



# Economic Health through Main Street Placemaking

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# Agenda

## Getting walkability right

- Benefits of walkability
- Placemaking as a practice
- Street geometry & pedestrian priority

## Land Use Regulations

- Planning Framework
- Supportive land uses
- Importance of residential uses
- Parking, Parking, Parking


## Economics that Support Downtown

- Land Valuation
- Leveraging Financial Incentives
- Importance of Public Space

# Getting Walkability Right



Source: Destination Ontario



# The Benefits of Walkability

Source: Deberarr on Stock

# Benefits of Walkability:

- Health
- Community
- Safety
- Accessibility
- Economy
- Environment



Stephen Avenue, Calgary

Source: The Everyday Tourist

# Health

- Cuts early mortality rate by 22%
- Improves mental health
- Raises Endorphin levels, lowers cortisol



# Community

- Boosts social capital
- Strengthens cultural identity



Source: Memphis River Parks Partnership

# Safety

- Crime correlated to street appearances and traffic
- Pedestrian focused streets lower traffic speeds
- “Eyes on the Street” – Jane Jacobs



# Accessibility

- Walking is the oldest and most democratic mode of transport
- Those with mobility issues have higher demand for walking infrastructure



# Economy

- Boosts local economy
- Pedestrians typically spend 65% more than drivers
- Regional tourism destination



# Environmental

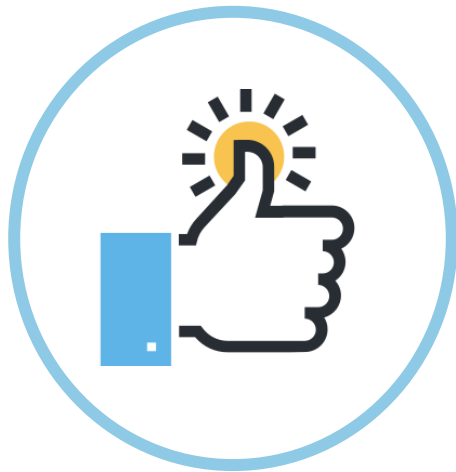
- Greenhouse reduction for active mobility trips
- Walkable neighbourhoods can save 704 KW/h per week



Sønder Boulevard

Source: SLA

# Walkable City (Jeff Speck)



**1. Useful**



**2. Safe**



**3. Comfortable**



**4. Interesting**

# Useful vs Not Useful



Safe vs

Not Safe



Source: Paul Krueger



Source: City of Edmonton

# Comfortable vs Not Comfortable



Source: Montgomery Planning



Source: Adam Greenfield

# Interesting vs Not Interesting



Source: Jeff Swenson, Getty



Source: Crain's Detroit Business

# Why Walkability is good for Downtowns



**Increases Retail  
Spending**



**Increases  
Property Values**



**Increases Visitor  
Dwell Times**



**Resilient Local  
Communities**

# Increase in Retail Spending

- More foot traffic = more spending
- Slower movement = higher chance of entering shops
- Supports small/local businesses over big-box



## Increase in Property Values

- Walkable areas are more desirable = higher demand
- Stronger long-term investment stability



# Increase Visitor Dwell Times

- Comfortable streets means people stay longer
- More time = more spending + activity
- Encourages multi-stop trips



# Create Resilient Communities

- Social Cohesion and Security
- Physical and Mental Health
- Environmental Sustainability
- Economic Vitality
- Enhanced Safety and Access



Foster dense mixed-use environments that promote physical safety, social connection & economic stability



# Placemaking as a Practice

# What does Placemaking mean?

Placemaking is the process of reimagining public spaces into welcoming, safe, accessible, and sociable destinations



# Why is it Important?

Improving public spaces supports foot traffic, strengthens local businesses and communities, and enhances overall quality of life



# How Long People Stay Downtown

Transforming underutilized areas into gathering places encourages people to linger



Source: Destination Ontario

How Frequently  
do They Return?

Regular programming  
gives people a reason  
to go downtown



Montebello Park, St. Catharines

Source: Marydel Homes

# How Visible and Accessible Businesses Are

Farmers markets provide increased foot traffic, motivating local businesses to stay open and gain visibility



A street scene in a historic town. On the left, there are multi-story brick buildings with arched windows. A Subway sign is visible on the ground floor. In the middle of the street, a cyclist with a backpack is riding away from the camera. Several cars are parked or driving. On the right, there's a sidewalk with a utility box covered in notices, a person with a backpack standing near a bicycle rack, and more historic buildings. A street lamp with a star-shaped decoration is in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is overcast and slightly dim.

# Street Geometry and Pedestrian Priority

# Needs for Right of Ways (ROWs)

- Vehicles/Deliveries
- Pedestrians/Cyclists
- Transit
- Sidewalk Uses
- Services
- Parking
- Lighting



## Narrow Streets

**Our wide streets allow emergency vehicles to quickly respond to crashes caused by our wide streets.**



Both are 20mph zones, but only



one of them is designed like it.

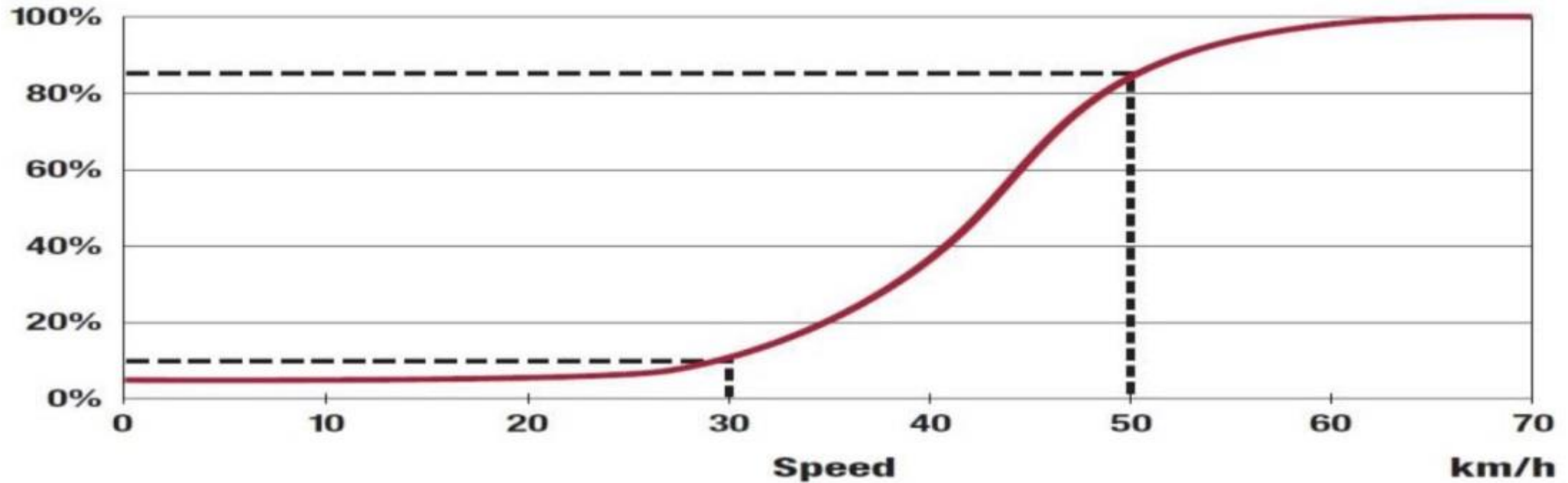
# Narrow Lane Widths

Wide Lanes are often seen as safer, but this assumption is false.

