

## **Downtown East Action Plan - Implementation Update and 2025-2030 Action Plan**

**Date:** June 19, 2024

**To:** Economic and Community Development Committee

**From:** Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

**Wards:** 13 - Toronto Centre

### **SUMMARY**

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The Downtown East area is defined as Bloor Street to the north, Front Street to the south, Bay Street to the west, and the Don Valley Parkway to the east. Many distinct neighbourhoods are in this area, including Moss Park, St. James Town, Church-Wellesley Village, Regent Park and Cabbagetown. These neighbourhoods have resilient social networks, a history of community involvement, and local identities. Alongside being a destination for people across the city for jobs, services, entertainment and tourism, Downtown East also faces a multitude of complex social challenges amidst its vibrancy and economic activity. The 2020-2024 Downtown East Action Plan was developed to address these entrenched issues, ranging from poverty and homelessness to mental health and substance use crises. Despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic impacting implementation, significant progress has been made through multi-sectoral collaboration and targeted initiatives.

The Action Plan, guided by extensive stakeholder collaboration, has delivered tangible outcomes in community safety, housing strategy advancement, and the provision of support services to meet urgent and emerging needs. Piloted initiatives and citywide strategies have evolved to amplify impact. Notwithstanding concerted efforts, significant ongoing challenges persist; most notably, housing affordability, healthcare access, and sustainable funding for initiatives that support the outcomes of the Action Plan.

Key lessons from the implementation of the first phase emphasized the importance of collaborative partnership building, enhanced community engagement, and strategic alignment to maximize impact. Addressing systemic challenges such as service gaps and sustainable program funding remains crucial for long-term success. The 2025-2030 Downtown East Action Plan will continue to prioritize safe, inclusive communities, cross-sector collaboration, stability for those experiencing marginalization, and a model for City responses to complex issues.

Staged implementation strategies, ongoing communication, sustained funding, and enhanced monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are outlined as critical components for effective implementation of the next phase of the Action Plan. Continued partnership between stakeholders and the City of Toronto, coupled with proactive community engagement, will be essential to address the evolving needs of the Downtown East and foster a more resilient and inclusive community.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the Downtown East 2025-2030 Action Plan, outlined as Attachment 4 and direct the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration and other relevant Divisions, to include the staffing and resources needed to implement the 2025-2030 Action Plan through the 2025 Budget Process for consideration to advance the Downtown East Action Plan, and report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee with a mid-implementation Progress Report in 2026.
2. City Council authorize the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to enter into any agreements integral to implementing these recommendations, within the resources in the approved operating budget, upon terms satisfactory to them, and in forms and terms satisfactory to the City Solicitor, to support implementation of the Downtown East Action Plan, as required.
3. City Council authorize the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to create a grant program to provide funding to not-for-profit organizations in accordance with the City's Community Grants Policy.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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This report seeks approval to adopt the Downtown East 2025-2030 Action Plan and implement the actions as identified in Attachment 4. This would be the second five-year Action Plan for the area.

The original Five-Year Action Plan (2019-2024) was approved by Council in July 2019 and, the City has supported the implementation of the Downtown East Action Plan through existing resources from a number of City divisions, since 2020.

Social Development, Finance and Administration's base Operating Budget has included annual funding of approximately \$1.47 million (gross and net) that has been fully allocated to support the implementation of the Action Plan. Other Divisions and Agencies supported the Action Plan based on ongoing resources and activities that were already occurring.

The new Five-Year (2025-2030) Downtown East Action Plan continues to focus on safety and inclusivity and includes recommended actions and activities that the City should prioritize over the next few years. Some are ready for implementation, and other core and signature projects may require longer-term reviews, more strategic planning among City divisions, community engagement, as well as collaborative efforts exploring inter-governmental funding opportunities, prior to execution.

As outlined in Attachment 4 of this report, approximately \$2.705 million (gross and net) in additional funding will be required in 2025 to continue existing actions and begin new actions while other actions will use existing resources. Some of the unfunded new or emerging priority actions identified in this term of the Action Plan need to be further reviewed, scoped, and assessed. These unfunded priority actions include new grants of \$0.850 million (\$0.800 million for a Safe & Inclusive Communities Grant program and \$0.050 million for the development of a Strengthening Neighbourhoods Grant program) to help advance the central outcomes of the Downtown East Action Plan with community activation projects.

Social Development, Finance and Administration and other City Divisions will continue to review their capacity and resources and will include funding requests for the unfunded priority actions in the 2025 Budget and future Budget processes for consideration along with other City priorities, subject to the City's financial resource capacity.

The continuation of the Downtown East Action Plan requires ongoing resources and commitment from community stakeholders and multiple levels of government - the City lacks the resources, funding, authority, and jurisdiction to achieve all its goals independently.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

## **EQUITY IMPACT**

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The Downtown East Action Plan has a demonstrated positive equity impact on Indigenous peoples and Black residents, among other diverse equity-deserving community members, including other racialized residents, women and gender diverse people, seniors, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, youth, newcomers, those with low-income levels, and those living with disabilities, among others. It also has positive equity impacts on people experiencing marginalization. Such individuals, according to the plan, are defined as people who are at risk because of the drug toxicity crisis and/or a lack of affordable and supportive housing, and/or adequate mental health services/supports and other health and social supports. In addition, those benefitting from this plan may experience social stigma and discrimination, which often excludes them from full participation in society and the job market.

