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Brantford Community Safety Search Conference



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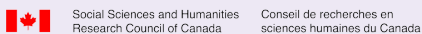


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Executive Summary

In recent years, concerns about safety in Brantford, particularly in the downtown area, have grown. While there have been several efforts to address these concerns, including downtown task forces and relationship building between police and the community, research conducted by the Centre for Research on Security Practices (CRSP) at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) finds that these issues persist. In response to such concerns, this research team led an **action-oriented search conference** to bring together stakeholders, disseminate research on local community safety, and develop inclusive solutions to ongoing safety concerns.

Method: facilitators led participants through a variety of action-based research strategies including an appreciate inquiry, carousel activities, and a capacity builder to develop a vision for Brantford and an action plan to realize that vision.

Vision: participants envisioned Brantford as “a destination with a strong cultural hub. It prioritizes collaboration and support to foster a thriving community”.

Opportunities: participants identified various opportunities to enhance community safety in Brantford, particularly through affordable, supportive transitional housing, community events, a community hub, better connections to the Grand River and Mohawk Lake, downtown revitalization, enhanced education and employment supports, enhanced social services, safe injection/consumption sites, supports for youth, and transportation.

Constraints: participants identified various constraints to making their visions a reality including a hesitancy to making change, lack of accountability, lack of buy-in/interest and red tape, lack of collaboration/working in silos, lack of funding and/or resources, and public stigma.

Action Plans: participants identified four areas of interest when creating tangible action plans to address community safety, including affordable housing, community events, downtown revitalization, and transportation.

Next Steps: Each action planning group committed to tangible steps to achieve their respective actions plans. We encourage both conference participants and community members at large to engage with the findings presented throughout this report to inform, progress, and/or create initiatives with the goal of enhancing community safety within the City of Brantford. To support these strategies, the researchers at CRSP are leading a community safety survey to gather residents’ perceptions and experiences of community safety, particularly their perceptions and experiences of crime, disorder, and victimization. The results of this study will serve as a basis for any changes implemented by search conference participants and enable evaluation of these strategies.


Introduction


The City of Brantford is facing a 'Crisis in the Downtown' (Ruby, 2021) as the community struggles with increasing social disorder, visible homelessness, lost and relocated businesses, and fear of crime. While there have been several efforts to address these concerns over the last few years, a more evidence-based approach is required.


The research team at the Centre for Research on Security Practices has conducted extensive empirical research on community safety in downtown Brantford. This has included collaborations with the Brantford Police Service to understand crime patterns across the city and conducting walking focus groups across the downtown to better understand what is contributing to, and detracting from, perceptions of safety in downtown Brantford.


Early insights identified key areas of concern including that perceptions of crime and violence differed from reality, social disorder and poverty related calls for service to police account for a significant percentage of police time and resources, and that certain areas of the city specialized in certain types of crime. Further, the research identified that the City of Brantford was struggling to develop a shared vision for what the downtown should look like and how to effectively address the actual and perceived crime and safety problems.

In response to these concerns, CRSP hosted a two-day, interactive search conference to disseminate research findings on safety in the downtown, build local capacity through engagement with a Canadian community safety expert panel, and facilitate the creation of a network of stakeholders in Brantford to use this information and expertise to develop future-focused community safety plans. Specifically, the search conference was guided by the following key objectives:

 **Objective one: Assemble community stakeholders to identify current assets in Brantford that can contribute to improving community safety perceptions and realities.**

 **Objective two: Share research findings on crime and perceptions of safety in the downtown with community stakeholders to build shared knowledge around actual and perceived risk and co-construct a shared vision for downtown Brantford for the next 5 – 10 years.**

 **Objective three: Engage community stakeholders in creating community safety action plans.**

 **Objective four: Create a network of stakeholders to oversee the implementation and evaluation of the action plan by creating a local and bottom-up governance system.**

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The research team attempted to achieve these objectives by incorporating support and engagement from all local community safety stakeholders, building capacity in evidence-based approaches, and connecting previously disconnected community members and stakeholders and creating systems of bottom-up governance and evidence-based research.

The following report outlines the background research that informed the search conference, the search conference methodology, the findings of the conference, and the next steps. The report also details the themes that emerged throughout the conference and the key action plan items. This report is intended to act as a record of these events for the stakeholders involved and for future residents and changemakers as they continue the important work of making, and keeping, Brantford a safe and inclusive place to live, work, learn, and play.



Brantford Today

Situated along the picturesque Grand River, Brantford is a beautiful city and an area of choice for residents, businesses, tourists, and students. Attractions such as the Canadian Military Heritage Museum, the Wayne Gretzky Sports Centre and Bell Homestead National Historic Site provide interactive opportunities to explore Brantford's history. Other destinations in Brantford include Harmony Square, an outdoor area for events and festivals downtown, the Sanderson Centre for the Performing Arts, and Elements Casino (The City of Brantford, 2024b).



Home to four local post-secondary schools, including Wilfrid Laurier University, Conestoga College, Six Nations Polytechnic, and Westervelt College, Brantford is also a recognized destination of choice for the over 3,500 full-time students studying in the area (The City of Brantford, 2024a).



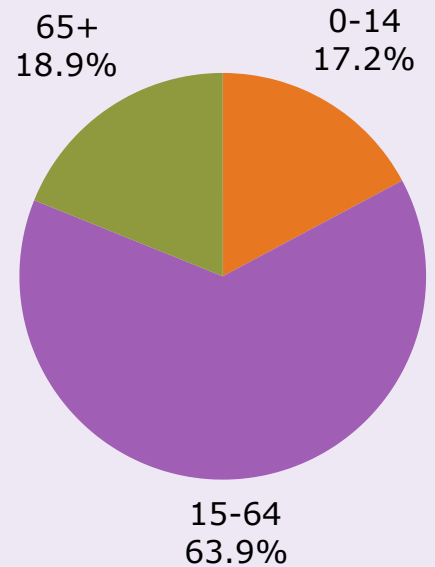
With a population of 104,688 residents as of 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023) Brantford proudly has a higher growth rate (6.21% since 2016) than provincial (5.8%) and national (5.2%) averages (The City of Brantford Economic Development, Tourism, & Cultural Initiatives, 2024) .

Situated on the traditional territory of the Haudensaunee and Anishnaabe Peoples, Brantford is home to a large Indigenous population of approximately 5,415 (5.2%) individuals as of the 2020 census. Brantford also shoulders the largest First Nations reserve in Canada, Six Nations (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Brantford is home to a large immigrant population of 16,095 individuals (15.6%) having emigrated from regions such as Europe (6,300, 39.1%), Asia (6,240, 38.8%), the Americas (2,635, 16.4%) and Africa (845, 5.4%), among others (Statistics Canada, 2023).

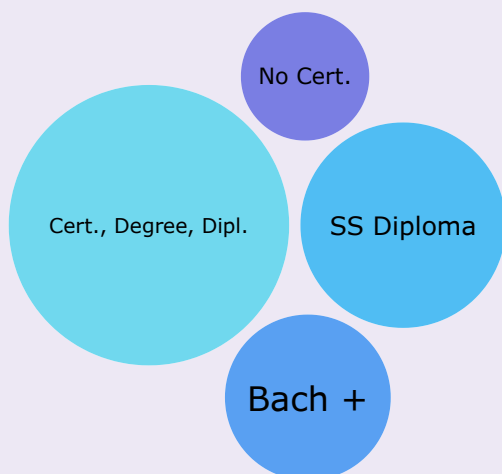
Brantford consists of primarily single-detached housing units (60.6%) with one to two residents (61.2%). A majority of residents own their home (27,505, 66%) compared to renting (14,170, 34%). As of 2021, Brantford was home to 17,970 individuals aged 0-14 years (17.2% of total population), 66,925 individuals aged 15-64 years (63.9%), and 19,800 individuals aged 65 and older (18.9%) (Figure 1) (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Figure 1: Age of Brantford Population



As of 2020, the median income for Brantford was \$39,200. Amongst residents aged 25 to 64, the majority of residents held a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree (31,200, 57.2%), followed by secondary school diploma or its equivalency (16,745, 30.7%), a bachelor's degree or higher (10,765, 19.7%), and no certificate, diploma, or degree (6,590, 12.1%) (Figure 2) (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Figure 2: Educational Background of Brantford Population



Amongst this same age group, the top industries in this region include architecture, engineering, and related trades (5,955, 10.9%), business, management, and public administration (5,855, 10.7%), health related fields (5,765, 10.6%), social and behavioural sciences and the law (3,795, 7.0%), and personal, protective, and transportation services (2,645, 4.9%), amongst others (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Background

In midsized communities like Brantford, Ontario, visible indicators of social and physical disorder leave people fearful and unwilling to engage in civic life (Popham, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified these concerns, as housing has become increasingly inaccessible and homelessness and visible encampments in these areas continues to increase (Dej et al. 2021). Municipalities like Brantford are working to respond to these concerns through strategies such as community safety and well-being plans (Davis et al. 2021). Still, many of these plans lack a detailed evidence-base of the actual problems, and do not fully engage those most impacted by these decisions: residents and local stakeholders.

Action-Based Research

Action-based research differs from traditional methodologies that consult participants and make decisions without their direct involvement. For example, many residents and local stakeholders have often participated in interviews, focus groups, and town halls, where their opinion is noted, but then the so-called “experts” create a plan that may have little to do with some of the concerns raised in these meetings. This can often lead to residents feeling like their opinion is not important and their time was wasted.

Instead, action-based research requires the researcher to act as a facilitator of transformative change, in partnership with participants. In addition to identifying, exploring, and explaining a problem, action-based research is used to begin to *address* that problem with the actors most impacted by it and the stakeholders (both public and private) in a position to make the most change (Stringer & Aragón, 2020; Hodgkinson & Saville, 2018). Action-based strategies utilized in this two-day workshop included:



An **appreciative inquiry** and asset mapping exercise, to identify what is working well and where participants could build on previous successes.



A “**carousel**” or series of facilitated workstations on the empirical findings on crime and safety in downtown Brantford, to meaningfully engage and demystify perceptions of risk with reality.



A **capacity builder** panel of community safety experts from across Canada to provide short presentations on evidence-based success in other communities, to build local capacity in alternative solutions, and to offer ongoing, practical feedback throughout the workshop.