Wide lanes encourage speeding, increasing likelihood of collision



Figure 2.1: Probability of fatal injury to a pedestrian with increases in speed.

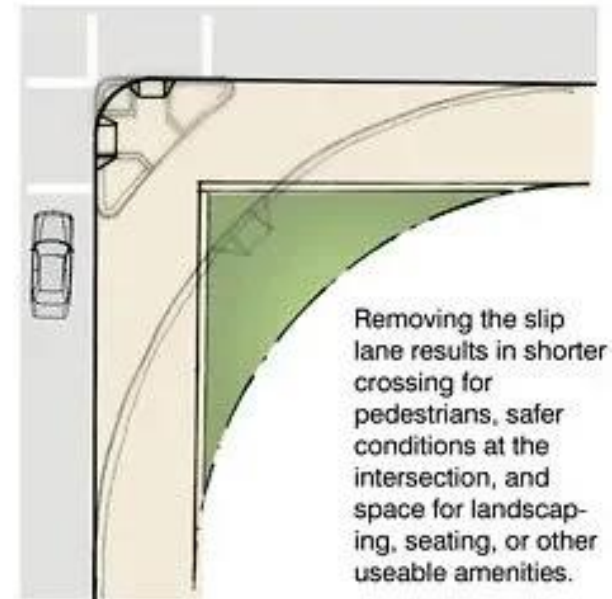
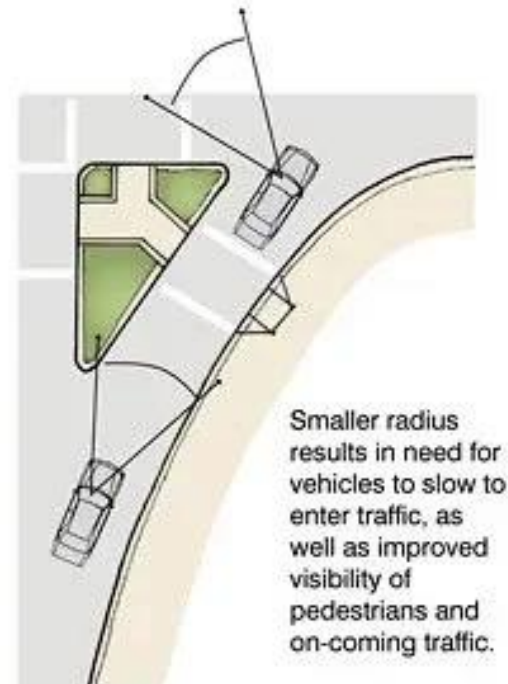
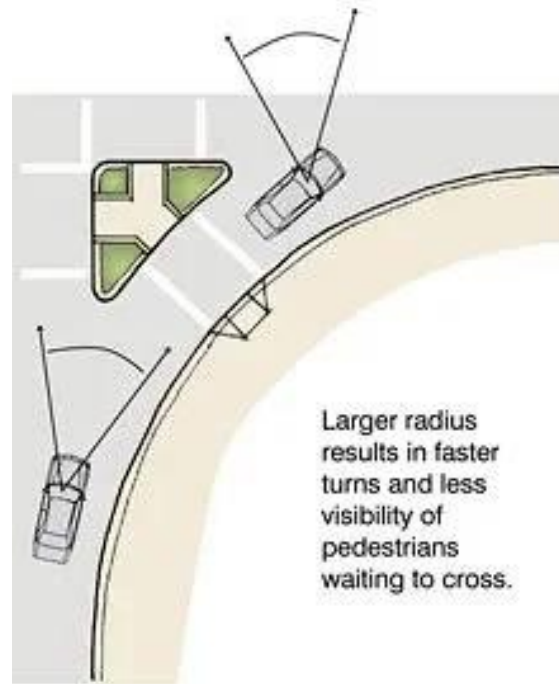


Source: OECD (2006) Speed Management. <http://www.internationaltransportforum.org/Pub/pdf/06Speed.pdf>

Traffic Fatalities Increase at Higher Speeds

# Smaller Turning Radii

- Enforce slower turning speeds
- Enhance visibility
- Facilitate shorter street crossing distances



# Excess Pavement

Sneckdowns can be used to measure vehicular habits. They can also be referenced when redesigning our roads into better streets



Sneckdowns

Source: Ben Wedge

# Reclaiming the street for people

- Pedestrian refuge
- Sidewalk cafes
- Street trees
- Parkettes



Sneekdowns



Source: John Geeting

# On-Street Parking



Source: HotBot, Robert Mitc

# One-way Streets

One-way streets encourage higher speeds, at the expense of business exposure and pedestrian experience



