

# Staff Report



To	<b>Committee of the Whole</b>
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Wednesday, September 4, 2024
Subject	Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program- Streetscaping Level of Service and Construction Mitigation

## Recommendation

1. That an enhanced level of streetscaping be approved for the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program giving priority to improved tree canopy, flexible streets, public seating, paving stones in highlighted areas, and a design that optimizes public space for the most efficient operating budget, subject to the project budget increase (estimated at \$17.1 million) being adopted through the 2025 budget confirmation.
2. That Staff prepare the design and tender of Wyndham Street North construction to expedite construction, with reasonable mitigation measures taken to minimize construction disruption and road closures.

## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek Council’s direction on the streetscape level-of-service and associated investment as part of the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program (DTIRP) with focus on Wyndham Street North and St. George’s Square (the pedestrian realm area surrounding the Wyndham Street North/Quebec Street intersection).

Council is also requested to provide direction on the pace of construction.

This report should be considered in conjunction with the following reports:

- Solid Waste Resources Recycling Program Transition Audit
- Downtown Collection Area Update
- Improving Access to Public Washrooms in Guelph
- Downtown Guelph Heritage Conservation District Study

These reports outline key elements of the Downtown Renewal Program, a comprehensive vision to transform how Downtown Guelph looks, feels, and functions, while also preserving its unique cultural heritage.

## **Key Findings**

### **Streetscape**

- In 2014, Council endorsed the Downtown Streetscape Manual and Built Form Standards (2014 SS Manual) that identified streetscape concepts for downtown. Presently, streetscape enhancements beyond existing conditions (“Good” level of service) are unfunded within the 2024-2027 multi-year budget.
- In response to Council direction, a Council Workshop was held to consider the various streetscape level of service (LoS) along Wyndham Street North and St. George’s Square on May 22, 2024.
- A combined streetscape enhancement and placemaking investment of \$7.5M achieves the request from the Council Workshop for another investment option along Wyndham St. N. and St George’s Square that prioritizes tree canopy, flexible streets, public seating and highlight paving stone.
- By extrapolating the LoS proposed for Wyndham St. N and using expedited construction techniques, the total streetscape investment that will be required for other DTIRP streets in the 10-year capital budget is \$17.1M.
- Staff estimates as each project is completed an annual operating and maintenance (O&M) cost may be approximately four per cent of the capital investment. However, through detailed design, staff will aim to achieve the most efficient O&M impact.

### **Construction Mitigation**

- DTIRP is not a typical City reconstruction project and thus requires non-typical construction mitigation.
- The project team has developed an extensive list of enhanced mitigation strategies to be finalized for implementation.
- The pace of construction is a key mitigation strategy that has disruption and financial impact implications to the City and businesses, and as such warrants direction from Council.
- To minimize the cumulative construction timeline, avoid construction fatigue, realize economies of scale plus other benefits, staff recommend that the re-construction of Wyndham Street North be expedited.

### **Strategic Plan Alignment**

The Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program, as part of the overall Downtown Renewal initiative, advances the Strategic theme of ‘People and Economy’ to progress towards creating a beautiful community space by improving the Downtown for all businesses, residents, and visitors.

This program of work also advances the Strategic theme of ‘City Building’ as it assists in advancing the City’s housing pledge and the City’s asset management needs through the replacement and upsizing of aging underground infrastructure to support growth in Downtown Guelph.

### **Future Guelph Theme**

People and Economy

## **Future Guelph Objectives**

People and Economy: Make downtown a vibrant place for everyone

## **Financial Implications**

For the streetscaping elements based on Council priorities, Council may consider a project budget increase of \$17.1M over 10-year capital budget in the 2025 Budget Confirmation. By increasing DTIRP project costs, other capital projects will need to be deferred to accommodate these costs or the tax levy will need to be increased.

Staff will work in consultation with the Mayor through the budget confirmation development to incorporate the enhanced streetscaping within the directed budget funding envelope. The operating budget impact is estimated at four per cent of the capital costs, however, this will ultimately depend upon the design. These operating impacts will be incorporated into the budget as more information becomes known, but with the lens of optimizing the capital design for the lowest operating impact.

