



**BOARD
OF
TRADE**

WHAT WE HEARD **REPORT**

REVITALIZING OUR CITY

TO OUR MEMBERS

Thank you for sharing your insights, ideas, and feedback throughout this process. This *What We Heard* document reflects the voices of our community — the priorities, concerns, and aspirations you've expressed. Your input has shaped this work, and it captures the commitment of those who live, work, and invest in our city because they believe in its value and potential.

This document is complimentary to our *Revitalizing Our City Recommendations* report and reflects the real priorities of our members — business and community leaders from downtown and beyond. From safety and functionality to economic vitality and revitalization, it highlights what matters most. We're using it to inform our advocacy efforts and guide meaningful conversations with the City of St. John's, the Provincial Government, and the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC).

We plan to share this document with candidates in the municipal and provincial elections to ensure the voices of our members are heard and reflected in their platforms. By highlighting the priorities of the business community, we aim to foster greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing our city, and to encourage policies that support safety, economic vitality, and long-term growth.

This is not a one-time effort. We are committed to keeping you informed of our advocacy, continuing our conversations with you, and adapting our efforts as new challenges and opportunities arise; ensuring these issues remain a priority, regardless of government turnover at both the municipal and provincial levels.

We'll be reaching out regularly to update you, and just as importantly, to listen and learn what you need from us next. Please know that you can always reach out to us directly as well.

With your input and our shared focus, we'll continue working to build a stronger, safer, and more vibrant place to live, together.

Thank you again for your continued support and engagement.



AnnMarie Boudreau
CEO, The Board of Trade

BACKGROUND

The Board of Trade has heard significant concern from members about the state of our city, particularly in our downtown.

There is a lot of worry surrounding the volume of business closures in recent months; business owners are hearing a lot of anxiety from patrons and employees regarding their safety and security; and there is general concern and recognition about the overall aesthetics, appearance and lack of prioritization that business owners are feeling.



(collaborative engagement session with members)

To better understand the issues and feedback from members, and to ensure the Board of Trade is informed, and positioned to advocate on their behalf, the Board of Trade hosted an engagement session with members.

The session provided an opportunity for business owners to share their experiences with both the Board of Trade and each other, as well as provide constructive and creative ideas for how we both address their concerns and collectively work to improve our city and our downtown to work towards rebuilding it as the cultural, community and business hub it once was.

Strategic Focus

→ Support for business

- Biggest challenges facing businesses
 - How we can attract more businesses and investment
 - Types of support businesses need
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→ Safety and security

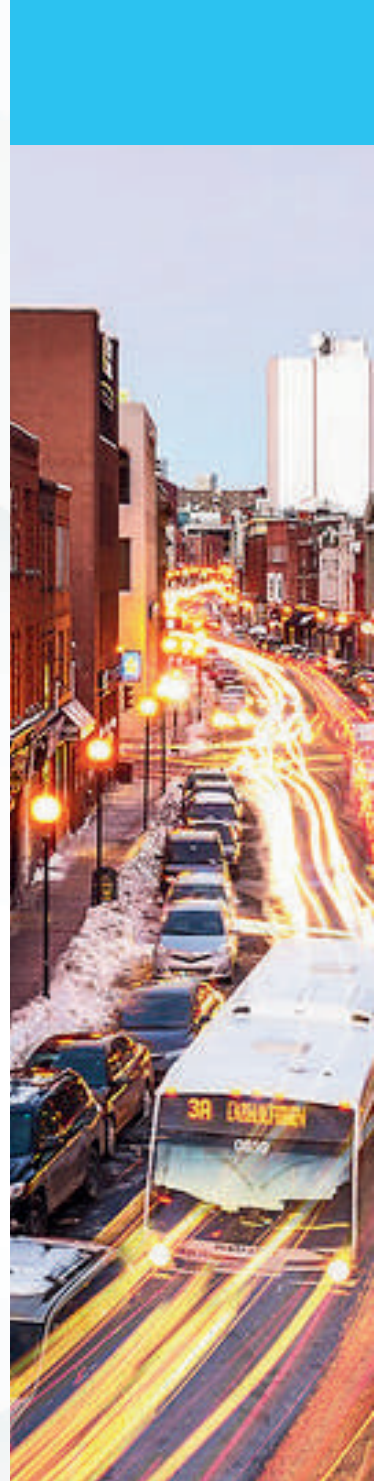
- The main safety concerns impacting businesses and the community downtown
 - How we can work to strengthen partnerships between businesses, law enforcement and the community
 - How we make our city and downtown feel safer and more welcoming for everyone
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→ Public spaces and infrastructure

- Infrastructure challenges that need attention
 - How we can improve the appearance, accessibility and functionality of our city and downtown core
-

→ Community engagement and downtown pride

- How we can strengthen downtown's identity as a cultural and business hub
- How we can foster a stronger sense of community pride in the downtown
- How we can bring more people downtown



WHAT WE HEARD

The conversation and feedback were robust. There was ***unanimous support and agreement amongst business owners*** that the downtown is an integral part of our city and our community, and that we must work together to restore its reputation and vibrancy.



