

To work in concert with capital improvements, a number of parallel potential strategies could be considered to facilitate and accelerate the success and vitality of Downtown Belleville. These strategies have been recommended in direct response to a number of challenges that are specific to the Belleville context. Furthermore, some of these ideas emerged through the course of the process and through public consultation, while others are proven methods used elsewhere and in similar contexts. Other recommended strategies are grouped under the following themes:

1. Sustaining and Reinforcing the Master Plan
2. Generating Investment Interest and Building Broad Community Support
3. Enhancing the Viability of Retail
4. Encouraging Private Property Improvements
5. Generating Tourism
6. Attracting a Residential Population

1 Sustaining and Reinforcing the Master Plan

Adopt the Downtown Master Plan

The Downtown Master Plan should serve as a document to guide amendments to policy and to direct physical design and improvements within the Downtown. Adopting the plan will give it credibility and will set in motion the necessary actions to bring about the Downtown's transformation.

Undertake a Heritage Conservation District Study

A study area encompassing the entire City Centre as well as the East Hill and West Hill neighbourhoods should be undertaken to define and retain Belleville's greatest potential economic asset for the future - its past. The Ontario Heritage Act (the Act) plays an important role in enabling a municipality to designate the whole or any part of an area as a Heritage Conservation District (HCD). This allows City Council to protect and enhance the special character of groups of properties in an area. The identified character is established by the overall heritage quality of buildings, streets and open spaces as seen together. An HCD not only deals with the bricks and mortar, but also addresses the public realm which contributes to an area's intangible characteristics. As such, Heritage Conservation District Guidelines contained within a Plan would provide more certainty for the identified Downtown character, especially given the recent amendments made to the Act. These guidelines will help direct decisions regarding alterations, demolitions, new construction and landscaping.

Study Process:

The study format includes survey and research, boundary delineation, review of existing City Policies, development of preservation and design guidelines, and development of an implementation strategy. Public participation and consultation with the area's property owners will occur throughout the study process. In defining the heritage character of the area, the study will document the history of the buildings in the Downtown area, their architectural and historical significance and the growth and evolution of the neighbourhood that has occurred.

The Study will include guidelines for managing change consistent with good heritage conservation principles so as to encourage continued maintenance of the Downtown heritage character. At the conclusion of the study, staff will report on the suitability of the area for designation as a Heritage Conservation District under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. If City Council ultimately designated the area as a Heritage Conservation District, the study would form the District Plan required by the Act. The District Plan would provide guidance to the public, property owners, staff and City Council when considering alterations, demolitions and new construction in the area.

Undertake Comprehensive Urban Design Guidelines

The Master Plan provides the overarching long-term vision and a framework for broad based assessment of projects and for investment decision-making. Urban Design Guidelines provide an imperative layer of detail that assists in the implementation of the Master Plan by providing clear and detailed guidance for built form to ensure that the outcomes match the intentions.

If a Heritage Conservation District is not undertaken or does not encompass the entire City Centre, Guidelines should be developed as the next step in the implementation process. An important aspect of the scope of the Guidelines will be to address streetscape design, signage and wayfinding, architectural guidelines and the staging of how Dundas Street will be transformed into a pedestrian oriented urban corridor.

Expand the BIA to Enhance its role as the Steward of the Plan

Expanding the BIA to correspond to the entire City Centre will greatly enhance their financial capabilities for programming and improvements, provide a unified voice for the Downtown, and ensure the coordinated implementation of the Master Plan.

Establish a Downtown Development Review Committee

Create a broadly represented committee that includes the BIA, resident, historic and other interests. This committee would review and make recommendations on development applications for the Downtown that are moving through the approvals process so as to ensure consistency with the objectives of the Master Plan.

Establish a Design Review Panel

To provide the Downtown Development Review Committee with expertise support, consider a Design Review Panel comprised of volunteer professionals in the disciplines of architecture, urban design and landscape architecture. Development applicants and their consultants would be asked to present proposals to the Design Review Panel. The Panel in turn will make recommendations to the Committee and will work with the applicant's design team to promote design excellence and consistency with the Master Plan.