The Downtown East Action Plan supports the continuation of several funded initiatives to address the barriers and needs of its diverse equity-deserving community members. The Action Plan also includes initiatives focused on improving the City's ability to develop and implement programs and services that consider the needs and perspectives of a variety of community members.

## DECISION HISTORY

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On July 19, 2022, City Council adopted Item EC31.21, Downtown East Action Plan - Implementation Progress and Next Steps. It included a direction to report back with an update on the progress of implementation and recommendations, including resource requirements, for Phase 2 of the Downtown East Action Plan.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.EC31.21>

On May 11, 2022, City Council adopted Item PH33.3, Dundas-Sherbourne Neighbourhood Revitalization - Update, which directed a community visioning and master planning exercise to support the future plan for the Dan Harrison Community Complex and the Dundas-Sherbourne neighbourhood. The report also directed staff to develop a Downtown East Housing Strategy to connect the many housing projects occurring in the area. Council directed CreateTO to explore real estate opportunities in the area for strategic city-building purposes and pursue partnership opportunities to support neighbourhood revitalization.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.PH33.6>

On February 2, 2022, City Council adopted the Community Crisis Service Pilot report that provided direction to pilot the Toronto Community Crisis Service in response to non-emergency mental health crisis calls and wellbeing checks. Four pilots featuring community-led mobile crisis support teams comprised of a multidisciplinary team of crisis workers with crisis intervention and de-escalation training will be dispatched to respond to non-emergency crisis calls involving a person in crisis, wellness checks and other calls to be determined. Community health service partners will become anchor partners to ensure that adaptive and service-user-centred care continues after the initial intervention. The Downtown East area is served by one of the pilots.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.EX29.2>

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.EX29.1>

On February 2, 2022, City Council adopted SafeTO: A Community Safety & Well-Being Plan for the City of Toronto, an Implementation Plan outlining key actions and deliverables to advance four priority actions contributing to significant policy and service transformations in the areas of mental health crisis response, gun violence reduction, supports for communities impacted by violence and data analysis across multiple institutions.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.EX29.2>

On July 16, 17 and 18, 2019, City Council adopted the Downtown East Five Year Action Plan, which included a summary of the outcomes of the enhanced 12-month Action

Plan, an 18-month Work Plan for the five-year Action Plan, four central outcomes and a proposed framework for measuring success.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EC6.16>

On April 16, 2019, City Council adopted MM6.13 which directed the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to update the “Review of the Dan Harrison Community Complex” and to include a renewed comprehensive strategy to address the long-standing complex challenges in the upcoming Downtown East Action Plan and to work in partnership with Toronto Community Housing to codevelop a timeline for implementation and full costing for and report the outcomes to the October 15, 2019 meeting of the Planning and Housing Committee.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.MM6.13>

On March 7, 2019, City Council adopted the 2019 budget which included the following service level enhancements related to the Downtown East: enhanced street and laneway cleaning under Solid Waste Management Services, continuation of seven street outreach workers for Toronto Public Health, and enhanced staffing levels for Parks Ambassadors and Park Cleanup across the Downtown East.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EX2.5>

On June 26, 2018, City Council adopted CD 29.5, which approved an Enhanced 12-month immediate Action Plan for the Downtown East Area, expanding the area from Bay St. to the DVP and Front St. to Bloor St. including the immediate vicinity of the Respite Centre at 21 Park Road while it is operational. This item included 36 action items, which were assigned to multiple City Divisions. It also included a direction to report back with a five-year Action Plan for the community in the second quarter of 2019.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2018.CD29.5>

On February 12, 2018, City Council adopted the 2018 budget which included allocations for one temporary full-time position to oversee the coordination of the Downtown East Action Plan.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2018.EX31.2>

On December 5, 2017, City Council adopted motion MM 37.15 to address the service gap in the Downtown East Revitalization Area. Council requested City staff to identify resources required to address current challenges and report to Budget Committee with a funding request. Council also directed City staff to establish an expert staff team to respond to the immediate crisis and develop a comprehensive 5-year plan.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2017.MM35.17>

## **COMMENTS**

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The Downtown East area is defined as Bloor Street to the north, Front Street to the south, Bay Street to the west, and the Don Valley Parkway to the east. Many distinct neighbourhoods are in this area, including Moss Park, St. James Town, Church-

Wellesley Village, and Cabbagetown. These neighbourhoods have resilient social networks, a history of community involvement, and local identities. Regent Park also falls within the area boundaries, however as a community identified for revitalization, this neighbourhood is guided by a separate process that includes the [Regent Park Social Development Plan](#).

The Downtown East is a destination for people from across Toronto and outside the city. Large numbers of people come for jobs, services, shopping, entertainment, and tourism. This contributes to the economy and vibrancy of the community but can also bring negative impacts associated with unplanned entry of significant numbers of people; namely, heightened congestion, litter, and incidents of social disorder.

The Downtown East Action Plan was developed to address several complex and entrenched challenges in the area. These challenges are all associated with above-average rates of poverty, homelessness, housing, community safety, mental health, and substance use, particularly overdoses related to the drug toxicity crisis. In response to the heightened need for support in this area, in June 2018, City staff from multiple divisions began to implement a 12-month action plan and develop a five-year action plan for the area. In July 2019, City Council approved the Downtown East Action Plan (the "2020-2024 Action Plan") which included a work plan and an outline of resources required to support the first phase of implementation.

