



Stratford City Council  
Committee of the Whole Open Session  
AGENDA

**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026

**Time:** 10:00 A.M.

**Location:** Council Chamber, City Hall

**Council Present:** Mayor Ritsma - Chair Presiding, Councillor Beatty, Councillor Burbach, Councillor Henderson, Councillor Hunter, Councillor McCabe, Councillor Nijjar, Councillor Sebben, Councillor Wordofa

**Staff Present:** André Morin - Chief Administrative Officer, Tatiana Dafoe - City Clerk, Audrey Pascual - Deputy Clerk, Kim McElroy - Director of Social Services, Tim Wolfe - Director of Community Services, Taylor Crinklaw - Director of Infrastructure Services, Karmen Krueger - Director of Corporate Services, Adam Betteridge - Director of Building and Planning Services, Neil Anderson - Director of Emergency Services/Fire Chief, Stuart Filson - Supervisor of Planning Policy & Placemaking

To watch the Committee of the Whole Open meeting live, please click the following link:  
<https://stratford-ca.zoom.us/j/89678054440?pwd=PmdBTf8CWfsdW4Zyj8YLGhjBV07dV4.1>

A video recording of the meeting will also be available through a link on the City's website  
<https://calendar.stratford.ca/meetings> following the meeting.

Pages

**1. Call to Order**

Mayor Ritsma, Chair presiding, to call the Meeting to order.

Councillor Biehn has provided regrets for this meeting.

Respectful Conduct Statement

**2. Declarations of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof**

The *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* requires any member of Council declaring a pecuniary interest and the general nature thereof, where the interest of a

member of Council has not been disclosed by reason of the member's absence from the meeting, to disclose the interest at the first open meeting attended by the member of Council and to otherwise comply with the *Act*.

Name, Item and General Nature Thereof

**3. Adjournment to Committee of the Whole In-camera Session**

Motion by \_\_\_\_\_

**THAT Committee of the Whole move into closed session to consider the following matter:**

**4.1 Confidential Report of the Chief Administrative Officer with respect to an update on the potential redevelopment of municipal property (CM-26-05) - Litigation or potential litigation, including matters before administrative tribunals affecting the municipality or local board (section 239.(2)(e)); and Advice that is subject to solicitor-client privilege including communications necessary for that purpose (section 239.(2)(f)).**

**4. Reporting Out of Closed Session**

**5. Grand Trunk Renewal Project Workshop #2**

Workshop #2 gives realistic options for the Grand Trunk site by examining constraints, costs, municipal capacity, and decision sequencing. Building on the shared concepts from Workshop #1 on January 27, 2026, it applies those frameworks to Stratford-specific realities. Councillors will gain a clearer picture of what is feasible, what trade-offs exist, and how different decisions now either unlock or constrain future choices on the project. No decisions will be made at the workshop. The goal is to build consensus and prepare the Council for decisions anticipated in the spring.

**5.1 Welcome**

Lead: André Morin, Chief Administrative Officer

**5.2 GTR: A Cornerstone Project Shaping the Future of Stratford**

1 - 44

Lead: André Morin, Chief Administrative Officer

Reviews the project's outcomes history, achievements, and its alignment with municipal plans and priorities. Reminder of project work ahead and considerations.

**5.3 Shared Facility: Investing in Our Growing City**

45 - 103

Lead: André Morin, Chief Administrative Officer

Speakers: Krista Robinson - Chief Executive Officer of the Stratford Public Library; Mike Ennis - Chief Executive Officer of the YMCA of Three Rivers

Reports progress on the shared facility partnership, with some early concepts and costs. The amenity's impact and benefits for residents will also be reviewed.

#### **5.4 Transforming the Superstructure**

Lead: André Morin, Chief Administrative Officer

Summarizes the cost projections of work needed to adapt the superstructure/building for various development outcomes under consideration.

#### **5.5 Closing Remarks and Introduction to Workshop #3**

Lead: André Morin, Chief Administrative Officer

Reviews the session's key points and provides an overview of the topics planned for the third educational workshop.

### **6. Date of Next Workshop:**

April 9, 2026, at 2:00 pm in Council Chambers located at Stratford City Hall, 1 Wellington Street.

### **7. Adjournment:**

Motion by \_\_\_\_\_

**THAT the February 26, 2026, Committee of the Whole Open Session Meeting adjourn.**



# Grand Trunk Renewal

## Vision & Guiding Principles

The Grand Trunk site will transform into a generational asset that supports the idea of the City of Stratford as a great place to live. That means a prosperous, inclusive, sustainable, and welcoming community for everyone.

The renewal process for the site began by updating the project's original Vision Statement and Guiding Principles. That document outlines how the community wants this site to look and function. It also lays out the values that should guide any decisions around the site's development.

We did this through an extensive campaign of public engagement, asking YOU for your ideas on how to redevelop this important piece of municipal property.



**Principles developed by you... for you.**

Once we finished the engagement process, we gathered all the community feedback and determined that it fell into **six important principles:**



**Sustainable + Fiscally Responsible**



**Celebrate Past + Future Forward**



**Inspiring + Inclusive**



**Distinct + Diverse + Multifunctional**

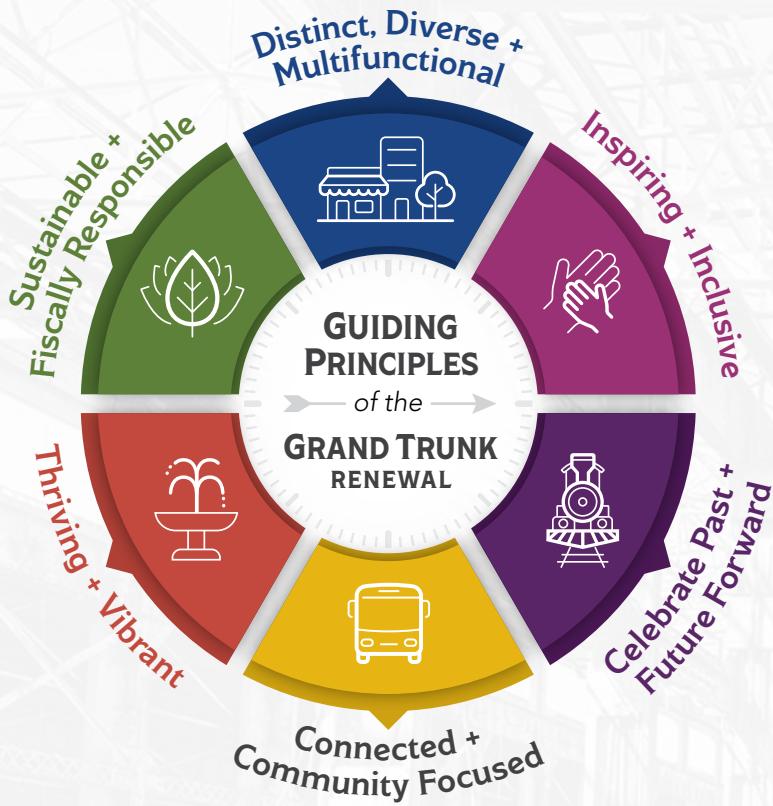


**Connected + Community-Focused**



**Thriving + Vibrant**

These values will guide the city as it develops places, services and amenities in a dynamic centre of activity that serves both Stratford's residents and its visitors.



Based on what you told us, here are the Grand Trunk Renewal Vision & Guiding Principles:

#### Sustainable + Fiscally Responsible

Create a Sustainable, Resilient and Fiscally Responsible Community

- Net-zero carbon emissions
- Resilient to climate change
- Generate new revenue
- Partnerships and strategies that serve the public

#### Thriving + Vibrant

Cultivate Cohesive and Vibrant Community Spaces

- Spaces for living, learning, health, wellness, recreation, entrepreneurship
- Social connections and inter-generational relationships
- Gathering spaces that foster a strong sense of community

#### Connected + Community Focused

Foster Connectivity and Community Wellbeing

- Attainable and affordable housing
- Amenities: day care, shopping, community gardens and kitchens, services
- Safe, inclusive, welcoming environments
- Connectivity: Grand Trunk + Downtown + Neighbourhoods + adjacent developments

#### Inspiring + Inclusive

Create an Inspiring, Inclusive and Dynamic Community Meeting Point

- Foster sense of belonging and welcoming for everyone
- Promote play, curiosity, social gathering
- Celebrate innovation, culture, creativity
- Vibrant, accessible design for all seasons

#### Distinct, Diverse + Multifunctional

Design Distinct, Diverse and Multifunctional Urban Spaces

- Higher-density buildings for diverse housing
- Highlight unique history of Grand Trunk site
- Mix of living, learning, recreation and gathering spaces
- Public spaces support recreation, culture, community interaction
- Using Transit Hub for transit-friendly development
- Safe spaces for pedestrians and cyclists

#### Celebrate Past + Future Forward

Honour the Past, Address Current Needs, Innovate for the Future

- New uses that celebrate site's history and heritage
- Showcase social, cultural and economic history
- Address present needs, anticipate future challenges
- Make space flexible, adaptive



# Grand Trunk Master Plan

February 2018

URBAN  
STRATEGIES  
INC



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# 01 INTRODUCTION

The Grand Trunk site, an 18 acre site on the south edge of Stratford's Downtown, has long been an important site in the city. Once home to over a third of Stratford's workforce, the site lay vacant for a number of years save for municipal parking and the Stratford-Perth YMCA, which has grown into an anchor for the Stratford community, serving over 2800 members annually. Recently, the site has been given life again with the opening of the University of Waterloo's School of Digital Media, the first building of a planned University of Waterloo Stratford Campus. The Grand Trunk site stands to renew its place in, and as the heart of, the city and become a place for residents and visitors alike through the Grand Trunk Master Plan.

Urban Strategies Inc has prepared a Master Plan for the Grand Trunk site on behalf of the City Stratford. The Master Plan provides a framework for how the site could develop over time and it addresses a range of urban planning and urban design matters such as parking, built form, open space provision, the public realm, and the street network. The Master Plan may also serve as a basis for future amendments to the City of Stratford Official Plan and any other regulatory documents, such as zoning, informing growth on the site.

This Master Plan builds from a wealth of work already completed to understand the site and the Grand Trunk Railway Shop (Grand Trunk Building) itself. Prior work includes a series of engineering reports and analyses, a heritage assessment, and a technical review of site opportunities and constraints. The Master Plan has been informed and influenced by a multifaceted and phased public engagement process which included community roundtables, open houses, online feedback, and "talking walls" set up around the site. The vision for the future of the site articulated in this document is a direct result of community feedback and input.

This report introduces the site's physical and regulatory context, provides an overview of the work completed to date including the public engagement process, establishes a vision and appropriately flexible framework for the Grand Trunk site's evolution, and provides recommendations on phasing and next steps to implement that vision and framework. The Master Plan envisions a range of uses in association with, and complementary to, existing uses on the site. Importantly, these new uses will form the core of a Community Hub on the site, anticipated to be housed in the existing Grand Trunk building. If it is determined that the Grand Trunk Building is unable to be retained given its age, stability of other limiting factors, a new building may be explored to house the Community Hub. The intention is to retain and reuse this building, however, due diligence must be adopted in the regeneration of the site.



**Figure 1 ►** The Grand Trunk Site Today



The Grand Trunk Community Hub will be a convergence of education, community, entrepreneurship, and innovation to strengthen and diversify the Stratford economy, providing services and amenities for both residents and visitors.

The Hub will facilitate a cluster of uses that create a strong identity, sense of place, and centre of gravity for the Grand Trunk site and Building, expanding and connecting to the existing Downtown. It will generate a critical mass of activity that appeals to a diverse cross-section of Stratford's population.

# 02 SITE CONTEXT

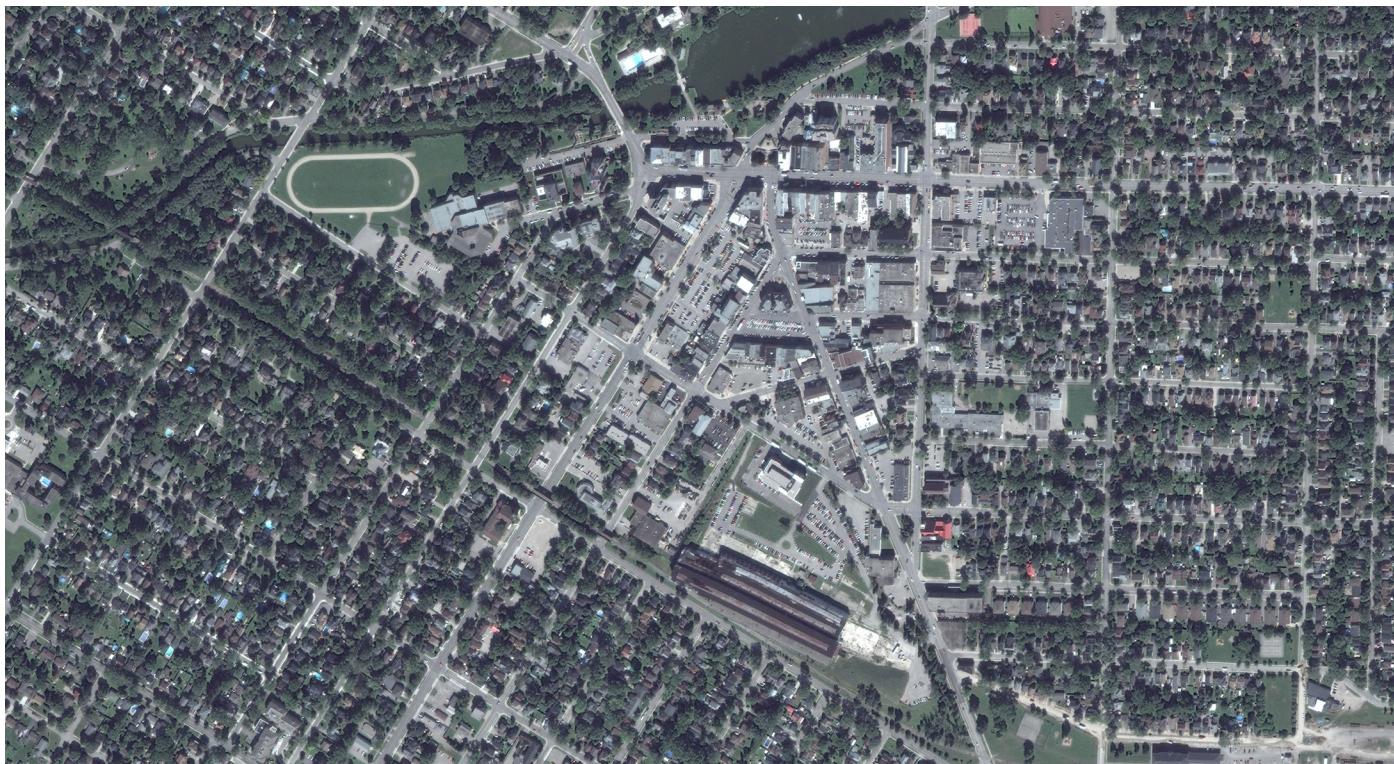
## ► Downtown Stratford

Downtown Stratford, or Stratford City Centre, measures approximately three and a half square kilometres and is defined by its remarkably intact heritage character. This character expresses itself as consistent and proud streetwalls comprised of three to four storey brick Victorian buildings which create an extensive “main-street” network typified by Ontario Street and Wellington Street and housing over 300 stores and businesses. Because of the triangular shape created by the main streets in Downtown Stratford, the “centre” of the City Centre naturally falls at the intersection of Downie and Wellington Streets. The intersection is anchored by Stratford City Hall, and Market Square behind it, which together create a coherent focus for the City Centre district.

Given the picturesque setting of Downtown Stratford, enhanced by the complementary natural setting of the Avon River to its north and the presence of the Stratford Festival, it is unsurprising that tourism is Stratford’s most significant economic driver next to manufacturing.

Much of that tourism is the result of the Stratford Festival which attracts over 500,000 visitors a year to the city and employs approximately 1,200 people, more than any other single entity in the city. The influence of the creative sector extends beyond the Festival to the dozens of smaller performing arts, musical, and artistic groups that practice and perform in the city.

Downtown Stratford is also the home for Stratford’s growing population, which increased from 30,903 in 2011 to 31,465 in 2016, growth of 1.8%. Many new residents are coming in response to the city’s effort to further diversify Stratford’s economy and tap into the emergent technology sector centred in Kitchener-Waterloo. The opening of the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus and the provision of free wifi throughout the Downtown by Rhyzome Networks (the city-owned data infrastructure company) are reflective of this 21st century economic development strategy. As the city, and the Downtown, continues to grow and evolve, there is a need to ensure that the amenities, services, and community spaces that serve the community grow and evolve in turn.



**Figure 2 ►** Downtown Stratford

## ► Recent Downtown Initiatives

There have been several recent initiatives and construction projects in, and proximate to, Downtown Stratford that help to inform the future context and design of the Grand Trunk site:

### **Market Square**

The redevelopment of Market Square has transformed the space behind City Hall from a surface parking lot and bus drop-off to a public plaza. The pedestrianized area is supported by seating, high quality paving material, and street trees, which will provide amenity for residents and support the hosting of special events in the Downtown.

### **Transit Terminal**

The revitalization of Market Square created an opportunity to improve how bus transportation and parking is provided in Downtown Stratford. A new transit terminal with weather protected seating areas and washrooms will be constructed on the Grand Trunk site in proximity to Downie Street. The location was determined via public input and supported by City Council.

### **Tom Patterson Theatre Rebuild**

Currently housed in a former curling arena, the Tom Patterson Theatre can no longer support the infrastructure and technological needs of a modern theatre facility. The Stratford Festival is proposing to rebuild a contemporary theatre facility on the same site. An opportunity exists on the Grand Trunk site to potentially accommodate some of the past users of the Tom Patterson Theatre facility and site.



**Figure 3 ►** Market Square Redesign

## ► The Grand Trunk Site in the City

The Grand Trunk site is the largest undeveloped site within Downtown Stratford. It is located an approximately two-minute walk from the heart of Stratford, Market Square and City Hall, and is adjacent to Shakespeare Park. Because of its location on the southern edge of Downtown Stratford, the Site acts as an interface between the city's core and the surrounding neighbourhoods, in particular the St. David Street neighbourhood to the south. Moreover, the Stratford Via Rail Station is located an approximately five-minute walk from the site.



**Figure 4 ►** The Site in the City

## ► A Confluence of Key Routes

The Grand Trunk Site, and Downtown Stratford more generally, is located at the confluence of key routes into - and out of - the city. Travelling east along Highway 8 brings you to Kitchener within 45 minutes and further on to the Greater Toronto Area in approximately one hour. Taking Erie Street south out of Stratford, London is an approximately 45 minute drive away on Highway 7. And to the west, past Goderich, Sarnia and the United States border are approximately 1.5 hours away by car. Potential future transit investments in the GO Transit or existing Via Rail network would also better support Stratford's role as a regional crossroads and cultural destination, and as an emerging "living lab" community that supports the Toronto-Waterloo Technology Corridor.



**Figure 5 ►** A Confluence of Key Routes

## ► Downtown Stratford's Public Realm

Although Stratford's Downtown core is highly walkable and offers a variety of amenities to pedestrians including restaurants, entertainment venues, theatres and retail options, residents and visitors travel outside the core to access the city's riverside park system and other parks and open spaces. In addition to the revitalization of Market Square behind City Hall, the Grand Trunk site is a significant opportunity to contribute new green and open space in the heart of the city.



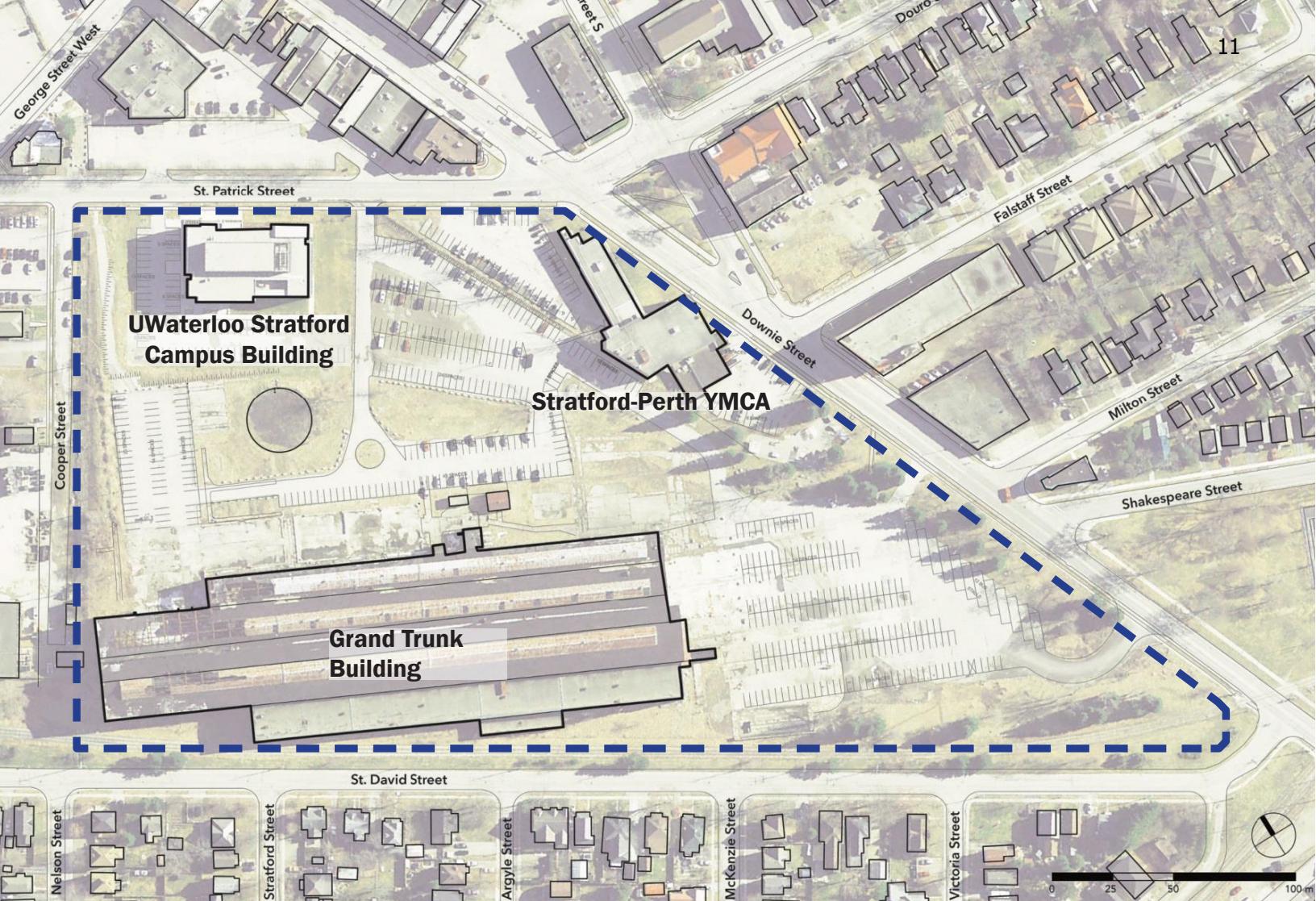
**Figure 6 ►** Downtown Stratford's Public Realm

## ► Parking in Downtown Stratford

The economic viability of Downtown Stratford depends, in part, on the availability of parking, both for residents traveling to jobs in the core and for visitors arriving from elsewhere. As a result, parking represents a significant portion of the land uses Downtown. Today, the Grand Trunk site provide approximately 40% of the municipal parking supply in Stratford, acting as a free parking lot for Downtown Stratford employees as well as playing a critical role as overflow parking during periods of high traffic volume in the city for visitors. As the Grand Trunk Site evolves, replacing and/or augmenting that parking supply, and considering new transportation demand initiatives, will be a core objective in order to support the overall success of Downtown Stratford.



