



# **Strategic Review Final Report 2016**

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April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016



## Executive Summary

According to the mandate as a Business Improvement Area under section 220 of the Municipal Act, the Downtown Guelph Business Association works to improve and promote Downtown Guelph businesses and service providers.

The brand identity of Downtown Guelph is that its businesses and service providers are independent, informed professionals who provide authenticity, expertise, and personalized consultancy for a wide variety of goods and services. Downtown Guelph business and service providers offer unique, informed experiences. The DGBA facilitates the growth of “entrepreneurial urbanism” in Guelph’s BIA to promote this brand identity.

This Strategic Review has determined that DGBA staff is doing its job very effectively with limited resources, championing expertise, uniqueness, and authenticity.

Key takeaways of this 2016 Strategic Review:

- Member knowledge and expertise should be leveraged to share information among members (e.g. seminars), and to provide intelligence for new business recruitment
- A recruitment committee should be established to brainstorm, transfer, collect, and share information that will be applicable to new business recruitment
- Data should be collected (via Wi-Fi network), analysed, and provided to members to build intelligence on consumer trends and foot-traffic statistics
- A long-term vision of Downtown Guelph development should be established, and the DGBA is positioned to lead the process

## **DGBA Mandate:**

The DGBA's legislated two-fold mandate as a Business Improvement Area (BIA) under section 220 of the Municipal Act is:

- To improve, beautify and maintain public lands and buildings within the BIA, beyond that which is provided by the municipality at large
- To promote the area as a business and shopping area

## **DGBA Strategic Goals (2016)**

The DGBA Strategic Plan (2011) defined five strategic goals, which remain valid in 2016:

- Provide a unified voice for downtown Guelph
- Lead the economic development of downtown Guelph
- Contribute to community cultural and social development
- Promote and engage a member-focused mandate
- Manage DGBA resources to support a member-focused mandate

## **Downtown Guelph - Brand Identity & Strategic Positioning**

Downtown Guelph is the core of vibrancy and prosperity in the region.

Downtown Guelph businesses and service providers are independent, informed professionals who provide expertise, authenticity, and personalized consultancy for a wide variety of goods and services.

## Key Recommendations of this Report

1. Continue to engage members, collecting their voices in support of advocacy and business development.
2. Expand membership engagement to include business recruitment activity. Consider establishing a recruitment committee to transfer, collect, and share information.
3. Consider all opportunities to support new business recruitment in the BIA, including partnerships, professionals, and alliances that support opportunities to foster new business recruitment in the BIA.
4. Engage member intelligence. Create opportunities for members to share their expertise through information sharing, shared best practices, and/or a series of seminars offered with no admission charge for BIA members. Survey results indicate strong support for attendance, and for seminar participants.
5. Promote the downtown through continued use of social media, group advertising, “scene advertising,” events, and targeted communications (newsletters, emails).
6. Continue to articulate the uniqueness and authenticity of Downtown Guelph.
7. Reconsider offering Associate Memberships to interested businesses that exist outside of current boundaries as a means of engaging new partners, and generating a little extra revenue.

## Key Marketing Messages

1. Downtown Guelph retailers are passionate, independent, informed experts who offer experienced consultancy to their customers and patrons.
2. Downtown Guelph is the genuine, energetic, and authentic core of a vibrant and growing community.
3. Downtown Guelph businesses and services play a critical role in the growth and vibrancy of the broader Guelph / Wellington community.
4. Downtown Guelph Businesses foster a vibrant, liveable culture in the downtown core.

## Strategic Review – Stakeholder Input

Two stakeholder meetings were conducted in February and March of 2016. DGBA staff was interviewed. These discussions were followed by a survey that was distributed to all DGBA members.

**Key themes and recommendations** that apply to the DGBA Strategic Plan:

### 1. Support a Member-focused Mandate (Promotion and Beautification)

**Champion Expertise:** Existing businesses are a repository of expertise and experience that can be shared for collective benefit.

