Downtown Sudbury
a plan for the future
going downtown growing downtown

Centre-ville de Sudbury
un plan pour l’avenir
fréquenter et développer le centre-ville

Canadian Institute of Planners
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Project Summary

Downtowns are important. They are the historic and symbolic heart of a community, the reflection of a city’s image, pride and prosperity. They are the meeting place for the entire city, where all types of different people come together to celebrate and share common experiences. A healthy, active, successful downtown makes a positive statement about the prosperity of a city, sending a positive message to future residents, businesses and investors. The reverse is also true, which is why a strong, implementable vision for Downtown Sudbury is so important.

Few cities in Canada have undergone the transformations that the City of Greater Sudbury has since its birth as a railway camp called Sudbury Junction in the late 1800s. Although the past 120 years have brought both boom and bust, Sudbury has grown and prospered even in some of the most difficult economic periods. Over the past century, Sudbury has evolved from its modest beginnings as a lumber town to a world-recognized leader in mining innovation and a growing regional capital for northern Ontario. Today, Sudbury is an impressive city with potential to become an even more significant centre in Ontario.

For the City’s next chapter, Urban Strategies was retained by the City of Greater Sudbury to prepare a Master Plan and Action Strategy that will direct the ongoing evolution of the city’s downtown. Urban Strategies was supported by IBI Group, providing specialist advice on transportation and heritage retention, the J.C. Williams Group, advising on commercial markets and downtown housing opportunities and Yallowega Belanger Architecture, providing architectural direction.

Downtown Sudbury is Greater Sudbury’s first neighbourhood. It is the historic core and centre of government services, financial services, retail, sport and entertainment uses, community uses, and arts and culture. It is where people live, work, shop, worship, recreate and celebrate. It is a key tourism focal point and important economic engine. Its image defines the character of Greater Sudbury. While Downtown Sudbury has a number of impressive strengths, including its arts and culture offer, intact heritage, an active BIA and a bustling restaurant and bar scene, there is potential for further improvements. Improving the health of the downtown crucial to Greater Sudbury’s future economic competitiveness and success.

To strengthen the performance of the downtown and inspire confidence in its future, the Master Plan established an agreed Vision for how the downtown of this proud northern city should evolve over the next 30 years. The plan set out a clear, inspired and achievable course of action to enhance the heart of this regional centre. Through a mix of area-wide and site specific recommendations (including actions, initiatives and design guidelines), the plan reinforced the downtown’s role as the biggest, brightest and best downtown in Northern Ontario. Strategies are presented for improving the downtown’s level of economic, cultural and retail activity, its sense of place and its role as the urban centre for the region. The supporting Action Strategy focuses on how the Master Plan should be delivered – what actions are required, how much initiatives cost, which partnerships need to be formed, how initiatives can be funded, and how delivery should be phased. The plan seeks creative solutions to financing and lever public investment to continue making positive change happen in Sudbury.

Community engagement was at the core of the project process with several opportunities embedded in the process for local community and stakeholders to be actively involved shaping the Master Plan. Over the course of the study, more than a thousand creative ideas were shared by a diversity of interests. Hundreds of Sudburians participated in project workshops, interviews, open houses, youth events, community forums and social media events. Outreach events included three major Community Forums, regularly scheduled Community Liaison Group meetings, a series of interactive Visioning Workshops, a hands-on Design Charrette, thematic round tables and several days of face-to-face interviews.
Study Goals & Objectives

The aim of this project is to empower the City of Greater Sudbury to achieve positive and meaningful change throughout its downtown to help it become the employment, service and cultural centre of Northern Ontario. The Master Plan will work to create the appropriate conditions and physical environment across the downtown to make it an attractive location for investment.

The primary goal of the Downtown Sudbury Master Plan and Action Strategy was to establish an agreed Vision and re-development plan to guide public and private investment across the downtown over the next 30 years (with a focus placed on the first 10 years). Objectives included:

- establish a clear vision and agreed path for its realization;
- act as a long-term strategic plan to guide investment and provide a platform for attracting new investment;
- provide a coherent planning context to guide physical regeneration across the study area;
- work in partnership with Laurentian University to identify a site for the new School of Architecture, Canada’s first School of Architecture in more than 40 years;
- identify opportunities for intensification to deliver growth objectives (Growth Plan for Northern Ontario);
- raise the profile of Downtown Sudbury as an residential and employment destination; and
- provide new opportunities for social regeneration.

