

Creating Economic Momentum in Downtown London

November 2025

Economic Momentum Executive Summary

Downtown London is regaining momentum. Cranes on the skyline, fuller event calendars, and rising foot traffic point to a core that is rebuilding its economic engine and civic identity. Our 2025 Momentum Report established five guiding principles of downtown vitality (Economy, Vibrancy, Inclusion, Resilience, and Identity). This paper dives deeper into the economy, outlining the pillars that drive it, the constraints slowing progress, and the moves that will convert momentum into durable growth.

What's Holding Us Back?

Three interlinked challenges curb performance:

- Vacancy and under-utilization (storefronts, upper floors, offices and parking lots) driven by market shifts, ownership dynamics, displacement and affordability.
- Perceptions of safety, which shape behaviour more than raw crime metrics and are tightly tied to cleanliness, lighting, programming, and visible social supports.
- Reduced weekday foot traffic, as hybrid work, parking costs, construction delays, and commute frictions suppress the daytime customer base.

A cross-sector safety ecosystem is emerging with a variety of community partners engaged in the work, but requires sustained coordination and storytelling to shift perceptions.

Momentum: Summary

Why Downtown Matters

Downtown London punches above its weight: it concentrates jobs, investment, culture, and tourism, generating outsized fiscal returns for the entire city. Neglecting the core risks a negative spiral, resulting in shrinking tax revenues, higher service costs, talent leakage, stalled private investment, and a weakened regional brand. A thriving downtown is therefore not a niche goal; it's a citywide competitiveness strategy.

The Seven Economic Pillars: Current State

Downtown performance rests on seven interdependent pillars: Office & Employment; Retail/Hospitality/Services; Arts, Culture & Entertainment; Residential & Mixed-Use; Tourism & Visitor Economy; Public Realm & Placemaking; Institutional & Educational Anchors. A preliminary Economic Scorecard yields a composite score of 3.7 out of 5 based on our metrics, surveys and third party sources. Strengths include culture / tourism, placemaking, and institutional presence. Weaknesses are reflected in elevated office vacancy and the need to accelerate residential delivery and occupancy.

Moves That Matter Now

1. Rebuild Confidence & Safety

Expand coordinated, visible interventions (lighting, cleaning, foot patrols, outreach) and communicate progress to counter reductive narratives.

2. Activate & Convert Space

Pair festivals and Downtown Trails with retail activation; scale pop-ups and “meanwhile” uses; fast-track office-to-residential conversions and flexible workspaces.

3. Grow the Residential Base

Pursue mixed-income housing and student-oriented options to create 24/7 demand and stabilize street-level retail.

4. Leverage Anchors & Partnerships

Deepen ties with Fanshawe College, Western University, civic institutions, and venues to drive talent pipelines, conferences, and cultural programming.