**“Uniqueness works”:** Unique, consumer-targeted, specialty businesses (e.g. Wyndham Art Supply, Knar Jewelry) work well in the downtown, both as successful businesses, and as entities that support the “vibe” of the downtown. “People come for the experience and the service.” As a core asset, authenticity and expertise should be championed and highlighted at every opportunity to support the overall brand of the downtown.

**Share the Mandate:** Be clear on what the DGBA does, and that it is not required or able to “fix sidewalks” nor “replace lamp standards.”

**Create Winning Conditions:** If the DGBA facilitates winning conditions for success, the market will be successful.

**Grow Partnerships:** programming and partnerships support mutual objectives of promoting foot traffic, cultural events, tourism objectives support, and enlivening the area – while extending resources.

**Recognize Authenticity:** Expertise and personalized consultancy are key assets that support “real experiences.” Authenticity speaks to both students and suburban citizens, two primary target demographics for growth.

**Further define a focus:** What is the focus of a “member-focused mandate?” How can member needs and views be captured and articulated?

## 2. Provide A Unified Voice

**A Collective Voice:** This speaks to the strategic goal of providing a unified voice for downtown Guelph. Aggregating anecdotal challenges into a collective voice that can advocate clearly for easier access, permits, bureaucratic navigation should be addressed.

Members must be “present and vocal” to stand behind the organization in order to heighten the organization’s effectiveness as a voice of the membership.

DGBA members have most of the facts and information required to support effective lobbying. Establishing an efficient means of information collection would demonstrate a “unified voice of downtown” to express effective lobbying platforms and business development intelligence.

**Communication:** The DGBA can further facilitate collecting and sharing of information and facts - talking points for owners and staff - to support development, facilitate progress, and attract foot traffic and new business. The DGBA can also formally collect and share development initiatives and progress that may already be underway.

**Perception:** The DGBA must be seen both as a co-operative partner for the City, property owners, and businesses – one that will support revenue generation through its efforts.

**Service Delivery Inhibitors:** Supporting enforcement and policing of negative issues, potential public threats, or cleanliness are vital - not as public conversations (because it propagates a negative narrative), but in private lobbying. These must be forwarded as primary concerns.

**Support the Downtown Experience:** Facilitated, free parking sends the message that “we want your business.”

### 3. Lead Economic Development

**Vision:** It is important to define a long-term vision. Strategy is one thing, but it is easier than execution. Plans are easier than “getting somebody to do it.” The DGBA should lead and champion a vision of downtown. It should ask, “What is the vision for downtown Guelph? What do we want it to be known for? Diverse retail? Entertainment? Both? What does the downtown look like in five years? How is ‘the place’ attractive? What components make ‘the place’ attractive? What are we trying to get to?”

**Brainstorming:** Understanding of market conditions, and sharing of opportunities, can be facilitated among DGBA members through brainstorming, and the establishment of a “recruitment committee.”

**Big Picture Development:** The DGBA can help to show “the endgame” to City, developers and investors - “speak of investment, not cost” - “how much revenue (development) will bring in over 50 years.”

**Retail Recruitment:** “We (the DGBA), as an organization, have to get more sophisticated at attracting non-food retail. We do not have the data to support better non-food retail recruitment.”

**Pooled Information:** For recruitment, existing retailers can be more active. Leveraged contacts and street-level ideas can feed into a collective voice for business attraction, identifying both needs and opportunities.

**Motivate Property Owners:** Landlords often take no interest in whether their space is rented, or to whom. The BIA has a much greater stake in who occupies spaces, so the DGBA should help recruit. Small regional companies are the best targets: ie, Bread Bar, Goodness Me - whoever did the recruiting for the new space at Wellington/Gordon is “clearly tapped into this method.” The DGBA should pair up with an excellent commercial realtor. The landlord/BIA could share a finder's fee - especially if the landlord got a higher rent than expected.

