

# Attachment-1 Engagement summary

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## Council Workshop: Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program

On May 22, 2024, City staff presented an engaging Council Orientation and Education Workshop for City Council regarding the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program (DTIRP) and other related initiatives in and around the Downtown.

The focus of the experience was to:

- explore and discuss options for construction pacing (fast vs. slow), and
- discover what the current level of funding for streetscape elements provides, and what enhancements could be offered through other levels of funding.
- This process also compared streetscape options to various connected existing policies and plans, so Council could gain an understanding regarding what streetscaping level of service can be achieved as currently approved, and what is not in the current budget allocation for Phase 1 construction on Wyndham Street North.

The workshop consisted of a brief presentation followed by Council members rotating between three activity tables (outlined below) in smaller groups. Council then came back together for a summary conversation to complete the workshop.

## Construction Pace and Mitigation Table

Figure 1 Council Workshop May 22, 2024.



Figure 2 Downtown Guelph 3-D Model.



Council explored a 1:500 scale model of the DTIRP footprint and surrounding areas set up in the context of fast vs. slow construction impacts. Staff from related departments were present to explain various considerations and mitigation options, and to answer questions from Council.

Objectives for this table included:

- Educate Council about the two primary options under consideration for construction on Wyndham St. N., and the trade-offs involved in each option:
- Fast (construction in approximately two years), or
- Slow (construction in approximately four to five years)
- Share and listen for impacts for various options and mitigation efforts to be explored.
- Give Council time to reflect with the different impacts in the Downtown as a whole and ask questions.

## What we heard

During this session, staff received questions seeking clarity about the construction process and plans for the form and function on various streets, as well as the knowns and unknowns about what may cause construction delays.

Staff heard a strong interest in establishing contingency plans to mitigate delays the project could encounter, as either construction pace option could be at risk of delays.

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Overall, we heard several themes among the comments and questions:

- Prioritization
- Transit and GO buses must be prioritized in the construction planning.
- Extended detours are costly and frustrating for users.
- Ensure consideration of mobility bus access points.
- Pedestrian and visitor safety and access is of paramount importance.
- Plan access for emergency vehicles throughout each stage of construction.
- Plan for ease of deliveries in and out of Downtown businesses.
- Thoughtful and thorough planning is important.
- Confirm what is underneath the ground as much as possible before starting construction.
- Think through detours, and vehicle and delivery access to ensure every business is close to an access point with minimal frustrations.
- Be sure to understand potential ripple effects beyond Downtown.
- Ensure that we do not have to re-do construction again any time soon to upgrade infrastructure or support increased growth.
- Create careful balance between promising and delivering.
- Explore if Douglas Street be adapted during Wyndham St. N. construction to allow for vehicle turnarounds and access into the centre of Downtown from Woolwich St.
- Protect and support our Downtown businesses.
- The project team should work closely with the Downtown Guelph Business Association (DGBA).
- Regardless of fast or slow construction, businesses will need to access marketing opportunities, continue existing events, and added special construction events to keep visitors coming Downtown.
- The 2027 bicentennial will be an important event to factor in.
- Talk to the businesses and keep them involved in the project to find the right solutions.
- A storefront for construction will be important for businesses to know where they can find someone on the project team to help with any issues that may arise.
- Consistent and clear communication with businesses and residents is important.
- Find creative solutions to mitigate parking impacts from construction, including repurposing land, and parking vouchers or programs for the parkades.
- Explore pop-up and relocation options in City facilities or underused buildings for businesses and/or click-and-collect pick-up locations.
- It was noted that we should understand normal attrition in Downtown businesses (e.g., how many might typically close in a two-year period) so that we can watch for a change in trends throughout construction and continue to enforce and/or explore stronger mitigation measures.

## Thoughts on fast vs. slow

- There were mixed interests in undertaking either fast or slow construction.
- Some members of Council expressed interest in getting it done as fast as possible; some for reduced impact, and some for cost control and avoiding inflation.
- There were concerns that phasing construction in pieces may trickle into more issues and more frustrations from businesses over time.
- Some wanted to plan construction slower as well as in several phases so that more access is maintained for more of Wyndham St. N. businesses at any given time.

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- The slower phased approach would allow the seasonal patio program to continue in areas not under construction along Wyndham St. N. Noted that the patio program is a great incentive for visiting Downtown.
  - Otherwise, staff were encouraged to find creative solutions to providing alternate patio space, such as in Market Square.
  - Several conversations occurred around studying other municipalities and their construction process, successes, and challenges.
  - Specific mention of Kincardine, noting their project was completed in just over a year.
  - Several members of Council asked for a cost/benefit analysis of fast vs. slow construction.
  - There was general agreement that if construction (or individual sections of road) could be completed within one calendar year, that would be a preferred option. It was noted, however, that this course may increase costs, noise bylaw complications, the need for stockpiling equipment, and other risks to be explored further.

