



Downtown Resilience:

Building a Downtown That Adapts, Recovers, and Thrives

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DOWNTOWN 
LONDON
BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Executive Summary

Downtown London's strength is not defined by a single moment in time, but by its ability to adapt, recover, and continue to evolve. We call that resilience.

In a period of ongoing change, resilience helps London's downtown remain economically stable, socially connected, and physically relevant over time. It supports a place where businesses can grow, offices choose to locate, people choose to visit, institutions invest, and residents choose to live, work, and participate in everyday life.

This working paper positions resilience as a system of interconnected drivers, pillars, and measurable outcomes. These are supported by targeted investment, strong partnerships, and strategic action.

London's downtown is currently in a **moderate but strengthening** position, with clear opportunities to build long-term stability by:

- growing the residential base
- diversifying the economic mix
- strengthening community loyalty
- increasing flexibility to respond to change

This work also recognizes and celebrates the resilience already demonstrated by businesses, entrepreneurs, offices, institutions, property owners, artists, and community partners. At the same time, it acknowledges that resilience should not be taken for granted. Long-term success depends on strengthening the systems, partnerships, and conditions that support a stable, welcoming, and investable downtown environment.

Together with previous working papers related to downtown vitality, this paper helps define what a healthy downtown needs to succeed over time:

Economy reflects how downtown prospers

Vibrancy reflects why people come downtown

Inclusion reflects who feels welcome downtown

Resilience reflects why downtown endures

This paper is both a framework and a call for collaboration. It invites partners across business, government, institutions, culture, development, and community sectors to help shape a downtown that can adapt, recover, and thrive through change.

Why Resilient to Downtown

London's downtown continues to demonstrate resilience.

London has shown continued resilience during its 200 year history. In more recent years, businesses, property owners, institutions, artists, workers, and community partners have adapted to significant disruption. This includes the impacts of COVID-19, ongoing construction, shifting work and consumer patterns, rising costs, public space pressures, and broader social challenges.

That resilience should be recognized and celebrated.

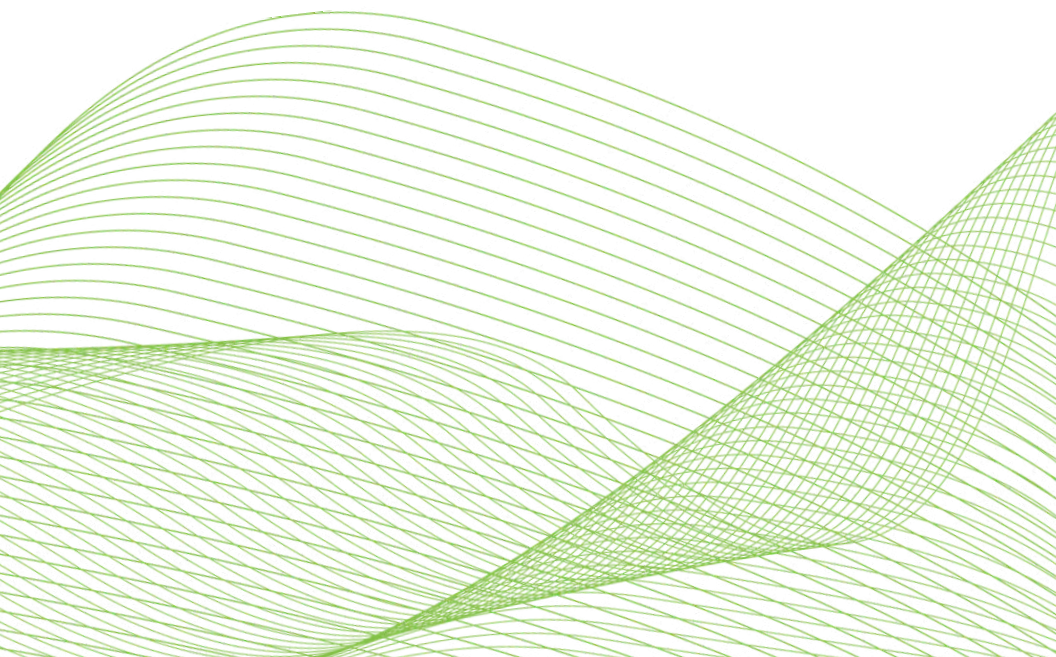
At the same time, resilience should not be mistaken for unlimited capacity. Many businesses continue to operate under strain, navigating affordability, staffing, public perceptions, safety concerns, and the visible impacts of health and homelessness challenges affecting the broader community.

