

# **DOWNTOWN LONDON COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

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# **DOWNTOWN LONDON COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

# **DOWNTOWN LONDON COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

## **I. Introduction**

Downtown London has long been the focus of many studies, and the location of various community improvement initiative. These previous studies have related to the retention of the Downtown as the primary business, office, cultural and administrative centre for the City, and as a regional centre for Southwestern Ontario. The community improvement projects undertaken have focused on physical and infrastructure improvements to the Downtown core as a means of ensuring that the area remains attractive for investment, and as a place for people to work, shop and live.

These past community improvement efforts have been tied to specific projects and have not address Downtown improvement in a comprehensive manner. The adoption of a Community Improvement Plan that incorporates the findings and recommendations of recent studies, as well as the policies and objective of the City's Official plan, will ensure that future improvement projects address the Downtown in a coordinated manner.

Downtown London reflects the evolution of urban centres throughout North America. The movement of residents to the suburbs, and the movement of stores and services to those areas, is not unlike most other cities. This trend is well established, and would be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse. In London, this trend has been exhibited in the decrease in the Downtown share of the retail market, as regional malls and suburban shopping plazas provide retail opportunities for residents outside the Downtown. There has also been a concurrent shift in the City's office market, as suburban office space now accounts for 21% of the total office supply in the City, up from 14.5 % prior to 1980.

In November, 1994, Council received the report *A Summary of Potential Strategies for Revitalizing London's Downtown*. This report outlined various initiatives and strategies that could be employed to foster Downtown revitalization and renewal. A key initiative identified in this report was the creation of a Downtown Rehabilitation and Redevelopment Grant Program. This program is intended to encourage the designation and retention of heritage structure, encourage the rehabilitation of the existing building stock in the Downtown, and to provide opportunities for redevelopment on vacant and underutilized land.

The purpose of this community improvement plan is to provide the context for a coordinated municipal effort to improve the physical, economic and social climates of the Downtown. The initiatives identified in the Downtown report, and summarized in this Plan, are intended to stimulate private investment and property maintenance and renewal in the Downtown. The focus of these initiative, and of the Community

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Improvement Plan, is to foster an environment that will increase the supply of residential units within the Downtown to ensure a viable Downtown population, and to encourage the provision of unique or specialized attractions and public facilities, and the location of community amenities to make the Downtown an attractive place for these types of investment to occur.

The Downtown Community Improvement Plan will be administered through the Planning Division, with assistance provided by the various Departments and Division assigned the responsibility for specific implementation projects.

The Downtown Community Improvement Plan is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of revitalization projects that may be undertaken to stimulate community improvement. Rather, the Plan is to provide a context for Downtown revitalization projects, and to guide the municipal decision-making process so that actions are undertaken that are supportive of, and instrumental in, encouraging Downtown renewal. For this reason, the plan does not list area-specific projects to address identified deficiencies. The Plan provides a framework to better identify those projects and makes reference to the many initiatives that have been previously identified for Downtown revitalization. These projects all involve economic realities, reliance on projects that will require public funding to encourage redevelopment and revitalization will not accomplish the goal of creating and maintain a vibrant, healthy Downtown. The Downtown Community Improvement Plan can provide a context and reference point for developing specific community improvement projects, as well as identifying actions that can be undertaken in a more coordinated manner that will foster Downtown renewal.

