

Are downtowns back?

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Ontario East Municipal Conference
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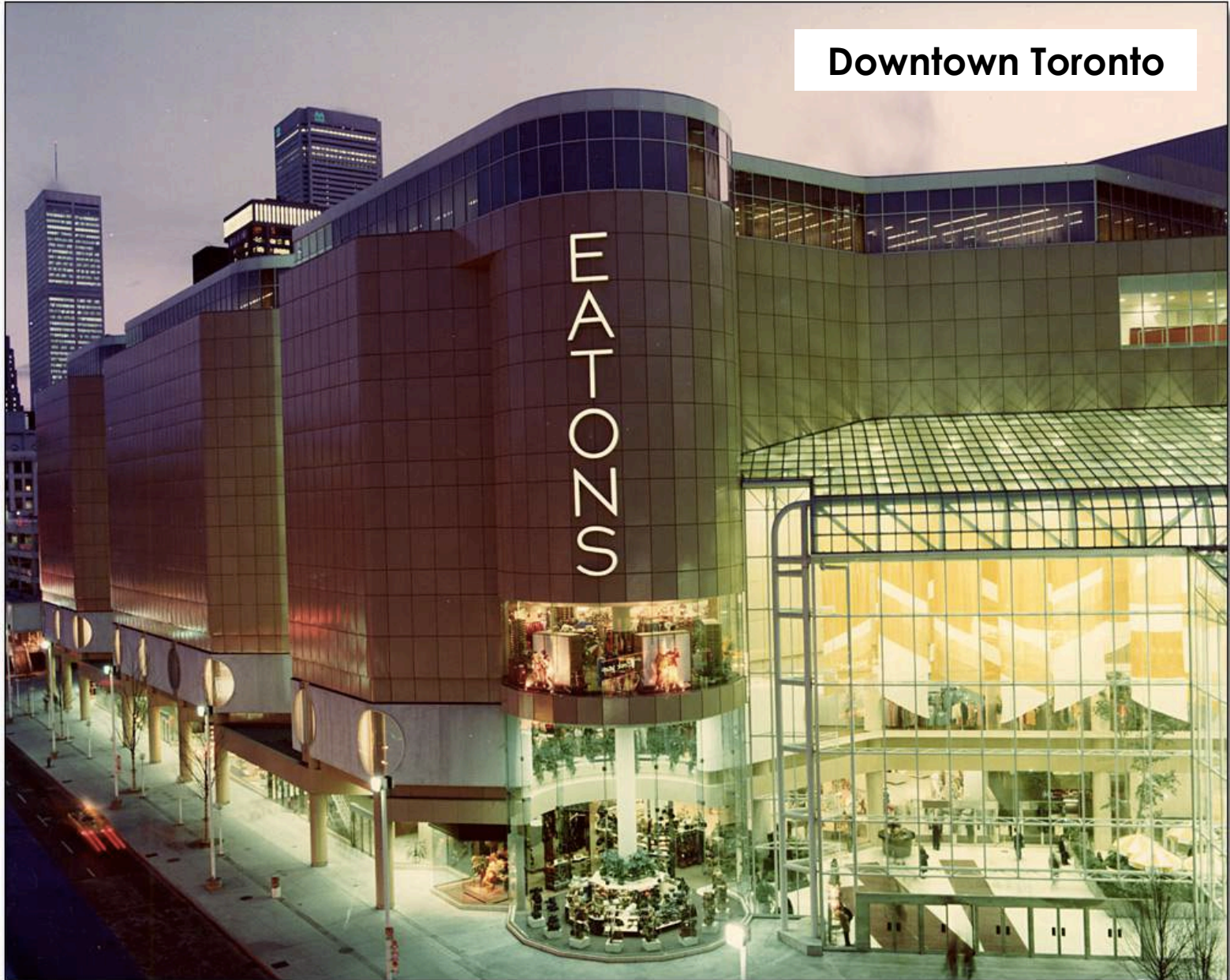
Presentation overview

