

## **2.2.1 DOWNTOWN: THE HEART OF TORONTO**

Toronto has only one downtown. It plays a vital role as the city's economic and cultural hub and is critical to the health and prosperity of the entire region that surrounds it.

*Downtown*, with its recognizable skyline, is Toronto's image to the world and to itself: cosmopolitan, civil, urbane, diverse and liveable. It is the oldest, most dense and most complex part of the urban landscape, with a rich variety of building forms and activities.

*Downtown* is the place where our city's history was born and where much of our future will be shaped. It is an area that has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples for nearly 15,000 years. Built and cultural heritage can be seen in *Downtown's* significant buildings, districts, landmarks, landscapes and archaeological sites. The conservation and promotion of cultural heritage resources – of First Nations and Métis communities and of settlers – should guide future planning and investment decisions *Downtown*.

Toronto's *Downtown* includes a portion of the *Central Waterfront*, which offers unique opportunities for substantial employment and residential growth and for upgrades and expansion to the public realm and community facilities as waterfront revitalization proceeds. Both *Downtown* and the *Central Waterfront* are guided by their own Secondary Plans.

The Province's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2017) identifies a *Downtown Toronto Urban Growth Centre* and establishes a minimum density target for this area.

### **Economic Powerhouse**

*Downtown* Toronto is the most accessible business location in the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the largest employment centre in the regional economy. Thousands of students, shoppers and visitors also spend time in *Downtown* Toronto every day. The economic strength of *Downtown* arises not only from the largest concentration of office towers in the nation but also from the myriad of other activities located here:

- government offices centred around the Provincial Legislature, City Hall and the courts;
- arts and cultural venues;
- entertainment activities and sporting events;
- festivals and special events in public spaces, streets and along the waterfront;
- destination and speciality retail;
- restaurants and food markets featuring Toronto's diverse cuisines;
- nightclubs, bars and live music venues;
- film and TV production and a flourishing film scene;
- major tourist attractions and convention facilities;

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- concentration of print and broadcast media;
- post-secondary educational institutions; and
- health sciences and related treatment and research facilities, many linked to the University of Toronto and Ryerson University.

The concentration, intensity and interaction among all these activities, the access to national and global markets, connections to decision makers in business and government, the ability to easily walk around interesting and safe streets, all give rise to a synergy that fosters innovation, creativity and an atmosphere of success.

While we anticipate and want *Downtown* to accommodate growth, this growth will not be spread uniformly across the whole of *Downtown*. In fact, there are many communities *Downtown* that will not experience much physical change at all. While the population mix within these communities will change over time, their physical character will remain largely unchanged.

Other parts of *Downtown* will see the development of vertical mixed-use communities in predominantly mid-rise and tall buildings. Mixed use is a key ingredient to the successful functioning of *Downtown* that creates “accessibility through proximity”. Every home built within the *Downtown* area offsets the need for in-bound commuting each day.

The *Financial District*, the *Health Sciences District*, the institutional complexes of government and higher learning, and the creative industries and cultural sector economies centred on King-Spadina and King-Parliament are the prime areas of job growth.

Toronto's *Financial District* is Canada's premier centre of commerce. This is where commercial activity is most intense with a concentration of large architecturally significant landmark buildings. Jobs are concentrated in large office buildings tightly clustered within walking distance of Union Station and several subway stations, the majority of them connected to one another through the climate-controlled PATH network.

Many of the jobs located *Downtown* are in government, education or health services, and most of these are located in *Institutional Areas* north of the *Financial District*. In addition to being the seat of government for the City and the Province, *Downtown* is home to large teaching hospitals and other health services that have a regional draw. Equally important are campuses of higher learning, including the University of Toronto, Ryerson University, George Brown College and OCAD University.

There is also an important cluster of arts and culture activities *Downtown*. From museums, galleries, theatres and performance halls of national significance to small theatre, music and dance companies and individual artists, Toronto's *Downtown* helps to shape Canadian

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culture. The City needs to support the important economic contribution that is forged here through arts and culture.