**Figure 7 ►** Parking in Downtown Stratford



**Figure 8 ►** The Grand Trunk site Today

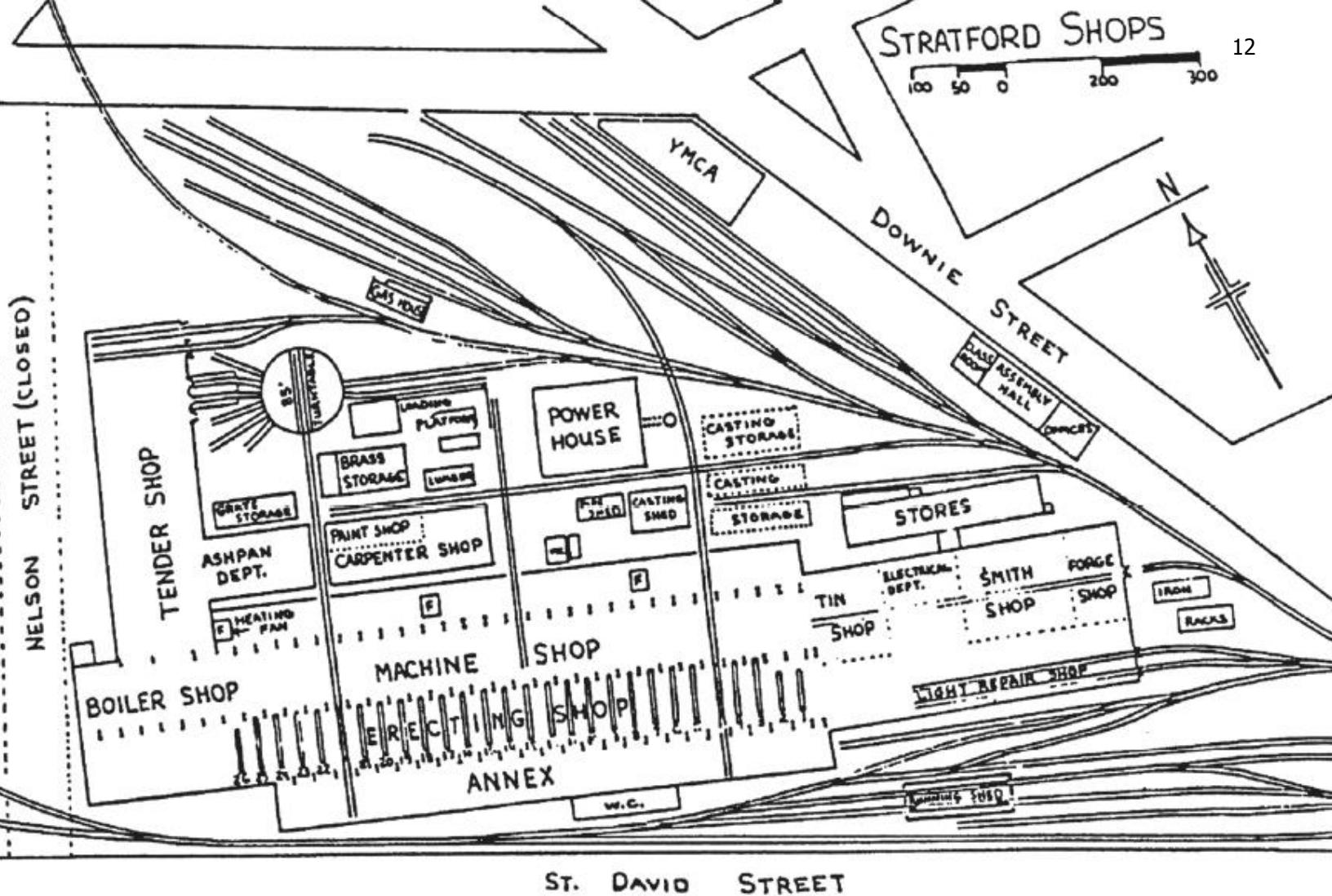
## ► The Grand Trunk Site

The Grand Trunk site (the site) comprises approximately 18 acres within Downtown Stratford bounded by St. Patrick Street to the north, Downie Street to the east, St. David Street to the south, and Cooper Street and the west. The core of Downtown Stratford lies just north of the site, the site is surrounded by residential neighbourhoods to the east, south, and west.

The Grand Trunk site was originally developed as one large single parcel and, as a result, has poor internal connectivity and limited external connectivity. Currently, the site can only be accessed from St. Patrick and Downie Streets. A significant grade differential prevents access from the west side of the site from Cooper Street and an active rail line creates a connectivity challenge on the southern edge of the site between St. David Street and the site. Within the site, there is no rational street and block network. Instead, internal connections facilitate access between surface parking areas reserved for municipal parking.

Parking provided for the Stratford-Perth YMCA and for the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus building is separated from the municipal parking areas.

The Grand Trunk site is currently occupied by three buildings. The first phase of the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus is located at the northwest corner of the site and is approximately 42,000 square feet. The Stratford-Perth YMCA is located along the Downie Street frontage on the northern edge of the site and is approximately 45,000 square feet. The Grand Trunk Building, for which the site is named, is over 160,000 square feet and is located along the southern edge of the property. Other elements of historical industrial features are visible on the site, including the footprint of the original rail turntable and remnants of the original rail tracks, sides, and spurs.

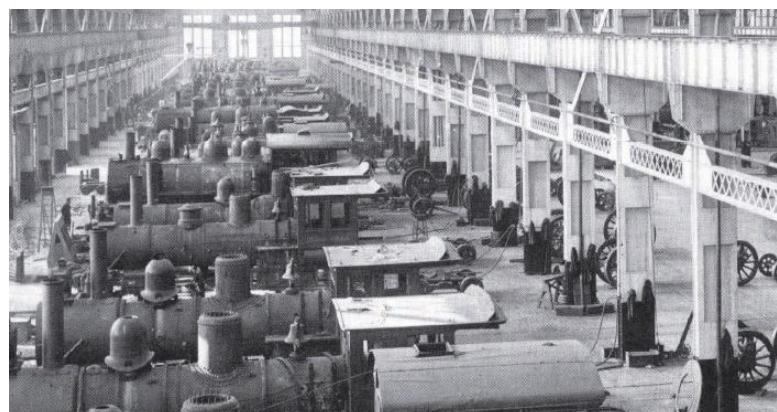


**Figure 9 ►** The Original Grand Trunk site and building

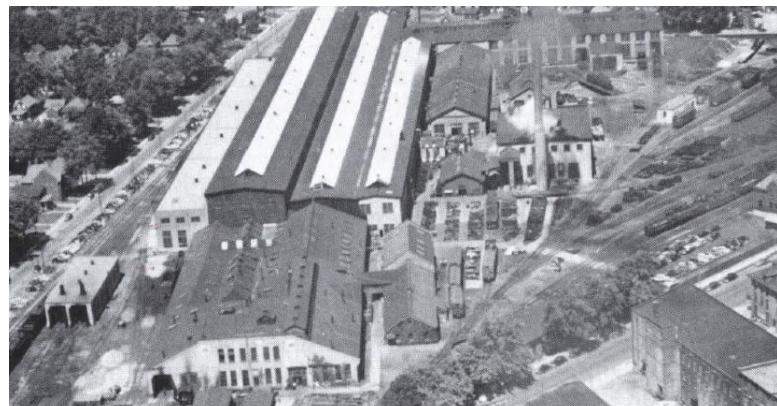
### ► A Brief Site History

The Grand Trunk Building was opened in 1871 as a locomotive repair facility and later, through the early twentieth century, expanded and grew to its maximum extent by the 1940's. At its height, the Grand Trunk building employed approximately 40% of Stratford's workforce. By the 1960's, the need for steam locomotives had declined significantly in favour of diesel-powered trains, resulting in the site being transferred to Cooper-Bessemer, a boiler manufacturer.

The site was abandoned in the mid-1980's and in the 1990's the City of Stratford purchased the site pursuant to its program for the acquisition, sale and development of industrial/commercial lands. The City subsequently sold a portion of the site to a private interest. Several years later, following discussions between the City and the University of Waterloo about bringing a satellite campus to Stratford, the City expropriated that portion of the site that was still in private ownership. The University subsequently began construction of the first phase of the Stratford Campus, which hosted the inaugural class of its Global Business and Digital Arts Program in 2012. Since 2012, the Stratford Campus has enjoyed considerable growth in both its undergraduate and graduate programs.



**Figure 10 ►** Train Repair



**Figure 11 ►** The Original Grand Trunk Building

# 03 POLICY CONTEXT

A review of the provincial and local policy directions and initiatives supports the reinvestment and redevelopment of the Grand Trunk site.

## ► PROVINCIAL POLICY STATEMENT (2014)

The anticipated redevelopment of the site as envisioned in the Grand Trunk Master Plan, including the Community Hub, is consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement (2014).

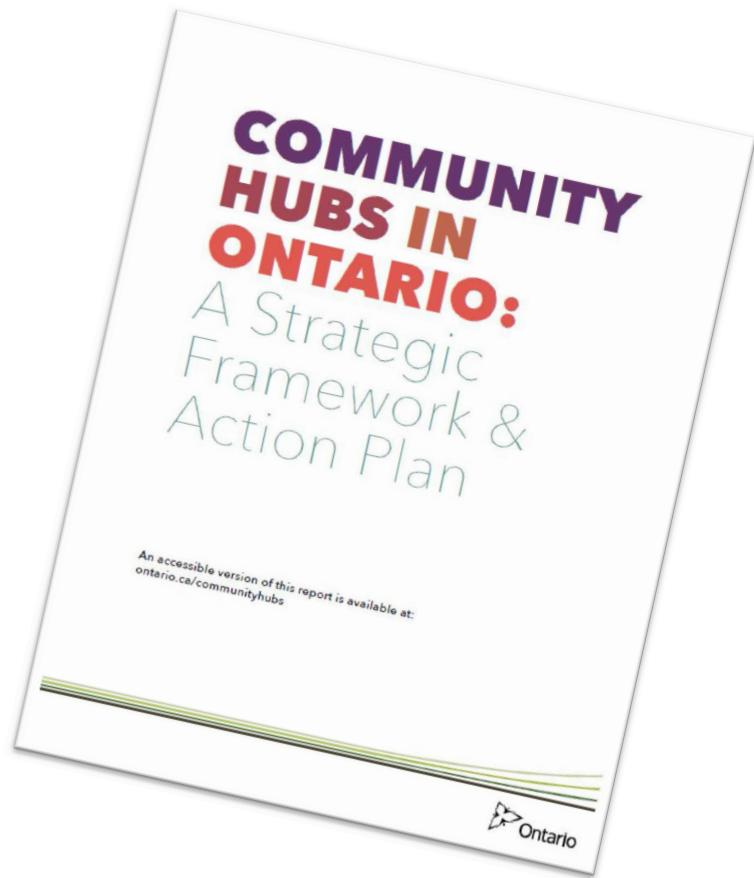
## ► COMMUNITY HUB STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND ACTION PLAN

In March, 2015 the Government of Ontario launched an initiative to improve and enhance community services across the Province by facilitating and supporting the creation of community hubs, which is outlined in a document titled Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework & Action Plan. Community hubs are described as central points within a community that provide a range of health, social service, recreational, environmental, and educational uses within an integrated facility. They can be located in existing schools, community centres, places of worship, libraries, or other public buildings.

The future redevelopment of the site envisions a Community Hub in an adaptive reuse of all or part of the Grand Trunk building, as well as an expansion of the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus. Given the range of uses envisioned for the entire site, both the redeveloped Grand Trunk building and University campus could be considered a community hub. The vision for a Community Hub on the site as a whole will be outlined throughout this Master Plan.

## ► ONTARIO'S FIVE YEAR CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

Ontario's Five Year Climate Change Action Plan (2016-2020) is an important document relevant to the Master Plan as it establishes the key actions for managing climate change until 2020. This Action Plan aligns with the Community Hub Strategic Framework and Action Plan insofar as its aim is to, in part, support sustainable and resilient community services and facilities. Specifically, it identifies that the reuse of heritage properties is inherently sustainable and could be an excellent platform to showcase low-carbon technology and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The reuse of the Grand Trunk Building is an intention under this Master Plan which will be explored in further detailed investigations.



## ► STRATFORD OFFICIAL PLAN (2013) Downtown Core

The 1993 Stratford Official Plan, as consolidated designates the site “Downtown Core”. OPA No. 21, currently under appeal as related to the site, changes this designation from “Downtown Core” to “Cooper Site – Major Institutional Focus Area”.

In general, Stratford’s Official Plan describes the Downtown Core as a place that is “vibrant, compact, multi-functional, attractive and people friendly”. In support of the continued success of the Downtown, Official Plan policies encourage the rehabilitation of older buildings and recognizes the significance of Downtown heritage landmarks and their role in enhancing their surroundings. In addition, the Official Plan states that it is a policy of the City to maintain, make better use of, and increase, where feasible, the supply of parking Downtown. The vision for the Grand Trunk Master Plan meets the Official Plan policies with regard to the Downtown Core.

## ► OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT 21 - COOPER SITE - MAJOR INSTITUTIONAL FOCUS AREA

Starting in 2012, the City undertook the process of updating its Official Plan to ensure consistency with provincial policy and legislation. This process culminated in the adoption of the Stratford Official Plan Amendment 21 (OPA 21) by the City on December 14, 2014. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs approved OPA 21 on July 21, 2016.

OPA 21 is in force and effect City-wide, save and except as it relates to the Grand Trunk site. Currently, the policies of OPA 21 as they relate to the site remain under appeal as a result of an appeal by a former owner of the site and claimant under the Expropriations Act.

OPA 21, although under appeal in relation to the site, would amend the Stratford Official Plan with respect to the ‘Cooper Block’ (the Grand Trunk site) as a major institutional use focus area. The OPA would permit a broad range of uses and include goals and objectives as follows:

- To encourage public and institutional uses which will restore a sense of purpose and vibrancy to the Cooper Site making it a focus of activity in the southern part of the Downtown Core.

- To ensure that development in the Cooper Site complements and supports the role of the Downtown Core as the primary focus of the City with its own distinct character and identity.
- To ensure that the historic use of the Cooper Site is appropriately commemorated with an emphasis on the importance of rail to the development of the City.

The City’s Official Plan, both pre-OPA 21 and as amended by OPA 21, support the process the City has undertaken to prepare and adopt this Master Plan. This Master Plan is intended to be a flexible and visionary document that will inform future development and redevelopment of the site. Any future Official Plan amendment(s) that may be required (if any) to implement any aspect of this Master Plan will proceed through the ordinary planning application process.

## ► ZONING BY-LAW NO. 201-2000

The Grand Trunk site is zoned C3-2 which is a mixed-use zone permitting a wide range of uses including apartment dwellings, commercial uses, senior’s housing, institutional uses, and industrial uses. A maximum height of 15 metres is permitted on the Grand Trunk site and any new development must include a minimum of 10% landscaped open space in the proposal.

The vision for the Grand Trunk Master Plan is generally in conformity with the existing zoning regulations for the site. Depending on the ultimate form that development/redevelopment of the site takes following further investigations, future Zoning By-law amendments may be required to implement any aspect of this Master Plan. These amendments would proceed through the ordinary planning application process.

# 04 PROCESS

The development of the Grand Trunk Master Plan has been supported by thorough research, background studies, and, crucially, an extensive community engagement process. For over a year, Urban Strategies, the City of Stratford, site partners, community members, and other consultants have worked together to understand the opportunities offered on the Grand Trunk site, coordinate efforts with regard to program needs, and develop and invite feedback on guiding principles and a vision for the Grand Trunk Community Hub. The first step in the development of this Master Plan was the undertaking of a technical review to understand the work performed to date with regard to the site and building's physical and environmental condition and to obtain clarity from the existing on-site partners of the University of Waterloo, the YMCA of Stratford-Perth, and the City of Stratford with regard to their priorities and plans for the future of their operations on the site.

As background, the technical review was itself informed by an intensive three-month process which involved a tour of the site and its surroundings, an extensive review of the previous body of work regarding the Grand Trunk site and Building, one-on-one interviews, and a two-day working session with key stakeholders and potential partners. The technical review also analyzed precedent community hubs elsewhere in Ontario.

## ► Document Review

The Grand Trunk site and Building have been studied extensively. In preparation for this technical review, Urban Strategies benefited from the following reports:

- *Potential Remedial Costs Related to the Redevelopment of the Cooper Site Property* (RJ Burnside & Associates Ltd., 2009)
- *Heritage Consultation and Report* (Goldsmith Borgal & Company Ltd., 2012)
- *Building Condition Assessment Report* (Read Jones Cristoffersen, 2012)
- *Community Workshop and Recommendations* (Malone Given Parsons Ltd., 2013)
- *Potential Salvage/Remediation Feasibility Study* (Read Jones Cristoffersen, 2013)
- *Roofing Components Visual Review* (Read Jones Cristoffersen, 2014)
- *Roofing Components Visual Review Including Hazardous Materials Abatement Costs* (Read Jones Cristoffersen, 2015)
- *Costing for Partial Demolitions Options* (Read Jones Cristoffersen, 2015)

## ► Technical Review Working Session

On December 20 and 21, 2016, Urban Strategies facilitated a two-day technical review working session at the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus. The purpose of this session was to discuss the technical considerations applying to the site, confirm the needs of the University of Waterloo and other potential partners, and to identify implementation options and an investment framework to support the achievement of the overall vision for the future of the site. Attendees at the session included representatives from:

- City of Stratford Staff
- Festival Hydro
- Stratford-Perth YMCA
- University of Waterloo Stratford Campus
- Urban Strategies
- N. Barry Lyons Consulting
- CBRE

## ► Key Partners

Along with the City of Stratford, the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus and the YMCA of Stratford-Perth are key partners in the development of the site and Grand Trunk Community Hub. Their program needs are summarized below and are integrated into the vision for the future of the Grand Trunk site.

### University of Waterloo Stratford Campus

In 2009 the City of Stratford entered into an agreement with the University of Waterloo to establish a Stratford Campus. The agreement indicated that the Campus would be on a single site of at least 8 acres located in the Downtown Core; the Grand Trunk site was chosen as the location and development of the Campus was contemplated to occur in phases. The initial building occupies approximately 1.4 acres of the site. The University of Waterloo is interested in integrating a Student Campus Life component into the Grand Trunk Community Hub, in addition to new academic buildings and student housing which is planned to be constructed on the Grand Trunk site as the Campus grows.

### YMCA of Stratford-Perth

The YMCA of Stratford-Perth has served the Stratford community on the Grand Trunk site since 1869 and is an integral part of the city. The existing building is in need of drastic renovation and repair to address accessibility, space, and operating inefficiencies. In addition, the YMCA operates the only indoor publicly-accessible aquatic facility in Stratford. A new YMCA of Stratford-Perth is envisioned to be integrated into the site and Grand Trunk Community Hub, accommodating a new pool and additional child-care spaces. The new YMCA is anticipated to require approximately 45,000 square feet of the Hub. The existing YMCA building is expected to be demolished.

## ► Other Potential Partners

### City of Stratford Library

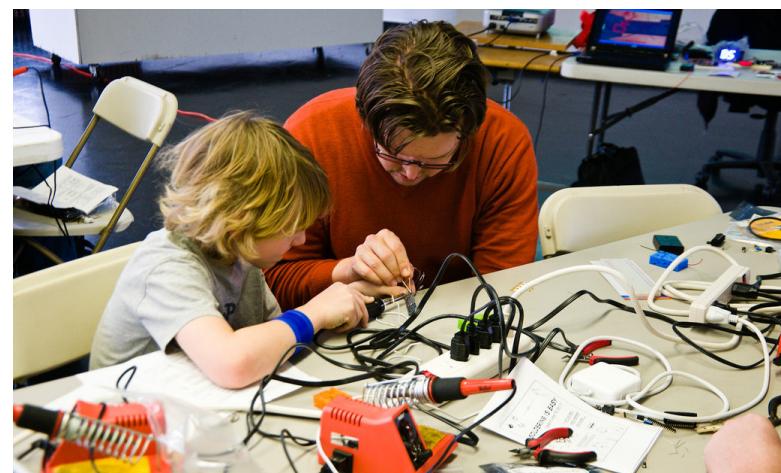
The Stratford Library also has an interest in participating in the Grand Trunk Community Hub. It intends to potentially expand its services to include a Maker Space, a place where users can access new technology and related services such as 3D printing machines and simple programmable robotics.



**Figure 12 ►** University of Waterloo Stratford Campus



**Figure 13 ►** YMCA of Stratford-Perth



**Figure 14 ►** Potential MakerSpace Activity

## ► Precedent Hubs

The technical review also entailed a review of precedent spaces across Ontario to better understand the roles and functions these hubs serve in their communities. Precedents reviewed include the following:

- Evergreen Brickworks, Toronto
- Wychwood Barns, Toronto
- The Tannery, Kitchener-Waterloo
- Lansdowne Park, Ottawa
- Market Square, Guelph

All of the above examples share the following similar characteristics that inform the vision for the Grand Trunk Community Hub:

- Incorporate flexible and programmable open space for people to gather and for events to be held.
- Accommodate and anticipate activity in all seasons.
- Provide a range of uses and opportunities for both the private and public sector.
- Build from the unique characteristics of their site and context.
- Adaptively reuse landmark buildings, whole or part, to give them new purpose and new life.



**Figure 15 ►** Evergreen Brickworks, Toronto



**Figure 16 ►** Wychwood Barns, Toronto



**Figure 17 ►** Lansdowne Park, Ottawa

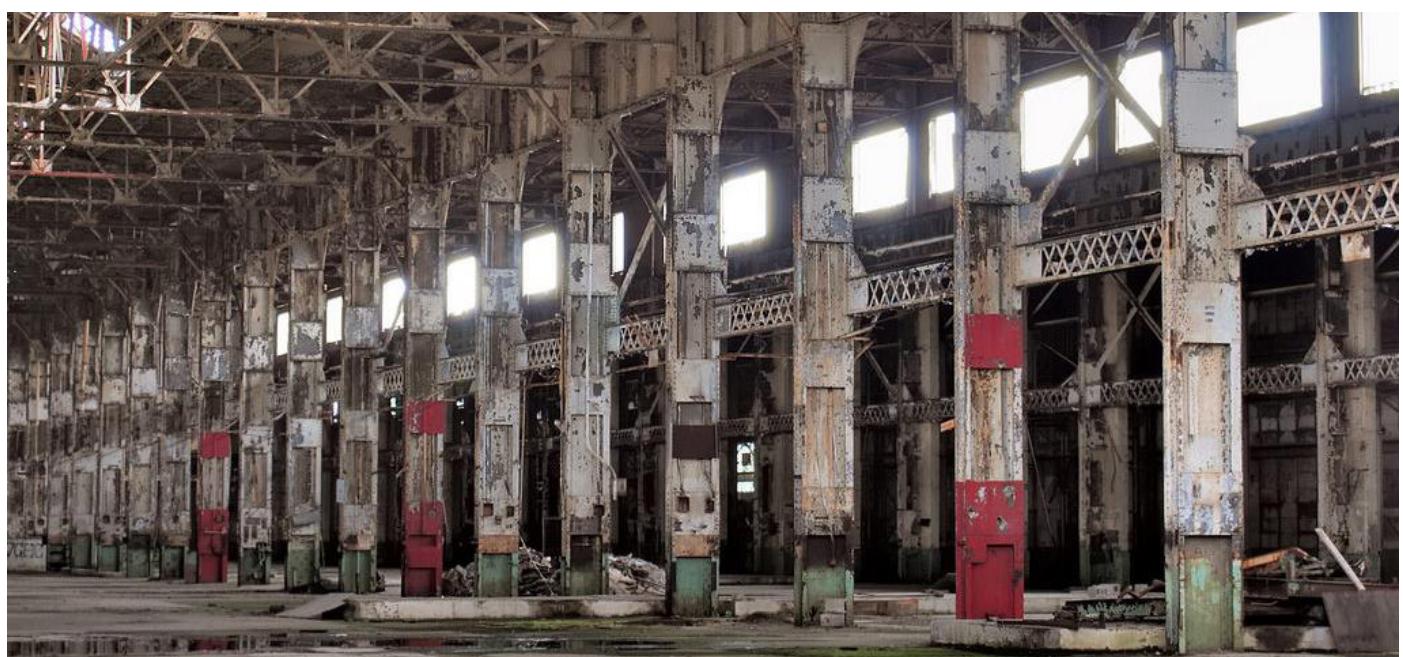


**Figure 18 ►** The Tannery, Kitchener-Waterloo

## ► Technical Opportunities and Constraints

The technical review process identified several opportunities and constraints for the evolution of the Grand Trunk site into the Grand Trunk Master Plan. These opportunities and constraints have been based on the input and advice of the technical review participants, and include:

- Given the site's industrial history, there are chemical impacts to soil and/or groundwater quality across the property; however, the nature and distribution of these impacts varies across the site. Based on the results of environmental investigations carried out at the site over the past 25 years, it is expected that where present, impacts to soil and/or groundwater quality could be managed through a combination of targeted remediation and/or implementation of risk management measures.
- the existing rail line, operated by the Goderich-Exeter Railway, which separates the Grand Trunk site from the St. David Street Neighbourhood to the south is expected to operate into at least the near future, complicating the ability to connect the Grand Trunk site to the communities to the south;
- key partners, including the Stratford-Perth YMCA and the University of Waterloo, are committed to participating in the creation and evolution of the Community Hub;
- other partners have indicated an interest in the Grand Trunk Community Hub;
- future investment in rail infrastructure could see the GO Rail network extended to Stratford, terminating at the existing VIA Rail station immediately adjacent to the Block;
- the “annex” and fire-damaged portions of the Grand Trunk Building should be considered for demolition to also facilitate the development of the Community Hub and rehabilitate the building;
- there is a desire to retain and/or augment the current supply of municipal parking currently available on the Grand Trunk site;
- both public and private sector uses will be required to realize the vision for the Grand Trunk Community Hub; and
- celebrate the long-standing history of the Grand Trunk site and Building through adaptive reuse of portions of the Grand Trunk Building and in other ways as possible.