Main Street, Hamilton

Source: CBC, Dan Taekema

# One-way Streets

Engineered to move vehicles in the most efficient manner



# Two-way Streets

Two-way streets support slower traffic, business visibility, and navigation

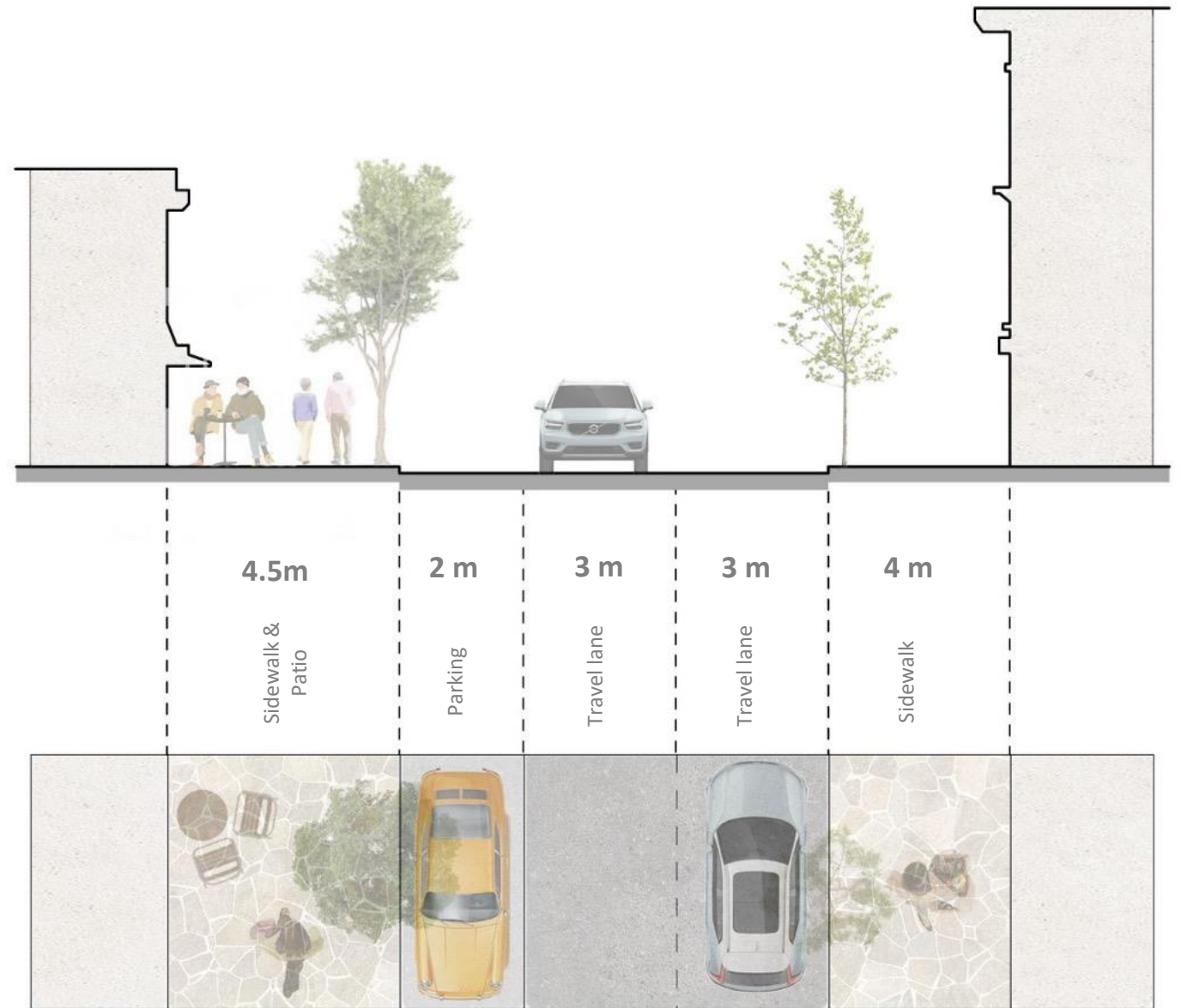


Downtown St. Catharines

Source: MMAH/Flickr

# Downtown Cross Section

- **Narrow lanes**
- **On-street parking**
- **Generous sidewalks that support pedestrian traffic and business activities**
- **Street furniture & trees**
- **Building relationships**

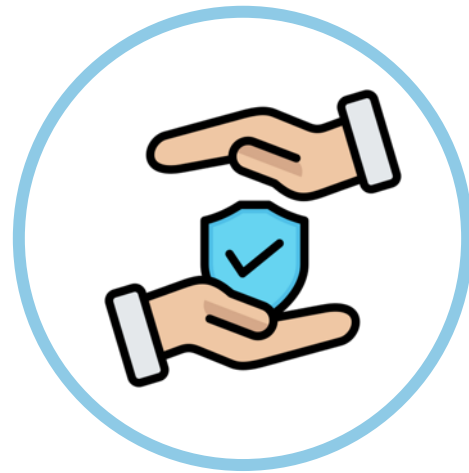


# Successful Downtown Streets

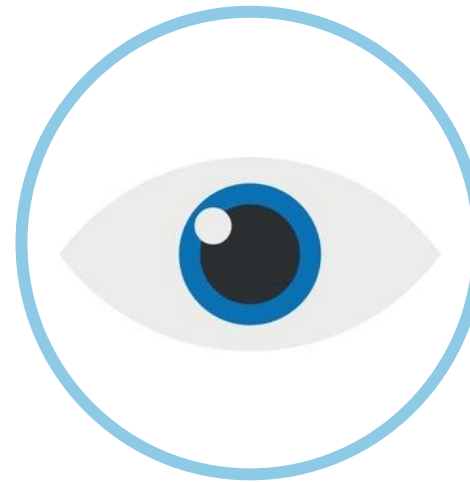
## Prioritize



**Comfort**



**Safety**



**Visibility**



**Human Scale  
Activity**

# Comfort

- Wide sidewalks
- Shade + trees
- Street Furniture



# Safety

- Slower traffic/separation
- Sufficient pedestrian-scaled lighting
- Active frontages
- Pedestrian priority



Source: Isthmus.

# Visibility

- Active storefronts
- Clear signage
- Landmarks & wayfinding
- Maintained sightlines