Overall, these strategies are embedded in the facilitated **search conference** that is intended to create a local and bottom-up governance network by encouraging participants to identify a shared vision for the future of community safety in Brantford, the opportunities and constraints to realizing the vision, and an action planning session to begin to create community safety plans to achieve that vision. The search conference is overarching and supports the other action-based strategies identified above.

What is a Search Conference?

A search conference is designed to bring local expertise together to create action plans that are designed, implemented, and evaluated by the participants themselves (Morley & Trist, 1993). Unlike typical conferences where experts share their expertise through a series of organized presentations, search conferences recognize the expertise of all participants and try to bring this expertise together to create action. The search conference involves participants working together in facilitated break-out groups to complete a visioning exercise on the conference topic, identifying opportunities and constraints to the vision, and creating an action plan for change. Each session is usually followed by a debrief with the entire group to identify common themes and next steps.

Search conferences can be a useful tool to mobilize information through a network of actively engaged local stakeholders using a facilitative and action-based process. Crime prevention strategies are often applied to, or for, communities, which can reduce local buy-in and interfere with implementation and sustainability. Alternatively, the search conference combines public education with public engagement to create holistic and sustainable solutions directly with the participants. The relationships built through the search conference often contribute to building longer-term solutions based in collaborative, bottom-up governance systems.



The Brantford Community Safety Search Conference

On Tuesday November 21, 2023, to Wednesday November 22, 2023, the research team from CRSP at WLU hosted the Brantford Community Safety Search Conference. Twenty-two community safety stakeholders from across Brantford attended. The search conference was led and facilitated by Dr. Tarah Hodgkinson (WLU) with support from Drs. Carrie Sanders Samantha Henderson (WLU), and Camie Condon (Seneca College), and a team of 12 student research assistants from WLU and Seneca College. The research team also brought in a panel of community safety experts from across Canada including Christiane Sadeler (More Better Solutions), Elisabeth Miller (City of Saskatoon) and Anna Brassard (SafeGrowth®).

The Brantford Community Safety Search Conference was bolstered by identifying current assets in the community, disseminating research findings on crime and safety, and building capacity with participants. For this conference, the vision focused on crime and safety in Brantford and asked participants to identify what they want downtown Brantford to look like in 5-10 years. Because no one knows the future, visioning exercises enable participants to be creative about the kind of future they want to create and, at the same time, recognize their shared values (Hodgkinson & Saville, 2018). Once the vision was established, participants identified opportunities and constraints to making that vision a reality. These could include current or planned initiatives, funding opportunities, and political will. Once key themes were identified, the participants collectively identified a few possible action plans and then self-selected into new groups to develop steps for these plans for action. These plans were captured in writing, and the participants are responsible for holding themselves and each other accountable for putting the plan into action (Morley & Trist, 1993).



THE SEARCH CONFERENCE





Appreciative Inquiry and Asset Mapping

Appreciative Inquiry and Asset Mapping

After an initial welcome, the participants were divided into breakout groups of 5-6 people. Participants were asked to identify what they loved about Brantford. This included describing important places, events, programs, and people. Facilitators supported these discussions at each table noting key ideas and themes. Participants were actively engaged in this activity, clearly excited about the opportunity to discuss what they love about Brantford. In some groups, participants wrote down their own ideas on a poster paper to later share with the group, while facilitators in other groups noted key themes arising in group discussion. In the debrief, one representative from each group presented their ideas to the main group.

Appreciative Inquiry and Asset Mapping Outcomes

Takeaways from this inquiry were grouped into five categories: City and community achievements; places; events; organizations/programs; and people.

City and Community Achievements

Among the many city and community achievements identified by participants, they continually reflected on the sentiment that:

“While Brantford is a mid-sized city, there is a small town feel to it that allows different communities to come together”

“Everyone knows everyone”



Participants further reflected on various efforts to revitalize the downtown.

“In the downtown area, there are less vacated lots and boarded up buildings. Buildings that were beginning to get worn down have been revitalized with the expansion of the university campus.”

“the introduction of new businesses, restaurants, and attractions in the downtown core has made the city a more exciting place to live and work.”

Participants also mentioned the growth and support of immigration in the city as an asset, speaking to the enhanced diversification of language, food, and religion in the city.

On top of the 18 new businesses that had recently opened in the downtown, participants also recognized that the expansion of Wilfrid Laurier University has contributed substantially to downtown revitalization. Participants particularly applauded the increased recruitment of students to post-secondary campuses contributing to a livelier downtown.



Furthermore, participants applauded current housing developments which exceed many other developmental initiatives across the province.

“It may be a small town but there is potential for a lot of development and growth; an ability to make it positive, what we want it to be.”

Places

Participants appeared to find it very easy to name places that serve as an asset to Brantford. Some of the places they noted included Six Nations, Harmony Square, Victoria Park, the Brantford Public Library, Friday's Coffee shop, the Wayne Gretzky Sports Centre, Wilfrid Laurier University, Conestoga College, the Laurier Brantford YMCA, the Bell Homestead, St. Andrew's Church, Margo's Place, the Sanderson Centre, Taal, GELA, Mohawk Park, various community centers, Brantford's parks, bike parks, and trails, and the Grand River.

Participants also recognized Victoria Park as a valuable gathering space for families, specifically due to its aesthetic greenspace. Participants who worked within shelter and foodbank organizations also highlighted the unique opportunity Victoria Park offers, as a neutral space, in connecting with clients. This space was identified as particularly useful when connecting with people experiencing homelessness who often frequent the park outside of shelter operating hours.

"Victoria Park is a great place for everyone to be and form a sense of community with one another."

"Harmony Square and its ability to bring the community together and offer a family-oriented experience."

"(It is) a point of pride for the city, the community and residents."



Offering a diverse array of weekly in-person and online programming, the library caters to various groups, including teen drop-ins, youth crafting and tutoring, yoga and wellness sessions, programs for newcomers, adults, parenting supports, and activities for seniors. The success of these programs, participants noted, is attributed to the library's constant and reliable scheduling, ensuring that community members can access them regularly. Importantly, all programs are offered free of charge to individuals with a library membership, which participants believed fosters inclusivity.

"The Brantford Public Library is a unique and invaluable community hub, making efforts to connect and support residents."

"Friday's Coffee is a welcoming, safe, familiar place."

Participants shared similar feelings that Friday's Coffee is a good, safe space for personal and professional meetings. Importantly, participants noted its particular appeal to youth who share the opinion that it is a safe meeting place.

Events

Participants also discussed their pride in the number of community events and how these events contributed to community spirit. Particularly, participants reviewed events hosted in Harmony Square such as live music, free skating, and the over 300 youth that participated in trick-or-treating during Halloween.

"During Halloween, over 300 kids were trick-or-treating; there is still community spirit and there is still a big community here."

Participants also discussed various other events that they felt fostered community spirit, such as the Christmas parade and New Year's celebrations. Participants applauded these events for facilitating public gatherings within and amongst the community. In this same light, participants mentioned the Brantford International Villages Cultural Festival as a valuable event. Participants valued the festivals' ability to foster community connection through the sharing of food and traditions.

Organizations and Programs

Participants reflected on the several organizations and programs contributing to the success of the community and the positive changes that they have enacted. Participants appreciated the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team (MCRRT), that pairs a Mental Health Specialist with a police officer to provide de-escalation, on-site safety planning, and stabilization. Participants also appreciated the Brantford Downtown Outreach Team (BDOT) that provides warm winter packs, amongst other supports to vulnerable populations. Further, they appreciated the Encampment Response Team and the Outward Facing Special Constables team who help to make the community safer through engagement with the community and connecting vulnerable populations to resources. Participants seemed to hope that constables, through the Outward Facing program, could begin to feel more like members of the community with more stable community connections than typical police officers. Participants also shared that they appreciated the Homelessness System of Care Panel, that consists of representatives from Brantford Native Housing, BDOT, City Bylaw, and the Food Bank, among others.

Furthermore, projects like "Let's Talk Brantford", the Community Safety and Well-being Plan were discussed.

Participants also highlighted organizations such as the Food Bank, which is very active in the community, providing various inclusive snack and meal programs, and the Brantford United Way, which improved their application process to direct funding opportunities. Participants also applauded organizations such as St. Leonard's Community Services, Woodman Community Centre, the Why Not Youth Centre.

"The Brantford Police Pilot Project brings together bylaw officers, social workers and police officers who meet weekly to discuss challenges in housing encampments and provide shelter solutions for vulnerable populations."

"The Why Not? Youth Centre provides a sense of family and family support for youths without it, (and is) available to youth after school hours and on weekends."

"The Food Bank has implemented a shopping model that allows clients to have more choice with what food they can get and allows the foodbank to cater to more dietary restrictions."

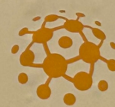
Lastly, participants recognized various programs such as Library drop-ins, which provide opportunities to hang out at the library or connect with supports if interested, Youth Fusion, a program for newcomers that provides education about life skills and allows youths to attend a gym, Rise Up a BIPOC youth program that provides youth with mental health support and skills, life skills classes, and CPR certifications, Y Mind, a 7-week program for youth to learn coping mechanisms related to mental health and anxiety, and Equine Therapy, a group run through Liberty for Youth. Additionally, participants noted BL's Little Free Pantry, GO snacks, food cupboards, community gardens, skate exchanges, anti-human trafficking symposiums, housing programs for youth, and LGBTQ+ groups as assets.

“A notable recent achievement in the community is the establishment of three housing programs for youth. Two homes are specifically dedicated to supporting young mothers and their children, focusing on educational attainment, parenting and life skills development, and connections to local support networks. Another house serves as a shelter for young males, offering a supportive environment to transition away from street life. Residents collaboratively contribute to maintaining the home while acquiring essential life skills, paving the way for employment opportunities and fostering independence.”

Appreciative Inquiry – Tell us what is amazing about Brantford



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People

Finally, participants appreciated the commitment of the Brantford community, speaking to residents' sympathy in supporting vulnerable populations. This sentiment was reflected when participants discussed the continual support that the community shows to both individuals and organizations in need. Participants stated that this support enhances community involvement and community connection and cohesion.



"Across many of the ongoing programs, there has been good support and financial or goods donations that have been happening in the Brantford area."