## 4. Contribute to Cultural and Social Development

**Events:** Events bring people downtown to see what's going on, allowing them to have a positive experience, and get a sense of the friendliness of downtown, while potentially quelling concerns about safety.

**Concierge:** The BIA has a strong role to play as a “party-thrower” for downtown events - a concierge, or a co-conspirator for downtown events.

**Enhancing the Flavour:** The DGBA can provide service in working with the City to be “enabling for downtown business,” helping voice collective issues to regulatory organizations - particularly when certain businesses (e.g. cafes) are hindered from adding to the “flavour” of the downtown with patios, tasteful awnings, outdoor lighting, liveliness, etc.

**Access:** The DGBA can facilitate ways to “make it easy to come downtown” for those who don't live there, alongside maintaining the “flavour” of downtown - helping to mitigate obstacles to growth, and maintaining the perception that the downtown is “more friendly.”

**The Social Fabric:** As a “business association”, the DGBA must be guided by what impacts the bottom line. It must be mindful of the social fabric of downtown, but that still can't take precedence over the region's economic vitality. Are we missing service delivery because of lack of policing and enforcement? Are negative factors inhibiting business and/or service delivery? Can those elements be mitigated in a manner that is not socially disruptive?



## 5. Manage DGBA Resources to Support Mandate

**Adaptability:** The DGBA should be open to, and adaptive to changing demographic trends.

**Data Provision:** Resources can (and should) be focused on providing non-anecdotal information and data to better support strategic, effective advertising, attraction, and business recruitment. Information provision (data) is key to presenting compelling cases for new businesses considering situating themselves in the core.

A methodical collection of data would also provide better evidence for the success (or lack of success) that downtown events provide for downtown retailers, and impact non-downtown festivals have on downtown business.

**Data Analysis Partners:** Raw data may provide value to DGBA members who could facilitate data analysis in exchange for “first access” to the data.

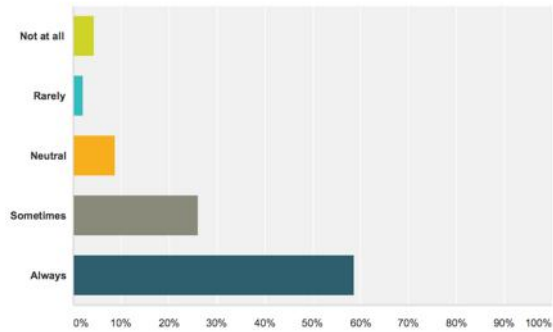
**Curating a Mix:** “Ground-floor curating” is not currently being addressed. Gaps and vacancies are not being proactively filled. A volunteer recruitment committee may start the process of identifying information, partners and professionals that can fill these gaps.

**Outreach:** Personal contact from DGBA staff to members seems the most effective way to stimulate member engagement, but is time consuming.

# Survey Results

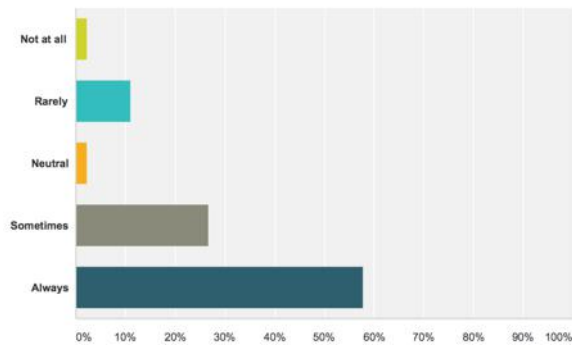
**Q1 Would you find it useful to access data related to how people are using the downtown (e.g. demographics, foot traffic)?**

