



DOWNTOWNS CANADA: A FEDERAL AGENDA

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1954, the International Downtown Association (IDA) has more than 550 member organizations worldwide including: North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. IDA is a world leader and champion for vital and livable urban centres. Through its network of committed individuals, rich body of knowledge and unique capacity to nurture community building partnerships, IDA is a guiding force in creating healthy and dynamic centres that anchor the well-being of towns, cities and regions in the world.



ABOUT DOWNTOWNS CANADA

Downtowns Canada is a national coalition of the International Downtown Association. **Downtowns Canada was established to provide leadership from the Canadian members of IDA on issues critical to Canadian urban centres.** We are made up of business improvement areas from across the nation.



Founding members are listed below:

Downtown Calgary

Downtown Charlottetown

Downtown Fredericton

Downtown Halifax

Downtown Hamilton BIA

Downtown Kingston

Downtown London

Downtown Rideau

Downtown Saskatoon

Downtown Vancouver BIA

Downtown Victoria

Downtown Windsor BIA

Downtown Winnipeg Biz

Downtown Yonge BIA

Regina Downtown BID

St. Catharines Downtown Assoc.

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The International Downtown Association would like to thank Kadie Ward of Build Strong Cities Corp. for her contribution to this report.



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"Canada is home to the very first Business Improvement Area (BIA) established in 1970, which gave rise to a global industry aimed at revitalizing urban centres. We continue to see growing interest in leveraging the expertise of public space management organizations as a key resource for improving the economic, social, and environmental health in society. By convening a timely national policy discussion and delivering this report, Downtowns Canada further illustrates how Canadian downtown management professionals are blazing the trail for a more prosperous future for everyone. Congratulations on a job well done, and thank you for working to improve cities across Canada."

David T. Downey, CAE, President and CEO, International Downtown Association

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



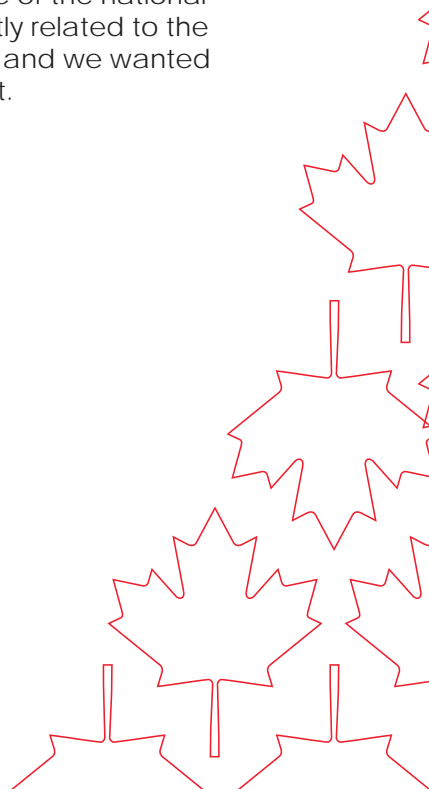
STEFANO GRANDE

We are Downtowns Canada, a national coalition of the International Downtown Association representing organizations across the country that manage Canada's business districts, making them vital places in the nation's identity and key centres of growth in our economy.

Downtowns Canada believes the federal government should play a stronger leadership role and further coordinate agency actions to strengthen business neighbourhoods and city cores. The federal government should prioritize program funding aimed at reinvestment in our urban cores, and work collaboratively with local governments and organizations to provide research and data to support the development of effective policy and legislation.

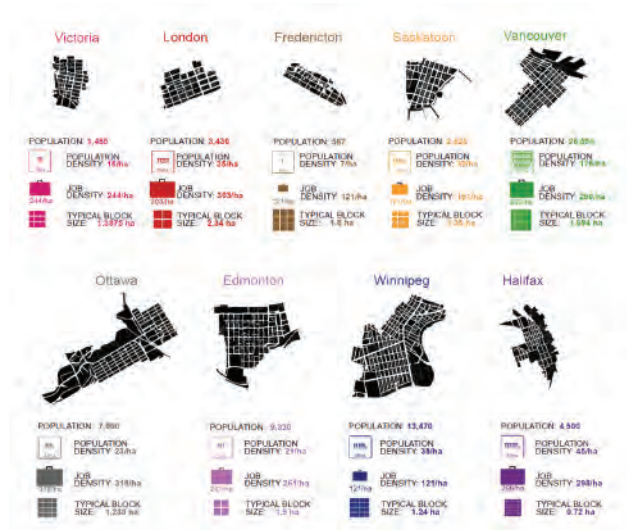
Downtowns are the economic and cultural hubs of Canadian cities. Downtowns generally occupy less than 1% of the land area within an entire city and yet they attract an average of 20% of citywide construction value. Downtowns are dense in size and their success plays a vital role in the economic health of the area, and Canada overall. According to the Conference Board of Canada, Canada's hub cities are a driving force of the national economy. The economic health of cities is directly related to the well-being of the city's core. Downtowns matter and we wanted aspiring elected officials to tell us their views on it.