The creation of the 2020-2024 Action Plan utilized an inclusive approach, engaging diverse stakeholders including residents, businesses, and academic partners. Through extensive consultation and evaluation, the Action Plan was crafted to identify service gaps, assess the efficacy of previous initiatives, and leverage best practices. Designed for adaptability, the plan emphasized ongoing monitoring and collaboration across various sectors and levels of government to effect systemic change and address community priorities effectively. Four central outcomes were established and are further described in Attachment 1.

### *Ongoing Need for Comprehensive Social Intervention to Address Complex and Increased Social Needs in the Downtown East*

- The Downtown East area is home to approximately 209,505 individuals, representing 7.5% of the City's population<sup>1</sup>. This is a fast-growing area with estimated population growth of 14.6% from 2016 - 2021 according to Census Canada data compared to a population growth rate of 2.3% for the City as a whole.
- Based on the Shelter System Flow Data<sup>2</sup> it is estimated that there were 10,964 people experiencing homelessness in Toronto in April 2024. Neighbourhood-level information is not available, but the Shelter System Flow Data finds that individuals experience homelessness in all areas of Toronto.

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<sup>1</sup> A best match approximation of the Downtown East area was used to collect statistical demographic information using census tracts and social planning neighbourhoods. The population counts and growth rates use 2016 and 2021 Census data for this geostatistical area.

<sup>2</sup> Shelter System Flow Data is a point-in-time count of people experiencing homelessness and entering and leaving the shelter system each month in Toronto. Shelter System Flow Data – City of Toronto

- There are 23 service locations offering shelter or allied services (respites and 24-hour women's drop-ins) in the Downtown East. These locations provide 1,685 shelter beds.
- Approximately 8.9% (374 out of 4,193) of FindHelp Ontario (211ontario.ca) listed community service organizations in Toronto are in the Downtown East area, providing a range of support to the community.
- The drug toxicity crisis continues in Toronto and across Ontario and Canada. In 2023, there were 4,514 non-fatal and 288 fatal calls for suspected opioid overdoses attended by Toronto Paramedic Services. The two neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of calls were Downtown Yonge East (713) and Moss Park (610).
- In 2023, there were 118 requests to 311 in Toronto Centre for 'Clean-Up of Litter on Laneways', and 331 requests to 311 for 'Clean-Up of Needles/Syringes', representing 12% and 34%, respectively, of total requests to 311 of these incidents in Toronto.

There is an ongoing and persistent level of urgency for health and social action in the Downtown East. Multi-sectoral collaboration is needed to comprehensively address the social conditions in the area to improve health and social outcomes for individuals and the community.

### *The Exacerbated Social Inequities and Impact of COVID-19*

Staff launched the implementation of the 2020-2024 Downtown East Five-Year Action Plan in late 2019. The requested budget was subsequently approved in March 2020 which coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Unanticipated issues emerged. Emergency orders limited access to services and supportive spaces to address basic needs and necessitated additional interventions to support communities, particularly community members who were experiencing marginalization. City and community services were required to pivot to address critical needs and deep vulnerabilities, adjusting service priorities, funding, staffing models and program responses to address emergent needs. The COVID-19 pandemic thus impacted the trajectory of implementation and progress of the 2020-2024 Downtown East Five-Year Action Plan.

COVID-19 exacerbated long-standing systemic social and health inequities in the Downtown East. Unequal experiences of the social determinants of health created and compounded the conditions whereby Indigenous, Black, and other equity-deserving groups continue to be disproportionately impacted. In response to COVID-19, specific equity actions were implemented across Toronto through the TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan ([2020.HL24.1](#)). In the Downtown East, a range of targeted financial supports, interventions and responses were launched, including key initiatives that advanced the Action Plan, and many continue to provide services post emergency-level response as they remain necessary:

- Enhanced service levels including year-round dedicated Parks Forestry & Recreation cleaning crews in the Downtown East to enhance cleanliness and hygiene in public spaces.



- Funding supported initiatives such as the Community Outreach and Support Team, Here to Help, and the Harm Reduction Community Care Project.
- The Downtown East Justice Centre pilot was established in collaboration with Social Development, Finance and Administration and the Ministry of the Attorney General to stabilize adult offenders living at the intersection of homelessness, mental health and substance abuse specific to the Downtown East area.
- Additional Harm Reduction staff were allocated to Toronto Public Health to support vulnerable populations and reduce drug-related harm, including preventing the spread of communicable diseases during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent need for continued support and resources to address the complex issues facing vulnerable communities. The learnings from this period are documented in past reports ([2022.EC31.21](#), [2022.HL36.2](#)), and have informed the next Downtown East Action Plan.

## **Demonstrated Multi-Stakeholder Coordination to Advance 2020-2023 Action Plan Outcomes**

The effectiveness of the Action Plan implementation thus far underscores the transformative impact of cross-sector collaboration. Through concerted efforts leveraging the authority of partners across multiple sectors, there have been tangible outcomes, from bolstering community safety to advancing the Downtown East Housing Strategy. Funded initiatives and citywide strategies complement this approach and amplify the collective impact.

### *A. Implementation Highlights from the 2020-2024 Downtown East Action Plan*

The implementation of the Downtown East Action Plan commenced in July 2019 and deepened following the approval of resources to support implementation through the City budget process in March 2020. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic delaying the implementation of the Plan, most actions in the Work Plan have been advanced. The actions are often overlapping in nature with each initiative often affecting more than one outcome that will yield benefits to the Downtown East area.

