

Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area

# River District Action Plan

December 2020



### **A Note on COVID-19**

The *Marketing & Branding Action Plan* was completed during 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting the world. The impacts are expected to have long-term implications that include:

- The funding and program priorities of municipal, economic and tourism organizations will be under pressure, with reduced resources.
- There will be long-term changes to businesses and industry- especially in the area of experience development and tourism, as well as the ability of operators to service and host visitors.
- There will also be many changes to government and public institutions and their support of existing and future programs as their proprieties are pulled in competing directions.
- Rebuilding traffic and visits from local, regional and domestic markets will take time.

Both the City of Owen Sound and the Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area must closely monitor these realities and adjust plans on a short term or long-term basis as needed.



# Project Background

Owen Sound's downtown is a vital economic component of the city, both for its residents and for the surrounding community as a regional hub for goods and services. To create a strong core, the City of Owen Sound and the Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area (OSDIA) have partnered to focus on revitalization initiatives which will strengthen and expand partnership opportunities. Both parties are motivated to work together, towards the common goals of increasing visibility, economic opportunities and shifting the perception of Owen Sound's downtown.

This project, a joint request for a 3-year Branding and Marketing Action Plan from the Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area and the City of Owen Sound, is an excellent step towards growth and revitalization.

In order to effectively understand the current state of Owen Sound's downtown and to ensure recommendations strategically enhance the value of the downtown for stakeholders (and target market), a multi-step process was utilized for this project. Research worked to set the stage and determine the foundation for marketing and branding in the downtown. Extensive consultation was undertaken, surveying OSDIA board members, key downtown stakeholders, city staff as well as Owen Sound residents to determine their current thoughts in relation to the city's downtown and suggestions on how to make the area more enticing and attract additional visitors. Finally, site visits were undertaken by the consulting team, assessing the area during different seasons, days of the week and times of day. The findings were summarized and used as input into the recommendations included in this report.

The marketing and branding actions that follow, provide practical, achievable, measurable tasks for Owen Sound's downtown. The recommended brand will ensure that Owen Sound's downtown captures its potential and will position the city for future growth and vitality. It will help to ensure that change and growth come from within and expand outwards to increase the overall economic stability and health of the entire community.

## Project Goals

The goals of the project are two-fold.

1. Create a refined downtown identity (brand) that captures the story and rallies people together, and
2. Develop a marketing plan with clear actions and objectives to tell that story.



# The Current Situation

Local economies (and downtowns) are a community’s backbone and need support, partnerships and creative ways to ensure their viability. Understanding the current state of Owen Sound’s downtown, its’ unique challenges and the value propositions it has, is integral to determining how it can stand out and get noticed.

Reviewing and understanding the current context through research, stakeholder input and site visits ensured a strong understanding of what Owen Sound’s downtown has been, where it is today and what it will be tomorrow.

## Situational Analysis

24 key documents related to Owen Sound’s downtown were reviewed to provide context and insight to the project. The documents reviewed included (but were not limited to):

- Owen Sound Harbour & Downtown Urban Design Master Plan Strategy 2001
- City of Owen Sound Recreation, Parks and Facilities Master Plan 2018-2028
- Community Improvement Plan 2010 (Extended 2015) & 2020
- 10th Street bridge reconstruction OSDIA promotion & communication plan 2019
- 2019 OSDIA event summary report
- City of Owen Sound Strategic Plan (2015-2020) Making our Vision Clear
- Owen Sound Downtown Revitalization Project 2017 & 2018 update
- 2019 OSDIA & City of Owen Sound Agreement
- Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2013-2015
- Owen Sound Waterfront Development Opportunities June 2012
- BR&E - Final Business Retention and Expansion Survey Results- Oct 2010- Aug 2011
- Owen Sound Community Profile- April 2017
- Market Area Data Report- City of Owen Sound January 2017
- Cultural Master Plan (November 2007) Revised Jan 2012
- The River Precinct. Owen Sound’s Downtown – 2013
- Community Safety & Well Being Plan 2020



*“[Downtown Owen Sound] has potential, I see a lot of people motivated to improve it (likely out of sheer survival), it is beautiful and has amazing history and character.”*

*- Community Survey Submission*

A sample of key findings from the document review phase include the following:

<b>River &amp; Harbour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The infrastructure, capital improvements, policy changes, and strategic positioning made to support the harbour/ river precinct are coming to fruition.</li><li>• There is potential to further leverage the connection between the river and neighbouring businesses.</li><li>• The proximity between the downtown core and natural recreational assets (trails, escarpment, river, harbour, waterfalls etc.) is unique in comparison to other communities.</li></ul>
<b>Events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is potential for a connection between the harbour and the downtown through space activation, events and theming.</li></ul>
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Infrastructure can be utilized to create additional trail system connections to the downtown.</li><li>• Consistency in themed streetscaping elements throughout the downtown is important.</li><li>• Continued development and enhancement of public parking, waterfront assets, walking trails, and public washrooms in the downtown would enhance the experience for multiple segments including tourists, residents and the business community.</li></ul>
<b>Marketing &amp; Branding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The downtown should be experienced as a distinct area or place in the community. Gateway buildings or streetscape elements should mark the main entry points.</li><li>• There is a need to foster more positivity downtown by having organizations work together with the goal to shift the current perception of the city’s downtown.</li><li>• Owen Sound has a long history of arts and culture, and as a thriving port city.</li></ul>
<b>Organization &amp; Stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Partnerships between the city, OSDIA and other key downtown stakeholders would be valuable for longer term planning and growth.</li><li>• Continuously pursuing funding/ granting opportunities specifically for streetscaping and capital improvements for downtown could be beneficial.</li></ul>
<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan and develop a shopping and restaurant district.</li><li>• The downtown should be utilized, programmed, and accessible year-round while serving a variety of uses.</li><li>• Connect planning practices to the CIP goals – especially in relation to promotion and ongoing viability &amp; revitalization of the downtown and harbour areas by focusing on pedestrian-oriented retail, commercial, office, civic, cultural, entertainment and government uses.</li><li>• Trends include an aging population, sustainability, shift in waterfront dynamics, increase in local tourism (stay-cations), local food and use of outdoor recreational facilities.</li></ul>



## Current Views on the Downtown

Stakeholder engagement was completed in June and July of 2020, through a variety of sources including a community and resident survey, OSDIA membership survey, key stakeholder one-on-one interviews and workshops with the OSDIA board and key City of Owen Sound staff.

Residents' current views of Owen Sound's downtown indicated that they had positive associations when asked to describe the area's atmosphere and personality. They used language such as "friendly, artistic, eclectic, beautiful, quaint, charming, historic" and that the area is full of potential. There was a notable shift to a combination of responses (both positive and negative) when residents were asked to describe the current state of the area. Frequent adjectives such as "vacant, scary, unclean, in need" where contrasted alongside "potential, beautiful, charming, small town".

*"I would highlight the diversity of our business community as an asset (e.g., Europa, Milk Maid, Randy's Records, Heartwood Hall, Curry House, Phoenix Bookstore, Artists Co-op), as well as some of our cultural events (Pride Parade and Festival of Northern Lights). For a small town, we have a vibrant arts and culture scene, which is worth recognizing."  
- Community Survey Submission*

*"I feel unsafe and needs more small-town charm. It does not look appealing."  
- Community Survey Submission*

When asked how respondents would positively describe Owen Sound's current downtown to out of town relatives, adjectives and terms included highlights such as "quaint, good connection with the river, artsy vibe, interesting, and positive ambiance at restaurants".

*"Owen Sound offers the best of both worlds. It is a small city with enough shopping options for my everyday needs, while offering the quaint atmosphere of a small town. Also, worth mentioning, the spectacular sunsets."  
- Community Survey Submission*

Perspectives on the current state of Owen Sound's downtown vary with age, so it is important to ask, "Who should the OSDIA attempt to attract and encourage to spend more time and money in the city's downtown?"

The business community and key stakeholders were engaged in a series of questions during surveys, workshops and interviews. To better understand the area's unique selling proposition, it was asked what makes Owen Sound's downtown different and better than other downtowns in the region? The top thoughts included the harbour, waterfront and music paired with these two assets. It was noted the connection to water is a major advantage which is currently underutilized.



When stakeholders were asked (in their opinion), the best tools Owen Sound's downtown could use to attract more people to the area, answers included events (specifically to show people the city's downtown is safe and has changed), connecting downtown to the water, encouraging and increasing pedestrian activities and incentivizing businesses to locate in the area.