Stefano Grande
Chair of Downtowns Canada
IDA Vice-Chair
Downtown Winnipeg BIZ Executive Director

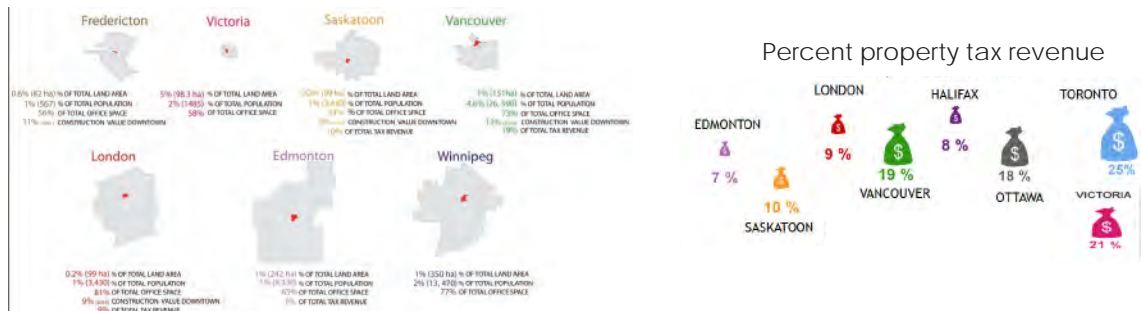


WHY DOWNTOWNS MATTER TO CANADA

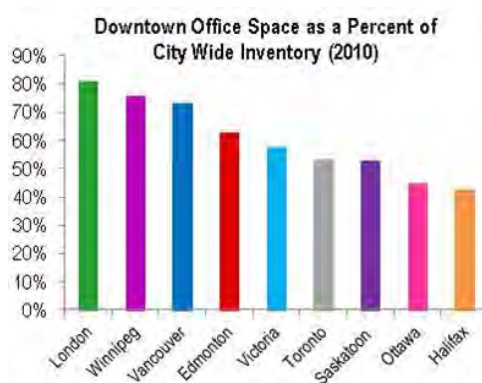
Downtowns have a high-density of jobs, and are centres of employment



Downtowns are 1-2% total land area but can generate 10-25% of city's total tax base, they are sustainable economic engines



Downtowns maintain a strong commercial/office space position within cities and regions



DOWNTOWNS CANADA ALL-CANDIDATES SURVEY AND RESPONSE BY PARTY

PROJECT SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

In light of the federal election and with a goal of elevating the importance of urban issues within the public policy discussions, Downtowns Canada mobilized 17 cities across the country to engage with federal candidates to let them know urban issues are election issues.

DOWNTOWNS CANADA AREAS OF FOCUS & SURVEY

In an earlier consultation with BIAs and BIDs across the country¹, four key concerns related to downtown revitalization and management were identified:

1. National Infrastructure/reinvestment;
2. National social justice policy;
3. National affordable and social housing (with mental health and addictions support);
4. Economic development.

Downtowns Canada administered an *All Candidates Survey* in 15 cities (coast-to-coast) across Canada. The survey asked questions directly related to aforementioned concerns, asking federal candidates to rank the importance of these issues, and define how their party intends to address them through policy and programs.

The survey was sent to candidates in 15 cities across Canada with the goal of obtaining responses from one candidate in each political party. With a total pool of 60 candidates, 20 responded to the call: 7 Liberal, 6 Green, 6 NDP, 1 Other, 0 Conservative.

Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and Business Improvement District (BIDs) organizations in six of those 15 cities also hosted *Town Hall All Candidates Debates* during the week of September 16th – 22nd, 2015. These debates engaged federal candidates on similar topics including transit and transportation, cost of housing, safe streets and crime, and general urban infrastructure.