**Figure 19 ► Grand Trunk Building interior**

## ► Community Engagement Process

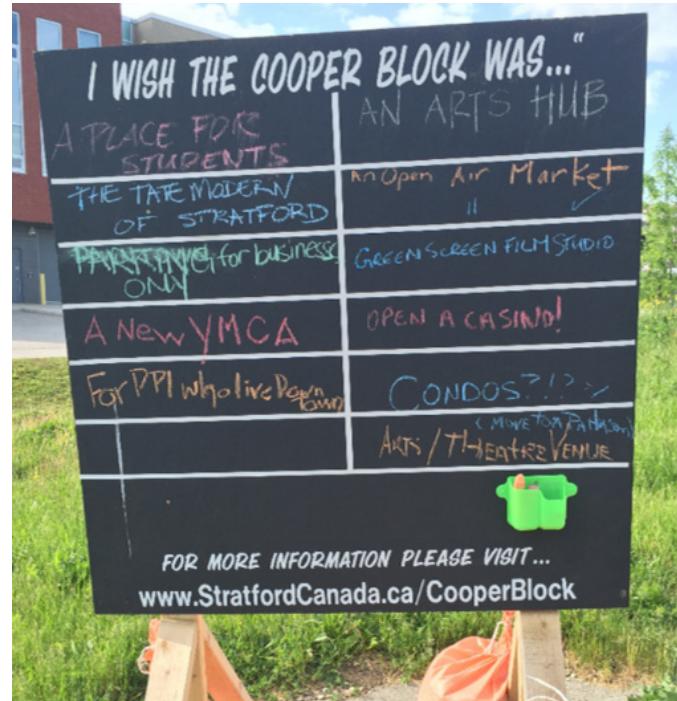
The community engagement process formally began in June, 2017, after the results of the technical review were presented to Stratford City Council in May, 2017. Community organizations, members of the general public, and other stakeholders such as Festival Hydro were invited to contribute their feedback in a number of ways in order to ensure that as many people could participate in this process as possible. The following public consultation tools and methods were utilized to invite feedback and input:

- Community Roundtables
- “Talking Walls”
- Kitchen Table Kits
- Online Feedback / Website / Email
- Two Public Open Houses

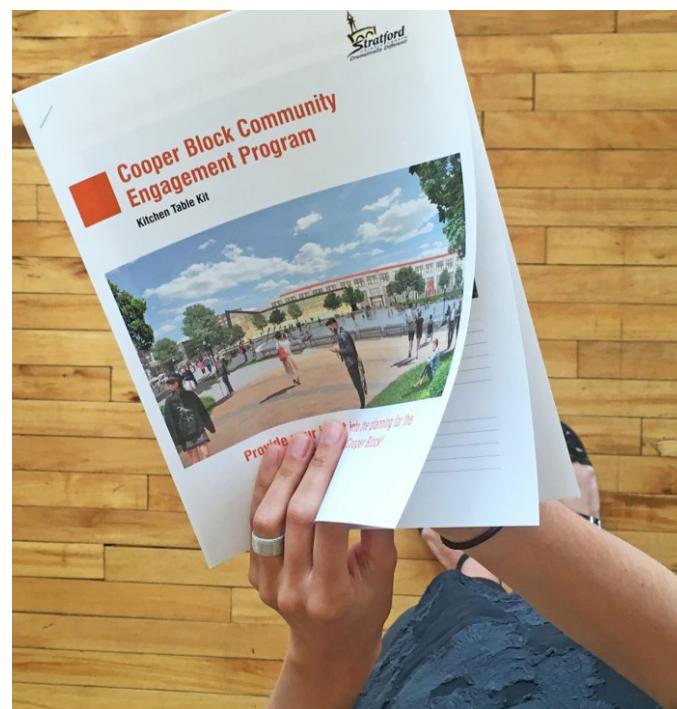
After the initial round of consultation activities conducted in mid-2017, the following statistics were identified, providing an indication of the robustness of the community engagement program and speaking to the excitement Stratford residents have for a shared vision for the future of the Grand Trunk site. In total, this first phase of the community engagement program resulted in:

- 20+ different community groups and organizations consulted at community roundtables;
- 100+ attendees at the public open house;
- 50+ kitchen table kits received;
- 30+ unique ideas submitted via the “talking walls”; and
- 15+ direct emails received.

The feedback obtained through the initial community engagement process helped inform both the guiding principles of the Grand Trunk Master Plan concept as well as the particular potential uses and physical structuring elements of the Grand Trunk Community Hub. The Draft Grand Trunk Master Plan was then presented to the community at a second Open House on November 7, 2017. Feedback from the community on the draft Master Plan was provided over the next month, and has been addressed throughout this document.



**Figure 20 ► “Talking Wall” Example**



**Figure 21 ► Kitchen Table Kit**

A summary of all feedback received from the community is provided in the following pages.

## ► What We Heard - Initial Consultation

Residents, community members, city staff, and other stakeholders provided a wide range of suggestions and ideas for the future of the Grand Trunk site. The top four ideas for program uses shared via the “talking walls” were:

1. A community centre / YMCA.
2. Public parking.
3. Entertainment uses (i.e. laser tag, mini golf, theatre).
4. Arts and culture space / performance venue.

At the community roundtables, representatives of local organizations such as the Kiwanis Club, the Chamber of Commerce, Heritage Stratford, and the Arts and Culture Collective shared their priorities, which included:

- Ensuring the site is inclusive and welcoming for young and old residents alike;
- Incorporating green and open space;
- Balancing the Grand Trunk Community Hub with the vibrancy of Downtown; and
- Celebrating the history of the Grand Trunk Building.

Ideas submitted through the kitchen table kits echoed these sentiments. The most common responses provided through the kitchen table kits were:

- rebuild / integrate the new YMCA building;
- parking is a priority;
- find room for a community theatre / performing arts space;
- accommodate a large green space with seating and trees; and
- adaptively reuse a portion of the Grand Trunk Building.

At the first public open house, held at the University of Waterloo’s Stratford Campus in June 2017, attendees expressed enthusiasm and excitement for the idea of a Grand Trunk Community Hub and shared the following feedback:

- urgent need to capitalize on the momentum generated for the Grand Trunk Community Hub and ensure implementation;
- preference for a passive green space over a more urban-in-character plaza or square;
- significant support for flexible and multi-purpose programmable space for community groups and residents including a community centre, arts venue, and/or seniors’ centre; and
- desire for some form of adaptive reuse of the Grand Trunk site and Building to celebrate its important industrial history.

The results of the initial community engagement process clearly revealed a number of shared and critical priorities and issues that informed the Grand Trunk Master Plan.



**Figure 22 ►** Attendees at the Open House

Overall, the following key directions were developed to inform the draft Master Plan and were presented to City Council in September 2017:

- Preserve of a portion of the Grand Trunk Building as possible to celebrate the important industrial heritage of this critical site and as an opportunity for adaptive reuse of the structure as a community hub.
- Explore the development a Community Hub potentially to include the following uses: The YMCA, Cultural / community space (including flexible meeting rooms), student life / recreational space and small-scale retail and commercial uses supportive of above uses.
- Develop a central passive and green recreational space as a focus for the Community Hub and university/ community-related uses.
- Develop a fine-grained street and block network that promotes ease of movement for pedestrians, cyclists, and motor vehicles.
- Introduce residential uses including University of Waterloo student housing, a range of mid-to-low density market-rate housing, and affordable and/or seniors housing.
- Seek opportunities for temporary / interim uses which will facilitate/accommodate longer-term economic development opportunities for the City.
- Integrate the proposed bus terminal logically as a key mobility hub and early site animator
- Call the community hub the “Grand Trunk Community Hub”
- Maintain the site’s important parking function for the Downtown. This function should be consolidated on the western portion of the site where cap-and-cover is the most realistic solution for environmental conditions
- Continue to strengthen existing partnerships between the University of Waterloo, the Stratford-Perth YMCA, the City of Stratford, and the constellation of community groups and organizations through ongoing communication and participation in the process of refining the Master Plan.
- Create a place that reflects Stratford’s community, values, and aspirations.
- Plan for both the short and the long-term, with flexibility to respond to change securing early “wins” such as the location of the transit terminal and short-term leasing opportunities while protecting opportunities for longer term investments.
- Pursue design excellence in open space and architectural execution to create a unique and cherished destination in Downtown Stratford.
- Signal the importance of the site/community hub by retaining a significant view corridor from the intersection of Downie Street and St. Patrick Street to the entrance of the Grand Trunk Community Hub and the repurposed Grand Trunk Building.
- Development will occur and be planned through a phased process.

## ► What We Heard - Further Consultation

On November 7, 2017 a second Public Open House was held at the University of Waterloo's Stratford Campus. At this Open House, the draft Master Plan which had been informed by the initial consultation was presented. The Open House was well attended, with approximately 120 - 150 community members in attendance. The interest in the Master Plan was evident with the following feedback provided:

- 23+ Feedback Forms received;
- 83+ Post-It notes with comments provided;
- 42+ unique comments received online; and
- 5+ direct emails received.

The feedback received on the draft Master Plan can generally be categorized into five themes, including:

- Built Form
- Use and Program
- Open Space / Recreation
- Transportation and Parking
- Sustainability

The majority of comments related to land use and program. Generally, feedback was positive on the uses and programs envisaged in the draft Master Plan. Specific comments were provided on new uses/programs, however, with a focus on community orientated uses. General support was provided for the built form outcome envisioned on the site, with building heights and massing supported.



**Figure 23 ►** Attendees at the second Open House

Other feedback reinforced many of the comments which had been provided in the initial consultation, such as the need for parking, desire for green open spaces, support for retaining the Grand Trunk building and support for sustainability initiatives. Several key comments which have been reinforced in the final Master Plan include:

- Desire to protect or reuse the 1907 'west wall' to showcase the history of the site.
- Need to understand and manage the traffic implications of the street network, in particular to the St David neighbourhood.
- Need to consider safety at intersections as part of the Master Plan development.
- Desire for an integrated walking and bicycle network, with the new street network promoting sustainable travel choices.
- Need to accommodate a variety of interest and user groups, such as seniors, cultural groups and creative industries.
- Desire for sustainability initiatives to be explored and provided given the opportunities posed by the site.

Overall, there was positive community support for the draft Master Plan with feedback highlighting that the Plan was "visually appealing", "progressive", "impressive" and containing "lots of great features". A range of feedback received was complementary of the process to date and similar to the initial consultation, there was strong support for the project to proceed as soon as possible so the full benefits could be realized.



**Figure 24 ►** Attendees and Panels at the second Open House

# 05

# THE GRAND TRUNK MASTER PLAN

The Grand Trunk site including the future Community Hub is envisioned to be a convergence of education, community, health, culture, entrepreneurship, and innovation; will aim to strengthen and diversify the Stratford economy, and provide spaces, places, services and amenities for both residents, students, businesses and visitors.

The vision for the Community Hub creates a cluster of uses that allow for a strong identity, sense of place, and centre of gravity for the Grand Trunk site, generating a critical mass of activity that appeals to a diverse cross-section of Stratford's population and businesses.

The purpose of the Grand Trunk Master Plan is to provide a flexible framework for reinvestment on the Site as well as inform further policy, capital program and partnerships necessary to implement the vision and development concept presented herein.

To establish a platform for regeneration and success, the Master Plan needs to address matters including land use, transportation, servicing and urban design.

The transformation of the Grand Trunk site, described in this Master Plan, is a city-building opportunity in the literal sense. Reinvestment on the site will complement the Downtown and fill in a void in the heart of Stratford, revitalizing a key site that was for most of the city's history a landmark and destination. Recognizing the sites' original role as a critical employer of Stratford residents, the Grand Trunk Community Hub will translate that function for the twenty-first century, providing space for community groups who enhance the city's quality of life, facilitating opportunities for learning, recreating, living, economic development and employment.



**Figure 25 ►** The Grand Trunk Master Plan - Demonstration Plan

Finally, the Grand Trunk Community Hub will continue to grow the Stratford brand and further position Stratford as a community that celebrates its industrial past and supports its contemporary manufacturing industry. The Hub will build off of the city's existing strengths in the arts and culture while supporting Stratford's diverse community and embracing the growth in digital and technology industries. From children and youth to students and seniors, the Hub will provide a range of intergenerational services reflecting the community's day to day needs while supporting the emerging creative class economy.

## ► The Essential Ingredients

As outlined in Chapter 4, a key driver of the Master Plan and future Community Hub has been a desire to address a variety of community needs, as well as City of Stratford purposes and objectives, including to accommodate the expansion and renewal of existing users of the site, namely the University of Waterloo and YMCA. These users will play an important role in the overall redevelopment of the site, anchoring the initial phases of redevelopment and providing ongoing activity and vibrancy to the site. Consideration has been given to City-wide and community-based needs and opportunities for complementary and shared uses in the short and longer term and to accommodate flexibility. The program that has informed this Master Plan includes:

- Expanding the University of Waterloo, including a mix of academic uses, student housing, student living and incubator space.
- Relocating and upgrading the YMCA, replacing current facilities and including a day-care facility.
- Retaining a proportion of car parking and allowing for a more efficient approach to parking.
- Including potential new uses on the site, such as seniors recreation, community-based arts, culture and creative spaces, library-related facilities, private and affordable housing, learning and education space, businesses, offices, studios and short-term accommodation.
- Accommodating new investment to the Block in incubator, business and private development interest.

## ► The Guiding Principles

The following planning and development principles emerged as a synthesis of the background review of the site; its history; the policy framework; the opportunities and constraints identified during the technical review; and the feedback provided by Stratford residents, community groups, and other participants in the community engagement process:

- 1 Celebrate the history of the site by adaptively reusing portions of the original building and site as the Grand Trunk Community Hub.
- 2 Create a place that reflects Stratford's community, values, and aspirations.
- 3 Introduce a fine-grained street and block network that weaves the site into the City of Stratford, is pedestrian friendly and creates development blocks to accommodate future uses.
- 4 Establish a range of passive and green public spaces, anchored by a central, all season gathering commons.
- 5 Retain and enhance the significant view corridor at Downie and St. Patrick Streets as the entry portal to the Grand Trunk building and site.
- 6 Integrate a new transit terminal into the site to enhance mobility and transportation options for Stratford.
- 7 Explore the convergence and integration of program, activity and actors to establish a successful Community Hub.
- 8 Encourage complementary land uses, such as student and senior living, incubator space, residential, community-based recreation and cultural and hotel uses that can contribute to the long term prosperity of Stratford.
- 9 Demonstrate design excellence and sustainability in built form, public spaces, program and cultural landscapes.
- 10 Create a reinvestment framework that can accommodate phased development over time while providing certainty and accountability to the Stratford community and other partners.



**Figure 26 ►** Rendered view of the Grand Trunk Demonstration Plan

## ► Demonstrating the Potential Outcome

While the Master Plan establishes a flexible framework for reinvestment, it has been necessary to demonstrate how this framework may be implemented. In order to illustrate a potential implementation of the Master Plan, a demonstration plan has been developed, as illustrated in Figure 26 below.

This demonstration plan has been used throughout this report to illustrate a potential outcome using the framework layers and key directions of the Master Plan. It should be noted that the detailed development phases to be progressed under the Master Plan will be further refined in an ongoing manner and may differ from the demonstration plan shown.



## ► Key Elements

The Grand Trunk Master Plan is a flexible framework designed to guide the phased reinvestment of the site and allow for an efficient, sustainable and logical progression of development to achieve the highest quality outcome for the City of Stratford.

Within this reinvestment framework there are distinct opportunities and directions, brought together and framed as Key Elements. These Key Elements will be important to the success of the Community Hub. The Key Elements include:

- Celebrating Stratford's history through adaptively re-use portions of the Grand Trunk Building.
- Facilitating a community hub of: learning, education, health, culture, recreation, innovation, entrepreneurialism, community and living.
- Expanding and enriching the University of Waterloo Campus to increase the academic offering.
- Rebuilding and enhancing the YMCA facilities.
- Integrating the new Stratford bus terminal.
- Creating a fine grain of streets and blocks.
- Extending the street pattern to connect the site into Stratford and surrounding neighbourhoods.
- Creating The Common as a place of confluence and gathering of different users of the site.
- Introducing the Grand Trunk Spine as a visual and pedestrian connection.
- Attracting and unlocking private investment.
- Allowing for innovative parking solutions.

In addition to the Key Elements, the Master Plan identifies five site-wide structuring 'layers' that will contribute to transforming the site from its underutilized condition to a vibrant part of Stratford. The overall guiding principles, transformative vision and key elements will be important in achieving this vibrancy. The Master Plan is structured to address and provide directions for each of the following site-wide layers:

1. Streets and Blocks
2. Public Realm and Open Space
3. Use and Built Form
4. Mobility, Parking and Servicing
5. Sustainability

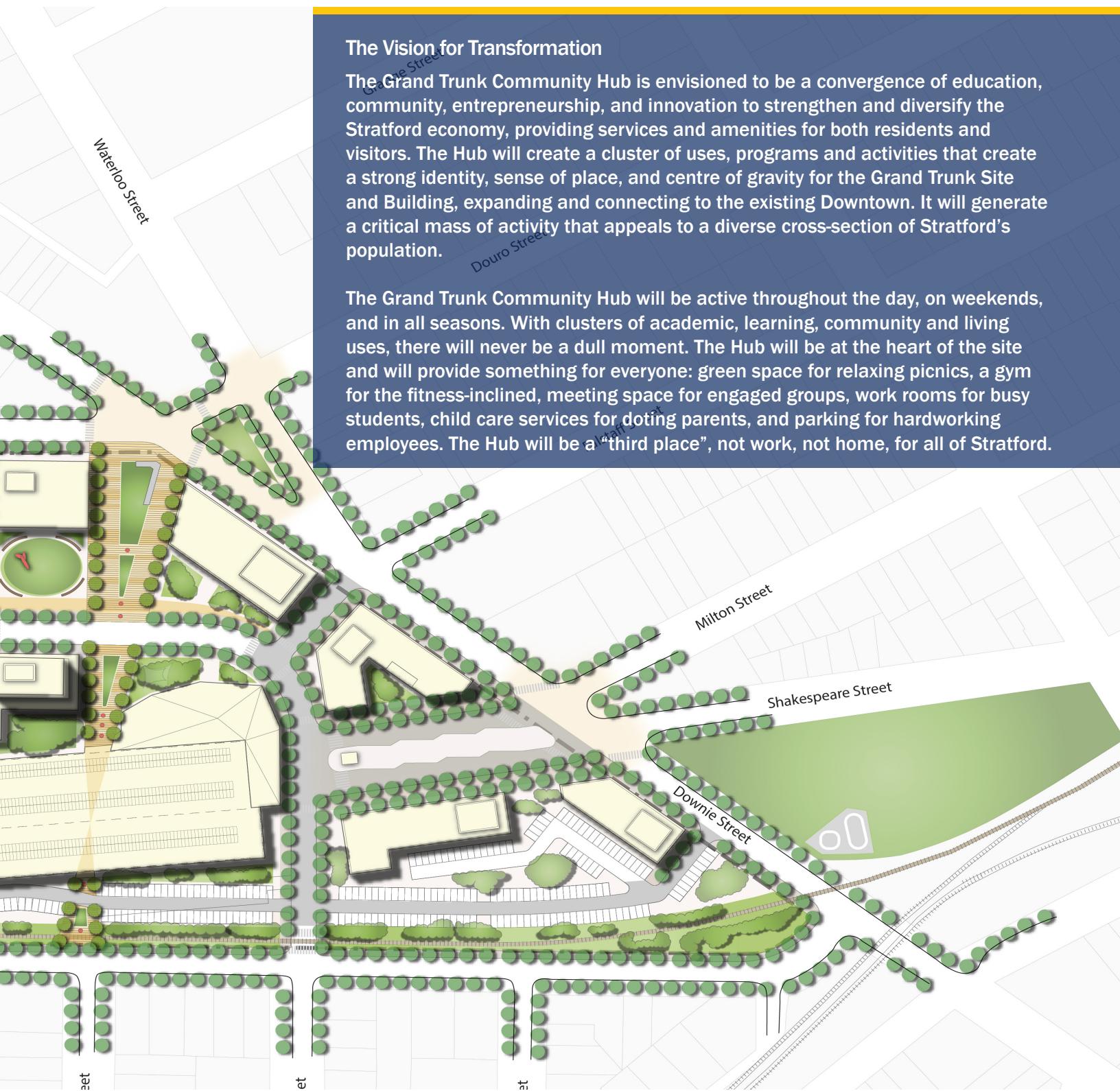


**Figure 27 ►** The Grand Trunk Demonstration Plan

## The Vision for Transformation

The Grand Trunk Community Hub is envisioned to be a convergence of education, community, entrepreneurship, and innovation to strengthen and diversify the Stratford economy, providing services and amenities for both residents and visitors. The Hub will create a cluster of uses, programs and activities that create a strong identity, sense of place, and centre of gravity for the Grand Trunk Site and Building, expanding and connecting to the existing Downtown. It will generate a critical mass of activity that appeals to a diverse cross-section of Stratford's population.

The Grand Trunk Community Hub will be active throughout the day, on weekends, and in all seasons. With clusters of academic, learning, community and living uses, there will never be a dull moment. The Hub will be at the heart of the site and will provide something for everyone: green space for relaxing picnics, a gym for the fitness-inclined, meeting space for engaged groups, work rooms for busy students, child care services for doting parents, and parking for hardworking employees. The Hub will be a "third place", not work, not home, for all of Stratford.



## ► Streets and Blocks

The Grand Trunk Master Plan seeks to establish a framework for a logical and hierarchical street network and block layout. The future design of the street network should encourage the phased reinvestment of the Grand Trunk site and establish flexible development blocks for phased delivery. A key basis of the Master Plan is to reconnect the site into the surrounding Stratford centre, overcoming issues of isolation and scale which have restricted the potential of the Grand Trunk site. Also central to the anticipated street network and block layout is the integration of the new bus terminal, enhancing mobility and transportation options for Stratford.

### The Street Network

The anticipated street network is designed to create logical connections to surrounding streets and increase porosity and linkages through the site. A new north-south central road is anticipated, providing a spine through the heart of the Grand Trunk site and connecting St Patrick and St David Streets. From this, a finer grain street network will be achievable through connecting secondary roads /routes and pedestrian paths. The anticipated street network, illustrated in the potential Street Network at Figure 28, is flexible and would allow for phasing of redevelopment and delivery.

The final design and composition of streets will be developed further as the Master Plan is implemented in consultation with key stakeholders. In the development of the final design of the future street network, all potential traffic and safety considerations should be assessed and managed, including the range of traffic distribution from the site to surrounding streets. Overall, a high quality street design should be delivered for each new street, consistent with the technical standards of the City of Stratford.

### Block Layout

Logical and flexible development blocks are able to be created as a result of the street plan layout. These development blocks have been carved from the larger Grand Trunk site, creating a fine grain structure and enabling reinvestment to occur in a phased manner.

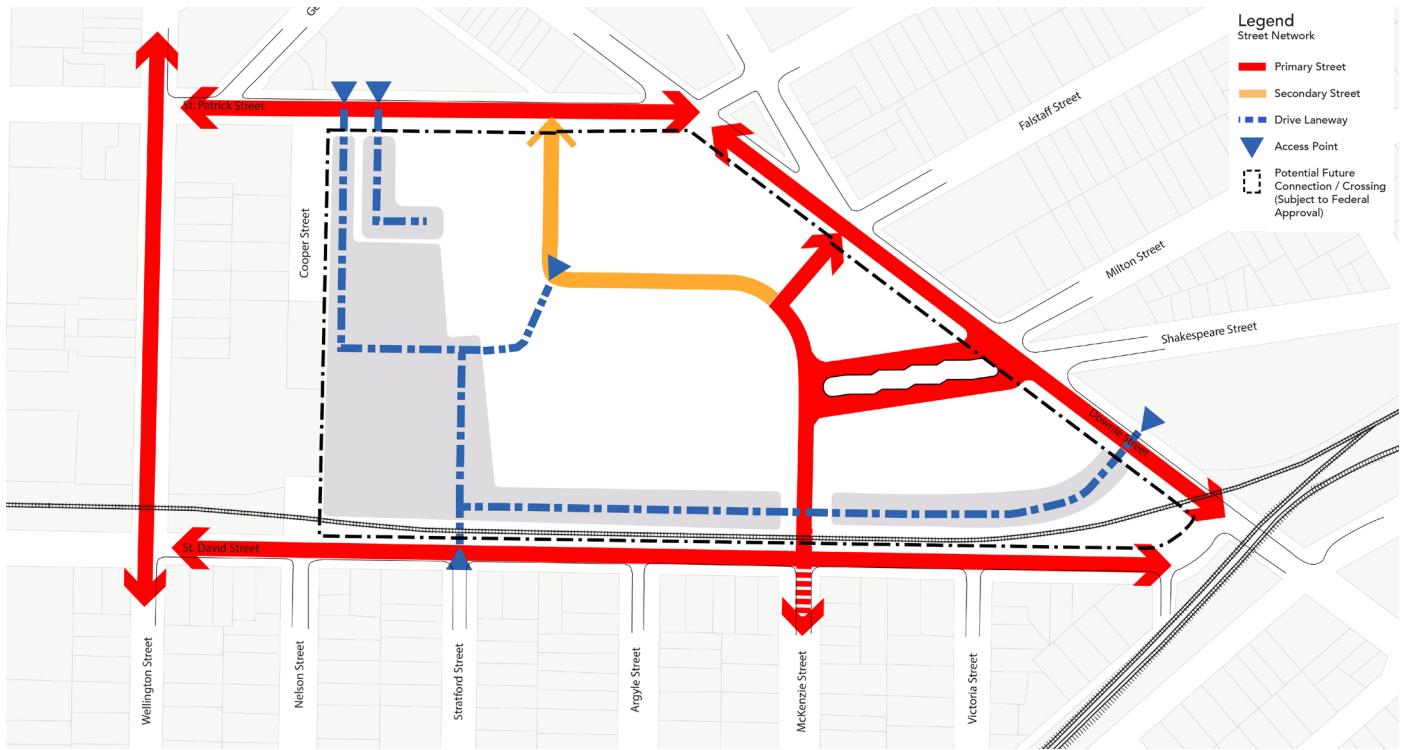
The development blocks devised under this Master Plan, as shown in the potential Block Layout in Figure 29, are overall positioned and sized to allow for a range of built forms, land uses, programs, activities and publicly accessible landscaped spaces.

