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DOWNTOWN DUNDALK FIRST IMPRESSION COMMUNITY EXCHANGE (FICE) REPORT

Prepared For:

The Corporation of the Township of Southgate
(c/o Brenna Carroll, Economic Development Officer)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE) is a tool offered by the Ministry of Rural Affairs as a precursor for rural municipalities to establish a Downtown Revitalization Program within their communities.

Improving the town's downtown area in collaboration with residents and local businesses is a local priority for the Township of Southgate. The Town's Community Strategic Plan (2023-2027) identifies revitalizing Downtown Dundalk to enhance its beauty and restore pride-of-place in the downtown as one of municipal councils key goals. This Goal is one of the strategic priorities in the Plan, with the intent to foster a thriving economy. This project is explicitly identified as an action item to address the following Goal: "Participate in the Downtown Revitalization Program that Includes Developing a Vision for Downtown Beautification in Consultation with the Community" (4.C).

Our Team was contracted by the Township of Southgate to undertake a first impressions audit as a component of the Downtown Dundalk's Revitalization Project. The purpose of the first impressions audit was to offer fresh perspectives and unique insights about Downtown Dundalk to understand future opportunities and challenges to attract potential residents and businesses.

1.2 PROCESS

In accordance with municipal goals identified in the Town's Community Strategic Plan, the FICE was an assessment of Downtown Dundalk, focused on downtown revitalization, appearance, businesses, infrastructure, entertainment and recreation. The Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs established the following criteria to guide downtown-focused assessments:

- The look and feel of the downtown area;
- Businesses, retail stores, and restaurants; and
- Entertainment (events, festivals, arts and culture activities).

Based on these criteria, our Team created a questionnaire (Appendix A) to guide and inform our evaluation of Downtown Dundalk. Our Team conducted one (1) in-person site visit in February 2025 and relied on Google Maps to identify site elements. The following sections of this report identify the study area and outline our observations and findings of Downtown Dundalk based on the identified criteria as first-time visitors. This report is provided as information to the Township of Southgate and will inform future recommendations of ways the downtown can be revitalized with streetscape features and businesses that enhance livability and community cohesion by considering population growth from new housing developments in the three (3) MZO areas.

2.0 STUDY AREA

Figure 1 shows the study area of Downtown Dundalk, with a focus on Proton Street South and Main Street East (between Young Street and Artemesia Street).



Figure 1 : Downtown Dundalk Study Area

3.0 BUSINESS, RETAIL STORES, AND RESTAURANTS

3.1 BUILDING TYPOLOGIES

There is a mix of historical and modern architectural styles in Downtown Dundalk. Buildings with historical architectural style are connected in the form of row houses, while newer and more modern buildings are detached from other buildings within the Downtown.



Figure 2: Proton Street Mixed-Use Row Buildings (Schaap, 2025)



Figure 3: New Guardian Pharmacy (Google Maps, n.d.)

3.2 STOREFRONT APPEARANCE AND PRESENTATION

Building materials primarily consist of vinyl siding and brick, of a variety of colour. There is a mix of old and modern materials used, with a portion of buildings using traditional materials (such as brick), while other buildings appear renovated and modern.

The maintenance of the exterior facades of buildings varies. Our Team found that businesses with a more modern architectural style were well maintained with minimal but attractive landscaping features located on the sidewalks in front of their businesses compared to more historical buildings converted into businesses.

Many of the businesses within historical buildings are structurally intact but are in a mildly deteriorated condition, particularly vacant buildings seem rundown, as paint is evidently flaking on buildings, and brick buildings are discoloured.

Active businesses include inviting features, such as large storefront windows and clear signage. Many businesses include signage above doorways, flush with the building façade. Some businesses include further signage in the form of stands/displays on the sidewalk, further promoting visibility. ⁷

3.3 BUSINESS MIX AND DIVERSITY

There are a few franchise businesses within Downtown Dundalk, including the CIBC, Home Hardware, and Highland Fuels and Supply. However, the majority of businesses are local, including The Junction Family Restaurant, Buy-Way Store, Neil's Caribbean Grocery Store, Brydon Cardon Decorating and Florals, and Embellished Beauty.

