

Downtown Master Plan Public Information and Visioning Session Results

The following points and ideas were identified at the public meeting on July 29th, 2009. These ideas originated from each of the discussion groups during the meeting. The points and ideas have been resorted into themes to make them easier to follow.

Weaknesses and Constraints

Connectivity

- Poor connection to the river / Forks / Victoria Park
- Area south of railway – “Downtown fringe”
- Needs to be easier to get Downtown

Recreation and culture

- No performing arts centre
- Green space
 - Lack of green space
 - What green space exists is hard to find (river, parks)
 - Need for more ‘real’ trees and planters
 - More coniferous for year round greenery
 - Improve air quality
- Passive recreation
 - Insufficient sitting/resting places
- Need more culture and arts programs
- Not much to do after 6 pm other than bars

Image

- Lack of identity
- Lack of ‘vibrancy’
- Need to build on uniqueness – be ahead of other cities
- Lack of community
- Lack of sense of ownership
- No universally recognized place where people congregate
- Negative publicity
 - A negative public perception
 - We never celebrate success
- Safety
 - Some areas seen as unsafe
 - Richmond and King
 - There are specific areas that are of greater concern
 - Lack of police foot patrol – or not in the right places
 - Camera system – public is unaware
 - Alley safety
 - Recessed doorways
 - Poor sidewalk lighting in residential areas

Business

- Food

- No full-scale grocery store – Valumart is too far
- Nightlife
 - Too many bars
 - No non-alcoholic nightlife
 - Moratorium on bars
 - Bars that are gang havens
 - No proper crowd control after bars close for night
- Retail
 - Shops and uses should be grouped into districts (i.e. textiles, restaurants)
 - Not enough destinations
 - No hardware store
- Other
 - Over concentration of similar businesses and services
 - Need more on Dundas and Richmond
 - Lost business due to traffic rerouting (construction, maintenance, etc.)

Transportation

- Parking
 - Lacking in areas (short 3000 spaces)
 - Lacking short term parking
 - Not evident / convenient
 - Overzealous by-law enforcement
 - Need more monthly parking
 - Possible need for parking garage structure
 - Too many large parking lots (i.e. King, York)
 - Storm water issue
 - Lazy public
 - Expensive
 - Should be free
 - Safety concerns
 - Perception that there is no free parking
 - Monopoly
 - Parking metres on residential streets
- Transit
 - Bus traffic is too busy around Dundas and Richmond (bottleneck)
 - Buses are too large for the streets (limited width on Dundas)
 - Get buses off of Dundas
 - Lack of public transit
 - No appropriate or central transit hub (local or regional)
 - Public attitude towards transit
 - Not enough bus shelters
 - Poor scheduling and routes
 - Too much smoking around bus stops – should be prohibited
 - Not enough bus traffic – more will help to reduce cars and increase walkers on street
- Other
 - No bike lanes / racks / storage
 - Bikes on sidewalks is a safety issue (for seniors, cyclists, etc.)
 - Too much rail traffic
 - Automobile traffic – circulation
 - Too many rail crossings
 - Noise from traffic – loud buses

Built Form

- Heritage
 - Disrespect/'facadism'
 - No control for rooftop access to prevent graffiti
 - More money for preservation
- Vacancies
 - Too many vacant buildings (inability to contact their owners) - Dead space on Dundas
 - Too many buildings in disrepair
 - (i.e. Corner of Richmond and Dundas, in front of library, old Grandma Lees)
- Design and style
 - Poorly designed public buildings (i.e. Court House, City Hall, Centennial Hall, Bell building)
 - Setback of higher buildings from the street
 - Visual clutter (signage)
 - Poor façade maintenance
 - Lack of architectural continuity
 - Too many blank walls
 - Eye sore on corner of Dundas and Clarence
 - "Fortress Alley" between Talbot and Ridout
- Other
 - Need disaster plan for high buildings and older buildings

Residential

- Underutilized former residential space
- Lack of living space
- Too much speculation and out of town landlords
- Lack of 'economic diversity' pertaining to residential
- Lack of choice for residential tenure
- Need more on Dundas and Richmond
- Not enough people living Downtown yet
- More student housing
- Absentee landlords
- Need to maintain balance between rentals and ownership

Pedestrian Realm

- Downtown is not pedestrian supportive
- Sidewalks
 - Narrow sidewalks (constraint for cafés and street trees)
 - Sidewalks are unsafe
 - Uncared for materials
- Accessibility
 - Poor access from building to building (should be opportunities to move from store to store without going outside – i.e. tunnel)
- Cleanliness
 - Poor cleanliness and maintenance of streets – dirty image
 - Lack of a recycling program (more City involvement required)
 - Waste management
 - Streets are unloved
 - Smell from public urination

- Other
 - Lack of snow clearing
 - No drinking fountains
 - No safe and clean public washroom facilities
 - Need more amenity space
 - Traffic signals should favour pedestrians and cyclists
 - Unsafe intersections – Ridout & Queens, and Wellington & York
 - No store fronts on York from Wellington to Clarence, in front of JLC and library