A key opportunity offered by this street network and block layout is the ability for the University of Waterloo to grow in a contiguous manner, with the ultimate phasing of this expansion to be determined by the needs of the University. Another key opportunity has been the creation of a substantial block for the adaptively reused and rejuvenated Grand Trunk Building as intended under the Master Plan. The size of this block will ensure that the Community Hub can be an anchor for the site, not only in the form of the Grand Trunk Building, but also as a collection of new buildings and landscaped spaces around the rejuvenated building.

Street frontage opportunities for future buildings are able to be maximized in the blocks to promote activation. Ample opportunity for access, both pedestrian and vehicular, should be created through the block layout which would allow for flexibility in the future uses and built form outcomes on each block.

### Key Directions

- *Establish a new internal street network as an extension of the existing surrounding streets, weaving the site into Downtown Stratford and ensuring seamless connectivity.*
- *Focus on the development of a finer grain street network which allows for greater permeability through the large site and promotes pedestrian movements.*
- *Ensure all traffic and safety considerations are addressed and managed in the design of the future street network.*
- *Create logical, well-proportioned and flexible development blocks to facilitate reinvestment and accommodate a range of built forms and land uses.*
- *Optimize the available frontage for each block to key streets, in turn allowing for an animated and active built form which addresses the street.*



**Figure 28 ▶ Potential Street Network**



**Figure 29 ▶ Potential Block Layout**

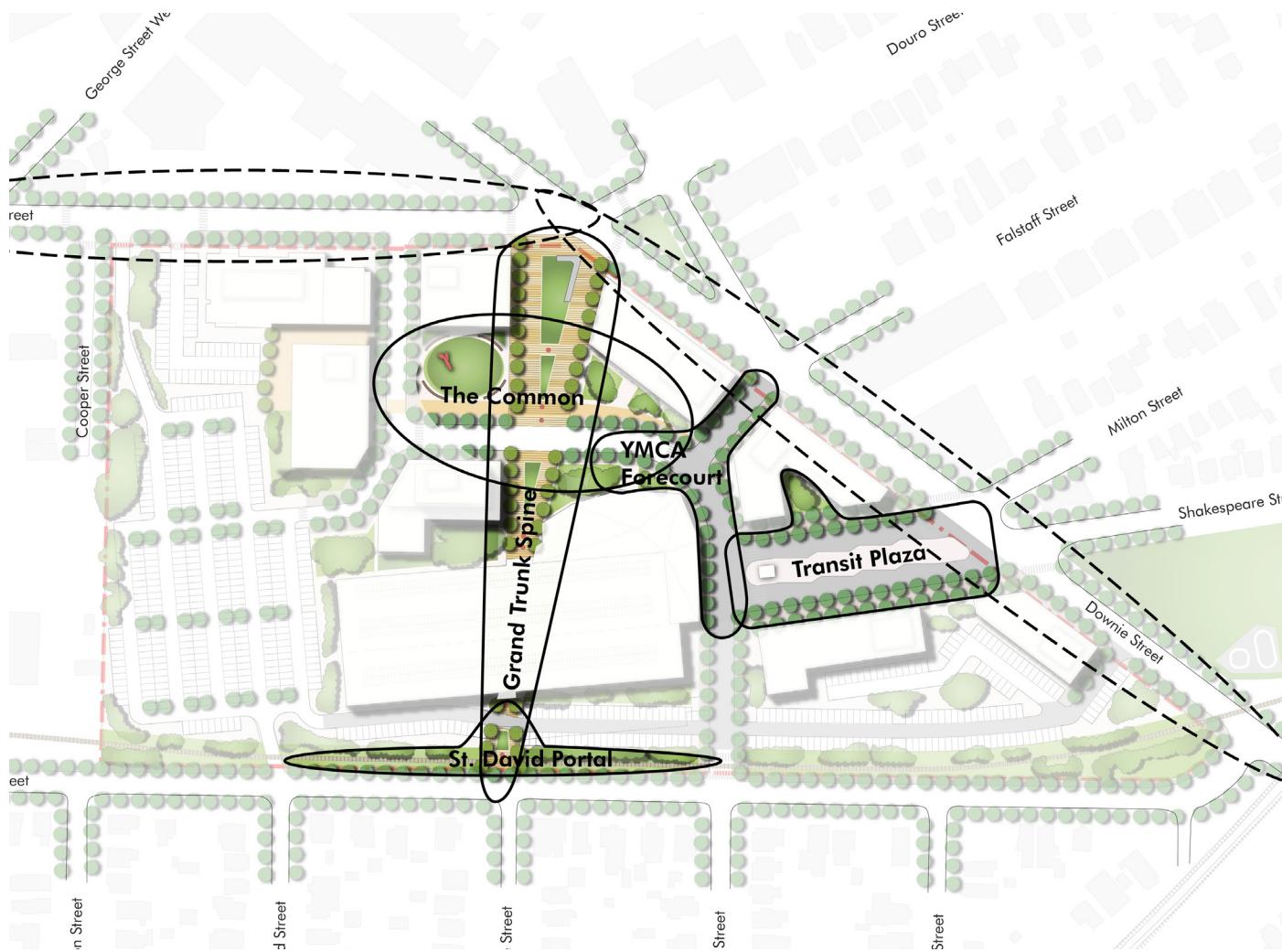
## ► Public Realm and Open Space

A mix of green passive and recreational spaces are envisioned in the Master Plan to enhance the public realm, offering a complementary setting to the rejuvenated Grand Trunk Building and ensuring a dynamic atmosphere is created for the Grand Trunk Community Hub. These public spaces have been shown as part of the demonstration plan (refer to Figure 30).

A core public realm element envisioned in the Master Plan is the Grand Trunk Spine, a central public space which enhances the prominent vista connecting St Patrick / Downie Street to the Grand Trunk Building.

New open spaces should be attractive, inspirational, cultural and focus on place making; promoting meeting, gathering and physical recreational activities which contribute to the Community Hub and reflect the values of the Stratford community.

Overlapping and well-proportioned public spaces are anticipated to be delivered on the Grand Trunk site, integrating into a green and connected network and reflecting their purpose and immediate context. These spaces may include The Grand Trunk Spine, The Common, the YMCA forecourt, the Bus Terminal Plaza and the adjoining streetscapes as shown in the Public Realm and Open Space in Figure 30.



**Figure 30 ►** Public Realm and Open Space

Whilst likely associated with separate users and potentially under different ownerships, these spaces are envisaged to be publicly accessible, encouraging interaction amongst all users and visitors to the site.

Public realm design, including streetscape design, should be of a high quality, celebrating the site's history and contributing to greening of the block. The public realm and all open spaces should be designed to be inclusive and accessible to all users. The future design should also focus on sustainable initiatives, in particular when designing features associated with on-site water management, lighting, etc. Existing features of the site should also be incorporated where possible in the landscape design, such as the 1907 'west wall' and other historic railway features.

Enriching the public domain should be opportunities for public art, both permanently and temporarily. Public art should reflect the range of different site users and visitors, facilitating greater connections between all users of the open space to be delivered. The qualities of the separate spaces envisioned are described further below.

### **The Grand Trunk Spine**

The Grand Trunk Spine is envisioned as a public space and critical view corridor through the site from the corner of St Patrick / Downie Streets to St David Street. The Spine is both a journey and a destination connecting the Downtown and the St Davids neighbourhood with the Hub. This space would allow for a new vista, showcasing the rejuvenated Grand Trunk Building and welcoming visitors into the site.

### **The Common**

The Grand Trunk Common, an all season gathering place, should provide a green heart to the Block, creating a beautiful space that showcases the new Community Hub and anchors community interaction. The landscaping of the Common should include historical interpretations of the site's history, such as representations of the old railway tracks or key buildings which once operated on the site. A strongly defined quadrangle could be achieved in part of The Common, contributing to the institutional presence of the University and enhancing student life.

### **The YMCA Forecourt**

Providing an address and green threshold to the signature building, the YMCA Forecourt could be a space where building form and landscaping can be truly integrated. The YMCA Forecourt would assist in bringing visitors into the site and providing a strong setting for the signature YMCA building as a key component of the Grand Trunk Community Hub.

### **The Bus Terminal Plaza**

The Bus Terminal Plaza will be important in providing an attractive centrepiece to the new bus terminal located on the site. A landscaped setting should be provided to the northern and southern edges of the plaza, allowing for an attractive transition between the functional bus terminal and the future development blocks.

### **St Patrick and Downie Streetscapes**

The streetscape design of both St Patrick and Downie Streets should be of a high quality and create a green edge to the Grand Trunk site. A consistent language should be applied in the streetscape design internally to the Grand Trunk site, and into these prominent existing streets.

### **Key Directions**

- *Provide a series of vibrant, connected and diverse green spaces, such as the Grand Trunk Spine, The Grand Trunk Common, the YMCA Forecourt and the Bus Terminal Plaza.*
- *Retain and enhance the significant view corridor from Downie and St. Patrick Streets to the Grand Trunk Building, creating a central public open space.*
- *Ensure new buildings address and animate the landscaped and public spaces.*
- *Design new open spaces to be attractive, inspiring and publicly accessible.*
- *Achieve a high quality and sustainable streetscape design that effectively connects the Grand Trunk site into the Downtown and surrounding neighbourhoods.*

## ► Land Use and Built Form

### Clustering Uses

Fundamental to the Grand Trunk Master Plan is the integration and convergence of a variety of uses, programs and activities, with a focus on expanding the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus. Further, the existing YMCA is anticipated to be relocated and enhanced to capitalize on its success in the local community and to build on the rich history of the site and Stratford. The University of Waterloo and the YMCA will play an important role in facilitating a true convergence of use, with a desire to achieve the comingling of spaces and programs, with all users working towards a shared outcome of a vibrant Community Hub.

A centrepiece of the site transformation is the adaptive reuse and expansion of portions of the Grand Trunk building as a Community Hub as possible – a representation of the historic, yet through adaptive reuse, new Stratford. This Hub will act as an anchor for the site and a touch point for the wider Stratford community, allowing for a celebration of Stratford's history from the arrival of rail in 1856 to the present day values and character of Stratford's people.

Complementary uses which contribute to the creation of a Community Hub on the Grand Trunk site will be provided in new well-designed buildings.

Such potential uses may include: facilities for community and indoor recreation activities; parks and open space; public uses and infrastructure; community gardens; retail; cultural, entertainment and performance, dining and hotel accommodation; residential such as student and senior living; incubator space, parking.

As the Master Plan progresses, these new uses will be spread across the site to capture the value proposition offered and allow for the creation of a vibrant new community where uses are not only integrated, but co-dependent on each other.

Whilst the intention is to encourage integration and convergence of uses across the site, the Master Plan envisions several 'use clusters' as illustrated in the Land Use and Program Map in Figure 31:

- Academic and Learning
- Community Hub
- Living
- Shared Parking

These use clusters are a starting point for structuring future buildings and uses across the site. The final layout and arrangement of buildings and uses will be the subject of further consideration as the Master Plan develops.

### Key Directions

- *Encourage the integration of uses, program and activities, both horizontally and vertically across the site and within blocks.*
- *Promote a range of land uses that foster the convergence of education, community, health, culture, entrepreneurship, innovation and economic prosperity.*
- *Recognize and foster through complementary land uses four areas of focus: Grand Trunk Community Hub; Academic and Learning; Living; and Parking.*
- *Design the built form to create intensification opportunities that are sensitive to the surrounding community while encouraging reinvestment of this important site.*
- *Animate and activate the site and public realm through building design and placement of active at-grade uses.*
- *Seek to achieve design excellence and sustainability in buildings, infrastructure and public realm design.*

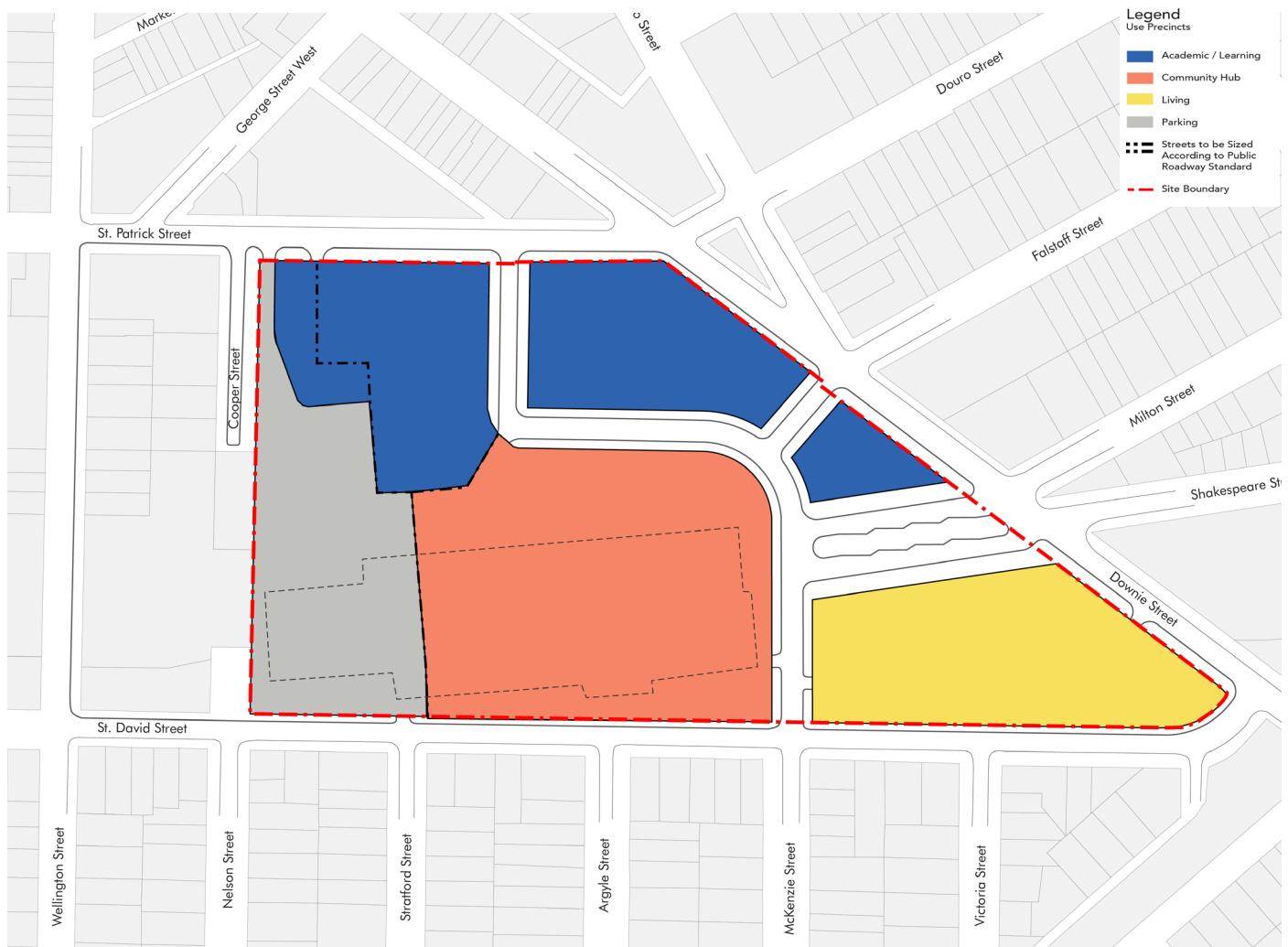


Figure 31 ► Land use and Program Map



Figure 32 ► A render of the potential signature building and rejuvenated Grand Trunk Building

## Built Form

The Master Plan anticipates design excellence and sustainability to be achieved in all new buildings, programs, activities and open spaces. New buildings should be positioned on blocks to engage with ground level landscaping and the building design must contribute to and animate the wider public realm. Three distinct use and program clusters have been created under the Master Plan as illustrated in Figure 31 on the previous page, including the Academic and Learning Cluster, Community Hub Cluster and Living Cluster. Anticipated heights of buildings are illustrated on the Building Height Map in Figure 33.

## The Grand Trunk Community Hub Cluster

The Grand Trunk Community Hub 'block' is anchored around a revitalized Grand Trunk building, intended to be adaptively reused where possible for community-driven and economic development purposes. The adaptive reuse of this building could be similar to Wychwood Barns, where a portion of the building was required to be demolished, but remaining portions were retained and upgraded. The staging and progress of the adaptive reuse will allow for opportunities for temporary and/or interim uses which do not preclude longer-term economic development initiatives and the overall prosperity of community activities. This building will be able to be better appreciated through the retention of the important vista from the corner of St Patrick / Downie Street to the rejuvenated building.

Other new buildings on this block may include a relocated YMCA and a new building that allows for complementary economic development uses. These complementary uses may potentially include learning, educational, hotel, or seniors/student living. The exact arrangement and location of these buildings on the block will be subject to further design investigation. Despite the final arrangement and location of these buildings, it is important that activation of building edges occurs to all key streets and public spaces.

The existing height of the Grand Trunk building should be retained, while any new signature addition to this building could reach a height of three storeys. It is anticipated that the third building on this block may be three storeys, but additional height could be explored as illustrated in the demonstration plan at Figure 33. Further urban design analysis would be required for any additional height sought and this would be subject to required planning approvals.

## Academic and Learning Cluster

Initially, the existing University of Waterloo building could be expanded on the same block, with an immediate addition to this building plus further built form, either in a connected structure or separate building. A contiguous expansion of the University could then occur across the St Patrick and Downie Street frontages, allowing for the University to increase their presence and achieve key requirements such as providing modern learning spaces, a new quadrangle, satisfying car parking demands and allowing for opportunities for living/complementary University uses, programs and activities. The ultimate design and placement of buildings for the University will be driven by their exact requirements and should be developed over time. A generally consistent height of three storeys would be anticipated for the University buildings, except in the block to the north of the Bus Terminal where four storeys could be achieved (refer to Figure 33). Activation should be focused at a minimum to St Patrick Street, Downie Street and new internal streets.

## The Living Cluster

Complementary to the expanded university campus and new Community Hub on the site is an opportunity for residential buildings, allowing for the injection of new site users and increasing the sense of ownership for the Grand Trunk site. Residential buildings could include such complimentary uses as student residences or student housing, seniors housing, private residential and affordable rental housing. Residential opportunities in the form of lower rise housing could be explored on the south-eastern block, achieving a built form relationship with the educational development anticipated on the northern side of the bus terminal. Height in this portion of the Block is expected to be a maximum of four storeys, as illustrated on Figure 33. Activation and interaction with the surrounding streets is expected in any future residential buildings.



**Figure 33 ▶** Building Height Map based on the Demonstration Plan



**Figure 34 ▶** Extracts of building scales from the Demonstration Plan

## ► Mobility, Parking and Servicing

### Mobility

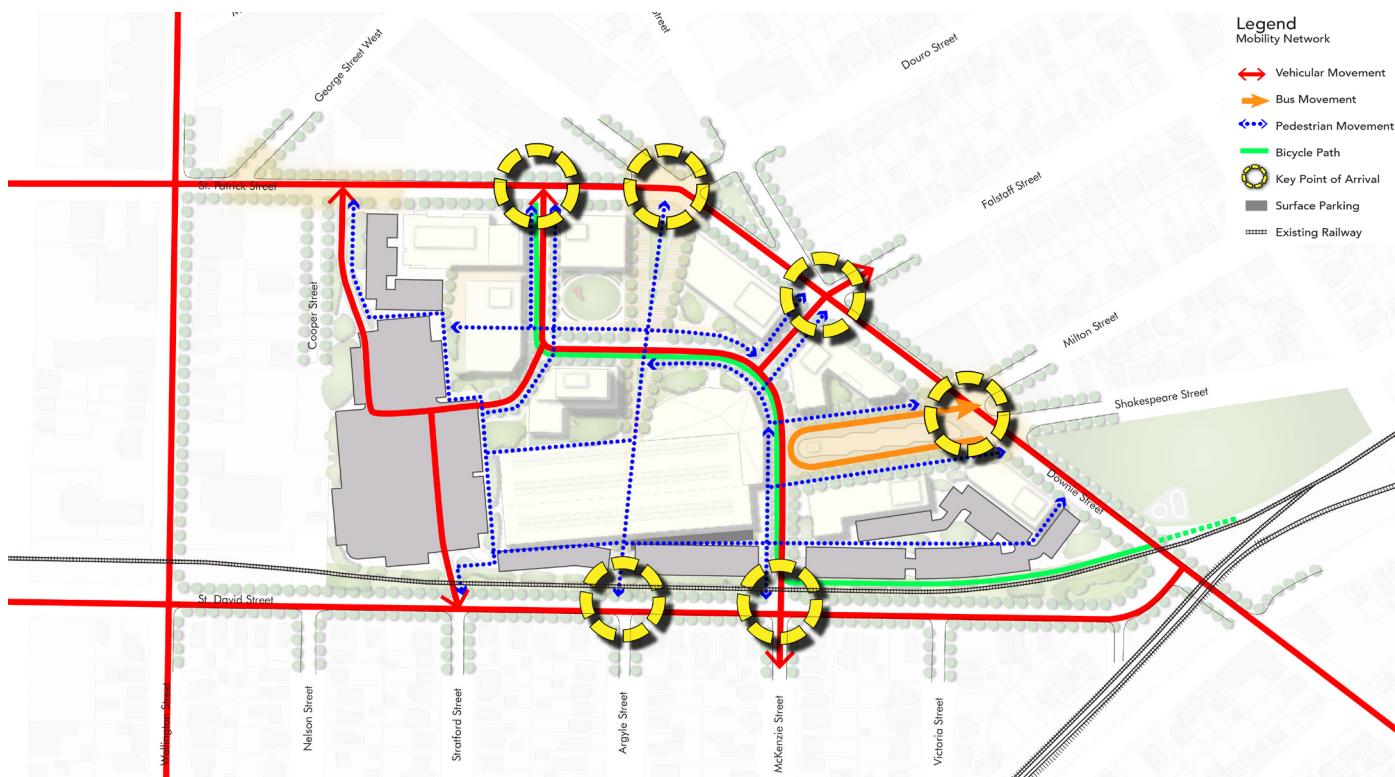
Improved mobility has been at the forefront of the Master Plan, with an aim to connect users and visitors of the site to Downtown Stratford and the surrounding neighbourhoods. A goal of the Master Plan is to maximize the vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian permeability of the site, as illustrated in the Mobility Plan at Figure 35. This is expected to be achieved both internally, and to the immediately adjoining transit network, through the delivery of key access points at the site edges and through the extension of McKenzie Street (desired), Falstaff and Shakespeare/Milton Streets into the Grand Trunk site. The key access points will be logical and connect new streets and pathways to the existing streets in Stratford, as shown in Figure 35.

Both vehicle and cyclist movements should be accommodated within the new street network. Bus movements through the site are anticipated to be concentrated around the Bus Terminal, and whilst buses may use the wider street network, they should largely be contained within a small portion of the Master Plan.

The showcase movement of integrating the new bus terminal as a key component of the street network will be important to the success of the Master Plan.

This bus terminal will play a pivotal role in the transport connectivity of Stratford. Importantly, potential conflicts between buses, vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians should be avoided through the provision of a pedestrian pathway network internally within the site, allowing for a clear separation of these movements.

Pedestrian movements into, through and from the site will be important and it is recommended that further investigations are carried out to identify safe and attractive pedestrian routes to nearby attractions, such as Market Square to the north and the Via Rail Canada station to the east. Pedestrian paths from the bus terminal should be determined to ensure seamless and safe connectivity between the new terminal and the remainder of Stratford, in particular, at substantial intersections where vehicles and pedestrian conflicts may occur.