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



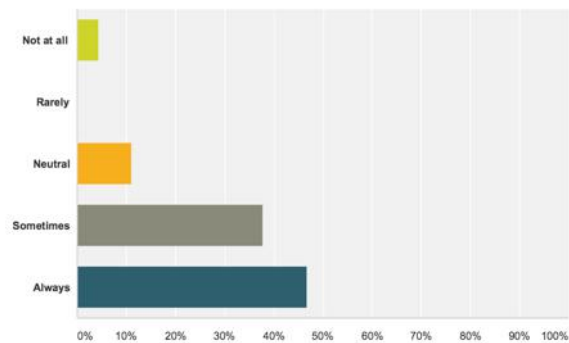
**Q2 Would you find it useful to access data regarding the impact of downtown events such as “Art on the Street” and “The Guelph Jazz Festival?”**

Answered: 45 Skipped: 1



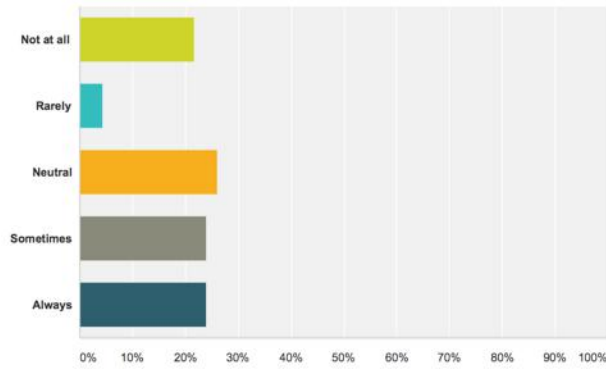
**Q3 Do you believe the DGBA should be engaged in new business recruitment?**

Answered: 45 Skipped: 1



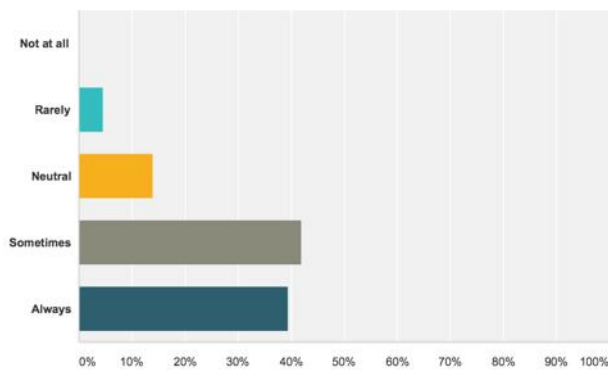
**Q4 Would you consider participating in a “Recruitment Committee” to support new business recruitment and the development of an “optimal business mix” in the downtown?**

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



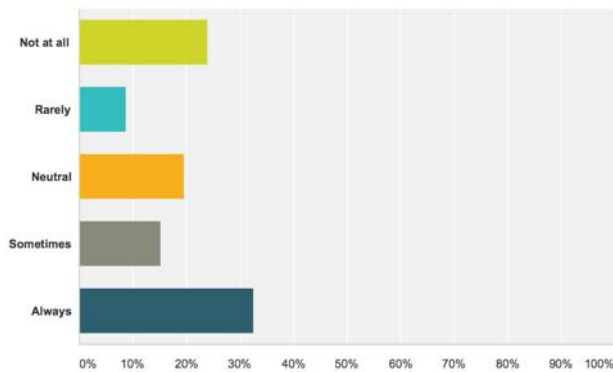
**Q5 Would you contribute information about your business (in confidence) if it helped with downtown business development or new business recruitment?**

Answered: 43 Skipped: 3



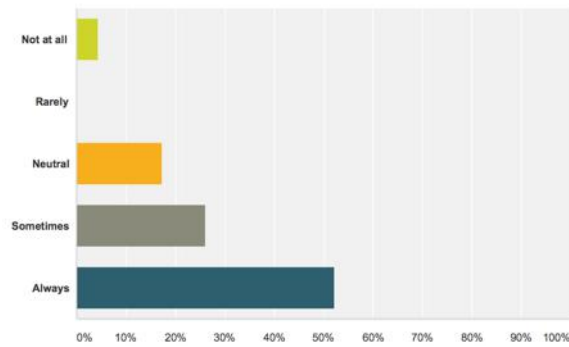
**Q6 Would you support heightened enforcement of parking regulations?**