Participants also named a few prominent members of the community who they believed contributed meaningfully to Brantford's success. Namely, Wayne Gretzky and the Gretzky family, the Fratelli family, Sue and Charlie from Why Not?, Nick from Wesley, Rick Mannon, who runs the track and field program and helps run community groups, Ross Enslav, who collects sporting goods for children who cannot afford their own, Mandy Samwell, the Ward 5 City Councilor who actively supports the community and the support received from Chris Henderson and Amy Brandt at the City.





Scanning

Scanning

After the appreciative inquiry and asset mapping exercise, participants were asked to participate in a scanning exercise. Scanning usually involves identifying the current state of affairs to ensure that all participants are on the same page. In the case of this search conference, participants had the opportunity to review the research evidence. Using a carousel method, participants were provided with a research package detailing four studies on community safety in Brantford. These included crime specialization, Brantford police service activity, perceptions of safety in downtown Brantford, and understanding homelessness in Brantford and other similar communities in Ontario. Participants were divided into four workstations, each facilitated by a research lead. Participants read through a short summary of the research findings for four studies. After familiarizing themselves with the study, discussing the study with one of the four research leads, and assessing the findings in relation to their experiences and understandings, the participants returned to their original work groups to share these findings with their group members.

Scanning Exercise

Fact Sheet 1: Crime Specialization in Brantford, 2022

This study analyzed location quotients (a calculation of an area's crime specialization, compared to surrounding areas), for Brantford's five wards for the year 2022 (see appendix A). Calls for service and incidents reported to Brantford Police Service were divided into six categories (violent crime, property crime, social disorder, drugs, traffic, and administrative). Results indicated that drugs specialized in Ward 3, with drugs and social disorder being highly specialized in Ward 5. Ward 4 specialized in property crime and Wards 1 and 3 specialized in property and violent crime.

Participants discussed the importance of these findings for the development of crime prevention strategies. Some participants discussed the disparity in the access of police services outside the downtown core as compared to inside the downtown, noting the increased demand for officers in the core.

“This is helpful in prevention approaches. Knowing crime rate by type improves the strategies used in combatting crime. But, accessing services is more difficult outside the downtown core, but most services are needed inside the core.”

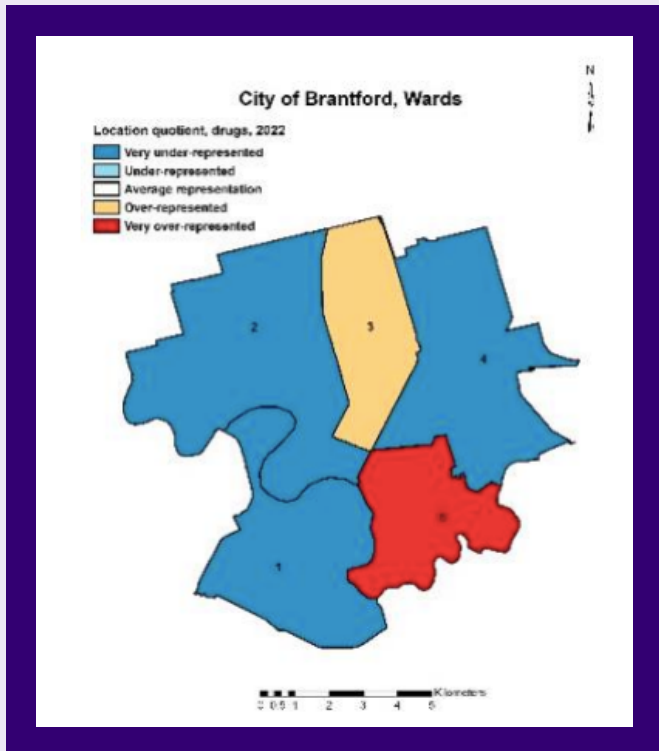


Figure 3: Drug Related Calls for Service by Ward

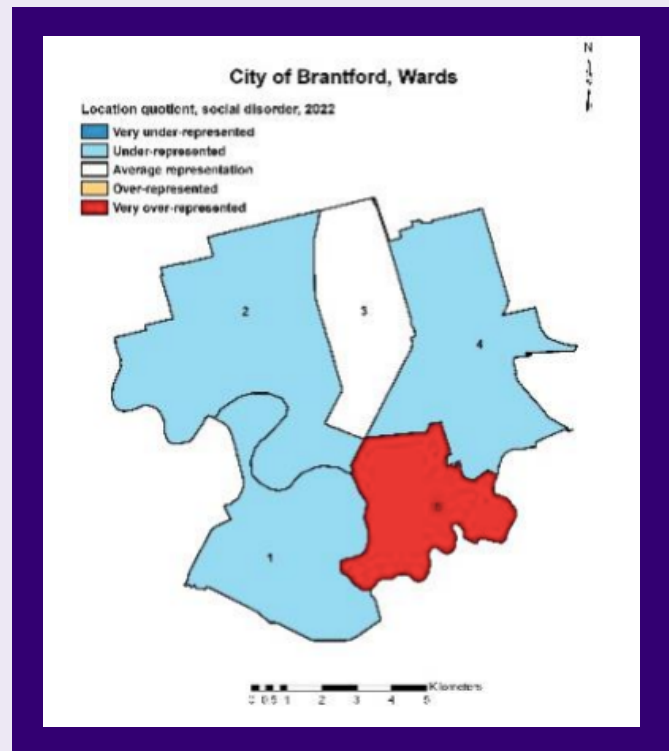


Figure 4: Social Disorder Related Calls for Service by Ward

A lengthy discussion centered around the nuances of reported and unreported crimes. Participants noted that certain crime types, such as violent crimes, often go unreported. Some participants attributed this to the stigma associated with calling the police, particularly for equity-deserving populations. For example, participants discussed that sex workers, for example, may be unlikely to report instances of violence. When prompted to expand on this thought, participants noted that equity-deserving groups may question whether the police will “take their side.” Participants also discussed that individuals may not report crime because they are scared of the police, scared of the repercussions associated with reporting to the police (i.e., “ratting people out”), or scared of retaliation from their community (i.e., isolation, non-acceptance).

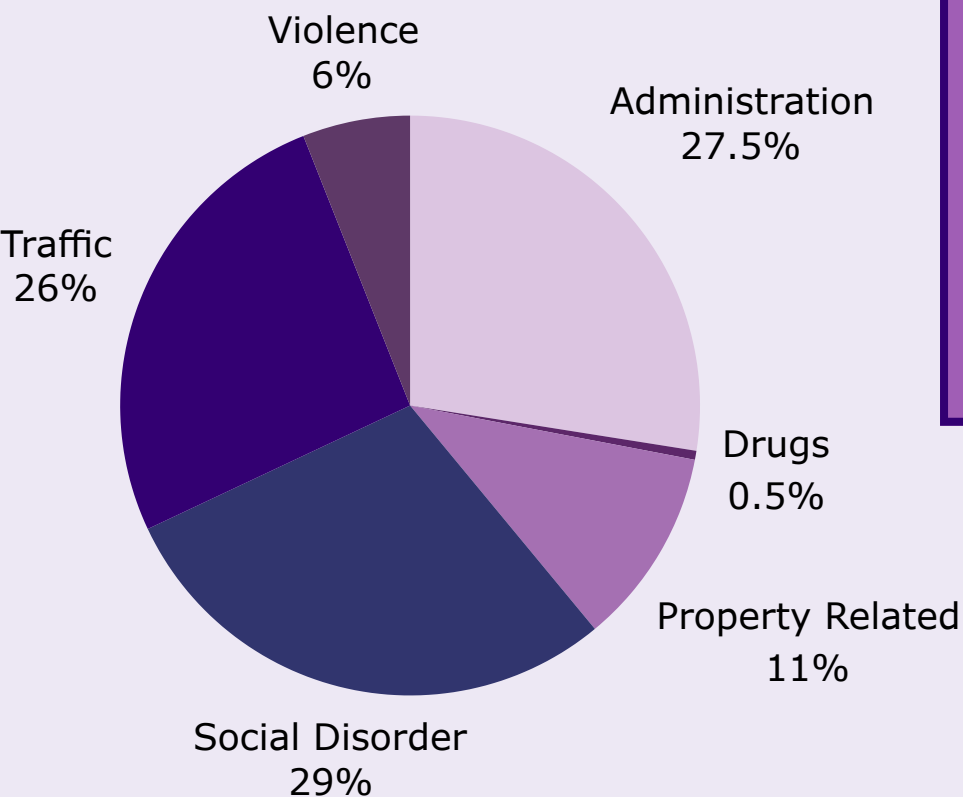
Participants inferred that the disconnect between the actual rates of crime and the perceptions of crime was a result of public stigma, particularly concerning drug use and homelessness. Participants discussed the importance of public education to break down this stigma. They emphasized “data over feelings.” Participants seemed to appreciate the research findings presented and shared that knowledge dissemination of data could work to reduce negative public stigma. Similarly, participants felt that enhanced relationship building between unhoused persons and other community members could enhance community cohesion and break down harmful stereotypes.

Fact Sheet 2: Brantford Police Activity

This study sought to examine Brantford Police activity through analysis of police calls for service and recorded incidents in 2022. Results indicated that a majority of the calls for service and incidents are related to social disorder (29%), administrative needs (28%), and traffic (26%). Meanwhile, calls for service and incidents related to violence, property crime, and drugs account for only 17% of calls/incidents (see appendix B). The research team also examined the top five calls/incidents per category type. This data suggested that many of the issues driving each category type did not directly relate to crime.

In fact, these findings suggested that the majority of police activity in Brantford is not crime related. Some participants felt that bylaw responses to these calls for service would be more productive than sending officers to nuisance or noise related incidents, for example.

Figure 5: Brantford Police Activity



“Brantford police activity sees more social disorder than actual crimes. Brantford is not the most dangerous city and compared to North Battleford (Canada’s highest crime severity index), Brantford is average in crime rates.”

Participants discussed the importance of investing in social services, such as mental health and addictions support, affordable housing, and shelter services. They inferred that investments into these services may reduce social service-related incidents.

Participants were keen to dissect the findings, particularly discussing the crimes that likely contribute to each category. However, facilitators encouraged participants to examine the bigger picture – that many of the calls for service and incidents center upon social disorder as opposed to actual crime. The feelings that the city is unsafe seemed to be a concurrent theme, even after reviewing these findings.