Undertake the Necessary Supporting Studies and Initiatives

Initiate the necessary studies that will keep the capital improvements on target including:

- Circulation and Parking Study to clearly define current and future need and demand, to determine road constraints for streetscape improvements including adding bicycle lanes, to determine the appropriate approach to relocating parking along the river, to better integrate circulation objectives with the Master Plan objectives, etc.
- Study for improvements to the mouth of the Moira River to improve water quality and to minimize flood risks;
- Detail designs for initial capital improvement projects such as the Downtown Gateways, Campbell Street Plaza and Promenade, and the River Walk;
- Assess and implement the required amendments to the City's planning policy framework;
- Begin the process of securing upper level government funding; and,
- Initiate discussion with major land owners and potential private partners for major developments.

2 Generating Investment Interest and Building Broad Community Support

Create a High Quality and Graphic Economic Development Promotional Package

Generate promotional materials comprised of key outcomes of the Master Plan and that includes inspiring and compelling imagery. As a brochure or poster it can be easily and widely distributed, posted or displayed in civic locations or storefronts, and be utilized for business development initiatives.

Identify an Effective Champion for Downtown

Find a broadly respected and influential individual that supports the Downtown and the objectives of the Master Plan. A non-partisan and trusted name with a local presence, appeal, vision and leadership can draw attention, change perceptions and generate enthusiasm. Possible candidates can include sporting figures, musicians, writers and artists.

Develop Branding Strategy with Broad Appeal

Create a logo, tag line and other identifiable triggers to represent the now bigger Downtown area. This branding should be evocative of a new dimension of the Downtown that is exciting, progressive, youthful, creative and dynamic.

Begin a Bellelevision 2020 Campaign

Begin a campaign to turn around local perceptions and to generate excitement that links the prospects of the Downtown with benefits to all of the City of Belleville. A clever recommendation by a local stakeholder was to use the name “Bellelevision 2020”. This campaign should be about raising awareness and instilling a collective pride in the Downtown. Set realistic goals and objectives for every year for the next 15 years as a means of measuring and demonstrating on-going success. Keep people informed and the spirit alive by generating a web site and regular newsletters for updates on any public or private changes, as well as festivals and events that highlight the distinction of the Downtown’s history, pedestrianism and architecture.

Use Design Competitions

Undertake national architectural, industrial design and landscaping competitions to generate ideas or detailed designs for key capital improvement projects such as the new foot bridge, gateways, parks and civic buildings. Competitions can generate tremendous local excitement, cause an influx of new visitors, raise national awareness of Belleville, lead to profiles in national publications, compel donations or sponsorship, and create a product of design excellence that may become a tourist attraction in its own right.

Develop Marketing Campaign Aimed at the Local Population

Once the branding is established, using it on every marketing piece that relates to the Downtown will be critical. Utilize mediums such as radio, newsprints, billboards and even painted murals. The ads should be designed to instill pride for Downtown in Belleville citizens and to reverse misconceptions such as inconveniences, crime, and urban decay.

3 Enhancing the Viability of Retail

Undertake a Market Study

A market study is currently underway and this will assist in defining the issues and opportunities. This should be an ongoing initiative to assess program success and to keep abreast of shifts in the market.

Manage The Village Like a Mall

Today's retailing must meet market expectations with respect to quality, service and convenience. One of the greatest discouragements to attracting shoppers which was consistently raised is the lack of coordinated shop hours. Arriving at a solution to this matter should be a priority and does not necessarily require longer hours. For example staggering hours with that of the mall or shifting hours to stay open later to better serve working population. Other lessons to learn from malls include consistent window dressing for empty storefronts, directories listing retailers, and a preoccupation with cleanliness and upkeep.

Develop Marketing Campaign Aimed at the Regional Population

Belleville has a catchment area of 192,000 people and appeal to this broader region is a tremendous opportunity. This campaign should take what has traditionally been thought of as a detriment to Downtown shopping and turn it into an asset – for example downtown as the “big box” alternative.

Encourage Specialty Retail to Concentrate

This is important for two reasons: First, isolated retail loses some of its ability to draw people based upon the liveliness of the district; second, retailers move to an area expecting support in the form of nearby shops and the foot traffic they generate. As the market grows the retail can expand outwardly and other retail areas in the Downtown could then be considered where appropriate.