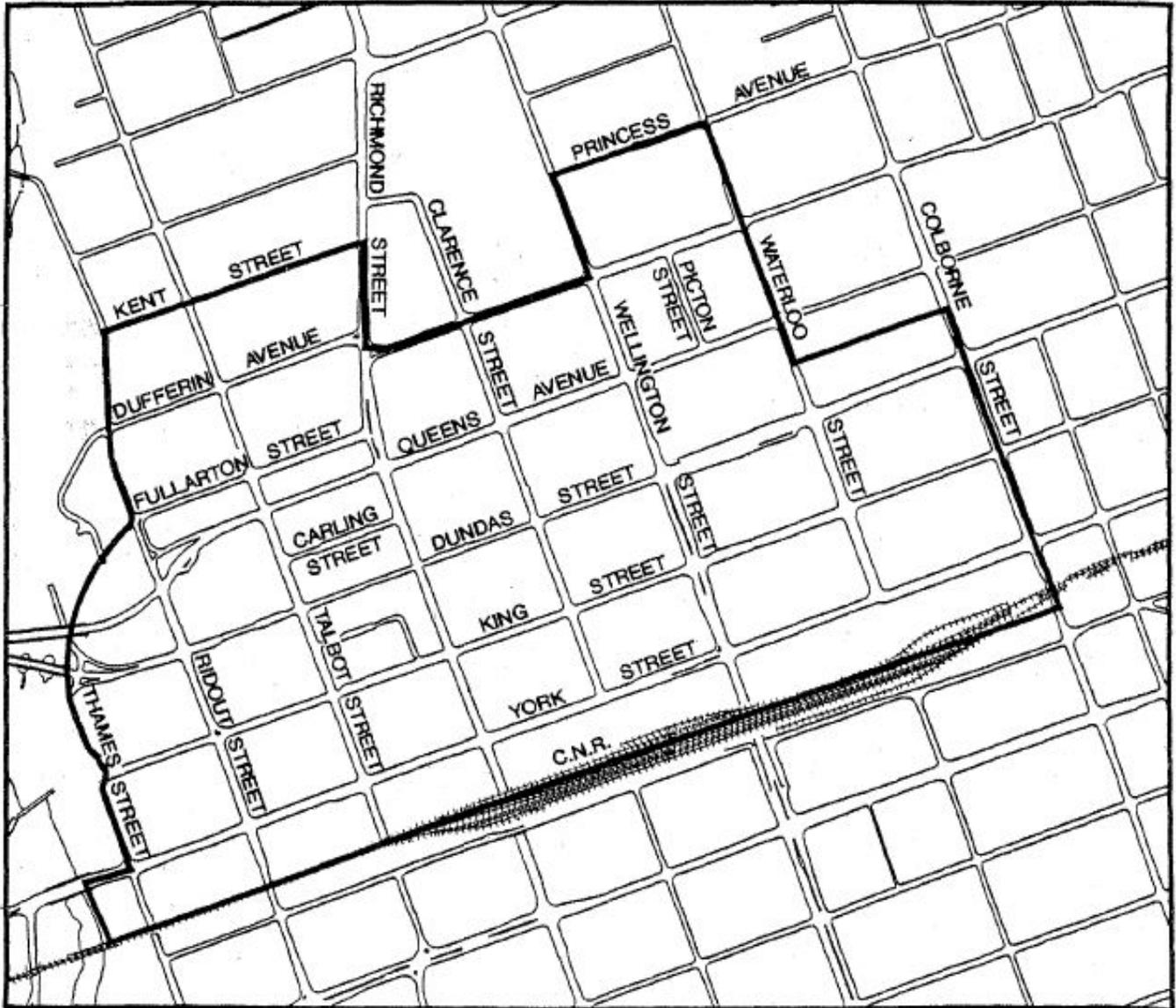
## **II. AREA OF APPLICATION**

The Downtown Community Improvement Plan applied to the lands designated by By-law of the Corporation of the City of London (see Appendix A). This is the area designated “Downtown Area” on Schedule “A” of the Official Plan for the City of London. The area boundary is identified in Figure 1.

This Community Improvement Plan is developed in accordance with Section 28 of the *Planning Act*, and in conformity with Chapter 14 of the Official Plan for the City of London, which outlines the Community Improvement policies for the City.

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FIGURE 1: THE DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT AREA



SCALE = 1 : 10,000



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### **III. GOALS OF THE DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Goals of the Downtown Community Improvement Plan are drawn from, and consistent with, the Goals for Downtown London as stated in the City's Official Plan and Strategic Plan. These include:

- a. To enhance the Downtown as a unique community and the Heart of the City. The Downtown shall be a place where people are attracted to live, work, shop and play;
- b. To encourage the preservation of significant heritage resources;
- c. To encourage and assist private property owners to rehabilitate buildings in the Downtown to ensure their long-term economic viability;
- d. To focus municipal efforts that address the provision of streetscape improvements, municipal services, and infrastructure; and,
- e. To promote the continued development of the Downtown as the primary business, office, cultural and administrative centre for the City, and as a regional centre for Southwestern Ontario.

### **IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE DOWNTOWN LONDON COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Objectives of the Downtown Community Improvement Plan are drawn from the objectives stated for Community Improvement in the City's Official Plan. These include:

- a. Promote the long-term stability and viability of the Downtown;
- b. Encourage the coordination of municipal expenditures and planning and development activity;
- c. Stimulate private property maintenance and reinvestment activity;
- d. Enhance the visual quality of the Downtown through the recognition and protection of heritage buildings;
- e. Upgrade physical services and social and recreational facilities; and,

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- f. Provide for streetscaping, servicing, and building rehabilitation and improvements to enhance the Downtown, and encourage complementary revitalization or redevelopment through private investment.