Participants were intrigued to learn about the intricacies of categorical calls for service and incidents. Participants were particularly interested in the finding that motor vehicle theft was surprisingly low (7.1%) as it countered their expectations. Participants appeared to believe that there has been an increase in car thefts in recent years, leading to the feeling that it is unsafe to leave your car in unfamiliar neighbourhoods at night.

Fact Sheet 3: Perceptions of Safety in Downtown Brantford

This study examined perceptions of safety in Downtown Brantford using data collected from 43 Brantford participants who live, work, or study in the downtown area and who engaged in walking focus groups between November 2022 and May 2023 (see appendix C). Research participants were asked to evaluate public spaces based upon their concerns of social disorder (i.e., visible homelessness, drug use, unpredictable behaviour), physical disorder (i.e., dilapidated buildings, vacant spaces or buildings, garbage), violence and harassment (i.e., stabbings, shootings, robberies) and familiarity.



“When I worked in Brantford 20 years ago, I was able to walk freely without fear. But now, I feel unsafe walking without my husband near and inside the TD Bank downtown.”

Research participants identified eight spaces as unsafe, including KFC, Market St. (from Chatham St. To Nelson S.), Market Centre Parkade, Queen St. (from Dalhousie St. To Colborne St.), Salvation Army Hostel for Males, Tim Hortons, Tim Hortons Alleyway, and Vegas World Lounge. Conference participants agreed with the spaces identified as unsafe. Some conversation centered upon why certain locations were deemed “unsafe”, such as KFC. However, after discussing incidences of social disorder and physical disorder that characterizes this area, participants agreed with the feeling that this area may appear as “unsafe”.



“We see a different story about the Parkade. Crime does not occur there, but social disorder incidents (yelling, noise) are prevalent in the area.”

“As a woman, hearing screams makes me feel unsafe, and I agree that these areas [pointing to areas identified as unsafe on the map] are correctly termed ‘unsafe’. We hear stories from our friends: seeing or hearing that these areas are unsafe convinces us not to go to these areas.”

Research participants identified the Market Centre Parkade walkway, Market St. Walkway (from Colborne St. To Dalhousie St.), and St. Andrews United Church were identified as uncomfortable. Conference participants agreed with these findings, discussing for example, their experiences of feeling uncomfortable when maneuvering through walkways such as the Market Centre Parkade Walkway and the Market St. Walkway.



Harmony Square, One Market, the Public Library, Victoria Park, and the YMCA were identified by research participants as a mix of unsafe, uncomfortable, and safe.

Conference participants discussed that areas may be perceived to be both safe and unsafe depending on weather conditions, lighting conditions, and time of day. For example, conference participants discussed feeling safer when areas are well lit, or when areas have security guards on patrol.

“At times I feel unsafe, but simultaneously confident to walk in other areas.”



Lastly, research participants identified safe spaces as Coffee Culture, Laurier’s Research and Academic Centre, and the Sanderson Centre. Conference participants echoed these sentiments, agreeing that they too felt safe in these areas.



Conference participants discussed experiences of “confirmation bias” in identifying unsafe spaces. Particularly, participants believed that hearing secondhand stories of violence occurring in a specific space, or frequently hearing sirens downtown, contribute to stigmatized perceptions of a space as unsafe, regardless of actual criminal acts in said space. One participant explained that when students hear second-hand stories of violence in certain areas, rather than experience it, they are more likely to view these areas as unsafe. Therefore, they believed that it was only a perception of violence, and not actual violence, that oftentimes leads students to avoid certain areas they deem as unsafe.

Participants tended to agree with this sentiment. They related it to their personal feelings of being unsafe while walking past garbage and used needles, or hearing a person yelling. In this sense, they related to feeling unsafe in areas of social disorder because it is something they personally experienced, as opposed to violence, which few if any had directly experienced.

Participants also discussed the ambiguity of police officer presence in these risky places. Namely, that police presence can represent safety while at the same time invoking fears of danger. Furthermore, participants also discussed how physical and social disorder contribute to public fears of violence. One table talked about how physical disorder has reduced drastically within the past 20 years while comparatively, social disorder has become a more substantial problem. When prompted to expand on this thought, some participants attributed the physical improvement of the area to the expansion of post-secondary campuses throughout the city. Importantly, participants appreciated that post-secondary campuses filled many unused buildings, renovated buildings, and brought students into the downtown core. On the other hand, participants felt that social disorder, such as drug use, homelessness, and loitering, became more prominent during this same period.



Participants discussed the lack of safety, and perceived lack of safety, in the downtown. Some participants mentioned that they avoid the downtown altogether because of these sentiments. Participants engaged in conversation about how lack of familiarity amongst community members downtown may perpetuate feelings of fear and discomfort in these areas.

Importantly, these findings sparked thoughtful conversations regarding empathy in the community. Participants discussed how the unhoused population face perpetual displacement and the “catch 22” of moving around while unhoused. Participants acknowledged the thin line between the housed and the unhoused, which sparked sympathy from participants to the people who are the subjects of social disorder calls.

Fact Sheet 4: Understanding Homelessness: Perspectives from 3 Mid-Sized Cities in Ontario

This study examined perceptions of homelessness using interview data collected from 86 participants including people with lived experiences of homelessness, service providers, business and community organizations, fire department, police officers, and bylaw officers, in three mid-sized cities, Brantford, Guelph, and Kitchener (see appendix D).

This study identified a few key findings. First, people experiencing homelessness feel marginalized in communities, particularly communities that take pride in caring for one another. Second, interviewees discussed the need for communities to respond to homelessness with non-law enforcement services. Lastly, results indicated that responses that build community resilience and community connectedness are vital.

In response to these findings, participants expressed discontent with how the system typically works against people experiencing homelessness.

Some participants shared the need for provincial and government support to address homelessness. Some participants attributed this discontent to a lack of accountability by various levels of government to address social problems. Participants suggested exploring opportunities to convert unused buildings into wrap around support systems for homeless individuals, with the purpose of instilling life skills and providing mental health supports for those in need.



"The system is broken, and nothing can be done without funding, resources, and space"



Participants also reflected on the stigma and misconceptions surrounding homelessness. Participants particularly attributed these misconceptions to inaccurate portrayals of homelessness in the media.

“There is a misconception about homelessness – there is a stigma and public perception. The media frames the issue negatively. We have to address the issue compassionately and make the issue a public concern, rather than leaving it up to the City or individual alone.”

“The City has to accept and cope with the failure of having their own community members be homeless”

Participants could relate to the common misconception that homeless people were typically “bussed in” from other communities, such as Hamilton and London. Participants discussed the importance of the City accepting accountability for homelessness.



“(education) would also create a more inclusive community, where it is not an us against them mentality”

Participants discussed the importance of education to dismantle negative misconceptions and foster community compassion. Participants identified education around the topic of homelessness and drug use as a way to reduce its stigmatization. Some suggested that if the community is more educated on these issues, they may be less likely to call the police for incidences related to social disorder.

In line with the findings, participants agreed that social disorder should be responded to by social workers and bylaw officers as opposed to police officers. Participants discussed the Brantford Police Pilot Project as a feasible solution to this problem. They explained that through compassion and humanity, police officers could and should connect homeless individuals with bylaw officials and social workers to find adequate, stable shelter or attain mental health support.

“In the encampments, we need to know how to talk to people. They are just humans that need help.” ... “By showing the right response, we have the ability to get rid of the encampments.”



Participants echoed the importance of supporting the homeless population to prevent unhelpful displacement. This was particularly the case when discussing the displacement of homeless individuals from businesses.

“Displacing homeless people does not address the systematic issues putting them there.”

Participants discussed the importance of educating first responders about the resources available for homeless individuals to reduce unhelpful displacement. Participants highlighted how the “Welcome Streets” outreach team helps to “move people along” in productive and supportive ways. Participants working in the field were eager to share their own success stories of how humane interventions and social solutions have been applied to support the homeless population, which allowed for positive and genuine conversations amongst participants about how to best support this community.





Capacity Builder

Capacity Builder

Next, the participants heard from three Canadian experts on community safety more broadly and some of the evidence-based strategies to improving community safety.

Christiane Sadeler from *More Better Solutions* shared her experiences and learnings in creating one of the largest municipal crime prevention plans in Canada. Christiane argued that crime prevention takes commitment and connection, often achieved through second order change, or radical, disruptive measures, such as implementing free education or establishing guaranteed incomes. She discussed how change requires clear citizen engagement, including advocacy, research, and evidence-based practices.

Anna Brassard from *SafeGrowth* shared with participants the four principal foundations for SafeGrowth method and practice: action-based practice, social ecology, neighbourhood activation, and socio-technical systems. Using these principles, Anna discussed the importance of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). Using an interactive activity, she demonstrated the importance of diagnosing a problem first, rather than the typical methods of immediately offering solutions that might not fully understand the issue or result in unproductive or harmful effects. She provided numerous examples of successful and local crime prevention strategies across North America using the SafeGrowth methodology.

Lastly, **Elisabeth Miller** from *the City of Saskatoon* and *the Canadian Municipal Network for Crime Prevention* discussed how communities can use their knowledge of CPTED to work with City officials within municipal planning to implement solutions to crime challenges. Further, Elisabeth discussed how her organization worked with neighbourhoods to create public, participation-based Local Area Plans (LAPs), to allow various community stakeholders to provide direct input into community planning. LAPs are an important first step in developing local strategy and accountability for community safety and have been replicated in other cities in North and South America.





Visioning Exercise

Visioning Exercise

After the capacity builder, the participants moved into the main sections of the search conference, starting with the visioning exercise. In breakout groups of 5-6, facilitators asked participants to identify a vision for Brantford by asking “**what should Brantford look like in 5-10 years.**” Facilitators asked participants to “think big,” imagining what an ideal Brantford could look like if no limitations existed and reminding them that no one knows the future. Participants were actively engaged in this exercise, excited about the opportunity to share their visions for the future of Brantford. In some groups, facilitators found that conversations were more fruitful when participants wrote down their own visions and later shared these visions with the group. In other groups, facilitators found it helpful to note key themes arising from participants conversations. In the debrief, one representative from each group presented their ideas to the main group.

