

OUR DOWNTOWN

CITY OF SAULT STE. MARIE DOWNTOWN STRATEGY

2016



SAULT STE. MARIE

Ontario Canada

INTRODUCTION

Downtown Sault Ste. Marie has always been economically, socially, and culturally valuable to our community. Over the past few decades, our downtown has faced challenges resulting from development outside the core, the ascendancy of big box stores, and the relocation of employment centres.

In 2006, the City released its first Downtown Development Strategy with the objective of enhancing the public realm and catalyzing private sector investment. Since 2006, momentum continues to build; building permit values of commercial and residential properties totaled over \$84 million from 2006-2016. Nevertheless, systemic challenges including vacancies, establishing a resilient neighbourhood, and cultivating a sense of place act as barriers to sustainable prosperity. This strategy seeks to eliminate these systemic challenges, endeavouring to establish long-term positive impacts.

THE VISION

More than a main street - a 'true' neighbourhood

An authentic place

A '24/7' neighbourhood

Entertainment and cultural centre of the city

Marketplace shopping experience

Well-connected place

Safe place



THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Downtown SSM will be the geographic focal point of the City's transition from a predominantly industrial economy to one focused on knowledge and creative sectors. The global shift from manufacturing-based industries has made it imperative for Sault Ste. Marie to diversify its economy. Investing in our downtown is absolutely critical to achieving this objective. The downtown is the city's most diversified, mixed-use, compact, and iconic neighbourhood with the highest proportion of locally-owned businesses and knowledge workers. As investment and people become increasingly mobile, enhancing the quality of place is essential to expanding our local creative clusters and retaining our community's youth. This strategy seeks to enhance these unique attributes to cultivate sustainable, locally-based, innovation-focused prosperity.

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY



An evaluation of past revitalization strategies and analysis of existing conditions serve as the foundation of this strategy. Juxtaposing these exercises revealed the downtown's enduring challenges, which were further contextualized through community feedback.

Using the existing downtown vision as a lens, planning staff developed key strategic directions to address the identified challenges.

From these key strategies, we developed an implementation action plan, including policy tools, major projects, and quick wins. Once a policy has been decided on, many different methods can be used to implement it. These include information, education, legislation, regulation, guidelines, programs, grants, taxes, and subsidies.

Major projects represent significant investment and, when implemented, have a long-term, profound impact.

Quick wins are an improvement that is highly visible, has immediate benefit, and can be delivered quickly and without significant resources (e.g., pilot projects).

We presented proposed directions and implementation strategy to the public for feedback through various engagement forums. We altered the strategy based on the comments we received.

KEY DIRECTIONS

The following key directions organize the strategy. They represent an overarching foundation and are substantiated with action items. Implementing measures associated with these key directions endeavour to address systemic challenges and create the ideal ecosystem for economic diversification and prosperity.

PRESERVE
DOWNTOWN AS
COMMERCIAL,
ADMINISTRATIVE &
CULTURAL CORE

DEVELOP A VIBRANT
RESIDENTIAL
NEIGHBOURHOOD

ENSURE STRONG,
COHESIVE
LEADERSHIP AND
COLLABORATIVE
ACTION

FACILITATE
BEAUTIFUL STREETS
AND OPEN SPACES

ENCOURAGE ACTIVE
USE OF DOWNTOWN
SPACES

IMPROVE MOBILITY
AND LINKAGES

1. PRESERVE DOWNTOWN AS CITY CORE

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

It is critical to maintain the downtown as the City's administrative, commercial, and cultural core. Physically concentrating services, sectors, and industries creates a definable district with a unique identity. Proximity generates synergies, fuels economic activity and increases land values. Government should demonstrate leadership by prioritizing downtown as the civic hub. Furthermore, the downtown's built form is the most efficient type of development, allowing for the sustainable use of municipal infrastructure.

ACTIONS



1.1 Encourage federal, provincial, and municipal governments to establish, maintain and expand their downtown office facilities.



1.2 Ensure policies in the new Official Plan support and grow the downtown's role as the administrative, commercial, and cultural centre of the city.



1.3 Encourage the reuse of vacant buildings.
1.3.1 Develop incentives to encourage the reuse of vacant buildings.
1.3.2 Work with incubator centres and the Community Development Corporation to match startups with potential landlords.

2. DEVELOP A VIBRANT RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

A robust and diverse population is the bedrock of a prosperous downtown. Downtown living allows people to live, work, play, and invest in their neighbourhood. Bolstering the downtown's population creates a built-in consumer base for businesses. Strategies must focus on residential development of diverse housing types and increasing neighbourhood infrastructure.

ACTIONS



2.1 Encourage the construction and rehabilitation of a variety of dwellings that can accommodate residents of all ages, income levels, and household size.

2.1.1 Encourage the District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board to increase the downtown's stock of affordable and rent-geared-to-income housing.

2.1.2 Create incentive programs to encourage infill development, specifically incorporating family units.

2.1.3 Develop incentives to encourage the conversion of second floor commercial buildings to residential use.



2.2 Encourage the development of neighbourhood infrastructure

2.2.1 Integrate features for children to enjoy, such as play areas, splash pads, and other family-oriented spaces throughout downtown.