Develop a Wayfinding Strategy

Belleville's current signs fail to convey a distinct image for the downtown. A new signage system is needed not only to convey information, but also to reinforce the special identity of the Downtown. This will become even more of an issue over time and with the advent of more facilities, including civic buildings, housing and retail. It will become increasingly important that people are aware of the features and of facilities in Downtown so that they can easily find their way there.

Establish supportive City-wide Policies

Over zoning for commercial lands can be detrimental to all existing commercial development in the City, not just the Downtown. The City should carefully manage the supply of lands for any uses to ensure the efficient allocation of services and that the health and vitality of existing businesses are not compromised unnecessarily and/or prematurely. If retail is struggling in the Downtown, it should raise alarm bells regarding the over supply of commercial lands. By not permitting any further commercial development on the periphery, the retail drain is likely to stop and Downtown Belleville may begin to see a dramatic turn around if a diminished land supply in a robust commercial market suddenly makes it an attractive location.

Accommodate Larger Format Retailers in Compatible Forms

The existence of large format retailer in the Downtown area is evidence that they can be viable commercial uses in this location. As a residential population increases, large supermarkets, drug stores and other big box types are a necessity for contemporary cities. The Downtown must balance the need to serve a residential population with the objective to improve its urban and pedestrian quality. It must also consider how to facilitate the incremental transition of automobile oriented corridors like Dundas Street into more urbane cross-sections. To do so requires the development of guidelines and development strategies for appropriate site configuration and building design.

Capitalizing on Waterfront Tourism

The current disconnect between the waterfront and The Village poses a serious challenge to drawing the visitors to Belleville who arrive by boat. Improving connections and accessibility for this desirable market should be a top priority that may have significant potential payoffs. The most desirable direct approach is via boat connection; however, until this is possible improvements to the quality of the pedestrian connections, wayfinding and marketing at point of arrival should be fast tracked. Other considerations can include complementary shuttle service in novel ways such as horse and buggy, bicycles or even rickshaws.

4 Encouraging Improvements to Private Property

Undertake an Inventory of Structures that Contribute to the Heritage Character

The current number of listed properties does not correspond to the sense of heritage character buildings that actually exist. In the absence of a Heritage Conservation District, the City or BIA, in conjunction with the Heritage Belleville, should undertake a survey of Downtown structures to inventory important and contributing Downtown buildings. The survey would assist the City and property owners in prioritizing efforts and securing funding for potential renovation projects based on the significance of the buildings and/or property to the heritage character of the Downtown. This study could feed into a HCD study if initiated in the future.

Well Designed and Packaged Information on Guidelines, Assistance and Incentive

Coordinated, consistent, graphic and easy to use “How-To” pamphlets for development applications processes, accessing incentive programs, and design guidelines can make the process less confusing and intimidating.

Provide Technical Assistance and Expertise

Many landowners simply do not have the technical competence and cannot afford to hire the expertise for upgrading their buildings. The City can utilize its in-house experts to assist with architectural, engineering and other necessary technical inquiries.

Tackle One Block at a Time

Be proactive through an aggressive campaign that tackles pockets of buildings at a time by encouraging higher property standards through by-law enforcement, providing assistance with the necessary applications, design and construction expertise and leading owners to potential funding sources. By succeeding with the majority of properties on an entire block, a momentum to change the entire street is a likely outcome.

Property Standards Control and By-law Enforcement

At a minimum, standards and by-laws are intended to provide a community with a sense of order and security. However, if these rules are not consistently enforced a breakdown in the physical and even the social order is inevitable. For revitalization to effectively take root, there needs to be a desire and momentum for change that can only come about with collective steps made forward. This cannot occur in a context that is unruly and/or indifferent.

For property owners to have the confidence and for meaningful investments to be encouraged there must be assurances that standards will be upheld and the efforts will not be unnecessarily undermined by those not willing to play by the rules. Despite incremental positive steps being made by individual property owners, the momentum remains stifled by the Downtown’s vulnerable image brought about by the negligence of others. Consequently, the Municipality has an important role to play in nurturing revitalization and it begins with being extra diligent in applying strict property standard controls and by-law enforcement. By first being consistent and unyielding on these matters the City provides a level of certainty which secures the foundations for an environment that is investor friendly.