In July 2022, a mid-implementation Progress Report ([2022.EC31.21](#)) for the Downtown East Action Plan was adopted by City Council and included implementation highlights from July 2019 to June 2022 and a status update on Work Plan actions. This report builds upon past highlights and includes those from July 2022 to December 2023.

Progress Highlights from the 2020-2024 Downtown East Action Plan include:

- Funding support of \$150,000 per year for the Community Engagement Team led by the Downtown Yonge BIA providing response and de-escalation support. The Team has a response time of less than 10 minutes to crisis calls.
- Resources have been invested to ensure free trainings are delivered in partnership with community agencies. Since 2020, more than 20 trauma-informed trainings have been provided to equip over 1200 frontline staff to better support people experiencing marginalization.



- A two-year grant of \$1 million (total) to support community agencies and resident groups in activating projects that align with the Action Plan central outcomes.
- Intervention pilots launched with funding of \$1.1 million to provide intensive support to people experiencing marginalization and support communities with alternative responses to issues.
- Strong mechanisms for cross-sectoral communication and collaboration developed including the Downtown East Action Plan Leadership Table to consider and strategically respond to issues, and the Yonge Dundas Operations Table to coordinate outreach and safety responses to emerging issues in the area.
- In 2022, with City, federal and provincial funding, Margaret's Housing and Community Support Services transformed the property at 17-19 Winchester Street from formerly underutilized multi-tenant houses into 35 new, self-contained apartments for women experiencing homelessness, with a range of on-site support services.
- In 2022, a supportive housing project at 292-296 Parliament Street opened its doors to provide 24 affordable rental homes and onsite support for those experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, including families and older adults. St. Jude Community Homes, an experienced housing and support services provider, is operating the site and supporting tenants.
- A Toronto Downtown East Justice Centre Pilot transitioned from a traditional courtroom into a community setting, connecting high-needs individuals with support and services to prevent cycling through the criminal justice system.
- In December 2023, a Downtown East Lived Experience Advisory Group was launched to co-create a fulsome and ongoing engagement and leverage the insights of these lived experiences to inform service planning and evaluation.
- Four Community Safety Teams patrol areas of high activity (Allan Gardens, Yonge/Dundas) with a 24-hour presence, engaging with shelter residents and community members to address safety concerns and discard biomedical waste.
- Enhanced service levels for laneway cleaning were achieved in Victoria Street, Dundas/Sherbourne, and Queen/Sherbourne areas.

Greater details of the full progress on the 2020-2024 Downtown East Work Plan actions, from July 2022 to December 2023 are noted in Attachment 2.

### *B. Funded Initiatives Supporting Community Safety, De-Escalation, and Resilience*

Launched in 2020, four initiatives were piloted through the Downtown East Action Plan: Here to Help, Community Outreach and Support Team (COAST), the Harm Reduction Community Care Project and Equitable Action for Change. Initiatives are maintained with funding of \$1.1 million to provide intensive support to people experiencing marginalization. The initiatives provided essential support to marginalized individuals, enhancing community safety and support for those experiencing crisis through distinct yet complementary approaches. Collectively, the initiatives have served over 4,500 individuals, managing over 10,000 crisis calls and visits, and distributing more than 200,000 harm reduction items. For more detail see Attachment 3, *'Impact Snapshot of Four Funded Intervention Pilot Initiatives'*.

Additionally, a two-year grant stream of \$1 million (total) to support community agencies and resident groups in activating projects that align with the central outcomes of the Action Plan was implemented. Four organizations (South Riverdale Community Health Centre, Covenant House Toronto, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, and Street Health) received a combined total of \$460,000 to provide initiatives such as trauma-informed overdose response, after-hours mental health support, education and capacity building for staff in youth emergency shelters. In addition, city staff worked with The Neighbourhood Group to provide small grants to residents in the Downtown East leading activities related to the Action Plan. See [2022.EC31.21](#) for more details on the grant and outcomes.

### *C. Multi-Sector Collaboration Towards a Targeted Response*

The Downtown East Action Plan aims to foster increased trust and collaboration among stakeholders. Collaborative platforms have been established and are utilized for partnership development, knowledge mobilization, collective problem-solving, and the development of responses to emerging issues and systemic challenges. These platforms serve as a venue for advancing progress and the outcomes of the Downtown East Action Plan.

- **The Downtown East Action Plan Leadership Table** is facilitated by City staff to foster collaboration among senior staff from 13 City divisions and five institutional partners to advance strategic issues and propose responses to chronic issues.
- **The Yonge-Dundas Operations Table** is facilitated by City staff and convenes 25 local stakeholders to coordinate cross-sectoral responses aligned with the Downtown East Action Plan.
- **Community Coordination Plan - Downtown East Cluster** is co-led by the City and United Way of Greater Toronto and enables coordination with over 45 local community organizations; fostering stronger collaboration among stakeholders and ensuring a community-focused response to emerging issues in the broader region.
- **Downtown East Ontario Health Team** improves both individual and population health and well-being through a connected system of diverse healthcare providers with a particular focus on supporting marginalized individuals.
- **Furthering Our Community by Uniting Services (FOCUS)** is a collaborative risk-driven, data-informed approach co-led by the City of Toronto, United Way Greater Toronto and Toronto Police Service to reduce risk, harm, crime, victimization and improve community resiliency and wellbeing.
- **Downtown East Justice Centre** is operated by the Ministry of Attorney General in partnership with the Ontario Court of Justice, the City of Toronto and community partners to prevent high-needs individuals at the intersection of poverty, homelessness, isolation, mental health and addictions from cycling through the criminal justice system by addressing risk factors with on-site, wrap-around supports.