### **V. THE DOWNTOWN NEIGHBOURHOOD**

Downtown London is the oldest part of the City and is part of the original Crown reserve set aside by Governor Simcoe in 1793 for the future capital of Upper Canada. Mahlon Burwell's survey of 1826 laid out the streets that form today's Downtown London northeast of the Forks, with Dundas Street laid out from the site of the Courthouse, running east to join with Governor Simcoe's street of the same name. North (Queen's Avenue), Ridout, Talbot, Clarence, Richmond, King, York, Bathurst, Horton and Simcoe Streets were all laid out at this time.

Downtown London also contains the largest concentration of heritage structures in the City. More than fifty Downtown buildings are listed as Priority 1 on the City's *Inventory of Heritage Resources*. Six buildings have been designated under *the Ontario Heritage Act*. The City's Advisory Committee on Heritage (LACH) is pursuing the designation of additional buildings and examining the feasibility of designating one or more Heritage Conservation Districts.

The style and construction of many of Downtown London's buildings reflect the requirements of one of the City's earlier by-laws, which required construction using either brick or stone as a result of the Great Fire of 1845, which destroyed much of the previous wooden construction in Downtown London. Many of the buildings Downtown were constructed during the boom times of the 1870s and 1880s following the discovery of oil. The dominant architectural style of the time was Italianate, popular between 1860 and 1885. Features of this style include arched windows and elaborate cornices. One of the best examples of this type of commercial architecture is the block along the east side of Richmond Street between King and York Streets.

Since the beginnings of the City, Downtown London has been the centre of the City's commercial and retail trade. It wasn't until the advent of suburban shopping centres in the 1970's that Downtown London lost its dominance as the retail core of the City.

The area designated as Downtown in the City's Official Plan is generally contiguous with the early City, and covers an area of approximately 102 hectares (250 acres). The Downtown is a well-defined area, bounded by both natural and man-made features that provide definable limits to the Downtown area. Concentrating community improvement

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and revitalization efforts within these boundaries will help to ensure that these efforts are not diluted. Within Downtown London, an identifiable scale and mixed-use pattern of development helps to provide a basis for the identification and implementation of revitalization efforts.

The area included in Downtown London has a total population of 2,425 people (1991), or 0.8% of the City total. The area includes 1,505 households, or 1.2% of the total number of households in the City. The residents of Downtown are older than the city averages, with 32.8% of the population between 20 and 29 years old, compared to 18.7% citywide, and 21.7% of Downtown residents are 65 years or older, compared to 11.8% citywide. There is also a larger proportion of women living in the Downtown, with 54% of the residents, compared to 51.9% citywide.

Downtown also has more singles (42.5% compared to 30%), fewer married couples (35% compared to 53.7%) and more widowed persons (10% compared to 6.3%) than the rest of the City. The Census separates households into family and non-family households. Family households refer to households that contain at least one census family, defined as persons living in the same dwelling who have a spouse or parent or never married child relationship. A non-family household refers to one or more people living in a private dwelling and do not constitute as a census family. In Downtown London, 63.5% of the households were non-family households, compared to the citywide figure of 32.2%. Of the census families in Downtown London, 150, or 27.3% have children living at home. Downtown London is home of 60 lone parent families, 75% of which are headed by women. For the City overall, women head 85.7% of the lone parent families.

Housing tenure rates and types of housing in the Downtown are also much different than the citywide average, with only 11% owner occupied dwellings, and 89% rental in the Downtown, compared to 54.7% owner occupied and 45.3% rental citywide. Only 2.4% of Downtown households are in single or semi-detached units, compared to 54.6% for the City. Apartments account for 95.6% of the Downtown units, compared to 31.2% for the entire City. Average household size is 1.59 persons in Downtown London. The citywide average is 2.51 persons per household.

While a much larger proportion of the Downtown housing stock was built before 1946 than for the entire City (22.3% Downtown vs. 17.1% for the City), there is also a greater proportion of housing stock built between 1981 and 1991 in Downtown than in the City as a whole (36.3% Downtown compared to 21% for the City). This reflects the large number of high-rise apartment structures built in the Downtown during this period. Housing built between 1961 and 1981 accounts for 35.7% of the dwelling units in Downtown, and 44.5% of the dwelling units citywide.