- Downtown decline across Ontario (mid 20th century)
- Revitalization strategies (1970s-2000s)
- 21st Century case studies:
 - Midsized city downtowns
 - Small city downtowns
- Economic evolution
- “9 Strategies” for Downtown Revitalization
- Questions/discussion



Downtown Peterborough

Downtown Toronto



Downtown Guelph



Uptown Wheatley



THE WINDSOR STAR
from the vault

Downtowns

Common features:

- Important civic buildings + oldest buildings
- Public space
- Highest density = highest tax base
- Mixed uses (residential/commercial)
- “Heart” of a community
- Definitions - small and midsized

Downtowns



Downtown Gananoque, 1910

Downtowns were once the only commercial business district in the city.



Downtown Gananoque, 1950s



Mid-20th Century Trends:

1. Suburban living
2. Suburban retailing
3. Auto-dependency

1990-2000's: Suburban Retailing



Small and Midsized cities

Consumer and residential trends favouring the suburbs were most acutely felt in small and midsized city downtowns:

- Limited tax base in smaller municipalities.
- Consumer support for suburban residential development.
- Market-led development.
- Population and economic decline.
- Downtown decline.

1970-2000's Revitalization Strategies



Peterborough Square, Downtown Peterborough

1. Act like the suburbs, build malls:
 - Federal Urban Renewal Program
 - Ontario Downtown Renewal Program (ODRP)
 - Eatons was a key partner/anchor
2. 1970's Business Improvement Associations (BIAs) begin.
3. Big ticket investments e.g. arenas, performing arts centres.

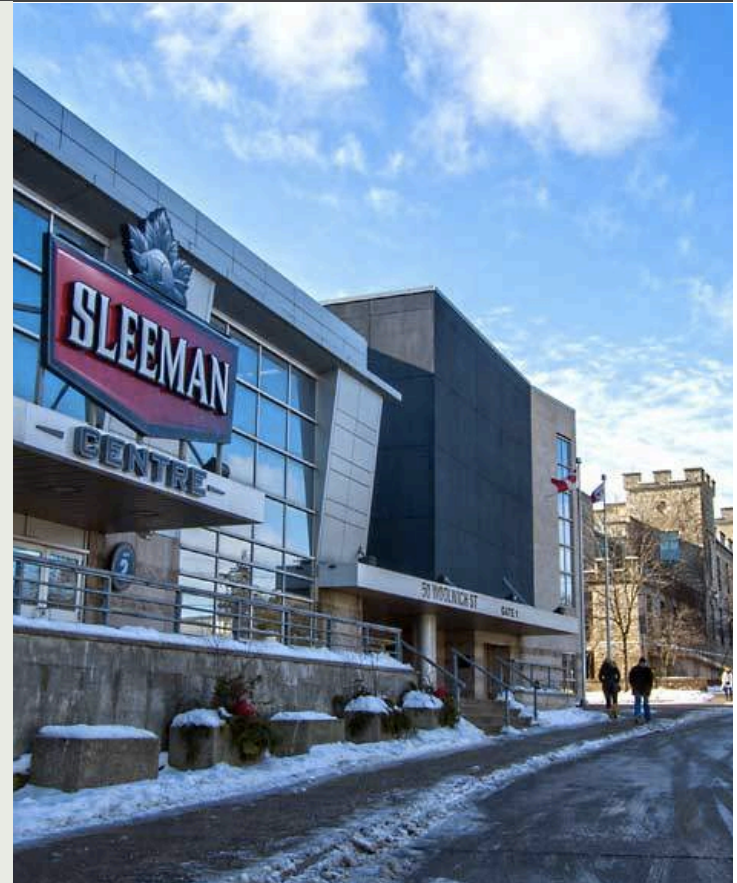
Revitalization backlash

One-off public investments.

No coordinated, overarching strategy.

Negative public response to downtown spending.

Limited private sector reciprocity.