Additional neighbourhood-level tables are also leveraged and broaden the scope of collaboration. Opportunities to connect with or create networks are continuously explored to advance the outcomes of the Downtown East Action Plan.

#### *D. Advancing the Downtown East Housing Strategy to Create More Affordable and Supportive Housing Opportunities*

The Downtown East Housing Strategy will establish a framework to achieve a balance of housing types across the housing continuum in the Downtown East. City Council directed Housing Secretariat staff to develop a Downtown East Housing Strategy to connect the many housing initiatives and developments planned and underway in the area, to create more affordable and supportive housing opportunities in the Downtown East area to support people with multiple marginalized identities, such as Indigenous, Black and 2SLGBTQ+ persons.

Once fully developed, the strategy will establish targets based on a data-driven understanding of the need for more diverse and affordable housing options, ranging from supportive housing, social housing, and affordable rental housing, to market rental, and affordable ownership. The Downtown East Housing Strategy will inform future decision-making when considering new investments in housing and services.

The City has developed housing targets as part of the [HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#), which was [updated](#) to include 65,000 rent-controlled homes, comprising 41,000 affordable rentals, 6,500 rent-geared-to-income and 17,500 rent-controlled market homes. As part of this target, the City continues to work to increase the supply of supportive homes in all neighbourhoods across the city including in the Downtown East area.

### **Leveraging Lessons Learnt**

Progress on the implementation of the Downtown East Action Plan has been achieved despite an array of persistent challenges, including food insecurity, the housing crisis, and the drug toxicity crisis. Urgent needs remain, underscoring the importance of tailored interventions, particularly in mental health care and substance use treatment, for those resistant to traditional services. Collaboration, sustained commitment, increased funding, resources, and partnerships are essential to overcome systemic barriers and ensure the well-being of Downtown East residents and businesses. Key learnings have emerged during the Action Plan's first iteration of implementation, and are detailed below:

#### *A. Prioritize Collaborative Partnership Building and Decision Making to Sustain Change*

- The use of collaborative tables has been instrumental, as these tables fostered improved relationships, facilitated the creation of new partnerships, and provided a platform for information sharing, collaborative problem-solving, and responses to emerging issues. Additionally, they serve as a forum to showcase the work and impact of the Downtown East Action Plan.
- The evaluation highlighted the need for enhanced engagement with community partners, especially Indigenous communities. Engaging with grassroots groups and smaller agencies also provides valuable insights into on-the-ground issues.

### *B. Ongoing Engagement to Enhance Trust Building and Awareness*

- A critical lesson emerged regarding consultations with the local Indigenous community. It became evident during implementation that relationship-building throughout the community is essential. Specific supports tailored to Indigenous needs are necessary to address the central outcomes of the Action Plan and engagement must be coordinated and intentional with empowerment of self-determination.
- There remains a need for improved engagement with all community partners to enhance understanding of the Action Plan's goals and foster collaboration in addressing complex challenges. Improved engagement with grassroots groups and smaller agencies would provide valuable insights into local issues.
- Some community members are hesitant to engage with programs like Here to Help due to concerns about police involvement, highlighting a need for improved public understanding and trust-building efforts.

### *C. Strategic Integration and Alignment to Maximize Impact*

- The City made operational changes across divisions to support the Downtown East Action Plan. Complementary plans and strategies, such as the Dundas Sherbourne Neighbourhood Revitalization Plan, were aligned to enhance the overall impact of the initiative.
- Utilizing the collaborative tables to ensure better coordination and leveraging existing strategies will support the Action Plan in its objectives including solutions to systemic challenges noted below.

### *D. Solutions to Systemic Challenges to Address Service Gaps*

- The lack of affordable housing, access to healthcare (including mental health services), adequate substance use treatment options, and insufficient income support are identified as critical systemic issues that limit the effectiveness of intensive case management programs like Community Outreach and Support Team. These challenges manifest in forms such as inadequate shelter capacity, long wait times for shelter intake, and limited access to withdrawal management beds and substance use treatment options, hindering the ability of outreach services to provide sustainable stability.
- To mitigate these challenges, centralized outreach efforts and a singular point of contact for all funded initiatives could improve community access to resources and support networks. A centralized approach promotes efficiency and coordination through streamlined access to services and enables a comprehensive understanding of community needs.
- Within the community challenges persist, including the lack of appropriate indoor drop-in spaces, insufficient shelter facilities, and a scarcity of evidence-based withdrawal management options. Addressing these challenges necessitates the adoption of more outreach-based case management strategies.
- A key impediment remains the lack of public awareness, which limits some initiatives like the Community Care Project's ability to engage with community

members and receive referrals effectively. Efforts to heighten public awareness and facilitate greater community engagement are vital to bridging service gaps and fostering sustainable stability within the community.

#### *E. Sustainable Program Funding to Sustain Impact*

- Inflationary pressures increase program costs, exacerbating staff retention and hiring difficulties, particularly for specialized roles like Registered Nurses. Outdoor work, physical demands, and short-term contracts further complicate staffing issues which affect program operations.
- Peer support workers faced challenges such as short-term funding, limited benefits, and the need for employment pathways beyond peer work, highlighting the importance of addressing the precarity of their work and ensuring adequate support mechanisms.