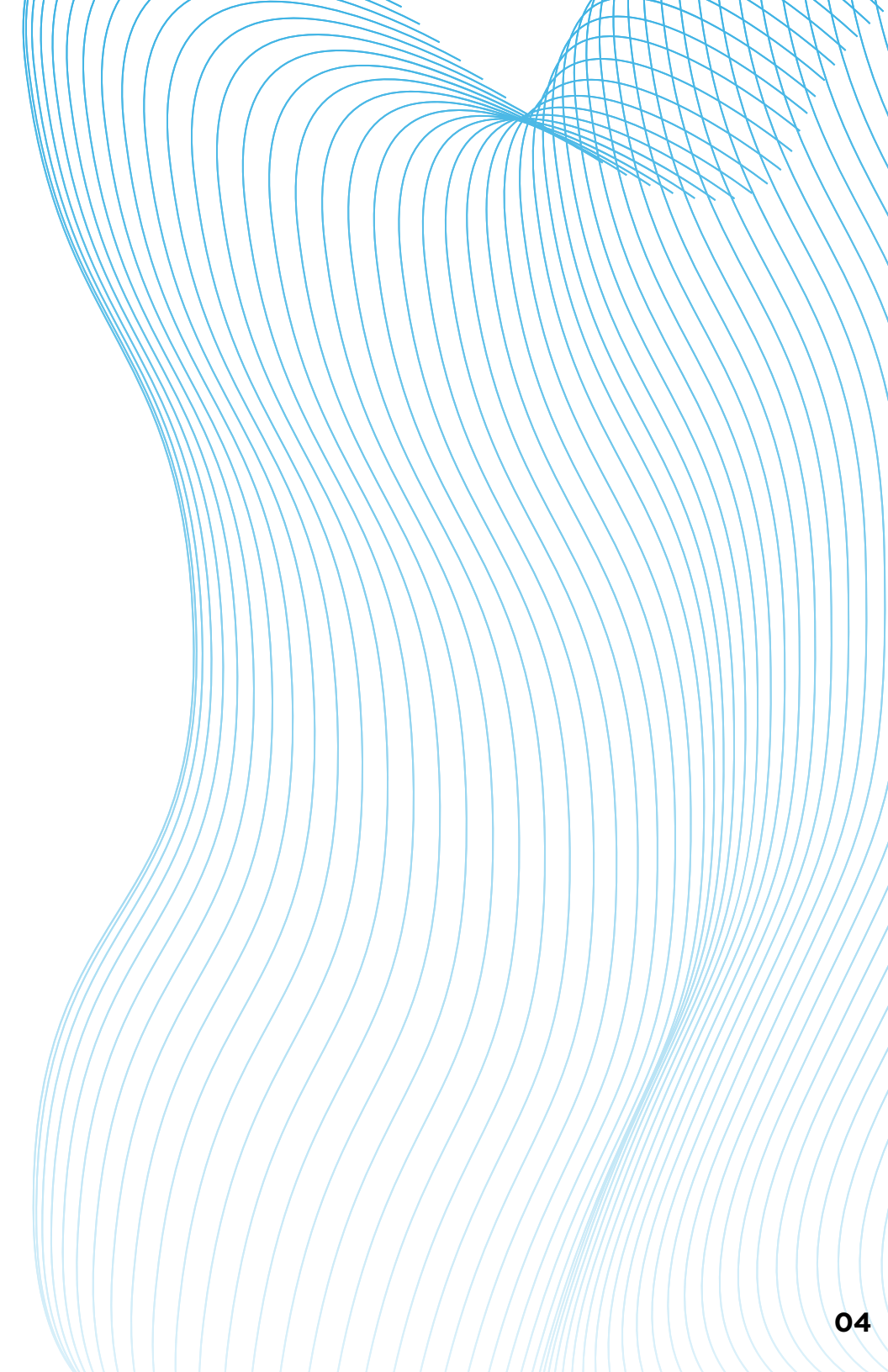
5. Own the Narrative

Use data and success stories to shift perceptions; highlight wins, measure what matters, and publish regular scorecards.

Our Path Forward

Economic recovery, cultural identity, and social inclusion are inseparable. By doubling down on activation, housing, coordinated safety, and anchor partnerships, while rigorously measuring outcomes, Downtown London can translate today’s momentum into lasting prosperity for the whole city.

Future working papers will outline implementable actions across the remaining principles and invite partners and residents to help shape the City’s forthcoming Downtown Plan.



Creating Economic Momentum in Downtown London

A constructive roadmap for a thriving, inclusive, and resilient core

Introduction

Downtown London is entering a new phase of momentum marked by renewed investment, stronger partnerships, and visible reinvigoration of streets and public spaces. Cranes on the skyline signal residential growth; fuller event calendars reflect a robust return of culture; and rising foot traffic points to renewed consumer confidence and a desire to reconnect after the pandemic. As we set out in our **2025 Momentum Report**, one truth anchors this effort: **downtown matters to everyone.**

Guided by five principles of downtown vitality, **Economy, Vibrancy, Inclusion, Resilience, and Identity**, this working paper focuses primarily on the **economy** while acknowledging the deep interdependence among all five principles. This document is presented as both a **white paper** and a **working paper**. It is a white paper because it sets out a clear, evidence-based roadmap for strengthening Downtown London's economic momentum, grounded in research, interviews, and practical solutions. At the same time, it is a working paper because downtown recovery is a **dynamic and collective effort**. Conditions change, opportunities emerge, and the most successful strategies will be those refined through collaboration.

By framing this as a working paper, we signal that this is not the final word on our downtown's future. Instead, it is a **platform for dialogue**. This is an open invitation for businesses, institutions, residents, and civic partners to shape the next phase together.

Through our research, interviews and experience, we have identified key barriers that dampen progress and propose constructive, community-centred solutions. Several solutions cut across multiple principles and economic pillars, compounding their impact.

Priority Opportunities for Impact

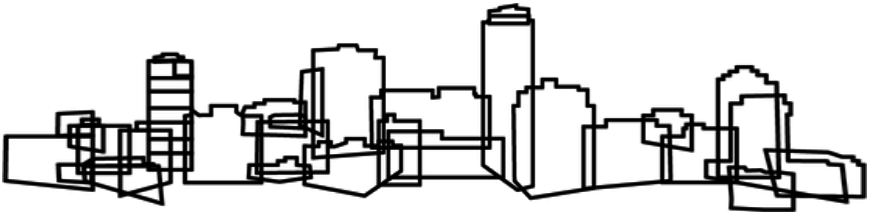
- **Vacancy and under-utilization.** Storefronts, upper floors, and office spaces must be reimagined and reactivated. Market shifts, local economic conditions, ownership dynamics, and perceptions of safety all shape occupancy.
- **Perceptions of safety.** Behaviour is driven as much by perception as by data. Lighting, cleanliness, programming, social supports, and business mix all contribute to a safer urban experience. London's foundation spans police foot patrols and specialized teams, City-led responses, outreach organizations, and the Downtown Clean Team. Our community response is leading the way and continuously improving, but requires sustained coordination and clearer storytelling. [Appendix A](#) provides more details. (Page 21)
- **Weekday foot traffic and customer base.** Hybrid work, higher parking costs, construction-related delays, and commute frictions suppress daytime activity. Employers are encouraging returns to the office and need complementary measures that improve the downtown experience and reduce barriers.

Our stance: Downtown London has the ingredients to succeed. The path forward is pragmatic and collaborative. We need to activate space, improve the frontline experience, grow housing, and align our anchors, while telling a more complete and nuanced story about progress and possibility.

Why Downtowns Matter

Downtown London punches above its weight. It concentrates jobs, attracts investment, anchors culture and tourism, and generates outsized fiscal returns that fund citywide services. When the core thrives, the whole city benefits. When it falters, the impacts radiate: shrinking assessment, rising service pressures, talent leakage, stalled investment, and brand erosion. Protecting and growing downtown vitality is not a niche objective. It is a cornerstone of London's long-term competitiveness and quality of life.

The Seven Economic Pillars



Office & Employment Base

Retail, Hospitality & Services

Arts, Culture & Entertainment

Residential & Mixed-Use Living

Public Realm Placemaking

Institutional & Educational Anchors

Tourism & Visitor Economy

Downtown Economy Model

The Interconnected Pillars of a Strong Urban Core

Vibrant downtown economies rest on interdependent pillars. Strengthening one often supports the others; conversely, weaknesses can cascade. London's seven pillars are summarized below with constructive next steps. Source references for this model are at the end of this document.

1) Office & Employment Base

Context.

