

A Jurisdictional Review of Canadian Downtowns:

Revitalization Themes and Lessons for Edmonton

City of Edmonton
Urban Planning & Economy
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I. Executive Summary

This report presents a jurisdictional scan of six major Canadian cities—Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal—to identify leading best practices relevant to downtown revitalization and to inform Edmonton's Downtown Action Plan. These cities were chosen based on the motion passed at the December 11, 2024, City Council meeting, which instructed Administration to conduct a jurisdictional scan of Canada's largest urban-metropolitan cities to identify best practices and competitive factors to inform Edmonton's Downtown Action Plan.

Through this work, a number of common challenges facing downtowns were identified. These include lack of housing affordability, high office vacancy rates, reduced traffic and visitation, low economic development, concerns over crime and safety, houselessness, cleanliness, transportation and accessibility. How each city responded to these challenges, given their particular context, is highlighted in a series of case studies providing Edmonton a broader perspective on potential approaches or solutions for its revitalization efforts.

Further review of these cities revealed a number of common themes, which include, addressing improvements to the public realm, focusing on economic development, social initiatives and infrastructure upgrades. While cities shared a common focus on these themes, actions taken by cities also reflected their unique context, history and capacity for change, providing insight for Edmonton.

Key takeaways for Edmonton based on this high-level scan of other cities indicate that successful downtown revitalization considers several factors.

- **Clear vision and direction** - A holistic approach to the challenges and opportunities present, aligns revitalization efforts and can garner broader stakeholder support.
- **Community collaboration** - Integrating approaches that support community involvement and leadership, including community groups and business associations.
- **Developing a multi-faceted approach** - Addressing the complexity and interconnected challenges downtowns face through coordinated actions across various sectors (e.g. safety, public improvements, housing, economic development) amplifies the impact of revitalization efforts.
- **Attracting investment** - Creating a business-friendly environment within the downtown and showcasing city commitment to growth through plans, initiatives and incentives are important for attracting and retaining private investment and supporting economic growth
- **Monitoring and adapting** - Data-driven decision-making, ongoing commitment to data maintenance and monitoring and a willingness to adapt strategies based on downtown performance metrics are essential for long-term success and resilience.

Edmonton should consider the findings contained in this jurisdictional scan to inform its thinking and strategies to accelerate its downtown revitalization efforts. By incorporating best practices and lessons learned here, Edmonton can create a downtown that is inclusive, vibrant, prosperous and resilient.

II. Introduction

Purpose

This report presents a jurisdictional scan of Canada's largest urban-metropolitan centres, undertaken to identify leading practices and competitive factors relevant to downtown revitalization. Its primary purpose was to provide insights to refine Edmonton's Downtown Action Plan by analyzing the strategies and actions proposed for the downtown revitalization of other leading cities. Understanding how these cities are working through similar challenges in their downtowns enables Edmonton to explore and expand on the ideas available to proactively address its own downtown challenges, accelerate regeneration efforts and ultimately create a more vibrant and prosperous city center.

Background

Downtown Edmonton plays a vital role as the city's identity as the largest employment centre, a residential community, an educational hub, a centre for arts and culture and a place that honours its history. It also serves as the regional and provincial capital. The downtown area has undergone considerable change in recent years, most notably during the COVID-19 pandemic. Edmonton is not alone in this; many Canadian cities face similar post-pandemic challenges, including declining downtown vibrancy and the need to adapt to new realities, such as remote work and evolving transportation patterns.

These challenges present a valuable opportunity for Edmonton to learn from other cities, what issues they share, how they responded and how Edmonton can develop a more informed and effective Downtown Action Plan. By examining the challenges, strengths and implemented and planned actions of other major Canadian cities' downtowns, Edmonton's Administration, City Council, key stakeholders and the public will gain a broader perspective on potential solutions and opportunities for revitalizing Edmonton's downtown through its action plan.

Research Approach

This report provides a jurisdictional scan of six major Canadian cities—Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal—to analyze the challenges facing their respective downtowns. The cities were chosen based on the motion passed at the December 11, 2024, City Council meeting¹, which instructed Administration to "conduct a jurisdictional scan of Canada's largest urban-metropolitan cities to identify best practices and competitive factors to inform Edmonton's Downtown Action Plan." These six cities are the largest in Canada, excluding Edmonton.

This report utilizes secondary research, supported in part by NotebookLM and Gemini AI, to gather and analyze data on the selected cities from online sources. The information included is based on available data and the time constraints to produce this report which, at the time of writing, may not include the most recent updates to programs, initiatives and outcomes from these cities. In addition, differences in the level of detail, focus, number of action plans and emphasis on data-driven decision-making across the cities' action plans make it challenging to fully capture and compare their revitalization efforts.

The following sections provide an overview of each selected city as a case-study. Each case study examines the city's downtown context, key challenges and specific actions within their adopted action plan. Best practices, initiatives and strategies that could be relevant to Edmonton's downtown revitalization efforts are summarized in Section 4, Summary of Case Studies.

¹<https://pub-edmonton.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=c9c6e084-b49a-493d-9300-db4b13966186&lang=English&Agenda=PostMinutes&Item=23&Tab=attachments>, viewed December 10, 2024.

III. Downtown Revitalization in Canadian Cities: 6 Case Studies

This section summarizes findings from a jurisdictional scan of six of Canada's largest urban-metropolitan cities: Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Winnipeg. It provides a snapshot of what these major Canadian cities are doing to improve their respective downtowns, emphasizing the post-pandemic period. They all share commonalities regarding the challenges they face and, in some cases, their overarching approach.

Common Challenges

These cities, while diverse, share characteristics such as high population density in their downtown cores, high employment rates and a mix of land uses. They also grapple with similar challenges, including:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| + Affordability | + Crime and safety |
| + High office vacancy rates | + Houselessness |
| + Reduced traffic and visitation | + Cleanliness |
| + Low economic development | + Transportation/accessibility concerns |

Comprehensive Approach

Each of the six cities reviewed had some recent direction (2020-2024) for the revitalization of their downtown. This direction was generally developed by city administrations (though not in all cases), often in collaboration with business improvement areas (BIAs), community groups and with input from provincial and federal governments. All of the cities reviewed proposed a series of downtown actions or strategies that covered a broad scope, from public realm improvements and economic development strategies to social initiatives and infrastructure upgrades.

However, cities are complex systems and so too are the challenges that face them. This means solutions must be framed, designed and delivered in context to be successful. Every city is different based on its unique location, history, development pattern, community focus, priorities, capacities and resources that in turn affect what revitalization efforts are actioned and how.

Each city case-study that follows summarizes its competitive advantages, key opportunities, specific challenges and past or ongoing initiatives that are being used to revitalize their downtown. The highlighted actions were selected for their broad applicability across a diverse range of cities, considering implementability, cost-effectiveness and potential funding sources. Any actual action or results are reported directly below each action with further information sourced.

Case Study 1: Vancouver, British Columbia

Vancouver, the second-largest municipality in Canada, serves as the heart of the greater Metro Vancouver region. Its downtown is uniquely positioned in the centre of the city and fronts onto the Vancouver Harbour, which leads to the Pacific Ocean.

