

Purpose

The historic downtown can best reveal the authentic spirit of a town or city. It is in the downtown that the vestiges of a community's historic roots can be found, and where the defining image that makes a place special and memorable is captured in distinct block patterns, roads, buildings and landmarks.

It is recognizing the value of the discovery and protection of these characteristics that is at the heart of the movement to rediscover and revitalize downtowns across North America. This resurgence is not just about enhancing civic identity and pride, although these objectives are valuable in and of themselves, it is also very much about a community's economic development and prowess.

Healthy downtowns facilitate vibrant cultural activities and industries, attract tourists, incubate local independent businesses, accommodate a variety of lifestyle choices and make efficient use of municipal services and infrastructure. These attributes are unique to downtowns because they have the necessary density of people, mix of uses, variety of activities, pedestrian charm, built quality and sense of place that enable this vitality.

Downtown Belleville has all the hallmarks to become a success, including:

- a proud and distinct history that remains evident in its built character,
- an inviting and charming scale,
- a growing and healthy surrounding region,
- remarkable natural features, and
- room for growth.

However, as with many similarly scaled cities, the historic function of the downtown as the primary retail and employment centre has diminished. This decline over many years has adversely impacted the area's aesthetic quality, urban vitality and perceived image. Fortunately, Downtown Belleville's treasured assets remain intact and it is well positioned to seize upon emerging opportunities to revitalize and transform its image.

This Master Plan is no less than about charting a course for the transformation of Downtown Belleville. It provides Belleville with a long-term physical vision that can be used to guide public improvements and private investments. It defines strategies that can capitalize on strengths and opportunities that will serve to bring the vision for the Downtown to fruition. However, the scope of the Master Plan and the magnitude of its potential, holds the capacity to have a profound impact on the entire City of Belleville.

Defining the Downtown

Downtown Belleville has traditionally been associated with a concentration of civic, business and retail uses that comprise "The Village" and correspond to the Belleville Business Improvement Area (BBIA). As the historic and symbolic core of the City, this is a primary area of focus for improvements and initiatives. However, the physical extent of the Downtown subject to the Master Plan appropriately encompasses a far larger area of influence.

For the purposes of the Master Plan, the Downtown area corresponds to the entire "City Centre" designation in the Belleville Official Plan (left). Downtown Belleville includes both sides of the Moira River, extending south to include the waterfront, as far north as Memorial Park, as far west as Hwy 62, and as far east as Charles Street.

Background and Process

In the spring of 2005, Office for Urbanism was retained by the City of Belleville to undertake the Downtown Master Plan. Following on the heels of the BBIA's "Vision for the Village" document, the Master Plan is to provide a physical framework and clear direction for actions to be undertaken by the City and BBIA over the next ten to fifteen years.

The Master Plan process was completed over three phases. During the first phase, we sought to understand opportunities, constraints, and the unique character of this area. Further, Office for Urbanism hosted a series of interviews with stakeholders representing broad interests in the Downtown and wider community.

In August, the second phase of the study began with an intensive Visioning Workshop that was held over three consecutive days in a vacant Downtown storefront. The Workshop served to facilitate discussion, debate and the generation of ideas by involving the consultant team, Steering Committee, stakeholders and members of the public. This was a dynamic event that served to stimulate energy and enthusiasm about the potential of the Downtown. Walking tours, focused meetings, presentations, working group sessions and nightly open houses all served to facilitate discussion and debate.

During the third and final phase of this study the ideas and feedback generated at the Visioning Workshop were consolidated into a Draft Master Plan. This was submitted for review in October and was subsequently presented at a final Public Open House in November for feedback. This document is the final Downtown Belleville Master Plan and culminates what has been a truly outstanding planning process.



How to Use the Plan

A Master Plan is most effective when it can compel, inspire and bring about the intended outcomes. To do so, it must be rooted in the realm of possibilities, be legible to a broad spectrum of users and provide clear and concise direction to decision-makers. To be credible, the Master Plan must also be substantiated through technical analysis, be a product of a well documented public engagement process, and define concisely the appropriate tools or mechanisms for implementation.

For ease of reference and manageability, the Downtown Belleville Master Plan is divided into the following three documents:

The Guiding Framework

This is the long-term physical plan and concept for the Downtown. It presents the intended physical structure that will guide decisions regarding the character of uses, open spaces, and the built form over the next ten to fifteen years. Of the three documents, The Guiding Framework will have the most longevity, given that it defines a vision for the Downtown to work towards.

This will be most useful for directing planning policies and public improvements, guiding investments by land owners and developers, as a reference to assess development applications and as an economic development tool.

The Implementation Strategy

This is the implementation plan and recommended actions. It sets out the potential projects, programs, policies and strategies to move the Plan towards fruition. With an emphasis on initial capital improvement projects, this document addresses the current conditions of the Downtown by defining the necessary actions that will advance the long-term vision presented in The Guiding Framework.

The Implementation Strategy document will be most useful in guiding the City and BBIA in defining programs, setting priorities, allocating finances and assessing achievements. Over time, this section of the Master Plan should be revisited and updated to ensure that the strategies remain relevant and current to the Downtown as it evolves.



The Background Report

The documentation of the analysis and process that is the basis of the Master Plan. This document provides a summary of the outcomes of the research, analysis and consultation that supports the vision contained in the Master Plan and the potential strategies to bring it to fruition.

The Background Report will be useful to trace how decisions were made and how the stakeholders and public were engaged in that decision-making.