Overall, the stakeholder input demonstrated that yes, there are challenges in Owen Sound's downtown (there always will be), but there are also many positive factors. This project will leverage the positives to allow the city's downtown to move forward, create solutions to the challenges, embrace opportunities and ensure everyone is proud of Owen Sound's downtown, ultimately allowing it to become the defining community hub that it was always meant to be.

## Site Visits

Six site visits were completed throughout Owen Sound's downtown across multiple days, times of the day and in different seasons from February to September of 2020. It should be noted that this timeframe directly correlates with the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the replacement of the 10<sup>th</sup> Street bridge, and as such, the amount of traffic in the downtown at the time of the visits may have been impacted by either of these factors. Site assessment notes were completed during each visit.

Findings consistent throughout all six site visits included the following:

- The majority of the OSDIA areas portray an inviting and positive image.
- Parking is easy to find. Access and time limits for parking are adequate.
- There is inconsistency with retail hours of operation, especially if visiting the downtown after 5pm or on weekends.
- Owen Sound's downtown is utilized by multiple groups (families, couples, tourists and individuals) with the most frequently noted segments being couples.
- Animation which draws people in was evident during five of the six visits but could be expanded upon.
- The beautification elements (especially flowers) were highly contrasted by infrastructure issues (heaved sidewalks).
- Public washroom signage in the downtown is nonexistent or very difficult to find.
- Downtown merchants were consistently helpful, welcoming and attentive across a variety of stores and services.
- The retail mix in all sections of the OSDIA may not be adequate to meet the needs of consumers. Retail is limited. A variety of dining opportunities exist. The mix of business offerings in each area is eclectic.
- Wayfinding and perpendicular signage could greatly aid in discovering more elements linked to the downtown core including specific businesses or destinations.
- The downtown has notable vacant storefronts throughout the area, creating 'gap teeth' for visitors and impacting their experience.



- There is a lack of consistency between elements (streetscaping, marketing, events, signage) which impacts continuity and connections to different areas of the downtown beyond 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East.
- After experiencing the downtown, the site assessment team generally felt happier than when they arrived.

*“I think Owen Sound has a great sense of community. The flowers look great and the city workers are doing a good job trying to keep the sidewalks etc. cleaned up.”*  
- Submission from Community Survey

## External Factors

A PESTLE analysis is a tool used to scan the environment and understand the external factors that impact an organization or situation connected to political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal elements. Factors for consideration in each of the six areas follow.

POLITICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Past dynamics, perceptions and history of partnership between OSDIA and city may impede or strengthen relations.</li><li>• City council is supportive and progressive in ensuring the downtown is successful.</li><li>• Vacancy tax rebates for landlords may be impacting the development of the downtown, business attraction and retention.</li><li>• Bylaw rules and enforcement (parking, garbage, snow removal, infrastructure etc.) will have an impact on downtown perceptions and the experience of visitors.</li><li>• The OSDIA board is made up supportive individuals with the downtown’s best interest in mind, and care should be taken to ensure the board continues to be able to commit the time and energy needed to the revitalization and marketing of downtown.</li><li>• There is a need for continued transparency during the city and OSDIA budgeting process, specifically to communicate policy and property tax implications in relation to downtown properties.</li><li>• The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may require a shift in resources and support through new programs, policies and support programs.</li><li>• The City and the OSDIA are committed to the well-being of the downtown, as evidenced through current initiatives.</li></ul>
ECONOMIC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact on the city’s businesses.</li><li>• Consumer purchasing behavior is changing with increased focus on both local products and online shopping and delivery.</li><li>• The disposable income of consumers is being stretched.</li><li>• The household and disposable income of the local population varies greatly.</li></ul>





- Economic uncertainty may shift purchasing behaviour in the near term.
- There is an opportunity to leverage a renewed focus on supporting local businesses.

## **SOCIAL**

- Residents and business owners have concerns regarding the safety and security of the city's downtown.
- There is opportunity to support community partners such as the Owen Sound Police Service, Grey County and social service organizations as they facilitate community dialogue related to substance use and housing issues which impact the downtown.
- assistance where needed.
- There is potential for increased community dialogue to discuss issues and measures being taken which will help to create positivity and create empathy.
- Due the current COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shift to working and learning from home, removing many people from the downtown area on a daily basis. This shift may become permanent.
- Shopping and working environment shifts highlight the need to invest in programming and infrastructure that will attract people to the downtown area.

## **TECHNOLOGICAL**

- The way people do business is rapidly changing due to technological advancements and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- Businesses are being forced to adapt to offer online ordering, curbside pickup and home delivery.
- Connectivity is important to consumers and businesses.
- High speed internet is in demand.
- Consumers are trending to cashless payments and currency.
- Increasingly, apps are used for banking and services are decentralized.
- Online booking and reserve a seat technology are gaining popularity.
- Virtual meetings are changing the way businesses operate.
- Augmented and virtual reality are gaining in popularity.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL**

- Vacant storefronts can have an impact on visitor's perception and willingness to shop.
- The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-term impact on downtowns, their programming options, the way visitors experience them and their businesses.
- Gathering limits will have effects on the capacity of public spaces.
- There is increased interest in community outdoor space such as public parks and natural areas. Connections from downtowns to natural areas are becoming increasingly important.
- There is currently an increased interest in relocation from large urban centres to more rural areas or small cities.



- Sustainability, shop local and local food are all of increasing importance with today's consumers.
- COVID-19 has required a reassessment of safety in retail and services for both consumers and businesses.

## LEGAL

- OSDIA boundaries exclude some key downtown assets and businesses.

The way people do business and experience the world is rapidly evolving. These changes will have enormous and long ranging impacts for downtowns. The OSDIA and the City of Owen Sound must continue to monitor these changes and adjust tactics accordingly as needed.

## Key Factors to Consider

Product and experience development are paramount for the success of a downtown- with the promotion of these assets secondary. In today's sharing economy, visitors will do a lot of the marketing lift if their experience is positive. With the continued creation of a vibrant, safe and welcoming space, traffic will increase and economic returns will be realized.

When creating a vibrant and engaging space that attracts visitors, the OSDIA and the city can't go at it alone. Leveraging the resources and assistance of supportive partners will augment the gains and ensure the success of downtown initiatives and create a greater local economic impact.

Key factors which influenced the framing of recommendations included:

- Owen Sound's downtown should be utilized, programmed, and accessible year-round while serving a variety of multi-use.
- Target market(s) should be focused on to ensure resources are strategically employed and tactics are effective to attract the desired visitor segments.
- The area is a working downtown and provides services and amenities that support the regional economy first, tourism second.
- The city's core is currently positioned as a regional hub, due to its larger quantity of retail and service providers (compared to other neighbouring rural communities).
- Opportunities (through branding or experience/product development) should better utilize assets such as public parking, the waterfront, walking trails and public washrooms.
- The infrastructure, capital improvements, policy changes, and strategic positioning of the river precinct have been a welcomed and beautiful update for the downtown.
- The current vibe or ambiance of Owen Sound's downtown is fairly negative, but, at the same time optimistic and acknowledges that there is positive momentum building.
- Survey results indicate that both residents and business owners have concerns about safety.



- Weaknesses of the city's downtown can cause a perceived snowball effect on local perception, positive change and momentum.
- The business community needs to come together.
- The timing is perfect for an identity change.
- The OSDIA and the City of Owen Sound have the ability to change perceptions and re-write their story.

## Target Market

When marketing to a prospective visitor, whether they are a local or a tourist, it is helpful to know who that visitor is, what they look like, enjoy and do. Describing in detail the type of person that Owen Sound's downtown will strive to attract will help target marketing efforts, branding, experience development and will guide business attraction and retention efforts.

### Primary Target Market

The primary market of focus for the OSDIA is local Owen Sound residents and those that live in nearby surrounding communities. This market can be targeted immediately.

- Owen Sound or regional resident – lives in Owen Sound's downtown area, suburbs or surrounding communities
- Age: 32 – 42 (older Millennials and youngest portion of Gen X)
- Married
- Children at home – ages 2 – 12
- Income: Comfortable – not a large income, but not a small one either
- Enjoys entertainment and social settings
- Likes to spend money on quality items
- Values experiences, high quality food and drink and date night
- Values culture and the unique
- Believes in supporting small business owners
- Enjoys window shopping
- Casual dresser, but well put together
- Believes in sustainability
- Sees potential even when others don't
- Confident and comfortable in their own skin
- Independent thinker
- Seeks to chart their own way – doesn't follow the pack



## Secondary Target Market

The OSDIA's secondary market is made up of people travelling to the region, and those driving through on their way to a vacation destination. This market can be targeted once the recommendations that follow have been implemented.