Government, financial institutions, tech, health, legal, and professional services remain critical drivers of daytime activity. Hybrid work has reshaped daytime utilization patterns, resulting in a busier mid-week with softer Mondays and Fridays.

Downtown London in recent years has experienced elevated office vacancy relative to peer markets, although we are seeing gradual declines in office vacancy according to CBRE research, due to new programs and strategies.

Challenges.

Perceptions of safety, parking costs, and construction-related delays reduce employee willingness to return to the office. Employers offering paid parking face higher costs; employees face taxable benefits. Office development outside the core has grown in a way that shifts office populations outside of our downtown.

London's planning framework has long recognized that major office development is most effective when concentrated in the downtown core. This principle has supported the economic vitality, vibrancy, and long-term competitiveness of our city centre. The London Downtown Business Association fully supports this direction and shares the City's goal of a strong, thriving downtown.

The London Plan Downtown Place Type, policy 799_14 states that the City of London will: "Direct large-scale office developments, greater than 5,000 m², to the Downtown to prevent the deterioration of the important Downtown office market while still allowing for a reasonable supply of office uses outside of the Downtown." Through this policy the City carefully guides office uses outside of downtown to small and medium-scale projects.

Over time, however, a variety of planning tools have been used that, while individually reasonable, together open the door to larger-scale office development outside the core. These include:

- Adaptive reuse of existing buildings
- Variances and site-specific zoning permissions
- Official Plan or zoning changes for major projects
- Transit-oriented growth policies under Official Plan Amendment 125
- Density bonusing and incentive arrangements

Each of these mechanisms can be valuable when applied in moderation. But taken collectively, they risk creating a pathway for major office uses to shift away from downtown, diluting the concentration of jobs and investment that the framework was designed to protect. When office jobs move outside of the core, the impacts are far-reaching: less foot traffic for small businesses, reduced spending in downtown establishments, weaker transit ridership, and a diminished competitive identity for London as a regional hub. Once dispersed, these benefits are very difficult to recapture.

Constructive approach:

- Scale flexible office and co-working offerings (e.g., Innovation Works, The Executive Centre, Talbot Court Corporate Studios, Regus) to match post-pandemic demand.
- Improve the employee experience: more awareness for foot patrols and outreach, better lighting and highlight wayfinding, targeted cleanliness standards, and predictable construction communications. Improve perceptions of safety overall. Improve communications with employees to make them aware of everything downtown has to offer (newsletters, calendars, etc.) Explore office communications systems/TVs. Continue Downtown London’s office building pop-ups, contests and promos. Pilot ways to make parking more affordable, recognizing that our members also own parking lots and need to be included in the solutions.
- Continue to align City of London Community Improvement Plan (CIP) incentives to convert and modernize under-used space, including targeted office-to-residential and Class-B/C upgrades that meet contemporary tenant needs.

- The London Downtown Business Association encourages Council and Planning staff to approach exceptions with caution, ensuring that major office development remains concentrated downtown. Downtown London already offers the infrastructure, transit access, cultural amenities, and civic institutions that make it the natural home for the city's office economy. By applying existing policies with care and discipline, Council can ensure these strengths are preserved and that the City's investments in revitalization continue to pay dividends. Together, we can protect the core's role as London's economic engine while supporting balanced growth across the city.

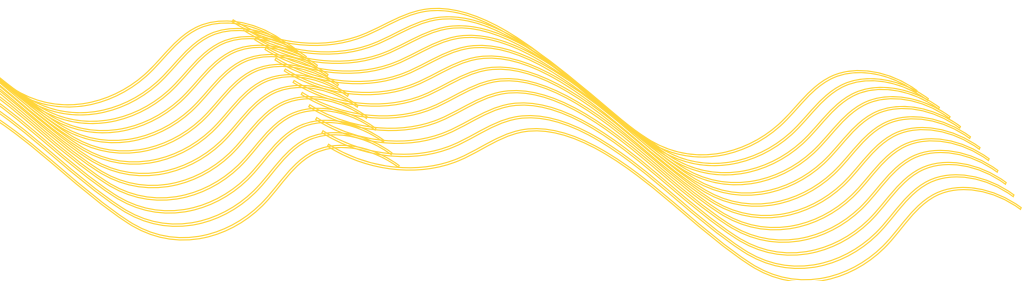
2) Retail, Hospitality & Services

Context.

Independent retail, restaurants, cafés, salons, and essential services provide the street-level heartbeat. Hospitality (hotels, RBC Place) extends activity beyond 9-5.

Constructive approach:

- Pair **events and Downtown Trails** with merchant activations (in-store promos, extended hours, merchant discounts and offers, wayfinding) so crowds translate into spend.
- Support **pop-ups, incubators, and “meanwhile uses”** to reduce vacancy friction and test concepts.
- Use **business mix management** tools like zoning, incentives, business attraction programs to balance essential services with destination experiences, retail and food.



3) Arts, Culture & Entertainment

Context.

As a UNESCO City of Music, London leverages venues and festivals that drive evening and weekend activity and regional tourism. The creative economy, driven by artists, technicians, event staff, and suppliers, adds jobs, identity, and draws visitors and locals alike.

Constructive approach:

- Reduce barriers to creative uses (short-term, affordable leases, more rehearsal/ performance spaces, insurance solutions).
- Scale **signature experiences** that are hard to replicate online and strengthen place identity and community pride.
- Tie cultural programming to **merchant participation** (bundles, passports, family-friendly add-ons).

4) Residential & Mixed-Use Living

Context.

A growing residential base creates 24/7 demand, enhances safety through passive surveillance, and stabilizes retail. Mixed-use development hedges against single-sector shocks.

