



Interim Strategic Plan 2026

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Introduction

Downtown London's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan has served as a foundational roadmap for advancing our mission to foster a vibrant, welcoming, and economically resilient downtown district. As we approach the conclusion of that plan, we recognize both the progress made and the work still to be done.

At the same time, the City of London has initiated the development of a new Downtown Plan, led by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI), which is expected to be completed in Q2 of 2026. This city-led plan will set a renewed vision and direction for the downtown and will have direct implications for future investments, programming, infrastructure, and policy.

In recognition of this important timing, Downtown London will not immediately launch a new multi-year strategic plan upon the expiration of the current one. Instead, we are introducing this 2026 Interim Strategic Plan, a focused, one-year strategy designed to:

- Advance high-priority actions from the 2021-2025 plan that remain incomplete or in progress,
- Maintain momentum on core programs and services that support our members and the downtown community,
- Position Downtown London to align effectively with the City's Downtown Plan once it is released, and
- Lay the groundwork for the development of our next multi-year strategic plan (2027-2031), to begin following the release of the Downtown Plan.

This interim plan is not a full strategic refresh. It is a transitional roadmap that ensures organizational focus, accountability, and continuity during a pivotal year for Downtown London.

Key Considerations

As we transition from the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan into this interim planning year, several internal and external factors have shaped the direction and scope of the 2026 Interim Strategic Plan.

1. Mandate Under the Municipal Act, 2001

Downtown London operates under a mandate defined by the *Municipal Act, 2001*, which tasks Business Improvement Areas (BIA) with two key responsibilities:

- oversee the improvement, beautification, and maintenance of municipally-owned land, buildings and structures in the area beyond that provided at the expense of the municipality generally,
- promote the area as a business or shopping area.

In fulfilling this mandate, LDBA serves four key roles widely recognized across the BIA sector:

- Area Marketer: driving foot traffic through campaigns, digital media, and partnerships.
- Event Facilitator: sponsoring and supporting festivals, events, placemaking initiatives, and public activations.
- Public Realm Investor: maintaining cleanliness and beautification.
- Policy Advocate: representing the interests of downtown businesses and property owners in city planning, economic development, safety, and recovery efforts.

2. Alignment with the City of London's Downtown Plan

The City's new Downtown Plan, being led by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI), is expected to be finalized in Q2 2026. This plan will offer a renewed vision for downtown, outlining municipal priorities, investment strategies, and long-term planning objectives. Rather than initiating a new strategic plan in isolation, Downtown London will align its next multi-year strategy (2027-2031) with the City's plan to ensure mutual reinforcement and impact.

The City of London is Downtown London's most significant public partner, responsible for the majority of infrastructure, services, and investment in downtown. As the City prepares to launch a renewed Downtown Plan, it is essential that Downtown London's strategic direction complements and reinforces that broader civic vision. Strategic alignment increases the value of

every dollar and hour invested by ensuring the BIA's efforts are focused where they can have the greatest impact, in step with municipal priorities.

As a municipally designated Business Improvement Area (BIA), Downtown London operates under the *Municipal Act, 2001* and in close collaboration with City staff and departments. Our mandate is to enhance, promote, and advocate for the district, not to replace or replicate City functions, but to work alongside them. Aligning our next multi-year strategy with the City's Downtown Plan will strengthen coordination, improve advocacy, and position Downtown London to better leverage public investments, build meaningful partnerships, and deliver value to our members.

Aligning with the City's plan means Downtown London is better positioned to advocate for funding, partnerships, and collaborative initiatives that directly benefit members. Waiting allows the organization to respond strategically, ensuring that future investments, campaigns, and programs are relevant and well-timed. In the meantime, this interim plan provides a focused framework that allows Downtown London to continue delivering high-impact programs and advocating effectively, while positioning the organization for a coordinated and forward-looking strategy in 2027.

3. Unfinished Priorities from the 2021-2025 Plan

Many initiatives outlined in the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan are still in progress, on hold, or were delayed due to evolving conditions. This interim plan prioritizes high-impact, achievable actions from the existing strategy that warrant continuation or completion in 2026.

4. Need for Organizational Focus and Flexibility

The interim year provides an opportunity to focus efforts on core programs, operational strengthening, and strategic readiness, without committing to new long-term directions until the external planning landscape is clear. It also allows staff and the board to prepare for the next full strategic planning cycle through evaluation, engagement, and capacity-building.