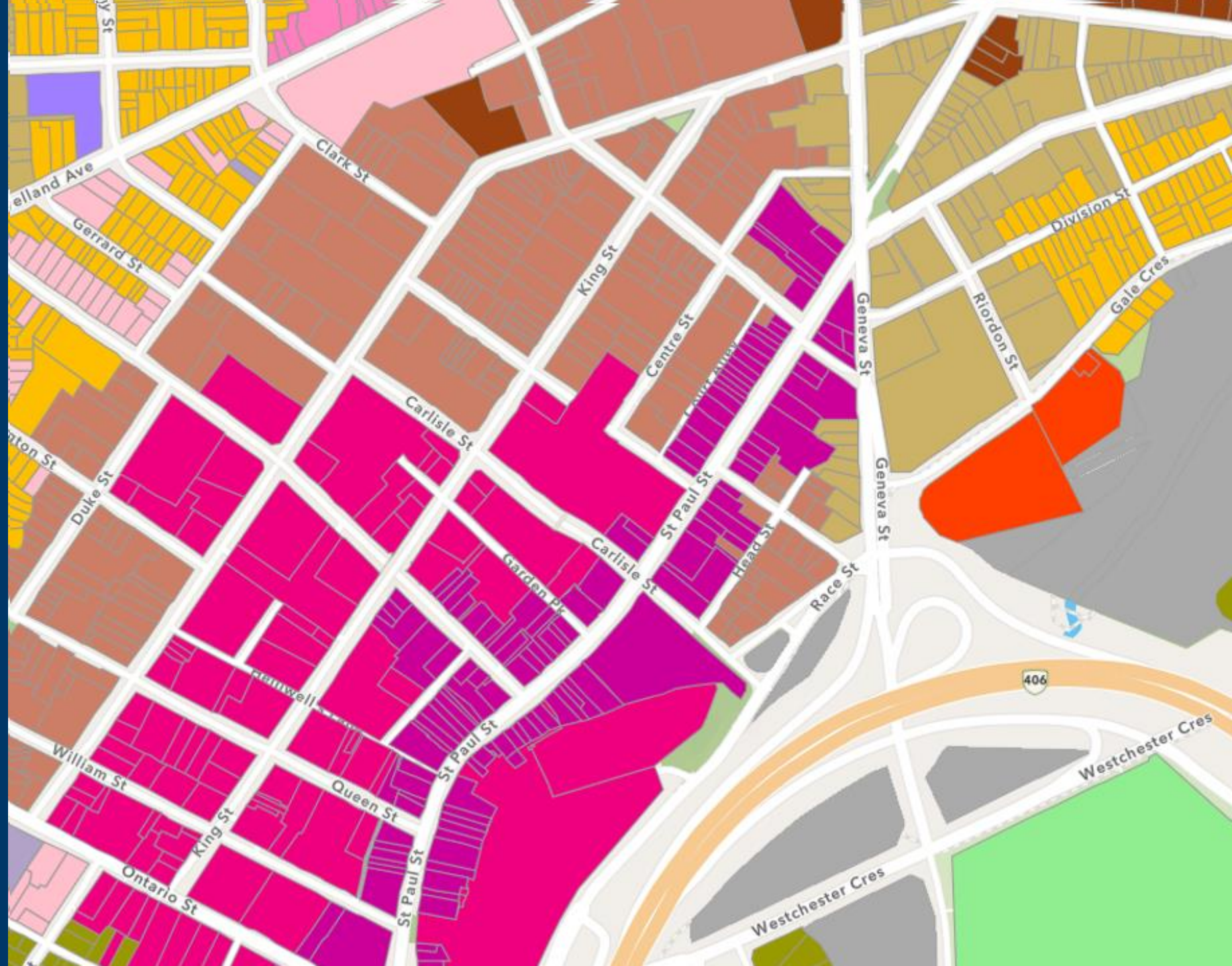


# Human Scale Activity

- Shorter block sizes
- Mixed uses
- Various program types
- Architectural details



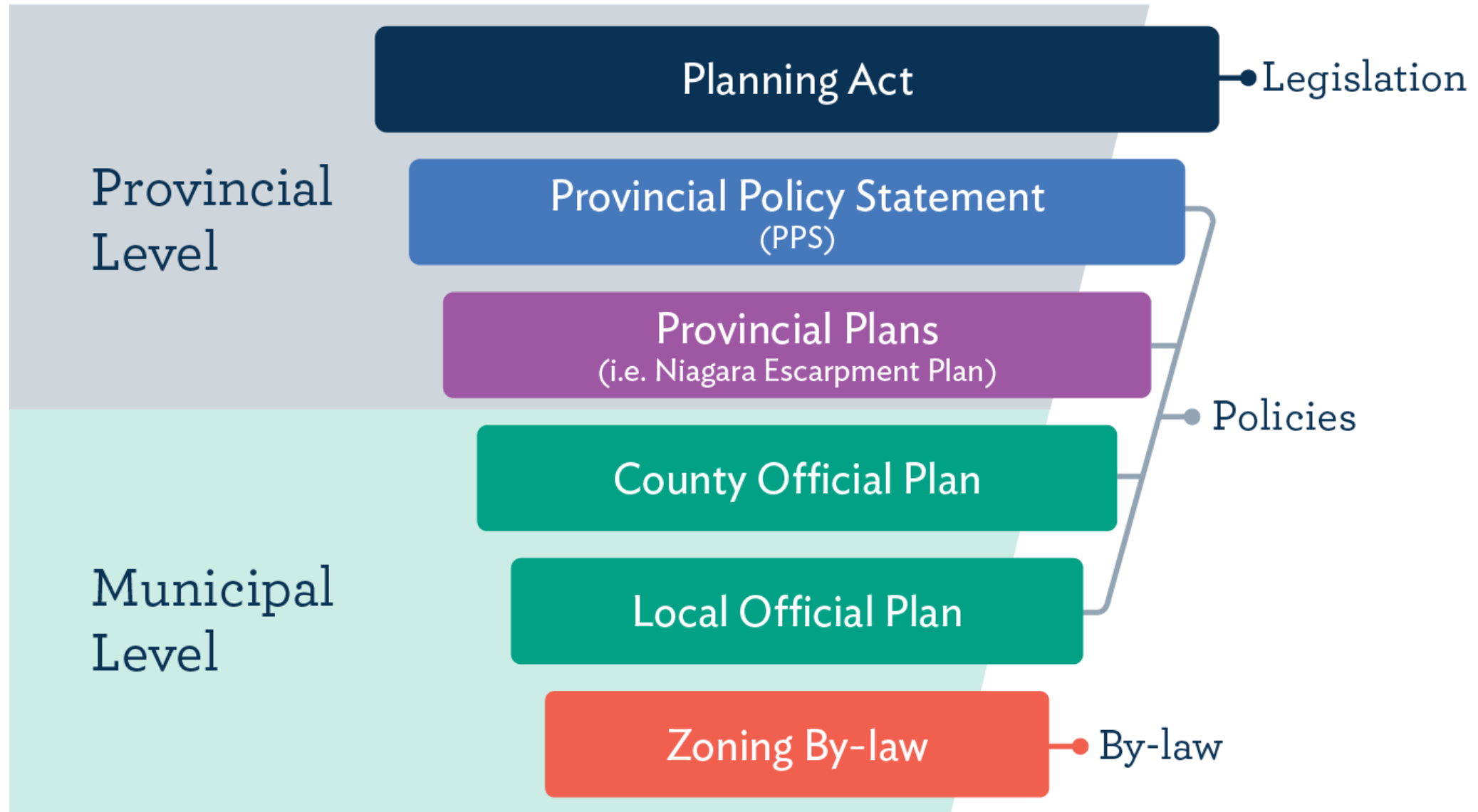
# Land Use Regulations



A hand holding a black pen points to a specific parcel highlighted in green on a detailed site plan. The plan shows a complex arrangement of lots, streets, and building footprints. The highlighted parcel is a multi-sided polygon with the number '524' written inside it. Other lots are labeled with numbers such as 1172, 1178, 1179, 402, 520, 522, 540, 542, 743, and 1039. The background is a faded, light-colored map.

# Planning Framework

# Land Use Planning Framework



## Site Plan Approval

- Site plan
- Landscaping plan
- Parking / traffic study
- Building elevations
- Servicing, Grading, & Stormwater
- Noise study

## Building Permit

- Application & fees
- Permit drawings
- Structural
- HVAC



An aerial photograph of a city and its surrounding agricultural landscape. The city is located in the center-left, with a dense grid of buildings and streets. To the right and top, there are large reservoirs and a winding river. The surrounding area is dominated by agricultural fields, some of which are irrigated, creating a patchwork of green and brown. The overall scene is a mix of urban, agricultural, and natural features.