Constructive approach:

- Advance **mixed-income** and **student-friendly** housing options to diversify resident profiles.
- Maintain and refine **CIP incentives** for office-to-residential conversions and transit-oriented development as needed to incentivize redevelopment.
- Ensure new density is matched with **amenities** (groceries, childcare, recreation) and public realm upgrades.
- Amplify and expand the experiences created in our **third spaces** and **plug-in spaces** Downtown. See [Appendix B](#) for more detailed descriptions. (Page 24)

5) Tourism & Visitor Economy

Context.

Major festivals and meetings generate millions in visitor spending across hotels, restaurants, retail, and attractions. Tourism feeds the talent and investment pipeline.

Constructive approach:

- Build a **Tourism Activation Roadmap** that packages venues, districts, and experiences into bookable itineraries. **Appendix C** shares more ideas for how we can implement this with downtown businesses and community partners. (Page 27)
- Convert day-visits to **repeat visits** through Downtown Trails, gift-card incentives, and targeted return offers from members.
- Coordinate calendars and storytelling across Tourism London, venues, and the BIA.
- Support the **Show Your Badge program** and explore more collaborations on conventions with Tourism London.

6) Public Realm & Placemaking

Context.

The public realm, including streets, sidewalks, plazas and parks, is the city's common ground. Quality, cleanliness, and comfort shape perceptions and behaviour. Placemaking turns spaces into destinations through programming and community participation.

Constructive approach:

- Deliver **visible wins**: lighting, cleaning standards, micro-amenities (seating, shade), and rapid graffiti removal.
- Expand **activation platforms** (e.g., Dundas Place flex street, Richmond Row) for festivals, patios, and pilot projects.
- Multiple **community-led moments** can be intentionally created, from murals to pop-ups to dance nights and guided or self-guided tours, to build a sense of belonging and pride.

7) Institutional & Educational Anchors

Context.

Fanshawe College's downtown campus, the London Public Library, City Hall, and proximity to Western University anchor daily population and civic life, stabilizing the local economy and creating pipelines for talent and ideas.

Constructive approach:

- Strengthen **institution-business linkages** (co-ops, applied research, conferences, cultural programming).
- Encourage **student housing** downtown and increase student-oriented services and experiences. Continue convocations at Canada Life Place (Western University and Fanshawe College).
- Leverage anchor calendars to drive **shoulder-period** activity for merchants by highlighting major recurring events we can use to plan promotions, staffing and programming around these key dates.

Scorecard: Downtown Economic Pillars

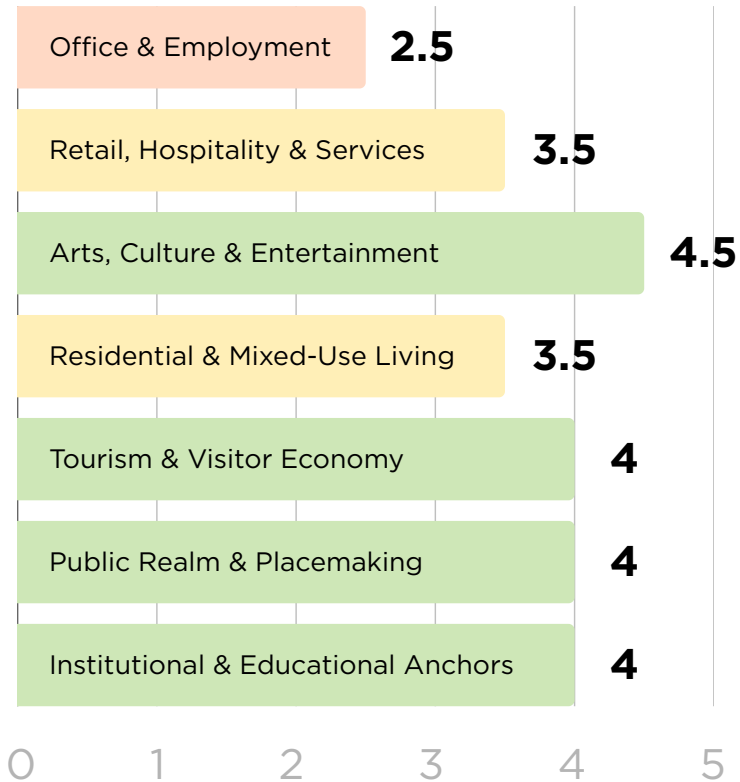
A thriving downtown isn't powered by a single sector; it's the synergy of employment, culture, residential life, tourism, and placemaking that drives resilience. When one pillar (like office demand) weakens, others (like residential or arts/culture) must grow to rebalance the ecosystem.

To guide action, we track economic pillar performance using a blended score (where 1=weak and 5=strong) informed by BIA metrics, surveys, and external indicators. The colours on the graph provide a quick glance at how we are doing, with orange indicating our weakest areas, yellow being moderate performers and green representing our key economic strengths.

Downtown London's strengths (culture, tourism, placemaking, anchors) can counterbalance office softness as residential delivery accelerates. The task is translating visits into spend, and momentum into durable confidence.

Now let's take a look at each pillar in terms of our current situation, required focus and potential partners for collaboration.

Downtown London Economic Pillar Scorecard



Score (1 = weak, 5 = strong)

See [Appendix D](#) for a more detailed explanation of the Downtown Economic Pillar Scorecard. (Page 29)

Action Items to Continue Economic Momentum

Employment & Office. Elevated vacancy in a hybrid era.

Focus: flexible offices, better employee experience (safety, amenities, parking predictability and pricing), and targeted modernization/conversion. Continued concentration of offices downtown.

Partners: Employers, Downtown London, City, economic development partners (London Economic Development Corporation and City of London).

Residential Density & Housing. New towers are advancing; diversify product and price points.

Focus: mixed-income and student options; accelerate office/parking-to-residential conversions.