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Generally, Downtown residents are better educated than the City average, with only 4.7% of the population older than 15 years with Grade 9 or less education, compared to 8.4% for the City overall, and 28.8% of Downtown residents have a University degree, compared to 14.7% for the City.

There is a difference between the occupation groups of Downtown residents compared to the citywide labour force, as indicated in the following table.

**Table 1: Occupations of Labour Force Participants (15 years +)**

OCCUPATION	DOWNTOWN AVERAGE (%)	CITYWIDE AVERAGE (%)
Agriculture and related services	0.6	1.1
Manufacturing Industries	7.6	14.7
Construction Industries	3.2	6.2
Transportation and Storage	0.6	2.4
Communications and other utilities	4.8	3.2
Wholesale trade	1.9	4.2
Retail trade	13.3	13.9
Finance and Insurance	11.1	5.6
Real Estate	0.6	2.1
Business Services	6.7	5.4
Government Services	4.1	5.2
Educational Services	8.9	8.8
Health and Social Services	13.3	12.1
Accommodation, food and beverage services	13.7	7.0
Other Service Industries	3.8	6.6

Total household incomes are slightly lower in Downtown than for the City as a whole, as indicated in the following table.

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**Table 2: Household Income (1991)**

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	% OF HOUSEHOLDS-DOWNTOWN	% OF HOUSEHOLDS-CITYWIDE
Under \$20,000	29.7	21.9
\$20,000-\$34,999	29.3	21.2
\$35,000-\$49,999	15.8	18.8
Over \$50,000	23.9	37.8

### VI. OFFICIAL PLAN POLICIES

The City's Official Plan contains numerous policies for the Downtown. The Downtown is designated with an exclusive land use classification (Downtown Area), that is contiguous with the area designated as the Downtown Community Improvement Area. The Official Plan provides the following Downtown-specific objectives:

- i. Promote the continued development of the Downtown as the primary business, office, cultural and administrative centre for the City of London and as a regional centre for Southwestern Ontario.
- ii. Concentrate the development of major office buildings, hotels, convention facilities, cultural uses and government buildings, having city-wide or regional significance, within the Downtown.
- iii. Encourage growth in the resident population of the Downtown and adjacent areas through new development and the renovation and conversion of existing buildings.
- iv. Encourage the consolidation and enhancement of a compact, pedestrian-oriented shopping area within the Downtown.
- v. Facilitate vehicular and pedestrian movement into and within the Downtown through improvements to the network of roads, parking areas and pedestrian facilities.
- vi. Support the development of services and facilities in the Downtown that will attract and support tourism.

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- vii. Encourage the provision of high level of transit services in the Downtown.

The Downtown-related policies of the Official Plan support these objectives and encourage the development of the Downtown as a high density, multi-functional mixed use area, while also recognizing the contribution of the large number of heritage structures that exist in the Downtown. The range of permitted uses are at a scale that recognize the role of the Downtown as the community and regional centre.

An additional policy speaks to redevelopment, rehabilitation and conversion. Policy 4.2.6 states that:

The efficient utilization of lands and buildings within the Downtown will be encouraged through the redevelopment of vacant or under-utilized land and functionally obsolete buildings, and the rehabilitation, where feasible, of buildings that are functionally viable but substandard in appearance or condition.

As previously noted in this report, the City's Official Plan also contains policies related to Community Improvement. Chapter 14 of the Official Plan outlines these policies and designated the Downtown as an area eligible for community improvement. The goals and objectives related to community improvement have also been noted in this report.

The City's Z-1 zoning by-law implements the policies of the Official Plan. Most of the Downtown is zoned either DA (Downtown Area) 1 or 2, permitting a wide range of retail, office, cultural, institutional, entertainment and residential uses.

### **VII. PREVIOUS COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS**

Various portions of the Downtown have been the sites of past community improvement projects. The blocks bounded by York, Richmond, Carling and Talbot Streets were included within the Commercial Area Improvement Plan (CAIP) Plan A in 1984. This Plan outlined a series of municipal projects totalling \$800,000 to be undertaken in this area. This project was cost-shared with the Province on a "50/50" basis. The works undertaken included sidewalk improvements, curb and gutter replacement, street lighting, plantings, street furniture and road resurfacing.

In 1986, a second Community Area Improvement Plan was developed and implemented for the blocks bounded by Darling, Talbot, Dufferin, Clarence and Dundas Streets. This Plan identified additional works to be undertaken in this area, similar to the

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projects undertaken under the CAIP Plan A. This project was also for \$800,000 worth of works, also cost-shared on a "50/50" basis with the Province.