Competitive Factors

- + Vancouver holds deep social and environmental values
- + Strong tech community, seeing the highest growth in the sector in North America (city-wide with a focus downtown) in 2023
- + Downtown Vancouver is the most densely populated downtown in Canada
- + Downtown possesses several viewpoints and corridors to the surrounding geography
- + Dynamic downtown economy
- + Downtown has strong community participation



Downtown Challenges

- + Crime and safety
- + Homelessness
- + Cleanliness
- + Affordability (especially housing)
- + Climate Change (sea levels rising)
- + Reconciliation (as an opportunity)

	City of Vancouver	Downtown Vancouver
Geographic Area	115.18 km ²	7.1 km ²
Population	662,248 residents (2021) ²	~137,000 residents (2020) ³
Population Density	5,750 capita/km ² (2021)	14,084 capita/km ² (2021)
Employment	359,280 employed in labour force (2021)	130,000 workers (2024) ⁴

Past and Ongoing Initiatives

- + City adopted its Downtown Public Space Strategy in 2020 which sets a 30 year plan to address pressures on the downtown through a focus on public space planning.
- + City focused on providing inclusive public spaces including child-friendly initiatives, vendor support, plaza stewardship and improved online resources.
- + City matching public space supply to demand by developing land acquisition strategies and policies for privately owned public spaces in addition to targeting spaces for various events and completion of a new downtown plaza.
- + City focused on the design of high-quality public space, developing design guidelines, expanding storefront activation and creation of a solar access policy.
- + City promoting year-round, day-and-night public spaces through stewardship programs, a night time economy strategy and updated weather protection guidelines.
- + City connecting public spaces by improving network connectivity for active modes by categorizing street roles and implementing near-term projects like laneway activation and wayfinding improvements.

²<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0&DGUIDlist=2021A00055915022&SearchText=vancouver>.

³ <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/downtown-public-space-strategy.pdf>, viewed February 1, 2025.

⁴ <https://www.dtvancouver.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/State-of-Downtown-2024-Spreads.pdf>, viewed February 1, 2025.

Action Plan

Vancouver's Strategic Plan 2023-2028, developed by the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (BIA) with support from the mayor, includes many calls for advocacy to address the downtown's challenges and revitalize the area. Most initiatives in the plan call upon the City of Vancouver to develop and implement policy to support positive change and outcomes.

Action Plan Highlights:

1. Create a Safer Downtown

The plan advocates to provincial and municipal governments to address public safety, enhance community safety program, strengthen BIA partnerships with police, health care and municipality to address public safety.

2. Provide Reasons for People to Come Downtown

The BIA advocates for and supports bringing back office workers, creating new placemaking initiatives, programs and special events, creating beautiful streetscapes and interactive public spaces through urban design and laneway transformations, more downtown events, festivals and experiences.

3. Elevate the Downtown Economy + Reduce Barriers to Doing Business

The plan advocates for the City to streamline permitting processes and downtown economic growth policy, partner with other key organizations to support more initiatives, events and programs downtown, advocate for and actively support new development in

downtown Vancouver, including more hotels, retail/ commercial space, cultural facilities and new/ enhanced public amenities (such as public washrooms, daycare spaces, public transit infrastructure, etc.), advocate for more affordability broadly such as affordable housing, construction costs and the cost of doing business.

4. Strengthen Engagement with Our Members + Stakeholders

The BIA wishes to strengthen BIA engagement with members, increase engagement opportunities, events and outreach, continuing to work with external stakeholders on the strategic priorities and develop a plan to engage within Indigenous Nations.

5. Champion a Thriving Granville Street

The plan calls on the City to allocate appropriate resources and funding to address the socioeconomic challenges of Granville Street, lobby for continued renewal and take an active, leading role in the City's Granville Street Planning Program, support the advancement of an Office for the Night-time Economy to enhance a 24-hour economy.

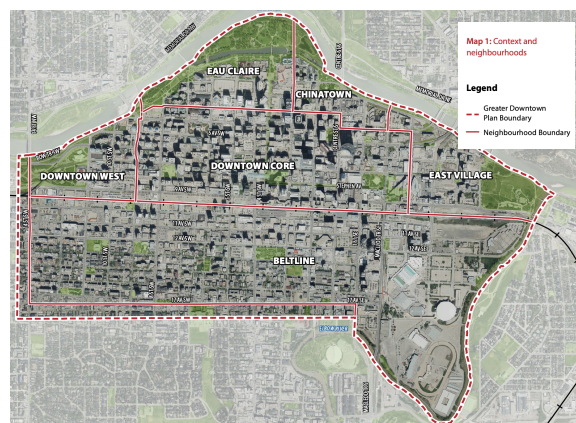
Given the Action Plan's recent adoption and its completion by the Business Improvement Area, the specific outcomes and potential funding is not available. Additionally, the Downtown Public Spaces Strategy is very recently adopted and has only just begun implementation. Precise actions, funding, governance structures, results and evaluation metrics are not yet available.

Case Study 2: Calgary, Alberta

Calgary is the fourth-largest municipality in Canada and Alberta's largest municipality. Its downtown is centrally located within the city and fronts onto the Bow River to the north.

Competitive Factors

- + Calgary serves as a key economic hub for the western prairies and is a gateway to the Rocky Mountains
- + The city is establishing itself as an emerging tech hub with numerous startups and tech workers
- + Calgary features a highly educated and experienced workforce
- + Reputation for offering a high quality of life that helps attract and retain talent
- + Calgary's downtown is a significant economic driver, serving as the city's business, innovation and creativity centre



	City of Calgary ⁵	Downtown Calgary
Geographic Area	820.6 km ² (2021)	5.9 km ²
Population	1.306 million (2021)	44,990 residents (2019) ⁶
Population Density	1,592 capita/km ² (2021)	7,600 capita/km ² (2019)
Employment	638,645 employed in the labour force (2021)	156,000 workers (2016)

Downtown Challenges

- + Financial fragility of businesses
- + Reduced traffic and visitation / Reduced downtown workforce
- + High office vacancy rates
- + Low economic diversification / Dependence on the energy sector
- + Decreased downtown activity outside of typical office hours
- + Climate change
- + Need for greater inclusion

Past and Ongoing Initiatives

- + City approved the Greater Downtown Plan in 2021 that guides revitalization efforts
- + City is investing \$100 million to convert and or remove 6 million sq ft of vacant office space in the downtown. As of late 2022, 13 office conversion projects were approved or underway, aiming to create over 1,500 new homes.⁷
- + City is investing in downtown public space activation initiatives including modernization of Stephen Avenue, redesigning Olympic Plaza and improvements to green spaces
- + City is focusing on multimodal transportation improvements with a focus on pedestrianization, expanding the cycling network, improving transit and enhancing the Plus 15 network.
- + City is diversifying its economy and investing in the creation of an innovation district
- + City is upgrading underground power, collaborating to provide digital connectivity and investing in Internet Exchange Point infrastructure to support the 5G network.

⁵<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0&DGUIDlist=2021A00054806016&SearchText=calgary>

⁶<https://www.calgary.ca/planning/community/greater-downtown-plan.html?redirect=/greaterdowntown>

⁷<https://www.calgary.ca/research/downtown-report.html>

Action Plan

Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan is a non-statutory plan adopted in 2021 which provides a roadmap for revitalising the city centre over the next decade. The plan aims to address its downtown challenges and proposes five strategic moves focused on neighbourhoods, green spaces, streets, transit and future innovation. Each of these strategic moves proposes additional specific actions ranging from short-term pilot projects to long-term initiatives.