ce Matters n Vitality

These pressures are not for London's downtown alone to solve, but they shape the environment in which businesses, public spaces, and community life function every day.

This is why resilience matters now. It is not only about recovering from past disruption. It is about building the conditions that help London's downtown remain stable, adaptable, and competitive over time.

For Downtown London, this means celebrating existing strengths while supporting the partnerships, policies, and coordinated actions needed for long-term success.



What Is Downtown Resilience?

The background of the slide features a series of thin, yellow, concentric arches that resemble a stylized topographic map or a series of overlapping waves. These arches are centered horizontally and extend across the width of the slide, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lines are most prominent in the lower half of the image, where they form a dense, tunnel-like pattern that draws the eye downwards.

Resilience is the ability of London's downtown to adapt to change, absorb disruption, continue moving forward and growing over time.

It applies to the full downtown ecosystem, including:

- businesses and property owners
- residents and workers
- institutions and students
- visitors and community organizations
- service users and equity-deserving communities

Resilience is shaped by how well the downtown can respond to:

- economic shifts
- changing consumer behaviour
- workforce evolution
- development pressures
- unexpected external shocks

Resilience is not about returning to what was. It is about responding to change in ways that strengthen the downtown over time.

In London's downtown, resilience can be understood across three dimensions:

1. **Economic** - A resilient downtown supports a diverse business ecosystem, encourages entrepreneurship, and reduces reliance on any single sector.
2. **Social** - A resilient downtown builds strong partnerships, supports community connections, and creates conditions where more people participate in downtown life.
3. **Physical / Place** - A resilient downtown uses space effectively, adapts to changing needs, and maintains a public realm that is active, functional, and welcoming.

Resilience is a capacity that must be built intentionally through planning, partnerships, investment, and action.

Resilience Reflects Readiness for Change

Resilience is what helps downtown vitality endure.

Economic momentum downtown reflects prosperity to attract investors and entrepreneurs. A vibrant downtown attracts people. An inclusive downtown ensures more people feel welcome. Resilience is what helps those conditions persist over time, especially during periods of change.

Resilience supports:

- a more stable business environment
- stronger local spending and repeat visitation
- greater confidence for investment and development
- more adaptable public spaces
- a downtown that remains relevant to changing community needs

Downtowns are not static. Consumer expectations evolve. Business models shift. Workforce patterns change. Public space must respond.

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses in London's downtown were demonstrating their ability to adapt, adjust, and navigate change. "Pivoting" became a widely used term to describe this behaviour, highlighting the agility required to respond to both challenges and opportunities. For Downtown London, resilience is not just about recovery. It is about readiness. It is the ability to move forward with confidence, flexibility, and shared purpose.

Downtown Resilience Model

Resilience is not built through any single initiative. It is created through the combined strength of people, places, institutions, businesses, and systems.

At the centre of this model is the desired outcome:

Downtown London Resilience
Adapt • Recover • Thrive

This reflects the downtown's capacity to respond to disruption, remain relevant, and continue generating economic, social, and place-based value.

This outcome is supported by four impact drivers and seven interconnected pillars.

Four Impact Drivers

These are the key conditions that strengthen resilience across the downtown ecosystem.

1. Stable Residents & Anchors - A strong and growing base of residents, institutions, employers, and long-term uses helps create consistent activity, local spending, and year-round stability.

