



Request for Proposals:
Downtown London Strategic Plan
2027 - 2031

Issuing Organization: Downtown London Business Association (LDBA)

Submission Deadline: January 30, 2026 at 4:00PM EST

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Introduction

The Downtown London Business Association (LDBA) is seeking a qualified consultant/firm to lead the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for the 2027-2031 period. This plan will guide the organization's strategic priorities, programming, and advocacy efforts while aligning closely with the outcomes of the City of London's Downtown Plan.

LDBA will provide all necessary data, reports, and internal documentation. The successful consultant will not be expected to conduct original data collection but will instead analyze the data provided to develop a strategy informed by evidence, engagement, and strategic alignment.



Background and Context

LDBA is a business improvement area (BIA) dedicated to enhancing the heart of London, Ontario. We represent more than 1,400 businesses and property owners within our boundaries, funded through a levy on commercial properties in the area. Our main functions, as defined under Section 204 of the Municipal Act, 2001, are to:

1. Enhance and maintain the public spaces in our area, going beyond what is typically provided by the municipality.
2. Promote downtown London as a vibrant destination for business, shopping, dining, and culture.

Established in the 1970s, LDBA looks after the concerns and interests of its members. Broadly, our programming improves and enhances downtown through business retention/recruitment, beautification, advocacy, and organizing/sponsoring events. In addition, LDBA is responsible for marketing Downtown London as London's most exciting and diverse neighbourhood.

LDBA is governed by a Board of Management composed of 12 members and one City Councillor representing the downtown ward. The board provides strategic oversight and direction, ensuring that the organization remains aligned with member interests and municipal priorities.



Downtown London has undergone significant transformation and progress since 2021 (the start of our last multi-year strategic plan). With new residential developments, investment in public infrastructure, and an evolving business landscape, the downtown is in need of new strategic direction.

The City of London is developing its Downtown Plan (to be released in Q2 2026), and alignment with this plan is essential. The Downtown Plan is being created to help the City of London plan for the long-term future of downtown. The plan will develop strategies that support residential, commercial and employment growth, and establish downtown as a vibrant destination for Londoners and visitors. The LDBA'S new strategic plan must reinforce and complement the City's efforts while focusing on the specific needs and opportunities of the downtown business community.

Downtown London is a small but economically significant area, representing 0.7% of the City's land area yet generating more than 5% of its municipal tax revenue. The total assessed property value within the downtown BIA boundary reached \$2.04 billion in 2024. As of 2024, the area is home to 11,513 residents, up from 8,389 in 2021. Since 2020, 1,456 residential units have been approved, are under construction, or have been completed, contributing to continued residential growth. While there are 610 total storefronts downtown, our internal records estimate that approximately 15.5% are currently vacant. Combined with a 31.4% office vacancy rate as of Q2 2025, visible storefront and commercial vacancies remain a significant challenge facing downtown.



Project Objectives

The primary objective of this project is to develop a clear, measurable, and actionable strategic plan for LDBA (2027-2031) that reflects the needs of the downtown business community and reinforces broader city-building goals.

Specifically, the strategic plan will:

- Establish a renewed vision, mission, and set of priorities for LDBA that are grounded in evidence and stakeholder input.
- Reinforce and align with the goals, strategies, and objectives outlined in the City of London's forthcoming Downtown Plan (Q2 2026).
- Interpret and synthesize existing data and reports provided by LDBA.
- Incorporate perspectives from a diverse range of downtown stakeholders, including:
 - LDBA members (businesses and property owners)
 - Key organizations/institutions such as Tourism London, Dundas Place, London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC), London Chamber of Commerce, Fanshawe College, London Police Services, and the City of London.
 - Key anchors such as Covent Garden Market, Canada Life Place, Grand Theatre, and RBC Place.
- Create space that fully embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by fostering partnerships with Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities, women, LGBTQ+ communities, persons with disabilities, newcomers, and other underrepresented groups. It should highlight and amplify the experiences of these communities, ensure resources are intentionally allocated for their visibility, leadership, and promotion, and importantly, position DEI tourism not as an add-on, but as a priority woven into the region's tourism identity and product mix, while also ensuring that all equity-deserving groups are reflected and valued in the broader vision for the visitor economy. It is important to LDBA that these values be reflected in its new strategic plan.
- Where applicable, draw on insights from external reports, such as the Chamber's *The Role of Culture in London's Downtown Evolution* report to inform recommendations.
- Deliver a comprehensive implementation framework with phased actions, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, timelines, and key performance indicators to guide execution and monitoring.