Action Plan Highlights:

1. Repurposing Vacant Office Spaces

The City wishes to redevelop office spaces into residential units or other uses to reduce vacancy and attract new residents, businesses and talent. The plan recognizes that converting office space to residential units is a complex and costly process and incentives are required to stimulate investment in these types of projects.

2. Enhance Public Spaces

The City aims to improve the experience for residents, workers and visitors within the existing public spaces across the downtown such as Stephen Avenue and Olympic Plaza Transformation project.



3. Diversify the Downtown Economy

To become less reliant on the energy sector, the City aims to create a more resilient and innovative economic hub with investments in technology, high-growth sectors.

4. Create Vibrant, Mixed-use Neighbourhoods

The City plans to integrate residential, commercial, retail, entertainment and cultural spaces across the downtown to make the area active at all times.

→ The Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC) is leading the Arts Commons



Transformation (ACT) project which is a \$660 million expansion and modernization of Calgary's premier performing arts centre, alongside the adjacent Olympic Plaza Transformation project⁸.

5. Increase Downtown Residential Population

The City plans for a mix of housing types and affordable housing to create a more balanced community and economic activity.

6. Focus on Climate Resilience

The City is actively integrating climate change mitigation and risk-reduction strategies into its infrastructure planning and development to ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience of the downtown area (e.g. flood resilience).

Together, the direction of the Greater Downtown Plan and these initiatives are leveraging Calgary's opportunities and strengths to create a downtown that supports the well-being and quality of life of its residents and visitors while fostering a stronger sense of community and identity.

⁸<https://www.calgary.ca/planning/projects/arts-commons.html>, viewed February 28 2025.

Case Study 3: Winnipeg, Manitoba

Winnipeg, the seventh-largest municipality in Canada and serves as the capital of Manitoba. Its downtown is the oldest urban area and the entertainment, cultural and economic heart of the city.

Competitive Factors

- + Downtown benefits from strong coordination between government and business/community organizations dedicated to improving downtown
- + The Forks is Winnipeg's top destination for shops, restaurants and outdoor space with connection to the river
- + Winnipeg is known for its winter experiences, arts scene and festivals
- + The city has historical character, green spaces and access to outdoor activities
- + Downtown is home to Winnipeg's main arena

Downtown Challenges¹⁰

- + Reduced downtown workforce
- + Reconciliation (as an opportunity)
- + Climate change
- + Affordability
- + Homelessness
- + Crime and safety

Past and Ongoing Initiatives

- + The Downtown Community Safety Partnership¹¹, established in April 2020, is a partnership between the Province of Manitoba, the City of Winnipeg, the Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone (BIZ), the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service, the Winnipeg Police Service and True North Sports + Entertainment. The Downtown Community Safety Partnership provides 24-hour, seven-day-a-week coverage to service the downtown.
- + Winnipeg's Downtown Recovery Strategy¹² (adopted October 2021) seeks to revitalize downtown post-pandemic by focusing on improving spaces, supporting people and building business.
- + Winnipeg CentrePlan 2050¹³ (adopted Sept. 26, 2024) sets out strategic moves to create a resilient and thriving downtown providing policy direction to: a) Create great urban neighbourhoods, b) Re-envision streets to foster urban life, c) Grow a greener Downtown, d) Create a lively Downtown and e) Improve Downtown governance and implementation.



	City of Winnipeg ⁹	Downtown Winnipeg
Geographic Area	475.2 km ²	16.3 km ²
Population	749,607 (2021)	68,445 residents (2021)
Population Density	1,484.1 capita/km ² (2021)	4,095.3 capita/km ² (2021)
Employment	366,595 employed in labour force (2021)	70,000 workers (2020, pre-covid)

⁹https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Winnipeg&DGU_IDlist=2021A00054611040&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0

¹⁰https://downtownwinnipegbiz.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/DWB_State-of-Downtown-report_July-2021-low-res.pdf, viewed February 12, 2025.

¹¹ <https://www.dcspace.ca/>, viewed February 12, 2025.

¹² <https://www.downtownrecovery.ca/>, viewed February 12, 2025.

¹³ <https://engage.winnipeg.ca/centreplan2050>.

Action Plan

Winnipeg's Downtown Recovery Strategy provides a three-year plan developed with a working group (including BIZs, tourism, City Administration, etc) to prepare a coordinated action and investment plan to kick-start downtown recovery post-pandemic.

Action Plan Highlights:

1. Improving and revitalizing outdoor places

Improving and revitalizing outdoor spaces in the city's downtown through elements such as: tree planting, sidewalk repair, lighting, removing accessibility barriers, improving wayfinding, improving cleanliness through community events and a cleanliness strategy and investment in specific high-impact infrastructure projects to encourage surrounding economic investment.

→ Air Canada Park revitalization has been initiated.

2. Energize and activate downtown spaces

Reenergize the downtown post-pandemic by: creating a downtown events fund to help new and existing festivals/public events, establishing a pop-spaces program to activate under-utilized spaces year-round and launching a 'spend downtown' marketing campaign.

→ A "Support Downtown" marketing strategy has been initiated.

3. Support people in the downtown

Provide some immediately actionable items to contribute to a more supportive downtown community by: expanding community outreach presence on the street, collaborating with existing community partners to secure funding for 24-hour safe spaces, provide safe amenities like public washrooms and drinking water throughout the downtown and establish connections between downtown businesses and community-based groups.

4. Develop affordable housing options

Build on the success of the public-private partnership over the last 20 years to continue

creating housing with a range of affordable options by: initiating new mixed-income housing using tax increment financing, augmenting affordable housing initiatives to overcome hurdles such as building or land acquisition and developing a marketing plan with downtown's education institutions for student housing.

→ \$20 million has been allocated to create an Affordable Housing Now program launched by the City of Winnipeg and administered in partnership with CentreVenture Development Corporation for capital grants and tax increment financing.

5. Build and support business in downtown

Build on pre-pandemic momentum through tax credit and gap financing programs and bring business back downtown by: developing a campaign to support and encourage workers to return and new companies to locate downtown, establishing an incubation strategy to mentor and help find locations for emerging business, implementing a facade improvement program to create inviting and attractive entrances and replenishing gap financing fund in support of challenging revitalization projects, including surface parking lot redevelopment.

→ The Province of Manitoba has since provided \$2.5 million to fund a Building Business Grant Program.

→ \$10 million funded through tax increment financing has been allocated to initiate a Heritage and Economic Development Incentive Program through a partnership with CentreVenture to conserve heritage buildings and redevelop downtown surface parking lots.

Case Study 4: Toronto, Ontario

Toronto, Canada's largest municipality, serves as the heart of the greater Toronto metropolitan region. Its downtown forms a portion of the city's southern boundary and fronts onto Lake Ontario.

