

Marketing Canada Awards

Submission

Downtown St. Catharines Lighting Project

Category

Recovery Project or Plan

Prepared by

The City of St. Catharines

Submitted to

The Economic Developers Association of Canada

Purpose of Project (including anticipated outcomes)

The City of St. Catharines has made major strides in revitalizing its downtown and creating a safe and welcoming core that attracts private sector investment, visitors and residents.

However, like most communities, St. Catharines' downtown became challenged by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring the City to refocus on the importance of creating safe and inviting outdoor public spaces to continue to attract visitors, residents and businesses.

Through strengthened partnerships, the City implemented the Downtown St. Catharines Lighting Project in an effort to restore confidence in public spaces and restore Downtown as Niagara's urban playground.

Effectiveness / Meeting Objectives (if known)

Released in May 2020, the City's Pandemic Recovery Strategy identified public realm improvements and animating the downtown as important tools for creating a safe and inviting setting, which was crucial to the City's economic recovery efforts. To support its objectives, the City enhanced the downtown visitor experience by improving lighting in public spaces.

The project resulted in a decorative lighting canopy spanning the 1-kilometer main stretch of commerce and activity in Downtown St. Catharines with more than 40 strings of light mounted on custom-made brackets that enhanced both safety and aesthetic. Generally, the Downtown St. Catharines Lighting Project supported the retention of 514 businesses employing 7,168 people in the core, including important jobs in the tourism, hospitality and entertainment sectors.

In its initial launch, the project supported more than 25 weeks of events in Downtown St. Catharines, including more than 475 hours of pedestrianized streets impacting 232 businesses and 20 outdoor patios. 464 Downtown events were additionally supported attracting more than 444,000 visitors in 2022-23.

Challenges & Changes made

Centered primarily on fastening string lights to existing light poles that are stretched over and across the road allowance required the following considerations:

- Varying road width/distance between light poles
- Transit and emergency vehicle access heights
- Infrastructure for installation of lighting/meeting of height requirements
- Contingency planning in the event of emergency
- Durability of lighting in the event of emergency releases
- Costs for replacement and yearly maintenance
- Approval and rating for weight and wind resistance by an engineer

The project's main costs were expected from infrastructure required for the hanging of lights, the lights themselves, labour for installation and staff and consultant time incurred.

This project then became a collaborative effort sponsored by the Tourism Partnership of Niagara, and Alectra Utilities and managed and implemented by City of St. Catharines. Significant coordination was done with local stakeholders, primarily the St. Catharines Downtown Association, local businesses and other community stakeholders, utilities and municipal services.

Target Audience (demographics)

- Residents
- Visitors
- Businesses and entrepreneurs
- Investors
- Community partners and stakeholders

Any details regarding the sustainability of your project.

With increased reliance on public space and outdoor dining options, the light canopy creates the ambiance needed to draw visitors seeking an engaging and visually appealing destination. Creating more inviting and well-lit public spaces is also a future-proofing measure to ensure the vitality of important community assets and civic identity.

While a COVID-19 recovery initiative, improving the quality and feel of the downtown experience furthers Downtown St. Catharines' development as a distinctive tourism destination, contributing to a unique urban experience and enhances its ability to draw even more visitors to new and existing events.