

DOWNTOWN WINNIPEG REVITALIZATION POLICY POSITION

Introduction

The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce recognizes Downtown Winnipeg as the vibrant heart of our city. However, Downtown Winnipeg is struggling with several interconnected issues - economic stagnation, safety concerns, a lack of diverse housing options, and rising office vacancy rates - which have all contributed to a decline in the urban core's appeal and functionality. Recent data indicates that office vacancies downtown remain at 18.4%¹ in 2024 and reports of violent crime in downtown Winnipeg increased by 17% in 2023 compared with 2022, police figures showed².

Despite these challenges, Downtown serves as the economic engine of Winnipeg, generating tax revenue far beyond its less than one-percent share of the city's land area³. It hosts the largest concentration of employment and office development, benefiting the entire city. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring that Downtown Winnipeg remains a thriving, inclusive, and welcoming place for all residents and visitors. This will require a collaborative and strategic approach that tackles immediate concerns and lays the groundwork for long-term success.

Our Vision

Our vision for Downtown Winnipeg is a thriving urban centre, constantly evolving as the city grows, offering opportunities to come together to live, play and work. This vision includes a vibrant mix of residential spaces, diverse businesses, and attractive amenities that collectively foster a strong sense of community.

Achieving this vision requires a steadfast commitment to several key principles:

¹ Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, "Downtown Snapshot – Q3 2024", 3.

² Winnipeg Police Service, "WPS 2023 Statistical Report", 21.

³ Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, "The State of Downtown The impact of the pandemic to date", 2021, 2.

- Promoting economic vitality
- Enhancing community connectivity
- Ensuring safety and security
- Encouraging sustainable practices
- Supporting inclusivity
- Partnering with Indigenous communities

The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce recommends

City of Winnipeg

1. Invest in Infrastructure to Drive Economic and Residential Growth
 - **Eliminate the business tax:** Eliminating the business tax for ground-floor businesses would encourage street-level vibrancy and support those most likely to be impacted by vandalism.
 - **Leverage Partnership:** Continue to collaborate with all levels of government and the private sector to address downtown housing needs, leveraging resources such as CentreVenture and the Housing Accelerator Fund.
 - **Achieve CentrePlan 2050's Ambitions:** Prioritize funding, align planned infrastructure, and enhance collaboration across city departments. Invest in storm and wastewater systems to support sustainable growth and offer incentives to redevelop vacant properties and surface parking lots, fostering an accessible and inclusive community.
 - **Office Relocation:** Promote moving offices and government services to downtown and encourage public-private partnerships that foster co-working spaces, innovation hubs, arts and culture centers, and business incubators.
 - **Return to Office:** Promote increased transit use, parking revenue, hospitality engagements and enhanced public safety through the immediate requirement for all civic employees to return to the office on a full-time basis.
2. Strengthen Transportation Infrastructure to Support Economic Growth
 - **Enhance Downtown Accessibility:** Ensure the implementation of the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan is well-funded, and continue investing in infrastructure that enhances the quality of life for all downtown users.

- **Downtown Parking:** Make downtown easy to get to with a parking strategy that focuses on dynamic pricing, shared parking arrangements, and integrating technology to improve efficiency and revenue allocation.
- **Optimize Goods Movement:** Plan for efficient goods movement throughout downtown in the *Transportation Master Plan: 2050*.
- **Prioritize Road Safety:** Work to make downtown safer and reduce collisions by fully implementing the *Winnipeg Road Safety Strategic Action Plan*.

In addition, the City of Winnipeg plays a key role in enhancing public safety and implementing a downtown first policy.

Province of Manitoba

3. Enhance Public Safety and Social Services

- **Ensure Adequate Funding for Downtown Safety:** Continue to provide sufficient and reliable funding to the Downtown Community Safety Partnership, Winnipeg Police Service, and other local organizations to address safety concerns.
- **Modernize Emergency Response Procedures:** Integrate mental health supports and social services with police and paramedics by adopting a trauma-informed approach to emergency responses. This includes a co-response model where mental health clinicians work alongside emergency responders.
- **Invest in Social Supports:** Implement the measures outlined in *Your Way Home: Manitoba's Plan to End Chronic Homelessness*, including gap-closing measures in income assistance, child welfare, and employment opportunities.

In addition, the Province of Manitoba plays a key role in implementing a downtown first policy, building a strong downtown, and investing in infrastructure that drives economic growth.

Government of Canada

4. Building a Stronger Downtown with Targeted Investments
 - **Support Downtown Growth:** Invest in large infrastructure projects such as transit, net-zero buildings, and tourism, enhancing sustainability and driving economic growth.

Business Community

5. Implement a Downtown First Policy
 - **Downtown Reengagement Plan:** Reinvest in downtown by creating a reengagement plan that advertise support and commitment to the downtown community.

Appendix A

Recommendation	City of Winnipeg	Province of Manitoba	Government of Canada	Business Community
1. Invest in Infrastructure to Drive Economic and Residential Growth	Lead	Co-lead	Support	Support
2. Strengthen Transportation Infrastructure to Support Economic Growth	Lead	Support	Support	Support
3. Enhance Public Safety and Social Services	Co-Lead	Lead	Support	Support
4. Building a Stronger Downtown with Targeted Investments	Support	Co-Lead	Lead	Support
5. Implement a downtown First Policy	Co-Lead	Co-Lead	Support	Lead

Appendix B

Recommendation	Title	Timing
Rec 1	Eliminate the business tax	<i>Immediate (0-12 months)</i>
	Leverage Partnership	<i>Mid-Range (3-5 years)</i>
	Achieve CentrePlan 2050's Ambitions	<i>Short Term (1-3 years)</i>
	Office Relocation	<i>Short Term (1-3 years)</i>
	Return to Office	<i>Immediate (0-12 months)</i>

Rec 2	Enhance Downtown Accessibility	<i>Short Term (1-3 years)</i>
	Downtown Parking	<i>Immediate (0-12 months)</i>
	Optimize Goods Movement	<i>Short Term (1-3 years)</i>
	Prioritize Road Safety	<i>Immediate (0-12 months)</i>
Rec 3	Ensure Adequate Funding for Downtown Safety	<i>Immediate (0-12 months)</i>
	Modernize Emergency Response Procedures	<i>Short Term (1-3 years)</i>
	Invest in Social Supports	<i>Short Term (1-3 years)</i>
Rec 4	Support Downtown Growth	<i>Mid-Range (3-5 years)</i>
Rec 5	Downtown Reengagement Plan	<i>Short Term (1-3 years)</i>