In 1987, the PRIDE (Program for Renewal, Improvement, Development and Economic Revitalization) program replaced the CAIP program. The Downtown PRIDE area covered the block bounded by Dundas Street, Clarence Street, Queens Avenue and Wellington Street. Improvements undertaken for this project included sidewalk improvements, curb and gutter replacement, lighting, landscaping, street furniture and road works. These works cost \$600,000 and were again funded on a "50/50" basis with the Province.

Since that time, there have been no joint municipal/provincial improvement projects undertaken in the Downtown, however, these projects resulted in \$2.2 million worth of Downtown improvements.

In 1986, the City initiated a façade improvement program. This program is still ongoing, and in November 1994, was modified to provide additional funds for façade restoration projects. The London Façade Restoration Program provides interest-free loans amortized over 10 years to property owners who rehabilitate and improve the facades of commercial buildings. When the program was adopted in 1986, the maximum amount available to property owners was \$12,500. The recent changes to the program have increased this to 50% of the value of eligible improvements up to \$15,000, or \$625 per foot frontage to a maximum of \$25,000. An additional \$5,000 is available if the property is designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The following table summarizes the value of the Façade Restoration Program to date.

**Table 3: Façade Restoration Loan Program Summary**

YEAR	PROJECT COST (ESTIMATED)	LOAN AMOUNT
1987	126,503	21,798
1988	205,602	68,456
1989	79,696	34,651
1990	172,736	79,362
1991	56,455	28,087
1992	640,350	41,325
1993	47,038	27,352
1994	41,100	21,161

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YEAR	PROJECT COST (ESTIMATED)	LOAN AMOUNT
1995 (to date)	74,465	37,234
Total	1,443,945	359,426

This program is available to property owners within a defined area of the Downtown that is contiguous with the boundaries of the Downtown Business Improvement Area. This area, bounded by properties fronting on the south side of York Street, and east side of Ridout Street, properties fronting on the north side of Queens Avenue, and the west side of Waterloo Street, is smaller than the Downtown Community Improvement Area, and the area defined as the Downtown in the City's Official Plan.

In addition to these community improvement projects; the City has undertaken various capital improvements within the Downtown that did not avail of Provincial funds or community improvement programs. For example, the Dundas Street reconstruction project has continued, using municipal funds to implement streetscape improvements, and provide on-street parking. Additional funds have been allocated for 1996 to complete this project. The City has also acquired two sites within the Downtown to operate as municipal parking areas. These projects were undertaken without community improvement funds.

### **VIII. THE COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Municipal Council has long considered the Downtown as meriting special consideration to ensure that it remains a viable community-wide resource, and functions as the heart of the City. The City's Strategic Plan, developed as part of the Vision '96 process, has confirmed this role of the Downtown. Recent city initiatives, such as an Official Plan amendment to more explicitly direct large scale office development to the Downtown, the removal of parking requirements for Downtown residential development, and a five-year suspension of development charges for Downtown residential development, are all indicative of the City's commitment to the Downtown. These initiatives have been brought forward within the context of a Downtown-centred, Downtown-specific program of community redevelopment.

It is recommended that a Downtown Capital Improvement Fund be established to fund community improvement projects in the Downtown that are not dependent on private development to fund. Projects to be funded through this program could include:

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- Streetscape improvement projects and sidewalk improvement projects in areas of the Downtown that are not currently funded, as is the case for the Dundas Street Reconstruction project.
- Tourist infrastructure such as directional signage and “character area” development, as identified in the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines.
- Enhanced street lighting and possible alleyway upgrading or lighting.

This fund will also include a priority list for projects to be undertaken. These priorities will be established in consultation with Downtown stakeholders, such as the Downtown Resident’s and Clock Associations, the Urban League and the Downtown London Business Association. This fund could also be established as part of a Downtown Development Corporation that would be involved in major capital projects. These projects will be specifically identified and prioritized as appendices to this Plan.

The Downtown Community Improvement initiatives described are intended to promote the Downtown as a community-wide resource and will direct and prioritize public and private initiatives to encourage Downtown revitalization.

The following table summarizes the strategies and initiatives that may be pursued through this Community Improvement Plan, and through any other City action intended to foster Downtown revitalization. Many of these initiatives have been previously presented in the October 1994 report, *A Summary of Potential Strategies for Revitalizing London’s Downtown*. This list is not intended to be exclusive or exhaustive, but rather, is intended to provide a framework for Downtown revitalization and renewal.