Partners: City, developers, housing agencies and parking lot owners / operators.

Retail, Dining & Entertainment. Strong anchors with uneven conversion to spend.

Focus: retail activation tied to events/Downtown Trails; pop-ups and incubators; hospitality support.

Partners: Businesses, event organizers.

Institutions & Education. Strong stabilizers with untapped linkage potential.

Focus: co-ops, applied research, academic conferences; student housing downtown.

Partners: Fanshawe College, Western University, London Public Library, City of London.

Arts, Culture & Tourism. Leverage our UNESCO music platform with room to scale in the future.

Focus: immersive cultural destinations, family-friendly programming, bundled itineraries.

Partners: Tourism London, arts organizations, venues, Chamber of Commerce, London Music Office.

Public Realm & Placemaking. Quality public space is foundational.

Focus: lighting, cleaning, micro-amenities, rapid response; expand activation platforms.

Partners: City of London, BIA, community groups.

Safety, Inclusion & Social Infrastructure. The most urgent pressure point, and the greatest opportunity for visible progress.

Focus: coordinated safety and support, stigma reduction, transparent reporting.

Partners: City, social agencies, London Police Service, health partners.

Priority Actions (12–24 Months)

1. Rebuild confidence on the ground. Scale coordinated safety and outreach, set and publish cleanliness service level agreements, and expand lighting and wayfinding. Tell the story of progress consistently.

2. Activate and diversify space. Use Downtown Trails, events, and “meanwhile uses” to convert vacancy into value; tie programming to merchant offers. Leverage the City’s Fit-Out Grant to convert vacant spaces into tenant-ready business locations.

3. Accelerate housing delivery. Fast-track conversions; continue to align incentives and approvals; include student and mixed-income options that support 24/7 life.

4. Modernize the office value proposition. Grow flexible offices; improve commute/ parking experience; pilot employer-BIA partnerships that reward in-person days. Grow discounted employer purchases of Downtown Gift Cards to bring employees back to downtown businesses. BIA continues popping up at office towers/major employers.

5. Leverage anchors. Program with Fanshawe College, Western University, venues, and civic institutions to drive conference, cultural, and shoulder-season demand. See [Appendix E](#) for examples. (Page 31)

6. Own the narrative. Publish quarterly scorecards, highlight success stories, and counter reductive judgments about the downtown with data and real examples.

7. Create a Local Investment Partnership Fund. Collaborate to support the entrepreneurial ecosystem downtown. Establish a revolving fund co-created by the City, BIA, business leaders, the Chamber of Commerce, and other funding partners. Use funds to match investments for facade improvements, adaptive reuse and placemaking pilots to build long-term sustainability and shared ownership of downtown's renewal.

What's Next?

This paper examines the principles of creating a vibrant **Economy** while touching the interconnected principles of **Vibrancy, Inclusion, Resilience, and Identity**. Forthcoming working papers will present more implementable solutions across targeted sectors, developed with input from community partners and considering the City's forthcoming Downtown Plan. While we await the City's plan, we can continue our momentum in the shorter term.

Call for collaboration.

We invite businesses, institutions, social agencies, cultural organizations, and residents to co-design the next chapter. Downtown is where commerce, culture, civic life, and community intersect - London's best platform for inclusive growth and a hopeful, shared future. With focus, partnership, and steady delivery, Downtown London can turn today's momentum into long-term prosperity, shared by businesses, residents, and the entire city.

APPENDIX A: Perceptions of Safety and Community Interventions

Perceptions of safety are shaped by a number of nuanced and inter-related factors. It is important that we communicate clearly and intentionally to inspire confidence about our progress as a community. We have identified four key levers for addressing both perceptions and actual safety in our downtown, and there is a good deal of work underway already in each of these areas. They include:

- **Visible Safety Interventions** - a variety of programs, services, strategies and responses to improve perceptions of safety.
- **Placemaking** - a mix of intentional, built amenities and enhancements to the public realm, and in response to placemaking, community takeovers of public spaces for creative uses and activations.
- **Programming** - activating public spaces with inclusive, creative and engaging activities.
- **Supportive Housing / Social Services** - a broad spectrum of health/addiction services and housing solutions that address the complex needs of unhoused persons in our community and transition these individuals to appropriate housing and supports.

This summary is only intended to provide a snapshot of some of the many initiatives underway to support improved safety and perceptions of safety downtown. We gratefully acknowledge the work of many more organizations engaged in impactful work and appreciate their contributions to our community. In addition, many of our members' private buildings contribute to safety in a multitude of ways, at great expense and effort for their organizations. We also recognize the ongoing work by the City of London and London Police Services to influence changes to legislation that will have an impact on actual safety downtown and throughout our city.

Visible Safety Interventions

London Police Services:

- [Community Foot Patrol](#)
- [Open-Air Substance Use Strategy](#)
- [Project Learn](#)
- [Nurse Police Response Team](#)

City of London:

- public CCTV cameras
- private [Spotlight Program](#)
- [Coordinated Informed Response \(CIR\)](#)

Community partners:

- [C.O.A.S.T. program](#) (St. Joseph's, CMHA, LPS, and LHSC)
- [Project Pathways](#) (LHSC, CMHA, LPS)
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (LPS, City)

Downtown London:

- enhanced cleaning [Clean Team](#)
- [Property Damage Grant](#)

Placemaking

City of London:

[Dundas Place](#)
[Wayfinding signage](#)

Community engagement:

(e.g. salsa dancing at Market Lane, art and music experiences on [Dundas Place](#))

Downtown London:

Beautification - murals, seasonal planters, holiday decorations

Programming

City of London:

Dundas Place and Victoria Park festivals and events (with community organizers)

Covent Garden Market:

Festivals, events, weekly farmers' market

Downtown London:

Downtown Trails, Downtown for the Holidays (with Dundas Place, City of London, Tourism London and Covent Garden Market), event sponsorships and in-kind support for festivals and events

Supportive Housing / Social Services

Whole of Community System

Response:

- London's Health and Homelessness initiatives
- Community fundraising
- House of Hope
- London Cares
- 519 Pursuit
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
- London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC)
- City of London
- Downtown London
- and many more dedicated community organizations

Province of Ontario:

HART Hubs Strategy

APPENDIX B: Rewiring Downtown Civic Life

In urban regeneration circles, much has been written about third places, representing spaces (often businesses) that play a role in urban life between home (first place) and work (second place). We recognize these third places as important to our urban regeneration and have intentionally supported them as targeted uses in Downtown London. These spaces have been identified among our ‘targeted uses’, meaning they are priorities for business attraction and growth. As third places disappear, citizens engage in more individualistic thinking and participate less in community engagement. It’s a shift that drives a lot of decision making and consumer behaviours.

More recently Matt Wagner, Ph.D., currently the **Chief Innovation Officer at Main Street America**, has added to the downtown lexicon by identifying what he calls plug-in spaces, an enhancement upon the typical third place. In his work, he leads the Innovation Team responsible for research, launching new tools, and developing innovative approaches to strengthen regional downtown and commercial district development.

Changing how we think about downtown businesses and experiences leads us to more intentional management of the business mix, new operating models for businesses and public spaces, and new roles that community members can undertake in delivering plug-in places that have economic impact. For many businesses, this strategy starts out as a way to build a dedicated customer base and ongoing revenue generation. But at a deeper level, much more is at play.

Comparing "third places" and "plug-in spaces"

1. Third Spaces

Derived from Ray Oldenburg's sociological concept, "third places" are informal, community-oriented locales, places like cafés, barbershops, bookstores, parks and libraries. These spaces foster casual conversations, connection, and civic engagement. Cafés, barber shops, and breweries traditionally serve as these **passive connection hubs**, allowing people to gather and interact without a formal invitation or agenda.

2. Plug-In Spaces

Matt Wagner defines a **Plug-In Space** as a more **intentional and active evolution** of civic-oriented small businesses. These businesses do much more than provide a casual setting; they consciously craft opportunities for civic and social engagement. Key characteristics include:

- **Intentional programming:** Hosting gatherings, panels, meet-ups, or discussions that intentionally bring people together around common interests or local topics, far beyond passive socializing [Main Street America](#).
- **Designed for connection:** Physical spaces that integrate commerce with cultural or social functions, such as combining a barbershop with an art gallery and music venue, to encourage dialogue and accidental social interactions.
- **Micro-community formation:** These venues help people find like-minded groups (e.g., a bike shop that hosts a weekly ride club), going deeper than casual encounters to build lasting relationships.
- **Civic impact:** By hosting cultural events, storytelling series, or supporting local causes, Plug-In Spaces help rebuild empathy and civic trust in communities, acting as small-scale but significant civic infrastructure.

Downtown London examples of plug-in spaces include places such as **The London Bicycle Cafe, Toboggan Brewing Co., Wink's Eatery, Museum London, TAP Centre for Creativity, and Dundas Place.**

In summary:

- **Third Spaces:** Offer passive, unstructured opportunities for social interaction, like bumping into neighbours in a cafe.
- **Plug-In Spaces:** Actively design and facilitate social infrastructure; they aren't just places where community happens; they make it happen.

In Wagner's vision to **rewire downtown civic life**, plug-in spaces represent a modern evolution, local small businesses that **intentionally weave together commerce and community**, filling gaps where traditional civic institutions may fall short, especially in an age of digital isolation and civic fragmentation.

Downtown London already has a few of these plug-in spaces, and we encourage more attraction and development of this type of use in the future to support creation of an engaged and dedicated downtown community where businesses thrive and consumers feel a sense of belonging.

APPENDIX C: Downtown London Tourism Activation Roadmap

Short-Term Wins vs. Long-Term Plays

Focus Area	Short-Term Wins (0-18 months)	Long-Term Plays (2-5 years)
Visitor Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiarization tour with London Tourism welcome centre staff "100 Things to Do Downtown" QR-code decals for trails (patios, murals, food, music) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration on signature anchor festival (e.g. Lights Festival, expanded Downtown for the Holidays) Cultural corridors on Dundas Place & Market Lane (with partners) Placemaking (e.g. River District, Richmond Row, Market Lane)
Marketing & Storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint Tourism London/Ontario's Southwest campaigns (48-hour itineraries) Festival impact infographics UGC contests ("Best Downtown Moment") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position Downtown as "London's Front Door" in national campaigns UNESCO music brand leveraged for recurring international event Convention & business-travel integration
Partnerships & Packages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hotel + dining + show gift card bundles Student welcome initiatives Event venue tie-ins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Show Your Badge packages (dining, entertainment add-ons) Formalized Downtown and Tourism London co-branding strategy
Infrastructure & Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance wayfinding & signage (next phases) Cross-promotion inside hotels / VIA station / market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete, permanent wayfinding system (digital kiosks and signage) Downtown nightlife strategy (safety, lighting, curated and supported late-night economy); reference www.Ottawaatnight.ca

Explore Joint Priorities (Downtown London + Tourism organizations)

- **Data & Insights:** Continue data on foot-traffic, hotel occupancy, event attendance - shared dashboard
- **Co-Branded Campaigns:** Downtown as the heart of the London experience
- **Investment Advocacy:** Advocate for continued City-led safety, wayfinding, beautification investments

APPENDIX D: Downtown Economic Pillar Scorecard

For each of the economic pillars we've identified, we have scored our current situation using data from our own metrics, and external sources.

