

Date: 2023-03-27

Subject: Information Report – Activate Downtown Brampton - Status of Year 1

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Report Number: Planning, Bld & Growth Mgt-2023-335

Recommendations:

1. **THAT** the report from Shahinaz Eshesh, RPP, MCIP, Policy Planner III, Downtown Revitalization, Planning, Building & Growth Management Department, dated March 27, 2023, to the Committee of Council Meeting of April 26, 2023, re: “**Information Report – Activate Downtown Brampton - Status of Year 1**” be received; and,
2. **THAT** Council receive the 8 80 Cities report, attached herein as Appendix A, titled, “Activate Downtown Brampton – Summary Report & Recommendations for Future Placemaking Initiatives”.

Overview:

- **Activate Downtown Brampton was a series of interactive installations and activations that took place in downtown Brampton’s laneways and public gathering spaces from May to October 2022. The project was a collaborative partnership between 8 80 Cities, the City of Brampton (City), and the downtown Brampton Business Improvement Area (BIA).**
- **The project, Activate Downtown Brampton, was funded through the My Main Street Community Activator Program, a two-year \$23.25-million investment by the Government of Canada through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) that was delivered by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) and the Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO). The project received \$223,650 through the grant program.**

- **Activate Downtown Brampton** aimed to bring life and vibrancy to the downtown through a series of interactive installations and activations in laneways and public gathering spaces. The program was driven by community partners, stakeholders, residents, civic engagement, and participation to activate public spaces.
- The Activate Downtown Brampton program was a critical step to address **Meanwhile Strategies** of the Integrated Downtown Plan (IDP), per Council's directive in September 2021, to provide vibrant and inclusive spaces to support its community through COVID-19 recovery and navigate disruptions due to the ongoing construction for the Region of Peel's Water and Wastewater infrastructure upgrades and the City's Downtown Revitalization (Streetscape Improvement) work.
- The Downtown was activated for 23 weeks from May to October 2023, which included live music throughout the Downtown, family-friendly programs, activities, night markets, and health and wellness events. This resulted in a 242% increase in the number of people spending time in Vivian Lane and a 136% increase in the number of people moving through the lane.
- The program supported 269 musicians (60% being local Brampton artists), 90 bands, 30 local vendors (artists, service providers and community organizations) and 40 volunteers.
- The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council on the successful outcomes of the Year 1 2022 pilot and to inform Council of continuation of the Activate Downtown Brampton program for the current Term of Council (2022-2026) as construction continues for the Region of Peel's Water & Wastewater infrastructure upgrades and the City's Downtown Revitalization (Streetscape Improvement).
- This report is consistent with the "A City of Opportunities" theme in the Term of Council Priorities. It supports the creation of complete communities, unlocking the potential of the Downtown, prioritizing jobs within centres as well as attracting investment and employment.

Background:

Integrated Downtown Plan (IDP) and Downtown Revitalization Program

The Integrated Downtown Plan (IDP) is a road map to coordinate the City's many ongoing capital initiatives, programs, and infrastructure projects, while providing an evolving framework to guide future growth and strategic investment in downtown Brampton to 2051. The IDP aims to address Meanwhile Strategies, which are short-term interventions,

programs and temporary activations, including activating underutilized public laneways and public spaces to support Downtown and Main Street economic recovery.

In addition, the Downtown Revitalization Program is a capital program to support the delivery of key current and future capital infrastructure projects, including the current Region of Peel's Water and Wastewater construction and leading the City's partial streetscaping along Main Street and Queen Street (completion in Q1 2025) and the revitalization of Garden Square and Ken Whillans Square.

In response to the ongoing construction, the IDP was established to identify and implement Meanwhile Strategies to support the immediate community needs through *Council Motion CW424-2021*. *Council Motion CW424-2021* on September 29, 2021, through the Downtown Revitalization Plan and the IDP, directed staff to (i) implement key short-term initiatives and strategies to enhance Downtown streetscape and engage with the Downtown community; and, (ii) conduct an 8-week Urban Design Activation Strategy to study development opportunities for temporary and long-term urban design activations in the downtown. The Activate Downtown Brampton program was initiated to respond to the direction for an 8-week study.

My Main Street Community Activator Grant

The My Main Street Community Activator Grant delivered by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) and the Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO), was a two-year \$23.25-million investment by the Government of Canada through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario). My Main Street provided support for community projects in southern Ontario designed to draw visitors and increase local vibrancy in Downtowns and along Main Streets. The grant supported projects that aimed to support post-pandemic recovery, revitalize neighbourhoods, and reimagine public spaces.