The Master Plan provided a series of land use recommendations (future function and policy changes), design guidelines (place specific design considerations) and 52 targeted revitalization proposals for the downtown’s built form and open spaces. To create an easily understandable and navigable strategy, the plan clustered the 52 individual initiatives around three central directives to drive change across the downtown. Directives included:

Activity and Growth: Create a Downtown that is a Destination for the City and the Region

As Sudbury’s economy continues to evolve and its cultural offer develops further, the downtown must play an increasingly important and high profile role as the primary location for continued economic and cultural growth.

Access and Connectivity: Create a Downtown that is the Heart of Greater Sudbury

Downtown must be strongly connected to the rest of the city and the region and be accessible to all. It should be easy to get to and easy to get around in.

Beauty & Pride: Create a Beautiful Downtown that celebrates the Spirit of Sudbury

Downtown must become a place of pride for all of Greater Sudbury, a place of beauty and excitement that raises the heart and spirit of the entire community. Many wonderful elements are already in place and hint at the rich history of the downtown. These elements need to be brought forward in a bolder statement of beauty and northern identity.

The Downtown Sudbury Master Plan & Action Strategy project addresses each of the areas identified by the CIP as critical neighbourhood-based issues to be resolved through the planning process, including continued economic development, city centre revitalization, heritage preservation and planning, housing provision and brownfield repair and redevelopment.
Explanation

1. Innovation & Contribution to the Profession

Urban Strategies’ work represents the highest standards of quality for community-led regeneration and has been very well received by the City of Greater Sudbury. By building trust, rallying stakeholder support and creating a clear vision and implementation plan, the Downtown Master Plan and Action Strategy has already had a significant impact on planning in Sudbury and is already working to reshape the landscape of the downtown.

Never before had such a comprehensive and forward thinking plan been prepared for the downtown. The comprehensiveness of the Master Plan through the inclusion of physical, social and economic strategies within a single place-based study was the first for the City of Greater Sudbury. The scale of the study area, combined with its role as the political, commercial and recreational heart of the Greater Sudbury presented an opportunity to reinvent this area at a scale and diversity not before seen in the city.

To encourage ownership of the plan, the City demanded that a significant emphasis be placed on stakeholder engagement and public consultation. Working in partnership with the City to promote events and engage the community in the master planning process, Urban Strategies’ successfully attracted between 100-150 participants to each of our major events. With fewer than 600 residents living downtown, attracting almost 400 participants to the downtown consultation events was a significant achievement. Never before had the City been able to attract this level of community representation to a City study held in the downtown.

Many of the ideas and concepts contained in the ultimate plan were derived from the community through a three year process of communication, dialogue, presentations and feedback. This process involved regular consultation and feedback from the project steering committee (the Community Liaison Group), other community groups, downtown organizations – such as the Chamber of Commerce and the BIA, the client team, the City of Greater Sudbury, university partners, private land owners and developers and a myriad of other advisors and stakeholders. Consensus planning played a critical role in the design and planning process and a considerable amount of community input was reflected in the final plan.

Although considered quite radical by some Councillors, City Departments and stakeholders, the Master Plan and Action Strategy developed by Urban Strategies for Downtown Sudbury presented the opportunity to reinvent this area at a scale not before seen to create a contemporary and more sustainable downtown. Controversial as some aspects of the plan were, due to the trust developed throughout the project and the genuine relationship forged between the consultant team, the client group, local politicians and key stakeholder, the plan has garnered significant political and public support and is expected to be formally approved by Council in April 2012.

Consultation summaries were prepared following all community engagement events.
2. Methodology
The plan was firmly rooted in the context of the City of Greater Sudbury and within the qualities of the downtown’s particular location. From that initial analysis of opportunities and constraints, we began with a Vision statement which underpinned all that followed. The plan was tested and modified in an iterative process which resulted in the final plan, one that was an optimal solution for the downtown’s growing potential.