5. Upcoming Strategic Planning Process

Downtown London will release an RFP for a strategic planning consultant in early 2026. The development of the 2027-2031 Strategic Plan will begin after the City releases the Downtown Plan. This will ensure the new strategy is directly informed by, and aligned with, broader city-building efforts.

6. Evolving Data, Research, and Member Insights (2021-2025)

Since 2021, Downtown London has strengthened its capacity to collect, analyze, and use data to inform its programs, guide investments, and advocate for change. These insights have come from internal tracking systems, member engagement, and third-party sources such as Environics Analytics and City of London development records. As Downtown London prepares for its next strategic planning cycle, this data foundation provides critical context for evaluating what's working, what's changed, and what emerging opportunities should be prioritized.

Key insights from 2021-2025:

- The resident population grew from 8,389 residents in 2021 to 11,513 residents in 2024.
- The assessed value of properties in the downtown grew from \$1.96 billion in 2019 to \$2.04 billion in 2024.
- From 2020-2024 there was approximately \$646 million in private construction.
- From 2020-2024, LDBA supported more than 500 businesses through grants or programming.
- Daytime population rebounded from the pandemic, from 35,372 in 2021 to 45,717 in 2024.

Strategic Priorities

Downtown London's 2026 Interim Strategic Plan retains the six strategic priorities established in the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan. These priorities remain relevant, interdependent, and essential to the continued progress of downtown. During this one-year transition period, Downtown London will focus on advancing unfinished actions, sustaining momentum in key areas, and positioning the organization to align with the City of London's forthcoming Downtown Plan. Each strategic priority continues to provide a lens for decision-making, resource allocation, and advocacy, ensuring that Downtown London remains focused, responsive, and impactful throughout 2026.

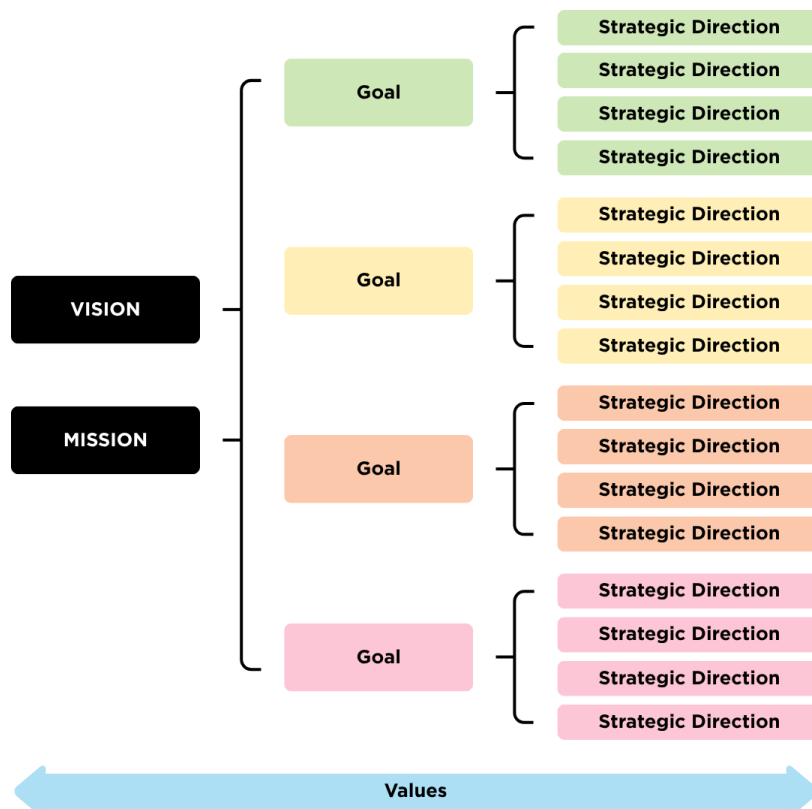


Fundamentals of Downtown London's Strategy

The Downtown London 2026 Interim Strategy sets the course for the organization's direction and efforts during the 2026 year. The strategy is based on the following fundamental elements:

- The Vision Statement provides a future oriented declaration of Downtown London's image of success. It answers the question of where the organization wants to be in the future.
- The Mission Statement is the reason Downtown London exists. This action-oriented statement describes what Downtown London does and why.
- Values represent the core beliefs that inspire Downtown London's choices. They guide how it operates and deals with others in pursuit of the vision.
- Goals are the broad aim or end-result Downtown London wants to achieve in support of the vision.
- Strategic Directions are the foundational ideas or actions required to achieve the goals.

