

Impact of Homelessness, Mental Health and Addictions Conditions on Business Task Force Mandate

The Impact task force will research and identify actions and partnerships, with the goal of addressing the impact on business due to homelessness, and mental health and addictions conditions in the community.

Background

In response to growing concerns from Chamber members about the impacts of homelessness, mental health issues, and addictions conditions on their businesses, the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce undertook a review of the City of Greater Sudbury's programming and service delivery, particularly in the downtown, to identify actions that support members in navigating social challenges that continue to affect their operations, decrease customer visits, result in increased costs and affect their abilities to recruit and retain employees.

The recommendations in this report do not address social services, but focus on actions related to security, cleanliness and increasing foot traffic in the downtown. The Chamber and its members support and recognize the work of our countless community and non-profit organizations who continue to provide important and life saving work to support our residents experiencing homelessness, and/or living with addictions and mental health conditions.

Additionally, recent changes to the provincial legal and enforcement landscape have introduced new tools to help address crime and safety concerns in urban areas. While their impact remains to be seen, they present an opportunity to analyze how efforts can be better aligned with the needs of businesses and communities.

As part of its continued efforts for advocacy, the task force engaged in research and consultation to ensure the recommendations are informed by real-world experiences and successful examples, including:

- Roundtable discussions with business and property owners.
- Continuous member feedback.
- Review and analysis of municipal data and public safety trends.
- Presentations by the Greater Sudbury Police Service and City staff.
- Case studies from municipalities with successful programs such as Medicine Hat and Guelph.

The goal of this report is to support the City and its partners in implementing a collaborative approach to address the impacts of homelessness, mental health and addictions conditions faced by our business community. While many of the recommended actions focus on the downtown, the Chamber recognizes these challenges are community-wide and has included broader actions.

The City has taken steps to support affected businesses in recent years, such as investments in community policing and outreach. The recommendations in this report build on these efforts, reflecting the Chamber's commitment to creating a downtown which is welcoming and conducive to doing business.



A more active downtown benefits the entire community by encouraging investments and improving quality of life for businesses and residents alike. A 2020 study by the Canadian Real Estate Association highlighted that vibrant, well-maintained downtown areas can boost local business revenues by up to 15 to 20 % through increased foot traffic and consumer spending.

A vibrant downtown not only enhances the economic vitality of our city but serves as a magnet for business investment and immigration. By encouraging an environment that supports entrepreneurship and attracts newcomers, downtown areas can drive sustainable economic growth and cultural diversity.

The Chamber will continue to monitor anticipated regulatory changes that may affect the recommendations in this report.

Recommendations

Increased Security and Crime Prevention

1. Increase police presence with auxiliary/volunteer patrols

Description

The existing volunteer auxiliary constable program assists the Greater Sudbury Police Service with events, programs and community engagement. These trained volunteers are committed to community safety and to the wellbeing of our community, and it is recommended the program be expanded to focus on the downtown. There is also an opportunity to increase the number of patrols by partnering auxiliary officers with municipal law enforcement officers.

Estimated Cost

Auxiliary officers are mostly unpaid, and increased costs would be incurred for equipment and training. With a potential decrease in calls downtown due to the increased security presence, costs could be offset.

Impact

Improved patrol frequency would improve public perception of safety. This would contribute to increased foot traffic downtown and improved relationships and trust between police and the community. In addition, it allows hands-on experience and training for officers, many of them often entering the police force as constables.

2. Introduce regular public reporting on staffing for police patrols downtown

Description

It is recommended that regular public reporting on dedicated minimum staffing for police patrols downtown be implemented, including the number of calls received, number of hours spent downtown, response times and nature of incidents. These updates should be communicated to downtown businesses, residents and property owners, as well as the community. At this time, while police has officers patrolling the downtown 24/7, those who work, live and visit downtown are unaware of the impact of this work.

Estimated Cost

The estimated cost would be minimal, as the data is already available.



Impact

Regular reporting will improve accountability, transparency and public trust. Increased police presence also enhances the public perception of safety and security in the downtown and deters petty crime and vandalism.

3. Grant program for safety and security improvements

Description

Businesses and property owners across the city continue to face significant increased costs for cleaning and security. It is recommended that a grant program for businesses to help mitigate costs of security improvements be implemented. The grants would also cover expenses such as security cameras, alarms, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) improvements, lighting and other measures. The Greater Sudbury Development Corporation recently quickly implemented a grant program for businesses affected by U.S. tariffs, however, after years of challenges related to societal issues beyond their control, no program is available locally to help address these escalating costs. Many other similar programs exist, including in British Columbia, where small businesses are offered up to \$1,000 for prevention equipment.

Estimated Cost

An annual grant program with a fund of up to \$500,000 could be allocated through existing Greater Sudbury Development Corporation grants and incentive programs.

Impact

This program would help businesses and property owners by managing increased costs, improving confidence among existing business owners and encouraging further investments.