The OSDIA's secondary target:

- Visitor to the region – lives in southern Ontario (Toronto, Mississauga, Oakville, Milton, Caledon, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Burlington, Hamilton, Guelph)
- Travelling through Owen Sound on their way to the Bruce Peninsula, Sauble Beach or their cottage
- Trying to escape urban living for a short time
- Travelling with family or friends
- Age: 35 – 45 (older Millennials and youngest portion of Gen X)
- Wants to experience the outdoors
- Curious about small towns and cities
- Likes to explore and wander
- Casual and comfortable
- Looking for food and drink, a short rest stop to stretch their legs or an outing on a cloudy day

While the target consumers outlined above will be the primary and secondary focus of marketing and branding tactics, it is important to note that these markets are not the only ones who will benefit from and be attracted to the downtown based on the tactics undertaken.



## Looking forward – Strategies & Actions for Success

While it is important to review the situational analysis of Owen Sound’s downtown to provide historical context, insight and considerations about directions for future planning, ultimately staking a goal marker and strategically developing the milestone which will get the downtown where it needs to be, will create the roadmap for success. The recommendations that follow outline four main pillars with strategic objectives and sub actions to focus on.

1. River District Branding
2. River District Management
3. River District Experience Development
4. River District Promotion

The following recommendations are summarized below. For more information, please see the recommendation summary chart on pages 34-41 which includes additional details about each recommendation such as task lead, resources required and recommended timeframes for implementation.

### Branding

#### **Strategic Objective: Create an impactful and bold identity.**

Owen Sound’s downtown brand perceptions are evolving. When large changes need to be made to make an impact, bold moves need to be taken in order to make this happen.

**Recommendation: Rebrand Owen Sound’s downtown.**

In an effort to demonstrate change, signify a new chapter and rally support with a positive connection for the area, a new brand for Owen Sound’s downtown is recommended.

*“The town has utterly failed to connect its downtown with the waterfront and lacks charm, personality and any useful reason to stop.”  
- Community Survey Submission*



*Actions:*

**1. Leverage downtown's connection to the river through branding.**

It was clear in the stakeholder input, that the river is a large part of the region. It has been overlooked for years. In fact, much of the city's-built form has turned its back on the river.

The river can create tangible visitor experiences while simultaneously romanticizing the region. A name that includes the word "river" will therefore have positive connotations associated with it and offer the area a new start.

The term 'district' is an established term used in big cities to divide the city into consumable and marketable areas. For example, Entertainment District, Fashion District etc.

Rebranding the city's downtown as the "River District" will:

- Re-establish a connection to the river/harbour,
- Define what the region looks like,
- Associate positive connotations with the area, and
- Signify a place people want to be part of, and that visitors can connect with.

It is important to note that a new name will take time to take hold and will require everyone to be on board and on the same page. However, the new name can be a rallying point for people and businesses to get behind. Eventually the River District will:

- Create a sense of pride of place, and
- Become the envy of other communities.

The River District is a place where people gather. It is a destination for people looking for a city experience, in a rural setting. It is a place where people feel safe and meander. It is a place for celebration and community.

**2. Undertake a brand touch point audit.**

To ensure that River District branding can effectively be integrated to create maximum impact, a brand touch point audit should be completed. This audit will highlight where opportunities are available to integrate River District branding throughout Owen Sound's downtown and ensure the brand lives up to its brand promise on the ground through consistency and cohesion. The audit will note brand integration opportunities at specific locations, streets, intersections, civic places, individual businesses etc.



**3. Follow a predetermined timeline for rebranding.**

In order for the rebranding of the city's downtown to be successful, there are a number of management and experience development tactics that must be completed in advance of the renaming. (See recommendations summary chart with timelines below). Ensuring certain changes are made in advance of the rebranding will set the stage for the River District renaming to be successful.

**4. Follow the brand toolkit in all applications of the brand.**

The brand toolkit has been established to document the proper uses of the River District logo and the supporting elements such as colours/ fonts associated with it. Following the recommendations of the brand toolkit in all River District marketing, communications and design elements will ensure the consistency and integrity of the application of the brand.

**5. Throw a brand launch party.**

Once the area is ready for the name change to be enacted, celebrating the rebrand will be instrumental in establishing it as the new moniker for the region. The launch could include a media release and/or a coordinated PR approach alongside a River District launch event or party to create excitement or buzz.

**6. Change the organization's name.**

To align the Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Area (OSDIA) with the River District rebrand, a name change to the RDBA (River District Business Area) is recommended. The new name will integrate the new brand into the OSDIA's communications to members and implementation of initiatives (such as themed events) throughout the entire downtown core. This name change will additionally help to signal the transition to the new brand (and identity) for the downtown and to encourage membership and local business owners to rally in support.



## River District Management

### Strategic Objective: Create a safe and clean space.

The River District is a cultural hotspot and a vibrant place to visit that benefits from the city's current beautification efforts. However, these positive values are outweighed by the current perceptions held by residents and stakeholders that the area is "sketchy, unsafe and dirty".

**Recommendation: Increase the safety and comfort of patrons and business owners.**

Patrons who feel safe, secure and comfortable are more likely to return and related their experience to their friends in a positive manner. Business owners value their personal safety, that of their employees and the longevity of their business assets. If they feel safe and secure, they are more likely to keep their business in the area and recommend new businesses to locate there.

#### *Actions:*

**1. Encourage the development and activation of a substance use and River District housing initiative.**

Work with Grey County social services and housing as well of other partners including OSPA, and CMHA to address substance use and housing challenges. Leverage information from the Grey County Social Services community safety and well-being plan (in conjunction with other partners), to determine the magnitude of the substance use and housing issues in Owen Sound's downtown, the contributing factors, key areas of concern, and outline a plan to combat the issue in a positive and mutually beneficial manner.

**2. Facilitate the implementation of an accessibility program.**

Ensuring that the River District is an accessible place for all to enjoy will increase its appeal to all markets and ensure that it complies with current standards. Issues such as sidewalk heaving can cause access impediments for users. Consider leveraging the CIP program grants for accessibility (where applicable) to encourage accessibility improvements to be made.

- a. Undertake a River District public space accessibility or [walkability audit](#) to determine any accessibility issues and implement upgrades where required.
- b. Deal with any sudden and/or unforeseen accessibility issues in a timely manner.
- c. Ensure businesses and landlords are aware of the accessibility requirements. Communicate requirements using a variety of communication tools as outlined below.





- d. Enforce the requirement for snow clearing on sidewalks in front of downtown buildings.
- e. Establish an accessibility program under the CIP

**Recommendation:** Ensure the cleanliness of the River District.

A clean space will have curb appeal, enticing visitors to spend longer in the River District and return to again and again.

*Actions:*

**3. Create a business reward program.**

Establish a River District business reward program designed to recognize businesses that invest in the cleanliness and beautification of their space in order to help make the downtown an inviting place to visit.

### THE GOLDEN BROOM AWARD

The Brantford OSDIA has created the Golden Broom Award, designed to encourage businesses to increase the cleanliness and beauty of the downtown. From July to October, one business a month receives the honor, which seeks to award business appearance related to cleanliness, signage, window display and trash and litter management among other items related to making the downtown an inviting place to visit.

**4. Undertake a waste and cleanliness audit.**

Completing a waste and cleanliness audit throughout the downtown area, will provide additional information, insights and a baseline of information about areas of improvement and current issues. It is recommended that the audit review and address elements such as:

- a. The schedule of litter patrols in the River District, throughout the year.
- b. The number of garbage and recycling receptacles. Ensure any new repositories align with the River District brand.
- c. River District garbage standards bylaws. If required, update to ensure the cleanliness of the downtown at all times and enforce the rules.
- d. The current tactics to encourage businesses to place garbage curbside immediately before pickup to eliminate unsightly overnight sidewalk garbage accumulation and decreasing the opportunity for waste to blow around.



- e. The locations of the stoop and scoop waste dispenser stations throughout the area. Consider encouraging users to stoop and scoop using on brand signage and messaging.