Downtown arena, Guelph, Ontario



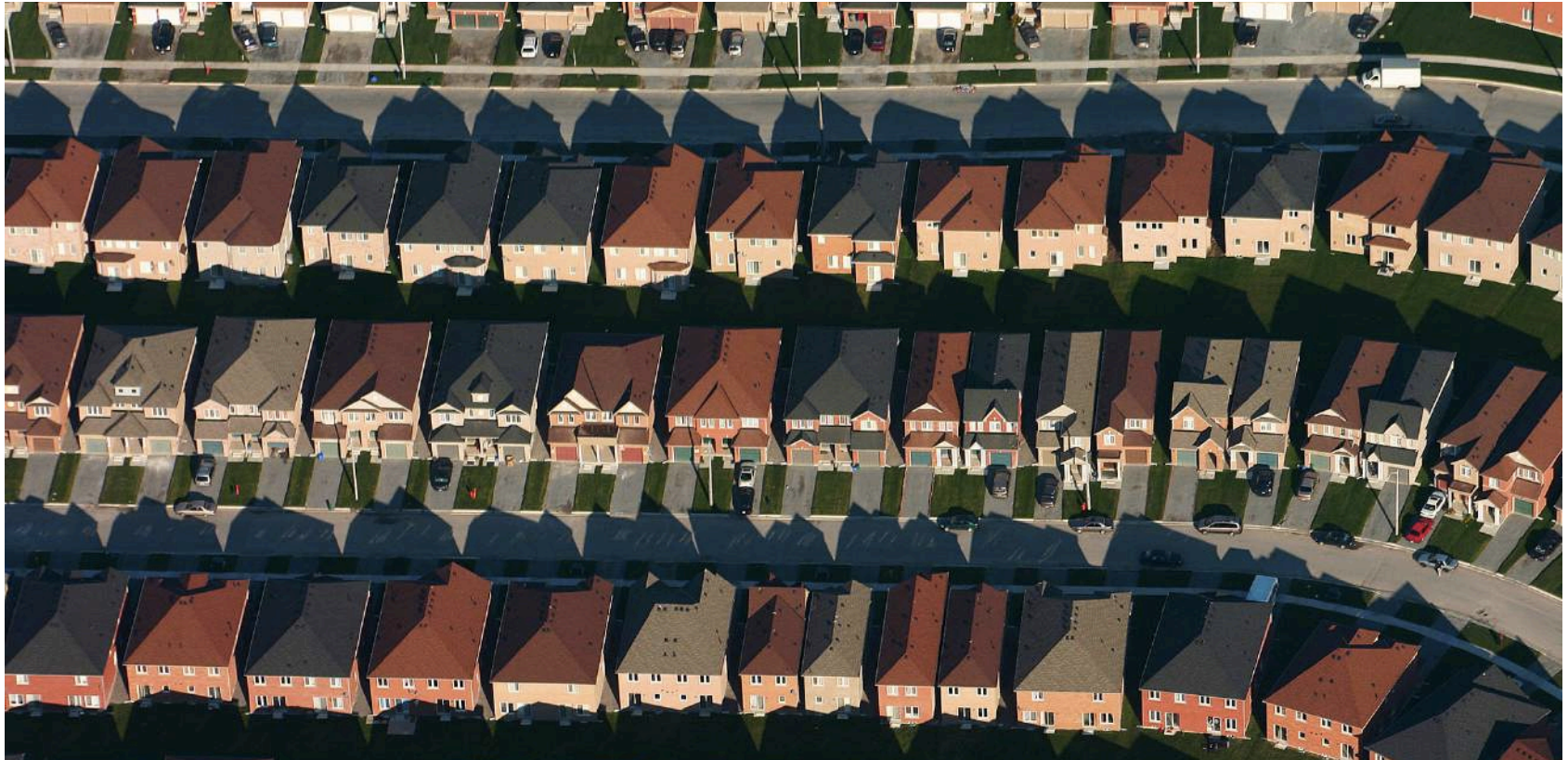
Downtown Guelph

Declining buildings, and vacant second-level apartments.



Highway 401

Extensive gridlock, insufficient public transit.



