City of Cambridge and BIA Road Closure Initiative

1. Recovery

**Purpose of Project**

The City of Cambridge, in partnership with the Hespeler Village BIA, initiated a [road closure program](https://www.investcambridge.ca/en/key-sectors/patio-season.aspx) during the COVID-19 pandemic to support local businesses and ensure public safety. Starting in July 2020, a portion of Queen Street East was closed every Saturday to allow businesses to expand into the municipal roadway, facilitating social distancing, providing safe pedestrian spaces, patio expansions and pedestrian activities. The primary goals were to bolster economic activity, maintain community engagement, and ensure the safety of residents during the pandemic. Since then, the program has scaled significantly, with the Queen Street Road closure being dubbed “[Walk Queen](https://www.hespelervillagebia.ca/walkqueen)” taking place every weekend throughout the summer, and a portion of Main Street in Downtown Cambridge, labelled "[Get Into Galt](https://www.downtowncambridgebia.ca/events/get-into-galt-summer-crawl-2022)” being closed 7 days/week from May to October in 2021, 2022, 2023 and again in 2024.

The partnership between the City of Cambridge and the Downtown Cambridge and Hespeler BIAs has proven to be a remarkable example of a successful public-private collaboration. The City has been instrumental in handling the logistical aspects, such as road closures, beautification efforts, and ensuring pedestrian safety. Meanwhile, the BIA has taken charge of curating diverse and engaging programming, from live music and cultural performances to family-friendly activities and markets with over 100 events each summer. This synergy between the City’s logistical capabilities and the BIA’s programming excellence has created an exemplary model of collaboration, demonstrating the powerful impact of united efforts on community development.

**Effectiveness / Meeting Objectives**

This initiative continually meets its objectives effectively, with positive feedback from businesses and the BIA membership through our [EngageCambridge Survey Platform](https://www.engagewr.ca/2023-seasonal-road-closure?preview=true). The streamlined patio permit process and fee waivers resulted in a significant increase in patio permits, supporting the restaurant industry during a challenging period. The initiative's success prompted its expansion to additional locations in Downtown Cambridge and more frequent and longer closures in future years, demonstrating its impact on local economic recovery and community engagement.

**Challenges & Changes Made**

Initial challenges included coordinating logistics with various City departments, the Region of Waterloo and businesses, ensuring sufficient staffing, and addressing concerns from residents and businesses about accessibility and traffic flow. Over time, these challenges were mitigated by refining the closure schedule, enhancing communication with stakeholders through surveys, and allocating a dedicated budget to cover costs. The initial budget in 2020 was $10,000, and that has since grown to $50,000 a year in support to the BIAs from the City. The program evolved to include additional beautification efforts and contract garbage collection, ensuring a pleasant and clean environment for visitors.

**Target Audience**

The initiative targets a broad audience, including local residents, business owners, and visitors to Cambridge. The diverse programming, including live music, family activities, and cultural events, caters to various demographics including families, young professionals, seniors, and tourists ensuring broad community engagement and participation. The inclusive approach fosters a welcoming atmosphere for all age groups and interests. The City of Cambridge and the Hespeler and Downtown BIAs work hand-in-hand to amplify the marketing efforts for the road closure initiative. This collaboration includes crafting joint press releases that highlighted the event's benefits and logistics, ensuring consistent and compelling messaging though coordinated social media strategies and regular communication with the businesses. This unified approach not only increases awareness and attendance but also reinforces the partnership's commitment to supporting local businesses and enhancing community life.

**Sustainability**

The sustainability of the “Walk Queen” and “Get into Galt” road closure project is demonstrated by its continued implementation and expansion over four years. The initiative supports a vibrant and healthy community by promoting pedestrian-friendly spaces, physical activity, and social interaction and has become an integral part of Cambridge’s placemaking efforts. The program aligns with the City’s corporate strategy to create accessible and enriching experiences for residents. Ongoing support from the City and BIAs, along with a dedicated budget, ensures the project's long-term sustainability and positive impact on the community.