**5. Ensure adequate (safe and clean) public washrooms are available.**

Currently both the availability of public washrooms within the River District and signage directing people to a public washroom location is minimal. Having an adequate volume of public washrooms accessible throughout the entire area creates a healthy community (especially for safe handwashing practices) and allows visitors to effectively spend additional time in the downtown without having to leave to find a washroom elsewhere. In addition to having accessible public washrooms spread throughout the downtown, washrooms should always be clean. While always of importance, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated health crisis has increased the need for access to clean washrooms and handwashing stations as a primary tool for citizens (and governments) to help keep communities safe.

- a. The River District should assess the need and make additional public washrooms available – build new, install alternative washroom facilities and/or make washrooms in public buildings accessible to visitors.
- b. Install signage directing visitors to public washrooms throughout the area.
- c. Ensure public washrooms are safe, clean and open year-round for the comfort of downtown patrons.
- d. Encourage businesses to allow public access to restrooms and registration on apps such as GoHere.

**Strategic Objective: Create a visually appealing River District.**

River District beautification efforts are recognized by stakeholders and community members. Additional tactics can be used to level up and ensure the River District is an inviting and beautiful place that businesses and local residents can be proud of.

Both the Harbour and Downtown Urban Design/Master Plan Strategy and the River Precinct conceptualization plans are excellent documents which provide visual recommendations to consider in the downtown. These plans can be utilized as tools to achieve the vision for the downtown and the visuals recommended as part of the River District Branding Guidelines should also be used as a tool to continue to move the downtown forward.



### Recommendation: Continue beautification efforts

Visually appealing downtowns which have curb appeal, attract visitors and encourage them to spend more time wandering. This equates to more money spent at local businesses.

#### Actions:

#### 6. Beautify the River District's public spaces.

- a. Continue the current efforts to beautify the River District with flower baskets, bridge planters and flowerbeds, banners and Christmas decorations. Upgrade to River District branded elements and colours when replacing.
- b. Implement streetscaping upgrades such as benches, garbage receptacles, bike racks and lighting to align with the River District brand.
- c. In conjunction with local organizations, expand the community gardens initiative in the area to beautify undeveloped areas such as parking lots, alleyways and empty lots. Align locations to focus on first as recommended in the report entitled *Beautification in the Downtown Improvement Area* by the OSDIA Board of Management, tabled Oct 14 2020.

## CITY OF ST. ALBERT BEAUTIFICATION PROGRAM

The City of St. Albert has created an incentive program to encourage downtown businesses to beautify their space in line with their brand. The program elements include perpendicular signage, bike rack installation, planters, hanging baskets and street furniture. Additional funds are available when a business adopts a neighbouring business.

#### 7. Encourage River District business owners and landlords to beautify their property by leveraging CIP Programs.

Business owners take pride in their business and many of them are doing a great job of creating a beautiful space. However, not all business owners or landlords make an effort to beautify their property. Supporting and encouraging them to act will increase their sales and reap rewards for the area. Communicate the current funding available as part of the newest CIP program which includes a façade & beautification incentive. The program, which is available for business owners within the River District, allows them to access funds for the beautification of their property.

In addition to the funding already available with the CIP program(s), the façade and beautification criteria for funding should include:

- Guidelines in relation to upgrades and beautifications in line with the River District brand (colours, signage, awnings etc.).



- An added incentive in the form of additional cost sharing improvement funding aimed at River District properties.
- A strategy for communication to increase participation for building owners to upgrade river and harbour facing properties.
- A River District themed criterion for temporary beautification elements such as types of recommended plantings, Christmas decorations etc.
- Communication highlighting new programs within the CIP such as grants for landscaping and perpendicular signage etc.
- Leveraging opportunities with local suppliers/ partners or discount opportunities for any signage/ beautification installations and upgrades.
- A window painting incentive for landlords of vacant properties, encouraging them to work with local artists to install window art in empty storefronts.
- Targeted expansion of mural beautification efforts along the backside of buildings in areas that are currently lacking in visual appeal in order to make them more approachable and enticing. (Consider installations primarily in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East area between 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Street).
- Marketing tactics to entice program applications on an annual basis including direct email and personally delivered flyers.

## **Strategic Objective: Entice transient tourist traffic to stop in the River District.**

Setting the stage to tempt visitors to stop and spend time in the River District can take some preliminary work in order to attract their interest and to guide them to the area.

**Recommendation: Create visually appealing arterial routes through the city.**

Beautifying the River District's feeder streets will create a good first impression of the city, piquing the interest of traffic, enticing them to stop and explore. Arterial routes that are unkept provide the opposite effect, giving a negative first impression of the city and what it has to offer.

*Actions:*

### **8. Beautify arterial public spaces.**

- a. Increase the focus on landscaping and landscape maintenance along 10<sup>th</sup> Street throughout the entire city, along 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue East from the entrance to the city to 10<sup>th</sup> Street East, and along 16<sup>th</sup> Street East.
- b. Similar to the River District area, utilize flower baskets, bridge planters, flowerbeds, and banners along arterial routes to beautify the area.
- c. Update directional signage outside the core to direct traffic to the River District.



## 9. Encourage arterial route property owners to beautify their property.

Much like business owners in the core, arterial route businesses and residential property owners have the ability to create a good first impression for visitors by beautifying their properties. The newly updated CIP and related landscape/ façade programs can be leveraged to assist with improvements in arterial areas.

Communicate the eligibility of the façade / landscape programs to property owners on the arterial routes especially those located along 10<sup>th</sup> Street East and West and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue East from the city's entrance to 10<sup>th</sup> Street East. Similar to the overarching recommendation for specific enhancements and refinements of criteria for River District façade and beautification themed upgrades, consider developing guidelines pertinent for arterial routes which may consider the following:

- Area specific guidelines,
- Encouragement to install perpendicular signage,
- Partnership opportunities, and
- A window painting incentive for vacant properties.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BEAUTIFICATION

Internationally recognized destination developer, Roger Brooks noted one of the top three elements every downtown should invest in includes seriously reviewing beautification practices.

“70% of first-time sales at restaurants, retail shops, lodging facilities, and attractions can come from curb appeal. Travellers often use these phrases: “That looks like a nice place to eat.” or “That looks like a nice place to stay”. Beautification or curb appeal will always be an investment with a tremendous return.

<https://www.destinationdevelopment.org/articles/the-three-statistics-that-every-downtown-should-live-by>

**Recommendation: Make it easier to for visitors to find their way and stop in the River District.**

Installing wayfinding to direct traffic to the River District, and to support navigation while in the area will help to attract the attention of drive through traffic and ensure they find their way once they arrive. Making parking easy and effortless will encourage them to stop, spend time and money.



*Actions:*

**10. Undertake a River District wayfinding plan.**

Undertake a wayfinding plan, outlining River District signage needs. The plan should include recommendations regarding:

- River District wayfinding needs,
- Branded gateway signage welcoming visitors to the River District,
- Arterial route signage directing traffic to the River District,
- Signage to River District parking areas (directed from the main retail area), and
- Signage to key attractions (i.e. River District Retail Area, River Precinct, rest area, Farmers' Market, public washrooms etc.).

**11. Continue to offer complimentary parking for River District patrons.**

Business and city sponsored parking is a great way to welcome visitors and entice them to spend time wandering the River District. Consider continuing the complimentary parking initiative and implementing creative leniency solutions for those that park for extended periods of time, or for businesses that park in locations meant for visitors such as reminding instead of ticketing, offering coupons or gift cards, or eliminating tickets with receipt validation.

## THE WISMER HOUSE, PORT ELGIN

The Wismer House has gained attention for its creative way to deal with downtown patrons parking overnight. Instead of a slap on the wrist for breaking parking rules, they place a Wismer House creative version of a ticket on windshields parked outside their restaurant overnight, thanking them for their responsible behaviour and offering them \$10 off their next visit.



## River District Experience Development

### Strategic Objective: Create an engaging space.

Making public spaces consistently engaging and entertaining takes more than having a one-off event. The public needs to have a reason to frequently and repeatedly visit the downtown. A well programmed public area or activated space can be a primary motivator to attract (and retain) visitors in the downtown core.

**Recommendation:** Continue to invest in animation and activation of the River District.

Encourage and invest in animation and activation that will increase the appeal of the area and encourage visitors to spend time there. Activations should be in line with the brand and entice the target market.

*Actions:*

#### 1. Ensure River District properties are open for businesses.

Having a vibrant selection of businesses in the downtown, that serve the target markets' needs which are open during key operating hours will help to attract (and retain) visitors.