Pillar	Score 1 = weak 5 = strong	Key Evidence and Notes**
1. Office & Employment	2.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown office vacancy remains elevated (30.6% in Q3 2025 down from 31.4% in Q2) • Citywide vacancy sits at 25.7% by Q3 2025 but suburban markets are doing better • Employer and employee dissatisfaction with parking costs and commute times due to construction delays persists. Safety concerns also persist as our community comes to terms with Health and Homelessness solutions
2. Retail, Hospitality & Services	3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown BIA reports -978 events and -1M visitors (wpww-23) • Accommodation & Food Services jobs up -11% year over year to -17,785 (2-23) outpacing national growth • Strong rebound, but dependent on sustained foot traffic • Dundas Place foot traffic counters and BIA data on Downtown Trails show increase in foot traffic numbers
3. Arts, Culture & Entertainment	4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • London is Canada's first UNESCO City of Music (since 2021) • Music Venues: Canada Life Place, London Music Hall, Rum Runners, Wolf Performance Hall, Centennial Hall • Developing event ecosystem: Covent Garden Market, Richmond Row and Dundas Place activations reinforce cultural identity, creating and incubating cultural assets • Museum London and anchor galleries like Jonathon Bancroft Snell, Michael Gibson Gallery, Good Sport and TAP Centre for Creativity round out the culture sector. We still have room for improvement with more rehearsal and performance spaces, for example

<p>4. Residential & Mixed-Use Living</p>	<p>3.5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City offering incentives (\$35k/unit office-to-residential) and new Transit-Oriented Development forgivable loans (\$15k/unit) • Multiple high-rise projects underway and proposed signaling a strong residential pipeline • Execution risks around financing and timelines but policy tailwinds are favourable
<p>5. Tourism & Visitor Economy</p>	<p>4.0</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City-wide Tourism spending ~\$1.09B in 2023 (up 11% year over year) • RBC Place generated \$295M total impact since 2008; reported \$20-23M in annual direct spend with 2.8M delegates • Convention and visitor segments showing recovery momentum
<p>6. Public Realm & Placemaking</p>	<p>4.0</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public realm shapes perceptions about the City's overall vitality • Placemaking encompasses intentional actions and programming to influence improved perceptions • Dundas Place flex street is a City-led placemaking platform, an Ontario-first pioneering flex street initiative • Supports patios, festivals and retail spillover • City downtown strategies reinforce continued core-area investment
<p>7. Institutional & Educational Anchors</p>	<p>4.0</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fanshawe College Downtown Campus strengthens student presence • Western University building utilization still unknown; civic anchors (RBC Place, Canada Life Place) are assets • Convocations for both Western University and Fanshawe College at Canada Life Place were very positive for economic activity and foot traffic • Synergies with arts, digital and creative industries are at the early stages but poised for growth
<p>Average:</p>	<p>3.7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown London scores strongest on culture, tourism, and placemaking. Weaknesses remain in office demand and the pace of residential delivery. Diversification, activation, and continued investment in public realm and housing will be critical to sustaining recovery and vibrancy

1. Cushman & Wakefield London Office MarketBeat (Q4-2024); C&W MarketBeats (Q2-2025). Downtown London BIA office visits.
2. Downtown London BIA annuals; City sector profile (2025).
3. London City of Music; London Music Hall; City of London—Dundas Place.
4. City incentive programs; project coverage (ConstructConnect).
5. Tourism London 2023 impact; RBC Place business plan & impact page; Conference Board of Canada via Tourism London.
6. City of London—Dundas Place; Downtown Plan.
7. Fanshawe College Downtown Campus

APPENDIX E: Anchor Programming

Leveraging Institutional, Educational & Cultural Anchors to Drive Year-Round Economic Momentum

We can activate and sustain downtown vibrancy through strategic programming with Fanshawe College, Western University, major venues, and civic institutions. We can specifically target conference, cultural, and shoulder-season demand. Examples include:

1. Post-Secondary Anchors: Fanshawe College & Western University

Goal: Drive weekday visits, conference traffic, and student-to-downtown connection

Academic Conferences & Showcases

- Host joint symposiums and research events downtown (e.g., Innovation Works, RBC Place).
- Themes: urban retail, creative cities, sustainability, entrepreneurship.
- Include social itineraries with downtown restaurants and attractions.

Student-Led Cultural Pop-Ups

- Activate vacant storefronts with student art, fashion, and digital media exhibits.
- Program seasonal showcases: e.g. Holiday Windows, Winter Windows, Fall in the City, Creative Campus Downtown.
- Partner with LEAP Junction and Ivey/Morrisette to pop up student entrepreneurship showcases.

Orientation, Alumni & Networking Events

- Host September and April Downtown Welcome Weekends and alumni mixers.
- Offer Downtown Dollar Gift Card incentives or downtown restaurant passport promotions.

Applied Learning Activations

- Partner with Fanshawe event management and tourism programs to create Downtown Discovery Week or Student Curated Activations during slower months.

2. Civic Institutions: Museum London, London Public Library, Covent Garden Market, City Hall, RBC Place

Goal: Anchor off-peak visits and institutional collaboration

Downtown Winter & Spring Series

- Curate an indoor culture season: Light, Sound & Story—featuring art shows, readings, and small concerts from January - April.

Conference & Delegation Engagement

- Launch a Downtown Delegate Program with itineraries, gift card incentives, and after-hours maps for conference attendees.
- Target regional association events (teachers, planners, nurses, engineers) for downtown hosting.

Event Extensions

- Align with City events (Canada Day, Lighting of the Lights) by offering post-event downtown experiences.
- Example: Show your wristband for a discount program at participating restaurants and shops.