Together these elements provide the detailed framework for where the organization is going, and the actions it will take to get there.



Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision

London has all the attributes of a leading North American city. It has a highly educated workforce and one of the top talent pipelines in North America. London is one of the fastest growing urban centres in Canada. As the fight for global talent and business investment intensifies in the coming years, London is well positioned to prosper.

A thriving city needs a thriving downtown. Downtown London is the city's most dynamic and essential district, the place where commerce, culture, civic life, and community intersect. As London's economic core, downtown contains a high concentration of businesses, offices, financial institutions, and retail establishments, generating significant employment and contributing substantially to the city's tax base. It is also the cultural and social heart of the city, hosting landmark destinations, major festivals, and experiences that attract visitors and bring people together. Supporting a district of this scale and significance requires ongoing investment, collaborative leadership, and a shared commitment to its success. Downtown London is proud to represent more than 1,400 businesses and commercial property owners within downtown. As the city looks ahead to a more connected, vibrant, and sustainable future, downtown must continue to lead the way.

OUR VISION



Downtown London represents a thriving, progressive, and welcoming district in the heart of the city.

The people that own businesses, visit, work, learn, and live in the district are the essence of its vibrancy and diversity.

Mission

Downtown London is proud to work alongside many partners who contribute to the vitality, resilience, and continued growth of the downtown. City Hall, the London Chamber of Commerce, London Economic Development Corporation, TechAlliance, London Small Business Centre, Tourism London, Covent Garden Market, and Dundas Place, along with service providers, cultural institutions, and community organizations all play vital roles in shaping a thriving downtown.

Downtown London's role within this ecosystem is focused and member-driven. As a Business Improvement Area (BIA), we represent over 1,400 businesses and commercial property owners within downtown. Through programs, advocacy, strategic investments, and ongoing partnerships, we work to support economic activity, business success, and a vibrant district that benefits the entire city.

As a membership organization, we are guided by the needs and aspirations of the people and businesses who operate downtown every day. Their success, and the success of the downtown, is critical to the future of London. Downtown London is committed to ensuring downtown remains strong, welcoming, and positioned for long-term prosperity.

OUR MISSION



Downtown London represents and supports its members, fostering a strong, thriving downtown in the economic and cultural heart of the city of London.

Values

Values are what drive Downtown London. They guide our decision-making, animate our team, and shape how we serve our members and engage with our partners. Downtown London is committed to providing leadership in support of the downtown's continued evolution, but we are not alone in this work. Many organizations contribute to the success of the district, and we believe in working closely and collaboratively on shared priorities.

We believe downtown must reflect and celebrate the diversity of the city. That includes diversity in its people, businesses, arts, and culture. Downtown should be a place where people of all ages, backgrounds, and identities feel welcome and inspired to participate in city life.

We also believe in shared prosperity. A thriving downtown benefits not only its businesses and residents, but the city as a whole, economically, culturally, and socially.

OUR VALUES



Member Support: We assist our membership to achieve success through promotion, programming, and advocacy with a focus on the common good of the membership.

Leadership: We are uniquely positioned to speak as a catalyst for positive change, constructive advocate, and voice of the downtown.

Collaboration: We can achieve more by supporting and working cooperatively with our community partners on our shared goals.

Diversity: The variety and interplay of people, business, arts, and culture in the district provides a richness of opportunity and experience unparalleled anywhere else in London

Prosperity: The economic success of our members and the district reflects and impacts the economic health of the whole city.

Goals



Goals and Strategic Directions



1. Welcoming, Safe, and Vibrant Downtown

Objective: Plan and program efforts that support a vibrant atmosphere that attracts and welcomes visitors and encourages new and continued business investment in the downtown.

A welcoming, safe and vibrant environment is essential to the health and success of the downtown. From daily commuters and residents to event attendees and first-time visitors, the downtown experience shapes perceptions of the city and directly influences where people choose to spend their time and money.

Downtown London continues to hear from its members, including through annual surveys, that safety and social challenges remain among their top concerns. These complex issues require city-wide collaboration, sustained investment, and community leadership. Downtown London is committed to being an active partner in these conversations, bringing the voices of its members to the table and advocating for solutions that support both public wellbeing and business confidence.