Competitive Factors

- + Toronto is a global hub for finance, technology and culture
- + Strong commitment to environmental sustainability
- + Experiencing rapid growth
- + Centre for economic activity, cultural attractions, residential development
- + Diverse and strong consumer market driving retail growth
- + Regional hub for all public transit



Downtown Challenges

- + Overwhelming population growth
- + Affordability (especially housing)
- + Infrastructure gaps (utility, community services/amenities and active mode)
- + Transportation congestion (vehicular and transit)
- + Strained emergency services
- + Financial fragility of businesses (struggling retail)
- + Uncoordinated planning and development

	City of Toronto ¹⁴	Downtown Toronto ¹⁵
Geographic Area	630 km ²	17 km ²
Population	2.8 million (2021)	276,000 (2021)
Population Density	4,444 capita/km ² (2021)	16,235 capita/km ² (2021)
Employment	1,308,110 employed in the labour force (2021)	643,350 workers (2024)

Past and Ongoing Initiatives

- + City adopted the TOCore Plan¹⁶ in 2018 to manage rapid growth, guide development, improve infrastructure and promote sustainable communities over the next 25 years.
- + City has approved \$10 billion in new development projects since 2019 that includes a mix of office towers, residential buildings and mixed-use developments.
- + City approved over 10,000 new purpose-built rental units in the downtown core marking a significant increase compared to previous years.
- + City incentivized and approved over 2,000 affordable units within new developments.
- + City launched the Yonge Street pilot project (2021) that created a more vibrant and pedestrian-friendly space and led to increased foot traffic and economic activity in the area.
- + City implemented a number of complete streets pilot projects on several downtown streets
- + City added over 50 kilometers of new bike lanes and bike stations within the downtown core.
- + City is implementing an Energy Strategy promoting energy-efficient buildings through stricter green building standards and exploring district energy systems for sustainable heating and cooling solutions.

¹⁴https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Toronto&DGUI_Dlist=2021A00053520005&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0

¹⁵<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/research-reports/planning-development/>

¹⁶<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/planning-studies-initiatives/tocore-planning-torontos-downtown/>

Action Plan

Toronto's TOcore Plan is a 25-year vision for the city's downtown. The plan was officially approved in 2019 by the Province and provides a framework for managing growth, enhancing infrastructure and creating a more sustainable and livable downtown. It uses five implementation strategies (Mobility, Water, Energy, Community Services and Facilities and Parks and Public Realm) and a series of short, medium and long-term actions and initiatives to achieve the plan. A phased implementation approach along with ongoing monitoring and evaluation ensures progress and ability for Toronto to adapt to changing circumstances as necessary.

Action Plan Highlights

1 - Improve Public Parks and Spaces

The Parks and Public Realm Plan focuses on acquiring and expanding parks, enhancing design and accessibility and creating a more connected network to improve the quality, quantity and connectivity of public spaces.

- The Shoreline Stitch initiative aims to better integrate Toronto's waterfront with the downtown by improving cycling and pedestrian access, creating new parks and improved public space.

2 - Support Community Needs

The Community Services and Facilities Strategy focuses on providing adequate space for essential services (e.g. schools, childcare, libraries, recreation) through new facilities, reinvestment in current assets and prioritising co-location.

- This strategy aims to serve 50 per cent of children aged zero to four by 2026 and provide a series of new child care facilities.

3 - Improve Active Mobility and Transit

The Downtown Mobility Strategy focuses on Complete Streets, pedestrian improvements, cycling network expansion, transit enhancements and managing vehicles and freight for improved safety, efficiency and sustainability.

- The King Street Transit Pilot reallocated road space to prioritize transit and

pedestrians successfully creating attractive curb-lane public spaces with lessons learned being used to inform future projects.

4 - Improve water management

The Downtown Water Strategy is focused on upgrades to existing water supply, watermain, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure to ensure capacity can meet growth demands and mitigate flooding.

- Green Streets Technical Guidelines (GSTG) promote the use of green infrastructure (e.g. green roofs, permeable pavements) to improve water management, mitigate flooding and extreme weather in the core.

5 - Reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions

The Downtown Energy Strategy aims to reduce GHG emissions, develop low-carbon thermal energy networks and encourage near-zero emission buildings that align with TransformTO targets and address constraints within the electricity grid.

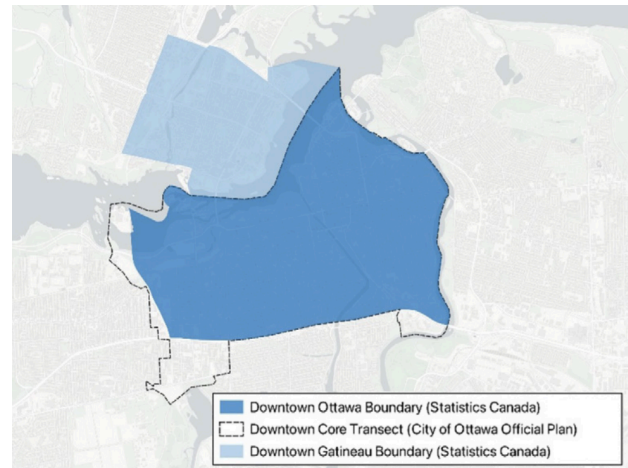
- Toronto's Green Standard promotes residential building energy efficient retrofits, require new building development to achieve near-zero emissions and large development projects submit an Energy Strategy Report to consider low-carbon options in support of developing new low-carbon energy sources.

Case Study 5: Ottawa, Ontario

Ottawa is the nation's capital and the sixth-largest municipality in Canada. Its downtown fronts onto the Ottawa River and forms a portion of the city's northern boundary. Directly north of downtown is the downtown of Ottawa's sister city of Gatineau.

Competitive Factors

- + Ottawa hosts national, global decision-makers daily and attracts millions of tourists annually
- + High concentration of federal historical buildings, assets and investments in the downtown
- + Proximity to Gatineau's downtown allows both municipalities to leverage shared visitors, infrastructure and services
- + Downtown economy thrives on knowledge-based sectors, including education, STEM and creative industries
- + Downtown's compact housing form generates significant property tax revenue and supports its business economy



	City of Ottawa	Downtown Ottawa
Geographic Area	2,788.20 km ² (2021) ¹⁷	9.7 km ² (2016)
Population	1,017,449 (2021)	74,000 people ¹⁸
Population Density	364.9 capita/km ²	7,628.9 capita/km ²
Employment	739,700 employed ¹⁹	78,000 workers

**The public sector accounts for 38% of Ottawa's downtown jobs*

Downtown Challenges

- + Lack of economic diversification / Over-reliance on public sector
- + Reduced traffic and visitation / Reduced downtown workforce
- + Increasing office vacancy rates
- + Affordability, homelessness
- + Crime and safety
- + Infrastructure deficits and urban design
- + Climate change

Past and Ongoing Initiatives

- + Ottawa commissioned a study after the pandemic revealing a business-as-usual approach to downtown revitalization could result in a potential \$66 million annual tax revenue loss without intervention
- + The city developed a downtown Task Force to stimulate discussions around the future of downtown
- + Ottawa launched a city-wide [Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan](#) in 2023, prioritizing seven areas, including downtown revitalization
- + The Nightlife Commissioner Office launched its [Nightlife Economy Action Plan](#) to grow the city's nighttime economy

¹⁷<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0&DGUIDlist=2021A00053506008&SearchText=ottawa>

¹⁸ https://livingcapitalottawa.ca/files/OBOT_A-Living-Capital-My-17_final.pdf page 41, viewed February 1, 2025.

¹⁹[https://ottawa.ca/en/business/why-bring-your-business-ottawa/diverse-economy#:~:text=In%20context%2C%20total%20employment%20was.Public%20Administration%20\(21.6%20per%20cent\)](https://ottawa.ca/en/business/why-bring-your-business-ottawa/diverse-economy#:~:text=In%20context%2C%20total%20employment%20was.Public%20Administration%20(21.6%20per%20cent))

Action Plan

Ottawa's 2024 A Living Capital plan outlines 17 downtown revitalization actions over five years, including increasing density and diversifying jobs. It proposes a \$500 million joint fund and is supported by a \$543 million Ontario-Ottawa deal, including \$20 million for downtown revitalization. A \$1.3 billion return on investment is projected within 10 years.