Social

- Social service offices
 - Bad location – heart of the Downtown
 - Too concentrated (should disperse throughout City)
- Street people – panhandlers
- Drug use on street
- Gangs
- Crime
- Need for citizen engagement

Other

- Get more private sector investment
- No cohesive design guidelines
- Emergency vehicle noise at night (speed was also a concern)
- Street layout (grid) may limit possibilities
- Downtown is too spread out
 - Fix heart of Downtown first
- Tracks Act as a barrier for parkland to north
- Deep lots are hard to maintain
- Purchasing policy – based on cost
- High taxes
- Power lines should be buried
- Too much favouritism toward developers which leads to an excess of both high rise buildings and destruction of heritage properties

Strengths and Opportunities

Connectivity

- Ease of walking within Downtown
- Good intercity connection (Greyhound, VIA)
- Could use better inner-city connection
- Opportunity to expand Downtown boundaries
 - Include Harris Park and Victoria Park
 - Old East
 - Richmond Row
- Pockets of vibrancy already exist – need to encourage connection to/between them
- Strong surrounding neighbourhoods
 - Opportunity to celebrate and support surrounding neighbourhoods – create better connections/linkages between them and the Downtown
- Core interacts with rest of London
- Shuttle between Downtown and Fanshawe / Western
- Centrally located
- Easily to access
- Connect TVP into Downtown

Recreation and Culture

- John Labatt Centre
 - London Knights
 - “Mini ACC”
- Low cost theatre (Rainbow Cinema) – opportunity for more
 - Cinema creates after hours traffic
- Covent Garden Market
- Central library
 - Open 7 days a week
- Kids theatre
- Arts Project
- Art Gallery / Museum London
- Art galleries - could be more
- City Lights
- The Grand
- Orchestra London
- Centennial Hall
- Opportunity for arts incubator
- More arts focus – living and work space
- Rehearsal spaces for theatre groups
- Big buildings and business can provide for an adopt an artist program
- Opportunity for a cultural hub / small pockets of arts
- Festivals
 - Opportunity for more throughout the year (new themes, seasons)
 - Better coordination between social events
 - Utilize Dundas St as well
- Green space
 - Victoria Park and Harris Park
 - Trail systems/bike paths along river

- Opportunity for green corridors
 - Green space at Middlesex county building
- Thames River – underutilized resource
 - Rubber Ducky races
 - Opportunity for boat rides on river
- Proximity to multi-use pathways
- Public art
 - Jet d'Eau
 - Tree sculptures
 - Opportunity for more
 - Tie into building design
 - Blackburn fountain

Image

- Distinct
- Opportunity to define the identity of the Downtown
- Growth and momentum
- One of the top 10 Cities to live in Canada
- Diversity of land uses and activities
- Lots of people on streets
- Family friendly
- Pet Friendly
- Opportunity for more meeting places
- Dundas St is Main street
- It's a big small town
- A lot of Downtown pride (people genuinely want it to succeed)
 - Emotional attachment
- Safety
 - It actually is safe – perceptions need to change
 - Crime is not that bad
 - Supportive police force
 - Opportunity to increase public safety (camera system to be monitored)
 - Street lights now light up road and sidewalk

Business

- Food
 - Variety of restaurants
 - New restaurants
 - More cafes with late hours
 - A lot of good diners and brunch places
- Nightlife
 - Density of bar locations (Richmond Row) and other activities
 - Opportunity for better nightlife, more patios, etc. throughout Downtown
 - Live music / entertainment
- Retail
 - Specialty / niche/ high quality shops (i.e. Kingsmills, Covent Garden Market)
 - Independent bookstores
 - Citi Plaza
 - One night of the week for late night shopping.
 - Weekly flea markets in surface parking lots

- Office
 - Strong office worker presence (30000 workers)
 - Middlesex London Health unit
- Other
 - Cheap rent for businesses
 - Encourage theme districts (i.e. King St restaurants, Little Italy, Distillery District, Greektown - Danforth)
 - Opportunity to adjust store hours (open during peak hours and evenings)
 - Good incentives
 - Talbot and King are people magnets (JLC, restaurants)
 - Eclectic mix
 - Live / work – expand - currently exist (old flour mill used as residential)
 - Opportunity to fill niches
 - Opportunity for City to reduce Downtown business tax to encourage developments
 - Hotels
 - More relaxed rules on street vendors (i.e. warm chestnuts, hot chocolate)
 - Office and government centre by day – culture and entertainment centre by night

Transportation

- Parking
 - Opportunity to for new development (i.e. buildings, green space)
 - Free parking after 6 pm
 - Opportunity for green energy – geo thermal
 - Can have multiple uses – festivals, DIY events
- Transit
 - Access is good
 - Opportunity for a bus junction
 - Downtown loop – 15 min (bus pass) – Fairground parking
- Other
 - Opportunity to synchronize traffic lights
 - Traffic flow on Queen and King
 - Grid street network
 - Opportunities with railway tracks – transit
 - Rail lines are positive – support light rail
 - Test closing streets to cars
 - No highway going through/around Downtown (unlike other Cities in Ontario)
 - Opportunity for more foot traffic
 - High speed rail