Scope of Work

Phase 1: Stakeholder Engagement and Visioning

The consultant will lead a focused engagement process with key stakeholders to inform the strategic plan. Broader public and member engagement have already been conducted by LDBA staff, as well as via Canadian Urban Institute's (CUI) engagement work for the Downtown Plan. These findings will be provided to the consultant for integration.

Key tasks include:

- Design and facilitate targeted engagement sessions with select stakeholders including (but not limited to): LDBA staff and Board of Management, Tourism London, Dundas Place, LEDC, Chamber, Fanshawe College, London Police Service, City of London, Covent Garden Market, Canada Life Place, Grand Theatre, and RBC Place.
- Review and, if appropriate, recommend updates to LDBA's current vision, mission, and values based on engagement insights and organizational goals.
- Identify shared opportunities and alignments between LDBA and the City's Downtown Plan, leveraging the engagement findings and early signals from the City's planning process.
- Incorporate and synthesize relevant engagement findings from the City of London's Downtown Plan process, publicly available in Q4 2025, to avoid duplication and ensure alignment.
- Deliver a summary report and presentation of Phase 1 findings to LDBA staff and Board.

Phase 2: Research and Analysis

Building on Phase 1 engagement insights, the consultant will review and synthesize existing data and reports provided by LDBA and its partners to identify strategic priorities and ensure alignment with the City's Downtown Plan.

Key tasks include:

- Review and analyze all relevant data and internal reports provided by LDBA. These may include demographic data, business and economic activity data, foot traffic patterns, spending patterns, member and visitor survey findings, and internal program evaluation metrics.
- Analyze the City of London's Downtown Plan deliverables (to be released Q2 2026) to identify areas of alignment, shared priorities, and opportunities for complementary or supporting initiatives by LDBA.
- Identify areas where LDBA can lead, support, or collaborate on implementing broader downtown objectives, especially in economic development, placemaking, cultural programming, and business retention/attraction.
- Validate and refine the strategic insights and directions emerging from Phase 1 engagement using the findings from the data analysis.
- Prepare a summary report and presentation of Phase 2 findings for LDBA staff and Board.

Phase 3: Strategic Plan and Implementation Framework

In the final phase, the consultant will consolidate findings from earlier phases into a comprehensive strategic plan and implementation framework for 2027-2031. The plan should be visionary yet actionable, aligning with the City's Downtown Plan while responding to the specific needs and opportunities within downtown London.

Key tasks include:

- Develop a draft strategic plan, including:
 - Updated vision and mission
 - Strategic goals and priorities
 - Proposed strategic initiatives
 - Program, policy, and project recommendations
 - Key performance indicators to monitor progress and outcomes
- Prepare a detailed implementation roadmap, including timelines, resource requirements, roles and responsibilities, and phasing of initiatives.
- Present the draft strategic plan and implementation roadmap to LDBA staff and Board for feedback.
- Review and provide recommendations on governance, staffing, and operational capacity to ensure the organization is equipped to deliver on the plan.
- Propose an evaluation framework and communication strategies to support transparency, reporting and accountability. This should build on LDBA's existing Marketing and Communications Plan.
- Incorporate feedback and deliver a final public-facing strategic plan and accompanying internal implementation guide.
- Present the final plan to LDBA staff and Board for approval.

Deliverables

The successful consultant will be responsible for the following deliverables:

- Phase 1 summary report, including key insights from stakeholder engagement and recommendations related to vision, mission, and strategic priorities.
- Presentation of Phase 1 findings to LDBA staff and Board.
- Phase 2 summary report, synthesizing research, data analysis, and alignment with the City's Downtown Plan.
- Presentation of Phase 2 findings to LDBA staff and Board.
- Draft strategic plan and implementation framework, including vision, mission, strategic goals, initiatives, KPIs, and roadmap.
- Presentation of draft plan to LDBA staff and Board.
- Final strategic plan.
- Presentation of final plan to LDBA staff and Board for approval.

Roles and Responsibilities

The following individuals and groups will play key roles in the strategic planning process:

- Consultant/firm: The successful consultant will lead the planning, facilitation, analysis, and development of the strategic plan and implementation framework. The consultant will report directly to the LDBA Executive Director and the Governance Committee throughout the engagement.
- LDBA Executive Director: The Executive Director will serve as the primary point of contact and will manage the day-to-day coordination of the project. This includes liaising with the consultant, coordinating internal resources, arranging stakeholder meetings, and ensuring that the project stays on track and on time.
- LDBA Board of Directors: The Board will review, provide input on, and ultimately approve the final strategic plan and implementation framework.
- LDBA Staff: The LDBA staff will support the strategic planning process by providing relevant data, internal reports, and operational insights. They will work closely with the consultant and Executive Director throughout all phases of the project, offering input, participating in working sessions, and reviewing draft materials.