2. Economic Diversification - A resilient downtown is not overly dependent on any one sector, audience, or business model. A broader economic mix helps downtown absorb shocks and remain competitive as markets evolve.

3. Community Loyalty - When people feel connected to downtown and choose to return regularly (as customers, participants, residents, workers, or visitors) it creates stronger local support and more sustained economic activity.

4. Flexibility & Adaptability - Resilient downtowns can respond to changing conditions. This includes the ability to activate spaces, support new business models, adapt underused properties, and respond quickly to emerging opportunities or disruptions.

Together, these impact drivers create the underlying conditions that help downtown remain active, investable, and relevant over time.

Seven Resilience Pillars

These pillars represent the interconnected parts of downtown life that contribute to long-term resilience.

1. Residential & Mixed-Use Living - A growing residential base provides a stable daily population that supports businesses, services, and activity beyond traditional office or visitor hours. Mixed-use development also strengthens resilience by creating a more balanced and adaptable downtown environment.

2. Public Realm & Placemaking - The quality, safety, comfort, and usability of public space shape how people experience downtown. Well-managed, welcoming, and flexible public spaces support activity, strengthen perceptions, and improve downtown's ability to respond to change.

3. Retail, Hospitality & Services - A resilient downtown business ecosystem includes a strong mix of shops, restaurants, services, and local enterprises that meet both everyday needs and destination demand. This pillar helps drive economic activity, foot traffic, and repeat visitation.

4. Arts, Culture & Entertainment - Arts and culture strengthen resilience by creating identity, attracting people, supporting local talent, and giving people reasons to return. They also help animate spaces, diversify activity, and reinforce downtown's emotional and cultural connection to the community.

5. Institutional & Educational Anchors - Major institutions and employers help stabilize downtown through workforce presence, student activity, talent development, research, investment, and long-term civic and economic contribution.

6. Office & Employment Base - Downtown's retail and hospitality sectors are more resilient when office workers are more engaged in everyday downtown activities, amenities and events.

7. Tourism & Visitor Economy (Supporting Role) - Tourism plays an important supporting role by bringing additional demand, visibility, and economic inflow into the downtown. While visitors contribute to resilience, long-term stability depends on ensuring tourism complements rather than replaces local and year-round activity.

RESILIENCE

ADAPT • RECOVER • THRIVE

Residential & Mixed-Use Living

Public Realm & Placemaking

Retail, Hospitality & Services

Arts, Culture & Entertainment

Institutional & Educational Anchors

Office & Employment Base

Tourism & Visitor Economy

DOWNTOWN RESILIENCE MODEL

How the Model Works

These seven pillars are interconnected.

- Residents and office workers support local businesses
- Institutions contribute to daytime activity
- Arts and culture drive engagement and identity
- Public spaces support participation
- Visitors expand economic opportunity

The stronger these connections, the more resilient London's downtown becomes.

What Resilience Looks Like in Practice

A resilient downtown is visible in everyday conditions.

It looks like a place where:

- residents support businesses beyond peak hours, shifting towards a 24 hour economy
- public spaces are active across seasons
- businesses adapt to changing conditions
- arts and culture create reasons to return
- institutions anchor activity and talent
- visitors contribute to, rather than carry, vitality

It also looks like a downtown that can respond quickly to change by:

- activating vacant or underused spaces
- supporting pop-ups and pilot projects
- adapting streets and storefronts
- building new partnerships

Resilience is not only about creating stability. It is a momentum builder and supports the ability to keep evolving.

Strategic Impact Opportunities

Downtown London's resilience can be strengthened most effectively by focusing on a small number of high-impact areas that reinforce long-term stability, adaptability, and participation.

The following five strategic opportunities align with the four impact drivers and represent practical areas for partnership, investment, and action.

1. Grow Stable Residents, Anchors, and Everyday Activity

- Support residential growth, institutional presence, and year-round activity to strengthen daily use and economic stability.