While the organization does not directly control policing, housing, or health policy, it plays a critical role in shaping the experience of the district through programs and advocacy that support safety, vibrancy, and quality of place. This includes:

- Maintaining a clean team presence to improve the appearance and upkeep of downtown.
- Supporting beautification initiatives such as murals, lighting, seasonal decor, planters, and public art.
- Increasing foot traffic through regular programming and promotion of the downtown.
- Sponsoring and supporting activations, events, and festivals that bring feet to the street.

By supporting safety, vibrancy, and quality of place, Downtown London can help create a safe and inviting atmosphere that encourages business retention, property reinvestment, and community pride.

1. Welcoming, Safe and Vibrant Downtown - Strategic Directions

1.1 Work with members, activation partners, City, and downtown commercial and residential property owners to deliver/sponsor a variety of culturally diverse events and activations to attract people and create vibrancy in downtown.

1.2 Echo and promote the initiatives of the City, London Police Services, and other community service providers to foster the perception of a safe, clean, and vibrant downtown.

1.3 Work with other BIA's, Ontario Business Improvement Area Association, International Downtown Association and others to share information on best practices and projects that could be successfully implemented in downtown London.



2. Diversified Economic Base

Objective: Grow and diversify the businesses, services, and activities that contribute to the economic vitality of the district.

Downtown London is home to a significant share of the City's economic activity. It contains a high concentration of professional services, finance, technology, education, hospitality, and creative industries. It is also a growing residential hub, with thousands of new units built, underway, or planned, and a diverse population that contributes to the area's energy and potential.

In the years following the pandemic, downtowns across North America have adapted to new patterns of work, travel, and commerce. London is no exception. The rise of hybrid and remote work has challenged traditional business hours, but it has also created new opportunities to activate the downtown for residents, students, and visitors. At the same time, London's rapid population growth, strong post-secondary presence, and rising downtown tourism activity positions downtown for continued economic diversification.

Downtown London's role is to support and promote a balanced and resilient economy, one that serves residents, draws in visitors, supports local entrepreneurship, and attracts reinvestments.

2. Diversified Economic Base - Strategic Directions

2.1 Support the City and residential developers' efforts to grow and diversify the downtown population and advance live, work, play opportunities for the downtown.

2.2 Working with community and economic development partners, help diversity business mix and investment in downtown.

2.3 Support community initiatives for business/retail entrepreneurship incubators targeted to post-secondary students and BIPOC communities to grow and stay downtown.



3. Strong Member Engagement and Support

Objective: Align marketing and business assistance to amplify member success.

Marketing the downtown as a shopping, dining, and commerce district remains one of Downtown London's core responsibilities. Over the past several years, Downtown London has established a clear and consistent corporate brand that celebrates the diversity, vibrancy, and value of the downtown experience. In 2026, the focus will be on upholding that brand and continuing to tell the downtown story in authentic, creative, and strategic ways.

Campaigns and content will continue to centre real businesses and real people, highlighting their stories in ways that resonate with both local audiences and visitors. Whether through digital campaigns, themed trails, storefront features, or seasonal promotions, Downtown London will continue to animate the district and drive attention to its members.

The downtown itself serves as a canvas. Through creative placemaking, wayfinding, signage, activations, and partnerships, Downtown London will continue to find new ways to bring visibility to businesses and reinforce the brand throughout the core.

In 2026, Downtown London will:

- Continue delivering strategic social media content, digital storytelling, and campaign messaging.
- Celebrate business investment and growth through grand openings, anniversary highlights, and business features.
- Uphold its visual brand through consistent materials, tone, and promotions across all platforms and touchpoints.
- Update the online member directory to be more intuitive and easier to navigate by category and location.

Member communication remains a top priority. With a growing membership base (now more than 1,400 businesses and commercial property owners), Downtown London will continue to use a range of tools, including the Business Insider e-newsletter, one-on-one member visits, social media updates, patio pub-talks, popping up in downtown events, member mixers, and its website to keep members informed, connected, and aware of support available.

Public perception surveys, intercept interviews, and CRM data tracking provide valuable insights into who is using downtown and how member needs are evolving. Downtown London will continue this work in 2026, leveraging both internal data and city-wide demographic trends to inform programming and advocacy.

In short, 2026 will be a year of continuity and consistency, continuing to engage members, elevate their success, and make downtown a compelling place to shop, dine, invest, and belong.