Action Plan Highlights:

1. Prioritize Housing

The plan calls for a multi-level governmental partnership to increase downtown residents by streamlining downtown development processes, raising height regulations, prioritizing public land for housing and potentially reducing development fees.

→ These actions, including an overhaul of Ottawa's zoning bylaw, are currently underway and expected to be implemented by the end of 2025.

2. Invest in the Future

The plan urges the federal government to immediately commit to 10 years of Payment In-lieu of Taxes and identify long-term downtown investment revenue sources, such as public-private partnerships and redirect parking revenue to create financial certainty for the City of Ottawa.

3. Address Homelessness, Addiction and Mental health

All three levels of governments are urged to develop a mental health strategy and a results-oriented program for downtown homelessness, mental health and addictions.

→ \$120 million in provincial funding has been allocated for shelters and homelessness supports, with an additional \$49 million for community and public safety, including a new downtown police hub²⁰.

4. Develop and Retain of Neighbourhood Services and Amenities

Ottawa and the federal government are urged to improve downtown amenities and services to attract residents and visitors, including identifying gaps, relaxing zoning for mixed-use development and expanding recreational opportunities to attract and retain residents and visitors.

5. Prioritize public realm investment for all seasons

Ottawa, Gatineau and the federal government are called to invest in public spaces and create a Downtown Vibrancy Office to revitalize both downtowns. Actions include developing a public realm plan, a Placemaking Fund, activating underutilized space and promoting greening and cleanliness.

→ \$11.8 million has been allocated to pedestrianize Ottawa's downtown ByWard Market and William Street²¹ and \$450,000 has been allocated for the new Downtown Vibrancy Office.

6. Support small businesses and main streets

Ottawa, the federal government and other organizations will collaborate to boost main street vibrancy and economic opportunity through ground floor activation, business development, construction mitigation and data tracking.

7. Engage the Design Community

To foster design excellence, the plan calls on the City and its creative partners to implement low-cost, scalable public realm improvements and develop design competition frameworks for capital projects.

²⁰<https://www.ctvnews.ca/ottawa/article/ontario-announces-new-funding-to-revitalize-downtown-ottawa-transform-byward-market-street-into-pedestrian-only-in-the-summer/>, viewed February 15, 2025

²¹<https://www.byward-market.com/news/ontario-announces-new-funding-to-revitalize-downtown-ottawa-transform-byward-market-street-into-pedestrian-only-in-the-summer-ctv/>, viewed February 15, 2025

Case Study 6: Montreal, Quebec

Montreal, the third-largest municipality in Canada, serves as the heart of the greater Montreal metropolitan area. Its downtown forms a portion of the city's southern border and stretches along the St. Lawrence River, featuring a major transportation port.

Competitive Factors

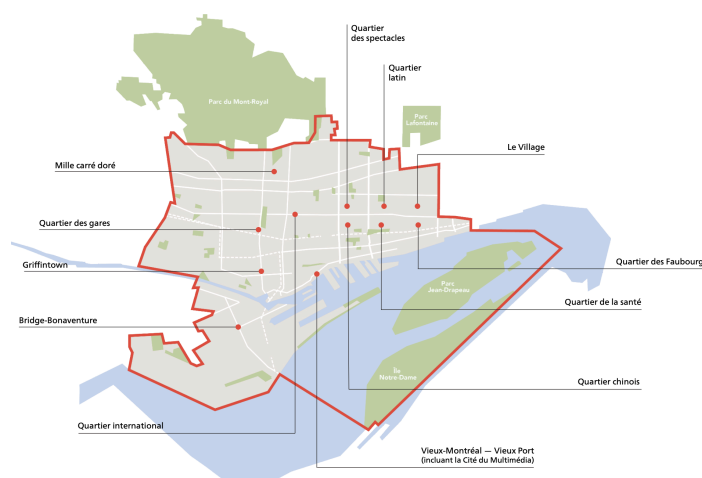
- + Montreal is an international gateway and economic and cultural hub for Quebec and Eastern Canada
- + Second-fastest growing municipality in Canada
- + Economy rebounded, surpassing pre-pandemic levels in consumption, employment, student attendance and tourism
- + Downtown is home to strong finance, aerospace, creative and tourism sectors
- + Downtown features mixed land uses and a high concentration of institutions and businesses
- + The downtown core is vibrant day and night

Downtown Challenges

- + Financial fragility of businesses
- + Reduced traffic and visitation
- + High office vacancy rates and business relocations
- + Affordability, homelessness
- + Crime and safety
- + Depleting municipal tax base
- + Transportation and accessibility challenges across downtown districts
- + Cleanliness

Past and Ongoing Initiatives

- + City and Provincial governments invested \$82 million in financial and marketing support to aid city-wide economic recovery through 2020 to 2022
- + City has invested in active transportation and safety initiatives downtown since 2020
- + City is currently updating its municipal development and transportation plans
- + City is developing its Montreal Cultural Development Policy 2025-2030
- + Initiation of Montreal Nightlife Policy downtown project



	City of Montreal ²²	Downtown Montreal ²³
Geographic Area	364.74 km ² (2021)	Area 9 km ²
Population	1.763 million* (2021)	109,509 residents (2021)
Population Density	4,834 capita/km ² (2021)	12,168 capita/km ² (2021)
Employment	2,338,800 employed (2022) ²⁴	350,000 workers (2021) ²⁵ 135,000 students in downtown (2024) ²⁶

²²<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0&DGUIDlist=2021A00052466023&SearchText=montreal>

²³[la Chambre de commerce du Montréal métropolitain](#) (2020), page 4, viewed February 1, 2025.

²⁴<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1339154/montreal-employment-level/>, viewed February 1, 2025.

²⁵https://portail-m4s.s3.montreal.ca/pdf/20210128_montreal_2030_vdm.pdf, page 70, viewed February 1, 2025.

²⁶<https://montrealcentreville.ca/espace-affaires/donnees-cles-du-centre-ville/>, viewed February 1, 2025.

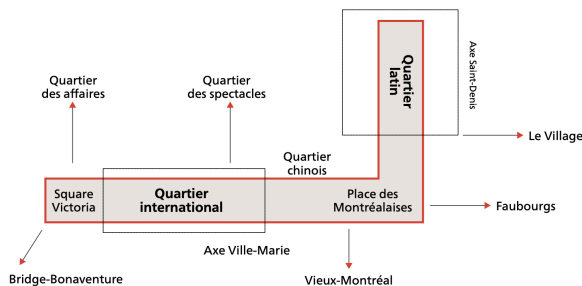
Action Plan

The City of Montreal has made downtown revitalization a key priority in its city-wide economic recovery plan, leading to the adoption of [Montréal's 2030 Downtown Strategy](#) in 2024. The City has allocated \$32 million to support the short-term and long-term strategy goals for their city center over ten years. The strategy aims to boost economic and cultural vitality, enhance neighbourhood identities, foster urban mix and create green and safe pathways.