Markham, Ontario

Suburbs disconnected from downtowns.

Provincial Growth Plan + Trends

Province (2005/6)

- Renewed provincial attention to regional planning.
- Response to unchecked growth.
- Build up rather than out.
- Focus on complete communities.
- Creation of 25 urban growth centres (UGCs).

21st Century Trends

- Desire for walkable communities.
- Demographic shift: Boomers and Millennials.
- Shopping/supporting local businesses and institutions.
- Re-urbanization?

UGCs in midsize cities

Midsized cities (50,000-500,000) outside of the Greenbelt are a **key** part of the provincial growth plan:

- Outer ring to attract 150-200 jobs and people/hectare and absorb **900,000** new residents or 24% of 3.7M provincial goal by 2041.
- Outer ring to accommodate **370,000** jobs or 21% of 1.7M provincial goal (Neptis Foundation, 2013, p.21) by 2041.
- Eight of these UGCs are stand alone cities with history of dispersed suburban development and downtown decline.
- Limited benefits from GTA 'spillover'.
- Limited city planning experience with intensification projects.

Urban Growth Centres In the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) Study Area



Two midsize city case studies

- Municipal incentives are proving to be a catalyst for residential and commercial growth in midsize cities.
- The growth plan is showing early signs of stitching together past investments that are leading downtown renewal.



Why incentivize?

Tool under the Planning Act to allow cities to create financial incentives for private developments.

- Community Improvement Plan (CIP) for a designated area.
- Goal of increasing assessment via intensification:
 - Attract commercial/residential
 - Protect heritage properties
 - Clean up and activate contaminated sites



Façade Grant, Downtown Guelph

Downtown Guelph

Community Improvement Plan

- Façade Improvement Grants
- Major Downtown Activation Grant (Tax Increment Grants)
- Downtown Feasibility Grants Minor
- Downtown Activation Grant
- Various Brownfield Grants

Projects

- River House/River Mill Condos
- Metalworks Condos
- Petrie Building

Municipal/public investment:

- Transit hub (GO Station)
- Market Square

Downtown Guelph: Mixed Use

Petrie Building



River Mill Condos



Metalworks Condos

Downtown Peterborough

Community Improvement Plan:

- Façade Improvement Grants
- Central Area Revitalization Grant (Tax Increment Financing)
- Brownfields Tax Assistance Program (TAP)
- Municipal Incentive Grant
- Residential Conversion and Intensification Grant

Key Projects

- Hunter Street East/West projects.
- City of Peterborough is also:
 - Waiving Development Charges
 - Heritage Property Tax Relief

Downtown Peterborough: Mixed-use + Facades



127 Hunter Street, proposed mixed use development



Hunter Street, mixed use building



Example, Façade Improvement Grant

Parking Lot....



Rendering Urban Park (Louis Street)



Memorial Gardens @ 1970s....