#### *F. Data Collection to Enable Performance Management*

- While monitoring of metrics and outcomes for funded initiatives is received regularly, there have been several challenges in reporting. This results from funded agencies facing staff turnover, data collected in formats that are difficult to share and draw insights from, and a lack of continuity in their data collection systems. There has been a lack of expectation setting and guidance from the City.
- The development of a data-based monitoring and evaluation system that aligns with the advanced analytics work of the SafeTO Collaborative Analytics and Learning Environment is crucial to enable evaluation, and improvement of service provision and to review the work happening in the downtown east holistically.

Additionally, multiple City strategies were developed at the outset and since the launch of the Downtown East Action Plan in 2020 (e.g. [Our Health Our City](#); [SafeTO](#); [Reconciliation Action Plan](#); [HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#); [Toronto Community Crisis Service](#); [The Encampment Office](#)). These emergent strategies directly impacted the response in the Downtown East and have been integrated into the implementation of the current Action Plan. They will be incorporated into the subsequent implementation phases. This approach ensures flexibility and responsiveness to evolving circumstances. Future implementation will continue to incorporate the impacts of these policy initiatives, ensuring adaptability to ongoing social policy changes. This alignment requires necessary staffing and funding adjustments to effectively address the intersecting challenges in the Downtown East.

### **Advancing a Renewed Downtown East Action Plan**

In 2023 and 2024, an extensive and comprehensive engagement process was initiated to develop the forthcoming five-year iteration of the Downtown East Action Plan (2025-2030). This process, conducted in collaboration with Fred Victor, Kwewok Nakii Collective, and 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, involved City staff undertaking inclusive consultations with the community. The primary objectives were to identify

service requirements, pinpoint deficiencies, and understand the diverse priorities of various demographic groups.

Consultations encompassed stakeholders from community agencies, Business Improvement Areas, residents' associations, and relevant City Divisions within the jurisdiction of the Downtown East Action Plan. Notably, special attention was dedicated to incorporating insights from Indigenous communities and organizations serving Indigenous populations. Engagement activities adopted a multifaceted approach, comprised of public surveys, town hall meetings, as well as smaller-scale group discussions and individual sessions tailored to specific interests. Engagements included:

- Over 2,300 responses to a public survey hosted on the City's website to reach a cross-section of the Downtown East community and provide a breadth of insights on community concerns and views on services required.
- Over 850 responses to the Downtown East Safe & Inclusive Neighbourhood Survey led by the Toronto-Centre Councillor to provide insights on safety concerns.
- 24 meetings with over 300 interactions with members of the public and different organizations in the Downtown East to identify key concerns and gather proposed solutions.
- 10 group meetings with Indigenous community members, grassroots organizers, and staff that work at service providers to identify areas of focus, priorities, and Indigenous-focused actions for the Downtown East Action Plan.
- 50 one-on-one sessions with Indigenous people in the Downtown East to explore Indigenous-focused actions more deeply for the Action Plan.
- 35 community members engaged to validate and provide feedback for shortlisted actions in the Downtown East Action Plan (2025-2030), including a dedicated session with members from the Downtown East People with Lived Experience Advisory Group.

The next iteration of the Downtown East Action Plan (2025-2030) will maintain an adaptable and proactive stance, featuring continuous monitoring of outcomes and efficacy. Effective execution relies on concerted collaboration among diverse stakeholders, encompassing residents, enterprises, community entities, and academic and institutional collaborators, alongside all levels of government, to address systemic issues and propel systemic transformation.

The primary findings from the engagement conducted can be succinctly encapsulated through the perspective of the four central outcomes and have been included as actions in the Downtown East 2025-2030 Action Plan Summary (Attachment 4).

### *1. Safe, Inclusive Communities*

The need for safe and inclusive communities in Downtown East remains a top priority among residents and businesses alike. Persistent engagement efforts reveal a prevalent apprehension towards crime and insecurity, particularly during evening hours. This apprehension not only impacts individual well-being but also impedes community

involvement and economic activity post-sunset. The community has made clear requests for expanded intervention initiatives targeting various forms of violence, including gun violence and youth-related incidents.

Furthermore, the request for 24-hour services for distressed individuals emphasizes the imperative of establishing comprehensive support systems. Addressing the lack of adequate street lighting and accessible public facilities such as washrooms is crucial in enhancing perceptions of safety and fostering a more vibrant and welcoming urban environment. Effectively addressing these public concerns is crucial for ensuring a sense of security and inclusivity is fostered for all in the Downtown East.

## *2. Cross-Sector Trust and Collaboration*

Nurturing trust and collaboration across disparate sectors are indispensable for the successful implementation of the 2025-2030 Downtown East Action Plan. Public communication needs to play a key role in keeping stakeholders informed of planned progress and outcomes. Transparent and accessible communication channels can alleviate apprehensions, instill confidence, and galvanize support from various groups within the Downtown East area.

Sustaining open communication channels and actively engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes enables the Action Plan to leverage collective expertise and resources essential for effectively addressing complex urban challenges. Persistent efforts to fortify cross-sectoral partnerships will facilitate sustained progress and ensure adequate fulfillment of Downtown East's diverse needs.

## *3. Stability for People Experiencing Marginalization*

Long-term investments from all orders of government in affordable, rent-geared-to-income, and supportive housing, coupled with initiatives focused on harm reduction, healthcare, and mental well-being, are crucial for providing stability and enhancing the quality of life for vulnerable populations. The issue of a lack of affordable housing remains a pressing concern for many residents, especially those experiencing marginalization. The demand for increased access to affordable housing options, including rent-geared-to-income housing and transitional housing programs, reflects the urgent need to address homelessness and housing insecurity in Toronto, particularly in the Downtown East.