Action Plan Highlights:

1. Targeted Investment Areas

The plan focuses investments and interventions within a small geographic area to leverage and connect the area's thriving gathering places, promote trips to downtown and encourage longer visitation.



2. Redevelop Large Underutilized Vacant Land

The City wants to grow the downtown population by accelerating the construction of 15,000 new housing units, increase affordable housing and construct a new public transit station to make the downtown more active outside of work hours.



3. Promote Neighbourhood Identity

The plan aims to enhance each downtown neighbourhoods' identity through public art, mural circuits, street markings, urban furniture and lighting to improve the overall environment and attract more people to live, work and visit downtown.

4. Develop a Winter Strategy for Urban Animation and Attraction

The intent is to create a strong and unifying winter destination in the downtown by leveraging the city's existing events and cultural sectors to support economic and tourist activities and grow the city's local and international attractiveness.

5. Create New Active Mobility Zones

The City will create new pedestrian and cycling zones within downtown to encourage a pleasant and safe experience and promote alternatives to car use. This initiative will designate pedestrian priority areas and provide local amenities that promote sustainable mobility.

6. Strengthen the Cleanliness of Public Spaces

This initiative aims to enhance the appearance of the downtown through City operations, regulations, education and enforcement to attract and retain residents and workers.

Given the Strategy's recent adoption, the City and its community partners have just begun implementation. Specific actions, funding, governance structures, results and evaluation metrics are not yet available.

IV. Summary of Case Studies

This section offers a high-level analysis of downtown revitalization efforts from Calgary, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver and Winnipeg and reveals a number of recurring themes or trends that suggest best practices. Drawing on the case studies, it aims to identify recurring themes in the approaches taken to address challenges as well as highlight some different examples in strategies and actions among the cities that may provide lessons for Edmonton. Each city presents unique contexts, perspectives and examples that offer an opportunity to influence Edmonton's thinking, strategies, actions and outcomes for downtown revitalization.

Common Themes

Each common theme is summarized along with key notes or examples of how some cities have differed in their actions. This offers a richer perspective on the types of revitalization efforts underway across Canada common among the cities reviewed and considered here in Edmonton.

Economic Diversification and Resilience

For many Canadian cities the central challenge is the need to shift away from over-reliance on single industries or sectors which can create heightened vulnerability to economic downturns in their downtown. Since the pandemic, Vancouver's downtown office market has experienced a slower economic recovery like many other cities impacting foot traffic²⁷. This is attributed in part to its high concentration of employment in technology, finance and professional services sectors that are conducive to remote work. This is common to many cities and highlights the vulnerability of downtown economies and businesses that are overly reliant on sectors susceptible to remote work. Calgary is another example in that it has been historically dependent on the energy sector, subject to boom-bust cycles. Since the pandemic it has been working to attract more diversified high-growth industries to its downtown leveraging the city's high quality of life to attract talent. Winnipeg's approach involves creating and maintaining jobs in the downtown core through its Building Business Grant Program²⁸. This program aims to support existing businesses, attract new ones and foster a more resilient downtown economy in the process. These examples demonstrate the understanding that a diversified business base, of all shapes and sizes, is essential for long-term downtown economic health and resiliency.

Leading example: Ottawa is taking an innovative approach to fostering economic diversification in its downtown by establishing a dedicated Business Incubation District²⁹. This plan is strategically targeting growth sectors such as technology, start-ups and cultural organisations that will create a dedicated hub for collaboration, innovation and entrepreneurship. Using this approach, Ottawa aims to transform its downtown into a destination for a wide range of new and diverse businesses in order to reduce its traditional reliance on public sector employment. This underscores the importance of planning and

²⁷ https://www.dtvancouver.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/SOD_April26_Digital.pdf, page 37, Viewed February 12, 2025.

²⁸ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/60310afd309be94a3a701172/634fdf30838d666551fc05e5_Building%20Business%20Grant%20Program%20Guide%202019-10-22.pdf, viewed February 12, 2025

²⁹ https://livingcapitalottawa.ca/files/OBOT_A-Living-Capital-My-17_final.pdf, page 71, viewed February 1, 2025

providing for physical spaces that foster economic diversification and collaboration, serving as a model for other cities like Edmonton facing similar economic challenges.

The overarching trend across the cities studied here is that they are making a concerted effort to cultivate more resilient local economies by attracting more diverse industries. This includes high growth sectors such as technology, arts and culture, education, health care sectors and creating hubs to foster this innovation. This is further supported by targeted initiatives to support entrepreneurship and small businesses.

The Evolving Nature of Work and Built Environment

Remote work accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered the demand for, and use of traditional office spaces. This has presented significant challenges for existing downtown businesses, building owners, developers and city administrations. All six cities are grappling with the challenge of how to help respond to high office vacancies, repurpose vacant or underutilised office buildings and adapt their downtown cores to accommodate a changing workforce and reinvigorate their downtown. This includes making targeted investments in amenities designed to attract more residents, businesses and visitors alike and exploring adaptive reuse of existing office structures for residential or mixed-use purposes.

The City of Winnipeg actively encouraged workers to return to the downtown area through several initiatives under its Building Business Grant Program. It developed a campaign specifically designed to promote the benefits of returning to downtown workspaces and attract new companies to the city center. It is currently investing in revitalizing downtown spaces through the improvement of outdoor areas and creating a pop-up spaces program to activate underutilized areas³⁰. These efforts aim to create a more vibrant and appealing downtown environment that will support more workers returning to the core.

The City of Toronto is addressing the changing nature of work and its dynamics through its downtown TOcore plan. This is a comprehensive strategy designed to manage growth, enhance infrastructure and ensure a more sustainable and liveable downtown. It includes improvements to its transit network, active modes, supporting the pedestrian experience through attractive and inviting public spaces. Another key element is reinvestment in the retention and expansion of community and cultural spaces and facilities, affordable housing and childcare spaces and an emphasis on local-serving retail and amenities that cater to both the needs of downtown residents and its workers. At its core, this plan seeks to balance downtown growth with the creation of a high-quality urban environment all the while addressing current and future infrastructure gaps, climate impacts and energy demands.

Leading example: Calgary's downtown economy was struggling before the COVID pandemic with high office building vacancies on the rise. A shift in office work to home during the pandemic compounded the downtown's economic struggles. This led the city to move forward with its Downtown Calgary Development Incentive Program³¹. This program will remove 6 million square feet of downtown office space over a 10-year period with a Council approved investment of \$100 million. Working with various downtown partners and stakeholders, the program aims to restore downtown property values and

³⁰ <https://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DMIS/ViewPdf.asp?DocID=21792&SectionId=645728&isMobile=yes>, viewed March 10, 2025

³¹ <https://www.calgary.ca/development/downtown-incentive.html>, viewed March 10, 2025

lease rates through funding for adaptive reuse or demolition of existing office buildings. The intent is to create new development opportunities with a focus on residential, retail business and services, institutional and academic space helping to reposition and reinvent Calgary's downtown as a vibrant, mixed-use neighbourhood. Early results suggest the program is working with 13 office conversion projects approved or underway to create over 1,500 new homes as of 2022.