**Figure 35 ►** Mobility Plan based on the anticipated street network

## Parking

Car parking within the Grand Trunk site should continue to play a role in servicing Downtown Stratford, as well as accommodating the needs of new users of the site. Parking provision is anticipated to evolve with the ongoing redevelopment of the Master Plan to reflect advancements in technology, such as Autonomous Vehicles, and to directly accommodate shifting demands. Flexibility and an adaptive management strategy should be adopted. It is anticipated that parking spaces could be shared across uses as the Master Plan develops. The basis of this sharing arrangement would be that different times of demand could be accommodated for different uses, maximizing the value of spaces and rationalizing the total number of spaces.

Under the Master Plan, parking is anticipated in the western portion of the site, reflective of constraining environmental conditions where a 'cap-and-cover' remediation strategy is required. Parking should also be situated along the southern boundary, within the 30 metre setback required to the adjoining railway infrastructure. This parking will be visible from surrounding streets, ensuring easy access and use.

The anticipated car parking strategy, illustrated in Figure 36, allows for approximately 850 spaces in the ultimate built-out situation, providing a higher number of spaces than the current 605 available on site. Additional temporary parking opportunities will be available throughout the phased development of the Master Plan.



Figure 36 ▶ Potential car parking strategy

## Servicing

Preliminary investigations have identified that the site is currently connected to a number of services. Servicing of the future uses under the Master Plan should therefore be carried out through amplifying / extending existing available infrastructure, or implementing new infrastructure as required. Loading/unloading points for the future uses should not conflict with any traffic movements and should be as close as possible to building entries. Ideally, loading/unloading activities will be undertaken off the street network.

### Key Directions

- **Promote the safety and ease-of-movement to, within and from the site for buses, vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians.**
- **Design key entry points to maximize safety, accessibility, promote pedestrian movements and to celebrate arrival.**
- **Introduce and integrate the Bus Terminal as an early animator, enhancing the mobility and transportation options for Stratford.**
- **Plan for the extension of McKenzie Street, Falstaff and Shakespeare/Milton Streets into the Grand Trunk site to strengthen connectivity to surrounding neighbourhoods. Potential traffic implications should be fully assessed during the planning phase of these extensions, including traffic infiltration impacts to surrounding neighbourhoods.**
- **Promote shared and phased parking solutions to address on-site needs and contribute to Downtown supply.**
- **Address environmental conditions of the site through strategic deployment of land use and localized mitigation strategies.**
- **Advocate for new crossings of the railway line to increase access to the site.**

## ► Sustainability

A benchmark development should be achieved on the site, not only providing exemplary design standards in built form and landscape features, but also in environmental sustainability, aligning with the Provincial Climate Change Strategy. Appropriate targets should be established for new development, such as aiming for a reduced carbon footprint. These targets could be achieved through a number of means, such as the adaptive reuse of the Grand Trunk building, the provision of solar panels, opportunities for electric charging stations and the provision of walking and cycling infrastructure that encourages more sustainable modes of travel.

Environmental stewardship is a core element of the Master Plan, both in terms of resolving past issues due to site uses and looking to the future to establish a new standard for sustainability in Stratford. The long history of the site and its past use for industrial rail purposes has an unfortunate consequence of environmental contamination over parts of the site. With this in mind, a comprehensive remediation strategy should be developed to overcome past contamination and ensure the site is suitable for the range of new uses. Where environmental conditions are most limiting, it could be decided to provide surface parking, allowing for a feasible solution of remediation in the form of 'cap-and-cover'. New developments under the Master Plan should focus on the development of green infrastructure to utilize low impact development (LID) solutions. LID solutions should be considered in the design of all landscaping and built form components of the site

The site, with its significant size and redevelopment opportunities, provides a once in a generation chance to implement new technologies and endeavour to achieve a highly sustainable outcome. Innovative design and sustainable excellence are priorities of the Master Plan and should be further explored in the development of the separate blocks.

### Key Directions

- *Foster sustainable development and environmental stewardship in all new buildings, public realm and infrastructure.*
- *Resolve the effects of past uses and the resulting current environmental conditions through a detailed environmental strategy.*
- *Promote design excellence and encourage demonstration and innovation in sustainable redevelopment.*
- *Establish and monitor targets to address climate change and environmental conditions on the site.*



**Figure 37** ► Examples of simple and effective sustainable measures (permeable paving: top left, electric recharge station: top right, green roof: bottom)

## ► Phasing

The transformation of the Grand Trunk site is expected to take place in phases and over time. Phasing of the Master Plan is important to ensure that reinvestment is able to occur at a pace consistent with market conditions, the City's objectives, and the needs of various users, including the YMCA and University of Waterloo. The initial phase of the Master Plan, following the development of the bus terminal, is anticipated to deliver the beginnings of the overarching street and block layout and the Community Hub, facilitating the future delivery of separate phases in a discrete and variable manner. Flexibility has been at the forefront of the Master Plan design and various phasing combinations for reinvestment are available despite the strategy outlined below. As such, the phasing diagrams illustrated in Figure 38 are indicative only.

Key principles of the phasing strategy include:

- Allowing for the continuous operation of the YMCA throughout the redevelopment, with operations transitioning from the existing building to the new building with no displacement issues or reduction of services/activities.
- Optimization of the ability for different uses, programs and activities to interact and converge on shared spaces, both within the public domain and future built form.
- Maximizing transitional opportunities such as utilizing future development blocks for temporary uses, including car parking to support the initial phases of development (both for operational and construction activities)

The phasing strategy will include the following elements:

### **The Community Hub Phase**

The Community Hub phase is envisaged to include the introduction of the bus terminal and the intended adaptive reuse of portions of the Grand Trunk building to house the new YMCA and complementary convergence and gathering spaces. Programatically, this may include the new YMCA facilities, recreation, student life space, incubator, meeting and performance space. Together these moves could create the nucleus of the Community Hub. Together this program approximates 100,000 square feet of adaptively reused and new gross floor area, new street connections and parking spaces.

### **Academic Expansion Phase(s)**

Other phases anticipate the expansion of the academic and learning focused blocks with the addition of new academic space, student housing and public spaces such as the Grand Trunk Spine and Grand Trunk Common. These phases will come forward along with funding and partnerships needed to implement these complementary uses.

### **Development Partner Phase(s)**

Several blocks offer an opportunity to partner with private sector developers to deliver a range of uses, programs and activities including student housing, seniors housing, residential, hotel, office, commercial and community amenities such as daycare. Potential sites for this partnership are identified on the Phasing Strategy map but are not limited to these solely. Full build out of the site may also be accompanied by the introduction of a parking structure at the west end of the Master Plan.



**Figure 38 ►** Indicative phasing options

# 06 RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The creation of the Grand Trunk Master Plan and Community Hub is a once in a generation opportunity for the community of Stratford. This landmark and historic site will be reborn as the heart of the city, building on the success of the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus and the legacy of the YMCA. The new Community Hub will be a place where residents and visitors of all ages can access services, start businesses, and explore the history of the city.

The City of Stratford is eager to advance the development of the site. In order to realize the vision of the Grand Trunk Master Plan, the following actions are anticipated:

- Formalize the partnerships with the University of Waterloo, the Stratford-Perth YMCA, and others partners, for Phase 1 implementation.
- Explore opportunities for partnerships with other organizations and businesses.
- Advocate to senior levels of government with a view to secure partner funding.
- Implement the Bus Terminal as an early animator of the site.
- Understand the flow through traffic implications of the anticipated street network, in particular to the St David neighbourhood.
- Complete the environmental due diligence process as required.
- Undertake more detailed investigations on the potential for adaptively reusing all or portions of the grand trunk building. If deemed possible and appropriate from further investigations, prepare detailed engineering and building design for the adaptive reuse of the Grand Trunk Building and YMCA facility.
- Implement first phases of site preparation including environmental remediation and Grand Trunk building stabilization.
- Establish targets for sustainable development as relevant to the Climate Change Action Strategy.
- Engage the community in public realm design / conceptual design processes.

Overall, the Master Plan provides a vision and key principles to guide the transformation of the site. If ever enacted in respect of the site, the requirements of OPA 21 would also be satisfied by the Master Plan. A focus on community, learning, living, economic development and prosperity is born through this Master Plan and these values will be key to the ongoing redevelopment of the site.



**Figure 39 ▶** The Grand Trunk Community Hub Concept Bird's Eye Rendering

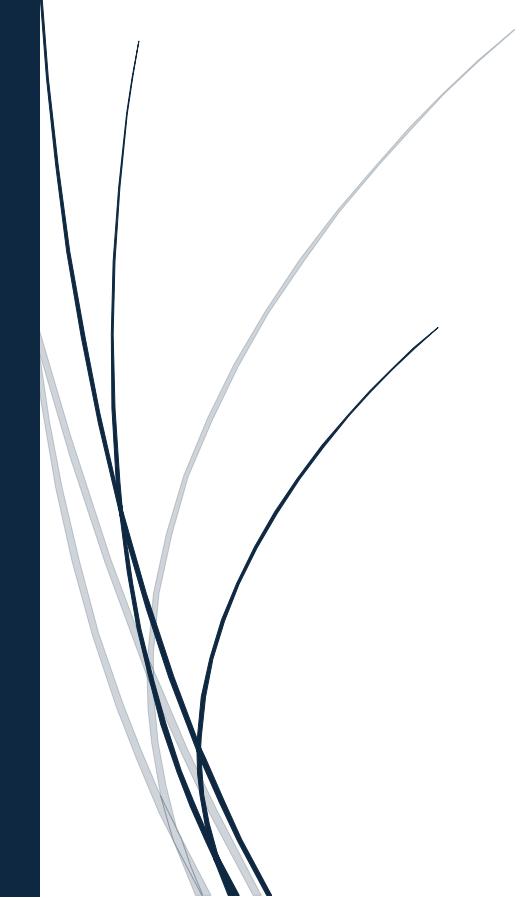




February, 2025

# Exploring the Feasibility of a Community Complex as Part of the Grand Trunk Master Plan

Understanding funding and operating models, along with the reasons for advancement.



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VACAL SERVICES LTD.

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## Executive Summary

The feasibility study examines the potential for developing a new community space at the Grand Trunk site in Stratford. The report addresses key action two from the Grand Trunk Renewal Project to determine the scope, funding, and design for a shared community recreation facility while considering the community's need for accessible and versatile spaces. Through comprehensive research, stakeholder engagement, and financial analysis, the study seeks to determine the viability of this facility and assist the Council in making an informed decision about its level of involvement in the project.

Key findings indicate that Stratford's current community facilities are insufficient to meet the evolving needs of its diverse population, and robust partnerships are essential for creating inclusive spaces. The proposed community complex will include facilities for sports, cultural activities, education, and social gatherings, along with dedicated areas for youth, seniors, and community service initiatives. These components align with Stratford's vision of empowering the community through services and opportunities that foster care, well-being, resilience, and environmental sustainability.

To complete a conceptual costing exercise, this study primarily focuses on the funding and operating models related to ten leisure spaces in Central and Southern Ontario, Canada. The research found that operating and funding models exist on a spectrum, leading to three categories: Third-Party Facility, Shared Facility, and Municipally Owned and Operated Facility. The municipal investment varies depending on the extent of the City's involvement in design, development, and operations, with greater investment offering increased control over space design, programming, and facility management. Funding sources identified include municipal investment, government grants, and partnerships with local organizations. Cost estimates have been adjusted for inflation using accurate Consumer Price Index calculations, ensuring realistic projections.

The proposed community facility at the Grand Trunk site will cover an area of 70,000 to 110,000 square feet. It will feature a pool, gym, walking track, childcare services, a library, meeting rooms, a café, community and communal spaces, an auditorium, a communal kitchen, a lounge, change rooms, and washrooms. With estimated construction costs at \$695 per square foot (excluding environmental remediation expenditures), the projected cost for this project is expected to range from \$48.5 million to \$76.5 million. Research estimates suggest that building a new community centre with limited municipal involvement (Third-Party Facility) could cost the municipality between \$1.83 million and \$47.59 million. Operating partnerships that include municipal oversight of community spaces and shared governance (Shared Facility) would raise the estimated costs from \$31.88 million to \$60.15 million. Lastly, a community complex owned and operated by the municipality would require investments ranging from \$35.08 million to \$72.29 million.

based on the cases analyzed. It is recommended that the City of Stratford adopt a shared model to ensure fairness in governance and equitable access for all citizens.

In addition to addressing community needs, the new facility is anticipated to provide economic and social benefits, such as retaining and attracting talent, enhancing residents' quality of life, creating opportunities for local businesses, supporting sustainable development goals, and fostering opportunities for reconciliation. The historical significance of the Grand Trunk site further enriches the project's potential to become a landmark that symbolizes Stratford's dedication to community development and sustainability.

This study concludes that the proposed community complex is viable and crucial for achieving Stratford's long-term objectives. The proposed next steps include:

1. Refining the Project Scope: Develop detailed options for design, programming, costing, and operational models.
2. Exploring Funding Opportunities: Pursue grants, private donations, and external partnerships to reduce municipal contributions.
3. Engaging Stakeholders: Maintain discussions with the YMCA, SPL, and other potential collaborators to clarify roles and responsibilities.
4. Reporting Back to Council: For final consideration, provide a comprehensive report with refined plans, funding strategies, and anticipated community impacts.

Stakeholders, including the YMCA, Stratford Public Library, Community Services, and various engaged citizen groups, firmly back the project, highlighting the urgent need for this initiative to move forward.

## Introduction

The City of Stratford is situated within the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Neutral (Attawandaron) Peoples. Stratford is located in Perth County along the Avon River in Southwestern Ontario. In 2021, the enumerated population of Perth County was 81,565 residents, reflecting a change of 6.2% since 2016. Although the City of Stratford falls within the Perth census division, it operates independently from Perth County. According to the 2021 census, Stratford has a population of 33,232 residents, with an average age of 44.8 years. Males represent 48.3% of the population, while females account for 51.7%. The largest age group in Stratford consists of residents over 65 years old. Additionally, 1.7% of Stratford's residents identify as Indigenous. The largest racialized group is South Asian, comprising approximately 675 individuals, or 2.1% of the population. The second group is Black, with around 585 individuals representing 1.8% of the population. The third group is Latin American, with approximately 315 individuals, accounting for 1.0% of the total population.

The primary economic drivers for the community are tourism and manufacturing. According to an estimate by the Conference Board of Canada, tourism generates \$140 million in economic activity, contributes \$65 million in tax revenue, and supports 3,000 direct and indirect jobs. Manufacturing and healthcare are the two largest employers at the industry level, accounting for 15% of the region's jobs in 2021. It is also important to note that Stratford has a robust agricultural sector and auto parts manufacturing. More recently, Stratford has emerged as a digital hub, highlighted by the Royal Bank of Canada opening a data centre and establishing the University of Waterloo's Stratford School of Interaction, Design, and Business.

The historic Grand Trunk Railway and Canadian National Railway (CNR) Shops were located on Downie Street in Stratford, Ontario. Spanning 18 acres and housing a 185,000-square-foot facility, the building was established in the mid-1850s and prospered for many years. By the 1940s, Stratford's locomotive repair shop employed nearly 40% of the city's workforce, earning the distinction of being the largest repair operation in the CNR network. However, as Canadian National transitioned to diesel-powered machinery, the Stratford CNR facility experienced a significant downturn in business, ultimately leading to its closure. The site remained vacant for several years and serves as municipal parking. It is also the largest undeveloped site within downtown Stratford. Recently, the site has been revitalized with the opening of the University of Waterloo's Stratford School, the first building of a planned University of Waterloo Stratford School Campus. The Grand Trunk site aims to renew its place in, and as the heart of, Stratford and become a gathering place for residents and visitors alike through the Grand Trunk Master Plan.

The YMCA and Stratford Public Library (SPL) have outgrown their facilities. In the spring of 2022, Lemay was engaged by the SPL to conduct a space needs assessment of their current library and to determine their future space requirements and needs for a venue designed to continue and enhance the excellent work and public service that the library provides to both the Stratford community and the larger Perth County region. The general findings were shared as part of a 2023 presentation to the Council regarding the library's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan - [click here to view the full report.](#)

To address the needs of the YMCA, SPL, other interested citizens, and the City of Stratford, the proposed community complex should include various amenities such as a pool, gym, walking track, childcare facilities, library, meeting rooms, café, community areas, shared spaces, auditorium, communal kitchen, lounge, change rooms, and washrooms. The anticipated size is between 70,000 and 110,000 square feet. Although the YMCA currently has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the municipality, it remains uncertain whether the library will be part of this project at this time.

The proposed square footage is designed to incorporate community spaces that meet the diverse needs of Stratford's population. This includes a community theatre space, areas for older adults and youth to gather and engage in shared programming, and spaces for community service initiatives. Thanks to their close collaboration with various community groups, the YMCA, SPL, and Community Services thoroughly understand these space requirements. The analysis section of this report provides a detailed examination of these specific needs.

The purpose of this research is to provide the Ad Hoc Grand Trunk Renewal Committee and the Stratford City Council with a comprehensive understanding of the varying levels of municipal investment needed to develop a new community complex at the Grand Trunk site. The study identifies three operating models, each corresponding to different investment levels based on the extent of influence the municipality wishes to exert over space programming and design. These models include third-party, shared, and municipally owned and operated facilities. To assist the Council in making an informed decision, data was collected from ten cases of old and new community centres built in Ontario, representing a range of partnership options and population demographics.

The remainder of this report presents the findings and analyzes the research study results. It begins by explaining the methodology and methods used to collect the data. Next, seven of the ten cases are detailed, along with financial reporting for all ten cases. We discuss third-party facilities, followed by shared facilities, and conclude with municipally owned and operated facilities. The report also includes a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis prepared by potential key partners of the proposed community complex (YMCA of Three Rivers, the City of Stratford, and the Stratford Public

Library). I then assess these results to pinpoint best practices for operations and funding, articulate the rationale behind the project's essential significance for the future, and wrap up with considerations for the Council moving forward.

## The Case Studies

A case study methodology was developed to determine the various funding and operating models associated with ten community leisure spaces in Ontario, Canada. Information was gathered through municipal records and federal and provincial announcements, alongside a thorough search of online third-party resources. It is worth noting that, where applicable and when information was available, municipal investment is broken down further in the case descriptions since not all municipal investment is cash in hand; it often includes in-kind support, such as the contribution of land. Inflation rates were calculated by adjusting the total facility cost based on the year it was constructed. This adjustment was made by multiplying the original building cost by Statistics Canada's September 2024 CPI (161.1) divided by the CPI for the year the facility was built.

At the same time, two working sessions were held with key stakeholders from the YMCA of Three Rivers, the Stratford Public Library, and municipal representatives from the City of Stratford. Additionally, the YMCA's and the municipalities' executives were interviewed to better understand each centre's funding and operating models. During the second working session, the participants completed a SWOT exercise to assess the feasibility of a shared community complex.

The research revealed that both operating and funding models exist on a spectrum. No one-size-fits-all solution or magic formula can determine what works best for each community. As a result, three categories emerged: third-party facilities, shared facilities, and municipally owned and operated facilities. Several cases were examined to validate the research while illustrating the types of partnerships, funding, and operating models. Variables related to financing and operational models depended on several factors, including population size, demographics, the level of municipal involvement, addressing the needs of the community, the municipality, and partners, as well as other market factors such as the political climate, the availability of grants, and pre-and post-COVID developments, to name a few.

This study addresses one of four critical actions in the Grand Trunk Renewal Project: identifying a shared community recreation facility's scope, funding, and design. In the future, additional interviews and focus groups may be conducted with the Ad Hoc Committee members and other stakeholders to evaluate space programming and design

needs as the municipality determines its level of involvement in this project. More research is also required on how the environmental remediation of the land will impact the overall cost of a new facility and how costs may change if the original Grand Trunk building is incorporated into the new space design. Best practices for community spaces across Canada and globally should also be considered. The researcher recommends that further research be conducted in these areas.

The case study section comprehensively analyzes ten cases, highlighting financial data, community demographics, funding and operating models, notable amenities, accessibility, and greening initiatives for each facility. The third-party facilities discussed include the YMCA Community Life Centre in Belleville (2027), the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka in Barrie (2027), the John M. Harper Library and Stork Family YMCA in Waterloo (2011), and the Stoney Creek Community Centre, YMCA and Library in London (2010). In these instances, the YMCA and Library (where applicable) oversee all operations with minimal municipal influence. The second category consists of shared facilities where the YMCA, Library, and municipal spaces work together on operations. This group includes the David Braley Vaughan Metropolitan Centre of Community (2022), the StarTech.com Community Centre, YMCA, and Library in London (2018), and the Quinte West YMCA (2009). The final category comprises municipally owned and operated facilities, which are the Kitchener Schlegel Park (2026), the Guelph Southend Community Centre (2026), and the Muskoka Lumber Community Centre and Library in Bracebridge (2024). Each explored case offers valuable insights into funding and operating opportunities, presenting a realistic depiction of costs and municipal expectations essential for making these projects viable and achievable.

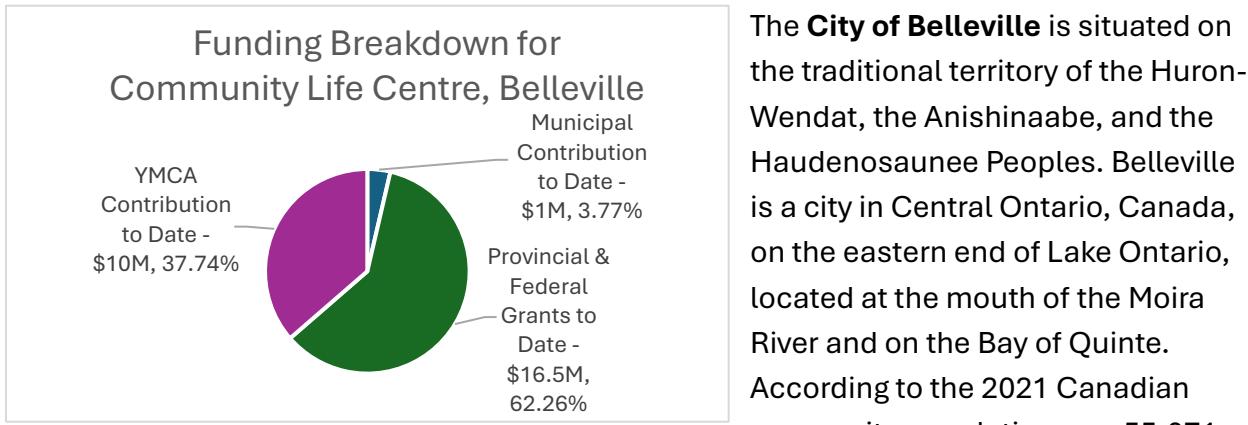
## Third-Party Facilities

Limited municipal influence in operation, space programming, and design.

Funding Variables	YMCA Community Life Centre, Belleville (2027)	Barrie YMCA, Simcoe/Muskoka (2027)	Harper Library & Stork Family YMCA, Waterloo (2011)	Stoney Creek Community Centre, YMCA & Library, London (2010)
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$ 26,494,000	\$ 67,000,000	\$ 22,300,000	\$ 29,783,000
<b>Accounting for Inflation</b>			\$ 29,882,000	\$ 41,100,540
<b>Total Municipal Contribution</b>	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 5,000,000	\$ 9,500,000	\$ 18,533,000
<b>Municipal Contribution as a %</b>	3.77%	7.46%	42.60%	62.23%
<b>Grants Contribution as a %</b>	62.26%	44.63%	18.39%	0.00%
<b>YMCA Contribution as a %</b>	37.74%	6.72%	36.77%	28.54%
<b>Library Contribution as a %</b>	0.00%	0.00%	2.38%	9.23%
<b>Other Contribution as a %</b>	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>Square Footage</b>	60,000	77,000	66,000	82,250
<b>Cost per square foot (inclusive)</b>	\$ 441.57	\$ 870.13	\$ 452.76	\$ 499.70
Provincial Grants	\$ 7,497,000	\$ 29,900,900		
Federal Grants	\$ 8,997,000		\$ 4,100,000	
Library			\$ 530,000	\$ 2,750,000
YMCA	\$ 10,000,000	\$ 4,500,000	\$ 8,200,000	\$ 8,500,000
Other				
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$ 26,494,000	\$ 67,000,000	\$ 22,330,000	\$ 29,783,000

\* The Barrie YMCA has not yet secured all the necessary funds to complete the project.