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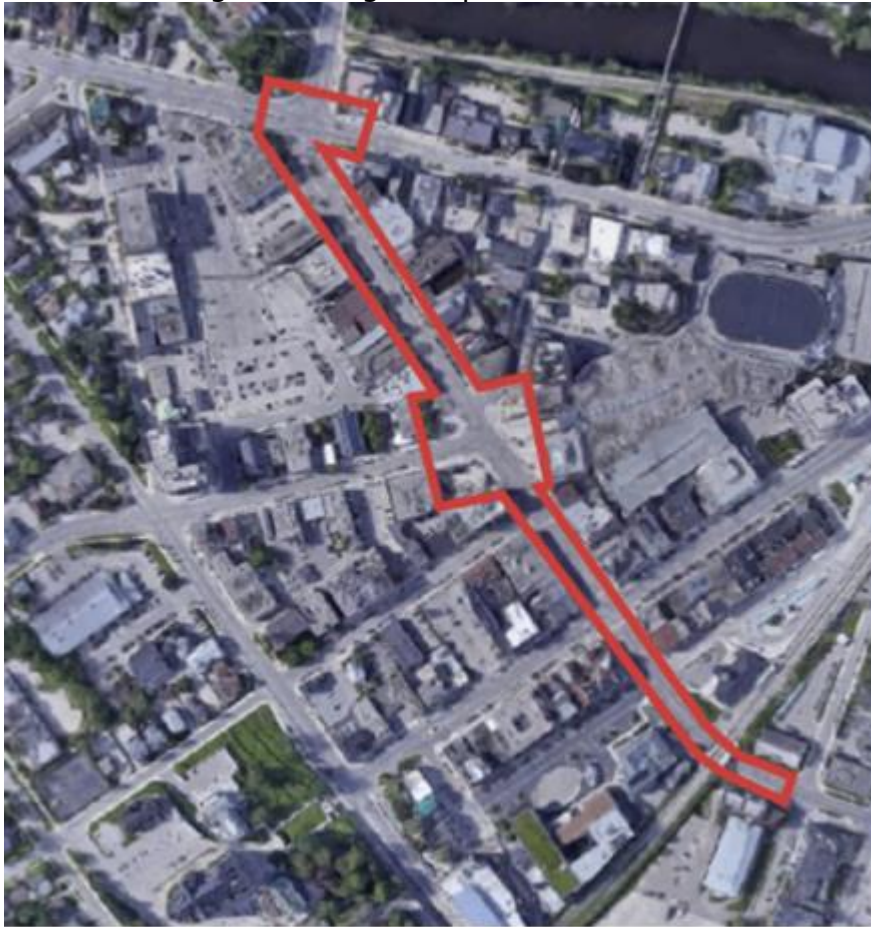
## **Report**

The purpose of this report, based on feedback from the Workshop and public, is to consider the:

1. Level of investment in streetscape enhancement; and,
2. Pace of reconstruction.

While the contents of this report and the May 22 Council Workshop focus on DTIRP Phase 1 – Wyndham Street North (Figure 1), which includes St. George’s Square, the proposed streetscape work on Phase 1 will reframe streetscaping decisions on Baker Street and future Downtown reconstruction projects.

Figure 1 Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program Phase 1: Wyndham Street North including St. George's Square



## Streetscape Enhancements

In 2014, Council endorsed the [Downtown Guelph Streetscape Manual, Built Form Standards](#) to guide the City's infrastructure and public realm renewal program. Due to budgetary challenges, the proposed streetscape enhancements are not currently funded. In response to the need to advance the [Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program](#) (DTIRP) and Council motions to address the streetscape level of service, a [Council Workshop](#) was held May 22, 2024, to review potential alternatives – Good, Better 1, Better 2 and Best options, where *Good* is the current Level of Service, *Best* is the 2014 SS Manual Level of Service, and two *Better* options provided a mix of elements. Background and summary information is provided in the [Council Workshop](#) agenda and Attachment-1, respectively.

From the Council Workshop, there was a general desire for enhanced streetscape in the Downtown area - especially along the Wyndham St. N. corridor as the hub of the City. Based on the priorities of street trees, flexible streets, public seating, and paving stones, staff prepared another option for streetscape upset investment for consideration.

An investment of \$7.5M achieves the request from the Council Workshop for another streetscape investment option along Wyndham St. N. and St George's Square and address potential placemaking costs within the Square.

Streetscaping should be developed using site-specific lenses with overall investment principles in mind rather than one singular choice for streetscaping approaches. Subsequent phases of DTIRP should be funded within the 10-year capital budget on a pro-rated basis appropriately to the tone established for Wyndham St. N. adjusted using the 2014 SS Manual as a guide to vary and rationalize the Level of Service accordingly. For example, the side streets will not see the same Level of Service investment as the core streets of Wyndham and Macdonell.

Extrapolating the Level of Service proposed for Wyndham St. N. and using expedited construction techniques, the streetscape investment that will be required within the 10-year capital budget is \$17.1 million. Attachment-2 provides a table of the potential streetscape and core capital investments by project. The project order is subject to the finalization of the DTIRP Capital Implementation Plan in Q2 2025 and future budget deliberations.

Developed from actual costs where available and replacement estimates, the increase in annual operating and maintenance (O&M) cost may be approximately 4 per cent of the capital investment. However, staff through detailed design will aim to achieve the most efficient O&M impact.

