

The Findings- Big Tent Downtown Stakeholders Meeting – Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Preamble: A Glimpse into the Future - Downtown Brantford in 2025

In 12 years, if all the projections discussed at this meeting become reality, Downtown Brantford will be a very different place than it is today. *Downtown will have been an ongoing construction zone for years (both infrastructure and new buildings). Laurier Brantford has grown to 13,000 students. The University has faculty and staff numbering over 1300 people, and has over 2 million square feet of academic and administrative space in 4-8 story high buildings throughout the downtown area. Ten large student residences dominate the horizon, each 12 stories in height, holding about 4000 beds. Meanwhile the City of Brantford continues to try to fulfill its density target by directing an additional 1500 jobs/ residents to the core by 2031, most housed in market-rate condo towers. Developers want to build downtown despite the fact that surface parking lots and development-ready land are no longer existent. Rents for the limited commercial retail space to service this community are the highest in the city. Varsity sports and cultural events draw people from across the region, filling the many diverse restaurants located here. On weekends many students return home and on weekdays many downtown residents commute to Hamilton, Waterloo Region and Toronto on GO Transit. Downtown has become a regional centre again.*

Executive Summary

On March 28, 2012 seven representatives from four organizations met in a structured process to discuss the complex issue of downtown revitalization. It was explained that downtown Brantford is subject to four development forces representing distinct approaches to revitalization:

- o Heritage preservation
- o Conventional private sector development
- o Post-secondary expansion, and
- o Provincially mandated intensification targets

The process showed there was a consensus, with the group unanimous in defining the challenge statement and expressing shared values on what constitutes good development. This can be explained by the established connections between various city advisory committees and to the Board of the Downtown Brantford Business Improvement Area (DBBIA) and the Downtown Action Committee. Years of cross-coordination and information-sharing has created a community of interest which has resulted in a consensus on a downtown development model. In general, the group was pleased with how downtown revitalization has been managed thus far (scale, quality and pace).

Key Findings

- The group was made aware of the significant development pressures coming to bear on downtown .Overall, as a group, they embraced a sophisticated and demanding development model which both values heritage preservation and welcomes new development, and felt that through good planning , development controls to ensure quality construction, and cooperation that this development model is achievable .
- The Heritage Committee participants indicated that they are more receptive to quality contemporary architecture than they are given credit for by the public. Ultimately, this balances well with the architectural sophistication demonstrated by Laurier Brantford in recent projects,

and the European influenced approach of G.K. York which pioneered much of the development (restoration and new construction) in downtown over the past 10 years.

- The group sees the Downtown Urban Growth Centre (UGC) as a finite environment of 110 hectares where high standards of design, construction and maintenance should be the norm. Poor quality construction and temporary repairs to the infrastructure are unacceptable.
- The entire group felt the City of Brantford is not responding effectively to infrastructure renewal. This is seen as a critical issue that needs to be researched and addressed now. Concerned that infrastructure replacement is not aligned with development activity, and could hinder wealth creation. Staff noted that development planning is not complete for the downtown and therefore the City cannot commit funding for infrastructure renewal.
- The group felt that the City of Brantford is not effectively dealing with heritage preservation. By not dealing with this matter directly, confusion and mistrust is becoming a problem.
- The group came to understand that the City of Brantford is not employing the full range of legislative tools it has at its disposal to create optimal development conditions in downtown.
- Generally, the group feels the planning coordination between the City and universities has been effective and successful thus far.
- Generally, the group likes the growth and investment (wealth creation) occurring in downtown.
- Generally, the group prefers heritage restoration where appropriate (e.g. S.C. Johnson, Post House, Carnegie, St. Andrew's Church) and new construction should be in a contemporary architectural language that is sensitive to the context (e.g. RAC, Harmony Square).
- The group highly values the diversity (social and economic) and integration of various walks of life in downtown. Need more market-rate housing to be built. Heritage, social diversity along with integration of the post-secondary institutions into the fabric of downtown need to work together to balance downtown growth. Achieving this is a key goal.



The Big Tent (our definition) – an approach to coalition building, which accommodates a variety of organizations and groups which represent different methods of downtown development.

Meeting Notes

The Participants

The Meeting Panel: Brad Emsley, Cindy MacDonald-Krueger and Jack Jackowetz (Heritage Committee) Antonio Araujo and Gray Nower (Wilfrid Laurier University), Cathy Oden (Chamber of Commerce) and Keri Korfmann (DBBIA). The Brantford Homebuilders Association was invited to participate but they did not attend.

The Staff Experts: *Planning:* Duran Wedderburn, Paul Moore, Helen Borowicz

Housing: Jamie Stephens, *Economic Development:* Paisley McKenzie and *Engineering:* Russ Loukes

The Facilitator: Mark Gladysz (Planning)

Agenda/ Meeting Format

4 PM	Introductions and Welcome
4:15 PM	First Presentation and Understanding the Challenge
4:35 PM	Second Presentation - Downtown Topics
	Short Break
5:25 PM	Exercise I – identifying Shared Interests
5:45 PM	Exercise II – Reconciling Interests and the Challenge Statement
6 PM	Dinner
6:25 PM	Review the City Building Toolbox
6:45 PM	Next Steps

Part I - A Review of Urban Change

First Presentation- Downtown Brantford/ Urban Transformation

The group viewed a brief presentation highlighting 12 building projects in the downtown area initiated over the past 4 years. This was meant to provide a review of urban change and to elicit a response from the group on the quality of specific projects as a prelude to the review of the broader challenge statements.