## YMCA Community Life Centre, Belleville (2027)



The **City of Belleville** is situated on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Anishinaabe, and the Haudenosaunee Peoples. Belleville is a city in Central Ontario, Canada, on the eastern end of Lake Ontario, located at the mouth of the Moira River and on the Bay of Quinte. According to the 2021 Canadian census, its population was 55,071

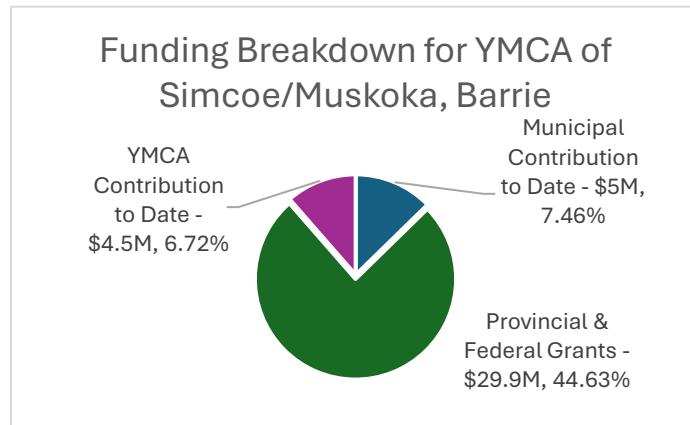
(Census Metropolitan Area population 111,184), with an average age of 44.5. Males comprise 48.4% of the population, while females comprise 51.6%. Locals over 65 represent the largest age group in Belleville (13,030 people), followed by those aged 55 to 64 (8,385 people). Belleville's population is mostly of European descent. The racial makeup of Belleville as of 2021 was 85.1% European descent, 5.6% Indigenous, and 9.3% visible minorities. The largest visible minority groups, as identified in the 2021 census, are South Asian at 3.9%, Black at 1.3%, Filipino at 0.9%, and Chinese at 0.8%.

The YMCA Community Life Centre in Belleville was proposed in 2021 and aims for completion by 2027. The planned facility will span **60,000 square feet** and is expected to cost approximately **\$26.5 million**, equating to **\$441.57 per square foot**. Notable features include two pools, a gymnasium, an exercise studio, a conditioning centre focused on youth and senior programming, and locker rooms with universal and family-changing areas. Additionally, the facility will host social and educational community programs and meeting spaces, including areas designed for individuals with physical and mental disabilities. There will be no municipal influence over space programming and design.

The Government of Canada is investing over \$8.9 million in this project through the Community, Culture, and Recreation Infrastructure Stream of the Investing in Canada plan. The Government of Ontario is providing more than \$7.4 million, while the YMCA of Central East Ontario is contributing over \$5.9 million. The YMCA's sale of its existing building and property for \$1.5 million will enhance the tax base revenue for the city when new homes are constructed on the land. The \$1 million municipal contribution is not cash in hand; it represents the estimated value of the land the municipality will donate for the new facility and the savings on development fees. It is estimated that constructing the YMCA Community Life Centre will directly and indirectly generate \$30 million in economic activity and create 200 full-time jobs during the project's duration.

It is worth noting that this project took 20 years to develop and was supported by both the MP and MPP at its inception. Additionally, much of the funding for this project comes from a series of successful federal and provincial grant applications, primarily attributed to hiring a third party who was experienced in writing grants and knowledgeable about the YMCA's ethos.

## YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka, Barrie (2027)



The **City of Barrie** is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe Peoples, which include the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatomi Nations, collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. Before the mid-17th century, the Wendat Nation (Huron) occupied these lands. Barrie is a city in Central Ontario, Canada, about 90 kilometres north of Toronto. It is located within Simcoe County and

along the shores of Kempenfelt Bay. Although Barrie is part of Simcoe County, it is an upper-tier municipality. Barrie is part of the extended urban area in Southern Ontario known as the Greater Golden Horseshoe. As of the 2021 census, Barrie's population was 147,829, while the census metropolitan area had a population of 212,667 residents. The average age in Barrie is 37.2, which falls below the national average. Over 87% of Barrie residents are of European descent, 7.6% are minorities, and 3.7% of the population identifies as Indigenous. The largest visible minority groups identified in the 2021 census are South Asian at 4.4%, Black at 3.9%, and Latin American at 2.0%.

The YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka Regional Hub was proposed in 2019 and is set to be completed by 2027. The facility will span **77,000 square feet** and cost approximately **\$67 million**, equating to **\$870 per square foot**. It will replace the now-demolished Grove Street facility, which was sold in 2020 and is being developed into residential units. The Grove Street building sale proceeds will be allocated to the new centre. The new YMCA will also feature licensed childcare, youth, and newcomer services, an accessible indoor playground, community meeting spaces, an intergenerational hub, a community kitchen, and a health/fitness and aquatics centre. It has been designed to meet the needs of Barrie for the next 100 years and will host cardiac and cancer rehabilitation programs while also providing 12 units for unhoused youth.

The projected budget for this new facility in 2019 was \$36.5 million; however, due to rising construction costs and unforeseen expenses, that total has now exceeded \$60 million. The \$5 million municipal contribution will be paid in installments that align with the ongoing

construction progress: \$500,000 in 2024, \$1.5 million in 2025, and \$3 million in 2027. Simcoe County will provide an additional \$5 million in funding to address the urgent needs of the community's unhoused youth population, which significantly drives support for the project. Furthermore, the YMCA has secured nearly \$30 million in funding from the province under stream two of the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, a grant that expires in 2027. The project has yet to secure all the funds necessary for its completion. However, due to the urgent need for youth housing, support for the project from all levels of government, and contributions yet to be received from operating partners, the project will ultimately be realized.

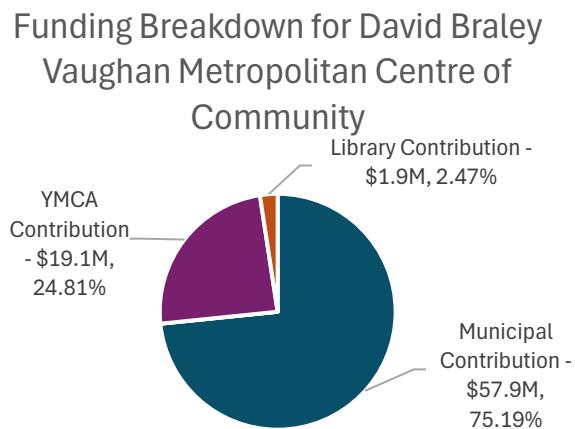
It is worth noting that the YMCA has signed a 50-year land lease with the City of Barrie for \$2 per year, with the opportunity for renewal; the land was not gifted in this instance. Regarding operations, the YMCA will be responsible for all activities, including the community kitchen and playground. In contrast, the Cardiovascular and Cancer rehabilitation centres will partner with the Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre and the Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Centre. At the same time, the YMCA will manage all other spaces.

## Shared Facilities

Mixed operational accountability

Funding Variables	The David Braley Vaughan Metropolitan Centre of Community	StarTech.com YMCA & Library, London (2018)	Quinte West YMCA (2009)
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$ 77,000,000	\$ 54,439,000	\$ 12,800,000
<b>Accounting for Inflation</b>	\$ 83,930,000	\$ 65,871,190	\$ 18,048,000
<b>Total Municipal Contribution</b>	\$ 57,900,000	\$ 42,859,000	\$ 8,400,000
<b>Municipal Contribution as a %</b>	75.19%	78.73%	65.63%
<b>Grants Contribution as a %</b>	0.00%	0.00%	31.25%
<b>YMCA Contribution as a %</b>	24.81%	16.90%	3.13%
<b>Library Contribution as a %</b>	2.47%	8.37%	0.00%
<b>Other Contribution as a %</b>	0.00%	4.37%	0.00%
<b>Square Footage</b>	109,000	170,000	50,000
<b>Cost per square foot (inclusive)</b>	\$ 770.00	\$ 387.48	\$ 360.96
Provincial Grants			\$ 4,000,000
Federal Grants			
Library	\$ 1,900,000	\$ 4,556,000	
YMCA	\$ 19,100,000	\$ 9,200,000	\$ 400,000
Other	\$	\$ 2,380,000	
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$ 77,000,000	\$ 54,439,000	\$ 12,800,000

## The David Braley Vaughan Metropolitan Centre of Community (2022)



The **City of Vaughan** is situated on the traditional territory and Treaty 13 lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The City of Vaughan also recognizes the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee Peoples. The City of Vaughan is the fifth-largest city in the Greater Toronto Area and the 17th-largest city in Canada. Caledon and Brampton bound Vaughan to the west, King/Richmond Hill to the

north, Markham/Richmond Hill to the east, and Toronto to the south. Vaughan was the fastest-growing municipality in Canada between 1996 and 2006, with its population increasing by 80.2% during this period and nearly doubling since 1991. Vaughan has 323,105 residents, with an average age of 40.9 years. Males comprise 48.8% of the population, while females represent 51.2%. Locals under 14 constitute the largest age group in Vaughan (53,290 people), followed by those over 65 (52,690 people). Indigenous people account for 0.2% of Vaughan's total population. The largest visible minority groups identified in the 2021 census are South Asian at 11.2%, Chinese at 8.3%, and West Asian at 4.0%. The most commonly reported ethnic or cultural origin was Italian, Chinese, and Jewish.

In 2016, the municipality approved the YMCA Centre of Community and Library mixed-use project. This approval specified that the City of Vaughan would contribute up to two-thirds of the YMCA's construction and project-related costs and 100% of the municipal library and leisure spaces. The project is financed through Infrastructure Ontario, with the YMCA of Greater Toronto as the borrower and the City of Vaughan as the guarantor. In June 2022, a generous donation of \$5 million from The David Braley Charitable Foundation enabled the completion of the project.

The **109,000-square-foot** project cost **\$77 million**, or approximately **\$84 million** when accounting for inflation, equating to **\$770 per square foot**, and was completed in 2022. The YMCA occupies 75% of the space, while the library and municipal areas account for the remaining 25%. Smart Centres donated the land as part of a deal with the municipality for the building project. The YMCA, library, and municipality each operate distinct spaces within the facility. The only exception is the communal lobby, which serves as a heating and cooling relief station for the unhoused population. The YMCA is a landlord for the library

and municipal areas, meaning they maintain and manage the building and its operations. Although the library and municipality do not contribute to the rent, they share expenses.

The municipally operated Vaughan Studios and Event Space is a 19,000-square-foot venue featuring a rooftop terrace. Its design embodies the contemporary urban lifestyle of the area and integrates cutting-edge, state-of-the-art amenities for the community, including:

- A 3,350 square-foot studio with a sky fold partition and gallery that exit to the rooftop terrace
- Two multi-purpose dance studios (825 square feet and 1,190 square feet)
- A 592-square-foot professional music-recording studio
- A 1,450-square-foot gourmet teaching kitchen

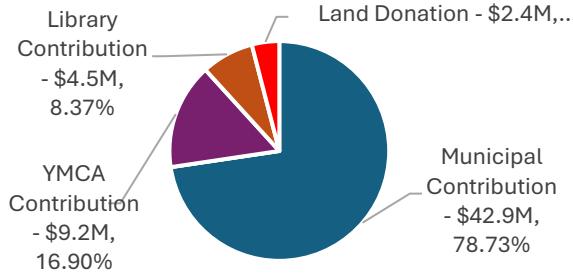
The municipally operated space provides programming for the community, including youth summer camps that use the dance studio and gourmet kitchen areas. Additionally, community members can rent the space for private events, and the rooftop terrace is a significant attraction, with many upscale events hosted there.

It is worth noting that the centre is situated in a densely populated urban area of Vaughan, providing direct access to the Jane and Finch subway line. Pro forma reports indicated that substantial development in the region would lead to increased traffic for the YMCA.

However, the limited parking availability, partnerships with new condominium developments, and the area's heightened vulnerability (implying a greater need for security) have resulted in the YMCA underperforming compared to forecasts. This situation is closely related to new condominium developments that offer gym facilities for their residents, the transient nature of individuals occupying these residences—many of which are owned by overseas investors—and the absence of onsite parking. Moreover, tensions can arise over the use of common spaces when high-end banquet rentals intersect with the unhoused population accessing the same facility.

## StarTech.com Community Centre, YMCA, and Library, London (2018)

### Funding Breakdown for StarTech.com Community Centre, YMCA, & Library



The **City of London** is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lünaapéewak, and Attawandaron Peoples. London is located in Southwestern Ontario along the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor at the confluence of the Thames River and the North Thames

River. According to the 2021 Canadian census, London had a population of 422,324, with a median age of 38.8. Residents aged 20 to 34 represent the largest age group in London, numbering 94,420, followed by those over 65, who total 75,070. Nearly 27% of London's total population identifies as belonging to a minority group, with South Asian, Arab, and Black individuals comprising the majority of this demographic. Indigenous people account for 2.6% of London's population. London is one of the fastest-growing cities in Ontario and is recognized as a regional centre for healthcare and education.

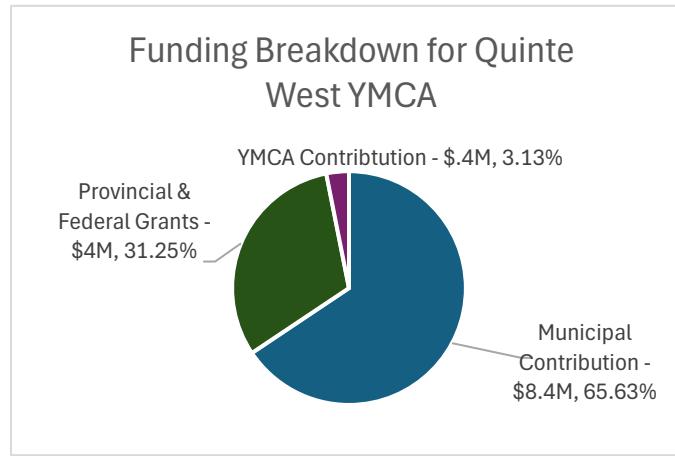
The **170,000-square-foot** project cost **\$54.5 million** or approximately **\$66 million** when accounting for inflation, equating to about **\$400 per square foot**, and was completed in 2018. The building's cost was shared among the municipality, the YMCA, and the library. Its construction represented the most significant municipal investment in the City of London. This project was made possible by a generous donation of land from Ali Soufan of York Developments, and the YMCA contributed an additional \$1.2 million in furniture and equipment. The municipal investment for this project is detailed as follows:

Funding Sources	Amount
Tax Support	\$26,597,000
Development Charges	\$11,706,000
Library Contribution	\$4,556,000
<b>Subtotal Municipal</b>	<b>\$42,859,000</b>
Donation of Land	\$2,380,000
YMCA Contribution	\$9,200,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$54,439,000</b>

The two-storey StarTech.com Community Centre, YMCA, and library is a shared community complex among the YMCA, the City of London, and London Public Library (LPL). The YMCA houses an athletic centre, aerobics rooms, a youth centre, a gymnasium, an aquatics centre with a teaching pool, childcare services, a 25-metre lap pool, change rooms, and a community space. The City of London facility features twin ice pads, multi-purpose rooms, change rooms, and an indoor running track. Additionally, a section of the building includes a library branch. The YMCA, library, and municipality each oversee the ongoing operations of their individual spaces. This innovative funding and partnership model allows the complex to meet diverse community needs while sharing the financial responsibility among the stakeholders.

It is worth noting that the building has undergone three name changes since its inception. The final name change occurred in 2020 to aid financial recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on community leisure spaces. A \$1.5-million sponsorship agreement with StarTech.com will secure the facility's name for the next 15 years. Regarding the ownership and operations of the building, the YMCA holds a 50-year lease with the City of London. Unlike Stoney Creek, the municipality owns the facility and will continue to do so under existing agreements, primarily due to the arena's infrastructure. The new community space was established based on the success of the Stoney Creek Community Centre, YMCA, and Library.

## Quinte West YMCA (2009)



The **City of Quinte West** is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), and the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte First Nation. The City of Quinte West is located in Southern Ontario on the western end shores of the Bay of Quinte on Lake Ontario. With tranquil waterways perfect for fishing, boating, or simply unwinding by the shore, Quinte West boasts a stunning natural

landscape. Paired with a dynamic and forward-thinking community, it is an ideal place to call home and build a career. According to 2021 census information, Quinte West, ON, has a population of 46,560 residents, with an average age of 44. Males comprise 49.8% of the population, while females account for 50.2%. Locals aged 65 and older represent the largest age group in Quinte West, with 10,345 individuals, followed by those aged 55 to 64, numbering 7,875. Indigenous people make up 5% of the population. The largest visible

minority groups identified in the 2021 census are Black at 1.5%, South Asian at 0.9%, and Chinese at 0.6%.

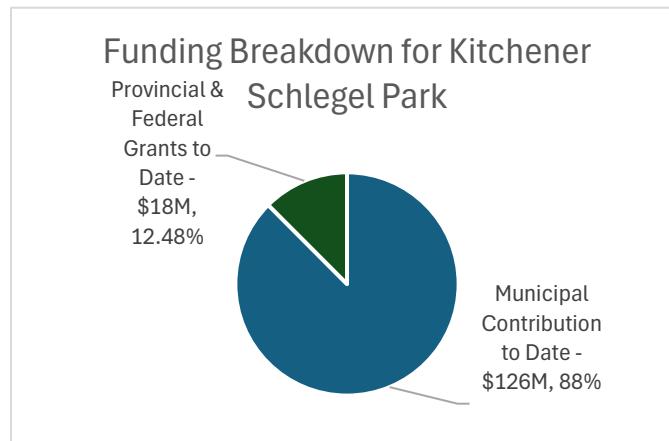
The **50,000-square-foot** project cost nearly **\$13 million** in 2009, or approximately **\$18 million** when adjusted for inflation, equating to roughly **\$360 per square foot**. To fund the project, the province invested over \$4 million in constructing the Quinte West YMCA, creating 32 construction jobs and resulting in 12 full-time and 86 part-time positions upon completion. Additionally, this project received backing through the Investing in Ontario Act. It was part of the Open Ontario Plan, reflecting the province's commitment to fostering active, healthy communities and sustaining economic stability. After raising \$5.8 million through internal and provincial contributions, the City of Quinte West secured \$6.6 million in affordable financing from Infrastructure Ontario to cover a portion of their contribution and to complete the project. Construction began in November 2007 and was finished by May 2009. Notable amenities include a 25-meter pool, two zero-entry pools, a therapeutic pool, a full-size gymnasium, walking tracks, a fitness room, community rooms, and childcare facilities. Also housed inside the centre is the Quinte West Sports Hall of Fame, which honours athletes, builders, and teams from the Quinte West community.

It is worth noting that, in this arrangement, the municipality covers all capital needs while the YMCA operates the facility and retains net revenues. The municipality constructed the facility, and the YMCA covered all interior expenses. The YMCA pays the municipality \$30,000 in annual rent, although depending on the current financial climate, it may receive some relief on these payments.

## Municipally Owned and Operated Facilities

Funding Variables	Kitchener Schlegel Park (2026)	Guelph Southend Community Centre (2026)	Muskoka Lumber Community Centre (2024)
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$ 143,820,000	\$ 115,500,000	\$ 78,000,000
<b>Total Municipal Contribution</b>	\$ 125,869,416	\$ 109,200,000	\$ 56,500,000
<b>Municipal Contribution as a %</b>	88%	94.55%	72.44%
<b>Grants Contribution as a %</b>	12.48%	0.00%	22.44%
<b>YMCA Contribution as a %</b>	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>Library Contribution as a %</b>	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>Other Contribution as a %</b>	0.00%	5.45%	5.13%
<b>Square Footage</b>	211,500	160,000	113,640
<b>Cost per square foot (inclusive)</b>	\$ 680.00	\$ 721.88	\$ 686.38
Provincial Grants	\$ 8,100,000	\$	\$ 17,000,000
Federal Grants	\$ 9,850,584	\$	\$ 500,000
Library			
YMCA			
Other	\$	6,300,000	\$ 4,000,000
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$ 143,820,000	\$ 115,500,000	\$ 78,000,000

## Kitchener Schlegel Park (2026)



**The City of Kitchener** is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral Peoples. Kitchener is located along the Grand River watershed and is one of the three cities that form the Region of Waterloo in Ontario. There are 256,890 residents in Kitchener, with an average age of 39.0. Males comprise 49.7% of the population, while females account for 50.3%. Locals under 14 comprise the largest age group in Kitchener (44,905 people), followed by those aged 25 to 34 (43,345 people). Indigenous people represent 1.9% of the total population, while visible minorities include South Asian at 9.9%, Black at 6.9%, and Latin American at 3.1%. According to the 2021 census, the total population of the Region of Waterloo (Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge) was 575,847, making it one of the fastest-growing regions in Ontario.

The proposed **211,500-square-foot** facility will cost nearly **\$144 million**, which equates to **\$680 per square foot**. It is scheduled for completion in 2026. The federal government has invested \$9.7 million into the project, while Ontario has contributed over \$8 million. The remaining \$126.2 million was financed through development charges collected by the municipality and by incurring debt. In a recent news release, the Schlegel Park project was identified as one of the main capital projects for the City of Kitchener. It will be partly responsible for the 3.9% increase in property taxes for Kitchener residents in 2025. A detailed breakdown of the funding for this centre is as follows:

Funding Sources	Amount
Federal Government Grant (ICIP)	\$17,950,584
2021-2023 Approved Budget (DC Funded)	\$3,550,717
Draw down the existing DC reserve fund balance	\$36,708,699
Debt issued in 2025	\$37,695,000
Debt issued in 2026	\$47,915,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$143,820,000</b>

The City of Kitchener will be exclusively accountable for the operations and management of the new facility.

The new community complex will be Kitchener's first net-zero carbon building, designed as one of Canada's most sustainable community facilities. In addition to operating at a very high level of energy efficiency through a geothermal heating and cooling system, it will also house Kitchener's most extensive array of solar panels. These panels will reduce carbon emissions by 22 tonnes annually and save the municipality nearly \$100,000 in utility costs yearly.

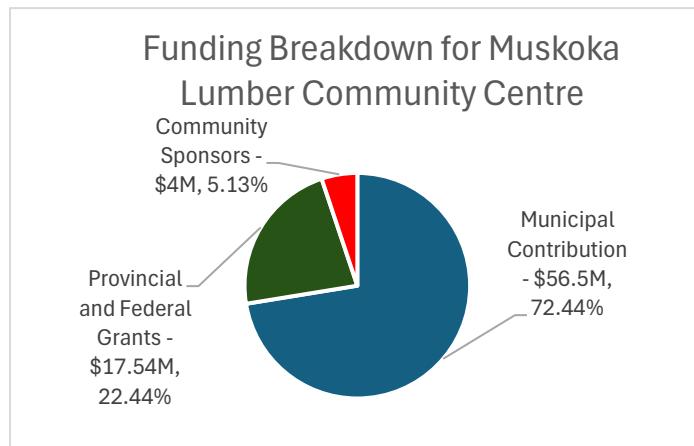
Intentionally created to promote a wider variety of sports and physical activities within the community, the new community space will feature:

- A FIFA-sized indoor turf fieldhouse that can be divided into four fields to allow more residents to use the turf simultaneously for sports such as soccer, cricket, and lacrosse
- The aquatics centre includes a community leisure pool and a separate lane pool with several viewing galleries
- A second-floor walking track around the perimeter of the turf field
- An indoor cricket batting cage to support year-round growth and development in this rapidly growing sport within the community
- A multi-purpose space with top-notch athlete amenities, including a sizeable dividable room for community events, family parties, or other rentals

The new facility has been designed with extensive landscaping and various outdoor amenities, which will help it blend seamlessly with the existing outdoor elements of RBJ Schlegel Park. The park features two outdoor soccer fields, a multi-purpose turf sports field, a cricket pitch, four outdoor courts, a splash pad, and additional play areas. The new complex is expected to accommodate 380,000 users in its first year of operations.

It is worth noting that the City of Kitchener adopted an Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) approach to designing and constructing the Kitchener indoor community complex. This approach enhances cost certainty and streamlines efficiencies during the design and construction phases by ensuring that key stakeholders responsible for the project's design, fabrication, and construction aspects are aligned under a single legal agreement. This model provides greater cost certainty and facilitates the quicker completion of projects compared to traditional project delivery methods.

## Muskoka Lumber Community Centre, Bracebridge (2024)



**The Town of Bracebridge** is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe – specifically the Ojibway, the Chippewa, and the Algonquin Peoples. Bracebridge is located in the Heart of Muskoka, the epitome of Canada's Cottage Country. There are 17,305 residents in Bracebridge, with an average age of 47.5. Males comprise 48.2% of the population, while females account for 51.8%. Residents over 65 comprise

the largest age group (4,850 people), followed by those aged 55 to 64 (2,960 people). Indigenous peoples constitute 3.1% of the population. The largest visible minority groups identified in the 2021 census are South Asian at 0.8, Black at 0.5%, and Chinese at 0.3%. The population doubles during the summer months, and the community has a diversified economy highlighted by strong construction, hospitality, and professional sectors.

The **113,640-square-foot** community centre opened in 2024, costing **\$78 million**, or approximately **\$690 per square foot**. The Goble family donated the 22 acres required for the new centre. Sponsorship deals were secured within the local community to raise funds for the latest build in exchange for naming rights. Nearly \$4 million was raised in this manner; an additional \$17 million came from the province of Ontario, half a million from the federal government, and municipal investments exceeded \$61 million, all contributing to the total cost of \$78 million.

The Muskoka Lumber Community Centre is a modern, multi-generational hub in Bracebridge designed to centralize community activities and services. It features a 1,000-seat arena, a library, the Proline Rentals Fieldhouse, an outdoor courtyard, and play areas, with space for future expansion. The 1,850 square-metre fieldhouse provides year-round sports opportunities, hosting two NBA-sized basketball courts, volleyball courts, pickleball, tennis, badminton, indoor soccer, and lawn bowling. The centre also includes a large auditorium with a deck overlooking the playground and forest. It is ideal for weddings, conferences, and events, ensuring versatile use for sports, culture, and community gatherings. The library is nearly triple the size of its previous location. New library features include a recording studio, a maker space equipped with a 3D printer and laser printer (among other tools), a dedicated local history room, multiple spaces that the public can book, and expansive common areas.