Below are the points considered by staff when developing the investment alternative for the Council's consideration. Figure 2 shows the streetscape vision using Council's priority investment areas of tree canopy, flexible streets, public seating, and highlight paving stone.

Figure 2 Streetscape Concept Prioritizing Tree Canopy, Flexible Street, Public Seating and Highlight Paving Stone



### **Street Trees**

- Creating conditions for large and healthy trees requires large soil volumes and is accomplished using underground soil cells for single trees or planting beds that can contain multiple trees.
- Tree location will be coordinated to enable cycling parking, waste receptacles, underground utility chambers, public seating, light standards, signage, etc. and avoid underground conflicts with municipal and third-party infrastructure such as servicing, underground waste disposal, and utility chambers.

### **Flexible Streets**

- Flat instead of raised/barrier curbs are purposely installed to facilitate free pedestrian movement during events and aid accessibility.
- Without a barrier curb, bollards are required to create the physical safety barrier separating all ages-and-abilities (AAA) cyclists, pedestrians, and storefronts from vehicular traffic in accordance with the Ontario Traffic Manuals and best practices.
- Assists those with mobility challenges to use all parking locations.
- To facilitate street patio program and maintain a continuous AAA cycling network, the bike lane is shifted into the parking lane. A flexible street design facilitates this relocation without the installation of custom transition ramps, however, requires removeable bollards.
- Bollards (2 metre spacing) are required along the entire length of Wyndham St. N., except in case-specific situations where a raised curb may be advantageous.



## **Public Seating**

- Public seating can be a mix of typical benches and informal landscape features.

## **Paving Stone**

- Opportunities exist to install paving stones to highlight feature areas or elements to add interest and delineate areas (e.g., sidewalks). These include the market zone (building face to sidewalk), the furnishing zone (aligns with street trees), and buffer area (bike lane to curb).
- Paving stones subject to vehicle loading (parking and travel lanes) should have a concrete base for stability and to lessen maintenance costs; however, although the road maintenance costs are reduced, a concrete base quadruples the installation cost and significantly increases maintenance costs for underground utilities. Therefore, paving stones will be installed in non-vehicle travelled areas only.

## **Other Considerations**

- Downtown Guelph has a unique asset in St. George's Square.
- As the 2014 SS Manual is not being enacted as proposed (i.e., traffic circle), a revised concept plan for St. George's Square is required by the Downtown Secondary Plan. A placemaking allowance for this implementation is included within the proposed streetscape investment for St George's Square.
- Other facilities in the pedestrian realm include cycling parking, waste receptacles, underground utility chambers, public seating, light standards, signage, and more.

## **Construction Mitigation Measures**

Infrastructure reconstruction in a busy downtown creates challenging circumstances for businesses, residents, and visitors due to disruptions to normal business activities, noise, dust, traffic management, and other factors beyond what is experienced on typical reconstruction projects. This is not to minimize the experiences of businesses and residents on other projects, but the challenges are compounded in a dense and active downtown.

The City's project team recognized the importance of construction mitigation and developed a list of proposed strategies that were presented at the [Council Workshop](#). A summary of results is provided as Attachment-1. The strategies adopted will be matured over 2024 followed by public and key interest-holder consultation.

The current project budget includes an allowance for the following and other mitigation strategies such as:

- Open a Downtown storefront office to provide immediate access to the City's project team, consultants, and contractor in Q2 2025.
- Retain a contract role of Downtown Construction Project Coordinator/Ambassador in Q2 2025 who will be available in the Downtown office and on-site, and who has the authority to take actionable steps. This

position is planned to be a City employee contracted through and compensated from the project budget.

- Development of an individual business access plans in consultation with business owners and may require dedicated contractor workers who assist with reasonable moving of goods and supplies in and out of the businesses.
- Arrangements for alternative parking, such as opening off-street parking lots for complimentary use.
- The Economic Development department will lead and prepare a business support plan in consultation with our business services advisors, and affected businesses.
- Traffic, cyclist, and pedestrian data is being collected in 2024 to develop a detailed traffic and pedestrian management plan during construction.

Of all the construction mitigation strategies considered, the most important is pace of construction which was extensively discussed at the Council Workshop. In concept, expedited construction closes Wyndham St. N. in its entirety for two construction seasons from April 2026 to late 2027. Portions of the corridor could be opened as able, for traffic access and during winter shutdown, etc. as reasonable. Slow-paced construction, on the other hand, undertakes the project over three stages spanning four or five years from 2026 to 2029/30, which would allow more of Wyndham St. N. to be open to traffic during the series of construction projects. The following points outline the key considerations for each pacing scenario. More detailed information was presented in the [Council Workshop](#).