- a. Create an environment of opportunity to allow River District businesses to open on Sundays, past 4pm on weekdays and on holidays. If tourist traffic is to be attained, it is important to have the area open at consistent times, especially on weekends, when the most transient traffic is moving through the area. A critical mass of businesses adjusting their opening days and hours will be integral to the success of the change.

#### 2. Invest in infrastructure to support animation.

- a. Continue to develop infrastructure to attract residents to the downtown area and encourage them to spend time there. Developments should be in line with the brand and attractive to the local target market. Connections to the water will be beneficial. Some potential examples include: a river walk, water fountain, skating rink, amphitheatre and stage for outdoor music, food truck gathering area etc. The location and format of these developments and infrastructure elements should be determined in conjunction with city's planning department. Adding infrastructure items with attraction appeal that provide ambiance and vibrancy for the area is key.
- b. Continue implementation and use of a policy that encourages sidewalk cafes and patio dining to increase the approachability and create a warm ambiance for the River District.
- c. Research and investigate closing a section of the River District to vehicular traffic on an ongoing or scheduled basis. (i.e. Friday evenings July-September).



- Start by communicating with and surveying OSDIA members to facilitate acceptance.
  - Encourage additional animation during this time period such as live music and craft beer sampling on patios.
  - Develop a walking only area with a quaint pathway and waterfront businesses along 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue East from 10<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Similar, but on a smaller scale to an Intrawest village such as Blue Mountain or Tremblant, businesses located in this area should be animated and engaging. The area would allow vehicular access during scheduled times, after hours for deliveries and loading/unloading goods.
- d. Consider an expansion of the OSDIA boundaries to include the west side of the river and harbour to ensure the inclusion of key properties that align with the River District brand.

## DOWNTOWN KINCARDINE

Through a partnership between the DIA, Town and Chamber, downtown Kincardine took advantage of main bridge closure and COVID-19 to pilot a pedestrian outdoor shopping concept. A full block was closed to vehicle traffic consistently Friday-Sundays starting in mid-June through September 2020. Strong communication alongside increases to accessible parking, access for business deliveries and patio bylaws changes positively supported this initiative. Economic results included:

- A trackable large increase of locals shopping in downtown
- Tourism marketing reached new urban markets (without spending any marketing money) including media recognition by the Toronto Sun
- 90% businesses indicated satisfaction with street closures
- More than 60% of businesses saw an increase in revenues compared to previous years with the remaining businesses maintaining existing revenues (even during COVID-19)
- An increase in street animation and volume of time people spent overall in the downtown thanks to patios, events, and rotating vendor booths
- Council has endorsed the program to continue in 2021 and is considering the option to expand days to include Holiday Mondays and add additional blocks to be closed to vehicles traffic

[Kincardine's Road to recovery: Toronto Sun Article](#)

### 3. Encourage animation of the River District.

- a. Encourage new and continued programming including (but not limited to) interactive heritage tours (i.e. Saints & Sinners Tour), music series and on street art activities or displays in partnership with local galleries or the TOM.
- b. Encourage new activities and attractions to engage visitors and locals. Examples of potential on brand examples could include an inner harbour water taxi, boat cruise, riverfront canoe and kayak rentals, waterfront vendors/shops.





## LITTLE FLEET, TRAVERSE CITY, MI

Traverse City Michigan is home to the Little Fleet hub of food trucks. The location, which features full time trucks and a rotating blend of differing vendors. This offers diners a diverse flavor of dining options from an eclectic group of street vendors who use a common outdoor eating space to create an element of consistent community activation.

(<https://mynorth.com/2015/04/little-fleet-trucks-to-open-in-traverse-city/>)

## TORONTO PUBLIC ART STRATEGY

The City of Toronto's 10 year public art strategy, calls for utilizing temporary public art to animate and change the dynamics on city streets. Specifically focusing on areas that need 'life' infused into them (such as laneways, walls, underpasses, utility boxes etc.) the goals include increasing the volume and frequency of temporary art installations in an effort to refresh, enliven and aminate all areas of the city through the use of creative, rotating and diversity of art in public places. Additionally, the city has created image databases, mobile apps, spin off complementary programming and walking tours to make the city's 1000+ works of public art accessible to visitors, residents and historical archives.

#### **4. Continue to plan and deliver a roster of exciting events that will attract the target market to the River District area.**

Events have the ability to attract a large amount of people to the city's downtown. However, they also often require an abundance of resources to implement. Care should be taken to ensure they are beneficial, purpose driven, targeted to the market and on brand.

##### *Actions:*

- a. Create an annual event plan.
- b. Create a criterion to evaluate and determine the most effective (and strategic) events to continue based on the resources required to hold the event versus the attendance attained, as well as the connection for the target market and River District brand. Additional consideration for COVID-19 pandemic requirements may include local health regulations and the changing nature of permitted public events should be reviewed as applicable. Smaller more intimate gatherings which are able to be booked in advance are required in the immediate term, and this could become the expectation going forward.



- c. Plan and deliver a roster of new events.
  - Ensure any new events considered align with the target market.
  - Give preference to events that align with the River District brand.
  - Consider events that will attract residents (primarily in the shoulder season), connecting them with city's downtown and the waterfront. Examples include (but are not limited to), a floating concert series, jazz festival, wine tasting and pairing events, craft beer festival, evening Christmas farmers' market.
  - Consider a major summer event that will attract tourists, is distinctive and ties to Owen Sound's unique selling propositions. A community harvest event along the harbour or in the River District with connections to local food, drink and music could be held at varying times throughout the year.
  - Ensure event partners are defined, engaged and assisting with event delivery.
- d. Work with the Festival of Northern Lights Board to upgrade the light show to current standards and extend the light show. Assist with applications for funding to support the developments.
- e. Work with the Georgian Bay Folk Society to encourage the expansion of Summerfolk programming to the River District. Programming could include a floating barge concert area and/or the closure of a street.
- f. Recap events each year and summarize key performance indicators, to inform decisions about future delivery. Provide a minimum two-year test phase for new events.

## FARM TO TABLE COMMUNITY HARVEST DINNERS, ORILLIA

Selling out 125 tickets in less than an hour, this annual [downtown local food dinner event](#) is a sought after experience that occurs in downtown Orillia. Sharing a meal with community members along a 128' table this dining experience links local/ regional food producers with restaurateurs and after dinner entertainment in the downtown.



## **Strategic Objective: Learn from and lean on others to build success.**

The River District can benefit from utilizing information about best practices, downtown development, strategic planning and downtown economic successes from other communities of all shapes and sizes, in an effort to build on successes and learn from challenges.

### **Recommendation: Leverage the experience, mistakes and successes of other destinations.**

With access to information easily available, downtown trends rapidly changing and resources being finite, it is essential to leverage the knowledge, experience and successes from others to help inform planning and provide inspiration which could be used in the River District.

#### *Actions:*

##### **5. Undertake an annual best practices mission.**

Undertake an annual best practice mission. Provide an opportunity to expand views and learn from other destinations that are doing a great job of attracting the target market to their downtown. Hire a tourism/downtown visitor experience expert to plan and guide a best practice mission trip for select members of the OSDIA Board and city staff as well as River District business members. Destinations for exploring and topics of consideration could include:

- Traverse City, Michigan – similarities to Owen Sound in geographical location, example of successful downtown development of retail, accommodation, dining and experiences.
- Stratford, Ontario – Riverfront development, downtown development and beautification, retail, accommodation and dining inspiration.
- Other communities as they become applicable.

### **Recommendation: Create the environment to attract businesses.**

Business attraction and retention campaigns aren't new, but strategically considering how specific niche business recruitment tactics can help to effectively transform the downtown and attract the target market audience is unique. Leverage the strategies used by other DIA's and communities to create a tailored approach to downtown business curation and recruitment.

#### *Actions:*

##### **6. Cluster and develop assets that will attract the target market.**

A destination business is a business that motivates people to drive out of their way to shop at or experience. In any downtown, it is critical that there are anchor destination businesses that draw



people into the downtown. Additionally, ensuring there are complimentary assets will encourage visitors to make a 'trip' or day of their time in Owen Sound by layering on multiple experiences.

