



A National Coalition of the
International Downtown Association

2015 DOWNTOWN DECLARATION

A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR CANADA'S DOWNTOWNS

and

NEW FEDERAL ROLE IN DOWNTOWN/URBAN ISSUES AND INITIATIVES

We are Downtowns Canada, a national coalition of the International Downtown Association representing organizations across the country that manage Canada's business districts, making them vital places in the nation's identity and key centres of wealth in our economy. Our affiliation with the International Downtown Association strengthens our mission to protect and promote, with one voice, the value of Canada's downtowns to Canadians and on the world stage.

Canadian business neighbourhoods and city cores are varied in form, size and make-up and yet across the country, these business districts play an important role in our communities locally, provincially and nationally. This document is a call to action for local business improvement areas/districts (BIAs/BIDs), municipal, provincial and federal governments and associations, business associations with a focus on urban areas and related groups and individuals with expertise in the areas of economic development, housing, mental health, social policy and municipal infrastructure and funding. We recognize the urgent need to include the sustainability of our cities and towns into the national conversation acknowledging the economic, social, cultural and environmental issues that directly impact business areas on a daily basis.

AREAS OF FOCUS:

Downtown organizations in every region of Canada have submitted their key concerns in four (4) major areas of downtown/urban issues:

1. National Infrastructure/reinvestment;
2. National social justice policy;
3. National affordable and social housing (with mental health and addictions support);
4. Economic development.

The following are the KEY RECOMMENDATIONS of Downtowns Canada and the groups that submitted input to its work. More detailed leadership, funding, research, and policy recommendations are presented for each of these topic areas.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Support a research fund for an annual or biannual research report to track the health, well-being and prosperity of Canada's Downtowns. "An Annual Report Card on the state of Downtowns".
2. A commitment is needed from the Government of Canada to work with the provinces and municipalities to assist in funding initiatives (including tax incentives) related to:
 - a. The deteriorating municipal infrastructure in the downtowns of all sizes of community (Downtowns are the barometers of well-being for virtually all communities; as such they must be supported and remain strong);
 - b. Downtowns becoming models for sustainable practice (a stronger commitment from the Federal Government to support innovative, local, sustainable initiatives which focus on our business districts and downtowns as the hub of our communities);
 - c. National strategies and policies for transit, affordable housing, infrastructure, crime prevention and mental health/addictions resources for downtowns with provincial support.
3. Federal funding and grant eligibility for Business Improvements Initiatives to:
 - a. Develop more urban development agreements and initiatives which support downtown in large centres (the Hub cities as defined by the Conference Board of Canada) as well as small & medium ones.
 - b. Focus on meaningful and creative investments by the three levels of government and the private sector. Ensure funding programmes such as Human Resources Development Canada ("HRDC") job training and creation programmes focus on urban areas and assist in multi-pronged focus on addictions and mental health.
4. Respond to specific criminal code and criminal justice system concerns of the downtown with research, policy and new legislation where appropriate.

WHY SHOULD THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RE-ENTER THE FIELD OF URBAN AFFAIRS?

- According to the Conference Board of Canada, Canada's hub cities are a driving force of the national economy. The economic health of cities is directly related to the well-being of the city's core.
- Downtowns and urban centres are employment hubs. They are also primary drivers of GDP and taxes.
- Urban areas are also a sustainable model for livability in an era of high energy costs and concern over carbon emissions.
- The Federal government should engage in a coordination and leadership role to strengthen business neighbourhoods and city cores, provide funding for programming that will allow for reinvestment, work collaboratively with other governments and organizations to provide research to support the development of effective policy and legislation.

WHAT CAN A FEDERAL INITIATIVE DO?

- **Coordinate** and provide **leadership** amongst federal ministries and agencies, between provinces/municipalities and at the academic level
- Provide **funding** (and tax incentives) in priority areas that are critical to urban development and vitality
- Initiate focused **research** and **data collection** on downtown statistics, nationally and regionally based on research and data, initiate **policy** directions
- Implement **legislation** in areas where the Federal government has authority (example: *Criminal Code* amendments)

THE FEDERAL LEVEL OF GOVERNEMENT SHOULD NOT BE AFRAID TO:

- Take a leadership role and become of focus of successful strategies;
- Initiate policy discussions on key downtown, urban issues;
- Initiate or fund research to support policy development and to assist downtown communities;
- Legislate when and where it can within its authority;
- Fund and incent the critical infrastructure deficit.