Responses from the *All Candidates Survey* and notes from the *Town Hall All Candidates Debates* were compiled. This report highlights the main themes, comments, and feedback from both federal candidates by political parties. We want to thank the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) for their leadership in drafting *A Blueprint for Cities*. Insights from FCM's Blueprint were used in our outreach, and are included in this report.

Below we report on the candidates' responses on issues that impact central business districts across the country. Downtowns Canada invites you, the reader, to consider these findings and the information on the value strong urban centers bring to our nation's economy while entering the polls on October 19, 2015.

¹The Value of Investing in Canadian Downtowns, Canadian Urban Institute, 2012

²Participating cities: See Downtownscanada.com

INFRASTRUCTURE:

Public infrastructure is the backbone of our economy and quality of life, but after decades of underinvestment, Canada is only just beginning to confront its "infrastructure deficit," a backlog of delayed repairs and construction that hurts every Canadian and business. For 25 years Canadians have watched the symptoms of the infrastructure deficit grow: rusting bridges, crumbling roads, and drinking water warnings. Safe, modern infrastructure boosts tourism and investment, makes communities more livable, creates jobs and beautifies our cities.

It's time to get down to work. Municipalities are able to get shovels in the ground quickly, and improve the framework that people and businesses rely upon on a daily basis. Increasing the amount of dedicated federal funding for core municipal infrastructure by \$1.5 billion annually would create local jobs, drive national growth, and protect the quality of life of Canadians.³

With this in mind, Downtowns Canada asked:

Question: There is a need for an increased commitment with continued and sustained resources from the Government of Canada to work with municipalities to assist in critical initiatives related to deteriorating municipal infrastructure in the downtowns. What is your party's position or policy on funding municipal infrastructure deficit?

CONSERVATIVE:

No Response.

GREEN:

The Green Party is committing up to \$6.4 billion per year (one point of the GST) to municipal infrastructure in an effort to provide stable, long-term funding to Canadian municipalities. They commit to creating a Canadian Infrastructure Bank to provide innovative financing and investment partnerships for municipal infrastructure projects. Looking more broadly at the issue, the Green Party will redress the fiscal imbalance facing municipalities. Finally, the Green Party has a vision for support for municipalities that includes fiscal tools such as increasing the gas tax transfer to municipalities to 5% and allowing municipalities to issue Municipal Registered Retirement Savings Plan Bonds that can be RRSPs or self-directed RRSPs.

LIBERAL:

The Liberal party is claiming a commitment to the largest new infrastructure investment in Canadian history, with a plan to nearly double federal infrastructure investment to almost \$125 billion – from the current \$65 billion – over the next decade, reaching an additional \$9.5 billion by year 10. Through new financial tools and increased transparency of the New Building Canada Fund, the Liberals will provide dedicated funding to provinces, territories, and municipalities for infrastructure priorities: public transit, social infrastructure – including affordable housing and seniors facilities, early learning and child care, and cultural and recreational infrastructure, green infrastructure – including local and wastewater facilities, climate resilient infrastructure, and clean energy. Liberals are committed to the creation of a new Canada Infrastructure Bank.

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP):

The NDP commits to investing the equivalent of one additional cent of the existing gas tax into municipal infrastructure. This additional funding in the first year is planned to grow into an additional \$1.5 billion invested at the end of first mandate. Transit has also been identified as a priority with \$1.3 billion earmarked for investment in transit. The NDP also recognizes that municipalities have different priorities, and strives to respect local decision-making on priorities. Therefore, their approach will be to provide stable long-term funding, rather than complicated "one-off" project application processes, to help municipalities meet the individual needs of that community.

³Blueprint for Cities, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

HOUSING:

Access to affordable housing is critical to the health, well-being, and economic prosperity of every community. Houses are getting more expensive and rents are on the rise. There is a shrinking number of lower-rent options. Many of the existing social housing units are at risk of having to increase the rent as long-term federal government subsidy agreements end.⁴

Canadians are in a housing crunch. Investing in housing affordability is an economic and social imperative that will pay forward. Cities are ready to work with other levels of government to create a stable and secure housing system no matter where Canadians live.

With this in mind, Downtowns Canada asked:

Question: What is your party's position or policy on developing a national affordable/social housing strategy that addresses municipal and urban needs?

CONSERVATIVE:

No Response.