- a. Through the BR&E, undertake a River District business gaps and location planning exercise. While completing a new or updated BR&E study, identify River District business gaps and potential clustering opportunities. Locating like-minded businesses that are positioned to attract the target market in a specified area will help to entice visitors, as they will experience businesses of interest to them. The planning exercise should note business types which may be in limited supply and map out strategic locations for River District businesses.
  - Target businesses that would be attractive to the desired market and support their wants and needs including businesses such as a butcher or deli, bakery, refillery, microbrewery or distillery, wine bar, waterfront dining, boutique inn and upscale souvenir shop.
  - Aim for targeted clusters of ideal business in the River District area, to attract visitors.
  - Encourage and provide support for targeted business development along the river and the harbour.
  - Provide an attractive and supportive environment for businesses to move to an identified targeted location.
  - Provide landlords with target business information which they can utilize when considering potential tenant applications at their building locations.
  - Review the existing vacant property incentives (within the CIP) in an effort to combat having vacancies in areas where business clustering practices are attempting to form.
- b. Mentor potential new River District entrepreneurs. Develop and implement an entrepreneurial support program (or collaborate with an existing program such as Catapult Grey Bruce) to support potential new businesses which will be located in the city's downtown. The program could include mentoring, a familiarization tour by a current business owner or city representative and/or an online resource for business planning.

## TARGETED CLUSTERS

Contrary to popular business owners' belief, a cluster of similar businesses can actually be beneficial for downtown retail areas. This creates a destination what will attract people from greater distances. Think how easy wedding dress shopping would be in a town with five bridal boutiques, or buying furniture if you could check out 10 nearby showrooms. Niagara Falls does a great job of this with their wineries, as does Lancaster PA with its quilt and fabric shops.

As a minimum, Roger Brooks of Destination Development International recommends a targeted rule for effective downtowns that visitors have 10 places to dine, 10 destination retail shops and 10 places open after 6pm within 3 blocks.



**Recommendation: Leverage the experience, mistakes and successes of other businesses.**

Distribution of information and sharing of best practices among businesses and downtown leaders can inspire others.

*Actions:*

**7. Enhance OSDIA communication tactics to create success.**

- a. Create a newsletter to OSDIA members with a simplified format. Designed to inspire and keep OSDIA businesses up to date, the emailed newsletter should be a short enticing read, with only snippets of information with links to further online information leaving the reader with a desire to learn more about a topic. Content should inspire members to get involved, and to make their businesses the best that it can be by profiling River District business owners who are doing new and unique things, as well as examples from other communities.
- b. Create an annual OSDIA summit for businesses. Plan a River District annual conference. Include:
  - Guest speakers from other successful small cities that been successful in reinventing themselves, cleaning up their downtown, animating and/or attracting the target market.
  - Forums for discussion of important area topics with focus on positive input and creating viable options.
  - Learning sessions including topics such as social media marketing, the façade upgrade program, the little things that make the difference for consumers etc.
  - Contact other DIA's to obtain best practice information on business recruitment, membership engagement and unique marketing strategies such as Yonge Street BIA, Downtown London BIA etc.

# River District Promotion

## Strategic Objective: Attract people to the River District.

Word of mouth promotion is a powerful tool (especially in a smaller community), and tackling many of the above recommendations will create spin off marketing and promotion, discussion, referrals and motivations to experience the River District. However, word of mouth advertising can't be controlled, measured or planned. Ensuring there is a strategic, noteworthy promotions and marketing plan to support Owen Sound's River District is essential.

**Recommendation: Follow a strategic, multi-layered collaborative and bold promotions plan for the River District.**

*Actions:*

### 1. Create a River District consumer website.

A stand alone, branded, up to date consumer website that is aimed at the target market will provide the inspiration for local residents to spend time in the River District and for visitors planning their visit to Owen Sound. For example, Vancouver's Gastown uses a content-based stand-alone website ([gastown.org](http://gastown.org)) to inspire visitor and residents to spend time in the area.

- a. Register a River District domain (i.e. owensoundriverdistrict.ca & .com).
- b. Design and program a River District content-based consumer website in line with the brand
- c. Create and post content regarding River District business owners, events and activities.
  - Hire third-party writers to create content when developing the site, and throughout the year.
  - Focus on topics that will be of interest to the target market (primarily local residents).
  - Provide an insiders' guide to the best finds.
  - Highlight unique goods and services, tell the secrets behind the delivery or focus on the business owners to create a connection and pride of place. For example, highlight Casero's margarita, the Milk Maid's scone making workshop, the new owners of a River District business, a walking tour itinerary etc.

### 2. Create an annual promotional tactical schedule & social media content calendar.

A schedule and content calendar will help to guide tactics throughout the year, ensuring they are tactical, on schedule (and on budget) which will assist in planning for future content development.



The document should include the timeline and the key point of contact. Considerations should be given to the resources available to implement the tactics and assignment of the tasks to city staff, OSDIA representatives or a third-party marketing firm. It will also help in ensuring branding consistency.

- a. Outline an annual social media content calendar to guide social media content and future content development, ensuring it is on brand, on topic and delivered in a timely manner.

### **3. Implement social media marketing tactics.**

Social media is an effective way to reaching targeted markets.

- a. Brand OSDIA social media accounts with the new River District look and feel.
- b. Ensure there are regular social media posts occurring. Focus the post content to excite the target market, encouraging visits by showcasing interesting businesses and products offered in the River District, as well as events. Keep posts on brand in content and look and feel.
  - Be mindful of posting frequency without overloading followers.
  - As new website content is loaded, push it to the audience.
  - Boost key posts to the local target market, using advertising budget.
- c. Digital advertising - Deliver digital ad campaign(s) to local and nearby residents in the target market.
- d. Social media influencers - Enlist local influencers to create and post target market focused content (i.e. Rrampt, 44 North Media etc.)
- e. Claim the River District Google business and Trip Advisor page.

### **4. Develop and deliver a promotional campaign to attract new and exciting businesses to the River District.**

Attracting new businesses will increase the vibrancy of the River District and reduce vacant storefronts which will in turn attract more visitors the area.

- a. Encourage targeted businesses to locate in or to relocate to the River District (in line with the targeted businesses to attract determined above).
- b. Invest in a program or creative marketing campaign for attracting entrepreneurs and targeted businesses to the River District.

### **5. Deliver a campaign designed to attract people who work from home to the city.**

Enticing residents from nearby cities, who are in the target market to the city as residents and encouraging them to live in or near the city's downtown area has the potential to increase the vitality of the River District and enhance visitation.



- a. Create a relocation campaign.
- b. Market to potential residents who work from home in the target market age bracket.
- c. Provide an incentive to relocate to the city and live in or near downtown.
- d. Encourage downtown landlords to upgrade the residential rental stock in a targeted area of the River District creating a prestigious River District rental area and investing in full renovations, high end finishes and hip heritage home curb appeal.

**6. Create a locals' love it here program.**

Build upon the shifting consumer awareness of the impact of local shopping (compounded by economic conditions created by COVID-19) and create a local's love promotional program complete with an incentive. The program would be branded to align with the River District and through incentives or promotion encourage residents to shop and experience the River District.





## Moving Forward - The roadmap to get there

The strategic objectives and recommendations above related to the River District branding, management, experience development and promotion will:

- Enhance future marketing programs and create long term economic success in the downtown area.
- Positively change the attractiveness of the River District based on measurable long-term development initiatives, which will in turn, create a critical mass of marketable assets for the future.
- Enhance the tourism appeal of the area.
- Stimulate word of mouth marketing, and
- Appeal to residents to increase their interaction with businesses, public areas and programming within the River District.

The implementation of this plan and following the steps outlined through strategic objectives, recommendations and actions is critical to the overall success of rebranding and enhancing the River District.

Ensuring that the plan is implemented in a layered, methodical manner will allow for critical elements to be developed ensuring that they support and solidify the River District rebranding. Rushing tactics or not fully executing them, may result in the new brand not be realized on the ground and/or not meeting visitor expectations which poses additional challenges for both the City of Owen Sound and OSDIA in terms of reputation management and future development.

In addition to the initial key steps outlined below, a soft brand launch is recommended to start to slowly and quietly trickle out communications related to the River District while River District management and experience development initiatives occur concurrently in the background.

To create momentum and strategic development, the key steps below are positioned as the most important tactics for the DIA to tackle first. (See the Summary of Recommendations & Timelines below for more information on timing.)

1. Register the River District domain.
2. Undertake a brand touchpoint audit
3. Consider an expansion the OSIDA boundaries to include the west side of the river and harbour to ensure inclusion of key properties that align with River District brand.