# Supportive Land Uses



## Downtowns Support a Variety of Land Uses

- Commercial office/retail
- Residential
- Civic Uses/Buildings
- Arts & Culture



An aerial photograph of a city, showing a mix of residential neighborhoods with smaller houses and larger apartment complexes, and a downtown area with several tall skyscrapers. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The text "Importance of Residential" is overlaid in the center in a large, white, sans-serif font.

# Importance of Residential

# Benefit of residential for downtown health



**Increase Foot  
Traffic**



**Enhance  
Safety**



**Strengthen Local  
Economy**

# Increase Foot Traffic

- Daily needs
- More spontaneous visits + impulse spending
- Stronger daytime + evening activity



# Enhance Safety

- More “eyes on the street” at all hours
- Increased natural surveillance
- Safer perception encourages more visitors



# Strengthen Local Economy

- Consistent revenue
- Local spending stays in community
- Supports business retention + reduces vacancies



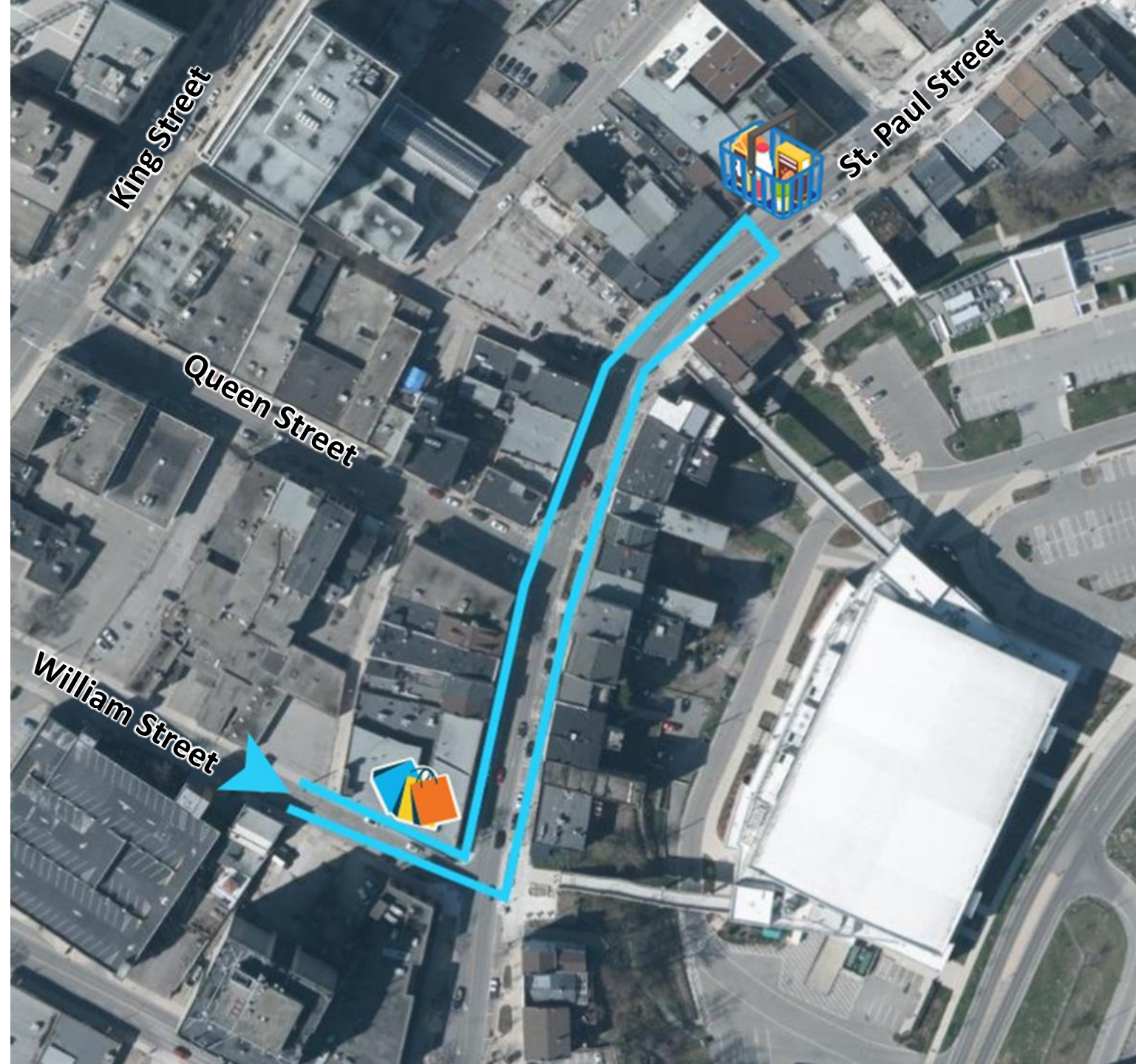
An aerial photograph of a large parking lot with many cars parked in rows. The cars are of various colors, including white, black, blue, red, and yellow. The parking lot is divided into sections by a central aisle and side aisles. The text "Parking, Parking, Parking!" is overlaid in the center of the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