GREEN:

The Green Party will implement a National Housing Strategy based on Housing First principles to address the needs of homeless people. This strategy will encompass increased social housing transfers for provincial, territorial, and municipal governments through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). Green MPs will also call for the appointment of a Minister of Housing to oversee the development and implementation of such a strategy, which would see 20,000 new and 8,000 rehabilitated affordable housing units built each year for the next decade. We will provide rent supplements or shelter assistance for an additional 40,000 low-income households per year, for 10 years. The Green Party plans to subsidize private developers to include a percentage of affordable housing in their housing projects.

LIBERAL:

The Liberal Party is committed to a National Housing Strategy that makes direct investments in affordable housing, provides tax incentives to expand affordable rental housing, and offers more flexibility for new home buyers. The Liberals commit to a new, 10-year investment of nearly \$20 billion in social infrastructure and prioritize those dollars for affordable housing and seniors facilities. They will direct CMHC and the new Canada Infrastructure Bank to support private construction of affordable rental housing for low-income Canadians. They will conduct an inventory of all available federal lands and buildings that could be repurposed and made available at low cost for affordable housing projects. A Liberal government will also modernize the existing Home Buyers' Plan so that it helps more Canadians finance the purchase of a safe and healthy home.

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP):

The NDP will reinstate a federal government commitment to a national affordable/social housing strategy by enacting the Affordable Housing Act, a bill that will recognize housing as a right calls for the development of a national housing strategy. They will sustain investment in Canada's affordable housing agreements, and provide incentives for the construction of 10,000 affordable and market rental housing units. The NDP is committed to renewing cooperative agreements that are set to expire and invest over \$2 billion in co-ops and social housing by 2020.

⁴Blueprint for Cities, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

TRANSIT & TRANSPORTATION:

Most people think of time spent in traffic as time wasted. Reducing gridlock through public transit in our nation's downtown districts is a triple win – a win for quality of life, for the economy and for the environment.

It is no coincidence that some of the most dynamic cities in the world - those that are great places to live and engines for their national economies - have some of the very best rapid transit systems.

People want to work hard, and then have time to relax with family and friends. They don't want traffic congestion or long commutes.

Canada's cities are committed to reducing traffic and increasing available transit. Maintaining \$1 billion per year in permanent, dedicated federal funding for municipal public transit projects will contribute to keeping people and ideas moving.⁵

With this in mind, Downtowns Canada asked:

Question: What is your party's position or policy on developing a national transit strategy that addresses municipal and urban needs?

CONSERVATIVE:

No Response.

GREEN:

The Green Party is committed to developing a National Transportation Strategy with all levels of government and working with municipalities to focus zoning to encourage more family-friendly housing development close to transit stops, tying land use and density to transportation capacity. They will invest \$6.4 billion a year in municipal infrastructure which can be used for transit. Investment priorities include increasing existing federal funding to stimulate a massive re-investment in public transportation, pedestrian, cycle and car-sharing infrastructure in all Canadian towns and cities.

LIBERAL:

The Liberals commit to more than tripling the federal investment in public transit over the next four years, and over ten years, quadruple it. Funding will be flexible to the requirements of municipalities, in order to maximize the number of public transit projects that are built in Canada. The Liberal Party is committed to working directly with our municipalities to (1) ensure that they have the money they need to keep public transit in good repair and (2) build new transit infrastructure to accommodate current and future demands. A Liberal government will quadruple federal investment in public transit by investing almost \$20 billion in new money over the next decade.

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP):

The NDP has drafted the Better Transit Plan that will tackle gridlock, and cut commute times, by the end of their first term. By the end of their first term, they are committed to transferring \$1.3 billion in annual funding to municipalities for transit investment, with municipalities having greater flexibility in using the gas tax transfer to address transit priorities. They will assign an extra cent of the gas tax uniquely to infrastructure needs on roads and bridges. Their national transit strategy is a component of their Urban Agenda, and will provide long-term stable funding for the next 20 years.

⁵ Blueprint for Cities, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

SAFETY & CRIME PREVENTION:

Over the past 30 years, policing duties have been shifted onto municipalities from other orders of government. Municipalities pay more than 60 per cent of Canada's policing costs, including \$600 million worth of federal policing around border security, international drug trafficking and cyber crime.⁶

Policing and public safety is the fastest-growing cost for municipalities - surpassing even health care - and now exceeds 20 per cent of spending. Without a new approach, these costs will push property taxpayers to the breaking point and crowd out other essential services.