After participants shared their groups’ ideas, and noted the commonalities among all of their responses, the lead facilitator (Hodgkinson), read a summary from a chapter she had written about the visioning exercise for another search conference in 2015 in Canmore, Alberta. She highlighted that many of the key themes that emerged in the Brantford participants’ visions for the future, were identical to those from Canmore, and in fact, almost every other search conference she had facilitated. She noted that the visioning exercise is important not only because it sets a goal to work towards, but also, because it enables participants to see how aligned their goals are with each other, and others who are working towards safer and more livable communities.

Vision

While the participants were split into various groups, each group seemed to align in their vision for Brantford. The general sentiment for the conferences’ vision for Brantford can be summarized in one pivotal statement:

*“Brantford will be a **destination with a strong cultural hub. It will prioritize collaboration and support, which will foster a thriving community**”.*



Destination

Participants wanted to see Brantford as a “go-to” city. Participants envisioned Brantford as a lively community with concerts, festivals, markets, continuous movie and television filming, and attractions catching the eye of tourists and out-of-town residents. Ideally, Brantford would have digital signs advertising key events and business to attract attention. These billboards would show events of the week to allow community members and travellers to easily see what is happening within the City.

Participants envisioned Downtown Brantford as a bustling district with retail shops, restaurants, and bars filling under-utilized spaces. Throughout Brantford, participants envisioned spaces such as movie theatres, parks, arcades, and gaming centres for community members to gather, with fully accessible public washrooms throughout the City.

“The downtown core should be full of restaurants and shops to bring people to the community and make it livable, especially for young people. They need attractions.”

“We need more living and walking areas with things to do, to go get coffee or food. If I want to go out with my girlfriends, there are only a couple of places I can go in Brantford and most times I have to go to other cities for decent shops and restaurants.”



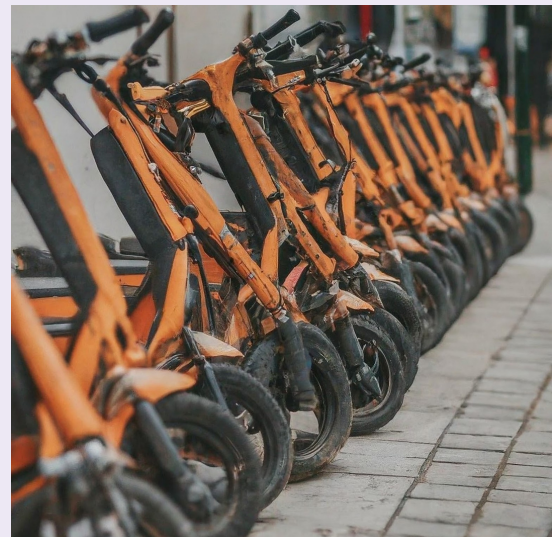
“There should be more social places where people can exist without paying money or having to buy something, such as community centres, indoor spaces and communal spaces.”

Participants seemed to believe that students are disadvantaged as there currently is a lack of nightlife for young people. While some participants argued that spaces must be created with multiple age groups in mind, it was ultimately decided that there should be community investments in spaces designed specifically for young- and middle-aged adults.

“There is a large university population here, but so many bars and clubs were shut down – where is the nightlife for young people? A lot of students don’t drive or have cars, so where are they supposed to go to relax? Should they leave Brantford and go home for the weekends? What about in the summer?”

“There is a lack of transportation around the city – including in and out of the city. For example, there are no busses between university campuses in Waterloo and Brantford. Bike rentals or scooter rentals would be beneficial.”

To make these visions a reality, participants discussed the importance of expanding the public transit system to allow for better inter- and intra-community transportation, creating more routes and better operating hours. Further, participants discussed the importance of diversifying transit options, such as the inclusion of rental e-bikes and scooters.



Participants also discussed how marketing Brantford as a destination required revitalization.

Participants envisioned flowerbeds along road medians and sidewalks and better garbage collection services. Further, participants cited the need for road and sidewalk construction. Lastly, participants noted the importance of green spaces for community connection.

“There needs to be a change in the downtown core and Greenwich – we need more people downtown, increased foot traffic, and improved cleanliness.”

“Like replacing the central medians on the roads with flowerbeds. That way the experience of walking around the city is nicer.”



Participants also brainstormed ways to enhance the community’s connection to the Grand River, such as increasing access to this area and beautifying the landscape. Participants envisioned walking or riding their bikes along the river, stopping for a picnic, and engaging in water sports.



Participants were excited at the concept of a Cultural Hub.

Participants envisioned a cultural hub as an intentional space featuring artisan shops promoting local art with unique eateries. Participants were excited at the idea of a space accessible to diverse populations that would spark community cohesion. The idea behind this space is to foster empathy amongst the community through genuine connection. In short, this space would provide an opportunity for members of the community to share stories and experiences, enhancing community cohesion. This space, they imagined, would become a dedicated space for under-represented groups and minority groups, who may otherwise feel unwelcome, to connect with the larger community.



“A hub ... being intentional with creating spaces to create events that have those mixed level incomes coming together and inviting homeless people to participate.”



Collaboration and Support

Participants discussed the notion that Brantford is a mid-sized city with a “small-town feel” at length. It was vitally important to participants that community cohesion shifts from a concept to a reality. To enable this, participants noted the importance of enhancing empathy and reducing the stigma of social issues and equity-deserving populations amongst community members through education and co-habiting in shared spaces.



Participants also discussed how the community could work to accept homelessness. Participants seemed to believe that this could be achieved through education and interaction and becoming comfortable sharing spaces.

“There needs to be education and interaction. They are human and have stories.”

“Exposing people to a different population to help reduce stigma. Like the International Villages held annually in Brantford, where they can educate and spread awareness, there is also interconnections, useful space.”

Participants also discussed the importance of inter-agency collaboration to allow for holistic supports. This collaboration would foster information sharing, enhanced system pathways and enhanced support services. For example, participants envisioned creating fully supportive and transitional housing initiatives.

Participants also envisioned shelter diversion programs, mentorship programs for emerging adults (i.e., those aged 19-29), youth specific programming, and employment supports.

“a fully supported housing space with evolved facilities, where humanity is intact, and a fully supportive housing system to help people monitor themselves.”



Further, participants discussed the importance of expanding mental and physical health supports, addictions supports, safe injection/consumption sites, and food programming. Participants also discussed improving affordable childcare accommodations to remove the barriers associated with parental access of these resources.

“Health and mental health need to be tied together, recognizing that they do go together.”



“Barriers need to be removed. Some programs require sobriety of a certain number of hours before someone can get any detox support. People need a safe space in order to get sober, but don’t have access to a safe space unless they’re sober. This is a cycle that the system perpetuates.”



Thriving Community

Participants envisioned Brantford as a thriving community, with a diverse range of programs that allow for enhanced community cohesion. Specifically, participants envisioned programming for a diverse range of community members, including youth, young adults, middle-aged adults, seniors, and families.

For example, participants described an indoor turf field offering a diverse range of year-round affordable sports programming.

“There aren’t a lot of events for youth. They don’t want to attend family or children aimed events, but do want a safe space to spend time with supportive adults.”

“Making these sports affordable for adults and children to encourage everyone to participate. Also creating more sports teams and leagues.”



Aside from programming, participants noted the importance of free spaces where community members can connect, such as community centres and parks.



“We want family-friendly spaces that are clean and keep our kids in mind. There needs to be community pride in keeping our spaces clean and safe.”



Additionally, participants noted the expansion of diversified places of worship, enhancing diversity and inclusion within the city.

“We see an increase in places of worship, which are the foundation of the community. These are spaces where people meet people like them and build strong relations within the community. These are positive spaces for newcomers.”

“(there is a) need for an overall expansion of services in West Brantford. For example, increasing things like retail, gas, small businesses, schools, doctors’ offices into West Brantford.”

Participants also discussed the need to enhance cohesion with community members in West Brantford. This would involve expanding services in West Brantford, but also enabling opportunities for residents across Brantford to engage.

Importantly, participants envisioned Brantford as an affordable community to live, work, and play. However, participants recognized the challenge associated with defining “affordable.”

“What does affordable housing mean? (This definition) needs to happen, it has to be flexible. (We) need to define it with stakeholders coming together.”

Participants therefore envisioned what “affordable” would look like in a thriving community.

“Affordable housing – which can be affordable even on minimum wage... Not short-term, but a community that people can live, work and play in.”





Identifying Opportunities

Identifying Opportunities

Once the vision was identified, participants returned to their breakout groups to identify opportunities to make this vision a reality. Facilitators encouraged participants to dive deeper into the assets they had identified in the appreciative inquiry and asset mapping exercise, sparking discussion surrounding the funding available, and new programs, strategies, or investments that are emerging in alignment with these opportunities. Participants were asked to be as specific as possible and reminded to focus solely on opportunities and not get distracted by constraints, as there would be time to discuss these in the next section. In the debrief, one representative from each group presented their ideas to the main group. Participants seemed encouraged to learn that various groups had similar ideas regarding the opportunities to improve Brantford. These opportunities included affordable, supportive, and transitional housing, community events, a community hub, connection to the Grand River and Mohawk Lake, downtown revitalization, enhancing education and employment services, enhancing social services, safe injection sites, support for youth, and transportation.

Opportunities

Affordable, Supportive, and Transitional Housing

Participants were primarily focused on opportunities around affordable housing, supportive housing, and transitional housing. Participants were excited during discussions around the creation of tiny home projects in Brantford similar to those established in Waterloo and Peterborough, Ontario. Of note, participants mentioned the current tiny homes project on Stinson and Stirton Avenue. Furthermore, participants expressed excitement around transitional housing projects expected to launch in 2024 in Brantford. Lastly, participants discussed the many apartment buildings currently being built within Brantford to address affordable housing. However, they noted that waitlists for these units are lengthy, contributing to feelings of hopelessness amongst those in need.

In addition, participants discussed that while multiple projects support the unhoused, barriers exist for families who seek to utilize these supports. For example, participants noted that oftentimes such projects have strict rules regarding the number of individuals who can stay in the same rooms, complicating access to such resources. Participants therefore identified that supportive housing units with less restrictions would be ideal for Brantford.

It was crucial to participants that a definition of “affordable” is created, such as defining how many rooms an affordable home may have, to better support families seeking affordable accommodations. Importantly, participants expressed the importance of providing wrap-around supports within these communities for residents. Above all, participants discussed the importance of establishing feelings of autonomy and safety in these spaces, particularly amongst previously unhoused folks transitioning to housed living.