FOUR THEME AREAS OF IMMEDIATE NEED REQUIRING FEDERAL INPUT

The following theme areas were identified by the Downtowns Canada as the most pressing issues for Canada's urban downtowns and input was received from BIA's, BID's and other downtown stakeholders into their top three (3) concerns or requests related to these issues areas. The following is a summary of the findings and common themes of the CITF:

1. Downtown Infrastructure Reinvestment

Coordination and Leadership

- Lead a **National Transit Strategy** and a **National Urban Development (land use and economic) Strategy** (do not fund transit that does not support sustainability).
- Foster cooperation between provinces and cities nationally on infrastructure rejuvenation approaches, funding and implementation.
- Ensure Federal ministries that touch on urban issues have a cross ministry approach to support downtowns.

Funding

- Fund transit and infrastructure with a focus on downtowns.
- Ensure regional economic development funding programmes such as ACOA and Western Diversification are coordinated and focus on urban areas.
- Continue to work with FCM, Big City Mayors and provinces to ensure development of new adequate and stable funding for municipalities (example: a share of GST from urban areas must return to urban areas).
- Reinstate Heritage and Main streets funding.

Research

- Take leadership in establishing the research base for **triple bottom line** best practices and analysis of all infrastructure spending – Economic, Environmental, Social.
- **Direct Statistics Canada** to develop a focus of research on downtown urban population, economic, housing, permit and crime trends.
- Study the **impacts of downloading** of legislative requirements on municipalities and their ability to reinvest in capital infrastructure.
- Create centres of research on urban core design and infrastructure issues.

Policy

- Develop the policy basis for the **National Transit Strategy**.
- Develop the policy basis for the **National Urban Development Strategy** focused on core development.
- Ensure PWGSC takes urban development into account in **locational decisions**, in building design

and adequately funds payments in lieu of taxes.

- Establish targets and goals nationally for **sustainability** and environmental improvement in urban areas with urban cores as a focus. Downtowns can be models for sustainable practice.
- Establish policy based on research (see above) into effective **higher density, residential and mixed use development**.
- Set policy that establishes tri-level urban development agreements as the norm for funding models in urban centres.

2. National Social Justice Policy

Coordination and Leadership

- Tracking, recording and supporting successful local programs and initiatives in social justice, crime prevention, early intervention, youth programming and education.
- Support social justice outreach programs and ensure these are not clustered but are decentralized so as to provide services to those in need without creating areas that decrease that are not necessarily attractive to businesses.
- Continue to pressure provinces and cities on policing strategies and service levels.
- Through HRDC, increase youth work programs and training, ensure BIA's/BID's have priority access to job creation programs.
- Coordination of public safety by-laws across the country and provide resources so that municipalities can see samples of by-laws that have been successful, and passed Charter tests, in addressing downtown activity.
- Encourage national social welfare organizations such as the United Way and Salvation Army to develop programs that assist with social issues within urban commercial areas.
- Require local police forces to undertake mandatory training for addressing vulnerable populations with mental health issues.

Research and Policy

- Undertake impartial, evidence based, balanced research on the successful drug and addiction programs.
- Undertake impartial, evidence based, balanced research on successful mental health outreach programs.
- Support research from impartial, evidence based, balanced sources to study the impacts on community resulting from densities of social service concentrations, the support for these services and how this concentration impacts on the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- Develop policies and strategy of national scope for addictions treatment and the related homelessness issues, based on models determined to work.
- Track and share data on movement of homeless and unemployed from region to region.
- Assist municipalities in developing strategies for loitering, panhandling and other uncomfortable activities that will pass examination under the Charter of Rights & Freedoms.
- Identify best practices for addressing social issues. Develop a toolkit for BID's/BIA's to use when developing outreach programs.

Funding

- Fund the drug addiction programs that the research proves are effective.
- Fund special job training and creation for downtowns.
- Fund youth programming and education programs.
- Prioritize funding for community based social outreach programs that focus on urban commercial areas.
- Support programs that coordinate cross-province border charges enforcement and reciprocal agreements to impede transient movement to avoid conviction
- Direct HRDC to fund BIA's/BID's for job training and employment programs for the homeless.
- Direct HRDC to fund BIA's/BID's for outreach programs for vulnerable populations.

Legislation

- Continue to pursue enhanced hand gun and organized crime legislation.
- Determine how legislation can be used to reduce aggressive panhandling.
- Continue to address sentencing (especially in repeat offence and youth crime matters) issues in the Criminal Code.