The City, in collaboration with the Downtown Brampton Business Improvement Area (BIA) and 8 80 Cities were successful in receiving \$223,650 through the grant program for a pilot activation in 2022. 8 80 Cities is a not-for-profit organization geared towards creating healthy and sustainable cities, in which people can grow up and grow old, by creating welcoming public spaces and inclusive city-building processes. 8 80 Cities expertise is in creating unconventional public engagement strategies that get people informed, involved, and excited about new initiatives in their cities.

Partnership of the Activate Downtown Brampton Program and 8 80 Cities

In partnership with 8 80 Cities' expertise in placemaking and injecting community engagement, the City and BIA collaborated to form the Activate Downtown Brampton project. The project team applied to the My Main Street Community Activator program with the objective to attract local residents to the heart of the city and create opportunities for social connection in underused public spaces through bold and lively laneway installations, community programming, and live musical showcases that celebrate the city's rich cultural diversity.

Current Situation:

Activate Downtown Brampton

Activate Downtown Brampton was established as a Meanwhile Strategy, in response to addressing the challenges faced in our downtown community and the impacts to local downtown businesses after more than a year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Downtown Brampton BIA looked to support local business through economic recovery, while infusing energy and vibrancy into downtown Brampton.

In addition, the Region of Peel's Water and Wastewater infrastructure upgrades capital project was planned, and had begun construction in April 2022, which ultimately impacted local businesses. The City recognized the importance of revitalizing its Downtown to provide vibrant and inclusive spaces to support its community through COVID-19 recovery and navigate disruptions due to the Region's infrastructure upgrades.

Activate Downtown Brampton was a placemaking initiative (May-October 2022) to attract local residents to the heart of the city and create opportunities for social connection in underutilized public spaces through bold laneway installations, community programming, and live musical showcases that celebrate the City's rich cultural diversity.

Through the Activate Downtown Brampton program, downtown Brampton was activated for 23-weeks. This included:

1. 23 Saturdays of live music across four locations in downtown Brampton namely Daily Times Square, Garden Square, Main Street South Patio, and Vivian Lane.
2. The physical transformation of Vivian Lane which included eight weeks of community programming in Vivian Lane;
3. The Flavours & Vibes Party in Buffy Lane; and finally,
4. The Salsa Dance Party in McArter Lane.

Vivian Lane was physically transformed with a vibrant ground mural by Brampton-based artist, Abiola Idowu, flexible street furniture, active edges, landscaping, and programming/activities.



Figure 1: Before (left) and after (right) photos of Vivian Lane showing the successful transformation of the space.

A range of community family-friendly programs, activities, and events were held in the downtown, such as yoga, story time, chess lessons, arts & crafts, and bingo. In addition, night markets were hosted in Vivian Lane that included a mix of community organizations, artists, artisans, and food-related vendors.

Public Engagement for Activate Downtown Brampton

The project team engaged with the community through various methods such as focus groups, one-on-one interviews, pop-up engagement, public life studies, social media, and volunteer engagement. This engagement helped the team better understand the community needs and informed the pilot activation and design for Vivian Lane and programming for 2022.

Successful Outcomes of the One Year (2022) Pilot

880 Cities monitored and analyzed the usage and traffic of Vivian Lane and other public spaces to evaluate the success of the program. Based on the Year 1 pilot and from the data observed, collected, and analyzed, it is evident that the activations were effective in attracting more visitors to the Downtown by increasing public movement.

In summary:

- The number of people moving through Vivian Lane increased by **82%**
- The number of people moving through Vivian Lane at night during the Night Market event increased by **850%**.
- Pedestrian movement along and around Main Street increased as a result of the transformation and programming. Movement increased by **89%** on weekdays and during the Night Market it increased by **177%**.
- The number of people spending time in Vivian Lane increased by **242%** and the number of people moving through the lane increased by **136%**.
- Perception and feeling of “socialness” in Vivian Lane increased to **82%** compared to 60% prior to the transformation.
- The program supported 269 musicians (60% being local Brampton artists), 90 bands, 30 local vendors (artists, service providers and community organizations) and 40 volunteers.
- Increased branding opportunities were created for the City. For example, the Dairy Farmers of Ontario partly shot their [commercial](#) in Vivian Lane, featuring the newly transformed and activated space.
- My Main Street featured the project in an article titled [“Downtown Brampton’s diversity is reflected in a new community-driven art and event series”](#). (Appendix B).