The Downtown Master Plan and Action Strategy was prepared across four phases. Phase 1 develops an in-depth understanding of where Sudbury has been, where it is now and where it could go in the future through a strategic overview of the area and analysis of social, economic and physical conditions of the study area and its wider context. Phase 2 synthesized the analysis and focused discussions on the future opportunities for Downtown Sudbury to cement a compelling and implementable Vision. Phase 3 translated the Vision into a structured Master Plan for Downtown Sudbury, supported by actionable projects to guide public and private investment over the next 10 years. The final phase, Phase 4, finalized the information collected throughout into a succinct Master Plan and Action Strategy for Downtown Sudbury - a plan that is ambitious, clear, forward thinking and fully reflects the aspirations of its communities.

The team that Urban Strategies assembled for this project combined local, national and international experience in urban planning, urban design, downtown retail strategy, innovative outreach and communications, and multi-modal transportation consulting. The ongoing involvement of the community and the private sector was critical to the success of the plan, as we realized that this support was essential for project delivery and passing on ownership to the wider community.

As this plan and project were created for a public sector client, it should be noted that its financial feasibility was a principal underlying requirement. Marrying that economic necessity with the higher guiding Vision statements, as well as planning and design principles, a plan emerged that was both visionary and achievable over a phased time line.

3. Clarity of Goals and Objectives
A healthy downtown is integral to a city’s overall social and economic success. With the over-arching goal of providing the City of Greater Sudbury with a blueprint to guide future growth and attract investment to the downtown, the Master Plan and Action Strategy was structured around delivering a series of objectives, all squarely set on a framework of implementation. The plan articulates a series of increasingly specific objectives: first, the Vision, which set out to prioritize high-level ideas that would enhance the downtown and the city as a whole, positioning it as the ‘Centre of the North’; second, the Master Plan outlines three central directives that comprise the strategy and are the primary objectives of the plan; and, finally, each of the three directives is supported by targeted objectives that, when realized, will deliver the Vision. The three central directives include:

Create a Downtown that is a Destination for the City and the Region
As Sudbury’s economy continues to evolve and its cultural offer develops further, the downtown will play an increasingly important role in providing the place for that continued economic and cultural growth. The strategy for creating a downtown that is a destination for the City and the Region is supported by the following four objectives:

- Grow Employment in the Downtown
- Create Destination Attractions in the Downtown
- Make the Downtown a Centre for Learning
- Make the Downtown a Centre for Living
Downtown must be strongly connected to the rest of the city and the region and be accessible to all. It should be easy to get to and easy to get around in. The strategy for creating a more connected and integrated downtown for Sudbury is supported by the following three objectives:

- Connect Downtown into local neighbourhood and the Greater Sudbury network
- Create a more flexible, yet fully connected Downtown street network
- Invest in the infrastructure necessary to support the growth of Downtown

Create a Beautiful Downtown that Celebrates the Spirit of Sudbury
Downtown can become a place of pride for all of Greater Sudbury, a place of beauty and excitement that raises the heart and spirit of the entire community. The strategy for creating a beautiful downtown that celebrates Greater Sudbury is supported by the following four objectives:

- Rediscover Main Streets as the setting for investment
- Create green downtown destinations
- Create smaller moments of beauty and surprise
- Reflect the Sudbury story across the downtown

4. Implementation
Implementing the Master Plan involves a long-term strategy. The Plan has a 30-year time frame and, therefore, it requires strategic and long-term thinking in terms of implementation. The key component of this strategy is to ensure that the plan itself has broad support throughout the community. To that end, the plan development process, whereby citizens, landowners and elected officials were thoroughly engaged over the past two and a half years set the stage for the long-term support and implementation of the Master Plan.

To direct implementation, a detailed, yet straightforward, Action Strategy Matrix was prepared for each of the three Master Plan directives. The matrix expressed how the transformation of the downtown can be achieved in practical and logistical terms by providing direction for each of the 52 initiatives around phasing, project inter-relationships, project champions, potential delivery partners, estimated costs, funding sources and next steps.