4. Increase investment in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Description

Perform a CPTED analysis in downtown city-owned areas and implement changes as a deterrent against repeated crimes, theft and vandalism. This could include installing lighting in alleyways, parking lots and parks, and using lower landscaping and trimming trees to increase sightlines. All improvements be completed using the principles of urban planning and design that align with the downtown area's beautification.

Estimated Cost

The cost for implementing CPTED principles would vary and could be implemented using City maintenance budgets. It is recommended that the use of Municipal Accommodation Tax MAT tax funds be explored, as it contributes to downtown revitalization.

Impact

Implementing CPTED strategies through best practices in urban planning and design will lead to a well-lit and visually inviting downtown. Well-lit, monitored spaces reduce night-time crime opportunities. Businesses will feel safer operating late evenings and nights, which will lead to increased foot traffic. This will also lead to the downtown looking more aesthetic, with its well-lit streets and alleyways, trimmed foliage.



Cleanliness and Beautification of Downtown

1. Increase litter collection frequency to include weekends and pre-events

Description

Current service levels for litter cleanup and garbage removal in the downtown are not sufficient to maintain a clean and welcoming environment for visitors. Litter cleanup occurs Tuesday to Friday, with no service on weekends. This results in significant trash on downtown streets, sidewalks and public spaces, and overflowing trash bins on weekends when restaurants, events and other programming occur. Visible litter or neglect deters customers, reduces foot traffic and harms a city's reputation.

Estimated Cost

Increasing litter collection on weekends would cost approximately \$140,000 for staffing and resources. Alternatively, contracting a private service for weekend cleanup may decrease the costs required to enhance the service. The City recently announced changes to recycling services that will result in savings of \$4 million in 2025 and \$2.1 million annually starting in 2026. It is recommended that a portion of these savings be reallocated to this service enhancement.

Impact

Cleanliness strongly influences how people perceive a downtown, as it signals safety, care and vibrancy. A clean environment attracts more visitors, encourages longer stays and boosts business confidence and investment. Maintaining a clean downtown supports economic growth, civic pride and overall quality of life.

2. Provide 24-hour washroom access

Description

Businesses and visitors to the downtown area have seen a significant increase in public urination and defecation, resulting in decreased cleanliness and more cleaning costs. It is recommended the City work in partnership with the downtown BIA, Public Health Sudbury & Districts and local non-profits to open permanent (existing) or portable 24-hour public washroom downtown to provide safe, clean and accessible facilities that serve vulnerable populations. Many municipalities provide this service, including Kitchener, Winnipeg, Victoria and Toronto. To be successful, dedicated 24-hour security presence will be needed to prevent vandalism, misuse and ensure safety of all users. They should be well-maintained, and may include support from outreach staff, ensuring they serve both public health and community safety effectively.

Estimated Costs

This recommendation would result in increased costs. It is recommended that current social services budgets (reporting surpluses of almost \$1 million in 2023 and 2024) be explored to fund this initiative, as it serves unhoused populations.

- Permanent, already staffed facilities (such as Tom Davies Square with existing 24/7 security on site): \$50,000 to \$75,000 annually (maintenance and cleaning).
- Permanent non-staffed existing facilities (such as Memorial Park): \$100,000 annually (maintenance and security).
- Portable self-cleaning units: \$150,000 to \$250,000 each, plus \$25,000 to \$40,000 annually (operation and cleaning).



- Increased staffing or outreach services to enhance safety and usability will incur extra costs, however, existing staff could be stationed at these locations.

Impact

When properly implemented and supported by continuous security presence, 24-hour downtown washrooms improve public health, reduce street-level disorder, and offer dignity to vulnerable residents. For businesses, they enhance customer experience, attract more foot traffic, and contribute to a cleaner, more welcoming environment, ultimately supporting economic activity and investment in the downtown core.

3. Re-allocate existing City summer student resources to the downtown

Description

Designate two or more of the City's seasonal summer student staff exclusively to downtown beautification and maintenance, rather than distributing or rotating them across parks or suburban areas. Their responsibilities could include maintaining flower beds, repainting benches and railings, and supporting small-scale public art or decorative initiatives that enhance the visual appeal of the downtown core and Memorial Park.

Estimated Cost

The initiative would involve minimal to no cost, as student wages are already part of the City's annual seasonal staffing budget.

Impact

Having a visible, dedicated beautification team in the downtown core daily will result in immediate, noticeable improvements. Cleaner, well-maintained public spaces contribute to a more welcoming and vibrant atmosphere, benefiting businesses through reduced litter, less graffiti and a more appealing environment for customers and visitors.

4. Reallocate two existing staff to maintain the downtown year round

Description

Reassign two existing City staff to focus exclusively on year-round maintenance of the downtown core. These staff would handle tasks such as sidewalk snow and ice removal, pruning and maintaining public planters, pressure washing sidewalks, performing graffiti removal and making minor repairs, including fixing broken lights, furniture, electrical, etc. This model mirrors successful approaches used in other Canadian cities such as Calgary, who reassigns existing parks and public works staff during winter and off-peak periods to maintain key downtown areas year-round.

