

# Downtown St. Catharines Lighting Project

Marketing Canada Awards  
Recovery Project or Plan



Submitted to  
**The Economic Developers  
Association of Canada**

Prepared by  
**The City of St. Catharines**  
Economic Development  
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# Introduction

Since the release of its Downtown Creative Cluster Masterplan in 2008 the City of St. Catharines has made major strides in revitalizing its downtown.

Public sector improvements, guided by the masterplan's strategic objective of developing outdoor public spaces for those visiting, working and living in the downtown, helped create a safe and attractive downtown that lured private sector investment, tourists and residents looking for a desirable place to live, visit and do business.

Like most communities, St. Catharines' downtown core became challenged by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which also exacerbated pre-existing socio-economic issues seen in urban centres across Canada. Through lessons learned over two years post-COVID, the City refocused on the importance of creating safe and inviting outdoor public spaces for visitors, residents and business owners.

Through strengthened partnerships with the Tourism Partnership of Niagara, St. Catharines Downtown Association and Alectra Utilities, the City installed canopy lighting spanning the entire length of the main street in Downtown St. Catharines, to enhance the core's reputation as a safe and welcoming visitor-friendly destination.

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# Objectives

The City's Pandemic Recovery Strategy, released in May of 2020, identified public realm improvements and animating the core as important tools for attracting visitors to a safe and inviting setting, which was crucial to the City's economic recovery efforts.



## Objective 1

Restore confidence  
in public spaces



## Objective 2

Restore Downtown  
as Niagara's urban  
playground

To support these objectives, the City proposed improving lighting in public spaces downtown to enhance the core's visitor experience. Enhanced lighting would also help improve public perceptions of downtown safety for visitors and residents.

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# Challenges

The proposal to enhance lighting downtown centered primarily on a canopy of string lights spanning a distance of approximately 1 kilometre along St. Paul Street from Ontario Street to Geneva Street.

String lighting would be fastened to existing light poles, and stretch over and across the road allowance to create a visually appealing canopy effect.

The lighting project required the following considerations:

- Varying road width/distance between light poles
- Transit and Emergency vehicle access heights (4.5m clearance according to Ministry of Transportation standards)
- Infrastructure for installation of lighting/meeting of height requirements
- Contingency planning in the event of emergency, such as for example a mechanism for quick release of lighting to access the upper floors of buildings in impacted areas
- Durability of lighting in the event of emergency releases
- Costs for replacement of infrastructure and yearly maintenance
- Approval and rating for weight and wind resistance by an engineer

Based on the project parameters and feedback received from communities that have implemented similar initiatives, the main costs to execute this project would come from capital costs in the form of infrastructure required for the hanging of lights as well as the lights themselves, labour required for fitting and installation of lights, as well as staff and consultant time incurred.

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# Effectiveness

With increased reliance on public space and outdoor dining options becoming a necessity, a canopy of lights contributes to the ambiance needed to draw visitors seeking an engaging and visually-appealing destination.

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.

## Objective 1

Restore confidence in public spaces

This project resulted in decorative lighting spanning the main stretch of commerce and activity in downtown St. Catharines, with more than 40 strings of light mounted on custom engineered and fabricated brackets to enhance the safety and attractiveness of the core.

## Objective 2

Restore Downtown St. Catharines as Niagara's urban playground

In its initial launch, this project supported more than 25 weeks of events in Downtown St. Catharines, with 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 to the downtown in 2022-23.

## Added Benefit

Leverage partners, leverage assets

This project became a collaborative effort that was 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, as well as other community stakeholders affected such as Fire and Emergency Services, Waste Collection, as well as local utilities and Niagara Regional Police.

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# Conclusion

Success for downtown depends significantly on evening traffic, particularly during events at the Meridian Centre and the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre that are draws for the food and hospitality sector.

With the dramatic changes brought about by the pandemic and the limitations imposed on both in-person events and indoor dining, these sectors faced even greater hurdles as they began the long road to recovery while regaining the trust of a public that was still weary of the risks of COVID-19 and new variants of the virus.

The City's rethinking of downtown public space, which led to other successful initiatives such as a Temporary Patio Program and a partnership with the St. Catharines Downtown Association on the pedestrianization of downtown through weekly street closures, highlighted the need for more inviting and well-lit public spaces as a future-proofing measure to ensure the vitality of important community assets and civic identity.

The Downtown St. Catharines Lighting Project helped enhance the public realm by improving the quality and feel of the downtown experience. Although broadly speaking an economic development initiative and COVID-19 recovery effort, the lighting canopy had direct impacts on the further enhancement and development of Downtown St. Catharines as a distinctive tourism destination, contributing to a unique urban experience in Niagara. It also enhances the ability of new and existing events to draw visitors to more well-lit and welcoming atmosphere.

# Contact us

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