Additionally, acknowledging the distinct challenges faced by Indigenous communities necessitates targeted investments and tailored support services to rectify housing inequities and promote cultural safety and inclusivity. Prioritizing initiatives that champion housing affordability and support individuals experiencing marginalization lays the groundwork for a more equitable and resilient community.

## *4. Model for a City Response to Complex Issues*

Despite the availability of support services, a significant gap persists in community members' awareness and utilization. Enhancing the visibility and accessibility of support



resources through improved communication products and public education efforts is imperative to facilitate easy access to assistance when needed.

Additionally, the development of an Indigenous-specific response strategy for the Downtown East with empowerment of self-determination, and the implementation of culturally appropriate services are necessary steps towards addressing the unique needs of Indigenous residents and fostering greater inclusivity and representation within the community.

Rigorous data collection and analysis are imperative for pinpointing service provision gaps and tailoring interventions to better cater to diverse populations' needs. By embracing a comprehensive and data-centric approach, the Action Plan can serve as a template for responsive and inclusive governance, establishing a precedent for effectively tackling complex social challenges through collaboration and innovation.

In early 2024, Social Development, Finance and Administration partnered with Toronto Metropolitan University to research, identify and assess approaches for engagement/service provision to people experiencing complex and overlapping vulnerabilities in the Downtown East. The final report is expected in May 2025.

## **Staged Implementation of Action Plan**

The Downtown East 2025-2030 Action Plan outlines a strategic approach to enhance the area's safety and inclusivity through a staged implementation process involving Quick Starts, Core Projects, and Signature Initiatives. Over 30 actions are identified incorporating the expertise of 15 City of Toronto divisions and agencies, with centralized coordination, monitoring and reporting facilitated by Social Development, Finance and Administration. Actions have been classified as either 'Measurable' for those with a defined target whereby measurable results directly contribute to achieving the intended outcomes, or as 'Enabling' for those without a defined target but facilitate progress and create conditions for change. Targets have been developed by the lead divisions and will continue to be refined throughout implementation, including the development of additional targets as needed. Additionally, each action has intended outcomes which identify directional measures of success. A full list of intended outcomes is included in the Central Outcomes of the Downtown East Action Plan (Attachment 1). A summary of all initiatives is included as actions in the Downtown East 2025-2030 Action Plan (Attachment 4).

The plan emphasizes adaptability, recognizing that as initiatives are implemented, new opportunities may arise, or unforeseen challenges may emerge. Therefore, the implementation strategy will remain iterative and responsive to these changes, ensuring that the plan evolves dynamically to meet the evolving needs of the community.

### ***A. Quick Starts***

Quick Starts initiatives or activities can be swiftly implemented within 6-12 months. They aim to address immediate needs and kick-start positive changes in the community. Despite their rapid deployment, Quick Starts are designed to be sustained throughout

the plan, ensuring lasting impact. A selection of Quick Starts is indicated in the table below:

Table 1: Quick Starts (6-12 months)

<b>Central Outcome</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Lead Division(s)</b>
Safe, Inclusive Communities	Enhanced Cleaning Services Levels	Continue enhanced cleaning services levels for select i) sidewalks, cycling infrastructure and laneways, ii) streets, iii) street furniture, and iv) parks, including exploring the addition of garbage bins on specific public property.	Solid Waste Management Services; Parks, Forestry & Recreation; Transportation Services
Safe, Inclusive Communities	Community Engagement Teams	Continue support for the Community Engagement Team led by the Downtown Yonge BIA providing response and de-escalation support in the Yonge-Dundas area. Explore and activate Community Engagement Teams in other Downtown East BIAs.	Social Development, Finance & Administration; Economic Development & Culture
Cross-Sectoral Trust and Collaboration	Dundas Sherbourne Neighbourhood Revitalization Plan	Develop and implement a coordinated, neighbourhood-based plan to comprehensively address complex and long-standing safety, stability and social cohesion issues in the area surrounding Dundas and Sherbourne, including the Dan Harrison Complex, 155 Sherbourne Street, as well as 275, 285, and 295 Shuter Street. The Revitalization Plan should facilitate partnerships among stakeholders, guide City investment, and advance intergovernmental alignment by incorporating two distinct components: a Redevelopment Plan and a Community Development Plan.	Housing Secretariat; Social Development, Finance & Administration

<b>Central Outcome</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Lead Division(s)</b>
Cross-Sectoral Trust and Collaboration	Standardized Reporting System for Funded Initiatives	Development of a standardized and streamlined reporting methodology to enable monitoring of funded initiatives. This will include new reporting tools, ongoing analysis, and feedback loops to improve operations and services.	Social Development, Finance & Administration
Model for a City Response to Complex Issues	Downtown East Action Plan Communication Strategy	<p>A public communications and marketing program is established to disseminate information regarding resources, responses, and services offered within the Downtown East. This includes the placement of physical notices. Cross-sector engagement opportunities are facilitated to address shared issues. Communication with the public involves providing information on available data within the DTE. Specific initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Updating the website with information on plan implementation and centralized community resources, including an interactive mapping of services available, and 311 information for service requests</li> <li>ii) Facilitating quarterly regional “Downtown East Action Plan Community Conversations” to update the public.</li> <li>iii) Develop a dashboard to monitor Action plan progress and relevant outcomes, outputs, or service level responses that address public realm concerns. Reports from the dashboard will be shared regularly with project stakeholders, including the public.</li> </ul>	Social Development, Finance & Administration