Overall, there is a limited variety of businesses, retail stores, and restaurants in Downtown Dundalk for visitors to attend to. The majority of businesses are serviced based, like healthcare and bank providers, a barbershop, a dog groomer, and a library, rather than retail or entertainment options aimed at visitors.



Figure 4 : Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (Google Maps, n.d.)

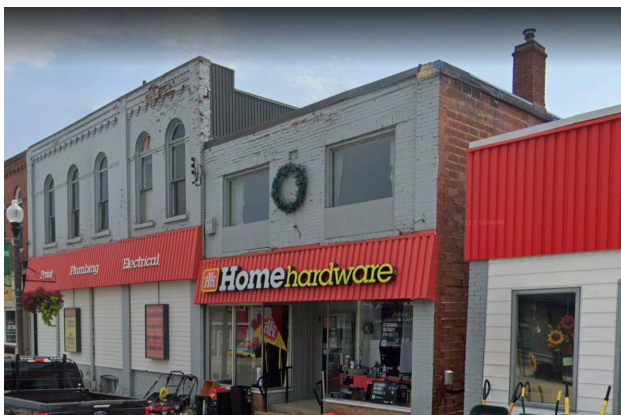


Figure 5: Home Hardware (Google Maps, n.d.)



Figure 6 : Highland Supply (Google Maps, n.d.)

3.4 VACANCY

Figure 2 illustrates the location of vacant buildings within the study area, which are municipally identified as follows:

- 37 Main Street East
- 47 Main Street East
- 1 Main Street East
- 31 Main Street East
- 5 Main Street East
- 20 Main Street East
- 78 Proton Street North
- 10 Proton Street North



Figure 7: Vacant Building along Main Street East (Schaap, 2025)



Figure 8: Vacant Building along Proton Street North (Google Maps, n.d.)

4.0 THE LOOK AND FEEL OF THE DOWNTOWN AREA

4.1 COMFORT

Seating

The downtown area provides several seating options, primarily concentrated in key public spaces and outside businesses. The Dundalk Lions Club Parkette, for example, located at the corner of Main Street East and Proton Street North, offers benches, a picnic table, and landscaped areas with flower pots and trees, creating a welcoming public gathering space. Additional seating is available outside Southgate Ruth Hargrave Memorial Library and Dundalk Pharmacy and Homecare, enhancing pedestrian comfort.

Garbage Disposal

Garbage and recycling bins are well-distributed throughout the downtown area, ensuring proper waste management. Bins are located outside Home Depot, the library, The Dundalk Old Town Hall, and at the Main Street East and Proton Street North intersection. Their strategic placement helps maintain cleanliness and convenience for visitors.

Safety and Lighting

Street lighting is present along major downtown roads, particularly Proton Street and Main Street, contributing to safety and visibility in the area. Side streets are noticeably less lit, which may reduce safety and walkability during evening hours. Enhancing lighting in these areas would improve overall security and pedestrian experience.

Multifunctional Spaces

Public spaces in the downtown core serve multiple purposes, accommodating both leisure and community activities. The Dundalk Lions Club Parkette is a key multifunctional space, offering seating, green space, and proximity to retail and commercial businesses. The Southgate Public Library also serves as a versatile hub, providing books, meeting rooms, and seating for visitors. Furthermore, Dundalk Old Town Hall hosts various events. Just outside the study boundary, Memorial Park includes a basketball court and skatepark, adding recreational opportunities to the broader community.

Street Trees and Shaded Structures

The downtown area features a mix of mature and younger street trees, contributing to urban greenery. While these trees provide some shade, dedicated shade structures are limited. Certain businesses, such as Dundalk Pharmacy & Homecare, have storefront overhangs that offer shade; however, additional shaded structures would increase the overall comfort for pedestrians.