2. Diversify the Economic Base

- Encourage a balanced mix of sectors, support entrepreneurship, and create space for emerging business models.

3. Strengthen Community Loyalty

- Increase repeat visitation, build stronger connections, and reinforce downtown as part of daily routines.

4. Increase Flexibility and Adaptive Capacity

- Support temporary uses, activate vacant spaces, and enable businesses and property owners to respond to change.

5. Support Office Sector and Workforce Stability

- Strengthen relationships with employers, support evolving workplace patterns, and integrate workers into downtown life.

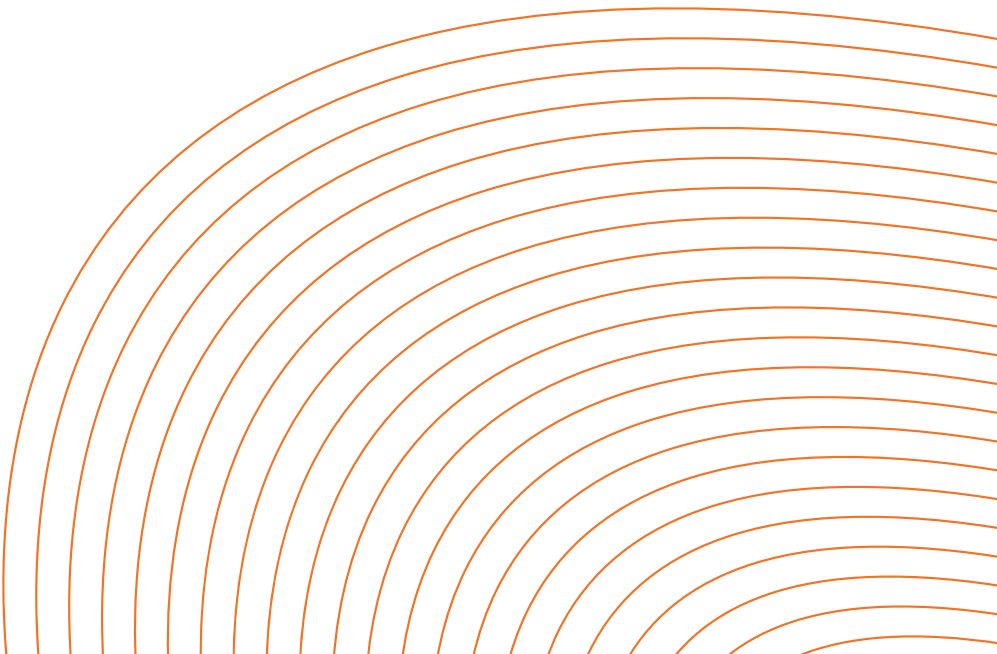
Supporting the office sector is not only about occupancy. It is about reinforcing the broader economic and social role that workers and employers play in downtown life. Currently we are observing that while employees may have returned to the office, we are not seeing them on our streets with the same frequency as their pre-pandemic activities. This has an impact on retail, restaurants and services who are eager to welcome them back.

Measuring Resilience

Downtown London's resilience is most effective when it can be **tracked, understood, and strengthened**. Key indicators across economic, social, and physical dimensions include:

- **Residential & Anchors** - Population growth, occupancy rates, institutional presence, and stable daytime populations.
- **Business Environment** - Vacancy trends, business retention, sector diversity, and emerging business models (a more fully realized ecosystem).
- **Public Realm** - Cleanliness, safety perception, accessibility, and public space usage.
- **Arts & Culture** - Event frequency, attendance, and engagement with local creative initiatives.
- **Tourism & Visitors** - Visitor numbers, event-driven traffic, and conversion to local spending.

By measuring these indicators consistently, Downtown London can **identify strengths, anticipate challenges, and guide strategic investments** that strengthen overall resilience.