I WANT A CITY AND DOWNTOWN THAT...

- “Is safe”
- “Is vibrant”
- “Has visible police officers”
- “Is vibrant and thriving”
- “Is forward thinking”
- “Vibrant, progressive and safe”
- “Inclusive and supportive of business and focuses on collaboration”
- “Feels positive”
- “Is family-friendly”

It is widely understood that no one can achieve this alone. If we are to intentionally work to improve the conditions downtown, it will require a collaborative, community effort. Businesses, the City of St. John’s, the province (both the provincial government and the RNC) as well as community partners, associations, etc., ***must work together.***

SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS

Business owners identified several priorities that would help improve the conditions for businesses operating within our city and the downtown area. They range in the level of effort and support that would be required.

A common theme throughout the discussion was the need for municipal and provincial support. Businesses feel that our city and our downtown core needs to be a focus of Council and that there is a role for Council to play in helping to revitalize downtown. The downtown is an integral economic and cultural driver for our province—without a thriving downtown community—tourism, employment, and cultural experiences will suffer.

Our city has unique needs and requires unique support from governments.

- “There must be recognition from city council that there is a problem, and we must collaborate to address it.”
- “We need to promote downtown as a vibrant place to visit and work”
- “We cannot treat the downtown area the same as other areas in the city”
- “We need progressive policies and a tax structure that are supportive for businesses”
- “Need policies that encourage occupancy and revitalization of vacant buildings”
- “Creative solutions from the city would be extremely helpful; tax breaks, restoration and occupancy incentives, etc.”



SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS

City council must recognize the value that businesses bring to the community and work collaboratively with them to help deliver positive experiences for customers and employees.

- “Need increased transit routes and shelters”
- “Need prompt snow removal and not just snow clearing”
- “Better lighting would help safety”
- “As a hub for businesses, downtown has to be seen as a safe and positive experience”

There was also significant recognition that we need to work together to re-establish the feeling of community and connectedness. Downtown is a unique and important part of the community and culture of both St. John’s and Newfoundland and Labrador as a whole.

- “As business owners, we need to work together and communicate more”
- “A business chat forum would be useful”
- “Need more planned events”
- “Need more organized events that give people a reason to come and experience downtown”
- “We need advertising dollars for downtown to generate awareness and remind people to visit”



SAFETY & SECURITY

The most prevalent discussion theme and concern for business owners was the issue of safety. There has been growing concern and an increase in the frequency of events that make customers and employees feel unsafe downtown.

This is of course deterring entrepreneurs from viewing downtown as an appealing location to open/operate a business. It is also preventing employees and customers from wanting to be downtown.

It was discussed as the paramount issue—if the perception of our city and our downtown is that it isn't safe, people will not visit and businesses will be forced to relocate, or worse—close permanently. Safety must be a priority as other supportive measures will not be required if the reputation of downtown cannot be restored, and people do not feel safe.

- “We have to keep our doors locked”
- “Dramatic increase in vehicle theft”
- “We need visible police patrols”
- “We are not the first city to face these issues. New York City addressed this by putting uniform police officers on the streets”
- “We need municipal bylaws that prevent panhandling”
- “I would appreciate clarity on what is the responsibility of the business owner and what is that of the city”
- “More community programming and training, similar to what the Newfoundland Embassy Pub is doing is needed”



SAFETY & SECURITY

There was widespread understanding and recognition that many of the events and circumstances contributing to the increase in safety and security-related events are beyond the control of the business community or the municipality. There are real social challenges that are contributing to the incidents affecting the experience people are having downtown that must be addressed and supported by community and healthcare-based programming. However, as these issues are contributing to the downtown experience—we all have a role to play in raising awareness of and advocating for supports.

- “The city needs more support from the province”
- “We need community-based training and programming partnerships so we can deal with the issues we’re facing. We don’t know who to call”
- “We could benefit from a research program. What have other jurisdictions done to address issues”
- “There is a role for the Minister’s office and the RNC here – we need support from them to address what is happening”
- “Crime is directly related to addictions and mental health issues that people are experiencing”
- “We need proactive policing. The RNC can’t wait for something to happen. We need a police presence downtown to prevent incidents from happening”
- “So many repeat offenders. We need better supports”
- “Housing and mental health supports will help fix the problems happening downtown”
- “You cannot police your way out of mental health issues”
- “Businesses must be a part of the advocacy and put pressure on government”
- “Aggressive panhandling must be addressed”
- “There are real funding and staffing challenges affecting the RNC. It is provincial, not municipal”
- “The RNC are often unable to deal with the situation they’re responding to downtown as it’s a social work problem and not a law and order one”
- “We need a unified approach to public safety”