## **Streetscaping Tables**

There were two streetscaping-related tables: One for streetscaping levels of service, and one for connected City plans and policies. These tables worked cohesively to provide Council with a holistic view of streetscape elements, including the factors to consider under varying degrees of enhanced levels of service and how each option presented is informed by or supports existing policies and plans across the City.

### **Streetscaping Levels of Service Table**

At this table, Council explored a larger model at about 1:200 scale centred on St. George's Square and surrounding areas. This model was complemented with to-scale versions of trees for greater insight.

The various levels of service also presented cars and trucks as well as life-size models of curb profiles and bollards to demonstrate the elements of streetscaping that have the largest impact on budget.

Figure 3 Concept Drawings.



Figure 4 Detailed view of Downtown Guelph 3D Model.



Council was shown illustrations of four options (Good, Better 1, Better 2, and Best) representing various levels of investment in streetscaping, and what enhancements beyond what is currently there (i.e., *Good* level of service) can be integrated with an increase of budget. As part of the information packet Council received in advance of the workshop, an informational video highlighted the streetscaping elements and their various social, economic, and environmental impacts to give context to the discussion.

Objectives for this table included:

- Educate Council about the specific elements for consideration in the Good, Better 1, Better 2, and Best streetscaping options.

- Provide Council with an opportunity to understand the relative impacts (e.g., functional, social, aesthetic, climate, budget) of a range of streetscape options.
- Tap into Council’s creativity to envision various future states; surface their individual and collective values as it relates to streetscape framed in the context of the “Good” options; and create space for them to explore and ask questions about the other levels of service.

## Connected Plans and Policies Table

Figure 5 Reviewing Concept Data.



Displayed along the wall, Council was presented with eleven different plans and policies and how they pertain to DTIRP. Each plan included a rating on a five-point scale of how the different streetscape options (Good, Better 1, Better 2 and Best) uphold the intentions of the respective plan or policy.

Connected policies and key directions as presented by the project team:

- Future Guelph Strategic Plan 2024-2027: Modernize and upgrade our Downtown.
- Official Plan/Downtown Secondary Plan: Beautiful and pedestrian friendly
- 2014 Downtown Streetscape Manual: Functional, pedestrian-forward Downtown with cycling and greenery
- Urban Forest Management Plan and the Tree Technical Manual: High quantity of healthy trees
- Transportation Master Plan: Specific street cross-sections identified for Downtown.
- Economic Development and Tourism Strategy: Modernized space with placemaking and upgraded finishes.
- Solid Waste Management Master Plan: Adaptability to recommendations in the plan
- Transit Future Ready Action Plan: Final design must include flexibility for bus stops and shelters.
- Urban Design Action Plan: Promote urban design excellence including new, fresh, and upgraded finishes and street tree plantings.
- Cultural Heritage Action Plan: Streetscape should not negatively impact cultural heritage resources and can integrate them into the public realm where feasible.
- Natural Heritage Action Plan: Provide street trees that are also green infrastructure ‘enhanced’ assets.

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Objectives for this table included:

- Educate Council about the various plans and policies that inform Good, Better 1, Better 2, and Best streetscaping options.
- Provide Council with an opportunity to understand the relative impacts the level at which each options upholds the various plans and what compromises exist in the various levels of service.
- Spark conversation about what each option successfully offers and the balance between must-haves and nice-to-haves in consideration of the fact that the level of service currently funded is *Good*.
- Council walks away with an understanding of the thought and efforts that went into making the *Good* option good.

## What we heard between both tables

The topic of streetscaping bridged between the two respective tables. Comments from Council were informed by both experiences in different orders, and so the themes overall have been combined in the summary below to share in a cohesive manner. Similarly, both conversations were informed by material shared in advance including a narrated video presenting the four options under consideration. Some members noted how informative the video shared in advance of the workshop was for setting the context, and for the process for decisions made in the four levels of service as presented.

In each group, staff received and answered questions about cost centres and functionality for the various streetscape levels of service. Overall, these information pieces, conversations, and clarifications helped to frame the context of the discussion around costs vs. value of various elements involved in the Good, Better 1, Better 2, and Best options as presented.

High level themes uncovered throughout the conversations are as follows:

### **Healthy trees in the Downtown are important**

- Several Council members inquired about a sponsorship or donation campaign to offset increased costs involved with soil cells.
- Full sized trees are of interest, especially without metal grates around the base.
- Tree diversity was of interest to some Council members as they sought to understand which of the soil/planting methods under consideration better allow for more biodiversity.
- Get strategic about tree placement. Priority should be given to trees in proximity to other activities (such as placemaking and patios).
- Trees aren't surviving as well as we had hoped on Carden St. and thus we must do better. If trees grow better in groups, plant them in groups and free up pedestrian space for other uses.

### **Consider how people interact in the space**

- In a number of groups, conversation moved toward the value of informal seating and the concept of sitting on a ledge of an open planter.
- The design should prioritize accessibility; if pixilated pavers or barrier curbs are used, we must do them in such a way as to be accessible to the highest extent.