Community Events

Building upon events highlighted in the appreciative inquiry segment, participants discussed the need to expand events programming, particularly for residents within the 30-50-year age group, families, and youth. As an example, participants mentioned expanding winter activities and better utilization of outdoor rinks.

They also mentioned removing barriers, such as cost of current recreational programming to make sports more affordable. Lastly, participants emphasized the need to utilize existing conference centers for more community events. It was crucial to participants that the community creates intentional events accessible to mixed income levels, with the purpose of connecting various community members who otherwise may not engage.

“(events that) bring all different groups together, building a sense of ownership.”



Community Hub

Participants identified that a “third place” was necessary in Brantford. They described this third place as an accessible, low barrier place where people can go that does not cost money. They inferred that this space would foster interconnection between all kinds of people.



Connection to the Grand River and Mohawk Lake

Participants expressed many opportunities to leverage the cultural and community potential of the underutilized Grand River and Mohawk Lake. Participants expressed interest in hosting community events in these spaces, including concerts, vendor markets, movie nights, rubber duck races, and yoga sessions. Participants also discussed opportunities to add additional boardwalks and trails to reduce the barriers to accessing these spaces both within Brantford and from other cities. Importantly, participants expressed the need to inform the community of access routes and events, for example through maps and brochures, to promote utilization of these spaces. However, participants identified the need to clean up these areas through revitalization projects to enhance public appeal.

Downtown Revitalization

Participants noted that while there are current downtown revitalization projects in the works, there is still much to be done in the area of revitalization. Participants mentioned the importance of promoting existing grants that businesses can apply for to renovate the outsides of their buildings. They also suggested that physical revitalization of storefronts would entice more shopping in the downtown area.

Furthermore, participants identified opportunities to develop condos in vacant buildings, as well as demolish or repurpose existing spaces to create opportunities for new development. Participants also identified opportunities to improve the physical appearance of the Downtown. They deemed enhanced garbage removal initiatives as essential. Additionally, they discussed opportunities to beautify streetscapes with flowerbeds, signage, lighting, fire pits and benches.



Enhancing Education and Employment

Participants discussed the importance of enhancing educational opportunities for all, particularly through enhancing pathways to education. For example, participants noted the need to build connections between high school and college/university to enable smooth transitions for students. Participants explored opportunities to expand existing programs across school boards to allow for better knowledge dissemination. Participants also discussed opportunities to standardize the information shared across high schools by colleges and universities.

Additionally, participants mentioned the need to improve adult literacy programs. They discussed opportunities to build “halfway points” for individuals who have aged out of the school system.

Building upon sentiments that arose from discussions around education, participants expressed the need to enhance employment skills training and employment opportunities for community members, particularly those with limited skills or connections.

Enhancing Social Services

Generally, participants discussed the importance of improving mental health and addictions support, particularly through enhanced long-term programming and fully supportive housing systems. Participants explored opportunities to expand on current mental health programs to accommodate adults who have aged out of the system. Additionally, participants discussed improving and creating additional shelter spaces, particularly spaces that are accessible during the day. Participants mentioned that projects are currently in the works to increase shelter bed spaces for youth. Overall, participants discussed the importance of social service outreach as opposed to police intervention, relying on programs such as the 'Welcome Streets' Outreach Team.

"Many of the shelters are an open dormitory style with no secure area for individuals to keep their belongings, resulting in constant theft of important documents and items."

Participants noted the importance of collaboration and information sharing between organizations. Participants envisioned a central hub for all social services to operate out of that would be staffed and accessible 24/7. In this space, participants discussed the need for secure areas for homeless individuals to keep their belongings.

On top of enhancing social services, it was also of vital importance that education efforts are created to reduce stigmatization and perceptions of "NIMBY-ism", and to enhance feelings of safety within the community. Participants discussed initiatives such as a "human library, and programs like those at Nottingham University, to foster experience and knowledge sharing amongst various members of the community.

"A human library ... instead of books, use personal experiences to educate others."



Safe Consumption/Injection Sites

Participants seemed to believe that there is widespread community interest in safe consumption/injection sites that are backed by empirical data. Participants discussed the establishment of safe injection/consumption sites in each of the five wards to best support service users throughout the city. Participants stated that spreading safe consumption/injection sites throughout the city would also alleviate large gatherings of drug users in one location, reducing the likelihood of public resistance against these sites. Participants proposed utilizing vacant properties to house these services. It was believed that these services should provide wrap-around support for service users.

Support for Youth

Participants recognized various opportunities to better include teens and young people in the community. Many participants expressed the need to establish more “positive spaces” for youth in the community, through both programming and physical spaces. These positive spaces should integrate youth with the greater community in places such as the YMCA, the library, and the under-utilized Gretzky Centre.



Importantly, participants expressed the need to enhance youth interventions in the school systems. Participants recognized that many interventions do not include educators. Therefore, additional interventions in school settings that incorporate educators was considered essential.

“Many kids are falling through the cracks and there is a lack of early interventions.”

Transportation

Amongst participants, there was a consensus surrounding the desire to revamp the current transit system.

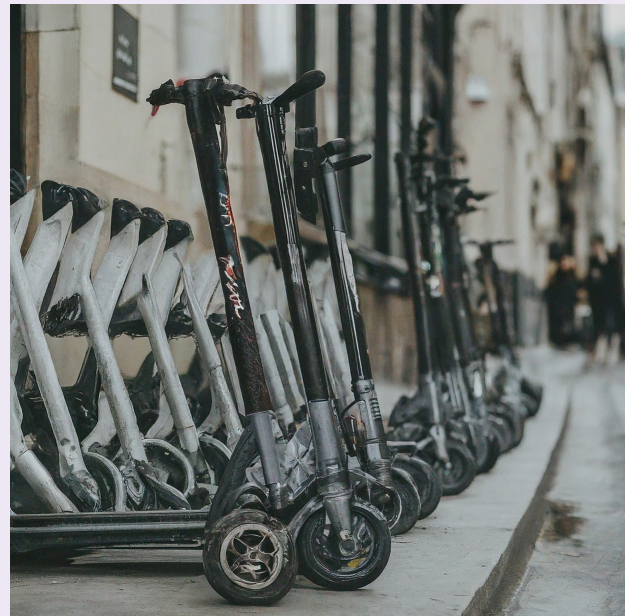
“The community is very interested in increased transit, so it should be available without too many barriers.”





Inter- and intra-city transportation was considered vital. Participants discussed improving bus routes and scheduling, such as offering 24/7 transportation services. For example, participants discussed the idea of a quick shuttle that travels from the downtown core to the industrial area, which they believed many workers could benefit from. However, participants noted that quick shuttles created in the past offered limited stops, reducing their accessibility. Participants said improvements to the transit systems should be established to create low-barrier, low-cost, and easily accessible transportation.

Furthermore, participants discussed diversifying transit options, such as the addition of rental bikes and scooters, accompanied by the creation of bike lanes. Participants discussed the bike path system in London, Ontario, which incorporates greenspace and does not rely on bike lanes in busy streets. Participants noted that while bike trails and lanes are on the City's radar, there should be greater focus and investment towards promoting them. Also, participants explored the possibility of creating rental bike and scooter programs like those in Toronto and Cambridge, Ontario.





Addressing Constraints

Addressing Constraints

After the discussion of the opportunities that exist and how to engage with them, participants worked in their breakout groups to identify constraints to making the group's vision of Downtown Brantford a reality. Facilitators encouraged participants to consider current service delivery gaps, missing supports, or inconsistencies which may hinder the ability to achieve their vision.

Noting that this topic of conversation could be more difficult for participants to actively participate, most facilitators encouraged participants to individually reflect on what potential constraints may occur in bringing about their vision of Brantford. After individual reflection, these facilitators encouraged participants to share their constraints with the group. Facilitators found that the individual reflection allowed participants to process and contemplate the question thoroughly, leading to active engagement and high-level discussions amongst the groups.

In the debrief, one representative from each group presented their ideas to the main group. Participants seemed relieved to learn that various participants experience or envisioned similar constraints in regarding to making their visions a reality. This consensus inspired participants to address these constraints in the action planning segment, discussed next. Participants identified six pertinent constraints affecting their opportunity to incite change, resistance to change, lack of accountability, lack of buy-in/interest, power, and red tape, lack of collaboration/working in silos, lack of funding and/or resources, and public stigma.



Constraints

Resistance to Change

Participants identified that changemakers can oftentimes be change averse, hesitant to step away from the status quo, or fear “breaking the mold.” As a result, participants discussed “paralysis by analysis” in which individuals or organizations avoid tough conversations or over-analyze the potential consequences of being a changemaker. In this sense, participants discussed the need to recognize that you cannot please everyone. They talked about how to make change your business and even be willing to put yourself out of work if it means creating real solutions. For example, participants discussed that many sources of funding exist, but that they often do not align with the priorities of typical pilot projects, or that organizations may be reluctant to share resources. Participants seemed to feel that in these instances, changemakers must advocate to challenge the status quo to utilize knowledge, funding, and resources in necessary and innovative ways, even if it may upset some.

“People need to not be afraid to step out of their own lanes, to communicate and initiate or start and make the first step.”

Lack of Accountability

Participants identified a lack of accountability as a consistent constraint. Participants identified that change requires a structured approach, wherein there is an execution plan, a prioritization of tasks, assignment of tasks, and accountability throughout the action plan to hold others accountable. One solution to address this constraint was utilizing community input to keep each other accountable and ensure political accountability. Another solution included utilizing data to ensure accountability.

“People are not trained in decision-making, but we make decisions every day, especially in big organizations. Therefore, data is important – data matters for our system.”



Importantly, participants also noted that sometimes those who initiate change are not often best suited for the role. In this sense, participants argued that changemakers must evaluate whose idea it was, who can do it, and who is best suited to carry out the work.

“In terms of understanding homelessness, we must also understand who is representative of the population and who is not (i.e. which organizations, policies, or politicians can help).”