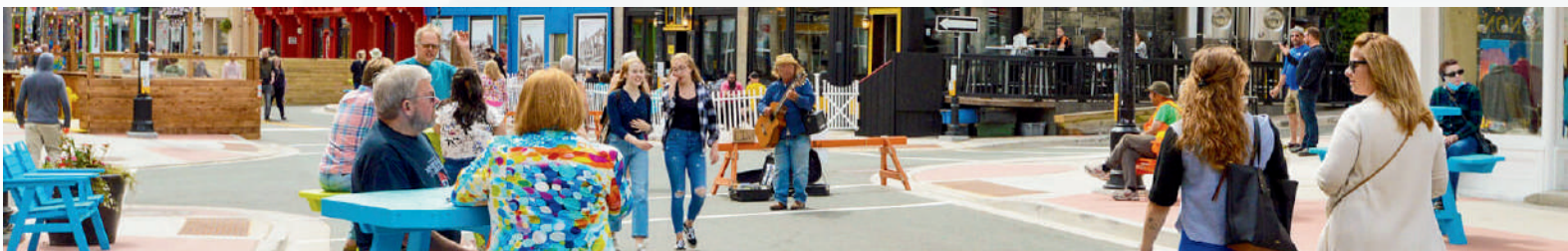


PUBLIC SPACES & INFRASTRUCTURE

The focus of the discussion surrounding infrastructure and public spaces centered around how to get more people choosing to spend time downtown and how to make it easier and more enjoyable to do so. Downtown must be marketed as a destination—somewhere people can spend time and enjoy. It is different from other areas within the capital city and should be positioned and marketed as such. As a highly concentrated area of retail and hospitality establishments—it boasts a high volume of employment and is a significant economic region of the city and province.

Increasing accessibility, opportunity, and access to information about what is happening downtown will help increase the volume of people that visit the area. By working together to build consistent habits, we can make downtown a year-round experiential activity for all. Many jurisdictions with climates similar to ours have developed creative ways to appeal to customers and offer unique experiences year-round.

- “Increase public transit services – shelters, routes and frequency, extend transit hours”
- “Best practice research would help us understand what has worked in other jurisdictions”
- “We need to protect what we have – we cannot let public assets decay”
- “Need to share information on events happening downtown so people are aware. Maybe a dedicated social channel or website that people can regularly monitor”
- “Need improved lighting”
- “Need to figure out how to have a useable waterfront and remove the fence”
- “A small downtown police station will deter criminal activity and make people feel safe”
- “We need to embrace Winter-friendly activities and embrace year-round programming and infrastructure”

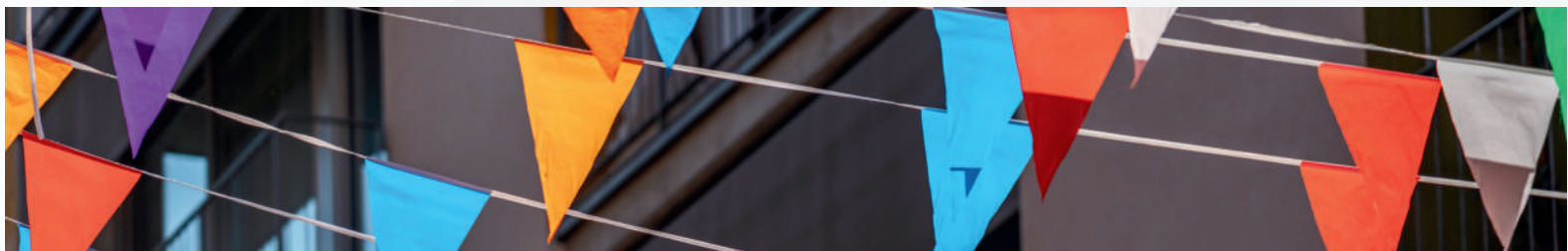


COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DOWNTOWN PRIDE

The over-arching theme of the discussion about community engagement and pride building was collaboration. There are so many reasons to care about downtown and so many organizations who are willing to help support and invest in its revitalization and growth.

Intentional effort and strategic focus are needed to help re-establish a sense of community and pride. Through engagement and partnerships, we can work together to rebrand and reposition downtown as a destination of choice that offers people of all ages a chance to experience part of the culture and community. We need to embrace businesses, big and small, as well as not-for-profits, community groups, arts and culture organizations. The city must play a leadership role in demonstrating that downtown is a critical cultural and business hub and demonstrate that it supports its revitalization, development and growth.

- “We need strong leadership”
- “Downtown needs to be rebranded so people see it as a year-round destination”
- “City needs to support creative ideas like outdoor parklets options for the winter season”
- “Need a campaign to highlight why businesses choose downtown; businesses who choose to operate downtown do it because they love downtown and believe in their community”
- “Need a Master Plan to understand the strategy and priorities of the city”
- “Need more events happening downtown, year round”
- Suggestions: Christmas Markets, night markets, New Year’s Eve event, winter events, all ages events, etc.
- “Need more positive messaging about downtown. As the people who operate businesses downtown it’s our job to advocate and be ambassadors for downtown”





Questions?

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