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



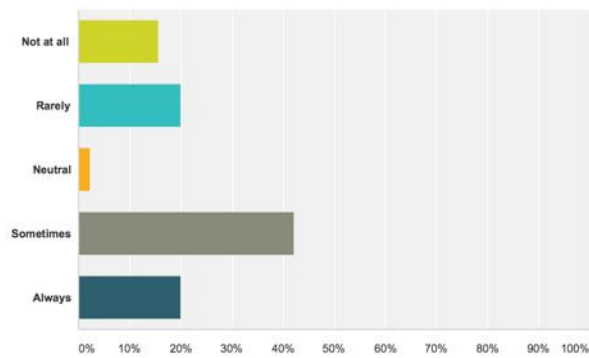
**Q7 Would you support heightened enforcement of property maintenance standards?**

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



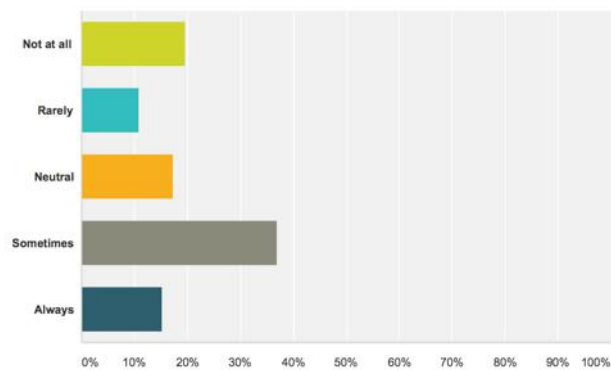
**Q8 Would you be interested in attending seminars or workshops about best business practices, conducted by experts who operate in downtown Guelph?**

Answered: 45 Skipped: 1



**Q9 Would you be interested in sharing your expertise by leading a seminar or workshop?**

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



## A Ten-Year Vision for Downtown Guelph: Key Comments

- With more residential housing being built downtown and near downtown it brings more traffic.
- Generally speaking, the downtown is not a disaster - and with the population density increasing there will be a certain success if only due to an increase in consumers living in the core.
- Baker St. Redevelopment.
- To see its potential become a reality; to make it more attractive to potential customers as a great place to get one-of-a-kind products; to make it more accessible.
- Transform the image or the perception of downtown.
- More university presence (important!). More opportunities for kids and families (library). We need better parking to support this. Car culture will not significantly weaken and will still be a challenge. Wifi and solar.
- Population, access, parking, and foot traffic is key.
- A cleaner, more active daytime community with strong and healthy businesses.
- Lots of parking available for longer than 2 hours per day so people can come downtown, stroll, eat, play. Downtown becomes a desirable destination.
- Convince City Hall to: (1) paint lines on Carden Street parking area to pack more cars in, easily 10-15 more cars can be accommodated if drivers knew where to park rather than where they guess to park(2) build more parking structures(3) extend free 2 hr. parking to 1/2 day.
- More diversity; clean up of dirty scruffy looking businesses; removal of methadone clinic from main core of downtown.
- More shopping and updated boutiques, similar to those on Quebec and Carden.
- More beat cops walking the downtown, introducing themselves to local business and the public. Just like Buzz but ten of him - and not just during the week, 7 days.

- With the incredibly insufficient parking available downtown, the focus should be on rectifying that situation as opposed to penalizing those who do come downtown. At a certain point strict enforcement (such as ticketing cars whose bumpers are 6 inches past the parking limit sign) drives people away from the downtown core.
- Would be of benefit to all business to have more variety of retail - maybe a grocer or hardware store.
- We need to really entice shoppers to come downtown, other than to have dinner or visit a bar.
- A full and diverse Independent business model - family style - local participation encouraged and used.
- A safe, quaint, inviting, progressive, clean community that provides a positive local vibe.