Cities that were successful in adapting to the changing nature of work and its effect on downtown businesses and vibrancy tended to focus on improving the physical environment of workers and residents with an early focus on safety and cleanliness of public spaces. Additional investments followed with public realm improvements (e.g. green spaces, parks, sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly streets), community amenities and facilities that helped contribute to local livability, attractiveness and vibrancy. Other initiatives considered business supports aimed at increasing the attractiveness of retail, expanded storefront activation and redevelopment of vacant and underutilized lands through funding of adaptive reuse or demolition of existing vacant space. Cities also recognize their central core area needs to be more appealing as a place to live in general given the changing nature of work and this has implications for the function and role of their downtown in the future.

Community Collaboration

Successful revitalization is not only about physical changes for the cities studied, but also about creating inclusive and equitable spaces that address the needs of all members of the community. Cities are recognizing the importance of inclusive planning and meaningful community engagement to ensure that revitalization efforts reflect the needs of all residents. Through these conversations there is also a growing emphasis on the need to address social issues such as homelessness, addiction and mental health as part of downtown revitalization efforts. Ottawa is developing a mental health strategy and programs to address homelessness, addiction and mental health, with allocated funding. They recognise that downtowns must be places of safety and inclusion for all members of the community. Vancouver has committed to the principles of Truth and Reconciliation, advancing their understanding and doing so in collaboration with local Indigenous partners on downtown revitalization efforts. Key initiatives incorporate Indigenous perspectives to ensure a more equitable and vibrant city center underscoring the importance of inclusivity and partnership in revitalization efforts.

Leading example: Winnipeg is addressing social inclusion and equity in its downtown revitalization by addressing systemic barriers and focusing on vulnerable populations. While the Winnipeg CentrePlan 2050 guides development with consideration for reconciliation, climate change and poverty reduction, it has also assembled a Downtown Action Team. This team is focused on supporting people in addition to revitalising places, fostering downtown living and helping businesses build. Key actions include expanding community outreach and collaborating with community partners to enhance downtown safety through the Downtown Community Safety Partnership initiative³², secure sustainable funding for 24-hour safe spaces, prioritising support for Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. Winnipeg is also adopting a harm reduction approach, providing amenities like public washrooms and drinking water. The city is also working to connect downtown businesses and community groups to reduce stigma and enhance collaboration. The success of this work is measured through community well-being indicators and effective service delivery.

³² <https://www.dccsp.ca/about-us/>, viewed March 10, 2025.

Cities across Canada are increasingly prioritizing social inclusion and equity in downtown revitalization. They recognize that successful efforts must address the needs of all community members through meaningful engagement. This includes actively engaging with diverse communities, addressing social issues like homelessness and mental health and incorporating Indigenous perspectives in planning processes to create a more inclusive and supportive downtown environment.

Public Places and Spaces

The quality and accessibility of public spaces are contributing factors to the success of downtown revitalization efforts across Canada. Investments in public spaces increases downtown attractiveness, accessibility and vibrancy for residents, workers and visitors alike. For these reasons cities are improving and or creating new parks and green spaces in their downtown to provide more inviting places to relax and recreate. Depending on their specific design, public spaces can provide people with a connection to nature while improving local sustainability outcomes (e.g. air quality, water management, cooler urban temperatures, energy savings, micro-habitats). Calgary for example, is advancing several initiatives to improve its downtown public spaces with a focus on creating more vibrant, resilient and attractive environments for people. Using the Greater Downtown Plan as a guide, Calgary is focused on strategic public realm investments, innovative projects and placemaking opportunities that make its downtown more pedestrian-friendly, accessible and attractive³³.

Cities are also focused on creating more pedestrian-friendly streets and expanding cycling networks within their downtowns to support a healthier, more sustainable public realm. Winnipeg is prioritizing tree planting, sidewalk repair, lighting and eliminating accessibility barriers as essential improvements. Montreal is focusing on improving the cleanliness and appearance of its downtown area while encouraging the use of active transportation. This aligns with Montreal's 2030 Downtown Strategy and emphasis on enhancing the physical environment to attract residents and workers through public realm improvements. Ottawa is also working to make its downtown more liveable and attractive through targeted investments in public realm and placemaking initiatives that contribute to a safer and more accessible public realm for all.

Leading example - Vancouver is focusing on placemaking efforts and urban design as part of its downtown revitalization, particularly through streetscape enhancements and laneway transformations. A key example is the Granville Street Revitalization project³⁴ which aims to create a more vibrant and engaging public realm with a particular focus on the nighttime economy. This work encourages people to spend more time using public spaces, generate activity and support businesses that contribute to a thriving downtown economy 24/7.

Canadian cities are increasingly investing in public spaces and placemaking initiatives as part of their downtown revitalization strategies. In addition to expanding and improving park space, efforts include creating supportive pedestrian environments and improving pedestrian access and movement within and between them. Cities that focus on the design of beloved public spaces, high quality pedestrian streetscape improvements and cycling infrastructure is key to success. By prioritizing public realm improvements for

³³ <https://www.calgarymlc.ca/districts/downtown>, viewed March 10, 2025

³⁴ <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/granville-street-phase-1-engagement-summary.pdf>, viewed March 10, 2025

people first (i.e. pedestrianization), cities aim to create more attractive, accessible, active and resilient downtown environments.

Mobility Options and Connectivity

Cities reviewed as part of this jurisdictional scan are prioritizing more efficient and accessible transportation options as part of their efforts to revitalize their downtown. This marks an even greater shift towards more sustainable, equitable and people-centric transportation. Pedestrian-friendly areas, expanded cycling networks and improvements to public transport infrastructure are a common means used to provide more equitable mobility access, options and connectivity in downtowns. Vancouver is expanding local and regional transit in an effort to help its downtown become more accessible to people outside the core area. Calgary is developing an integrated multimodal transportation strategy and expanding its cycling network to both enhance downtown access and reduce traffic congestion. Winnipeg is focused on supporting its downtown workforce by addressing mobility barriers and enhancing transit services. Toronto is prioritising walking, cycling and public transit as part of its broader approach to sustainable urban development, with a focus on people-first infrastructure. Ottawa is promoting more efficient and accessible mobility choices, employee transit passes and active transportation investments that address diverse transport needs with the help of federal and provincial transit gap funding.

Leading example: Montreal is prioritizing active transportation as part of its downtown revitalization efforts demonstrated in part by its plan to develop four large bicycle parking lots on the outskirts of the city center³⁵. This initiative respects the traditional pedestrian nature of the downtown core while promoting sustainable mobility and creating a more livable urban environment. Montreal is also implementing sustainable mobility corridors and improving pedestrian infrastructure as part of its commitment to active transportation. By providing convenient and safe options for cyclists and pedestrians, Montreal aims to create a more vibrant and accessible downtown that prioritizes the needs of its residents and visitors.

A focus on sustainable, equitable and people-centric transportation among the cities reviewed reflects a broader strategy to reduce their car dependency within their downtowns and find ways to encourage healthier, more environmentally friendly modes of transportation.

Strategic Data-Driven Decision Making

Cities are increasingly turning to more data and analytics to inform and measure the impact of their downtown revitalization investments, efforts and outcomes. This involves tracking a range of indicators according to the strategy and particular activity which could include pedestrian counts, transit trips, business openings and closures, housing unit counts, available daycare spaces and overall economic activity. By leveraging available data and analytics, cities are gaining further insights into various aspects of their downtown's performance more quickly allowing them to identify emerging trends faster, communicate findings, devise data-driven solutions and work with local stakeholders to adjust strategies together as needed.