In October 2014, the Town adopted a Preliminary Feasibility Plan to develop a new community centre to replace the existing Bracebridge Memorial Arena, constructed in 1949. At that time, the Bracebridge Public Library also sought to expand its services and needed additional space. The loans required to fund the centre have positioned Bracebridge as one of Ontario's most indebted communities. However, the Council determined that this level of debt was justifiable when weighed against the benefits the centre would bring to the community. The Town of Bracebridge supported incurring debt for the Muskoka Lumber Community Centre with a comprehensive financial strategy to minimize taxpayer impact. While the current 110-year-old library was beautiful, it no longer met the community's needs. Moreover, Bracebridge needed to replace aging assets, such as the decades-old arena, that no longer fulfilled their original purpose and provide new facilities to set the stage for leisure and learning for future generations.

## Summary of Cases

The above cases illustrate the various operating and funding models for developing a new community complex. Specifically, the proposed and recent examples provide a realistic perspective on funding costs, as the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the market, which has yet to recover. Additionally, these cases present an opportunity to explore best practices in greening, design, and accessibility initiatives to meet the diverse needs of community members now and in the future. These cases do not consider the costs of environmental remediation or the expenses related to renovating the existing building at the Grand Trunk site.

Municipalities chose to work with Infrastructure Ontario when financing information was available. These projects were funded through development charges, debt issuance, tax support, partner contributions, and provincial and federal grants (discussed in greater detail below). Municipalities also reduced costs by leveraging discounted services from local businesses (e.g., construction), securing community sponsorships, receiving donated land, and offering other in-kind support. In addition to financial contributions, municipalities often provided the land, retained facility ownership, and took responsibility for maintenance and long-term capital planning.

Several grants were obtained to help fund the community leisure spaces discussed in this report. Provincial funding sources include the Investing in Ontario Act, the Open Ontario Plan, and stream two of the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund (CSRIF), available until 2027. At the federal level, Belleville and Kitchener successfully accessed funding through the Investing in Canada Plan under the Community, Cultural, and Recreational Infrastructure stream. Moreover, the Gas Tax Fund and the Canada Healthy Communities Initiative have benefited previous projects.

Current grant opportunities include:

- Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund (CSRIF)
  - [Click here to learn more about this grant.](#)
- Canada Community-Building Fund (CCBF) (formerly the Gas Tax Fund)
  - [Click here to learn more about this grant.](#)
- Community Spaces Fund
  - [Click here to learn more about this grant.](#)
- Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) Capital Grants
  - [Click here to learn more about this grant.](#)
- Community Buildings Retrofit Initiative (through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Green Municipal Fund)
  - [Click here to learn more about this grant.](#)

Furthermore, Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) provides funding opportunities for smaller projects that align with a broader vision, and more research would identify additional grants that can be accessed.

Since grant application deadlines, eligibility criteria, and funding availability can change, reviewing each program directly when starting the application process is essential.

As mentioned, the YMCA already has an MOU with the City of Stratford, and the library's involvement remains uncertain. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the YMCA and Stratford Public Library have outgrown their facilities. The current YMCA building is over 60 years old and does not meet the community's needs, particularly in terms of aquatics, as it contains the only indoor community pool. If this pool requires maintenance, Stratford will become the largest community in Canada without an indoor pool. The same applies to the library. According to a 2022 study commissioned by SPL, the existing facility is significantly undersized for the community it serves. This limitation results in various operational issues, such as fire hazards, limitations in providing technology services, an inability to address community needs effectively, and serious accessibility concerns. New facilities are essential, and we are at a critical moment. We must now determine the level of involvement the City of Stratford will have with this project.

Based on the analyzed cases and square foot costs for projects built in 2020 and later, research estimates that a new facility will cost approximately **\$695 per square foot**. The

City of Stratford aims to construct a community complex that includes a pool, gym, walking track, childcare, library, meeting rooms, café, community spaces, communal spaces, auditorium, communal kitchen, lounge, change rooms, and washrooms with a planned size between 70,000 and 110,000 square feet. The total project cost may be between **\$48.5 million and \$76.5 million**, based on the findings of this study.

The research indicates that, depending on the size of the proposed facility—including a YMCA and potentially a library with limited municipal involvement—the required municipal investment could range from **\$1.83 million to approximately \$47.59 million**.

The research indicates that the necessary municipal investment could range from **\$31.88 million to approximately \$60.15 million** to construct a new community complex that accommodates the YMCA, the SPL, and other community groups (e.g., SACC), with shared operations and governance over space programming and design.

Lastly, research indicates that building a municipally owned and operated community space could require an investment ranging from approximately **\$35.08 million to \$72.29 million**.

It is important to note that regardless of the extent of the municipality's influence on the project, they are still obligated to provide a degree of investment.

*Please refer to Appendix A for costing analysis calculations.*

A SWOT analysis was conducted with potential key stakeholders involved in the project's inception and design to understand better how a shared partnership might work. The following section presents the SWOT analysis findings in exploring this potential partnership.

## SWOT Analysis

During a workshop on December 18, 2024, representatives from the YMCA of Three Rivers, the Stratford Public Library, and the City of Stratford participated in a SWOT analysis to evaluate potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of collaborating on the proposed community space at the Grand Trunk site. Below is a summary of the results.

### Strengths

- Operating strengths of the YMCA – save cities money through streamlined operations
- Shared operational costs among partners strengthen and mitigate financial risk for individual partners
- By expanding the partnership, there is greater access to a variety of potential funding sources
- Streamlining services for community members → Meet the demands of amenities needed in the community with greater access as partners are mainly serving the same constituents
- Positions the community for growth, economic development, and thoughtful planning for future generations
- Historically, capital investments are a win for the City of Stratford, boosting tax revenues for all levels of government and providing a 200% ROI for local government (CBoC, 2022)
- Increases the value of surrounding properties
- Impact more community members – serve similar populations – do not need to pick where to go or travel to more than one place
- The halo effect will benefit the downtown core
- Cost versus value – tangible versus intangible benefits – many intangible benefits associated with this partnership (attracting and retaining talent, social cohesion, etc.)
- Leverage partnerships for community fundraising

- Existing partnership culture is further ahead than other partnerships (positive reciprocal relationships and agreements – already demonstrated and proven) → will not operate in silos
- Unified leadership to help with diverse problem-solving
- Constructive collaboration among partners like the Municipality, SPL, and YMCA and potential collaborators like the Stratford Arts and Culture Collective (SACC).
- Opportunity for an incredibly unique building at a “complex site” steeped in rich historical meaning

## Weaknesses

- Operational differences – each organization operates differently and offers a different experience and set of expectations for users
- Not everyone will win—access to facility spaces will require compromise (size, access, etc.)
- Diverse interests, accountabilities, and stakeholders
- Scheduling of programs across partners—avoid duplication of services
- Differing opinions of community members
- Heavily dependent on fundraising and grants

## Opportunities

- Thinking ahead generationally
- Arrange agreements with future residential building developers to exclude community leisure spaces from the infrastructure plan → aiming to maximize users for the new community space (e.g., condominium members receiving 50% off YMCA memberships and community space rentals, ensuring a certain level of guaranteed revenue)
- There is an opportunity for shared governance to ensure alignment in planning and day-to-day operations
- Flexible use of space—when municipal spaces are not in demand, they can be accessed by the YMCA, SPL, or other groups to accommodate overflow or high-demand periods, and the opposite is also true

- Educate the community on how to access discounted YMCA memberships → show everyone what that looks like
- New space will offer more services to the community with greater accessibility, inclusivity, and green initiatives in mind
- Potential to involve Indigenous community with site design while addressing specific community needs—if they are willing to be involved
- Determine demand and type of pre-existing community facilities in Stratford to evaluate what community spaces are genuinely needed in this new complex, avoiding the duplication of spaces that are not in demand
- Determine the space required for all parties involved to serve the community effectively

## Threats

- Environmental remediation will cost money and take time
- Each organization has its own governance and management structures
- Political uncertainty at both the provincial and federal government levels
- Looming tariffs will impact the local economy
- Competing needs may cause tension
- Competing users may cause tension
- Staffing of these centres can be tricky → Lifeguards and childcare
- SPL and YMCA are quickly aging out of their structures
- Challenge to meet demand or expectations in the beginning
- Trying to get things right
- Future change in leadership on all sides, with differing priorities
- There is a financial risk associated with a project of this scale and complexity
- Challenges arising from shared decision-making

Ultimately, to advance the realization of the Sports Tourism Strategy and Municipal Cultural Plan, the municipality of Stratford must have the capacity to deliver the necessary programming and facilities to make these plans a reality. Therefore, the City of Stratford

should favour a shared model. The following section presents best practices in funding and operating models based on the ten cases explored and concludes the report.

## CONCLUSION

The concluding section of this report discusses best practices and funding models. I then outline the rationale for moving forward and finish with the next steps.

### Best Practices Operating & Funding Models

The SWOT analysis and stakeholder interviews revealed that these operational and funding partnerships can be effective. However, the following details must be considered throughout the design and implementation process. Each organization cannot operate successfully in its own silos; operational collaboration is crucial. The spaces must complement one another and will challenge organizational cultures in doing so. Strong MOUs, non-compete clauses among partners, new developments, and involving those responsible for ground operations in the design and planning phases will ensure operational success in a shared operating model.

When it comes to securing funding through grant opportunities, starting early is crucial. The YMCA can begin applying for grants with just a letter of support from the municipality. Engaging a third party who is familiar with the cause and has experience as a technical writer will enhance the chances of successful grant applications. Numerous opportunities exist to raise project funds through community sponsorships for naming rights related to the proposed facility spaces. Moreover, incorporating an Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) design from the project's inception will enable cost-saving measures. As mentioned, using an IPD in new builds refers to a project delivery method whereby key parties responsible for the project's design, fabrication, and construction are united through a single legal agreement. This model provides greater cost certainty and facilitates quicker project completion than traditional project delivery methods.

### The Rationale for Moving Forward

The most recent census data released by Statistics Canada indicates that Stratford's population reached 33,232 between 2016 and 2021—a 5.6% increase. While this might not appear as significant as the double-digit growth reported in nearby urban centres like London and Kitchener-Waterloo, it is approximately three times more than the 1.8% growth Stratford experienced during the previous five-year census period. With tourism and manufacturing serving as the main drivers of economic prosperity in this community, it is also essential to consider those who fuel these industries, including established and new community members, and the environment that sustains us. Considering population growth, the changing demographics of the area, the communal benefits tied to these spaces, the necessity of approaching economic development from the perspective of

talent attraction and retention, and the awareness that building this community complex will enhance property values, it is crucial for this project to advance without delay.

Moreover, this project supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acts as a global framework for peace and prosperity, highlighting the well-being of both people and the planet. Central to this agenda is the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which call for collective action to eliminate poverty, enhance health and education, reduce inequality, promote economic growth, combat climate change, and safeguard natural ecosystems. The proposed partnership project with the City of Stratford, SPL, YMCA, and other potential partners aligns with and can advance several of these goals, including:

- Goal 3 – Good Health and Well-being
- Goal 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Goal 9 – Industry Innovation and Infrastructure
- Goal 10 – Reduced Inequalities
- Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Goal 13 – Climate Action
- Goal 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
- Goal 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

Finally, we cannot overlook the significance of this project and its potential contribution to reconciliation. This new community space can aid decolonization efforts and fulfill the Truth and Reconciliation (2015) Calls to Action by Indigenizing the centre. Several ways to achieve this are outlined below:

- Waive user fees for community members who identify as Indigenous (the University of Waterloo has waived all tuition fees for students from the Six Nations of the Grand River and the Mississaugas of the Credit)
- Dedicate a meeting space that can accommodate Indigenous ceremonies
- Commission an Indigenous artist to create a mural welcoming users to the space
- Work with local Indigenous communities to determine their needs and how to accommodate those needs in the new community space

At the forefront of these initiatives is the recognition that the Indigenous community must be willing to participate in and support the initiatives outlined above. This will ensure that the project promotes Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence while avoiding the imposition of colonial ways of knowing in project delivery and design.

## Future Considerations

The YMCA and SPL have outgrown their current spaces, necessitating a new facility to accommodate their needs and those of the City of Stratford. The proposed 70,000–110,000 square foot community complex would feature amenities such as a pool, gym, walking track, childcare, library, meeting rooms, café, community spaces, communal spaces, auditorium, communal kitchen, lounge, change rooms, and washrooms. The new facility is estimated to cost between \$48.5 million and \$76.5 million, based on current construction costs of \$695 per square foot.

This research aimed to provide the Ad Hoc Grand Trunk Renewal Committee and Stratford City Council with a conceptual cost analysis to determine potential municipal investments and operating models for the proposed community complex. Data was collected from ten Ontario community leisure spaces, reflecting a variety of partnerships and demographics. Consequently, it was determined that a shared facility would require an investment from the municipality ranging from \$31.88 million to \$60.15 million. To establish a foundation for regeneration, the City of Stratford must decide how much it will invest in the proposed Grand Trunk Community Hub; this is critically important.

Furthermore, significant work has been done concerning the land's environmental remediation needs. Staff involvement in the environmental remediation of the Grand Trunk Railway site began in 1993, with numerous investigations carried out over the years. According to the 2018 Grand Trunk Master Plan, this site comprises several conceptual parcels with unique characteristics and remediation needs. More details about the parcel remediation needs, costs, and phases of restoration can be found in Taylor Crinklaw's November 2024 report. Climate action initiatives and grant opportunities are available at both the Federal and Provincial levels; these grants will significantly assist in reducing municipal costs to remediate the land.

The Grand Trunk Community Hub will unite education, community engagement, entrepreneurship, and innovation to enhance and diversify Stratford's economy while elevating its citizens' well-being by providing valuable services and amenities for all. This Hub will support various uses, establishing a distinct identity, sense of place, and focal point for the Grand Trunk site and building while seamlessly integrating with the downtown core. It will foster a vibrant space for activity, catering to the diverse needs and interests of Stratford's population now and in the future. The project development will be guided by the six principles established by the Grand Trunk Renewal Ad Hoc Committee members. Any proposed changes to the site must be:

1. Sustainable and Fiscally Responsible

2. Celebrate the Past and Future Forward
3. Inspiring and Inclusive
4. Distinct, Diverse, and Multifunctional
5. Connected and Community Focused
6. Thriving and Vibrant

If the Council approves the project's advancement, we can refine its scope, explore funding opportunities, and engage stakeholders. These steps will enable us to report back to the Council with improved plans for final consideration.

Leisure is a fundamental human right, and this project promises significant benefits for the community. However, in a capitalist-driven society, these benefits are often undervalued. My research aims to serve as a driving force, encouraging all stakeholders to move forward with these vital partnerships and essential initiatives. When we act with purpose, we can create meaningful change within our community and beyond.

# Appendix A: Calculations for the projected cost of the proposed community complex, Stratford

## Costing Analysis:

### For the third-party model:

- Minimum percentage: 3.77%
- Maximum percentage: 62.2%
- Total project cost range: \$48.5M to \$76.5M

#### Calculations:

- Minimum municipal investment =  $48.5 \times 0.0377 = 1.83$  (approximately \$1.83M)
- Maximum municipal investment =  $76.5 \times 0.622 = 47.59$  (approximately \$47.59M)

#### Range:

- Municipal investment range: \$1.83M to \$47.59M

### For the shared model:

- Minimum percentage: 65.7%
- Maximum percentage: 78.7%
- Total project cost range: \$48.5M to \$76.5M

#### Calculations:

- Minimum municipal investment =  $48.5 \times 0.657 = 31.88$  (approximately \$31.88M)
- Maximum municipal investment =  $76.5 \times 0.787 = 60.15$  (approximately \$60.15M)

#### Range:

- Municipal investment range: \$31.88M to \$60.15M

### For the municipally owned and operated model:

- Minimum percentage: 72.4%
- Maximum percentage: 94.5%
- Total project cost range: \$48.5M to \$76.5M

Calculations:

- Minimum municipal investment =  $48.5 \times 0.724 = 35.08$  (approximately \$35.08M)
- Maximum municipal investment =  $76.5 \times 0.945 = 72.29$  (approximately \$72.29M)

Range:

- Municipal investment range: \$35.08M to \$72.29M

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A photograph of a man with a beard and a young child looking at books on library shelves. The man is wearing a dark hoodie and the child is wearing a grey zip-up hoodie. The background is filled with bookshelves.

# Stratford Public Library and the Grand Trunk Renewal Site

**NEW LIBRARY  
Case Statement**

February 2026



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# The Need for A New Library

Stratford Public Library (SPL) is a bustling community hub. As a key contributor in our community's wellbeing and quality of life, SPL consistently ranks as one of the Ontario's busiest medium-sized public libraries in terms of circulation, program attendance and number of visitors.

Research shows that people from every neighbourhood within Stratford regularly visit the library. In 2025, an average of 12,500 came through its doors each month, borrowing over 400,000 items, and using the library's services in countless ways.

Since the library's construction in 1903 - 123 years ago - Stratford's population has more than has tripled. A 2022 update to SPL's 2003 space needs assessment, reconfirmed that the library is significantly undersized for both current and future populations. In 2023, addressing this space deficit became a top priority in the Stratford Public Library Board's Strategic Plan.

It's evident that SPL has outgrown its existing building. While there have been two additions, one in 1926 and another in 1975, there has been no significant capital investment in the past 50 years. Since that time, collection formats, technology usage, programming and community usage has grown and changed considerably. More public space is required to accommodate Stratford's growing population. Additionally, accessibility design requirements have progressed well beyond what the current facility can accommodate.

Approximately 34,000 square feet is needed to operate an efficient and effective library for Stratford's current population, and 50,000 square feet is needed for the expected population in 25 years. The current space is only 12,472 net square feet and is located on a landlocked site where expanded services and future growth are not possible. Parking cannot be expanded or placed on a level access. Additionally, the building's multi-level layout has created inefficiencies in staffing and customer service, while presenting significant accessibility challenges for users of all ages.

A 2013 building condition survey showed that by 2030 it would cost \$1.8 million in capital expenditures to upkeep the facility, systems and components, without resulting in any substantial improvement to the library services. Over \$1.6 million has been spent in capital expenditures over the past 10 years, with an additional \$500,000 anticipated in the next five years. The building has been well maintained by the Library and the municipality, but ongoing issues remain, including areas containing asbestos, drafty wood framed windows, inconsistent heating and ventilation, and chronic concerns with the front steps. An updated building survey report is expected in Spring 2026.

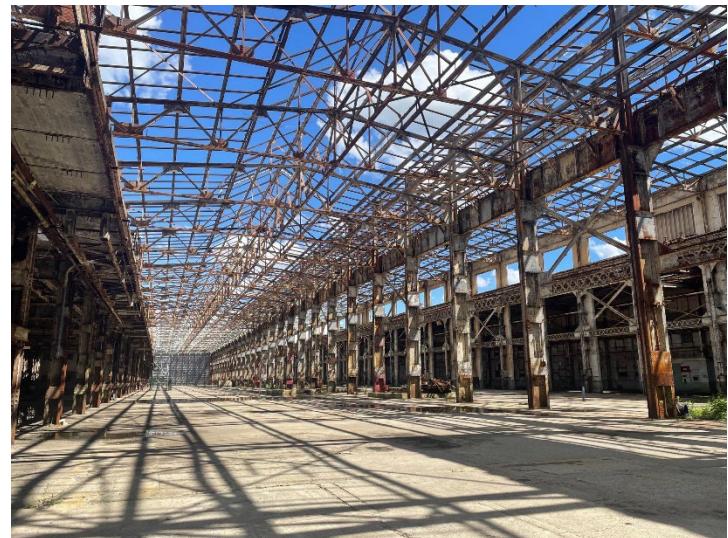
A new Stratford Public Library would serve as a vibrant, modern community gathering place in downtown Stratford, potentially welcoming up to 19,000 visitors each month. This new development would become a landmark in the heart of Stratford's downtown - a source of civic identity and pride for future generations.

# Vision

## A NEW LIBRARY AT THE GRAND TRUNK RENEWAL SITE

A redeveloped Stratford Public Library will be part of the larger vision to repurpose the Grand Trunk site in downtown Stratford. In partnership with the YMCA of Three Rivers and the City of Stratford, this project represents the strongest opportunity to shape the Grand Trunk site as a true community hub for residents.

A shared community facility featuring the Library and the YMCA has immense potential. It would create opportunities to share space and services, strengthen partnerships and deliver a greater collective impact on the community than either organization could achieve alone.



### BENEFITS FOR THE LIBRARY

- Sufficient space to build a library which is adequate for today and can properly serve future generations
- Opportunity to work more closely with the YMCA, nurturing both bodies and minds
- Provide space to work more fulsomely with our many other community partners
- Is located downtown which has been communicated to us as being important by the community
- Close to transit for better access and accessibility
- Opportunity to generate revenue streams through a retail space and space rentals

### BENEFITS FOR THE GTR

- SPL is a welcoming and trusted community asset. The library would capture resident's imagination and garner significant community support.
- SPL serves everyone in our community: all ages and backgrounds, embracing and advocating for diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging
- Libraries are a year-round destination, with SPL seeing over 150,000 annual visitors
- SPL is a proven community partner and connector. SPL believes community connections are vital in all that it does
- A city with amenities is a vibrant and attractive one and libraries are part of that package
- With 40 staff members and dozens of volunteers, in addition to the thousands of monthly visitors, the halo effect of use and spending will be beneficial to the site and downtown as whole



Toronto Reference Public Library, Calgary Public Library, Bracebridge Public Library

## BENEFITS FOR THE COMMUNITY

The library would be accessible and optimized for patron use and material flow. It would have adequate seating and collection space as well as more suitable space for entrepreneurs and local creatives to work in the MakerSpace. The library would provide both public and private space for the community: meeting rooms, reflection space, an auditorium for performances and events, and flexible space for people to be and enjoy being with others in the community. And parking would no longer be a concern for those with accessibility issues or for young families. The Library would not only be energy efficient, but designed with sustainability and environmental awareness at the core. And most importantly, the design will be flexible and adaptable to change over time as our community changes.

### JOINT FACILITY

There are many mission alignments between the Library and the YMCA, where we could both benefit from colocation, including sharing a lobby, restrooms, flexible auditorium space, café, and other amenities. There would also be shared users, increasing programming opportunities. In addition, the library has dozens of partnerships with other community organizations. The synergies created by these partnerships will generate incredible impetus towards our shared goals and contribute to the financial sustainability of the library.

### QUIET SPACE

Despite being a vibrant community hub, a library must also serve as a space where the community can find a place of solace. A place where students can find a quiet area to study or entrepreneurs can work, and community partners can meet with clients. Meeting rooms and study pods throughout will serve this need.

### COMMUNITY SPACE

A library needs adequate seating and space for the community to gather and use as their third space. Public seating will grow 400% and will be spread throughout the building, providing both space for groups, but also for people to focus on their work. There will be a children's area for young families to gather and children to play, as well as dedicated programming space for storytimes and various children's programming. A teen zone for youth to hang out and build connections through books, games and programming.

### ACCESSIBLE

The new library would be properly accessible for young families, people with assistive devices, and all those in between. Shelving of collections will be at an accessible height and aisles will be wide enough for assistive devices. Library materials could be returned easily after hours. Additionally, being close to the transit hub will support active transportation, while also improving our parking situation.



Edmonton Public Library, Kitchener Public Library,  
Calgary Public Library



## EXPERIENCE SPACE

A full-scale MakerSpace and innovation lab will provide greater access to technologies such as 3D printers, laser cutters, sewing machines, podcasting booth, video editing stations, large scale printer and other technologies and tools, allowing us to better serve Stratford's creatives and innovators. This space will also allow for small business to prototype products, and create promotional materials.

## INCLUSIVE SPACE

Public libraries serve all members of a community. The new SPL would offer inclusive spaces for members of local Indigenous communities (such as spaces for Indigenous art and a sharing circle), reflection space (prayer room), and space for new parents (including a space for nursing and stroller parking).

## REVENUE POTENTIAL

The retail space would be dedicated to host fundraising activities and book sales. With dedicated programming and meeting space, revenue may be generated through space bookings by the community.

## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

A joint facility with the YMCA will provide youth with an opportunity to be active after school, and pop over to the library to study, collaborate and hang out with their friends. It will give them a free place in downtown Stratford to just hang out, without the expectation to pay for anything.

## ENGAGEMENT SPACE

Imagine a Library with flexible space to engage the community, host speakers and performances, and showcase arts and culture groups. There will be space for community partners and social service organizations to offer complementary programs and services.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

As a public institution, libraries have a responsibility to be sustainable in their design. The library will be built using sustainable design principles, with an aim to be carbon neutral or better.

## HOPE

A new library will provide the community with a free and welcoming place of refuge, grounded in the belief of that access to knowledge, creativity, and connection should belong to everyone.