Built Form

- Great architecture – human scale
- Landmarks
- Blend of old and new buildings
- Heritage
 - Impressive concentrations remaining intact (Richmond, York, King)
 - Character
 - Identify and designate – builds pride
 - Need a walking guide for heritage tours
 - Downtown churches

- Victorian architecture
 - History attached to neighbourhood
- Vacancies
 - Empty storefronts can be used to showcase art and art portraying London's history
- Design and style
 - Chance to encourage green roofs and green technologies (in new and older buildings)
 - New buildings should be built to match the streetscape
- Other
 - Opportunity to use alleys, vacant spaces, and other underutilized built areas - Possibility for development incentives
 - Rejuvenation of some areas and buildings
 - Infill and intensification opportunities
 - Opportunity with old Victoria Hospital – demolition and de-commissioning
 - Overhaul of Galleria / Citi Plaza

Residential

- Affordable housing
- Healthy sized population and it continues to grow
 - Increasing professionals, seniors, disposable income
- Opportunity for a better mix of housing forms
- High density and other housing forms encourage more residents
- Desire for people to move back to Downtown
- New condos and apartments
 - Supported by grants and public money

Pedestrian Realm

- Sidewalks
 - First place to be plowed
- Other
 - Lower level pedestrian streetlights
 - Walkable - 10 minute walking radius
 - Opportunity for covered walkways

Social

- Recreation programs for kids- prevent crime
- Huge melting pot of diverse people
- Good student/youth presence
 - Opportunity to keep them here after they graduate
 - Make use of ideas and energy

Other

- Main Street, Downtown Business Association, East London BIA, Richmond Row (seen as Downtown Leaders)
- City planning focus on Downtown – Master Plan
- 'Sensational' City Hall staff (supportive and helpful)
- Opportunity for pedestrian street (Dundas, Carling, Market Lane)
- Opportunity to stop new development in City's outskirts
- People guides (Main Street/police/street musicians)
- Multiculturalism

- Active communities
- Strong Downtown arts community
- Extension schools
- Western and Fanshawe operations in Citi Plaza
 - Offer after hours traffic
- People are more environmentally conscious
 - Want to walk, bike, and live & eat local
- Support for creative class
- Money from parking metres to Downtown
- Mixed land uses
- Physical location – centre of City of London
- Regional role for Southwest Ontario
- History
- 24 hour blocks – services not bars
- Year-round activities
- Wellington Blvd
- Opportunity for urban agriculture
- Opportunity for sky farming
- Introduce wayfinding system – direct tourists in hotels to green space and gathering places
- London documentary shown in Tourism office
- Talbot from York to Kent is very attractive

Vision Statements

The following points and ideas were identified at the public meeting on July 29th, 2009. These ideas originated from each of the discussion groups during the meeting. The points and ideas have been resorted into themes to make them easier to follow.

- “A walkable, safe and vibrant community with lots of green space, multicultural restaurants, affordable living, and unique shopping. A place you would be proud to bring guests.”
- “A Downtown that is pedestrian friendly with a great grocery and transit system”
- “An attractive place we live, work and play that is active, dynamic and green”
- “Downtown is ‘THE’ vibrant live, work, play and stay place”
- “At the heart of it all”
- “Put the forest back into the Forest City”
- “A greater community where it is a pleasure to live, work and play”
- “It’s the future, the heart of the City, a place to work, live, play, exercise, for all age groups (young professionals, students, seniors)”
- “A very attractive and historical setting with relatively consistent architecture, vibrant business, more pedestrians and cyclists than cars, more green space including vegetable gardens and natural areas, and many activities for tourists and local residents of various age groups”
- “The one area, above all others, which concretely reflects Council’s purported support for walking as a primary mode of transportation and which discourages automobile use”
- “London will be a safe and welcoming environment rich in arts, culture, shopping, and leisure where there is a commitment to green living and social justice”
- “A place I want to go for fine dining, for a pleasant walk with colour, natural features and life. A nice space is the splash pad, but the pavilion to the south of it is often disgusting. Architectural features I will return to see regularly.”
- “Downtown London should be a centre for mixed uses. It should combine the best of commercial and residential space; pedestrians, cars and transit; both luxury and affordable rentals. It should have all the convenience of a neighbourhood and still be a destination for shopping and entertainment. It should be an easy and fun place to live, work and play”
- “Give them a place to live, work and play”
- “I think pedestrian only areas are a mistake. Inhibit vehicles a bit so there is less traffic without getting rid of them completely. Businesses need people going past, in whatever way.”
- “I’ve been driving in the core for 5 years. My future vision of the City of London is that the City has a strategic landmark at the Forks of the Thames, and to turn that landmark into a very entertaining place for tourists and Londoners living in the City”
- “London’s Downtown must always attract people in terms of residential use, pedestrian traffic, and the supports that encourage this (library, arts, facilities, grocery store, theatre, transportation, services) and the Arts community encouraged to be so as to draw people so that Downtown is the best place to live, work and play”
- “A destination for art, theatre, culture and varied creative entertainment”