This Plan is also intended to be generic, so that as additional projects are identified, they can be undertaken without amendment to the Plan, as long as they meet the test that they are intended to encourage revitalization and redevelopment in the Downtown. Specific projects may be added to this plan by appendix, identifying the project and any sources of financing, recognizing that no sources of financing have been identified at this time.

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Table 4: Summary of Downtown Community Improvement Initiatives

STRATEGIES	RATIONALIZATION
<b>ECONOMIC INCENTIVES</b>	
Rehabilitation Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grants to offset increased assessment arising from property improvements.</li> </ul>
Tax Rebates for Historic Designation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grant to be used against municipal taxes for heritage designation</li> </ul>
Removal of Development Charges for Residential Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waiving of development charges for five-year period.</li> </ul>
No Development Application or Permit Fees for Renovation and Rehabilitation Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waiving all Official Plan, Zoning and Site Plan application fees, as well as building permit fees, in the Downtown Area.</li> </ul>
No Parking Requirements for Downtown Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes to the zoning regulations to eliminate parking requirements for residential development.</li> </ul>
Expanded Façade Improvement Loan Program/ Façade Restoration Loan Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide greater incentives to use the funding available.</li> </ul>
<b>PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS</b>	
Downtown Development Corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporation established to complete specific projects or assemble land for future projects.</li> </ul>
Joint Venture Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific projects undertaken with private/public funding.</li> </ul>
<b>REGULATORY INCENTIVES</b>	
Restriction of Suburban Office Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limit the amount of office space outside of the Downtown Area</li> </ul>
Downtown Building Inspector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rehabilitation of older buildings in the Downtown often cannot meet Building Code requirements.</li> <li>Downtown Building Inspector will assist in overcoming obstacles in meeting rigid building code requirements.</li> </ul>
Limit Temporary Surface Parking Lots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To reduce the likelihood of buildings being torn down for surface parking lots, Council is being asked to adopt the position that no more temporary surface</li> </ul>

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	parking lots will be permitted in the Downtown.
Development Permit System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amendments to the <i>Planning Act</i> allow municipalities to control such issues as urban design through a Development Permit System.</li> <li>• Implementing regulations have not yet been developed.</li> </ul>
Limit Entertainment Facilities in the Suburbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council's policy permits cinemas and major entertainment facilities to locate outside of the Downtown Area.</li> <li>• Proposal is to restrict the location of the facilities to the Downtown Area.</li> </ul>
<b>IMAGE AND IDENTITY</b>	
Character Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow through with recommendations of the Downtown Design Guidelines by examining the feasibility of establishing character areas in the Downtown (ie. Hotel district, arts and culture district, restaurant district, etc.)</li> </ul>
Signage and Plaques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plaquing of historic structure and placing information signage/guides in the Downtown.</li> </ul>
Urban Design Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of recommendations of Downtown Design Guidelines.</li> </ul>
Tourist Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the development of character areas, signage, brochures, etc., making Downtown "visitor friendly".</li> </ul>
Design Competition for Public Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open up all significant public buildings and structures in the Downtown to design competitions.</li> </ul>
Dundas Street Reconstruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the pedestrian environment of Dundas Street and provide on-street parking.</li> </ul>
Sidewalk Cafes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamline the Administrative procedures and requirements for these types of facilities.</li> </ul>
<b>TRANSIT AND PARKING</b>	
Parking Management and Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address all aspects of Downtown parking supply and management, including land acquisition, parking rates and deposits, hours of free parking, etc.</li> </ul>

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London Transit Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate various opportunities to improve Downtown service and possible implementation of Shuttle Service.</li> </ul>
<b>POLICING AND SAFETY</b>	
Increase Police Presence in the Downtown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase police presence in the Downtown will help to address the perception that the Downtown is unsafe.</li> </ul>
Street Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased street lighting adds to perception of safety.</li> </ul>
Youth Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiatives to address issues of street youth and youth information services in the Downtown identified in previous reports on the Downtown.</li> </ul>
<b>OTHER INITIATIVES</b>	
Replacement of Covent Garden Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The current Market Building is nearing the end of its viable use and will require replacement.</li> </ul>
Increased liaison between the Downtown London BIA and City's Economic Development Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many of the programs of the LDBA and Economic Development Office regarding Downtown marketing may be more effective through on-going liaison and coordination</li> </ul>

### Summary of Community Improvement Projects

#### 1. *Downtown Rehabilitation and Redevelopment Grant Program*

In June 1995, as part of these Downtown revitalization efforts, Municipal Council approved the implementation of a Downtown Rehabilitation and Redevelopment Grant program to provide financial relief to property owners who undertake Downtown revitalization efforts, with a minimum cost to the City. One of the primary reasons for designating the Downtown as a Community Improvement Area is to provide a legislative basis for implementing this program, through the community improvement provisions of the *Planning Act*. The approval of the Community Improvement Plan will also allow other similar programs to be developed to encourage Downtown revitalization. The Grant program is described below.