Project Schedule

Date	Deliverable
January 5, 2026	Call for Request for Proposals (RFP)
January 30, 2026	RFP closes
February 2 - 6, 2026	Proposals reviewed and evaluated by Governance Committee, ED, Managers, and Policy and Research Coordinator.
March 2, 2026	Notify successful candidate and commence project
March - April, 2026	Completion of Phase 1 and 1st interim report & presentation to LDBA staff and board.
Q2 2026	Release of Downtown Plan Phase 2
May - June, 2026	Completion of Phase 2 and 2nd interim report & presentation to LDBA staff and board.
July - August 2026	Completion of Phase 3 and the draft strategic plan & implementation plan and presentations to LDBA staff and board.
Final Possible Date September 17, 2026	Present the final strategic plan & implementation plan for board approval.

Budget and Financial Parameters

Proposals must include a detailed fee schedule, broken down by project phase and deliverable, with estimated hours and rates where applicable. No additional charges will be considered unless a change in the scope of work is formally agreed upon in writing by both parties.

Consultant Qualifications

The successful proponent will be a qualified consultant/firm with demonstrated expertise in strategic and operational planning, particularly in the context of urban, downtown, and place-based organizations.

Proposals should clearly demonstrate experience in the following areas:

- Advanced experience in developing strategic and operational plans, including identifying measurable key performance indicators.
- Experience working with Business Improvement Areas, economic development orgs, or downtown-focused organizations.
- Strong background in developing business and marketing plans for nonprofit organizations, local boards, or public-sector entities.
- Understanding of Business Improvement Areas and their operation under the Ontario Municipal Act, 2001.
- Experience designing and facilitating stakeholder engagement processes with diverse groups, including businesses, institutions, and civic partners.
- Demonstrated ability to analyze and interpret data, such as demographic, economic, or survey data to inform strategy development
- Experience working directly with boards and committees.
- Familiarity with aligning organizational strategies to municipal master plans and frameworks.
- Economic and business development experience.
- Urban planning experience is considered an asset.
- Relevant academic or professional credentials.

Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposal submissions should be accompanied by a cover letter summarizing your understanding of the project and the services to be provided. Also include names of all individuals and their company name (if subcontracting any project work) who will be working with the proponent. The person signing the cover letter must be authorized to bind the consultancy.

The proposals must include:

- Cover letter
- Team and firm profile
- Detailed CV of each individual working on the project (including any subcontractors and their firm's name), along with their qualifications and experience.
- Identification of the project manager and clear description of responsibilities for each team member
- Project approach and methodology, including how the consultant will align with the City of London's Downtown Plan
- Project timeline, broken down by phase
- Fee schedule, including deliverables, estimated hours, rate/hour, and total cost to complete the work
- Description of how stakeholder engagement and data analysis will be approached
- 3 references for similar work
- Complete proposal package including all required sections, CVs, and appendices

Proposal Evaluation

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Relevant experience and qualifications: Demonstrated success in strategic and operational planning, particularly for BIAs, downtown organizations, or similar entities. Strong references and client satisfaction from past projects will be considered.
- Organizational development and performance improvement: Proven ability to identify opportunities for improved effectiveness, efficiency, and organizational performance.
- Stakeholder engagement: Experience designing and facilitating engagement processes with diverse stakeholder groups, including engagement tactics and methodologies used.
- Approach and methodology: Clarity, feasibility, and strength of the proposed approach for completing all phases of the strategic planning process, including alignment with LDBA's goals and the City's Downtown Plan.
- Budget alignment and value for cost: The proposal must provide a detailed fee schedule broken down by project phase and deliverable, with estimated hours and rates where applicable.
- Completeness and clarity of the proposal: Proposals should be well-organized, concise, and include all required components as outlined in the submission requirements.

Questions and Contact Information

Questions regarding this Request for Proposals should be directed to the Interim Executive

Director: **Vicki Smith**

Email: vicki@downtownlondon.ca

Phone: 519-663-2002 x 102

Questions will be accepted up until January 29, 2025 at 4:30PM EST.