### **Expedited Construction Benefits**

- Minimizes total combined construction disruption time and avoids construction fatigue by Downtown businesses, residents, and visitors.
- Limits planned road closures on Wyndham St. N. to perhaps two years instead of four or five years.
- Significant net cost savings (approx. \$850k) that can be utilized elsewhere or offset enhanced streetscape costs. Use of extended work hours and incentives to complete construction on time.
- Construction awarded to one contractor provides economies of scale, establishes up-front cost of corridor reconstruction, consistency of work, and avoids constructor liability concerns related to overlapping work sites.

### **Financial Implications**

An increase in the streetscape level of service, as put forward for consideration, results in an additional \$17.1 million of budgeted costs over the 10-year capital budget through the 2025 Budget Confirmation. These additional budgeted costs would be funded from the Service Enhancement Reserve Fund, which is tax levy supported.

Through the [2024-2027 Multi-Year Budget Companion Report – Council Budget Decisions, 2023-370](#), Council acknowledged that the 10-year capital budget was not fully balanced, and staff were “directed to balance the capital budget and forecast within available funding and report back to Council on the changes required through the 2025 budget confirmation.” To balance the capital budget and forecast within available capital revenues, there is already significant capital project



prioritization and deferral occurring. To accommodate this additional \$17.1 million within the directed budget funding envelope, it will likely require further project deferrals. Staff are working in consultation with the Mayor through this work which will be presented as part of the 2025 Budget Confirmation.

Once the capital works are complete, the enhanced level of streetscape gives rise to higher operating maintenance costs based upon the ultimate design. At this stage, these costs are estimated at 4 per cent of the enhanced capital, or \$684K over the ten-year period. These operating costs are only estimates at the time, and subject to much more assessment and validation once the capital design is complete.

## **Consultations and Engagement**

When preparing the 2014 Streetscape Manual, there was extensive community consultation to identify how to best shape the Downtown to support a flexible street approach while providing a safe and aesthetic multi-modal environment.

While the Streetscape Manual has been discussed broadly as part of the DTIRP body of work and staff have received informal feedback, specific engagement on streetscape has not yet occurred. Following Council's direction and budget approval, staff will consult with Downtown interest-holders on a proposed design in Q1/Q2 2025 where there will be an opportunity to refine the design based on community feedback all the while staying in line with Council's priorities.

As part of the community engagement earlier this year, staff collected ideas and feedback regarding a range of construction mitigation options that could be implemented during Phase 1. These conversations will continue to take place throughout 2024 and 2025 as construction and phasing plans mature. A summary of this community engagement can be found on the City's project [webpage](#).

Staff have recently rolled out the *Diggable Downtown Guelph* campaign that will help support DTIRP by raising awareness of the upcoming construction over 2024 and 2025 while emphasizing our vision for a vibrant and inclusive future Downtown Guelph – somewhere to be proud to live, work, play, and love. This widespread campaign will help inform residents, businesses, and visitors of the upcoming construction, but also get them excited for the final result of the new Downtown Guelph.

Future engagement with respect to the overall DTIRP includes:

- Summer 2024, various pop-up events, displays and initiatives as part of the Diggable Downtown Guelph campaign.
- Q4 2024 – Present DTIRP Phase 1 overview and the Capital Implementation Plan to the community outlining the future preferred project order and construction mitigation initiatives for Council endorsement in Q2 2025.
- Q4 2024 – Present proposed watermain and sanitary capacity improvement works along Wyndham St. S. and Wellington St. for community awareness.
- Q2 2025 – Preliminary preferred option for Macdonell and Allans Structures, including consideration of the Ward to Downtown Bridge, for Council endorsement in Q3 2025.

## **Attachments**

Attachment-1 Engagement Summary

Attachment-2 Potential Streetscape Investment by Project

## **Departmental Approval**

Antti Vilkkö, General Manager, Facilities and Energy Management

Nectar Tampacopoulos, General Manager, Environmental Services

Krista Walkey, General Manager, Planning and Building Services

James Goodram, General Manager, Economic Development and Tourism

Doug Godfrey, General Manager, Operations

Tara Baker, General Manager, Finance, City Treasurer

Glen Lombard, Acting General Manager, Strategic Communications and Community Engagement

Robin Gerus, General Manager, Guelph Transit

## **Report Author**

Reg Russwurm, MBA, P.Eng., Manager, Design & Construction

Andrew Miller, P.Eng., PMP, Project Engineer

Stacey Laughlin, MCIP, RPP, Downtown Revitalization Advisor

## **This report was approved by:**

Steve Anderson, CET

Acting General Manager, Engineering and Transportation Services  
Infrastructure, Development and Environment

519-822-1260 extension 2037

steve.anderson@guelph.ca

**This report was recommended by:**

Terry Gayman, P. Eng.  
Acting Deputy Chief Administrative Officer  
Infrastructure, Development and Environment  
519-822-1260 extension 2369  
terry.gayman@guelph.ca