There will be an additional report developed to recommend the adoption of the grant program. This report may recommend changes to some of the specifics and "mechanics" of the program, based upon public input received, however, the principles of the program namely, that it provide an incentive to encourage the rehabilitation and redevelopment of the

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Downtown, will remain the same. Possible changes may include the type of projects that may be eligible for the grants.

This municipal assistance program would provide grant to property owners who undertake renovations or redevelopment to their properties that would result in a reassessment of the properties. The amount of the grant would be determined based upon the incremental increase in the municipal portion of taxes that resulted from the work being done, however, the grant would not be a grant of the municipal taxes. The amount of the grants provided would not exceed the value of the work done that resulted in the re-assessment. For this reason, the total value of the work done, plus the amount of the municipal portion of the taxes paid prior to, and after the redevelopment would have to be known.

It is proposed that this grant program will commence on January 1, 1996 and conclude on December 31, 2007. For the first three years of the program (January 1, 1996 to December 31, 1998), owners of participating properties will be able to avail of the full benefit available within the appropriate level. This is in recognition of the fact that it may take more than two years for some larger-scale projects to obtain financing and approvals in order to commence. Owners of properties participating in the grant program who apply in the third year of the program (1998) will still be eligible for the full grant term. Participants in later years (after December 31, 1998) of the program will only be able to avail of the benefit scheduled for that year, that is, the grant will be based upon the applicable percentage grant to be applied in that year, pursuant to the schedules outlined further in this report.

Under the program, properties that are re-assessed as a result of renovation, rehabilitation or redevelopment will be eligible to apply for a grant for a period of up to ten years following the work that would “trigger” a re-assessment. At the time of a building permit application, a property owner would register their intent to participate in the grant program. The amount of municipal taxes paid would be determined, and upon the completion of the works, the municipal taxes to be paid as a result of the re-assessment would be calculated. The difference between the municipal portion of the taxes prior to the works being undertake, and the taxes after the completion of the works shall be the portion eligible for a partial grant under this program. By using the building permit as the “trigger” for establishing the payment schedule for the program, the value of the rehabilitation/redevelopment work to be undertaken can also be determined. As indicated above, the total value of the grant will not exceed the value of the work done. At the building permit stage, the construction value of the project is known, since this is what establishes the cost of the permit.

The grant schedule will be calculated for a period of up to twelve years, with the amount of the grant decreasing over the period. The amount of the grant will vary, depending upon the nature of the rehabilitation/redevelopment project, that is, the level of the program that the property fits, and by the time period in which the property is rehabilitated/redeveloped.

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### ***Level 1: Rehabilitation of Designated Heritage Properties***

This level of the grant program would apply to Priority 1 buildings that are designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act* and are rehabilitation or renovated in such a way that would not compromise the reasons for designation. In addition to the provisions of the *Planning Act* and *Municipal Act*, the *Ontario Heritage Act*, Section 39, allows municipalities to make grants or loans to the owners of properties designated under the Act for “the purposes of paying for the whole or any part of the cost of alteration of such designated property.”

The purpose of this program would be to encourage the restoration and renovation of these designated buildings to ensure their long-term viability. It is anticipated that these grants would encourage property owners to invest in repairs and renovations to these properties.

Property owners would not be able to apply for loans under such City programs as the Façade Restoration Loan Program but could apply for Designated Property Grants provided by the Province and apply for London Endowment for Heritage grants (beginning in 1996). If a designated structure is demolished prior to the grant period, the grant would cease. Council should require repayment of the grant by owners who demolish properties that have received this tax grant, during the grant period.

The eligibility requirements for this level of the program would be as follows:

- a) Any property owner desiring to be considered for a grant under this program shall make an application in writing to the Municipal Council at the time of requesting a Building Permit;
- b) To qualify, property owners must satisfy the following conditions:
  - The property shall be listed as Priority 1 on the City’s *Inventory of Heritage Resources*;
  - The property shall be designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*;
  - The property shall be rehabilitated/renovated such that it will not compromise the reasons for designation. This can be determined, since a Heritage Alteration permit is required prior to undertaking any work on a designated property;
  - The amount of renovations undertaken shall be sufficient to result in a re-assessment of the property;
  - The total value of the grants provided under this program shall not exceed the value of the work done; and,

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- If the property is demolished before the grant period elapses it shall cause the grant to be forfeited and be repayable to the municipality. It is to be repaid on, or before, the first day of municipal tax collection following the sale of the property.