Estimated Cost

Since this initiative relies on reallocating current staff, the additional cost is minimal. Minor expenses for tools and supplies could be absorbed within existing operating budgets.

Impact

A consistent and proactive maintenance presence downtown will result in cleaner streets, safer walkways and more regular upkeep of public infrastructure. Businesses will benefit from fewer customer complaints and increased foot traffic, while the City may reduce long-term repair costs by addressing issues before they become larger problems.



Increase Pedestrian Traffic and Visitors Downtown

1. Revise public sector remote work policies to align with their economic development mandates

Description

Public sector employees working downtown play a vital role in sustaining the local economy through lunchtime and retail spending. Key downtown government institutions such as Tom Davies Square are the largest downtown employers and must encourage employees to work from their downtown offices more often. Currently, City economic development staff, whose mandate includes downtown revitalization, are only required to work in the office one day per week. Revised remote work policies aligns workplace policies with government's broader economic development goals by increasing foot traffic and vitality in the downtown core. Across Canada, downtown cores have experienced a 20 to 40% drop in weekday office occupancy due to the rise of remote work, significantly impacting retail and service businesses. Cities like Toronto and Ottawa have responded by promoting hybrid work models to rebalance office occupancy and support local economies.

Estimated Cost

The cost for implementing such a change would be minimal, as it is largely a policy change.

Impact

Increasing the number of downtown workers on weekdays can boost sales for local lunch spots, cafés and retail stores, supporting business recovery and growth. Additionally, a higher presence of workers enhances passive surveillance, which helps reduce crime and improve public safety.

2. Reallocate two city staff to event programming

Description

The City should allocate two existing full-time staff members from the Economic Development Tourism or Leisure Services Community Initiatives sections to focus exclusively on event coordination and placemaking. These staff would be responsible for planning and organizing events, managing logistics, coordinating sponsorships and supporting the creation of engaging, inclusive events. Their work would facilitate a vibrant community and downtown atmosphere through regular programming, fostering a strong sense of community and attracting visitors. To increase the impact and community buy-in, City staff should actively collaborate with existing volunteer and community groups, many of whom already have experience in organizing successful local events. This approach aligns with North Bay's model, where the city's arts, culture and recreation department employ dedicated staff to organize events like the North Bay Summer Concert Series, Culture Days and the Santa Claus Parade. They take a more active role in event planning, rather than the current model in the City of Greater Sudbury that relies on community groups to plan events and activate public spaces.

Estimated Cost

Since this initiative relies on reallocating existing City staff, the additional cost is minimal. Costs to host events would be offset by ticket sales revenues and sponsorships, which has a current full-time permanent resource.

Impact

Re-allocating City staff to take a more active and collaborative role in event coordination will result in frequent and diverse event programming downtown. Regular and diverse events will draw residents



and tourists downtown in greater numbers, increasing foot traffic and boosting sales for local shops and restaurants. Over time, this consistent programming will help establish a reputation for a lively and dynamic downtown where “something is always happening,” enhancing community pride and economic vitality.

3. Streamline event permitting and evaluate fees to increase public space activation

Description

Simplifying and accelerating the process for hosting events across the community will make it easier for organizers to navigate requirements and obtain approvals, including those related to insurance requirements, permits, fire plans and others. Additionally, reviewing by-laws and grant programs to evaluate fees for volunteer-run and small-scale events will encourage more frequent community gatherings.

Estimated Cost

The cost for implementing this recommendation would be minimal, as it is largely a policy change. A decrease in permit fees would lead to less revenue, a modest economic development investment.

Impact

Lowering barriers to event hosting will lead to more volunteer-led and small-scale events such as seasonal markets, cultural celebrations, and neighborhood fairs. These events attract attendees who shop, dine, and engage with businesses, contributing to a livelier and more economically vibrant streetscape.

4. Lease Incentive Program

Description

To address the high vacancy rates in the downtown core and support new, expanding businesses, it is recommended that the City implement a lease support incentive. The program would provide financial assistance to eligible new tenants or landlords who enter commercial leases in impacted areas, such as the downtown. Incentives under the program could include two months of subsidized rent, support for leasehold improvements, and property tax offsets for landlords offering reduced lease rates.

Estimated Cost

An annual pilot lease incentive fund of \$250,000 to \$400,000 could be implemented through the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation or downtown-specific incentive programs in the existing City budget.

Impact

This program would support economic development by filling vacant commercial spaces, stimulating new business activity and increasing foot traffic. Reducing financial barriers could attract new businesses and entrepreneurs. An active retail and services environment could have broader economic benefits, including increased property tax revenue in the long-term, and reduced vacancy.