That's why libraries exist. And when the community comes together, it becomes something stronger.

## ESTIMATED SQUARE FOOTAGE REQUIREMENTS

A facility planning tool was created by Lemay Architects as part of the 2022 Library Space Needs study to help determine future square footage needs. This planning tool uses library design standards developed by the Administrators of Rural and Urban Libraries of Ontario as well as provincial and local accessibility design standards. A standard of 1 net square foot (nsf) per capita was recommended when planning a new library. Below is estimated square footage needs by program.

By collocating alongside the YMCA and other potential partners, there are opportunities for shared facilities such as a lobby, café, meeting rooms, and washroom facilities. While a new standalone library would require upwards of 45,000 gross square feet (gsf), sharing such facilities has the potential to reduce the anticipated library space needs by 15-20%.

With a facility at the greater Grand Trunk Renewal site, there would be opportunity for shared outdoor areas such as vehicle parking, bike racks, stroller parking, and exterior engagement space. For the purposes of this report, these numbers have not been included in the space calculations.

	Library Needs	Shared Space
Collections	10,040	
Core program space	2,100	
Visitor Seating	5,920	
Staff Spaces	3,380	
Logistical Spaces	2,800	200
IT & Building Infrastructure	650	1,600
MakerSpace	2,050	
Community Rooms	1,150	2,870
Retail / Café	500	1,000
Circulation Space – 30%	8,580	1,700
<b>Total Gross Square Feet</b>	<b>37,170</b>	<b>7,370</b>

# Funding Model, Economic Impact and Benefits

## COSTING & FUNDING SOURCES

The cost of a new library is difficult to estimate with precision at this early stage, particularly given the possibility of shared facilities with partners, and an ownership model that has yet to be determined.

Using 2025 Altus building cost data for new public libraries, the average construction cost across Canada is approximately \$650 per square foot.

Working collaboratively with community partners such as the YMCA and the City of Stratford to identify shared spaces and reduce duplication can meaningfully lower both initial capital costs and operating expenses. Preliminary estimates suggest opportunities to share approximately 8,000 gsf, directly reducing the size and cost of the library build, while lowering the facility's ongoing operational needs through shared staffing, maintenance, and building systems.

### MUNICIPAL FUNDING

Public libraries are core municipal infrastructure, comparable to recreation centres, roads, parks, and emergency services. As an essential service for Stratford residents, library facilities require the same level of long-term municipal investment, renewal, and stewardship as any other municipal asset.

A new Stratford Public Library is well positioned to align with future federal–provincial–municipal capital programs. These programs typically require municipal sponsorship or cost-sharing commitments, and the Library Board may seek such support when the project advances to a funding-ready stage.

In addition to intergovernmental capital opportunities, Development Charges (DCs) are available to contribute to the cost of a new library. According to the City of Stratford's 2022 Development Charges Report, DC funds may be used for the acquisition of land and the acquisition, construction, or improvement of buildings and related structures. The associated Development Charges Study indicates that up to 5% of eligible new-build costs may be recoverable through DCs.

### PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL FUNDING / GRANTS

SPL will be exploring funding sources at the provincial and federal levels. Grants such as the Green Municipal Fund and Canada Community Building Fund are prime opportunities. SPL will also explore other funding opportunities to raise both large and smaller sums.

### FUNDRAISING

The Stratford Public Library Board has charitable status and intends to embark on a major initiative to raise funds from the community through a variety of means.

The Library will also conduct traditional fundraising initiatives to attract major private donors and explore corporate sponsors and donors to augment our fundraising potential.

### CURRENT ASSETS

SPL's current building and property at 19 St. Andrew Street will need to be leveraged to contribute to the capital cost of the new build space. In Spring 2024 Otto & Company appraised the property with a conservative value of \$2,000,000. Additionally, the library has begun the contribution of funds into a reserve to support the costs of a new facility.

## ONGOING OPERATIONAL COSTS

The current library is relatively expensive to operate. Its multi-floor layout and numerous entrance/exit points require higher staffing levels to ensure community safety and maintain a secure working environment. Initial calculations indicate that in a newly designed, efficient facility, staffing needs should remain stable—even with an increase in overall space.

By improving environmental performance and sharing facility staff and operating expenses with partner organizations, it is anticipated that the library's facility-related operating costs will remain cost-neutral, if not decrease, over time.

## VALUE OF THE LIBRARY

In 2025, a Value of the Library study found that for every municipal dollar invested in Stratford Public Library, there is a Social Return on Investment (SROI) of \$6.64 per person, generating a total economic benefit of \$19,343,872.

The largest area of impact – unsurprisingly – was entertainment and leisure, valued at just over \$10 million. Significant benefits were also identified in local economic development (just over \$3 million), educational development (\$3.2 million), and inclusion and wellbeing of (\$383,000).

Public libraries continue to generate economic value long after construction is complete. They support Stratford's economy by:

- Providing the mechanism for life-long learning to support a knowledge-based economy
- Bringing thousands of people each day into the heart of the city to create a vibrant retail and service environment
- Delivering programs and services that support caregivers and give children the tools they need to learn and be ready to go to school
- Engaging small business in the potential of greater success through access to information
- Supporting employment and career development with the opportunity to use technology and information resources to enhance skills.

# Background Information

## PAST PLANS AND STRATEGIC HISTORY

### **2003: Space Needs Study, prepared by the Ventin Group**

This report found that at the time, SPL required a facility which was 60% larger than it currently was. Looking ahead, Stratford would require a library facility which was 27,000 nsf or 35,100 gsf to meet the needs of the population of Stratford in 2027.

### **2022: Space Needs Report, prepared by Lemay Architects**

This report found that SPL requires a library facility of 34,000 gfs to meet the needs of the current population. Looking at the population forecast for Stratford 20 years, the report recommended a 44,000 gsf facility. The report additionally endorsed the library provide space for social services agencies to co-locate at a joint facility, resulting in an overall recommendation of 60,000 gsf. Recommendations included a new build with affordable housing, a retail conversion, or a heritage site transformation.

### **2023: 2023-2026 Strategic Plan**

The library board made it a priority to address the space needs of the Library in these Strategic Plan. One of the primary directions is “Align Space with Demand” where SPL will plan for enough space to accommodate the program, services, and resources offered, with room for the library to continue to grow in the future.

**February 2024** – The Library requested City Council consider them as an anchor tenant at the Grand Trunk Renewal site. The Library was referred to the Grand Trunk Advisory Committee for consideration.

**March 2024** – The Library shared their request with the Grand Trunk Advisory Committee.

**July 2025** – The City of Stratford directed staff to conduct detailed costings and feasibility studies for a shared community facility, evaluating:

- A potential renovation of the existing YMCA
- A new build on the Grand Trunk site

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[2003 Ventin Space Needs Study](#)

[2022 Lemay Space Needs Study](#)

[2023 – 2026 Stratford Public Library Strategic Plan](#)

[2023 ARUPLO Guidelines for Rural/Urban Public Library Systems](#)

## WHO USES THE LIBRARY?

Stratford Public Library is used by a wide range of community members for an equally wide range of reasons. With no cost to enter or participate, it is often described as a community's "third space" - a place outside of home or work/school where people gather, connect, and experience a sense of belonging.

Every day, SPL welcomes an average of 500 visitors, totaling 151,000 in 2025. Visitors include parents and caregivers attending programs with young children; teens working on group assignments; newcomers accessing settlement support; seniors reading the paper or playing chess; tourists using Wi-Fi or printing tickets for local performances; and the vulnerable accessing a warm safe spot to sit.

SPL currently has 11,733 active library card holders, evenly distributed across the City of Stratford. Of these, 10% are children, 6% are teens, 75% are adults, and 8% are seniors. It is important to note that often children use their parents' cards and many families share a single card. Additionally, a library card is not required to enter the building, use Wi-Fi, or attend programs. As a result, the number of active card holders understates the true number of people who rely on SPL and its services.

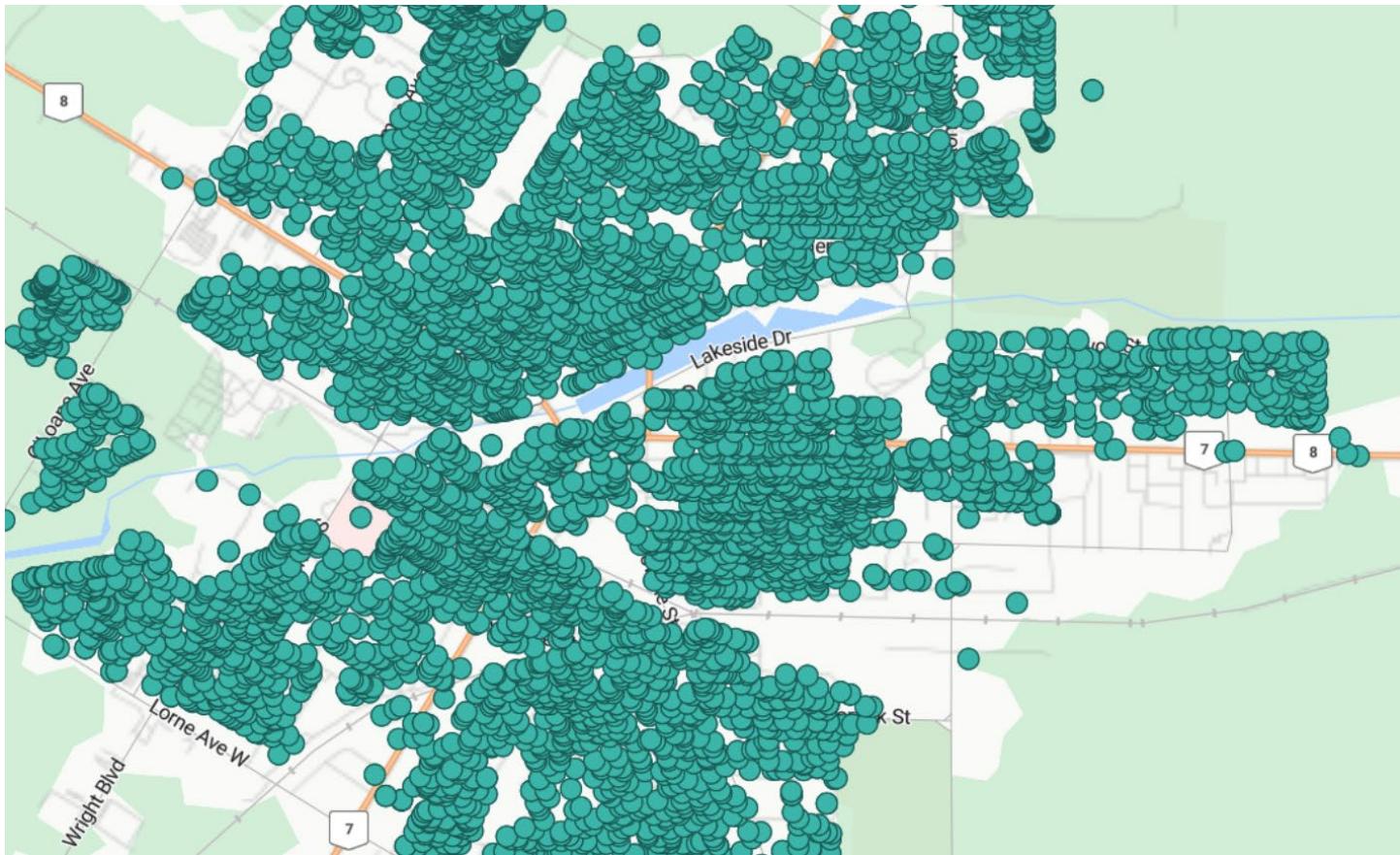


Figure 1 Map of active library card holders, Feb 12, 2026

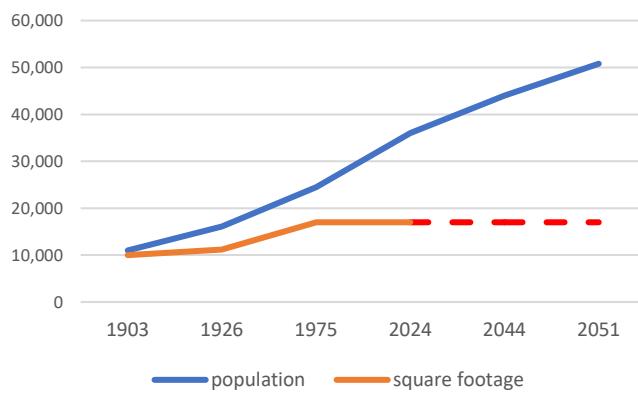
## SPACE COMPARISONS

### SIZE OF THE LIBRARY BY SCENARIO

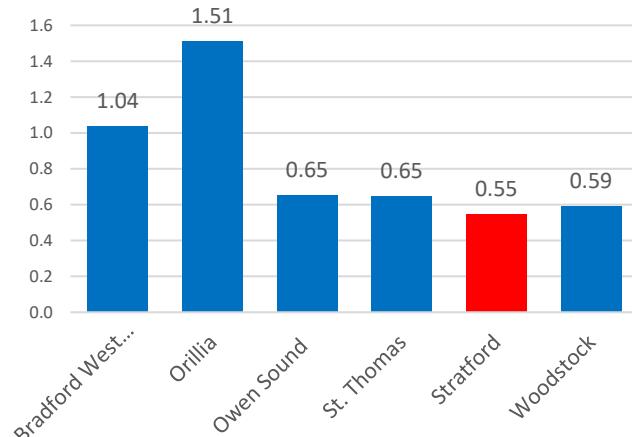
	Status Quo Scenario	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Description	Status Quo – St. Andrew Street location	New Standalone Library at GTR	New Library at GTR with shared space <sup>+</sup>
St. Andrew Street	17,202 gsf		
Grand Trunk		44,500 gsf	37,170 gsf
Shared Space			7,500 gsf
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,202 gsf</b>	<b>44,500 gsf</b>	<b>44,650 gsf</b>
<b>2026 Population Served</b>	33,232	33,232	33,232
<b>Space Deficit *</b>	-16,028 gsf	11,268 gsf	11,418 gsf
<b>2044 Population Estimate%</b>	44,000	44,000	44,000
<b>Future Space Deficit *</b>	-26,798 gsf	-500 gsf	-650 gsf

\* based on standard of 1 nsf per resident per Administrators of Rural and Urban Public Libraries of Ontario guidelines for Rural/Urban Public Library Systems  
+ including sharing lobby space, washrooms, auditorium, reflection room  
% based on Statistics Canada projections in Lamay Space Needs Report

Growth of Stratford Population vs Library Square Footage



Gross Square Footage per Resident of Libraries Serving Communities 30-40,000 Population



## JOINT LIBRARY / YMCA / MUNICIPAL FACILITIES

Collocating libraries with other facilities is a well-established practice. By sharing spaces such as lobbies, restrooms, and meeting rooms, as well as joint maintenance staff, libraries can significantly reduce operational costs. Moreover, this proximity facilitates collaboration on programming and services, enhancing community access and fostering stronger connections. The synergistic effect of shared resources not only improves efficiency but also creates a more dynamic and accessible community hub.

1. **One Stop Community Destination:** a single, vibrant destination where residents can access learning, wellness, recreation, and community services all in one place.
2. **Improved Accessibility and Equity:** Removes barriers for people who struggle with transportation, mobility, or cost. Families can attend a swim class, join storytime, access settlement support, or use digital resources all in one trip.
3. **Stronger Youth and Teen Engagement:** After school, youth can transition easily between homework spaces, creative labs, sports programs, leadership activities, or just a safe place to be themselves.
4. **Cost Savings and Operational Efficiency:** Efficiencies through shared space and facility staff translate into long-term municipal savings and more responsible use of taxpayer dollars.
5. **Expanded and Innovative Programming:** In working together, both organizations can offer programming that neither could provide alone. Collaboration could include health and literacy programs, technology and wellness sessions for seniors, newcomer family recreation nights, early-years literacy paired with active play opportunities. This kind of cross-programming increases participation and deepens our impact.
6. **Community and Economic Impact:** A modern, multi-use facility is a proven catalyst for neighbourhood revitalization, foot traffic, and local economic activity. Libraries already deliver one of the highest social returns on municipal investment, and pairing with a YMCA strengthens that impact even further.

<https://perkinswill.com/project/carrville-community-centre-library-and-district-park/>

**A number of recently built community facilities include:**

**Startech.com Community Centre, YMCA & Library (opened in 2018, 166,840 gsf, cost \$55,000,000)**

**501 Southdale Road West, London**

Includes numerous multi-purpose rooms, community kitchen, an indoor pool and gymnasium and a double pad ice arena, a YMCA fitness center and the Bostwick branch of the London Public Library.

**John M. Harper Branch Library Branch and Stork Family YMCA (opened in 2012, 77,600 gsf, cost \$22,000,000)**

**500 Fischer-Hallman Road North, Waterloo**

Includes a swimming pool, gym, fitness centre, track and a 21,000 sf library.

**David Braley Vaughan Metropolitan Centre of Community (opened in 2022, 109,000 gsf, cost \$35,000,000)**

**200 Apple Mill Road, Vaughan**

Features a YMCA health and fitness centre, Vaughan Studios & Events Space Centre with a rooftop terrace and gourmet teaching kitchen, the VMC Library offering a suite of resources and interactive programming.

**Cornell Community Centre (opened in 2012, 129,000 gsf, cost \$77,000,000)**

**3201 Bur Oak Avenue, Markham**

This large site includes a multi-level health and fitness centre, an indoor playground, a youth centre, three pool areas, and a multi-sensory room. There are also many all-purpose rooms and a 200-seat rehearsal/performance hall available for rent. Cornell also includes a state-of-the art Library.

**Bracebridge Muskoka Lumber Community Centre (opened in 2024, 113,000 gsf, cost \$78,000,000)**

**34 Salmon Avenue, Bracebridge**

Includes an arena, multi-sport field, outdoor courtyard and play space, and a 23,000 sf library. The property includes space for future expansion to grow with the community.



D

Figure 2 David Braley Vaughan Metropolitan Centre of Community

## BRANCH LOCATION

A multi-branch library system has been suggested as a potential solution to the Library's space constraints, however it is **not recommended** at this time. The Library Board's position is that the community's needs are best served by developing a modern, efficient, single-site library with centralized administrative functions and integrated service delivery.

There are a number of reasons for this:

- Current staffing is designed for a single location. Establishing an additional branch would require additional staff, as well as expanded collections and technology infrastructure. These additions would significantly increase annual operating costs without addressing the core functional limitations of the existing facility. Annual operating costs for recently opened branches across the province range from \$850,000 to \$1,300,000.
- A second facility would create substantial new capital and maintenance obligations. Beyond initial leasehold or construction costs, a branch would add a second building to the City and Library's long-term asset management responsibilities, increasing the demand on municipal infrastructure and future capital budgets.
- The Carnegie building would still require long-term investment. Even with a satellite branch, the original library would continue to need ongoing maintenance, accessibility upgrades, and operational staffing. A branch does not eliminate these obligations.
- Existing challenges at the Carnegie site would remain unresolved. Issues related to accessibility, building safety, limited parking, and layout inefficiencies would persist regardless of the addition of a nearby branch. A satellite location would not address these core barriers to service.

## WHY INVEST IN THE LIBRARY?

There is robust academic literature demonstrating the value of well funded public libraries to the community. Investing in libraries is a direct investment in community building, public safety and the future of our workforce.

### Community Building

A wide range of studies by a diverse set of authors (Chow and Tian 2021, Dalmer 2022, Johnson 2009, Oliphant 2014) concludes that the public libraries are among most effective community building institutions in municipalities. Their ability to build social capital is unmatched due to the diversity of free, barrier-free services offered to all residents.

Many institutions—churches, sports teams, volunteer groups—build social capital, but often within narrower social or economic circles. Libraries are unique: they bring together residents across social, economic, and cultural lines because membership and participation are free and accessible. Social capital, alongside physical and human capital, is recognized as a core pillar of community well-being. In Stratford, strong social networks are essential for employment, housing, civic engagement, and quality of life.

Studies consistently show that library users are more likely to join clubs, vote, donate to charity, report higher levels of trust, and feel a stronger sense of belonging. This is particularly important in Stratford, where retaining skilled labour depends on building social bonds that connect residents to the community.

### Investing in our People

Investments in public libraries have long-lasting, measurable impacts on people's lives, especially children and youth. Bhatt (2010) found that children who live closer to a public library spend more time reading and less time watching television. Gilpin, Karger, and Nencka (2021) demonstrated a strong correlation between higher library investment and improved reading scores in nearby school districts.

Physical proximity remains the strongest predictor of library use among children (Oliphant 2014). Chow and Tian (2021) found that increased library funding correlates with higher high-school and college graduation rates, higher median household income, and lower poverty rates. Karger's 2021 longitudinal study further confirms that access to a public library improves educational attainment and long-term labour market

outcomes. In short, investing in public libraries is an investment in the future success of children and youth.

### Public Safety

There is strong evidence that libraries reduce crime, both directly and indirectly. Studies by Porter (2014), Borges et al. (2021), and Floyd (2016) identify statistically significant correlations between proximity to a public library and reductions in burglary, robbery, assault, and vandalism. Crime reductions are especially pronounced during the hours the library is open.

Libraries deter crime by serving as welcoming public gathering spaces where consistent community presence discourages criminal activity. They also contribute indirectly by strengthening social capital—an essential component of social cohesion and collective action. Neighbourhoods with low levels of social capital consistently experience higher rates of crime, and libraries are identified as key institutions for building that social infrastructure.

### Survey Data

Public support for libraries across Canada and the U.S. is extremely strong. Oliphant's 2014 survey found that 86% of respondents view public libraries as essential to a strong community. Remarkably, 89% said they would pay an additional \$30 per year in taxes to support their local library—regardless of whether they personally used it or their income level.

Pew Research Center's 2013 national survey reported that 90% of residents believe closing their local public library would significantly impact the community, with 67% saying it would directly affect their household. Ninety-five percent said library materials help give everyone a fair chance to succeed, and 81% noted that libraries provide services hard to find elsewhere. Among job seekers, 47% described library support as "very important," and 40% of people with disabilities said help with government services at the library was "very important." Overall, 94% reported that having a public library in their neighbourhood improves their quality of life.

The Canadian Book Consumer Study (2022) found that 20% of Canadians regularly borrow books from the library, averaging 4.8 books per month. At an average cost of \$15.86 per paperback, this represents annual savings of more than \$913—before accounting for the value of programs, technology access, or other services. In 2022, most Canadian library users visited both online (77%) and in person (70%), illustrating the need for both high-quality digital services and modern, flexible library buildings.

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## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

"I truly don't know how I'd live without the Stratford Library. Each and every staff member is kind and helpful."

"Stratford Public Library is well known for punching well above its weight. From its good selection of books to its varied programming for all ages. It's a great resource for the city."

### **"Stratford library is wonderful but Stratford is too big for it!"**

"There are things for your kids to do while you're finding books. There are computers with only educational games. Also a reading program. I highly recommend."

"Excellent public library!!! Wonderful staff and selection of books. Wonderful adult and children's collections of books & DVDs."

### **"The library is a great space to be able to complete homework, etc. At home it can sometimes be hard to focus and that makes me late to turn in assignments, and projects for school."**

"Irreplaceably great. My children grew up reading here. Superb staff and wonderful resource for films and series DVDs."

"Such a friendly place with helpful staff and a strong sense of community. Good collection and they even have seeds for planting! Love the DND stuff they run and the Maker Space. They also save me from needing to have my own printer with the affordable printing/scanning system."

"Reading Buddies on Tuesday evening is difficult. Requires parking on side street, circling the block and a long walk. Even paid spots are full at this time."

"I think physical space is an issue making physical access difficult at times. As a user of mobility scooter it is limited by small elevator and width of shelving. I am lucky I can get by with a cane a bit but what about others? Library feels small and crowded."

### **"I am thankful for our library I just wish it had a sensory room so my son could start going to the library."**

"Small staff room means we are all forced to hang out together when, sometimes, what we want is to have space from one another. There's a lack of privacy for anyone who wants to use the staff room bathroom while others eat/take a break."

"Generally, I feel like the competition for storage AND work space around here causes a lot of fighting that can make some staff feel undervalued when they have to give space up to something else."

"The Stratford Public Library is a community hub that connects patrons in ways well beyond traditional book lending. As a community service provider, I meet occasionally with clients in the Stratford Public Library to provide adult learning instruction. The nature of this work ideally requires a quiet, private space to allow our learners not only to concentrate, but to feel safe. It is a vulnerable thing to learn as an adult. As the library is now, there is a lack of available private meeting space. The Stratford Library would benefit from a larger space with many meeting rooms available to agencies like ours. What we love about meeting with clients in the Stratford Public Library is that they can come and be part of a community. They can get a coffee, grab a magazine, use a computer, print something, browse the stacks, use the washroom, and take a snack. It is such a beneficial hub, and its offerings can only be improved upon by adding much needed space."

A library outranks any one thing a community can do to benefit its people.  
It is a never-failing spring in the desert.

Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919)