**Parking, Parking, Parking!**

# Debunking Parking Convenience

DOWNTOWN ST.  
CATHARINES

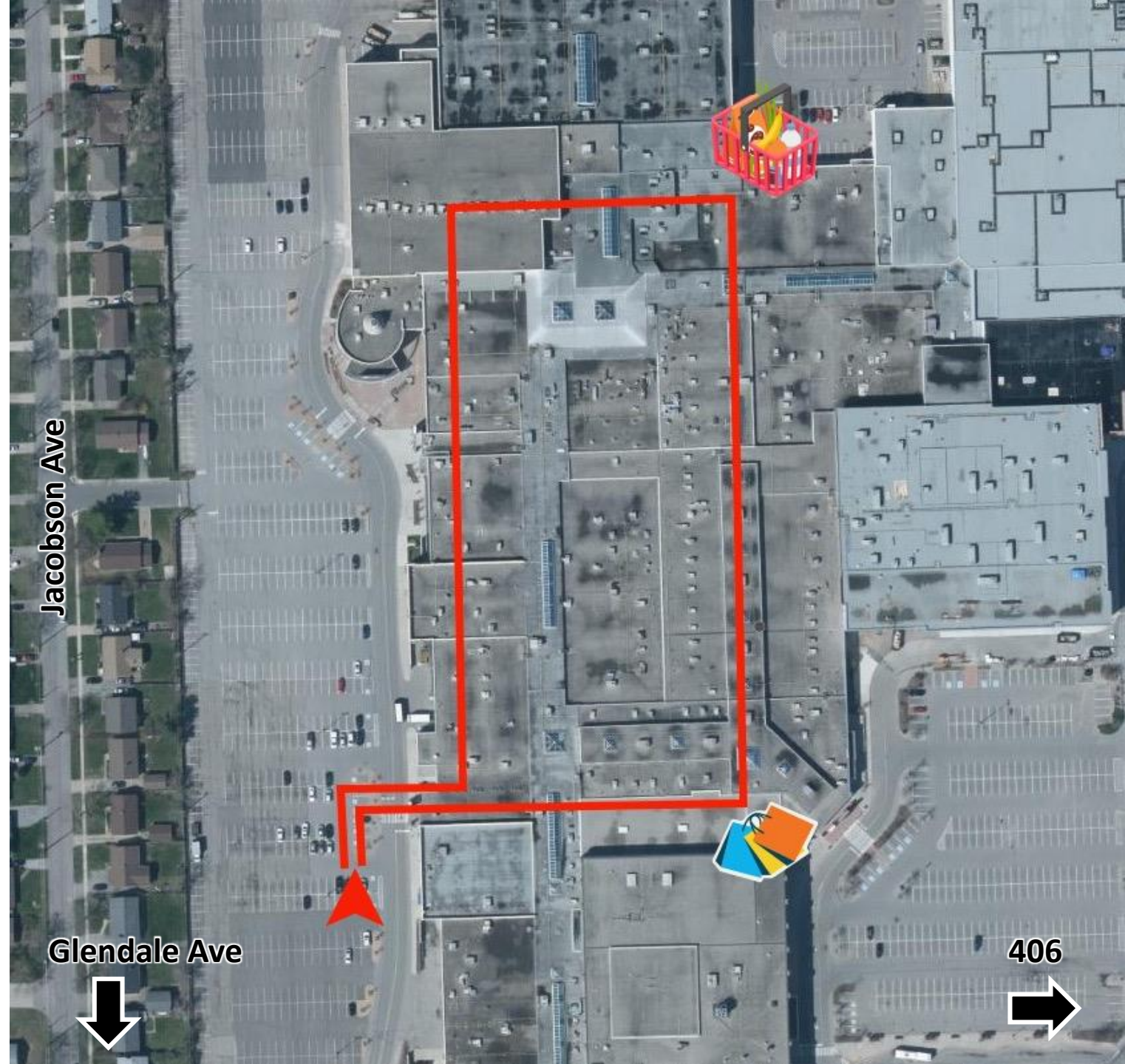
557 m



# Debunking Parking Convenience

THE NIAGARA PEN CENTRE

689 m



**Walking distances in parking lots can often feel shorter due to the open space, and visible destination.**

**This assumption, however, isn't necessarily correct.**

**Downtown on-street parking main is often quicker, and a more enjoyable walk**

557m



689m

# Case Study

## Balancing Customers, Business & Parking



# Old Town – Niagara-on-the-Lake

Case Study

Balancing  
Customers,  
Business &  
Parking



Irish Harp – Site Location

# Case Study

## Balancing Customers, Business & Parking



# Case Study

## CONTEXT

- Property has 3 angled parking spots at rear of property
- Parking serves 3 hotel rooms on second floor
- 68 m<sup>2</sup> temporary patio use at rear of property (parking area)
- Operating since 2020 (Covid)
  - large demand, dog-friendly, sustaining business
- Temporary Patio program ended December 2025

## PROPOSED

- Make temporary patio permanent
  - Addition patio generates 3 additional parking spaces
  - Total reduction required is 6 spaces

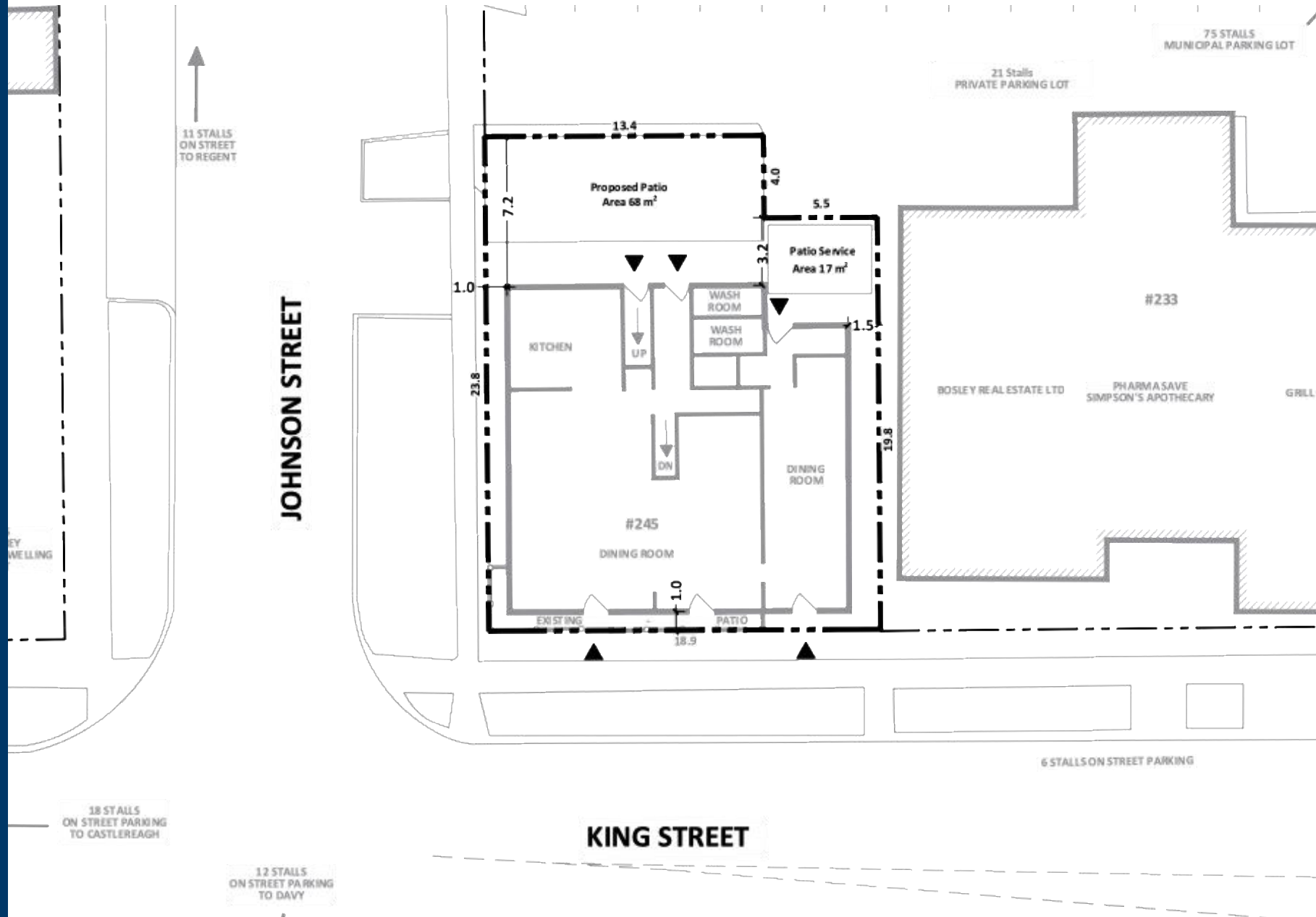
## APPROVAL OPTIONS

- Offset 6 parking spaces through cash-in-lieu agreement (\$436,000 value)
- Rezone property to reduce parking requirement (6 Spaces)

