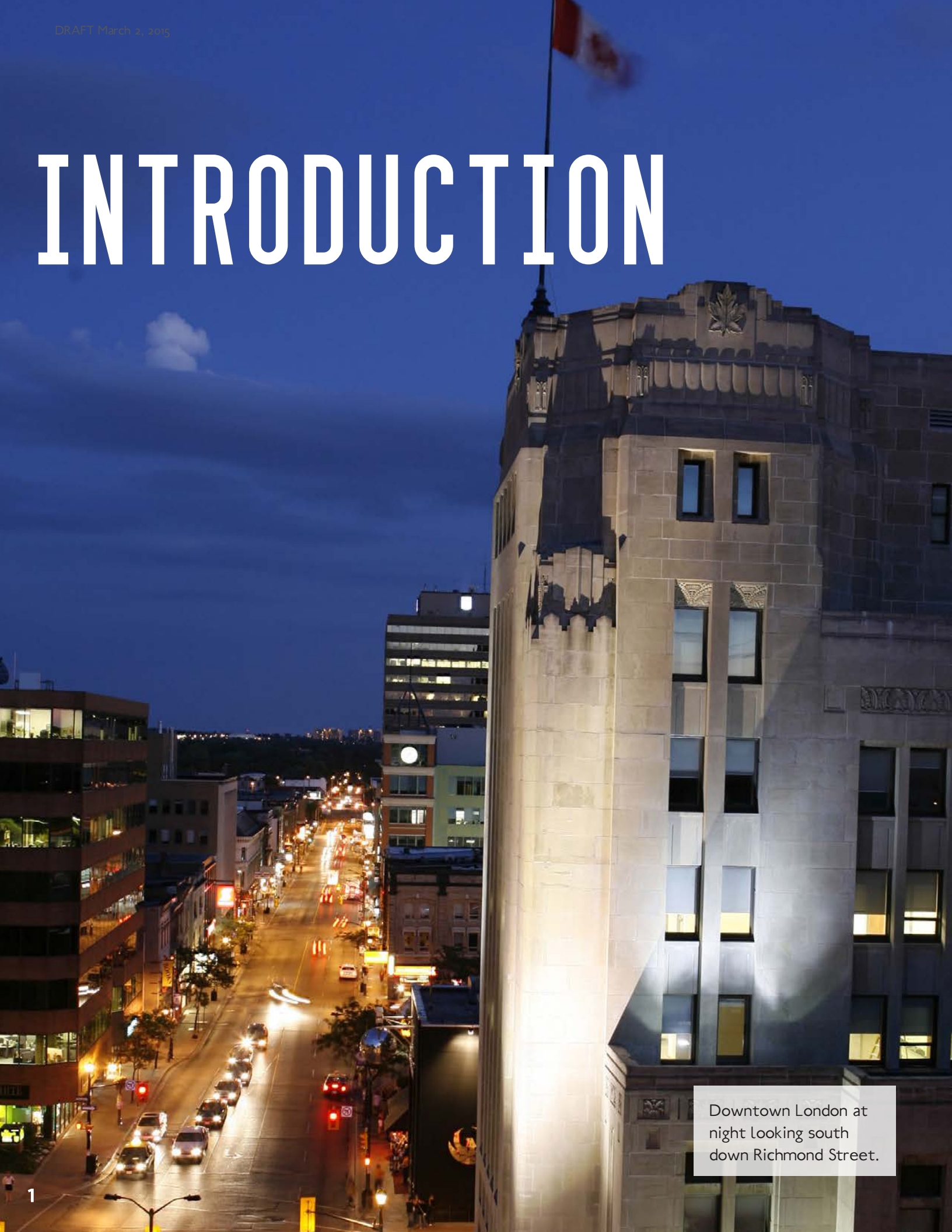
# OUR MOVE FORWARD

## LONDON'S DOWNTOWN PLAN

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# INTRODUCTION



Downtown London at night looking south down Richmond Street.