In addition to detailing each of the 52 initiatives, the Action Strategy provided a more immediate focus on achieving early successes and political support in year one actions that should be undertaken by the City and its partners within the first 12 months of Master Plan implementation. These actions will ensure that momentum is carried forward and a solid foundation for change is established.

As the Master Plan calls for a major transformation of the downtown, its successful implementation requires realistic and achievable policies that will allow for the shift from the current

A rendering to demonstrate how life can be brought back to Elgin Street through appropriate infill, quality streetscaping and a lushly planted greenway and multi-use path.
As such, the Action Strategy offers a series of recommendations for policy updates that will move the plan forward, including revisions to the Official Plan, Zoning By-law and Metro Centre Community Improvement Plan.

The opportunities captured by the Master Plan are already being actively pursued by City Staff. The City has worked within the agreed plan to bring about several early successes – including relocating the Sudbury Art Gallery to a new home located in the downtown, completing an assessment for a new and improved farmers market, the introduction of new street furniture and cycle facilities, an on-street parking pilot project and attracting new partners to the table to deliver initiatives in the downtown (namely Vale Mining who are looking to advance their re-greening agenda and CN/CP Rail who are in discussion with the City on the future of the Downtown Rail Yards). These new successes are changing the physical face of Downtown Sudbury and bringing new project partners to the table.

One of the most notable achievements of the process to date has been helping Laurentian University to expand their downtown presence through the introduction of a new downtown School of Architecture. The Master Plan identified a preferred site for the school, which Laurentian University has since purchased, as well as identifying several other potential sites for future growth. The new School will bring 400 additional people (staff and students) to the downtown on a daily basis, resulting in significant cultural and economic spin-off benefits, generating more than $15m/year for the downtown.

5. Overall Presentation

The overall presentation of the Downtown Sudbury Master Plan is best judged by reviewing the provided materials. The document itself is written using clear, yet exciting, language and is organized in a logical format that can be understood by a variety of audiences (professional planners, developers, landowners, general public, City staff). The document is laid out using a clean and easy-to-read graphics.

As a fully bilingual city, the client group ensured that all final documents – the Master Plan and Action Strategy as well as its Executive Summary – were produced in both French and English. To ensure full participation by community members and to engage in a meaningful and inclusive fashion, all Open House and Community Workshop materials were also made available in French. This was particularly important for the Downtown Master Plan due to the high representation of Franco-Ontarian organizations and individuals that call the downtown ‘home’. It should be noted that this Master Plan process was the first time that the City of Greater Sudbury agreed to translate non-technical documents into French language for public distribution.

All documents were produced with the Going Downtown, Growing Downtown logo (specifically created for this project by Urban Strategies to help differentiate the study and brand the process) and made available on the project’s dedicated project blog and website http://growdowntown.ca which is still operational should you wish to peruse it. To appeal to a broad audience and relay complex planning ideas as clearly as possible, the project blog was written in fun, plain language (in both English and French).
6. Public Engagement

A considerable amount of community input was reflected in the final plan, and consensus planning played an important role in the design and planning process. In total, more than 1,000 creative ideas were shared by a variety of participants across the master plan process. Ideas were collected using a range of outreach mechanisms, including three ‘Speak Up Sudbury!’ town hall forums (attended by more than 400 participants), two community workshops (attended by approximately 225 participants), a design charrette, several days of stakeholder interviews (held in both English and French), focus groups, targeted youth events, regular presentations to stakeholder and project partners, social media events (a blog and project website), and several days of one-on-one interviews and round tables with key stakeholders.

Over the course of the Master Plan process, a myriad of stakeholders were involved in the creation of the Vision. In total, including City staff, local businesses, the development industry, land owners, the universities and colleges, arts and cultural interests, police, community interest groups and individual residents. During these interactions the focus was on listening, seeking input, informing, and offering examples of how the components of the Downtown Sudbury Master Plan could meet a diversity of needs and generate excitement and consensus around a shared vision for the future.

Central to this engagement and education process was the Community Liaison Group – a 30-member group representing a broad cross section of associations, organizations and institutions that came together to advise and help shape the Master Plan. The Community Liaison Group contributed creative ideas for how to reposition the downtown and offered feedback on emerging content and advice on local issues.