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- If bollards are used, consideration should be made for moving them to make way for patios or events as needed.
  - Making St. George's Square a place for people first is of interest. Extra investment in this space may be something to consider.
  - Aesthetics should be considered where it would be a driver for people to come Downtown.
  - Safety and accessibility of passengers and smooth transit operations should be thought through; more people will be wanting to come Downtown so let's make transit a desirable way for them to get there.
  - We also plan to attract more bikes to the Downtown. Taking up pedestrian and patio space with bike racks could be a challenge to the success.

### **A streetscape that supports businesses is paramount**

- Consider deliveries in the streetscape and design decisions (both onboarding and offboarding of deliveries).
- Consider how tree size and placement may change the visibility of signage for pedestrians and travelers.
- If we use bollards, removable bollards are of interest to support patios, events, and flexibility.
- The capacity to block off streets is important for events that attract people Downtown.
- Integration of garbage along the streetscape should be carefully planned. Particular interest in the underground bins was expressed in several groups.
- Explore the concept of "special streets" and enhance the things that give different parts of Downtown its character (e.g., Douglas Street is already a bit of a boutique street).

### **We need to invest in the right ways for our Downtown**

- Longevity of the various options should be a strong consideration. Some Council members expressed interest in investing in quality materials now if they will last 30 or more years.
- Flat curbs work best for events, but not as well for snow clearing; understand the costs and benefits of each decision.

Overall, there was significant interest in combining various elements of the four levels of service to find a solution that is right for Downtown Guelph.

Some members of Council expressed interest in additional studies including a cost-benefit analysis and a map of how all the plans work together in decisions for Downtown be prepared. Other comments suggested including the Climate Adaptation Plan, Community Energy Plan, and Race to Zero to the list of plans in the scope of these decisions.

Several conversations circled back to budget and the challenging environment we are in as we make these decisions. Consideration of what other areas of work would have to be paused, differed or reduced if we increase levels of service through the budgeting process will be a significant undertaking.

## **Summary Conversation**

Following the breakout table rotation, Council came back together as an entire group to share what they had discussed and what resonated with them in each table. The conversation then



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moved to takeaways that resonated across all tables and the project as a whole, and some reflection on the experience.

In addition to the table-by-table items captured in the previous sections above, Council shared the following thoughts and feedback:

- The budget time this fall is the last reasonable moment to make decisions on streetscaping and levels of service.
- A fulsome understanding of the operating model and return on investment will be key in making decisions around the budget table.
- Seek grants and other sources of funding where possible from other levels of government. That may involve making some decisions specifically to receive the funding.
- Downtown needs to be a 'place,' and these decisions should support placemaking.
- *Business supports* mean a broad range of things: pedestrian and vehicle access, special events, marketing, and a well-managed project from design through construction and ongoing maintenance. We need to support our businesses.
- We can't sacrifice transit during construction or in the final design. Service standards for Guelph Transit are a priority for what we are trying to achieve in Guelph as a city.
- Downtown is a platform for tourism, recreation, and leisure. Both during construction and after, we must maximize opportunities for tourism and other attractions and events.
- We have many civic priorities in Guelph. Our Downtown is important to invest in, but not at any cost.
- Look down the road in 5, 10, and 30 years. Will the Downtown we decide on now still be a draw? Will we wish we had done something differently? Let's do that now if we can.

## What We Are Doing

Staff have reviewed the thoughts and feedback shared during the Council workshop. Representatives from various impacted departments are working together to progress this work and combined outcomes from the workshop, with ongoing project development and feedback from other community engagement activities to develop some next steps of note.

- In September 2024, staff will bring a report to Council including construction timeline recommendations and budgetary considerations for a new streetscape level of service, which considers the Mayor's direction on budget as well as the priorities of interest as shared by Council and the community to date including (in order of priority):
  - Healthy trees,
  - Flexibility for street use,
  - Public seating, and
  - Aesthetics.
- In the final design process for Wyndham St. N., the following considerations have been noted:
  - Higher levels of service consideration will be given to both St. George's Square and the high-traffic intersection of Wyndham Street and Macdonell Street to establish Downtown as a point of interest to visitors.
  - Accommodating underground waste will be a priority.

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- Wyndham St. N. will be designed and presented with an understanding that it may hold a higher standard of streetscaping and placemaking than some of the secondary and tertiary roads in Downtown.
  - Construction mitigation planning and implementation will be thorough and held to high standards of communication, including a strong line of connection and combined efforts with the DGBA.

## **Next Steps**

From the late summer of 2024 and leading up to and during construction, the “Diggable Downtown Guelph” campaign will ramp up with increasing communications and community activation to create an awareness and desire for change as we progress through the various planning and construction phases of the DTIRP project.

On September 4, 2024, staff will bring a report to Council for approval and direction for streetscaping and construction timing.

Later in the fall, further community engagement activities will occur to advance the work on construction planning, a revised St. George’s Square Master Plan and other Downtown renewal initiatives.

In 2025, the design phase of the project will begin and fulsome community engagement activities will be part of the process at the 60 per cent design level through to final design.