3. Strong Member Engagement and Support - Strategic Directions

3.1 Provide promotional support to members and continue to market the downtown as a business, shopping, dining, and cultural district.

3.2 Respond, track, and deploy appropriate resources that address members' issues and opportunities.

3.3 Provide effective member services, networking and information sharing tools and tactics, highlighting important member topics such as merchant best practices.

3.4 Explore and expand LDBA member activities for staff and board members that proactively supports member needs and opportunities.



4. Champion, Catalyst, and Liaison for the Downtown

Objective: Initiate and leverage collaborative efforts to advocate for and achieve shared goals with the organizations contributing to Downtown London's success.

Downtown London is now widely recognized as a respected, trusted, and effective voice for downtown. Through strong advocacy, consistent messaging, and an ongoing presence at key civic and community tables, Downtown London has established its role as a leader, collaborator, and spokesperson for the district and its members.

Downtown London is not alone in shaping the success of the core. Many organizations contribute to downtown's vitality, including City of London departments, Dundas Place, anchor institutions like Canada Life Place, the Grand Theatre, Covent Garden Market, and RBC Place, and economic partners like LEDC, Tourism London, TechAlliance, the Small Business Centre, and the Chamber of Commerce. Downtown London remains committed to collaborating with these and other partners, ensuring alignment, mutual support, and shared success.

While Downtown London will continue to collaborate across sectors and engage with a wide range of partners, it will do so with a clear understanding of its mandate under the *Municipal Act, 2001*. The organization will focus its efforts on the areas where it provides the most value, supporting businesses, enhancing the public realm, promoting the district, and advocating on key issues.

Downtown London will continue to:

- Participate in the development of the City's Downtown Plan, ensuring members' voices are represented.
- Collaborate with key anchor institutions and amplify their events, offerings, and district-wide impacts.
- Maintain and strengthen relationships with City Council and staff.
- Reinforce the importance of the downtown to London's economic and cultural health.
- Proactively advocate on top issues identified through annual surveys and member engagement.

- Produce clear, confident messaging and data storytelling to influence policy, investment, and public perception.

Downtown London will continue to serve as a credible and consistent advocate for its members and the downtown district. In 2026, the organization will maintain its role as a trusted partner to the City of London and other key stakeholders, contributing data-informed insights and representing the perspectives of businesses and property owners. As the city continues to grow and evolve, Downtown London will work to ensure that the downtown remains a priority in broader economic, cultural, and planning discussions, reinforcing its importance to the overall health and prosperity of London.

4. Champion, catalyst, and liaison for the downtown- Strategic Directions

4.1 Identify and leverage strong relationships with key strategic partners, community and business organizations for joint program development, economic development, advocacy, research, procurement of products/services, etc.

4.2 Establish Downtown London as the authority for current and up to date downtown information, and trends to reinforce the social and economic value of the downtown district.

4.3 Create and build a positive and professional brand and image for Downtown London as a trusted organization acting on behalf of its members.

4.4 Maintain an advocacy plan for key strategic issues/opportunities that support LDBA membership as a whole and help to influence political policy through evidence-based business cases.

Next Steps

This Interim Strategic Plan provides Downtown London with a clear, focused framework for 2026. It affirms the organization's mandate under the Municipal Act, 2001 and reinforces its commitment to supporting member success, enhancing the downtown environment, promoting economic activity, and advocating for the interests of businesses and commercial property owners. Staff will develop their 2026 Work Plan with this framework in mind, ensuring alignment between day-to-day operations and the organization's strategic priorities.

Staff will identify and implement key actions aligned with the organization's vision, mission, goals, and strategic directions. These actions will reflect the priorities outlined in this plan, as well as operational capacity, emerging opportunities, and ongoing collaboration with members and strategic partners.

Following the release of the City of London's Downtown Plan in Q2 2026, Downtown London will initiate the development of its next multi-year Strategic Plan (2027-2031). The timing of this process will allow the organization to align with the City's renewed direction for downtown and ensure Downtown London remains a responsive, coordinated, and high-impact organization.

With a clear mandate, a unified vision, and the continued trust of its members, Downtown London is well positioned to lead with purpose in 2026. This interim plan affirms the organization's enduring commitment to strengthening downtown as a dynamic, welcoming, and essential part of London's future. As the city grows and plans for what's next, Downtown London will remain a steady and collaborative voice, driving momentum, amplifying opportunity, and ensuring that downtown remains vital to the economic, cultural, and civic life of our city.