# Case Study

# Balancing Customers, Business & Parking

## Irish Harp – Site Plan



# Cash-In-Lieu vs. Rezoning

## CONSIDERATION

- Cash-in-Lieu program in place to offset expenses for Town to solve community wide parking issues
- Parking in Old Town is centralized – park once and walk to destination
- Irish Harp has been operating with the temporary patio since 2020 (5 Years) without issue
- Rear patio provides amenity to business and community
  - front patio area very limited
- Patios enhance walkability and create vibrant places – desirable use for residents/visitors that enhance experience
- Inclusion of patio fits with Old Town character and supports business sustainability
- Cash-in-lieu an expensive option
- Rezoning not supported by staff due to concerns over parking supply

## Cash-In-Lieu vs. Rezoning

### LACK OF ALTERNATIVES

- Temporary Patio program ended December 2025
- Optional rezoning to reduce parking only supported through removal of 3 hotel rooms — would result in sterilization of the entire second floor (170 m<sup>2</sup>)
- Parking requirements eliminate potential for outdoor patios across Old Town—detrimental to community character, social interaction, and walkability
- Local business growth restricted because of municipal-level problem (parking)

Cash-In-Lieu vs.  
Rezoning

or

Both

## NEXT STEPS

**Minor variance and  
cash-in-lieu hybrid  
option**



## What BIAs should consider with development applications & municipal projects

- Encourage residential uses
- Activate at-grade uses
- Street-oriented design
- Enhancement of public realm
- Support for local business
- Smart parking & servicing
- Arts, Culture & Civic investments pay dividends
- Every road reconstruction project is an opportunity



# Economics that Support Downtown





# Land Valuation

# Suburban vs Downtown



Source: Canadian Grocer



Source: love STC

# Downtowns Compete on Placemaking, Authenticity, & Experience

## Downtowns cannot compete with:

- Convenient (free) Parking
- Big-box pricing
- Highway access

## But they do offer:

- Authenticity (unique identity & placemaking)
- Walkability & Visual Appeal
- Art & Culture
- Public Places and Civic Uses
- Business Synergies (integration of uses)



Source: Wikideas1 Wikimedia Commons



Source: Lets Roam

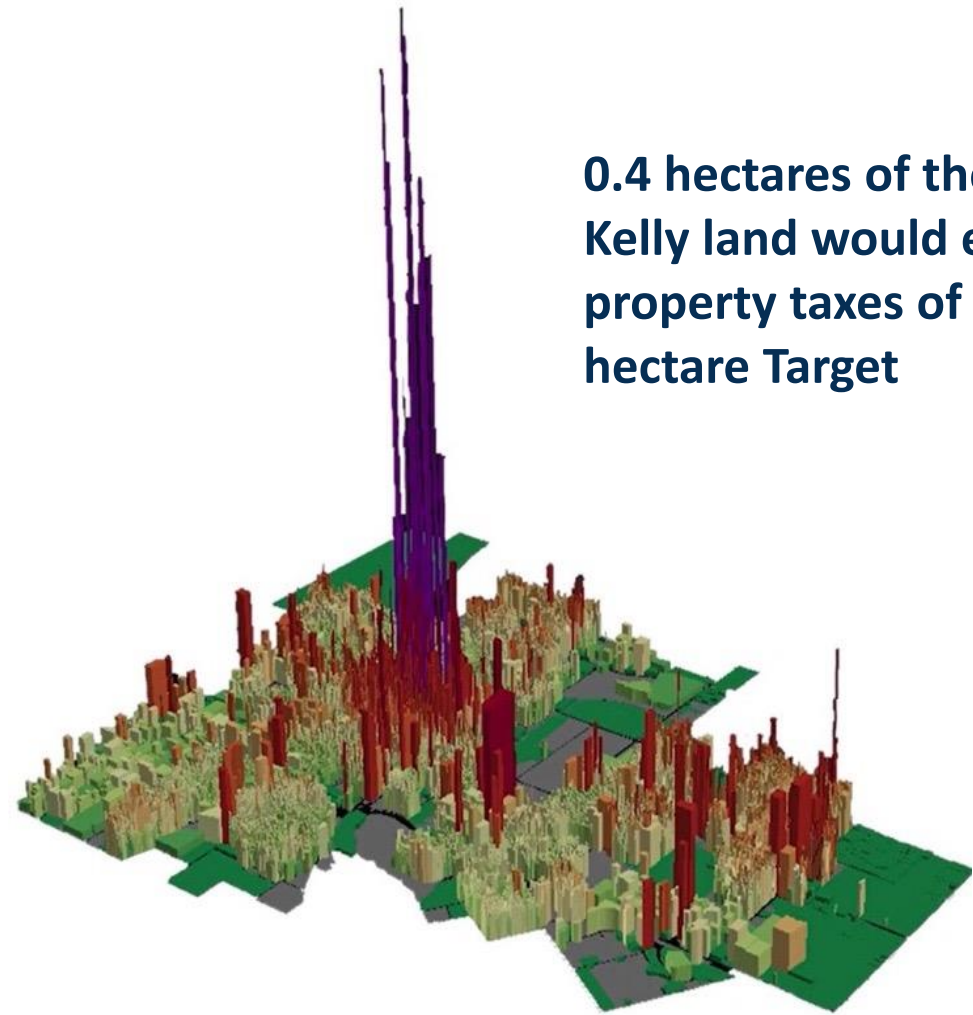


**Suburban Target: \$2,772,090 Value per Hectare**



**Petrie-Kelly Building: \$1.6M on 0.025 Hectares**

## Guelph City Property Tax Profile: 2013 Tax Yield



**0.4 hectares of the Petrie-Kelly land would equal the property taxes of one 3.7-hectare Target**

URBAN3

2019

City of Guelph  
Property Tax Production / Hectare

# Property Values & Placemaking

- Well-designed, vibrant areas command higher property values
- Walkable, vibrant areas are more valuable
- Quality design signals long-term investment



A dark-themed background image featuring a calculator, a magnifying glass over a bar chart, and a pen. The bar chart shows data for the months of January through August. The text "Financial Incentives" is overlaid in white.