3. Cultural & Venue Anchors: Grand Theatre, TAP Centre for Creativity, London Music Hall, and others

Goal: Drive cultural and shoulder-season visitation

Shoulder-Season Mini-Festivals

- Develop Downtown Music Week (Feb-March) or Fall Arts Fringe (Oct-Nov).
- Partner with Fanshawe College, UNESCO City of Music, and Tourism London, and London Music Office.

Dine + Show Packages

- Pair restaurants with theatre and concert venues for Downtown Date Nights and Weekend Passes.
- Measure impact through Downtown Dollar Gift Card redemption data.

Artist Residencies and Visible Creation

- Support downtown artist residencies with TAP or Grand Theatre to use public and vacant spaces for open rehearsals and installations.

4. Integrated Citywide Collaboration

Goal: Strengthen cross-sector planning and fill event gaps

Downtown Anchor Roundtable

- Convene Fanshawe College, Western University, Tourism London, Museum London, London Public Library, and RBC Place annually to align calendars and identify shoulder-season opportunities.

Downtown Guides Program

- Recruit volunteers and liaisons from local institutions to guide delegates, lead walking tours, or host micro-lectures during conferences.

Experiential Tourism Bundles

- Create multi-day cultural and educational packages: Stay Downtown & Study the City, promoted through Tourism London and Ontario's Southwest Tourism Corporation in off-peak months.

Outcomes

By leveraging existing anchors and shared programming capacity, Downtown London can extend its tourism season, sustain year-round foot traffic, and position itself as the region's hub for culture, learning, and collaboration.

Source References

Seven Economic Pillars of Downtown Vibrancy

The seven pillars model was created by amalgamating diverse sources that align closely with what the International Downtown Association (**IDA**), Brookings Institution (**Brookings**), and Canadian Urban Institute (**CUI**) consistently identify as the “critical assets” of strong downtowns: jobs, people, experiences, institutions, and places. The seven pillars framework we are using is essentially a Canadianized, Downtown London-specific adaptation of those leading best practices.

1. Office & Employment Base

- International Downtown Association (IDA) - The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities (2017–2022 series)
- Emphasizes office clusters as foundational for daytime population, transit ridership, and retail demand.
 - [IDA Value of Downtowns](#)

2. Retail, Hospitality & Services

- Project for Public Spaces - How Retail Supports Placemaking
- Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) - Bring Back Main Street initiative (2020–21).
 - [Project for Public Spaces](#) | [CUI Bring Back Main Street](#)

3. Arts, Culture & Entertainment

- Richard Florida, The Rise of the Creative Class (2002, updated 2019).
- Canadian Urban Institute - The Value of Arts & Culture to City-Building.
 - [CUI Research](#)

4. Residential & Mixed-Use Living

- Brookings Institution - The Case for Downtown Housing (2018).
- IDA - Downtown Residential Trends (2019).
 - [Brookings Metro](#)

5. Tourism & Visitor Economy

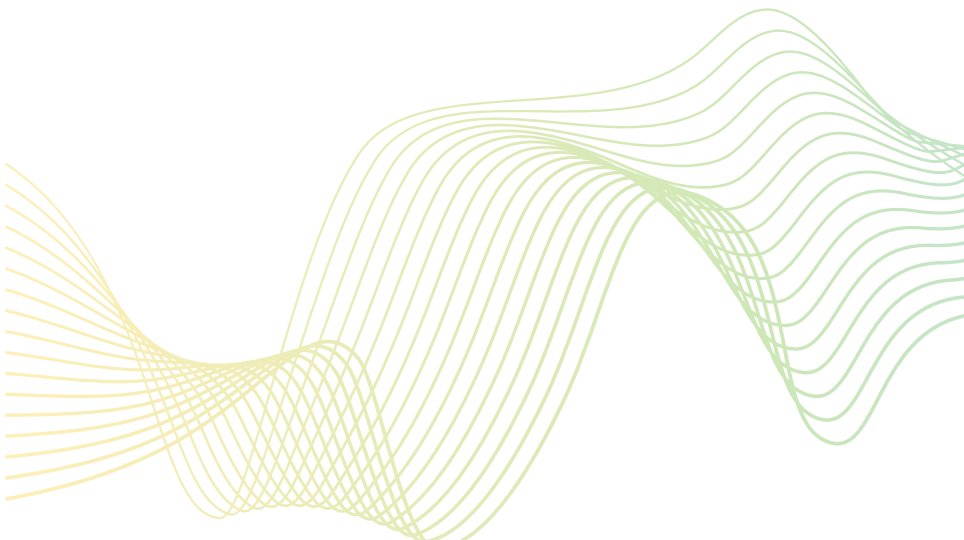
- Destination Canada - Tourism as a Catalyst for Economic Growth (2022).
- World Travel & Tourism Council - Cities Economic Impact Report.
 - [Destination Canada](#)

6. Public Realm & Placemaking

- Project for Public Spaces - What Makes a Great Place?
- Gehl Architects - Cities for People (2010+).
 - [Gehl People](#)

7. Institutional & Educational Anchors

- Brookings Institution - The Rise of Innovation Districts (2014).
- IDA - The Role of Civic and Educational Institutions in Downtowns (case studies).



This working paper draws on data and insights from a variety of sources and experiences. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, LDBA does not assume responsibility for errors, omissions, or the use of this information beyond its original context. For questions about the data or methodology, please contact info@downtownlondon.ca.



Downtownlondon.ca
519-663-2002
Info@DowntownLondon.ca

Facebook.com/DowntownLondon
Instagram.com/DowntownLondon
LinkedIn.com/Company/Downtown-London
TikTok.com/@DowntownLondon



114 Dundas Street, 4th floor
London, ON
N6A 1G1