³⁵ <https://www.cmm.ca/~media/Files/News/Memoires/2020/Plan-Action-Centre-Ville-FRA.pdf?la=fr>, viewed February 2025

Winnipeg uses a variety of metrics to determine the success of their strategies, including number of people living downtown, visits to museums and incidents reported to police. Montreal is creating a central data tool on commercial occupancy that will help monitor commercial activity, vacancies and change, identify emerging patterns and challenges and guide future downtown revitalization decision making. Ottawa is focused on measuring the impacts of their policies and investments with a study recently commissioned revealing a 'business-as-usual' approach to downtown revitalization could actually result in significant tax revenue loss without some form of intervention. Vancouver uses data and a variety of analyses to inform a host of revitalization strategies and decisions. Demographic information, industry-sector diversity, tourism visits and preferences, office and storefront vacancies and data on cleanliness and safety are used to assess, strategize and inform decisions regarding Vancouver's downtown.

Leading example: Calgary produces an annual State of the Downtown Report and quarterly series of Downtown Calgary Snapshots that exemplifies strong commitment to strategic data-driven decision-making³⁶. The city monitors and reports on the performance of their Downtown Strategy's four pillars – place, work, live and connect. This allows the city to track the value of their investments, progress, identify emerging trends, consult with stakeholders to address issues or take advantage of new opportunities. Dedicated data collection, analysis and reporting helps Calgary make better informed policy and implementation decisions.

Cities continue to recognize the importance of data-driven decision-making when it comes to downtown revitalization. By leveraging data and analytics, cities can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of their strategies, identify emerging trends and make informed decisions that optimize how they choose to allocate resources and achieve their desired outcomes. Ongoing monitoring and reporting enables cities to adapt to change faster, ensure revitalization efforts remain aligned with the evolving needs of the community and contribute to their downtown's long-term success.

³⁶ <https://www.calgary.ca/research/downtown-snapshot.html>, viewed 10 March 2025

V. Conclusion

Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal share many of the same post-pandemic challenges and revitalization approaches with individual actions specifically tailored to their context and situation. This offers valuable insights for Edmonton's downtown as it charts its own path forward. Each city applied a common revitalization approach, identified unique opportunities and strategies and revealed a diversity of solutions possible Edmonton can learn from. From harnessing a clear vision and comprehensive strategy to fostering community collaboration and data-driven decision-making, these provide important lessons and roadmap for creating a stronger, more vibrant and resilient downtown Edmonton.

Edmonton can collaborate with residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the revitalization process, confirm geographic areas of interest where consensus can be achieved on specific strategies and actions to improve it and support successful downtown revitalization. Many of the cities reviewed demonstrated collaboration with community interests and key stakeholders as integral components of their downtown revitalization strategies. They recognize that successful revitalization must address the diverse needs of the community encompassing not only its physical and economic aspects, but also its social needs. Cities collaborated with the community to identify areas within the downtown that should be improved ranging from smaller site improvements (e.g. sidewalks, street furniture, pedestrian crossings) and public spaces (Air Canada Park in Winnipeg) to much larger areas (e.g. redevelopment of Faubourgs and Bridge-Bonaventure neighbourhoods in downtown Montreal; creation of five new districts within downtown Ottawa). This also helped prioritize greater safety, accessibility and inclusivity for all community members fostering a healthier downtown overall and attracting new residents, workers and visitors.

Edmonton should consider its own approach that responds to its context, leverages available opportunities, is multi-faceted and can be developed and delivered in a coordinated and focused manner. A comprehensive downtown strategy helps ensure that different aspects of revitalization can be addressed, in a coordinated manner and not in isolation. Cities with a clear vision, plan and set of strategies for their downtown consider how its various elements (e.g. housing, infrastructure, public spaces, economy, community services) interact and impact one another. For example, Toronto's TOcore plan takes a holistic implementation approach that manages growth, enhances infrastructure and promotes sustainability and liveability through a series of subsequent strategic plans that combined, result in greater overall impact.

Harnessing a clear vision and strategy for downtown Edmonton can help clarify and prioritize its revitalization efforts and ensure they are aligned to achieve their best outcomes. Successful revitalization among cities demonstrated that in addition to having a strategy, it also included a clear set of strategic priorities to communicate and act from. Cities like Calgary, Ottawa and Montreal for example have detailed plans that outline specific objectives and timelines which help align and ensure stakeholders are all working together towards a common goal. Having clarity of purpose and alignment helps cities prioritize their actions, commit resources, initiate activities, monitor progress and make necessary adjustments over time. Without a clear set of priorities, city efforts can become reactive, fragmented, duplicative, costly and ineffective.

Edmonton can develop a comprehensive revitalization strategy and set of priorities that demonstrates the city's commitment to growth and provides the necessary predictability and confidence for businesses, developers and future residents to invest. Comprehensive strategies provide a clear framework for retaining

and attracting private investment and promoting economic growth. Cities with more robust plans are better positioned to create a business-friendly environment by streamlining permitting processes, offering development incentives and supporting small businesses vital to downtowns. Economic plans often focus on diversifying the local economy, re-purposing existing buildings and enhancing the quality of public spaces.

It is essential that Edmonton use data, analyses and feedback to continually refine, improve and communicate action outcomes in the downtown. Successful revitalization efforts often incorporate mechanisms for monitoring their progress. This allows them to assess their performance, adapt to changing circumstances or trends and demonstrate both transparency and accountability to their community. Cities like Calgary for example use data to guide decision-making through annual reports and snapshots to track the impact of their initiatives and communicate results. This helps ensure that revitalization efforts remain relevant and effective despite unforeseen challenges or events (e.g. economic downturn, social shifts, weather emergency). Investment in a dedicated, robust, ongoing monitoring and reporting program can establish a culture of continuous improvement. Downtown change and growth must be continually measured, accessible and reportable to be effective.

Next Steps

This review of downtowns among select Canadian cities suggests a compelling call to action and set of next steps for Edmonton. Capitalizing on this moment, Edmonton can take an enhanced leadership role in shaping revitalization of the downtown. This includes continuing to build relationships, listen and respond to community feedback on the challenges the downtown is currently facing (e.g. employment, safety, affordability, attractiveness) and opportunities ahead of it (e.g. increasing student population, supporting residential growth, business and tourism growth). Concentrating revitalization efforts on strategic locations and leveraging the positive impacts of public and private projects can create positive change that compounds over time. This includes demonstrating its stewardship by continuing to support downtown cleanliness, maintenance, safety measures, proactively enhancing the public realm and communicating all of this as its steadfast commitment to downtown's future. Edmonton can continue to actively support existing businesses and cultivate a business-friendly environment that attracts private investment, fostering a diverse downtown ecosystem from startups to scale-ups to established enterprises. All of this can be measured and communicated requiring robust monitoring to ensure performance, transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.

Finally, this jurisdictional scan underscores that successful downtown revitalization is not a static formula, but a dynamic process rooted in collaboration, strategic vision and data-driven adaptation. Edmonton, standing at a crucial juncture, can draw valuable lessons from its Canadian peers and build on its existing strengths. By adopting a holistic approach, prioritizing community engagement and creating a welcoming business climate, Edmonton can cultivate a downtown that is not only vibrant and prosperous, but also resilient and responsive to the evolving needs of residents, business, visitors and investors. The path forward demands a commitment to continuous improvement, transparent communication and a steadfast dedication to crafting a downtown that reflects the unique spirit and aspirations of Edmonton's growing community.