The grant schedule for this level of the program would equal 80% of the increase in the municipal portion of the taxes in year 1, decreasing to 70% in year 2, 60% in year 3, 50% in year 4, 40% in year 5, 30% in year 6, 20% in year 7, 10% in years 8 and 9, and pay the full amount of taxes in year 10. Year 1 will be January 1, 1998.

### ***Level 2: Rehabilitation / Renovation Grants***

This level of the grant program would apply to existing buildings that are rehabilitated or renovated to ensure their longer-term viability. The purpose of this level of grant is to further encourage the finer-grained, small-scale revitalization that has recently occurred in the Downtown, where buildings have been renovated for new uses such as restaurants and small stores. This level of Downtown revitalization has been cited in much of the literature reviewed for the Downtown Report as the primary means of ensuring long-term Downtown viability. Council would require repayment of the grant by owners who demolish properties that have received this tax rebate, during the rebate period. Property owners who participate in this program would not be able to apply for loans under such City programs as the Façade Restoration Loan Program.

The eligibility requirements for this level of the program would be as follows:

- a) Any property owner desiring to be considered for a grant under this program shall make an application in writing to the Municipal Council at the time of requesting a Building Permit;
- b) To qualify, property owners must satisfy the following conditions:
  - The property shall be rehabilitated/renovated such that it will be consistent with the Council-approved Downtown London Urban Design Guidelines, and the amount of renovations undertaken shall be sufficient to result in a re-assessment of the property.
  - The total value of the grants provided under this program shall not exceed the value of the work done; and,
  - If the property is demolished before the rebate period elapses it shall cause the grants to be forfeited and be repayable to the municipality. It is to be repaid on, or before, the first day of municipal tax collection following the sale of the property.

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The grant schedule for this level of the program would equal 70% of the increase taxes in year 1 (January 1, 1998), decreasing to 60% in year 2, 50% in year 3, 40% in year 4, 30% in year 5, 20 % in year 6, 15% in year 7, 10% in years 8 and 9, and pay the full amount of taxes in year 10.

In a report to follow on the Urban Design Guidelines, the definition of character areas, and other design issues in the Downtown. Also, to be address in this report is a confirmation of the Forks of the Thames as an important element of the Downtown. While officially outside the boundaries of the Downtown, the importance of the Forks as a part of the Downtown was recognized in the Urban Design Guidelines. This point should be reiterated, and opportunities to enhance the linkages between the Downtown and the River should be pursued.

### **3. *Downtown Residential Development***

The Community Improvement Plan identifies initiatives that have been undertaken or are proposed to be implemented to encourage residential development in the Downtown. The Community Improvement Plan, and the previous *Summary of Potential Strategies for Revitalizing London's Downtown* speak to the need to have a viable Downtown residential population. While Downtown serves a community-wide function, the day-to-day activity generated by a strong Downtown residential community is essential to a strong, viable Downtown.

Residential-specific initiatives include:

- Implementation of a Downtown Rehabilitation and Redevelopment Grant program that will provide economic incentives for residential development in existing and new structures.
- Removal of development charges for Downtown residential development.
- Removal of parking requirements in the zoning by-law for Downtown residential development.
- Waiving permit application fees for development in the Downtown.
- Identification of a Downtown Building Inspector, with expertise in the redevelopment and rehabilitation of the existing building stock in the Downtown.

Other initiatives that may further encourage Downtown residential development may be identified through the community improvement process.

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### **IX. SUMMARY**

The approval of Downtown Community Improvement Plan at this time will provide a legislative basis and context for some of the initiatives identified to foster Downtown revitalization. The Plan is intended to bring these efforts together within one document in order to ensure that the Downtown is dealt with in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, and that the initiatives identified can be directed towards community improvement.

Issues outside the purview of the Community Improvement Plan, but supportive of further Downtown revitalization, such as parking management and supply, by-law issues such as code enforcement, sidewalk cafes and sidewalk vendors, traffic circulation patterns, transit issues and policing, will be examined as part of the Downtown initiative previously identified.

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**APPENDIX A: BY-LAW DESIGNATING THE DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT AREA**

*(To be added upon adoption)*