With this in mind, Downtowns Canada asked:

Question: What is your party's position or policy on developing a national crime prevention strategy that addresses municipal and urban needs?

CONSERVATIVE:

No Response.

GREEN:

The Green approach to crime prevention is multi-faceted, acknowledging these realities and taking account of the myriad socioeconomic factors that influence crime. We will establish an independent Law Reform Commission to report to Parliament on all proposed changes to the Criminal Code. Crime prevention initiatives must balance national objectives with local imperatives. A variety of initiatives, like a Guaranteed Livable Income and support for restorative justice, could strengthen communities across Canada, particularly those struggling with a young population with few social and economic opportunities. Community police are also an invaluable resource and critical component of any effective crime prevention strategy. Canadian municipalities need financial support to help them expand community policing and to ensure that their forces properly reflect the diverse population of Canada (as should the RCMP).

LIBERAL:

Liberal Party is committed to evidence-based policies and projects that reduce crime and increase public safety. The Liberals will take a proactive role with a range of measures across several federal government departments, including health and justice. The Liberals understand the need to address the root causes of crime to see real results. Through collaboration and partnerships with provincial and municipal governments, the Liberals will contribute to developing programs and investing in projects that give our communities the tools that they need to deal with the root causes of crime at the local level, such as addictions, family violence, and mental health.

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP):

The NDP are committed to working with the provinces, territories, municipalities and First Nations communities to provide stable, multi-year funding to reach a goal of at least 2,500 new police officers on the streets, and keep them there permanently. The NDP will also re-launch the Police Officer Recruitment Fund with an investment of \$250 million over the next four years, followed by \$100 million in annual ongoing funding.

⁶ Blueprint for Cities, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTION SERVICES:

According to new findings from a study by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, mental health problems and illnesses cost the Canadian economy \$48.5 to 51 billion every year. As The Canadian Mental Health Commission has stated: "Ultimately there is a need to invest more resources and strategically to help improve the well-being of people with lived mental health experience across Canada."

The economic impact of mental health problems, addictions and illnesses is witnessed in our Downtowns and urban centres daily.

Increased preventative approaches are needed to create a safe environment where all citizens' needs can be addressed.

With this in mind, Downtowns Canada asked:

Question: What is your party's position or policy on developing mental health and addiction resources that address municipal and urban needs?

CONSERVATIVE:

No Response.

GREEN:

Greens believe a comprehensive approach to mental health and addiction is needed, and will advocate to extend the mandate of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. They will also increase funding transfers for non-institutionalized mental health patients to provide community-based support, outpatient, and inpatient care by mental health practitioners, especially in rural Canada. For drug addiction, we can no longer maintain the myth that criminalization will end addiction. We must invest in harm reduction, following the successful, and constitutional, Insite model. Part of their strategy will be to reinstate the Canada Health Accord and expand public health care services and funding to include mental health and addiction.

LIBERAL:

The Liberal party has a policy on a National Framework for Mental Health and they would create a new office of a national mental health ombudsperson who will issue an annual report for parliament on the status of mental health and mental health care in Canada. The Liberals would prioritize working with the provinces, territories, municipalities and Indigenous peoples to prevent mental illness, expand access to care and recovery services and support, and combat the stigma of mental illness, as well as ensure that there is stable and predictable funding available to provinces for health services.

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP):

The NDP have been calling for a National Strategy on Dementia to help address the mental health challenges of Canada's aging population. They also recognize that addressing mental health issues with younger Canadians is vital to life-long mental health. The NDP has committed \$10 million for expanded research and collaboration between healthcare providers, and \$15 million for health care providers and community mental health associations to reduce wait times. NDP government will negotiate stable, long-term health care funding for the provinces.

OVERALL SURVEY IMPRESSIONS

Considering that Canada is one of the most urban nations in the world, it remains a stunning omission how dialogue about urban issues has been missing from most federal elections. Elections are not always about the most important issues, but issues arising from political parties themselves, the media, and the constituents. Either urban issues have simply not been on the radar, or there has been no connection between those issues and Federal leadership.

The 2015 election may signal a dramatic new emphasis on the importance of our centre cities. Social media has certainly identified the need for a national urban agenda. Traditional media, particularly in the larger markets, has begun to do the same. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Big Cities Mayors Caucus have brought attention to the need for a better relationship between the Federal Government and cities.