## DGBA Resources Priorities: Key Comments

- Keep downtown clean and safe.
- Continue to lobby for parking.
- More staff required for DGBA and more funded programs like the banners.
- Marketing to attract business to locate or relocate in the downtown.
- Working with other organizations (tourism, arts council etc.) to combine other funds/projects with a common goal of bringing more people downtown.
- More public events downtown. Street festivals and parties. Movies. Car shows.
- More effort should be made to promote foot traffic in the downtown for daytime businesses - particularly around the holiday season.
- Choice: a place where people choose to live and choose to have their business.
- Facebook page should promote ALL businesses. Not a select few that gets repeated exposure there. Facebook page is free and effective.
- Somebody should be hired (with experience) to recruit business to the downtown core.
- Continue to foster a positive attitude with social media.
- Research outside Guelph for other models for events (and steal the best!).
- Advertising the downtown is not enough incentive but adding more quality events would be a better draw.
- Transportation initiatives that funnel folks from the north, east, and south ends to the downtown to enjoy what it has to offer: shuttle services that give already-formed groups in these areas (churches, clubs, sports groups, senior communities etc.) the opportunity to come downtown together may encourage them to use the bus other times when they see what can be done here. Pair this with coordinated activities, and there is a possible win situation.
- Continuing to advocate for business needs (Parking!) Recruitment of new business to downtown. Events to draw people from other areas of city downtown

## Benchmark BIAs - Notable Observations and Considerations

### Kingston, Ontario

Vision Planning: Downtown Kingston hosted a “Vision Petition” on [change.org](http://change.org).

Kingston articulates a Mission Statement...

To promote Downtown Kingston! as the vibrant and healthy commercial, retail, residential, and entertainment centre of our region, attracting more people to live, shop, work, and gather.

.... And a “Branding Statement”...

Downtown Kingston! is a full service central business district, prominently featuring specialty retail, restaurant and entertainment and functioning as a vibrant and vital community gathering place, in a walkable, historic waterfront setting.

### Woodstock, Ontario

Woodstock provides Association Memberships as a means of expanding partnerships, and for increasing revenue (in 2009, the BIA Board approved a plan to allow businesses outside the BIA boundaries apply for BIA associate membership).

### Windsor, Ontario

In addition to a business-focused mission (“to develop and market downtown Windsor with other stakeholders as the place people want to BE and businesses want to INVEST”) and a bold vision (“to be recognized as the model downtown of modern North American cities”), the DWBIA plays an active role in the implementation of the 1995 City Centre Revitalization Study. It also facilitates dialogue and activity among key stakeholders, including the City’s various departments, member businesses, other government agencies, the arts and culture community and the general public.

### Toronto Neighbourhood BIAs

While the various Toronto neighbourhood BIAs (e.g. Crossroads of the Danforth, The Danforth BIA) vary in scope and professionalism, they all seem to share the stated goals of “attracting greater business development,” “to respond to safety and security issues” and are “working on new parking options.”



### Belleville BIA

Belleville prominently shares information and partner program information, such as the municipality grant programs, Retail Council of Canada membership benefits, and tax rebate programs.

### Thunder Bay / Fort William BIAs

Associate memberships are also offered in these BIAs, and are even surrounded by secondary boundaries. Associate members pay a “minimal yearly fee directly to the BIA.” They also “work closely with the Thunder Bay Police to ensure we have a safe neighbourhood and contribute to the Eye on the Street Program.”

### Downtown London

Downtown London is two organizations operating with the same broad mandate: the continued improvement of Downtown London. Where the London Downtown Business Association (LDBA) seeks to improve the experience of existing merchants, MainStreet’s goal is to attract new and exciting businesses and investors to Downtown London. MainStreet and the LDBA are both governed by managing boards. The Downtown London staff carries out the programming.