Downtown London plays an important role in the life of Londoners. It is the cultural heart and the original neighbourhood of our city. The downtown is, and has historically been, a critical employment centre and economic engine. It is a pillar of the community and provides the basis for our future prosperity by attracting people to live and invest in London.

A strong downtown is one that exemplifies civic pride and showcases the true nature of the city. Downtown investment needs to encourage a public realm that is second to none in creating a people place that says “this is a great place to be.”

The *Downtown Millennium Plan*, prepared in November of 1998, was the last significant Downtown Plan implemented by London’s City Council. Fifteen years later, the *Downtown Millennium Plan* was recognized by the International Downtown Association with a Pinnacle Award. Well over \$100 million was invested in London’s downtown as a result of that Plan for a series of projects and initiatives. They included the John Labatt Centre (now Budweiser Gardens), Central Library, Covent Garden Market, Forks of the Thames improvements, downtown

lighting, a new Main Street program and an expanded range of incentive programs.

The success of these investments has been evident. The *Downtown Millennium Plan* noted that downtown assessed property value had declined dramatically between 1992 and 1996. This downward trend has been reversed since the completion of the *Downtown Millennium Plan*. Most recently, the 2013 *State of the Downtown* report identified an increase in downtown area assessed property value of \$388 million between 2002 and 2013 and our downtown’s assessed property value just reached the \$1 billion mark.

*Our Move Forward*, too, places an emphasis on public and private partnership initiatives that will create interest for private sector investment. It recognizes that downtown London is London’s face to the world.

A successful downtown is key for retaining and attracting business investment in London. A strong downtown tells the world that London is vibrant, interesting, exciting and enriching. It signals to investors that London is a captivating choice when attracting and retaining a high-quality labour force. It exudes the kind of success that breeds investment confidence.

This Plan is adopted as a guideline document under Chapter 19 of London's Official Plan. It is a result of background studies undertaken since 2009, which includes the *Downtown Master Plan Background Study* completed in June 2010. The Plan is also influenced by a number of parallel projects, such as the *Downtown Design Manual*, the *Downtown Heritage Conservation District* (Council approved April 2012), and the *Downtown London Parking Study* currently being completed. The "Smart Moves" *Transportation Master Plan* and the *Cultural Prosperity Plan*, both completed in 2013, provide further guidance to this Plan.

This Plan is rooted in an extensive public engagement process which included four public workshops attended by over 400 individuals, an online survey which was completed by over 250 individuals, a web page specifically created for the project, correspondence multiple times with the 1,400 land owners in the downtown, and specific meetings with downtown interest groups.

The most recent public engagement session took place in October 2013, at which the ten Transformational Projects were unveiled and an online survey asking for feedback on these projects was released. The responses from this engagement session and survey further informed

the policies and helped to prioritize the projects in this final Plan.

What is evident from this feedback is that recreating Dundas Street is a top priority and a clear next step in the revitalization of the downtown. Londoners also feel strongly about the need for more street trees and the general "greening" of the downtown streets and public spaces. Reconnecting with the Thames River is also strongly supported, as is providing better infrastructure for transit services, pedestrians and cyclists.

The engagement process helped to solidify the vision for downtown and chart a path forward. The key conclusion of the process is that people are passionate about London's downtown and its continued revitalization. Our community has a very strong emotional attachment to our downtown. The large number of people who took an interest in attending the community engagement opportunities and the enthusiasm with which they spoke, is clear evidence of this.

Emerging from all of the public opinion and feedback, along with the vision established by Council on November 15, 2010, the vision statement on the next page is crafted to summarize Londoners' aspirations for the future of the downtown.





# DOWNTOWN VISION

London's face to the world. A vibrant destination. A unique neighbourhood.



Photograph taken at the October 2013 meeting.

# DOWNTOWN VALUES

## LEADERSHIP

As we move ahead into the future, the City of London has a leadership role to play to ensure that investment in the downtown maintains its position as the “heart” of the community and ensures that the overall vision can be weaved together with the various partnerships that will need to be formed to ensure success.