Defining the Challenge Statement

The group was given a list of 6 statements which provided a continuum of opinions from very pro-heritage / anti-change to very anti-heritage / pro-change statements as follows:

- 1. Too much of our valuable heritage is being lost. This has got to stop.*
- 2. Our heritage downtown and new development are incompatible. Therefore, new development must be tightly limited or controlled.*
- 3. I wish we could have both our heritage legacy (buildings /resources) and good new development.*
- 4. There are some truly significant heritage resources like the Federal Post Office, but the rest are to varying degrees inconsequential if the new buildings are well designed.*

5. *Old buildings are just not as efficient as new buildings and cost more to rehabilitate than equivalent new construction. As “easy” heritage buildings are reused, the remaining buildings are not cost-effective to rehabilitate and complicate downtown renewal.*

6. *We need to get downtown going again, and nothing (including heritage) should stand in the way. We need a lot of cleared land to achieve our potential for growth.*

The members were given an opportunity to provide alternate statements; none were offered. The members were then asked to independently select one of the statements which described most closely their personal feeling about the problem/challenge.

The group members were unanimous in their selection of Challenge Statement No. 3
“I wish we could have both our heritage legacy (buildings/resources) and good new development.”

Second Presentation – A Review of Downtown Topics

The group reviewed presentations by local experts on a range of topics. The purpose of the presentations was to provide a common understanding of the various downtown characteristics which influence its current and future states. Everyone received the same information so that they were equal in their knowledge and ability to participate in the next exercises. The information was objective, based on current conditions, as well as approved studies, statistics and provincial directives.

The presentations were meant to convey both the remarkable opportunities and challenges facing downtown. With four engines driving renewal, there is great scope for positive change. However, without regard for the diverse social and economic roles downtown plays within the community and its architectural richness, the downtown’s future could easily become a post-secondary campus of undistinguished and oversized buildings. The group said it is the small-town feel, diversity and architectural richness that everyone values. As one member said “bad planning will bring bad development with big problems”. It was felt that in order to guide downtown revitalization, a planning model will be required that is based on achieving high quality design, construction and maintenance.



Table 1 – Summary of Downtown Topics

Topic	Key Ideas
Downtown Demographics (2006-2011)	52% increase in student population and displacement of permanent residents. The number of dwelling units has increased 5.7%.
Downtown Economy	Post-secondary has brought in quality development and economic growth, but in order to continue to move forward (on wealth creation)the City needs to undertake infrastructure renewal, a new transit terminal, streetscape improvements and intensification strategy to ensure quality development and developers come to downtown.
Affordable Housing and Social Services	Downtown has 103 affordable and 63 Rent Geared to Income housing units. The downtown is the “gateway” for residents to access the social services clustered here.
Transit, Transportation and Infrastructure	A variety of projects are being studied, but there has been delays in the following: implementation of building a new transit terminal, conversion to two-way traffic operations, street lighting and traffic infrastructure, and replacement of roads, and sewers and water mains. Awaiting clear direction on source of funding and commitment to land use changes for the Downtown, including intensification.
Downtown and Campus Master Plans	The Downtown Master Plan was approved in 2008 and encompasses 47 projects, of which many have been completed or well underway. However a number of projects related to heritage, culture and tourism have not been initiated. Infrastructure projects have been slow to start. The Laurier Campus Master Plan was approved in 2010 by the Board of Governors. It has a target of 15,000 students and over 1500 staff and faculty after 2023. Space needs of 2.7 million square feet and 5,250 residence beds are needed to fulfill this target. Projections from Nipissing, Mohawk and Conestoga are undefined at this time.
Economic Impact of Post-Secondary Institutions (2012-2016)	About \$155 million in construction activity is anticipated with 1,135 person/years of employment. Between \$155 to \$188 million will be spent in Brantford from Post-Secondary operational expenditures. Students will spend \$25 million annually on non-institutional spending or \$6,033 per student.
Intensification and Places to Grow legislation	The province has mandated that the Downtown Urban Growth Centre achieve 150 people/ jobs per hectare .Therefore, the city needs to add 6,000 people and 3,000 jobs to downtown by 2031. This will not be achieved solely by post-secondary expansion and will be augmented by the private sector contributing 1500 jobs/ residents to downtown.
Heritage Conservation	25 buildings in downtown are currently designated under Parts IV and V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Part II - Exercises for Defining the Community Values

After viewing the two presentations and defining the challenge statement, the group was then asked to provide their personal feelings on what they saw and heard. These comments were then clustered into likes and dislikes which are then refined as “values”. In general, the group was consistent in their views, suggesting they share values as a community of interest. (Numbers denote multiple answers).