5 Generating Tourism

Capitalize on the Emerging Wine Region

Belleville is at the gateway to Ontario's second significant wine growing region that is currently garnering tremendous regional attention. These regions attract discerning tourists, chefs and restaurateurs, and tremendous spin-off industries. With all attention turned to Belleville, it should be capitalizing on this proximity by developing a strategy to capture related businesses and to attract wine related tourists. Attracting a culinary school and establishing a wine festival are possible ways to firmly establish Belleville as the unofficial "capital" of this wine region.

Leverage the Heritage Assets

The most significant in-place resource from which to draw broad and far reaching appeal is the rich heritage building stock of the downtown. Belleville should develop an aggressive strategy to identify, protect, restore and widely promote its magnificent architecture. Its proud history should be on display throughout the downtown with interpretive plaques, buildings up-lit, and memorabilia sold in local stores.

Identify Unique Attractions to Pursue

Achieving longevity in the tourism industry is best accomplished by creating healthy, vibrant, living and breathing communities. However, growth in tourism can be generated by expanding and evolving local attractions. The Downtown Master Plan Guiding Framework has identified potential sites for landmark buildings that occupy important and visible sites which are well suited for major attractions such as museums or galleries. The quality and calibre of architecture can also be an attraction in itself and therefore, design excellence should always be a fundamental principle driving the development of attractions.

Attract Families by Targeting Youth

Youth represent a powerful demographic that are often central to a family's choices and decisions with respect to travel, entertainment and leisure. Specifically targeting youth related activities such as sporting facilities, a skate board park or venues for live entertainment can result in significant ancillary traffic.

Festivals and Events

Downtown Belleville should capitalize on its assets as well as other unique opportunities to develop festivals and events that can draw from a wide region. While conventional art and musical related events are not to be discouraged, identifying the unique, alternative and unconventional will have greater potency in drawing more people from further away places. Every opportunity should be taken to close streets for festivities where the size of the crowds warrants it.

Develop a Strategy to Attract Retirees

To capitalize on the aging demographic, Downtown Belleville will have to consider the distinct needs and desires of this group. Priorities relate to affordability, ease of movement, at-grade relationships, safety and security, passive leisure and accessibility to restrooms. Modes of travel should also be accommodated and includes coach tours and travellers by trailer that require specific locations for overnight parking and restocking.

6 Attracting Residential Development

Continue to Promote Adaptive Reuse for Housing

The first downtown residential projects are likely to be more feasible as adaptive reuse developments, in which historic buildings are renovated. The resulting housing is a special niche product that a specific segment of the market seeks and prefers over conventional single detached housing. Conversion can be encouraged by establishing a Residential Loan/Grant Program.

Promote Construction of New Housing as Complete Neighbourhoods

Studies indicate that demographics and market conditions support increased residential development in Downtowns. However, for new housing product in Downtown Belleville, it is necessary to bring a group of units on line together, in order to create a critical mass that buyers will perceive as a neighbourhood that offers a rich package of amenities. Public investment in these amenities such as attractive parks and streetscapes must lead the process.

Jump Start the Process by Participating and Lowering Risks

One substantial project is needed to “jump start” construction of residential development. The City could stimulate this project by assembling smaller parcels into one large redevelopment site and then undertake the planning, initial site preparation, sidewalks and street improvements. In this scenario, the site would then be offered to developers through a request for proposal. With the approvals and infrastructure already in place it would be a lower risk and therefore a tremendous incentive for developers. This approach also ensures that the planning and design objectives of the Master Plan are met.

Create Permissive Regulations

Zoning by-laws should provide incentives for adaptive reuse and new construction by lowering standards for parking requirements and/or allowing for unconventional/creative built form responses. Residential uses and commercial uses generally have alternating parking needs which would permit public parking area to be in use at all times of the day and therefore parking requirements can be significantly lowered. Residents should be offer special nightly permits at lower rates. Focusing on form and design and less on matters such as density and coverage can enable creative approaches to building additions or new construction, particularly on highly constrained sites.

Encourage Student Housing

Work with Loyalist College to establish a larger student presence in the Downtown. Strategies can include special student transit passes and establishing a Downtown Rental Housing Database geared to students.