Lack of Buy-In/Interest, Power, and Red Tape

Although participants displayed passion and resiliency, they often voiced feeling “worn down” by the lack of interest in these issues. Many people noted that they are tired of the lack of implementation and change, being part of an “endless pilot project.” Participants discussed experiences of proposals being dismissed by upper management and policymakers. For example, participants referred to youth pilot projects that had not been implemented long-term. A participant stated:



“There was a pilot project for youth that was very successful and helped kids with their homework and academics by providing laptops, workshops, mental health and employment supports. But it only lasted one year before it was cancelled. Why did the City stop this? We must implement these types of programs.”

“There’s a cultural issue – short-sighted, reactionary approaches to problems rather than long-term, proactive approaches.”

Some participants noted that bureaucratic culture is often short-sighted and reactionary, rather than long-term and proactive. As a result of this, participants expressed the lack of empowerment or influence as a constraint to affecting meaningful change. In fact, some participants noted that the findings of this search conference would be better presented by the research team, as they felt that senior management would not consider their ideas individually.

Lack of Collaboration/Working in Silos

There was a recurring observation that communication gaps exist amongst organizations. Many organizations realized they are concurrently engaged in similar projects aimed at addressing similar concerns, such as initiatives focused on addressing youth homelessness. This realization implies missed opportunities to pool funding and resources to establish more diverse, cohesive, well-rounded initiatives. Participants ultimately recognized the need for improved intercommunication and collaboration as a strategic approach to maximize efficiency and collectively address common goals. For example, participants noted that data collected from other cities, for example regarding safe injection sites, could be used to learn from, inform, and support such initiatives in Brantford.

“Collaboration and new connections are needed amongst people who are willing to step outside of their lanes”



“There needs to be more organized collaboration and communication between various organizations... Many people are all trying to do the same thing but are not working together.”

Furthermore, participants stated that an ideological shift is required that normalizes and allows referring to other organizations to prevent the reluctance to share resources.

Lack of Funding and/or Resources

The omnipresence of funding emerged as the most formidable barrier acknowledged by all participants. While possessing valuable ideas, the participants often found themselves hindered by the capital requirements necessary to translate these ideas into actionable initiatives. In cases where capital funding was accessible, for example for certain housing projects, long-term funding for additional services often is not.

“Companies would not be hesitant to pay for the land, but paying for staff and building often are more difficult.”

Additionally, participants expressed frustration with the many sources of funding that are under-utilized. Conversely, where funding is available, it is often not well publicized. Participants questioned whether these sources of funding are “set in stone” or whether they can be moved around, and if so, why they often are not reallocated.

“We need long-term solutions, funding for capital projects and more sustainability”

“We don’t really know all the resources available to us – I think it would be helpful to know, so we know what we’re working with.”

Further, many community organizations lacked awareness of grants available to start community initiatives. These financial constraints led to a sense of frustration and stagnation. Participants therefore discussed the importance of working with field experts to help with data sharing and decision-making. Particularly, participants noted working with organizations such as WLU to assist organizations in grant writing applications.

Furthermore, participants pointed to the lack of staff and volunteers, particularly in social service fields, which constrain efforts to expand social services. For example, the following conversation ensued regarding budget cuts to youth programming:



“We actually lost funding for youth workers to help kids and help the community. When we lost funding for a youth worker, we also lost an advocate for youth, and now there is no one to advocate for them. There are huge staffing issues and budget constraints.”

“Excluding kids from the budget is wrong, because youth are the lynchpin and future of our communities.”

Participants found it particularly difficult to advocate for and enact change when met with public stigmatization. For example, when discussing the creation of safe injection sites, participants discussed feelings of “NIMBY-ism”, which they felt impacts City buy-in of such services. Additionally, participants discussed perceived issues of safety, particularly in the downtown core, which constrains investments in such areas. For example, participants believed that the presence of homelessness, addiction, and litter has become associated with negative perceptions of safety in the downtown core. Participants seemed to believe that there is a lack of education surrounding these issues, which perpetuates avoidance of the downtown core, thus reinforcing negative perceptions of safety in this area. Participants continuously discussed the importance of public education and empathy building to reduce stigmatization, particularly through information and resource sharing throughout the community.



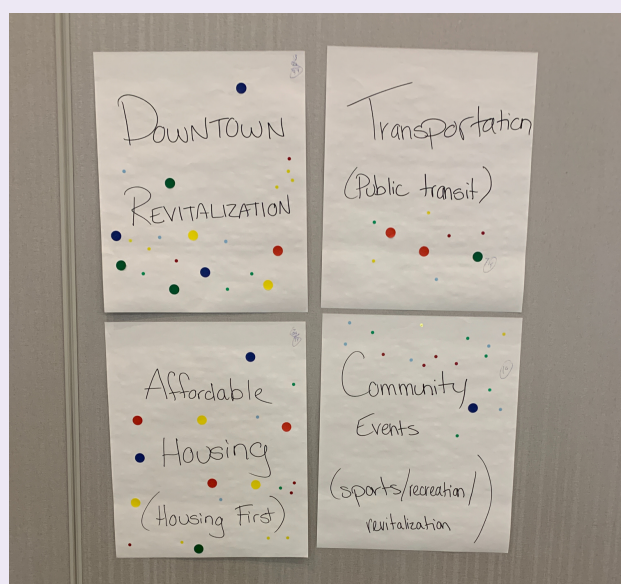


Action Plan

Action Plan

The final step of the search conference is the action plan. Often times there are numerous next steps that require action and different participants will have different capabilities to make these plans a reality. As a result, key potential areas are identified, participants are encouraged to narrow these down by voting, and then participants can self-select into the areas they are most passionate about. Based upon the key themes discovered in the “identifying opportunities” segment of the conference, the research team posted seven potential areas of action planning interest, including downtown revitalization, transportation (public transit), affordable housing, community events, safe consumption sites, Grand River revitalization, and third places (places that are free or almost free for activities and social engagement). Using a dotmocracy framework, in which participants are given a set of stickers or “dots” to vote, participants were provided with three small stickers (each accounting for one) and one large sticker (accounting for three) to vote on their most important topics which they used to vote on their top action planning priorities. The 4 priorities selected were affordable housing, community events, downtown revitalization, and transportation.

The lead facilitator first sparked discussion surrounding the action plan by leading participants through a “speed dating” exercise. The lead facilitator (Hodgkinson) provided participants with sticky notes. On these sticky notes, participants were instructed to write down how they would address 1-2 of the above themes. For the next 10 minutes, participants took turns sharing and listening to the visions of various participants. Participants were highly receptive to this activity, and it provided all participants a chance to connect with each other and share ideas in a quick and engaging format.



AFFORDABLE HOUSING



Participants decided that the first step to create affordable housing would be educating the public on the benefits of affordable housing to reduce stigma and enhance community buy-in for the project. Participants discussed the need to normalize conversations related to poverty and other challenges, citing education as a key tool to enhance comfortability with the project. Participants suggested that this education could be achieved through media campaigns, and the sharing of evidence-based data, and through roundtable discussions with various stakeholders, including individuals living/having lived in affordable housing units.



“Investing in public education around these sites would be a key to making this a reality. When the public is informed, they are able to have meaningful engagement with the projects and better support them.”

Next, participants suggested individuals should begin looking into best-practices established by other cities that have successfully addressed homelessness and created affordable housing.

Importantly, participants engaged in meaningful discussion regarding potential funding. Participants discussed opportunities to explore municipal, provincial, and federal funding options. Participants recognized the importance of involving City officials, such as the Director of Housing, to identify sources of funding for development. Furthermore, participants discussed long-term funding requirements to support the costs associated with providing wrap-around services in these units.



“Non-profits are struggling to be competitive and losing staff because of it.”

For example, participants discussed the current lack of funding and resourcing in organizations such as Brantford Housing and non-profit organizations. They stated that this is associated with current wage freezes for non-ministry workers in the housing field. These inadequacies, they noted, must be addressed to provide quality services.





Furthermore, participants recognized the need to secure land suitable for these kinds of projects. Participants suggested buying vacant properties which could be renovated to accommodate the housing units. Participants also discussed the need to connect with developers passionate about such projects.

“Finding developers who are interested in these projects is not an issue, it has become a huge business.”

Most importantly, participants discussed steps to receive approval for these spaces. They echoed the importance of collaboration amongst City officials, organizations, and developers to make this vision a reality.

In terms of actionable steps in the meantime, participants discussed establishing better case management and resource connection services in shelters. Furthermore, they discussed establishing uniformity of procedures and operations amongst shelters. Participants also noted the importance of creating community partnerships to allow for effective wrap-around supports for service users. Importantly, participants determined that it was of the utmost importance to define what “affordable” means to best serve the community.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Participants expressed a desire to enhance youth, family, and adult-centered events. A core action item amongst participants was relationship-building between the police and youth, with participants suggesting workshops be held on policing, or allowing youth tours of the police station. They discussed the police youth academy with Brantford Police and OPP, where youth 18 and older can join the academy to learn about police. Participants also explored the idea of a youth-based recreation program involving police officers acting as mentors.

“I am part of a youth committee in Brantford and at my next meeting – we meet every 3 months – I will bring up how we should start a police-youth relations program and try to cement positive relations between youth and the police community.”



Participants also discussed expanding recreational programming for youth to include a diverse range of sporting activities, for example, cricket teams. Alternatively, participants discussed a multi-sport league which would allow youth to participate in sports programming through one membership fee. Participants believed this program would allow youth to learn a variety of sports while also highlighting the multiculturalism of the community. One participant suggested that this could be a potential grant idea, and that there is the option to connect with the Brantford Immigration Partnership for this program. Furthermore, participants discussed the need for more open spaces for youth to hangout.



“We have a youth drop-in program at our library, but we don’t have a lot of children dropping in. There needs to be more awareness in our community about youth programming.”

Additionally, participants discussed difficulties in encouraging youth to participate in programming.

“Youth need food. When I am able to provide after-school snacks for hungry kids, there is more attendance for our after-school programs and activities (for homework help). We need a bigger budget to provide healthy snacks for them”

They determined that programs should be place-based to reduce transportation requirements. They also discussed working with local businesses to provide food during programs to entice youth to participate.

“A good idea would be trying to connect with our local food businesses and – restaurants and grocery stores – in the community to help us provide food and snacks for youth. I’ll help you liaise with local business owners and the community to see if we can get this done.”

Furthermore, participants discussed a lack of funding which affects staffing and resources required to run programming. Participants discussed establishing greater relationships with local colleges and universities to encourage volunteering for programming. Additionally, participants discussed partnering with the Grand River Employment and Training (GREAT) program which could connect Indigenous youth to career and volunteer opportunities in the community.