Figure 9: Street Trees



Figure 10: Seating Outside of Southgate Memorial Library



Figure 11: Dundalk Old Town Hall



Figure 12: Street Lighting



Figure 13: Dundalk Lions Club Parkette

4.2 ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility within Downtown Dundalk is supported by a mix of parking options, pedestrian infrastructure, and public amenities. On-street parallel parking, including barrier-free spaces, is available along Main Street (between Artemesia Street North and Dundalk Street) and Proton Street (between Owen Sound Street and Main Street), with additional free parking provided along Toronto Street and Artemesia Street North. Improved signage is recommended to better indicate free parking locations. Dual sidewalks are provided along both Main Street and Proton Street, and include braille indicators at crossings, enhancing pedestrian accessibility. Accessibility challenges remain past the Southgate Ruth Hargrave Memorial Library, where sidewalk infrastructure needs improvement. Additionally, many downtown businesses have step-up entrances, limiting accessibility.

4.3 VIEWS AND VISTAS

Downtown Dundalk features clear sightlines and well-maintained vistas that enhance visibility, safety, and accessibility. Buildings at the intersection of Main Street and Proton Street have chamfered corners, improving sightlines for drivers and pedestrians navigating the area. Both Main Street and Proton Street benefit from unobstructed views, which contribute to natural surveillance and a sense of security. Additionally, many businesses display prominent signage at street level, making them easily identifiable from a distance and improving wayfinding within the downtown core.

4.4 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Downtown Dundalk offers park and greenspace opportunities that enhance the area's livability and accessibility to nature. The Dundalk Lions Club Parkette, situated at the corner of Main Street East and Proton Street North, provides open space with mature trees, planters, and seating areas for public enjoyment. Moreover, street trees and planters outside of businesses contribute to the greenery within the downtown core. Located outside of the study area, Memorial Park offers further recreational space. The Grey County CP Rail Trail has an entrance point on Main Street West, serving as a connection to surrounding rural landscapes and neighbouring communities such as Corbetton, offering both active transportation and leisure opportunities. These green spaces play an important role in enhancing the downtown's environmental quality and community appeal.

5.0 ENTERTAINMENT

5.1 ENTERTAINMENT SPACES AND ACTIVITIES

Downtown Dundalk appears to have a limited number of entertainment options and flexible public spaces that can be adapted for different entertainment activities and needs.

A notable local entertainment activity within Downtown Dundalk is Jazz 'n' Pizazz, which offers the community a dance facility for all ages.

A small public square, Dundalk Lions Club Parkette is bound by Proton Street and Main Street East, but is insufficient in size to host larger activities or programs. A majority of entertainment amenities are concentrated in the Dundalk Memorial Park, which is located outside of Downtown Dundalk. Entertainment activities within the park include a baseball diamond, a skateboard park, a pavilion, a basketball court, and a recreational facility.

5.2 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS

Beyond the historical architectural buildings styles our Team identified multiple murals present on the exterior buildings of 2 Proton Street and 81 Main Street East. A deteriorated mural was located at 14 Proton Street, with the opportunity to be refurbished in the future. Moreover, a farm-themed mural covers the west side wall of Southgate Ruth Hargrave Memorial Library. A notable local historical attraction, Dundalk Olde Town Hall, was identified by our Team at 80 Main Street East.



Figure 14: Town Hall

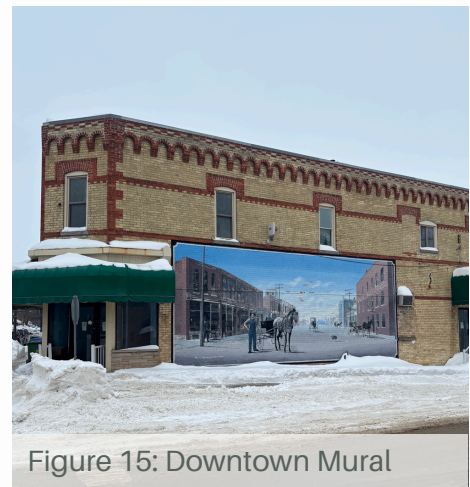


Figure 15: Downtown Mural

6.0 CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

The following provides a summary of our observations outlined in this report, regarding downtown revitalization, appearance, businesses, infrastructure, entertainment and recreation:

- There is a limited mix and diversity of businesses in Downtown Dundalk for visitors to attend to. The majority of businesses are serviced based, rather than retail or entertainment options aimed at visitors.
- The maintenance of the exterior facades and landscaping in front of buildings varies. Businesses with a more modern architectural style were well maintained with attractive landscaping features compared to more historical buildings converted into businesses.
- Downtown Dundalk has a limited number of entertainment options and flexible public spaces that can be changed for different entertainment activities.
- Multiple murals are located within the downtown area, contributing to the cultural vibrancy of Downtown Dundalk.
- There are a number of site furnishings within the downtown area such as seating, garbage disposal bins, lighting and flower pots. However, the provision of site furnishings is not consistent throughout the downtown area.
- Accessibility within Downtown Dundalk is supported by a mix of parking options, pedestrian infrastructure, and public amenities.
- Downtown Dundalk offers park and greenspace opportunities that enhance the area's livability and accessibility to nature.
- There are clear sightlines and well-maintained vistas that enhance visibility, safety, and accessibility.

In conclusion, our findings from the FICE will inform future recommendations of ways the downtown can be revitalized with streetscape features and businesses that enhance livability and community cohesion, which will be used to inform policy direction to facilitate downtown revitalization.

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APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A :
FIRST IMPRESSION COMMUNITY
EXCHANGE GUIDEBOOK AND
QUESTIONNAIRE**

First Impressions Community Exchange Guidebook and Questionnaire

Criteria	Questions	Answer/Observations
The Look and Feel of the Downtown Area		
Comfort	Are there site furnishings in the downtown area? (ie. benches, lighting, picnic tables, garbage disposal bins, etc.)	
	Are there places to sit without having to pay for goods or services?	
	Are there street trees and/or other shade structures?	
	Does the downtown area include multi-functional spaces such as walking, seating, playing and beautification?	
	Are there any design elements that discourage the use of spaces in the downtown area?	

Criteria	Questions	Answer/Observations
Accessibility	Is there convenient parking downtown? Where? More specifically, is there on-street parallel parking?	
	Are public washrooms available?	
	Are pedestrian routes safe and easy to use for a range of persons with disabilities?	
	Are pedestrian routes to the main entrances of all businesses accessible? Accessible entrances should be safe, direct, level and obstacle free.	
Green Infrastructure	Is there park space and/or greenspace in the downtown area?	

Criteria	Questions	Answer/Observations
Views and Vistas	Key sightlines, landmarks, obstructions affecting visual quality?	
Business, Retail Stores and Restaurants		
Vacancy	Are there any vacant buildings/businesses in the downtown area? If so, how many?	
Storefront Appearance and Presentation	Are the exterior facades of buildings/businesses well-maintained, inviting and attractive?	
	Is business signage clear in the downtown?	
	Is seating provided by businesses?	

Criteria	Questions	Answer/Observations
Business Mix and Diversity	Is there a sufficient mix of services and goods within the Downtown area?	
	What are the types of businesses located in the downtown area?	
	Does the downtown area offer something unique to attract customers to the downtown?	
Building Typologies and Scale	Architectural styles, heights, and densities.	
Entertainment (events, festivals, arts and cultural activities)		
Entertainment Features and Characteristics	Are there downtown cultural attractions? If so, what are they?	

Criteria	Questions	Answer/Observations
	Is there public art and embedded culture in the downtown area?	
	Are there squares, plazas and/or flexible streets to accommodate special events?	
	What types of entertainment spaces are located in the Downtown?	
	Is there a presence of memorable architecture and/or landscaped spaces?	