Downtown London Resilience Scorecard

The scorecard consolidates performance across five key impact drivers to provide a clear view of the downtown’s current position and trajectory:

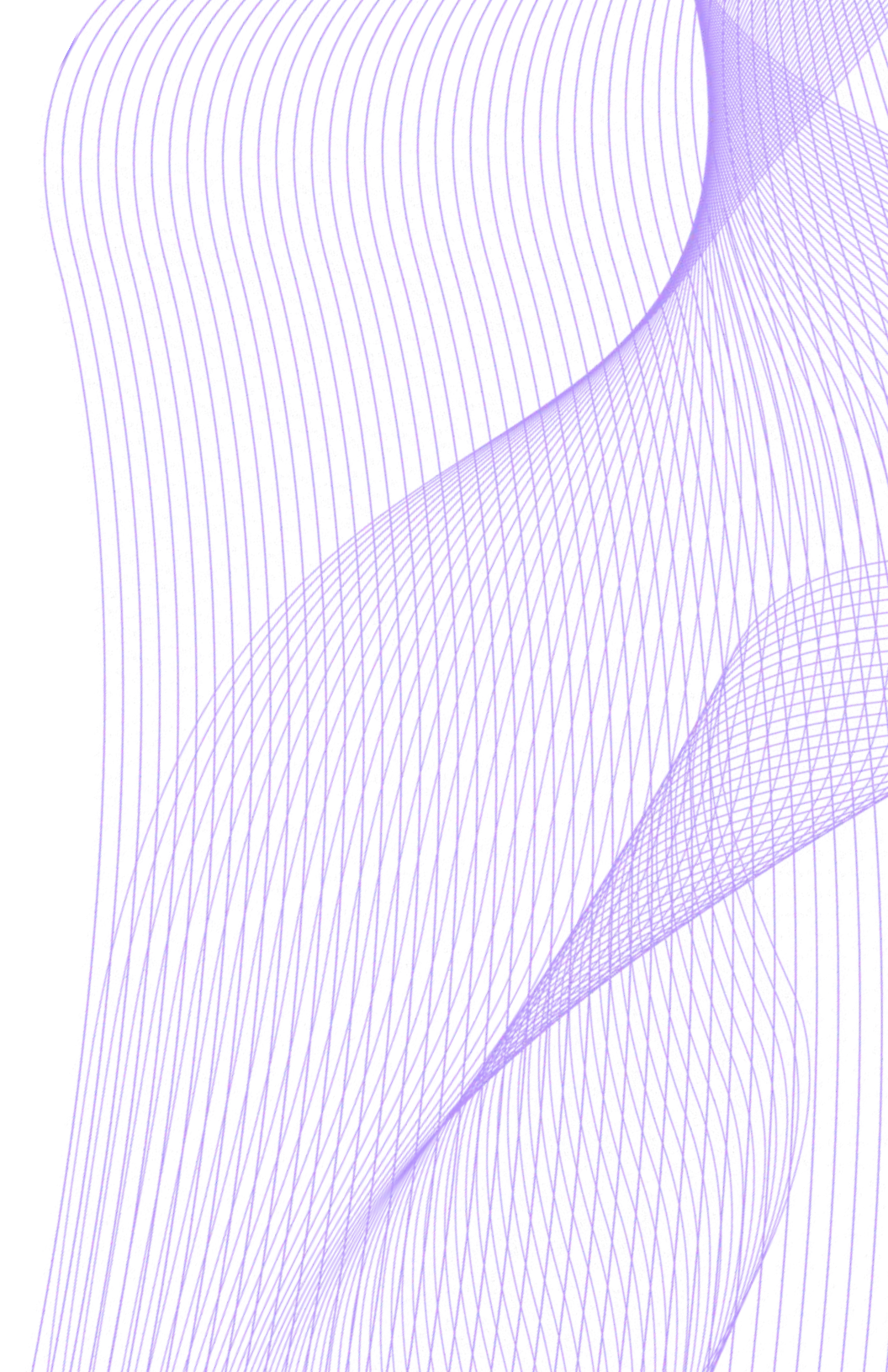
| Impact Driver | Current Status | Score (1-5) | Trend |
|---|--|-------------|------------------|
| 1. Stable Residents & Anchors | Residential growth, institutional presence, workforce density | 3.5 | Improving |
| 2. Economic Diversification | Sector mix, vacancy rates, new business models | 3 | Stable |
| 3. Community Loyalty | Repeat visitation, local engagement, event participation | 3 | Stable |
| 4. Flexibility & Adaptability | Temporary activations, pop-ups, adaptive use | 3.5 | Improving |
| 5. Office Sector & Workforce Stability | Office occupancy & tenant diversity, daytime population & engagement, economic spillover to retail & hospitality | 2.5 | Needs to improve |