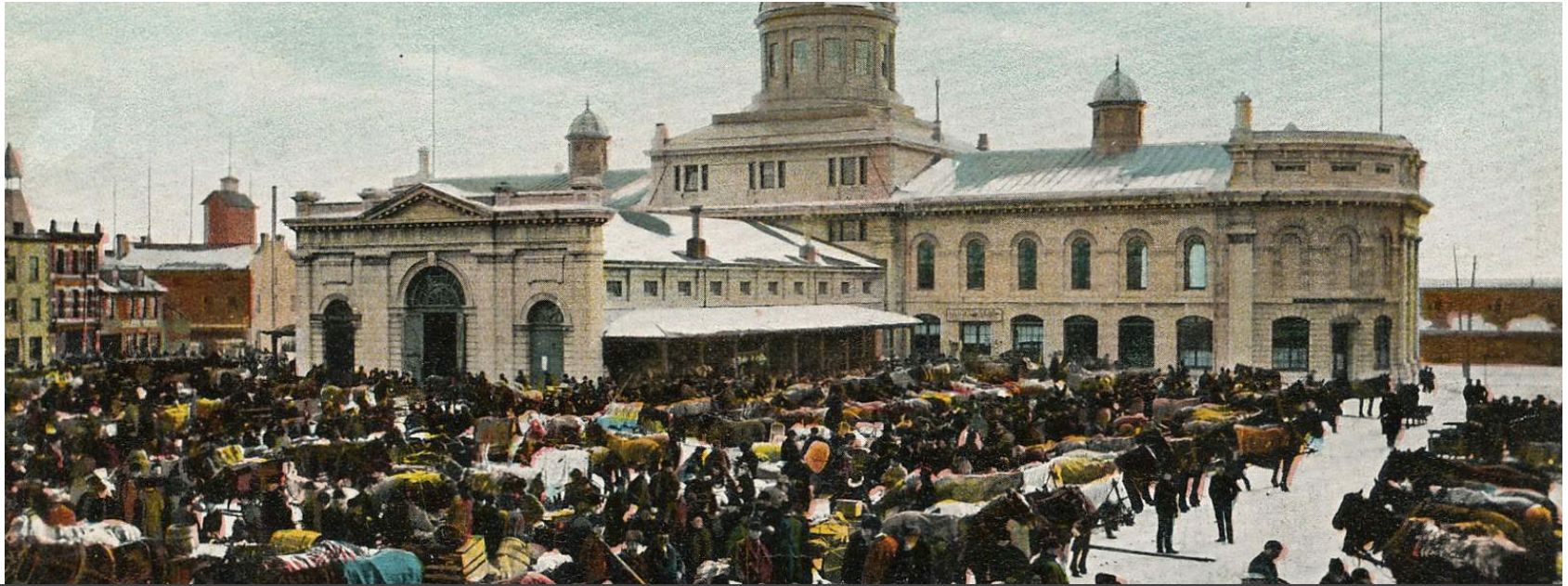
Becomes Market Square @ 2013





“The best street in downtown Guelph: Carden Street’s finally worth raving about”

Guelph Mercury, August 25, 2013



Downtown Kingston, @1910

Historic downtown market



Downtown Kingston @2015

Farmers market/skating rink

Drivers of midsize city re-urbanization

- Provincial planning targets
- Putting **people** first – residential development
- Developing **local** planning solutions (pre-zoning and incentives)
- Cultivating relationships with **developers**.
- Trend toward buying local, complete communities and active transportation.
- Market and demographic changes.

Three key partners

1. City hall:
 - ▣ Planners + Economic Development departments.
 - ▣ Council: plan beyond 4 year cycles.
2. Community:
 - ▣ Liaise/consult.
 - ▣ Respond to NIMBYism.
 - ▣ Incentives = investment.
3. Private sector:
 - ▣ Work with development industry.
 - ▣ Work with BIAs.



Business Improvement Associations

- First founded in the 1970s in Canada.
- Response to suburban retailing.
- Key activities: promotion, events, beautification and advocacy.
- Over 300 in Ontario (2/3 in small and midsize cities)
- Tool under the Municipal Act, requires approval from the city and province.
- Funded by a tax levy on property owners within a defined boundary.
- Usually in a downtown area.
- Governed by a Board of Management.



“DBIA right to push for downtown health unit”

Peterborough Examiner, January 22, 2014



“Downtown BIA test indoor farmers market in Old Quebec Street”

Guelph Mercury, January 30, 2014



“Not everyone loves Salsa: St. Clair street festival a nightmare for some businesses”

Globe and Mail, July 18, 2014



“Kennedy Road BIA members donate cash and toys to Toronto Policy holiday toy drive”

Scarborough Mirror, December 14, 2014

Town of Bancroft

- Population 3,880
(Statistics Canada, 2011).
- Bancroft BIA:
 - Events
 - Promotions
 - Communication with members
- Partnership with Town of Bancroft.