Many *Downtown* activities are interdependent. These activities are linked through *Downtown's* public realm: the streets, sidewalks and pedestrian connections, parks, squares, open spaces, natural areas and other publicly accessible spaces. This is where people experience public life most directly. The key to successfully shaping *Downtown's* future is to improve connections within the public realm and create places that foster public life.

Well-designed connections between the core of the city and the *Central Waterfront* are important to the vitality of *Downtown* as a great place to live, work and visit and as an attractive and competitive business location. The renewed *Central Waterfront* will create new opportunities for business development and contribute in an important way to the image of *Downtown* and the entire city.

#### Policies

1. The *Downtown Toronto Urban Growth Centre* will be planned to achieve, by 2031 or earlier, a minimum combined gross density target of 400 residents and jobs per hectare. Map 6 shows the boundaries of the *Downtown Toronto Urban Growth Centre*, the *Financial District* and the *Health Sciences District*. Map 6A shows the *Downtown Plan* and the *Central Waterfront Secondary Plan* boundaries.
2. *Downtown* will continue to be shaped as the largest economic node in the city and the region by accommodating development that:
  - a) builds on the strength of *Downtown* as the premier employment, institutional, retail, arts and culture, and entertainment centre in the Greater Golden Horseshoe;
  - b) advances economic competitiveness and helps to attract provincially, nationally and internationally significant investment and employment uses;
  - c) provides a full range of housing opportunities for *Downtown* workers and reduces the demand for in-bound commuting;
  - d) focuses on the *Financial District* as the prime location for the development of prestige commercial office buildings;
  - e) focuses on the *Health Sciences District* as the prime location for the expansion of healthcare facilities and related research, education and commercial functions;
  - f) supports expansion of institutions including post-secondary education, governmental and health; and

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- g) fosters growth of creative industries and the culture sector centred on the King-Spadina and King-Parliament Secondary Plan Areas.
3. Investment in *Downtown* on the part of the City, other levels of government and public/private partnerships will be sought to:
- a) maintain, improve and expand the public realm, including linkages between *Downtown* streets, parks, publicly accessible spaces, ravines and the water's edge;
  - b) expand active transportation and transit infrastructure;
  - c) promote an environment of creativity and innovation for arts and culture;
  - d) support and enhance Priority Retail Streets and specialty retail and entertainment districts found *Downtown* as important regional and tourist destinations;
  - e) maintain high-quality and resilient business infrastructure *Downtown* including a stable and secure hydro-electric grid, communications networks, district heating and cooling distribution systems, and water, wastewater and stormwater management infrastructure; and
  - f) create and advance research and business development alliances among the health, education, biotechnology and biomedical sectors *Downtown*.

### Living Downtown

*Downtown* is seen as an attractive place to live. There is a great degree of social and economic diversity among the *Downtown* population, accompanied by a diversity of housing types, tenures and affordability. Different communities have different needs in terms of community services and support. *Downtown* is an inclusive place for vulnerable people and, as growth continues, there is a need to address the threat of displacement and increase supportive services and affordable housing. Planning for *Downtown* community services and facilities cannot follow a broad city-wide template.

As *Downtown's* population increases, more residents are using its parks and open spaces as their shared backyards and gathering areas. They are joined by hundreds of thousands of workers and visitors that use these same public spaces to gather, celebrate and be active. *Downtown* has one of the lowest rates of parkland per person in the city and the acquisition of new parkland and improvements to the public realm must accompany growth. The development of a connected and expanded system of high-quality public spaces for people and healthy, diverse natural systems will keep *Downtown* liveable as it intensifies.

*Downtown* is where our history is richest, but it is also where we continue to rebuild to accommodate a growing economy and a changing society. Given that this is one place in

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Toronto where “change is constant”, we must ensure that our built heritage is respected, nurtured and celebrated.