The work of Downtowns Canada, though of a more modest scale, has brought even more focus to this discussion. Each political party has at least one policy perspective that aligns with the Downtowns Canada *Downtown Declaration* found on the website at <http://bit.ly/1MHH7vI>. A great bit of momentum is building and we can only hope that by the next election, the major parties will be fighting to see who has the strongest urban agenda.

“The economic health of cities is directly related to the well-being of the city’s core.”



DOWNTOWNS CANADA RESPONSE & RECOMMENDATIONS

While overall the candidates of all parties supported general investment in municipalities across Canada, we believe there is more room for commitment and collaboration from the Federal government. We are calling for a federal initiative from the political parties to engage central business districts in Canada's federal economic agenda.

A FEDERAL INITIATIVE CAN:

- **Coordinate** and provide **leadership** amongst federal ministries and agencies, between provinces/municipalities and at the academic level;
- Provide **funding** (and tax incentives) in priority areas that are critical to urban development and vitality;
- Initiate focused **research** and **data collection** on downtown statistics, nationally and regionally based on research and data, and initiate policy directions;
- Implement **legislation** in areas where the Federal government has authority (example: *Criminal Code* amendments).

POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES SHOULD NOT BE AFRAID TO:

- Take a leadership role and focus on successful strategies;
- Initiate policy discussions on key downtown, urban issues;
- Initiate or fund research to support policy development and to assist downtown communities;
- Legislate when and where it can within its authority;
- Fund and incent the critical infrastructure deficit.

To advocate for a federal initiative from the political parties to engage central business districts in Canada's federal economic agenda, we've organized our recommendations by themes.



DOWNTOWNS CANADA PLATFORM RECOMMENDATIONS BY THEME:

1. DOWNTOWN INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSIT REINVESTMENT

Coordination and Leadership

- Lead a National Transit Strategy and a National Urban Development Strategy focusing on land use and the economy, while not funding transit that does not support sustainability.
- Foster cooperation between provinces and cities nationally on infrastructure rejuvenation approaches, funding and implementation.
- Ensure Federal ministries that touch on urban issues have a cross-ministry approach to support downtowns.

Funding

- Fund transit and infrastructure with a focus on downtowns and city centres.
- Ensure regional economic development funding programmes such as ACOA and Western Diversification are coordinated and focus on urban areas.
- Continue to work with FCM, Big City Mayors and provinces to ensure development of new adequate and stable funding for municipalities (example: a share of GST from urban areas must return to urban areas).

Research

- Take leadership in establishing the research base for triple-bottom-line best practices and analysis of all infrastructure spending – Economic, Environmental, Social.
- Direct Statistics Canada to develop a focus of research on downtown urban population, economic, housing, permit and crime trends.
- Study the impacts of downloading of legislative requirements on municipalities and their ability to reinvest in capital infrastructure.
- Create centres of research on urban core design and infrastructure issues.



Policy

- Develop the policy basis for the National Transit Strategy.
- Develop the policy basis for the National Urban Development Strategy focused on core development.
- Establish targets and goals nationally for sustainability and environmental improvement in urban areas with urban cores as a focus. Downtowns can be models for sustainable practice.
- Establish policy based on research (see above) into effective higher density, residential and mixed use development.
- Set policy that establishes tri-level urban development agreements as the norm for funding models in urban centres.

2. NATIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY: SAFE STREETS

Coordination and Leadership

- Tracking, recording and supporting successful local programs and initiatives in social justice, crime prevention, early intervention, youth programming and education.
- Support social justice outreach programs and ensure these are not clustered but are decentralized to provide services to those in need, without creating areas of high concentration.
- Continue to pressure provinces and cities on policing strategies and service levels.
- Through HRDC, increase youth work programs and training, ensure BIA's/BID's have priority access to job creation programs.
- Encourage national social welfare organizations such as the United Way and Salvation Army to develop programs that assist with social issues within urban commercial areas.
- Require local police forces to undertake mandatory training for addressing vulnerable populations with mental health issues.