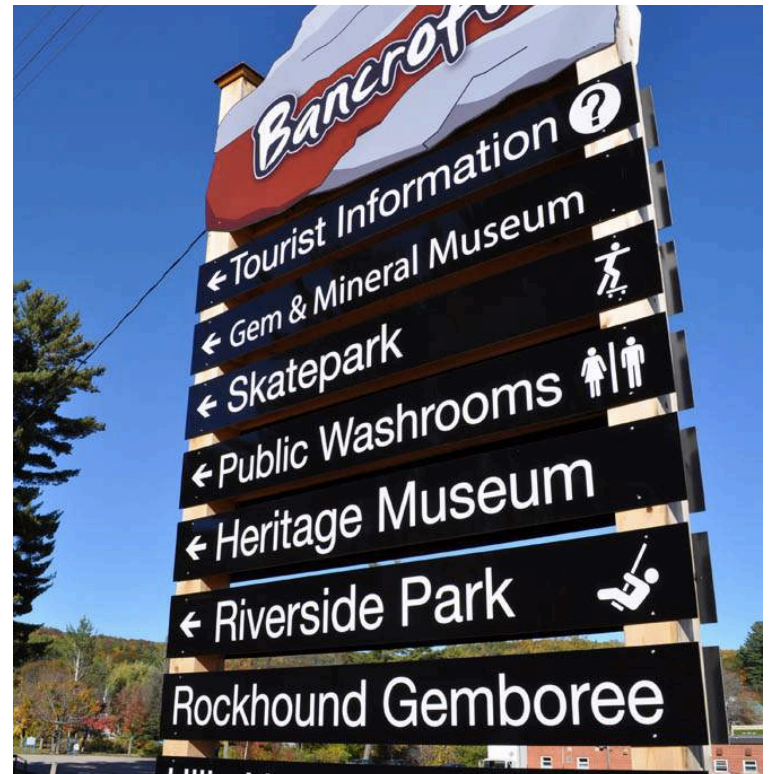


Beautification project, downtown Bancroft

Bancroft BIA



Heritage street banners



Signage project

Bancroft BIA: Special Events



Wheels, Water and Wings

Bancroft: Façades before and after

1 Bancroft Dairy / Current Building

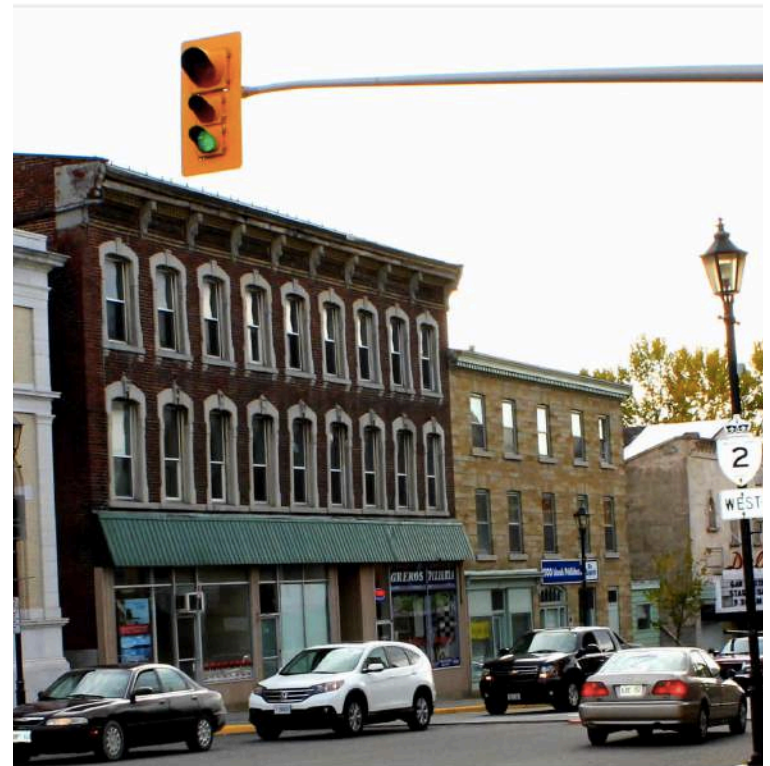


1 Bancroft Dairy / Facade Improvement (Board and batten painted Barn Red)



Downtown Gananoque

- Population 5,195 (Statistics Canada, 2011).
- Town façade improvement program.
- BIA focus on marketing.
- Collective actions:
 - Brewery hosts events with restaurant partners.
 - “We are better together than apart”, BIA Marketing Manager.





