



Why Maintain and Support a Healthy Downtown Belleville

Promotes Sustainability and an Efficient Use of Municipal Resources

Downtowns are existing urban environments and therefore redeveloping these areas supports the principles of sustainable development and Smart Growth. Downtown infill and redevelopment projects promote a concentration of growth and a wise use of existing community resources and infrastructure.

Facilitates Civic Life

Traditional downtown core areas are the location of a concentration of civic space and public amenities. These public spaces and amenities provide important forums for community interaction and connection through everyday use, events, and celebrations.

Accommodates a Variety of Lifestyle Choices

Downtown Belleville provides alternatives in terms of housing types, services, products, and entertainment which is very different from those found in suburban environments.

Concentration of Cultural Heritage

The Downtown has the greatest concentration of cultural heritage in Belleville. The importance of conserving heritage resources is understood to be a key factor in creating and supporting healthy and viable communities.

Symbolic and Profile Importance

The Downtown is the place where visitors are taken to see the heart of Belleville. It is a reflection of community accomplishments, community economic health, local quality of life, pride, ideals, and values. Most importantly, the image of the entire City and its quality of life is evaluated on the health and quality of the core areas.

Independent Business and Incubators

The Downtown provides ideal locations and environments for independent businesses, new businesses, and entrepreneurs. The built form affords a number of unique spaces in distinctive environments that enable businesses to create a flagship operation.

Economic Development and Return on Investment

A healthy Downtown generates tourism; improves real estate values, and lowers vacancy rates; enhances spending activity; increases tax assessment; reinvests in building stock; and, stabilizes existing businesses and attracts new business.

Belleville can Capitalize on the Changing Role of Downtowns

No Longer the Primary Retail Centre

The Downtown is no longer the primary retail centre of Belleville, nor the surrounding hinterland. Much of the retail activity is focused on new format retailers established on the edge of the City or at larger retail centres in other municipalities. Downtown Belleville will not regain its function as a primary retail centre and it can be anticipated that its retail role will continue to erode in the future. This does not mean that Downtown Belleville is dead. It does mean that the role and function of the Downtown needs to be reconsidered.

Historic Downtowns have Struggled to Reposition Themselves

Across Ontario and generally everywhere else across North America, small downtowns have been threatened by the new format retailing. Those downtowns that have thrived in the face of the retail revolution have recognized the change in shopping patterns and repositioned themselves by offering a different, sometimes complementary, retail function such as specialty retail, boutiques, entertainment, service retail and restaurants. They are also building upon their other functions as the historic cultural and administrative centre of the community, as well as a residential community.

Successful Downtowns have Promoted their Historic Character

Much of the success of these small downtowns is based upon their unique character. Historic buildings and/or key attributes of the natural setting such as a river/waterfront can create a marketing advantage by providing a distinct alternative to the large format retail centres. The key to this strategy is the quality of the experience. Many have become tourist attractions, creating new market potential.

Downtown Belleville has Potential

Downtown Belleville is still a centre for current residents and residents from the surrounding area. It offers an array of retail, residential, administrative, entertainment and service facilities. It includes smaller scale retail stores and bars/restaurants. In addition, Downtown Belleville offers a unique environment based on its historic character and the fine grain of development that differentiates it from new format retail experiences. Other assets include:

- Accessibility – Belleville is centred on the Windsor-Quebec Corridor and near the USA border.
- Natural Beauty – Downtown is located in a river valley, served by a river and on a boat accessible waterfront.
- An Emerging Wine Region – Belleville is the largest urban centre serving one of Ontario's burgeoning wine growing regions.
- Successful Cultural Amenities – existing cultural facilities are highly successful and new facilities are underway.
- Room to grow – Downtown has an abundance of infill and redevelopment opportunities.
- Competitive Advantage – The Downtown has been spared from many infrastructural, renewal and block amalgamating initiatives that have devastated other Downtowns.

Emerging Opportunities to Seize Upon

Shifting Quality of Life Priorities

In 2001, 13% of Canada's population was made up of senior citizens. In 2021, that proportion will increase to 18%. By 2031, one quarter of the population will be over the age of 65. The conveniences and amenities of successful Downtowns are well suited for the life style needs and wants of an aging population, including:

- Affordability
- Independent living by having support services, daily needs and amenities within walking distances
- Down-sizing to more manageable homes that require less maintenance
- Safe, comfortable and appealing settings
- An enriching life with easy access to cultural, recreational and social opportunities

Furthermore, the pedestrianism, sense of community and built quality of successful Downtown neighbourhoods has tremendous appeal to those dissatisfied with the time consumed by commuting and the banality of suburban environments. The increasing energy prices will only increase the attractiveness of neighbourhoods that are better built and that do not require a litre of gas for a litre milk.

The Growing Importance of the Tourism Sector

The historic character of successful Downtowns are an ever increasing attraction given their novelty, authenticity and because they offer a unique experience. As "destination communities", successful Downtowns are attractions with longevity that appeal to a wide spectrum of interests, and can have broad economic benefits.

The Race for the Competitive Edge

To be in the game of attracting high quality business investment, cities must be able to attract and retain an educated, talented and skilled workforce. This demographic has dispensable income, discerning tastes, is well travelled, cultured and sophisticated – they expect the same of the communities in which they choose to live.

The density and urban character of successful Downtowns nurture the vibrant social scenes, quality of shopping and eateries, and the variety of cultural and entertainment choices that would draw a creative and talented demographic.