A unique component of our process was utilizing members of the Community Liaison Group and their existing networks to access ‘hard to reach’ interests. Early in the project process, the team prepared a package of ‘turn-key’ educational and promotion materials that was used by Community Liaison Group members to facilitate smaller locally-based community visioning sessions, promote the project and collect additional feedback. The content of the package included a series of simple display panels, a brief presentation on the Vision and process, handouts and suggested activities by group or theme. This concept of Liaison Group members as ‘educators’ has helped empower members and sustained the engagement process through to implementation. The Community Liaison Group have since become the champions of the Master Plan within the wider community as well as partners responsible for delivering major initiatives (School of Architecture, Sudbury Art Gallery, Sudbury Central Library, amongst others).

The youth of downtown Sudbury were also engaged through a targeted outreach programme that involved young people from the N’Swakamok Native Friendship Centre as well as young people from the Sudbury Action Centre for Youth (SACY). These informal sessions were undertaken to collect the views of young people on how they use the downtown, what problems they feel exist in the downtown and what the best things are about the downtown that need to be protected and made even better.

Across our public engagement program, we actively reached out and included representation from the many communities that make Downtown Sudbury home, including the First Nations and Aboriginal people, the Francophone and Sudbury’s youth. The success of this effort is evidenced by the fact that each of these interest groups have voiced their support for the plan, hosted outreach events and are currently championing specific Master Plan initiatives.

Fully bilingual panels and handout materials were prepared for all community events.
7. Sustainability

A key consideration for the Downtown Sudbury Master Plan is sustainability and providing the means to accomplish balanced growth. The inter-related elements of our approach was rooted at the land use level: sustainability begins at the master planning stage – by creating sufficient densities to support transit, by providing opportunities for development to share infrastructure and innovative energy systems (such as district energy), by building in a spectrum of housing choices, by providing a mix of uses that include employment, social services, community uses and open spaces, and by introducing actions to begin to reclaim derelict and under-utilized brownfield lands and bring them back into a more productive and sustainable use. These are essential ingredient for the downtown to achieve social, economic and environmental well-being.

The Downtown Sudbury plan recommends more efficient land use policies that will help attract more people to live and work downtown. The plan proposes a target population for the downtown of between 3,000 and 5,000 residents by 2021 and directs those to specific locations across the downtown in a variety of forms. In addition, three employment growth initiatives are proposed, including nurturing the growth of downtown’s existing office hub to the expansion of employment lands on a brownfield site to the protection of prestige sites for their longer term redevelopment for Class A office product. These initiatives are in keeping with the Province’s Northern Growth Plan objectives for Downtown Sudbury, where a significant portion of future residential and employment development are to be directed.

The Master Plan recognizes that a great city is a sustainable city, and that a sustainable City must improve the quality of life for its citizens while it addresses social, economic and environment issues through the following:

- offering a growth management strategy that uses land efficiently by effectively allowing for a shift to intensification;
- delineating a natural heritage network across the downtown and tying it into the wider city-wide system;
- protecting existing employment areas and the introduction of new employment focused districts;
- creating greater housing choice by providing private sector incentives to deliver downtown housing and earmarking zones for residential intensification;
- expanding mobility choice, including the cycling and public transit networks and facilities;
- providing a focus on public realm and streetscape improvements to create a more walkable downtown;
- improving connections to adjacent communities to allow the downtown to be better utilized as both a regional destination as well as a local community service centre;
- increasing safety and the perceptions of safety in the downtown through targeted environmental improvements;
- introducing built form and open space guidelines to help ensure new developments and park spaces are designed to the highest standards of quality possible.
- highlighting the social importance of preserving buildings, monuments and landscapes of historical significance and placing an emphasis on telling the ‘Sudbury Story’ through public art, building materials, landscape treatments and signage.
- Supporting the provision of community and social services to better meet the needs of citizens. The plan solidifies the downtown’s role as a service centre for the region and places an emphasis on targeting and expanding support services for the substantial first nations and Franco-Ontarian cultural groups that are make the downtown home.

A detail of the Downtown Sudbury Master Plan