Research and Policy

- Undertake impartial, evidence-based, balanced research on the successful drug and addiction programs, and mental health outreach programs.
- Support research from impartial, evidence-based, balanced sources to study the impacts on community resulting from densities of social service concentrations, the support for these services and how this concentration impacts on the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- Develop policies and strategies of national scope for addictions treatment and the related homelessness issues, based on models that work.
- Track and share data on movement of homeless and unemployed persons from region to region.
- Assist municipalities in developing strategies for loitering, panhandling and other uncomfortable activities that will pass examination under the Charter of Rights & Freedoms.
- Identify best practices for addressing social issues. Develop a toolkit for BID's/BIA's to use when developing outreach programs.
- Prioritize funding for community-based social outreach programs that focus on urban commercial areas.
- Support programs that coordinate cross-province border charge enforcement and reciprocal agreements to impede transient movement to avoid conviction.
- Direct HRDC to fund BIA's/BID's for job training and employment programs for the homeless, and outreach programs for vulnerable populations.

Legislation

- Continue to pursue enhanced hand gun and organized crime legislation.
 - Determine how legislation can be used to reduce aggressive panhandling.
 - Continue to address sentencing (especially in repeat offence and youth crime matters) issues in the Criminal Code.
- 

3. NATIONAL AFFORDABLE AND SOCIAL HOUSING (WITH MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS SUPPORTS) POLICY

Coordination and Leadership

- Lead a National Affordable and Social Housing Policy with a downtown emphasis.
- Focus all levels of government and agencies on chronic homelessness (the costs and impacts of which are detrimental to both the urban core and society), and related mental health and addictions with 10-year plans and strategy.
- Coordinate levels of delivery of social services across jurisdictions to eliminate transfers from under-served areas.
- Ensure all participants in policy development in urban areas focus on housing for those in need as a priority as lack of affordability and availability of housing is the foundation of the majority of other social issues in downtowns.

Funding

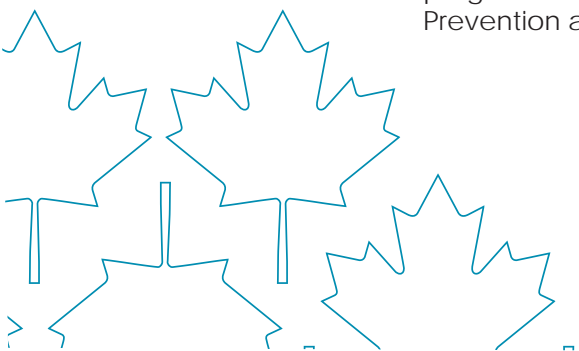
- Reinstate a range of social housing funding initiatives (co-op, affordable, supportive) and financially support crisis-level supportive housing.
- Fund addictions and mental health programmes, as it is a national crisis and goes to the heart of “peace, order and good government.”

Research/Data Collection

- A great amount of research has already been undertaken. Review existing data to avoid duplication and waste. Create measurable benchmarks to assess results.
- Research the impacts of “integration into the community;” coordinate with empirical, unbiased drug treatment research across Canada; and draw on international expertise.

Policy

- Develop the policy basis for the National Policy on Affordable and Social Housing (note much work done by the Eggleton Segal Senate Subcommittee – a timely and positive response is required from the Government).
- Direct HRDC to develop downtown job creation strategies and job recovery programmes for the addicted and ill (important in both Housing and Crime Prevention areas).



CONCLUSION

Business Improvement Areas/Zones (BIAs/BIZs), at the local level, are recognized as thought leaders and change agents in the continued endeavour of downtown revitalization. While the engagement of politicians and their respective parties in building capacity and advocacy is a common effort, the coming together as downtown advocates under the banner of **Downtowns Canada** and engaging the political sphere federally is a first for our BIAs/BIZs in Canada.

Over 15 cities have engaged in the conversation on topics which bind our downtowns across the nation:

- (1) **national infrastructure/reinvestment;**
- (2) **national social justice policy;**
- (3) **national affordable and social housing (with mental health and addictions support);**
- (4) **economic development.**