3. National Affordable and Social Housing (with Mental Health and Addictions Supports) Policy

Coordination and Leadership

- Lead a **National Affordable and Social Housing Policy** with a downtown emphasis.
- Focus all levels of government and agencies on chronic homelessness (the costs and impacts of which are detrimental to both the urban core and society), and related mental health and addictions with **ten (10) year plans and strategy**.
- Coordinate levels of delivery of social services so that some jurisdictions are not overwhelmed by those leaving under services areas.
- Ensure all participants in policy development in urban areas focus on housing for those in need as a priority as lack of affordability and availability of housing is the foundation of the majority of other social issues in downtowns.

Funding

- Reinstated a range of social housing funding initiatives (co-op, affordable, supportive) and support with dollars crisis level **supportive housing**.
- Fund addictions and mental health programmes as it is a national crisis and goes to heart of “peace, order and good government”, a federal head of power.

Research/Data Collection

- A great amount of research has already been undertaken, review existing data to avoid duplication and waste and create measurable benchmarks to assess results.
- Research the impacts of “integration into the community” and coordinate with empirical, unbiased drug treatment research across Canada and draw on international expertise.

Policy

- Develop the policy basis for the National Policy on Affordable and Social Housing (note much work done by the Eggleton Segal Senate Subcommittee – a timely and positive response is required from the Government).
- Direct HRDC to develop downtown job creation strategies and job recovery programmes for the addicted and ill (important in both Housing and Crime Prevention areas).

4. Downtown Economic Development

Coordination and Leadership

- Canada’s downtowns are the economic engines of the country – their vitality is critical.

Funding

- Foster centres of excellence in urban cores (example: technological centres).
- Strategically fund downtown flagship initiatives (conference centres, attractions, universities innovation hubs).
- Participate with funding (and tax incentives) for not just bricks and mortar, but also the aesthetics of the City – livability, beautification, street presence (especially in its own Federal buildings).

Research

- Take a leadership role, or direct strong academic resources, to track on an annual or biannual basis, using a measurable set of standards, the health of downtowns - “Annual Report Card on the State of Downtowns” (social, economic, physical).

Policy

- As noted under Infrastructure Reinvestment above, National Policies on Transportation/Transit and Urban Development (land use and economic) are important to Economic growth and sustainability of downtowns
- Develop a Federal arts, heritage and cultural resource policy oriented to downtowns (often the oldest and most vibrant parts of our urban areas).

Legislation

- Commit a share of the Federal value added/sales tax directly to municipalities – ensure a portion of the sales and services taxes generated in downtowns returns to downtowns through municipal government work with FCM initiatives in this area).
- Legislate to enshrine adequate payments in lieu of taxes for Federal buildings and operations in downtowns.

WHAT IS IDA AND DOWNTOWNS CANADA?

Founded in 1954, the International Downtown Association has more than 550 member organizations worldwide including: North America, Europe, Asia and Africa and is a world leader and champion for vital and livable urban centres. Through our network of committed individuals, rich body of knowledge and unique capacity to nurture community building partnerships, IDA is a guiding force in creating healthy and dynamic centres that anchor the well-being of towns, cities and regions in the world.

IDA accomplishes its mission by providing a rich and unparalleled combination of learning and information resources, including:

- Spring Regional Conferences located across North America
- Annual Convention and Tradeshow.
- Trending Topic and Best Practice webinars
- IDAdvantage weekly electronic news brief
- PEAK: IDA's online community for 24 hour exchange of information among members
- IDA Downtown Achievement Awards
- IDA Policy, Research and Practice initiatives
- IDA Advisory Panels and Advisory Visits

Downtowns Canada was established to provide leadership from the Canadian members of IDA on issues critical to Canadian urban centres.

CONCLUSION

Groups that manage business districts across Canada were consulted. Key downtown business and economic development groups had input. There is a strong and genuine desire for the Federal Government to re-engage in a wide range of critical downtown urban issues and Downtowns Canada sees the Federal government as natural leaders, researchers, and legislators who can also bring sharp focus on issues with targeted funding in coordination with provinces and municipal governments.

The International Downtown Association (IDA) is the ultimate information source on downtowns and a world leader and champion for vital and livable urban centers. Founded in 1954, IDA has more than 550 member organizations worldwide. IDA is headquartered in Washington, DC.

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