## B. Core Projects

Core Projects require a longer implementation timeline of one-to-two years and are aimed at addressing deeper-rooted issues or making substantial improvements to the area. Core projects will build on existing initiatives of City Divisions and partners to achieve the central outcomes of the Action Plan. Core Projects serve as the backbone of the plan, laying the groundwork for long-term transformation. A selection of Core Projects is indicated in the table below:

Table 2: Core Projects (1-2 years)

<b>Central Outcome</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Lead Division(s)</b>
Safe, Inclusive Communities	Access To Safe Indoor/ Outdoor Public Spaces	Identify opportunities to improve access to safe indoor/outdoor spaces for marginalized people to spend time in the Downtown East. Increase capacity for Park, Forestry & Recreation, Toronto Shelter and Support Services and Library staff to accommodate marginalized people in their spaces.	Toronto Public Library; Toronto Shelter and Support Services; Parks, Forestry & Recreation
Cross-Sectoral Trust and Collaboration	Mental Health, Addictions & Homelessness Business Support Strategy	Informed by consultation with local businesses in the Downtown East, design and implement a Mental Health & Homelessness Business Support Strategy to equip local businesses with the needed tools and insights.	Toronto Shelter and Support Services; Economic Development & Culture
Stability for People Experiencing Marginalization	Peer Employment Pathways	Promote collaboration between the City and agencies to create pathways that bring marginalized people closer to the labour market through safe and supportive roles.	Social Development, Finance & Administration; Toronto Shelter and Support Services

## C. Signature Initiatives

Signature Initiatives are multi-year strategies designed to address complex challenges and achieve substantial impact for individuals and communities. These initiatives

represent the cornerstone of the Action Plan, requiring meticulous development, coordination, and delivery to bring about transformative changes. Collaboration with diverse stakeholders and allocation of significant resources are common features of these initiatives, aimed at achieving meaningful outcomes in the community. A selection of Signature Initiatives is indicated in the table below:

Table 3: Signature Initiatives (multi-year approaches)

<b>Central Outcome</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Lead Division(s)</b>
Safe, Inclusive Communities	Washroom Enhancement Program	Undertake a comprehensive review of park washrooms city-wide and explore the feasibility and associated timelines with conversion to year-round usage or new build.	Parks, Forestry & Recreation
Stability for People Experiencing Marginalization	Critical Public Health Needs	Increase services that address barriers to access and respond to identified gaps, including: shelters, drop-in services, warming centres, housing workers, outreach workers, outreach services, supervised consumption sites, wrap-around support around supervised consumption sites, and harm reduction agencies.	Toronto Shelter and Support Services; Toronto Public Health
Stability for People Experiencing Marginalization	Overdose Prevention & Response	Work with City and community partners in the Downtown East to implement new actions in Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto.	Toronto Public Health
Stability for People Experiencing Marginalization	Affordable, Accessible & Available Housing	Continue to monitor and advance improved housing outcomes in the area, including tracking through the Downtown East Housing Strategy and HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan.	Housing Secretariat

<b>Central Outcome</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Lead Division(s)</b>
Stability for People Experiencing Marginalization	Investing in Indigenous Peoples & Services	Promote long-term investments in Indigenous communities to address housing, addiction, mental health, and health issues in the Downtown East.	Housing Secretariat

## **Next Steps for Effective Implementation**

Maintaining the momentum and impact of the Downtown East Action Plan requires ongoing resources and commitment from the City, community stakeholders, and all levels of government. Proactive community development and engagement efforts are essential. Partnerships between stakeholders and the City of Toronto will play a crucial role in increasing public awareness of available programs and support services in the Downtown East, facilitate access to municipal resources, and foster community-based initiatives. Consistent strategies for communication, community engagement, outreach, and activation should be developed.

Continued funding for initiatives supporting people experiencing marginalization is needed. As part of the 2025 budget process, Social Development, Finance and Administration will launch the Safe & Inclusive Communities Grant to resource existing initiatives and responsive interventions that fund overnight outreach programs, and the Strengthening Neighbourhoods Grant to fund resident-led groups to work collectively to address concerns in their neighbourhoods which advance the central outcomes of the Downtown East Action Plan with community activation projects. These grants will leverage the City's online grants management system to standardize and streamline reporting methodologies and analysis.

The complex and entrenched needs of the community require increased collaboration between City divisions and in some cases go beyond City levers. The City and community partners cannot resolve these issues alone. Addressing the complex challenges in the area will require additional investment combined with long-term, multi-sectoral approaches that include all levels of government, as well as participation from Indigenous organizations, and the non-profit and private sectors.

The Downtown East Action Plan has demonstrated impact in fostering a more collaborative environment and enabling social service providers to better support people experiencing marginalization. New and enhanced funding will be required in 2025, and future years, to continue implementation of the Downtown East Action Plan. Social Development, Finance and Administration and other City Divisions will review their capacity and resources and will include funding requests in future budget submissions for consideration along with other City priorities, as part of the 2025 budget process.

## CONTACT

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## SIGNATURE

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Denise Andrea Campbell  
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## ATTACHMENTS

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Attachment 1: Central Outcomes of the Downtown East 2020-2023 Action Plan  
Attachment 2: Downtown East Action Plan Progress Update, July 2022-December 2023  
Attachment 3: Impact Snapshot of Four Funded Intervention Pilot Initiatives  
Attachment 4: Downtown East 2025-2030 Action Plan