## PROSPERITY

A prosperous downtown helps to invigorate the entire city. The lasting memory of what we as Londoners and the world think of our city is characterized by the downtown. Through this Plan, and its implementation, we look to maintain and improve on the prosperity of downtown and our city.

## SUSTAINABILITY

A great place is one that is adaptable and resilient to various societal, economic and environmental changes over time. Sustainability requires an integrated decision making process to ensure all parties involved can be part of delivering the final vision and a forward-looking approach that recognizes the challenges of climate change.

## LIVABILITY

A thriving downtown is one that has been designed for people. The vitality of a place is directly related to people’s ability to contribute economically and socially to a particular neighbourhood or city. Creating a livable downtown will help to ensure that during the day this neighbourhood is an exciting place to be and at night it is safe and vibrant. People must come first in everything that we do.

## INNOVATION

Innovation leads to better places; it pushes leaders and citizens to continually build upon the strong foundations that exist in the cultural heritage passed down to us. Innovation and the creativity, cultural vitality, intellectual capacity and entrepreneurial skills that give rise to it are essential for all forms of growth and development. The City of London is committed to finding new answers and approaches to our downtown.

## PARTNERSHIP

No single entity can create a place or a downtown. Creative partnerships between both the private and public sector are needed to ensure over the long term that downtown remains a great place to be. The City of London will look to form partnerships to assist with delivering the overall vision of this Plan. Through these partnerships we will create a better downtown and a better London.

## INCLUSIVITY

A successful downtown is a place that includes all. The “heart” of our city must be one that beats for all citizens - a place where families, individuals and groups can come together. Downtown must provide a warm welcome to citizens and tourists alike; it must send a message that it is a great place to be for everyone.

## EXPERIENCE

All the planning we do will consider the experience that people will have downtown. We will create great places and spaces that provide for a wide array of rich and fulfilling experiences that keep people coming back again and again.

## HERITAGE

As the birthplace of the city, the downtown is rich in cultural heritage; this heritage sets the downtown apart from other neighbourhoods. When planning for new development, integration with the existing heritage will be a foremost consideration.



# OUR MOVE FORWARD

*Our Move Forward* is organized into five sections, which include the:

1. Planning Framework
2. Strategic Directions
3. Transformational Projects
4. Tools
5. Implementation and Targets

Each of these sections is integrated with the others to establish a focussed strategy of continuing the revitalization effort in the downtown.

The Planning Framework considers the existing downtown context and establishes a framework for future public and private investment.

The Strategic Directions section outlines the pillars of the Plan - the over-arching directions that will help realize the Vision. These key directions are then further organized into specific projects and other initiatives.

The Transformational Projects describe specific areas of improvement in the downtown, ultimately improving the overall experience for visitors and residents alike. These projects will be pursued over the long term as future budgets are developed and opportunities arise to implement them.

The Tools section includes policy statements consistent with the Official Plan and proposes organizational, operational, and financial means for achieving the Plan's vision and values.

The final section, Implementation and Targets, discusses the timing associated with the initiatives and Transformational Projects and establishes a system to prioritize these to help direct budgeting and planning in future years.



Market Lane



Budweiser Gardens



Covent Garden Market



# PLANNING FRAMEWORK



View of the  
downtown  
looking down  
Riverside Drive.



The Planning Framework is a critical look at the characteristics of the downtown and its context. This analysis establishes the existing conditions and sets the groundwork for the subsequent sections of the Plan. This allows the projects and initiatives found later in this Plan to build on the past two centuries of development and evolution of the downtown.

The Planning Framework provides contextual, demographic and economic information that sets a framework that is intended to guide the future direction of public and private investment in London's downtown. It also

provides the foundation for the subsequent sections of *Our Move Forward*. The Strategic Directions, Transformational Projects, Tools, and Implementation and Targets are the components that will ultimately be used to implement the Plan.