Overall Resilience Score: 3.2 / 5

This scorecard provides a **shared reference for partners, the LDBA board, and the public**, helping to translate values into measurable action.

Additional Metrics

Office occupancy & tenant diversity, daytime population & engagement, economic spillover to retail & hospitality, Daytime Activity, Convention & Event Activity



Strategic Partnerships

Resilience is built through **collaboration across sectors**, with each partner

| Sector | Collaborators | Key Outcomes |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Municipal | City of London (Municipal and Economic Development partners) | Align plans & initiatives (e.g. space downtown) |
| Institutional | Western University, Fanshawe College, major employers | Talent pipeline, research partnerships |
| Private Sector | Developers, property owners, tenants | Adaptive reuse of vacant space, space downtown |
| Community & Culture | Arts organizations, event producers, non-profits | Co-create initiatives, local talent |
| Business Community | Independent businesses, hospitality, BIA members | Training, peer-to-peer promotions |

Partnerships enable **shared accountability, proactive management of change**

Partnerships

er contributing unique expertise, resources, and influence.

| Key Actions | Impact |
|---|--|
| policies, share data, co-design g. protect larger-format office own) | Integrated strategy, efficient use of public resources, measurable impact |
| es, student integration, partnerships | Skilled workforce, innovation, increased engagement downtown |
| se, flexible leasing, activation of s. Protect larger-format office own | Resilient commercial spaces, diversified economy, vibrant downtown |
| clusive programming, support | Cultural vibrancy, public space activation, broader participation |
| r networks, marketing & | Strong local economy, increased foot traffic, business retention |

Change, and coordinated actions that amplify resilience outcomes.

Next Steps

Building downtown resilience is a **shared responsibility**. To advance the next phase, Downtown London recommends a **phased approach**:

Phase 1: Relationship Building

- Engage partners across municipal, institutional, private, and cultural sectors.
- Host listening sessions with businesses, community groups, and equity-seeking populations.
- Map existing initiatives and resources to identify alignment and gaps.

Phase 2: Co-Design Frameworks

- Collaborate on resilience strategies across all downtown pillars.
- Identify early activation projects such as pop-up events or adaptive space pilots.
- Develop a shared metrics framework for tracking progress.

Phase 3: Formalize Commitments

- Establish Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs), working groups, and partnership agreements.
- Integrate resilience considerations into governance and strategic planning.
- Launch communication channels to share progress, celebrate successes, and promote continuous learning.

Call for Collaboration

Downtown London invites partners to:

- **Co-create solutions** - Participate in planning, programming, and placemaking initiatives.
- **Share expertise & resources** - Leverage networks, knowledge, and assets collaboratively.
- **Champion inclusion & equity** - Ensure strategies reflect the full diversity of the downtown community and our city.
- **Track & celebrate impact** - Collaborate on measurable outcomes demonstrating resilience in practice.
- **Commit to continuous improvement** - Provide feedback, adapt strategies, and ensure downtown remains responsive to emerging challenges.


Resilience is built together. Through shared effort and strategic investment, London's downtown can remain adaptable, connected, and strong for everyone who lives, works, and visits here.

Resilience is built through adaptability and diversity. Flexibility and stability strengthen long-term sustainability. This is how downtown endures.



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