**In addition to building consensus on top priority issues,
our work has produced keen insights:**

- Our collective thoughts as downtown practitioners in creating better cities through investments in our downtowns is a worthwhile pursuit.
- We have established a better understanding on the federal policies that guide political parties.
- We have fostered a better understanding of the vision and beliefs of candidates running for office across Canadian city centres.
- We obtained valuable input from our communities regarding their goals and aspirations for their cities and downtowns.
- For those that believe in the importance of downtowns, their voting decisions will be aided through this process.
- Each political party and its respective candidates who participated in this national dialogue clearly demonstrated their understanding of the above priorities for downtowns and Canadians. It is our view that the policies articulated around investments in the creation of more sustainable neighbourhoods will lead to greater economic prosperity for our nation, allowing Canadians to benefit and reclaim their neighbourhoods for the better.
- More indirectly, the town halls that were hosted provided a venue for Canadians to talk about other issues of importance. From Winnipeg to Halifax, thousands tweeted using the hashtag #DowntownsCA. While the forums focused specifically on downtowns, it brought together other perspectives and opinions from the public about other pressing civic issues. While issues like the need for increased transit options and funding, affordable housing, and others were priorities for the personal lives of many who lined up and speak, it was how their personal concerns were linked to the health of downtowns that were powerful to see.

In the end, there is no better cause than creating great downtowns and urban neighborhoods; Canadians have responded.



Downtowns Canada is a national coalition of the International Downtown Association. We are made up of business improvement areas from across the nation.

Founding members contributing to our *Downtowns Declaration* and *The Value of Investing in Downtowns* report (both of which can be found at **DowntownsCanada.com**) are listed below. We are always looking to expand our network. Contact us if you are interested in learning more about how to get involved.

Downtown Calgary	Maggie Schofield, Executive Director, maggies@downtowncalgary.com
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DOWNTOWN VIABILITY AN ELECTION ISSUE

By **Stefano Grande**

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Rising national debt, infrastructure deficits that seem insurmountable, ballooning health-care costs, the need for jobs, escalating poverty and homelessness, spiralling costs of living and our fragile environment -- are all national challenges and should be topics of discussion. These issues will no doubt be highlighted during the federal election. We will hear dozens of solutions and policy statements, financial commitments and promises made. But what if there was one answer, a silver bullet to put our country back on track toward greater sustainability and prosperity? Urban centres.

A group of downtown practitioners and organizations, including the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, through a national coalition called Downtowns Canada, recently assessed the values of urban centres in Canada. With new research gathered, we've confirmed our belief in the importance of downtowns -- they serve not only an iconic purpose but are economic engines for Canada's economy.

To many, Canada's urban centres are seen as the place where history began -- where trade and commerce first took place, where immigrants first settled and where banks first set up shop. They are centres of employment, produce the greatest GDP and are home to some of the most powerful corporations in the world. They are places of culture, arts, sports, entertainment, events and more. They are the city's gathering spots. The emerging concentration of density and mixed-use buildings interspersed with history, parks and incredible places to hang out is the key to these economic engines.

Downtowns are huge tourism drivers as well, attracting visitors and convention-goers from around the world, because of their unique history, vibrancy and density of hotels and convention centre spaces. This creates new business and jobs. Downtowns are places of higher learning that produce many well-rounded entrepreneurs and professionals who are more ingrained in the day-to-day life of a city. There is not a greater place where creativity and ingenuity exist in a place than in downtowns.

Downtowns and urban centres are small in size, some as small as one per cent of a city's total land size, but can generate up to 25 per cent of a city's tax base.

They are very efficient, generating more taxes per acre than any other neighbourhood. They are very walkable. People who live downtown and in dense urban centres rely on cars less and tend to be healthier because they walk, bike or take transit to work, shop and play. Increased active living also means less carbon emissions, less reliance on gas and cars, and a more preventative health-care approach to life.

Urban residents tend to be more tolerant and accepting because downtowns are also home to poverty and homelessness as well. Immigrants and people of all walks of life and socioeconomic status are found here. Downtown is a place where people live in a welcoming, homogenous community.

And the opportunities to grow on these strengths are more realistic now than ever. Preserving our history and retrofitting older buildings is not only great for our environment, but builds in the formula for growth and jobs. City infrastructure already exists in these incredible places -- why build new infrastructure in an era when taxpayers can't afford it? Opportunities to revitalize underutilized buildings, reclaim valuable waterfront lands and eliminate surface-parking lots, from coast to coast, are significant and can generate a greater return on public investment and grow these engines strategically. A lack of federal attention to downtowns only works to safeguard and subsidize neighbourhoods that don't belong to everyone.

In an age of serious national issues and challenges and a debt crisis, we need more vibrant and fully revitalized downtowns and urban centres. The prosperity of our country lies in federal government action that is focused on sustaining and growing the economic engines of our country, downtowns and urban centres.



DOWNTOWNS CANADA: A FEDERAL AGENDA