The detailed analysis is included in *Appendix A*.

Next Steps for Activate Downtown Brampton (2023-2026)

While the Activate Downtown Brampton project was a one-year pilot, the Downtown Revitalization Division is eager to continue identifying potential projects and opportunities to advance and revitalize the Downtown through Meanwhile Strategies that are quick, cost-effective, and high-impact to the community. Placemaking and community building empower residents. This, in turn, creates vibrant and beautiful spaces that attract people. Placemaking is an ongoing process and needs continued commitment to establish and maintain partnerships with various local organizations and service providers. Staff have already engaged STEPS (a non-profit, public art organization) to bring artwork to Harmsworth Lane (6 John Street) in 2023. STEPS will be working with two local artists (Ashley Beerdat and Chelsea Charles) to paint a mural of a west facing knee-wall and installing a bespoke, vinyl print on an exterior stairwell window by May 2023. Staff are proceeding with the Activate Downtown Brampton program during the Term of Council (2022-2026) with the key objectives of:

- Attracting residents to the Downtown and supporting local businesses;
- Increasing opportunities for social connections;
- Celebrating Brampton's cultural diversity through programming;
- Engaging diverse communities in reimagining underused public spaces; and,
- Fostering partnerships and collaborations.

Staff will be exploring opportunities to revitalize our Downtown through physical transformations, programming, and community building. The following sites/locations will be considered for further exploration and realizing new activation strategies:

- Laneways
- Underutilized parking lots
- Underutilized public spaces
- City-owned properties in the Downtown.

Objectives and tactics for activations and transformations may include:

- *Playful & Accessible* – Murals, public art, play equipment, family-friendly activities and programming, etc.
- *Landscaping* – planters, trees, astroturf, community vegetable garden, etc.
- *Flexible* – temporary urban street furniture that are adaptable, moveable, and can be easily changed to facilitate various programming and activities.
- *Active Edges* – temporary design interventions along/within the public realm that are inviting and welcoming.

Staff recognize the importance of community building through partnerships with local businesses and the BIA, artists and not-for-profits to host activations and programming in underutilized public spaces. Removing financial barriers such as waiving or offering a sliding scale of facility rental fees and exploring flexible/reduced liability coverage may help support community programming in the Downtown. The City continues to support

the BIA, where possible with available resources, to facilitate programming and events in the Downtown.

The Activate Downtown Brampton program will continue to support a number of ongoing City initiatives, including establishing the Innovation District to attract start-up businesses, entrepreneurs, employers and talent graduates. As the downtown continues to grow and attract people, the more services and programs will need to be offered.

Corporate Implications:

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. Activate Downtown Brampton will be funded from the following source:

Project	Budget Approved	Actuals*	Commitments	Budget Remaining
183866 – 001- Downtown Improvements	\$24,009,000	\$3,876,781	\$14,251,097	\$5,881,122

*As of March 27, 2023

Arts & Culture Implications

The Performing Arts Division identified impacts on the operational team to support ongoing placemaking and activation projects, such as staff resources, programming, and logistics.

Term of Council Priorities:

This report directly aligns with the “A City of Opportunities” theme in the Term of Council Priorities. It supports the creation of complete communities, unlocking the potential of the Downtown, prioritizing jobs within centres as well as attracting investment and employment. The Integrated Downtown Plan builds on these objectives for the Downtown to reach its full potential with rich public spaces, cultural diversity and community building through placemaking initiatives.

Conclusion:

Implementing Meanwhile Strategies is a key deliverable of the Integrated Downtown Plan (IDP). Placemaking initiatives like Activate Downtown Brampton fulfill the needs of the community. Public spaces require regular activations and programming to transform into vibrant places to attract more visitors to the Downtown. Staff will continue with short-term activations strategies to unlock Downtown Brampton and fully realize its potential.

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Attachments:

- Appendix A: Activate Downtown Brampton – Summary Report & Recommendations for Future Placemaking Initiatives (Authored by 8 80 Cities)
- Appendix B: My Main Street Featured Success Story - *“Downtown Brampton’s diversity is reflected in a new community-driven art and event series”*, dated Dec 21, 2022
- Appendix C: 8 80 Cities Presentation – Activate Downtown Brampton