4. Change the organization's name
5. Place an increased focus on waste management.
6. Encourage the development and activation of a substance use and River District housing initiative.
7. Create a business rewards program
8. Continue to offer complimentary parking for River District patrons.
9. Encourage River District business owners (and landlords) to beautify their property.
10. Beautify the River District's public spaces.
11. Ensure the accessibility of places of business and public areas.
12. Undertake a River District Wayfinding Plan.
13. Create an annual promotional tactical schedule & social media content calendar.

## Summary of Recommendations

Branding <i>(Ordered in terms of execution timing)</i>	Y1	Y2	Y3
<b>Strategic objective:</b> <i>Create an impactful and bold identity</i>			
<b>Recommendation:</b> <i>Rebrand Owen Sound's downtown</i>			
2. Undertake a brand touch point audit.			
6. Change the organization's name.			
1. Leverage downtown's connection to the river through branding.			
4.. Follow the brand toolkit in all applications of the brand.			
3. Follow a predetermined timeline for rebranding.			
5. Throw a brand launch party.			

River District Management <i>(Ordered in terms of execution timing)</i>			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
<i>Create a safe and clean space</i>	<i>Increase the safety and comfort of patrons and business owners</i>	1. Encourage the development and activation of a substance use and River District housing initiative.	Grey County Social Services (lead), City of Owen Sound, OSDIA, Public Health, Owen Sound Police Services	Staff time to participate/ support initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan outlined</li> <li>Tactics implemented</li> <li>Decrease in substance use issues in the area</li> <li>Decrease in crime in the area</li> <li>Consumer and stakeholder perception of safety increased</li> </ul>			



River District Management ( <i>Ordered in terms of execution timing</i> )			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
<i>Create a safe and clean space</i>	<i>Increase the safety and comfort of patrons and business owners</i>	2. Facilitate the implementation of an accessibility program. a. Undertake a River District public space accessibility or walkability audit. b. Deal with any sudden and/or unforeseen accessibility issues in a timely manner. c. Ensure businesses and landlords are aware of accessibility requirements. d. Enforce the requirement for snow clearing on sidewalks in front of downtown buildings. e. Establish an accessibility program under the CIP.	City of Owen Sound (lead), River District business, landlords	Staff time, funds to rectify issues where required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walkability score increases</li> <li>• River District common areas and businesses accessible in all four seasons</li> </ul>			
<i>Create a safe and clean space</i>	<i>Ensure the cleanliness of the River District</i>	3. Create a business rewards program.	OSDIA (lead), City of Owen Sound, River District businesses, landlords	OSDIA Board or member time, City staff time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program implemented</li> </ul>			
<i>Create a safe and clean space</i>	<i>Ensure the cleanliness of the River District</i>	4. Undertake a waste and cleanliness audit. Include elements such as: a. The schedule of year-round litter patrols. b. The number of garbage and recycling receptacles. c. The River District garbage standard bylaws. d. The tactics to encourage specific timing for curbside garbage. e. The locations of the stoop and scoop waste dispenser stations within the River District.	City of Owen Sound (lead), PW division and Bylaw	Staff time, funds for placement of additional infrastructure and resources for additional pickup (if required)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Litter patrols increased</li> <li>• Trash management elements increased</li> <li>• Consumer and stakeholder perception of cleanliness increased</li> </ul>			
<i>Entice transient tourist traffic to stop in the River District</i>	Create visually appealing arterial routes through the city	8. Beautify arterial public spaces. a. Increase focus on landscaping and landscaping maintenance. b. Utilize flower baskets, bridge planters, flowerbeds, and banners along arterial routes to beautify the area. c. Update directional signage outside the core to direct traffic to the River District.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA, River District businesses and property owners	Staff time, funds to support CIP program initiatives and installations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of flower baskets, bridge planters, banners and flowerbeds</li> <li>• Number of gardens developed</li> <li>• Number of businesses applying for upgrade program support</li> <li>• Number of businesses applying for upgrade program support</li> </ul>			



River District Management ( <i>Ordered in terms of execution timing</i> )			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of properties upgraded</li> </ul> Consumer and stakeholder perception of the visual appeal of the River District increased			
<i>Entice transient tourist traffic to stop in the River District.</i>	<i>Make it easy to find your way and stop in the River District</i>	10. Undertake a River District wayfinding plan.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA River District businesses	Funds for planning, development and installation, staff time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan completed</li> <li>Number of wayfinding and gateway signs installed</li> </ul> Increased ease of navigation by visitors			
<i>Create a visually appealing River District</i>	<i>Continue beautification efforts</i>	6. Beautify the River District's public spaces. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue with beautification efforts in the River District with flower baskets, bridge planters and flowerbeds, themed banners and Christmas decorations.</li> <li>Implement streetscaping upgrades to align with the River District brand.</li> <li>In partnership, expand the community gardens initiative in the area to beautify undeveloped areas such as parking lots, alleyways and empty lots.</li> </ol>	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA, community representatives	Funds for beautification and/or installations, City staff time to implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of flower baskets, bridge planters, banners and Christmas decorations installed</li> <li>Upgraded streetscaping installed</li> <li>Number of gardens developed</li> <li>Increased positive perception of the area</li> </ul>			
<i>Create a visually appealing River District</i>	<i>Continue beautification efforts</i>	7. Encourage River District business owners and landlords to beautify their properties by leveraging CIP programs. Develop additional program criteria such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guidelines in relation to upgrades and beautifications in line with the River District brand (colours, signage, awnings etc.).</li> <li>An added incentive in the form of additional cost sharing improvement funding aimed at River District properties.</li> <li>Strategy for communication to increase participation for building owners to upgrade river and harbour facing properties.</li> <li>A River District themed criterion for temporary beautification elements such as types of recommended plantings, Christmas decorations etc.</li> </ul>	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA, River District businesses and landlords	Staff time, funds to support CIP program initiatives and installations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of businesses applying for upgrade program support</li> <li>Number of properties upgraded</li> <li>Number of perpendicular signs installed</li> <li>Number of murals installed</li> <li>Consumer and stakeholder perception of the visual appeal of the River District increased</li> </ul>			



River District Management ( <i>Ordered in terms of execution timing</i> )			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A grant to encourage the installation of perpendicular signage to allow passersby to easily identify the business.</li> <li>• Leveraging opportunities with local suppliers/ partners or discount opportunities for any signage/ beatification installations and upgrades.</li> <li>• A window painting incentive for landlords of vacant properties, encouraging them to work with local artists to install window art in empty storefronts.</li> <li>• Targeted expansion of mural beautification efforts along the backside of buildings.</li> </ul>			The number of applicants to the CIP landscape program			
<i>Entice transient tourist traffic to stop in the River District</i>	Make it easy to find your way and stop in the River District	11. Continue to offer complimentary parking for River District patrons.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA River District businesses	Staff time, funds for incentive program development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking remains free</li> </ul> Number of coupons/incentives distributed			
<i>Create a safe and clean space</i>	<i>Ensure the cleanliness of the River District</i>	5. Ensure adequate, (safe and clean) public washrooms are available. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the need for additional public washrooms.</li> <li>Install public washroom signage.</li> <li>Ensure public washrooms are safe, clean and open year-round.</li> <li>Encourage businesses to allow public access to restrooms</li> </ol>	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA, River District businesses	Funds for infrastructure and signage (if required) from both City & OSDIA, staff time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional public washrooms available</li> <li>• Signage installed</li> <li>• Washrooms are clean upon inspection</li> <li>• Businesses listed on GoHere or other washroom apps</li> </ul>			
<i>Entice transient tourist traffic to stop in the River District</i>	Create visually appealing arterial routes through the city	9. Encourage arterial route property owners to beautify their property.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA, River District businesses and property owners	Staff time, funds to support CIP program initiatives and installations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of flower baskets, bridge planters, banners and flowerbeds</li> <li>• Number of gardens developed</li> <li>• Number of businesses applying for upgrade program support</li> <li>• Number of businesses applying for upgrade program support</li> <li>• Number of properties upgraded</li> </ul>			



River District Management <i>(Ordered in terms of execution timing)</i>			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of perpendicular signs installed</li> <li>• Consumer and stakeholder perception of the visual appeal of the River District increased</li> </ul>			