2.2.2 Investigate the feasibility of adding public washrooms in the downtown core.

3. ENCOURAGE ACTIVE USE OF DOWNTOWN SPACES

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

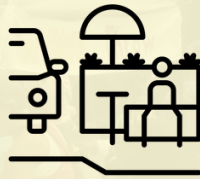
Downtown spaces should function as outdoor living rooms. Often, high quality design is not enough to ensure active use of downtown spaces. Once spaces are constructed, programming is critical to build community attachment to the space and ensure both active and passive use. Programming encourages sociability, inclusivity, and discovery. Programming also builds community when led by organizations.

ACTIONS



3.1 Make it easier for community groups to host events in the downtown.

- 3.1.1 Identify a Liaison Officer to promote event planning processes and opportunities and work with groups to plan events.
- 3.1.2 Provide a budget to Liaison Officer to assist with event planning and facilitation.
- 3.1.3 Streamline existing processes for occupying city property (e.g., sidewalk patios) and gaining municipal approval for events.
- 3.1.4 Work with the BIA to provide incentives for planning events (e.g., Activity Grants).



3.2 Encourage pilot projects, such as activating underutilized laneways, parking lots, sidewalk spaces.

- 3.2.1 Work with Public Works and Transportation to identify potential underutilized sites.
- 3.2.2 Promote community arts projects.



3.3 Encourage year-round use of public spaces.

- 3.3.1 Continue programming in park space and municipal facilities year-round.
- 3.3.2 Investigate the conversion of Esposito Park ice rink to a concrete ice pad to allow year-round use.
- 3.3.3 Organize events (e.g., Car Free Sunday) to facilitate pedestrian activity on streets

4. FACILITATE BEAUTIFUL STREETS AND OPEN SPACES

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The special features of our public realm is what makes our downtown unique and sets us apart from other cities. These features should be enhanced, expanded, and preserved. A high quality public realm encourages private sector development.

ACTIONS



4.1 Develop a distinctive identity for the entire downtown by promoting high quality urban design.

- 4.1.1 Develop consistent signage and wayfinding throughout the downtown.
- 4.1.2 Update downtown urban design guidelines.
- 4.1.3 Accentuate downtown gateways (Gore Street, Bruce Street, and Queen Street).
- 4.1.4 Enable all new capital works projects to incorporate streetscaping.
- 4.1.5 Implement Downtown Streetscape Manual
- 4.1.6 Maintain traditional heritage character of buildings
- 4.1.7 Work with community groups to facilitate funding and acquisition of public art.



4.2 Continue enhancing our downtown streetscapes

- 4.2.1 Proceed with the Bay Street Lane Reduction, Streetscaping, and Multi-use Trail project
- 4.2.2 Proceed with the Queen Street Tree Replacement and Furnishings Project
- 4.2.4 Incorporate landscaping into underutilized parking lots
- 4.2.5 Incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles in new design.

4. FACILITATE BEAUTIFUL STREETS AND OPEN SPACES



ACTIONS



4.3 Encourage high quality private property aesthetics

4.3.1 Develop facade grants for significant aesthetic improvements.

4.3.2 Increase resources for greater by-law enforcement of property standards



4.4 Focus resources on improving aesthetics of the following special areas:

4.4.1 Canal District

4.4.2 Suncor Property

4.4.3 Gateway Property



4.5 Create additional public gathering spaces (e.g., March Street stage area)

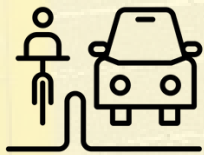
4.5.1 Repurpose underutilized spaces

5. ENHANCE MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Establishing a visible, convenient, safe, and enjoyable mobility network throughout the downtown enhances access to downtown spaces and amenities for all residents, reinforces the downtown as a distinctive district, and encourages modal shift. A "Complete Streets" lens represents an opportunity to develop our streets to focus on the pedestrian experience. The Complete Streets model treats streets as places rather than thoroughfares and considers the safety and comfort of all road users, not just drivers.

ACTIONS



5.1 Prioritize pedestrian and cycling mobility within the downtown

- 5.1.1 Evaluate our downtown streets through a Complete Streets lens and implement findings.
- 5.1.2 Develop a context-centric protocol for downtown traffic management and planning
- 5.1.3 Continue to implement the Cycling Master Plan and Transportation Master Plan
- 5.1.4 Ensure all downtown sidewalks are accessible for wheelchair users



5.2 Enhance pedestrian linkages from the waterfront to Queen and Gore Streets.

- 5.2.1 Investigate implementing temporary street closures for pedestrian usage.
- 5.2.2 Explore the possibility of developing shared streets (integrating both vehicular and pedestrian traffic into a shared space), specifically along the following streets:
 - a- Spring Street
 - b- Lower Gore Street
 - c- James Street
 - d- Foster Drive
 - e- Lower March Street



5.3. Increase connectivity to and within the downtown

- 5.3.1 Investigate the potential of a downtown trolley route circulating downtown.
- 5.3.2 Work with Transit to evaluate appropriate frequency and routes to access and travel through the downtown.

6. ENSURE ACTION AND STRONG, COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The objectives of this strategy can only be achieved through buy-in and accountability from City staff, elected officials, and community stakeholders.

ACTIONS



6.1 Encourage community partnerships and collaborative action.

6.1.1 Establish a downtown taskforce to meet biannually to monitor progress and discuss emergent issues.



6.2 Develop a higher standard community engagement protocol for downtown capital works projects.

6.2.1 Ensure engagement for all downtown projects include community wide input.



6.3 Create a new Community Improvement Plan to use as the implementation document for strategic directions outlined in this strategy.

6.3.1 Collect data for monitoring and evaluation