“Axleworks” Gananoque, Ontario

“We bought the building in a bank sale...and created our own destination in downtown Gan”, Owner, the Axleworks Building.

Other Development



A former declining building becomes a micro-brewery in downtown Gananoque

Economic Transition

- Mid 20C decline of the manufacturing economy as production goes global.
- Rise of the knowledge economy (or new economy, creative economy).
 - Defined as an economy where knowledge and innovation drives economic growth.
 - Relies on highly skilled workers, and an educated labour force (Drucker, 1969).
- The manufacturing economy once shaped cities, how is the knowledge economy shaping cities?

“Creative” industries

- Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings: lofts, post-secondary institutions.
- Cities will have to compete for the knowledge industry/workers.
- Cities that provide a high quality of life and diverse amenities are better able to attract the creative class (Florida, 2002); and this makes it easier to companies to locate in these cities (Blair and Carroll, 2009).



So, what about small cities?

- Knowledge economy is seen as “big city” clustering.
 - Silicon Valley
 - Mars Innovation District (Toronto)
- Consider:
 - Quality of life in smaller centres.
 - Real estate prices.
 - Role of technology.
- Emerging research on the role of business incubation and co-working in small cities.



What are smaller downtowns doing?

- Creating co-working spaces.
- Liaising with universities/colleges and Chambers of Commerce.
- Funding/incubating new businesses.
- Fostering the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Coworking, downtown Peterborough



What people are saying...

“Coworking spaces are fantastic for the economies of midsized cities – they provide an ecosystem for small businesses to flourish, grow and succeed in ways that are would not possible working alone.”

“It [coworking] is vital. Large businesses do not fuel these towns, and they are then too important to the economy if they fail [large businesses].”

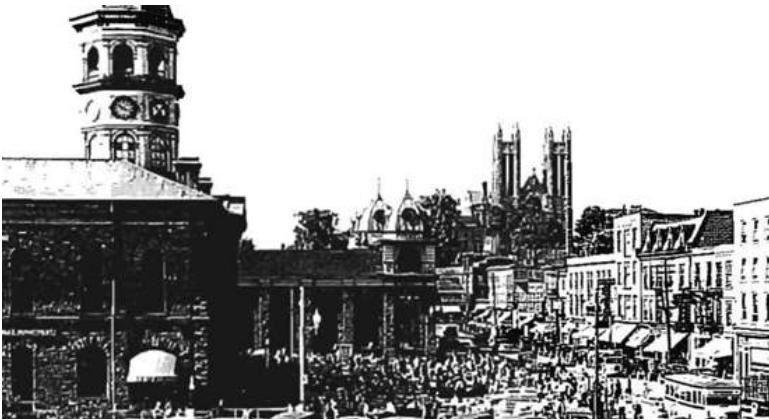
“[Coworking spaces] provide flexibility for new businesses to launch.”

“...there is a lot of empty space commercially....However, there is little in the way of high quality, affordable office space. We want to shape the face of entrepreneurship in this town...Like many other midsized towns we have high unemployment, so advancing entrepreneurialism with social impact could make a big difference.”

9 downtown revitalization strategies

1. Foster **Public + Private** partnerships.
2. Create and empower **BIAs**.
3. Develop **Community Improvement Plans** (CIPs).
4. Tap into **local assets** (there's no "one-size-fits-all" solution).
5. Celebrate **heritage**.
6. Welcome **newcomers**.
7. Cultivate **entrepreneurship**.
8. Find and support **local champion/s**.
9. Take **incremental** steps toward improvement.

Are downtowns back?



Thank you...questions?

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Research focus:

- Small and midsize city downtowns.
- Small city economic development strategies.
- Always looking for new case study cities.