Affinity Clusters - Likes

Cluster 1 – Wealth Creation

- Like the increased investment
- Like the economic growth
- Like the Post-Secondary expansion

Cluster 2 – Planning Approach

- Like that everyone picked No. 3 problem statement (2)
- Like the diversity and integration of various walks of life in downtown .This is highly valued (2).
- Like good planning (that has occurred)
- Like the planned growth of the post-secondary institutions
- Like that the City and University are following their master plans
- Like the Downtown Action Committee format for organizing downtown renewal.

Cluster 3 –Preferred Development Approach-Examples

- Like Harmony Square and the uses and amenities around it (3).
- Like the RAC building which compliments heritage architecture (2)
- Like for the city to assess the condition of the belowground and surface infrastructure
- Like the building restorations around Victoria Park (Carnegie, St. Andrew’s, Student Union)
- Like the heritage restoration /adaptive reuse projects shown in the first presentation.
- Like the mixed use projects being developed like Expositor Place and 255 Colborne (commercial at grade/residential above).

Affinity Clusters – Dislikes

Cluster 1 – Lack of progress on Infrastructure renewal, heritage preservation and retail expansion

- Dislike the lack of investment in infrastructure by City and others(3)
- Dislike losing downtown businesses like the Expositor newspaper
- Dislike not converting Colborne and Dalhousie to two way traffic operations
- Dislike poor quality of sidewalks and roads (patching repairs not acceptable)
- Dislike that infrastructure upgrades are not coordinated with the universities growth targets.
- Dislike the marginal role heritage is playing in Downtown Master Plan implementation (non-implementation of key projects).
- Dislike the Methadone Clinic

Cluster 2 – Unsatisfactory Development - Examples

- Dislike façade of 97 Dalhousie. If you cannot restore it don’t duplicate it, go contemporary.
- Dislike Lawyers Hall – poor workmanship
- Dislike lousy implementation of construction projects by public, post-secondary and private sectors. “Bad planning will bring bad development with big problems”.

Part III - Review of the City Building Toolbox

The final session was an opportunity for the group to become familiar with the variety of techniques that can be employed by municipalities to achieve optimal development in downtown.

Under the Planning Act (s. denotes section) and other legislation

- **The Official Plan** – contains a vision for future growth and policies to guide decision-making on how land and infrastructure in a community is to be used while taking into consideration important social, economic and environmental matters and goals.
- **The Zoning By-law** – implements the policies of the Official Plan on a property by property basis by regulating how land may be used; the size of lots and their dimensions; and the types of buildings that are permitted, how they may be used, their size, and where they may be located on a lot. Zoning By-Laws also regulate parking on individual lots.
- **Design Guidelines** – supplements the Official Plan and requires standards above what is required in the zoning by-law.
- **Demolition Control By-law** – used for protection of the rental housing stock
- **Site Plan Control** – assures a minimum development standard is met. Control of exterior design is a new policy now permitted under the legislation.
- **Building Permit Approval** – regulates construction activity.
- **Property Standards By-Law** – The Property Standards Bylaw is a bylaw for both interior and exterior maintenance and occupancy standards for repair for all properties within the City of Brantford, enforced reactively to complaints as they are received by the Building Department.
- **Community Improvement Plan Area (s.28)** in place since 2002 in downtown with a focus is on infrastructure and community improvements including incentives and exemptions .In Brantford it's more of a financial mechanism to permit grant assistance.
- **Interim Control By-Law** – freezes all development in an area while a policy is reviewed.
- **Development Permit system (s.70)** – new tool that combines variances, site planning and zoning within a discretionary service. All work is done up front so that a 45 day service turnaround can be achieved. If the proponent complies with the guidelines established the decision cannot be appealed by a third party.
- **Sustainable Streetscapes (s.41)** –municipality can now require the private sector to improve the public realm with a reference in the official plan and site plan control by-law.

Under the Ontario Heritage Act

- **Designation under the Ontario Heritage Act** – 25 downtown buildings are designated under an individual designation (Part IV) or a heritage district (Part V).
- **Heritage Register or Listing** – the register is the official list or record of cultural heritage properties that have been identified as being important to the community. Non-designated properties can be added to this list. Inclusion denotes significance .Brantford has not used this tool to full advantage as permitted under the legislation.
- **Heritage Inventory** – is not an official register or listing. The inventory is an educational tool in which to store historical information. Buildings included have not been rated or approved by Council and this is confusing to the public and development proponents.
- **Heritage Impact Assessment** - is a study to determine if any cultural heritage resource is impacted by a specific development or site alteration. This tool is used in Brantford.

Part IV - Next Steps

The group agreed to meet again briefly on Wednesday April 25 at 4 PM to review the findings of the meeting.

- It is recommended that the meeting group take the findings back to their constituent groups to review and discuss (BIA, Heritage Committee, Laurier Brantford, Chamber of Commerce and possibly Homebuilders).
- If the constituent groups agree that there is value in further developing a common strategy for downtown development based on these findings, that staff be asked to create another meeting opportunity.
- That this session would focus on the City Building Toolbox to create an appropriate downtown development model or strategy.