Toronto is grappling with the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, including disproportionate burdens on the city’s most vulnerable residents. As growth continues, there are opportunities to re-shape *Downtown* in ways that will slow the worst impacts of climate change, build resilience to shocks and stresses, improve business productivity, create employment, safeguard the vulnerable, and contribute to better public health. Downtown’s growth can help transform Toronto into a resilient, low-carbon city.

#### Policies

4. The quality of the *Downtown* will be improved by:
  - a) developing programs and activities to maintain and upgrade public amenities and infrastructure;
  - b) recognizing the high maintenance needs of streets, open spaces and City services in this heavy demand area;
  - c) enhancing existing parks and acquiring new parkland;
  - d) preserving and strengthening the range and quality of the social, health, community services and local institutions located *Downtown*;
  - e) supporting the development of complete communities;
  - f) developing buildings that are shaped, scaled and designed to enhance liveability;
  - g) providing a diverse range and mix of housing options, including affordable housing, to accommodate the needs of all household sizes and avoid the displacement of vulnerably housed and at-risk groups; and
  - h) developing a resilient and low-carbon Downtown.
5. The architectural and cultural heritage of *Downtown* will be preserved by designating buildings, districts and open spaces with heritage significance and by working with owners to restore and maintain historic buildings.
6. Design guidelines specific to districts of historic or distinct character will be developed and applied to ensure new development respects the context of such districts in terms of the development’s fit with existing streets, setbacks, heights and relationship to landmark buildings.
7. A campaign to improve *Downtown* over time and to achieve a healthy and competitive future will be pursued by setting priorities for local improvements.

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#### **Downtown Accessibility and Mobility**

Economic success and accessibility go hand-in-hand. *Downtown's* high level of accessibility is a result of the large concentration of jobs and housing (proximity) combined with the convergence of many transportation routes (mobility). *Downtown* is the largest centre of economic activity in the nation. As the focus of both the regional (GO Transit) and local (TTC) transit systems, it is easily reached by public transit by the nation's largest labour market. Planned investments in higher order transit to expand the subway and regional rail systems are needed to enhance the existing transit network and support projected growth. The Union-Pearson Express linking Downtown with Pearson International Airport and the pedestrian tunnel to Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport also boost Toronto's competitiveness by improving national, trans-border and international connectivity.

The large increase in *Downtown* activity and development over the past several decades has not been accompanied by any significant increase in road capacity. Instead, the growth in trips has been successfully handled by improvements to transit services and by an increase in *Downtown* housing that has put more people within walking and cycling distance of their place of work and other activities. Lower parking requirements in *Downtown*, including maximum parking limits for new office development, have helped reinforce this pattern of trip growth. Policies promoting sustainable travel choices, reducing dependence on private automobiles and encouraging mixed use development in *Downtown* are key components of this Plan.

*Downtown* streets, sidewalks and the connecting system of public spaces are not just links between activities but are also spaces to be enjoyed in their own right. The quality of the design, construction and maintenance of the public realm is vital to the image of *Downtown* and to creating an attractive district in which to walk and linger. The appeal of *Downtown* to pedestrians is an essential part of making the area more attractive and competitive.

The PATH system of climate-controlled walkways offers an alternative for moving between the major office towers, City Hall and the Eaton Centre. It plays an important role in moving commuters from Union Station and other rapid transit stations to their workplace and is an attractive feature in the marketing of *Downtown* office space and in promoting tourism and the convention business.

#### **Policies**

8. Priority will be given to improving walking, cycling and transit (TTC and GO) access to and within *Downtown* while the expansion of automobile commuting and all-day parking will be discouraged.

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9. Union Station functions as the major regional transportation hub and will expand its passenger and train handling capacity and incorporate features associated with electrification of the regional rail system.
10. Priority will be given to surface transit vehicles on key *Downtown* streets, particularly those with streetcars.
11. A program of street improvements will be implemented to enhance the pedestrian environment and expand the cycling network with measures undertaken to make walking and cycling *Downtown* safe, convenient and comfortable.
12. Development will be encouraged to connect to and expand the PATH network and other climate-controlled walkways without compromising the role of the street as the main place for pedestrian activity.