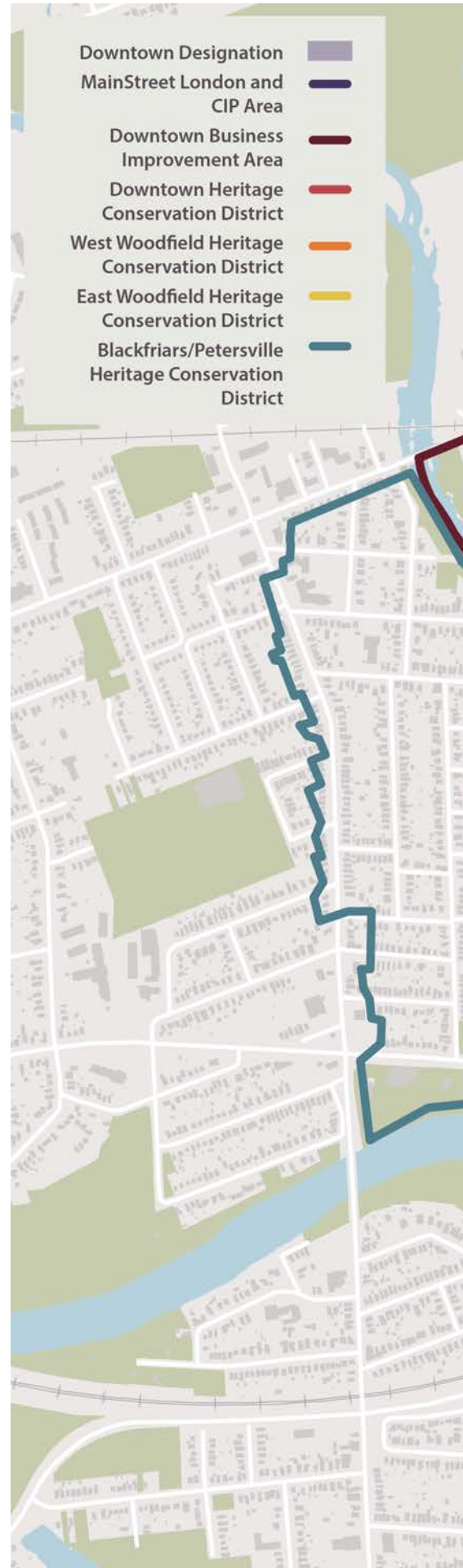
*Our Move Forward* provides detailed information and direction for public investment that will influence the downtown's future success. As with all public investment, it is a complex process that requires partnerships between municipal, provincial and federal levels of government as well as the private sector.



The 2013 assessed property value of downtown is over

**\$1,000,000,000.**

Map 1:  
Downtown  
Boundaries



## Defining the Downtown

The most frequently used boundary for planning purposes is that of the Official Plan’s Downtown Designation, illustrated on Map 1. However, there are several other defined boundaries which fall within the downtown area that serve various functions.

MainStreet London was established in 1999 in response to the *Downtown Millennium Plan*. This organization’s efforts to recruit tenants and improve the streetscape is focussed within the MainStreet London boundary. This boundary coincides with the Downtown Official Plan Designation.

The *Downtown Community Improvement Plan* establishes a legal basis for providing municipal financial incentives to private property owners in the downtown. Several incentive and loan programs provided through the City of London are now available to property owners within this

area. This area also coincides with the Downtown Official Plan Designation.

The Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA) is managed by the London Downtown Business Association. Through the collection of levies from business owners in this area, the Business Association oversees projects that support the improvement of the downtown and promote it as a business and shopping area. In December 2014, the BIA was expanded primarily northward, beyond its original Queens Avenue-area boundary to include properties fronting onto Oxford Street, as illustrated.

Four Heritage Conservation Districts, including West Woodfield, East Woodfield, Blackfriars/Petersville, and the Downtown, are located within the downtown and surrounding neighbourhoods. These Heritage Conservation Districts establish a policy framework to protect, conserve, and enhance the heritage character described in their respective heritage conservation district plans.