River District Experience Development <i>(Ordered in terms of execution timing)</i>			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
<i>Create an engaging space.</i>	<i>Continue to invest in animation and activation of the River District.</i>	2. Invest in infrastructure to support animation. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop infrastructure to attract residents to the downtown area.</li> <li>Continue implementation and use of a patio policy to utilize sidewalk cafes and patio dining.</li> <li>Research and investigate closing a section of the River District to vehicular traffic on an ongoing or scheduled basis.</li> <li>Consider the expansion of the OSDIA boundaries to include the west side of the river and harbour to ensure the inclusion of key properties that align with the River District brand.</li> </ol>	City of Owen Sound (lead – a, b, c), OSDIA Board (lead d), River District businesses	OSDIA Board or member time, infrastructure funds, City staff time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New infrastructure developments</li> <li>• Street closures</li> <li>• Number of patios and sidewalk cafes</li> <li>• Development of 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue East</li> <li>• Adjustment of OSDIA boundary</li> </ul>			
<i>Create an engaging space.</i>	<i>Continue to invest in animation and activation of the River District.</i>	1. Ensure River District properties are open for business. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create an environment of opportunity to allow River District businesses to open consistently.</li> </ol>	OSDIA Board/ members (lead), City staff, landlords	OSDIA Board or member time, City staff time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of businesses open consistently on Sundays and regular extended hours</li> </ul>			



River District Experience Development ( <i>Ordered in terms of execution timing</i> )			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
<i>Create an engaging space.</i>	<i>Continue to invest in animation and activation of the River District.</i>	4. Continue to plan and deliver a roster of exciting events that will attract the target market to the River District area. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create an annual event plan.</li> <li>Create a criterion to evaluate and determine the most effective (and strategic) events to continue.</li> <li>Plan and deliver a roster of new events.</li> <li>Work with the Festival of Northern Lights Board to upgrade the light show and assist with applications for funding to support the developments.</li> <li>Work with the Georgian Bay Folk Society (and other organizations) to encourage the expansion of Summerfolk programming to the River District.</li> </ol> Recap events each year and summarize key performance indicators, to inform future delivery.	OSDIA (co-lead), City of Owen Sound (co-lead), Event committee	OSDIA Board or member time, City staff time, potential funds for development and delivery of events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual event plan created, event report delivered</li> <li>Targeted roster of on brand events delivered each year</li> <li>Partners assisting with development and delivery of events</li> <li>Increased volume of visitors to the area</li> </ul>			
<i>Learn from and lean on others to build success.</i>	<i>Leverage the experience, mistakes and successes of other businesses.</i>	7. Enhance OSDIA communication tactics to create success. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a newsletter to OSDIA members with simplified format</li> </ol> Create an annual OSDIA summit for River District businesses.	OSDIA (lead), City of Owen Sound	OSDIA Board or member time, City staff time, funds to support conference delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter updated</li> <li>Newsletters distributed</li> <li>Newsletter open rate, click through rate</li> <li>OSDIA business conference held annually</li> <li>Number of conference attendees</li> </ul>			
<i>Learn from and lean on others to build success.</i>	<i>Leverage the experience, mistakes and successes of other destinations</i>	5. Undertake an annual best practices mission.	OSDIA (lead), City of Owen Sound, River District businesses	OSDIA Board or member time, City staff time, funds for program delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of familiarization tours held</li> <li>Number of participants</li> <li>Number of River District businesses participating</li> <li>Number of actionable ideas brought back to Owen Sound</li> </ul>			
<i>Create an engaging space.</i>	<i>Continue to invest in animation and activation of the River District.</i>	3. Encourage animation of the River District. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage new and continued programming.</li> </ol> Encourage new activities and attractions to engage visitors and locals.	OSDIA (lead), City of Owen Sound, other stakeholders as applicable	OSDIA Board or member time, City staff time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programs continued and developed</li> <li>New activities and attractions developed</li> </ul>			





River District Experience Development ( <i>Ordered in terms of execution timing</i> )			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased visitor positive perception of the area</li> </ul>			
<i>Learn from and lean on others to build success.</i>	<i>Create the environment to attract businesses.</i>	6. Cluster and develop assets that will attract the target market. a. Through the BR&E, undertake a River District business gaps and location planning exercise. b. Mentor potential new River District entrepreneurs.	OSDIA (lead), City of Owen Sound, Grey County, Catapult Grey Bruce	OSDIA Board or member time, City staff time, funds for BR&E, planning exercise,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business location plan completed</li> <li>BR&amp;E completed</li> <li>Mentorship program established</li> <li>Number of new businesses</li> </ul>			

River District Promotion ( <i>Ordered in terms of execution timing</i> )			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
<i>Attract people to the River District.</i>	<i>Follow a strategic, multi-layered collaborative and bold promotions plan for the River District.</i>	1. Create a River District consumer website. a. Register a River District domain. b. Design and program a River District content-based consumer website. c. Create and post content regarding River District business owners, events and activities.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA	City staff time or third-party developer, funds for programming, design and content development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website launched</li> <li>Content posted</li> <li>Website traffic</li> </ul>			
<i>Attract people to the River District.</i>	<i>Follow a strategic, multi-layered collaborative and bold promotions plan for the River District.</i>	2. Create an annual promotional tactical schedule & social media content calendar. a. Outline an annual social media content calendar to guide social media content and future content development, ensuring it is on brand, on topic and delivered in a timely manner.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA	City staff time or third-party marketing agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedule/calendar completed</li> </ul>			



River District Promotion ( <i>Ordered in terms of execution timing</i> )			Partners	Resources	Measurables	Y1	Y2	Y3
Strategic Objective	Recommendation	Tactics						
<i>Attract people to the River District.</i>	<i>Follow a strategic, multi-layered collaborative and bold promotions plan for the River District.</i>	5. Deliver a campaign designed to attract people who work from home to the city. a. Create a relocation campaign. b. Market to potential residents in the target market age bracket. c. Provide an incentive to relocate to the city. d. Encourage downtown landlords to upgrade the residential rental stock in a targeted area of the River District.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA	City staff time, or third-party marketing agency, funds for program delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program engagement – measurements to be determined based on tactic</li> </ul>			
<i>Attract people to the River District.</i>	<i>Follow a strategic, multi-layered collaborative and bold promotions plan for the River District.</i>	3. Implement social media marketing tactics. a. Brand OSDIA social media accounts for alignment with River District look and feel. b. Regularly schedule social media posts. c. Digital advertising. Deliver digital ad campaign(s) to local and nearby residents in the target market. d. Leverage local social media influencers. e. Claim the River District Google business and Trip Advisor page.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA	City staff time, or third-party marketing agency, funds for program delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social engagement</li> <li>• Social account growth</li> <li>• Content posted</li> <li>• Website traffic</li> <li>• Ad and post click through rates</li> </ul>			
<i>Attract people to the River District.</i>	<i>Follow a strategic, multi-layered collaborative and bold promotions plan for the River District.</i>	6. Create a local's love it here program.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA	City staff time, or third-party marketing agency, funds for program delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program engagement – measurements to be determined based on tactic</li> </ul>			
<i>Attract people to the River District.</i>	<i>Follow a strategic, multi-layered collaborative and bold promotions plan for the River District.</i>	4. Develop and deliver a promotional campaign to attract new and exciting businesses to the River District. a. Encourage targeted businesses to locate or relocate to the River District. b. Invest in a program or creative marketing campaign to attract entrepreneurs and targeted businesses to the River District.	City of Owen Sound (lead), OSDIA	City staff time, or third-party marketing agency, funds for program delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of new businesses</li> </ul>			

## Additional Anticipated Outcomes

There are a number of anticipated outcomes that can be used to gauge the success of the initiative as it is implemented.

- A more engaged business community,
- A decrease in the vacancy of storefronts,
- Growth in the uptake of programs within the CIP,
- An expanded toolset available to be leveraged by the City's economic development staff to more easily attract, and retain niche businesses,
- Strengthened pride of place for residents (as noted in feedback on future survey's and outreach),
- Improved social media engagement, increased reach, and increased conversation with the target market,
- Increased pedestrian traffic in the downtown core,
- Increase in length of visitation,
- Greater public engagement with programmed and events,
- Increased tourism and tourism receipts,
- Mitigation of safety concerns,
- Increased accessibility of public places and business storefronts,
- Stronger dialogue with the business community, developers, landlords and the city,
- Increased website traffic,
- Additional beautification resources focused on all areas of the OSDIA, and
- Increased opportunity for public and private partnerships.