# Financial Incentives

Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jul Aug

# CIP Incentives



## **Tax Increment Finance Program:**

- TIF projects: 45% rebate of the increased City tax levy

## **Brownfield Tax Increment Finance Program:**

- Annual property tax rebate of 80 % of the increase of the City's portion of property taxes



## **Façade Improvement Program:**

- Grant is up to 50 % of the project costs to a maximum of \$10,000 per building façade.

## **Urban Infill Tax Increment Grant**

- Rebates up to 100% of the municipal tax increment for up to 5 years



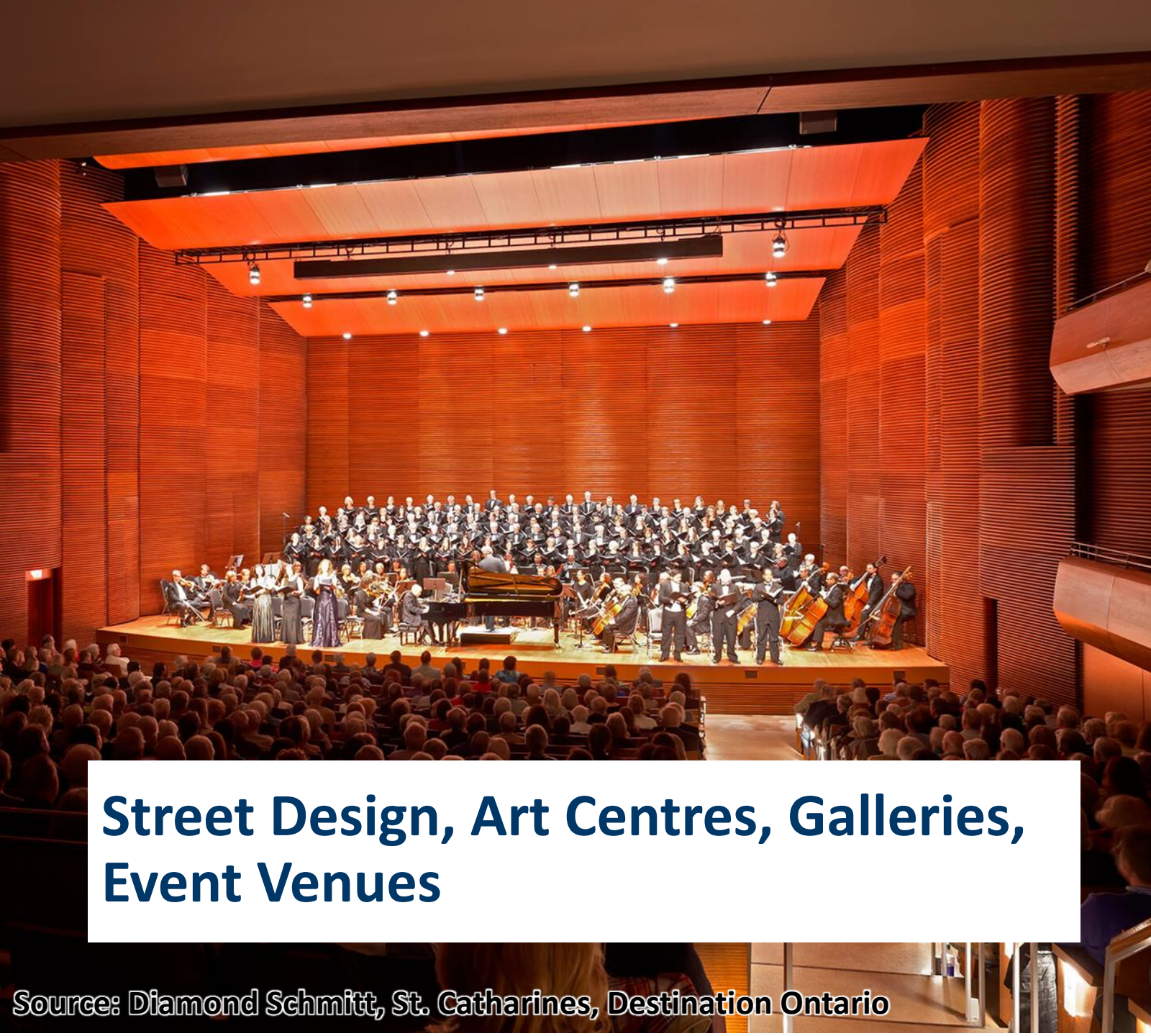
## **Downtown Forgivable Loan Program**

- One interest-free, forgivable loan up to \$100,000 per property (\$50,000 per unit)

## **Streetscape Improvement Grant**

- Cost sharing grant (60/40) up to \$20,000 for eligible works





## Street Design, Art Centres, Galleries, Event Venues

Source: Diamond Schmitt, St. Catharines, Destination Ontario





## Public Space for Entertainment & Event Programming

Source: Niagara Grape & Wine Festival, Love STC

# Civic Pride & Community Identity

- Downtowns offer sense of pride and ownership
- Location of key civic / public buildings
- Unique streets and events create distinct identity



# Partnerships

- MOU with City
- Welcoming Streets Initiative
- Police Services
- Event Programming
- Neighbourhood & Development Community



Source: Julie Jocsak St. Catharines Standard

## Key Takeaways

### Walkability is critical for economic health

- Good urban design drives foot traffic
- Foster key elements to support walkable places
- Downtown as destination

### Development Approval Process

- Participate in public process – Public & Private
- Residential uses should be encouraged
- Support multi-modal transportation and reduced parking requirements

### Economic drivers for prosperity

- Downtowns outperform big box shopping centres
- Offer better land value (Public and Private perspective)
- Leverage available Financial Incentives (CIP)
- Public investment/partnership is key to success
- Authentic Placemaking has strong ROI

# Resources

Better Neighbourhoods: [www.betterneighbourhoods.ca](http://www.betterneighbourhoods.ca)

Congress for New Urbanism: [www.cnu.org/publicsquare](http://www.cnu.org/publicsquare)

Strong Towns: [www.strongtowns.org](http://www.strongtowns.org)

Not just bikes: [www.youtube.com/c/notjustbikes](http://www.youtube.com/c/notjustbikes)

Urban 3: [www.urbanthree.com](http://www.urbanthree.com)

Better Cities Film Festival: [www.bettercitiesfilmfestival.com](http://www.bettercitiesfilmfestival.com)

# Questions?