“If we could spend less time trying to get funding for these programs, we could dedicate more time to running and developing the programs.”



Participants also discussed improving programming for families and adults. They discussed theatre and dance programs, paint and trivia nights, relocating the skate park for better visibility, outdoor skating rinks, Christmas markets, and access to food trucks throughout the community.



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Participants first discussed many of the existing initiatives aimed at revitalizing the downtown. For example, representatives from the City discussed planned housing and residential developments. They also discussed new roadways being added. Further, representatives from WLU discussed the anticipated Community Cultural Hub, including a new movie theatre. Representatives from Conestoga also discussed their optimism for expansion.

Participants recalled a time when the downtown core was a destination place. When it came to the discussion of future downtown revitalization, participants pondered the question “how can we entice people to want to visit, and stay downtown?”

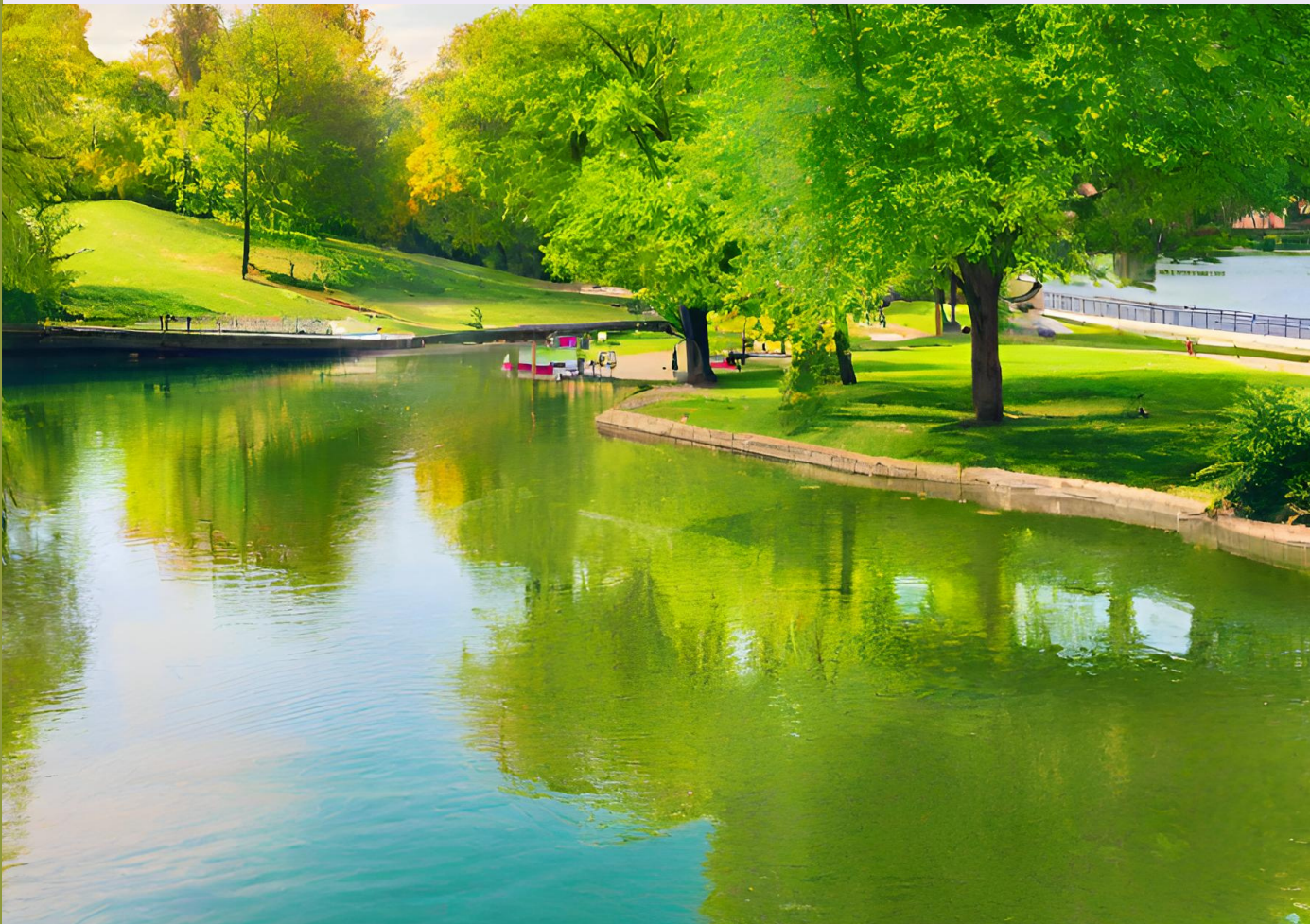
“People who use the library usually have it as part of their routine and they want to expand their routine while downtown.” ... “Right now, the library is a regular routine, but we want to add to that. Downtown used to be a whole experience back in the day.”

Participants discussed the need to fill vacant lots and spaces to enhance physical appeal and feelings of safety. Participants discussed filling these spaces with various shops and restaurants.

“Harmony Square and Dalhousie could be locations where regular events take place such as markets or street markets, such as what previously would happen.”



Furthermore, participants discussed enhancing green spaces, adding lighting to streets, lengthening sidewalks, and creating a mural. There was also some mention of the possible benefits of 3-hour free parking in the Market Centre Parkade, particularly for merchants. There were however conflicting views of the benefit of extended free parking, particularly as it relates to students buying parking passes. Participants engaged in discussion about removing barriers to accessing the downtown, such as fees, so community members could visit the downtown more regularly.

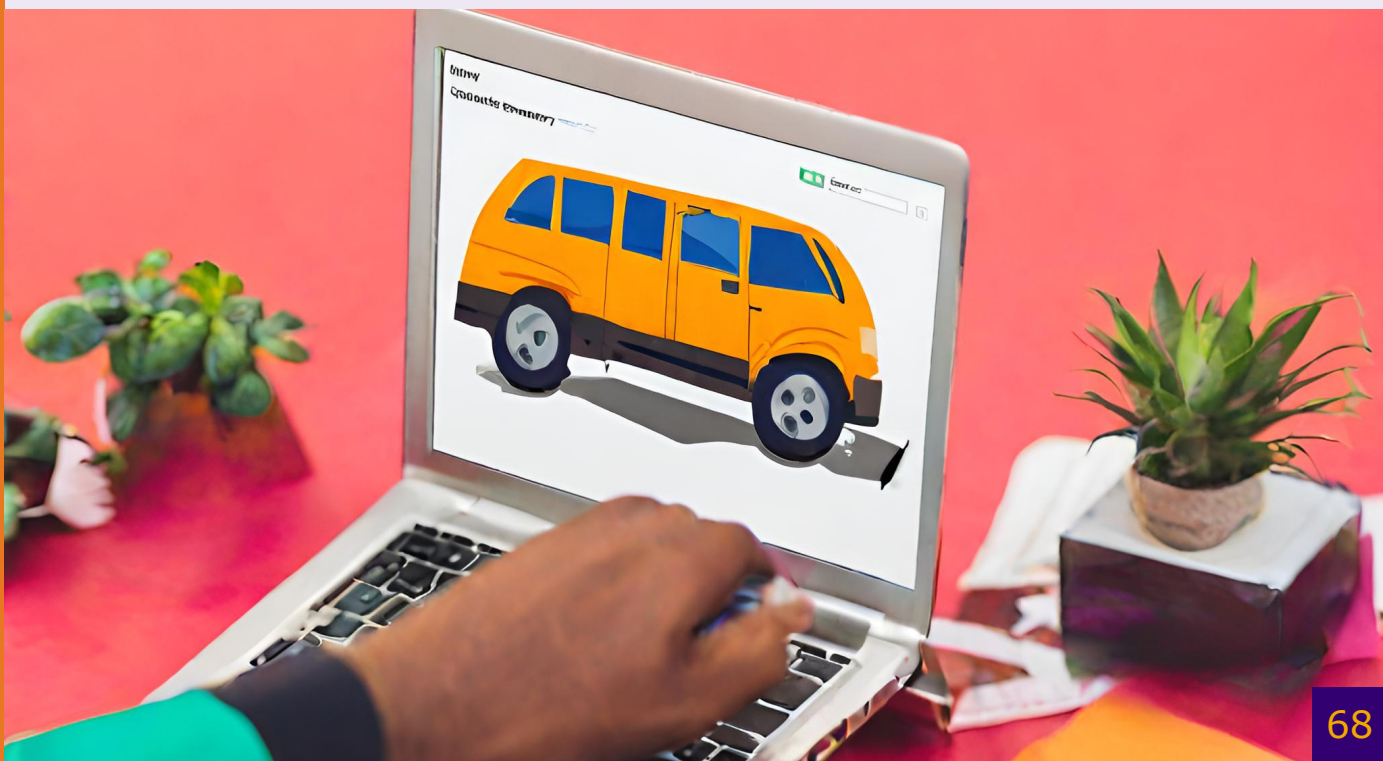


Participants also discussed the importance of social change, which they expected to occur naturally following physical revitalization efforts. In this sense, participants envisioned a bustling downtown, where community members gather to attend various events such as markets, trunk sales, sip and shops, and festivals, and scavenger hunts. Participants discussed the importance of promoting local businesses, particularly around the holidays through decoration competitions and “passport shopping”. In this sense, participants envisioned discount holiday experiences where customers could receive coupons or free small gifts for visiting multiple stores within the downtown. Participants also discussed expanding current holiday decorating competitions hosted by the DBBIA to include local schools and more businesses.

TRANSPORTATION

Participants agreed that the first step to enhancing transportation in the community would be to evaluate other municipal transit systems and learn from existing best-practices. Participants suggested that existing best practices, and political support from other communities could be used to leverage advocacy efforts in Brantford.

Next, participants discussed creating and disseminating a survey to the public. This survey would examine current barriers to accessing transportation, gaps in current service deliveries, and community needs. Participants discussed promoting the survey through email lists of ODSP users, foodbank users, and employment services in the area. Participants also noted that compensation, either through the form of coupons or money, may be beneficial to prompt responses. Participants envisioned using the survey results as a tool to advocate for improvements to the City of Brantford and Brantford Transit.



“Increasing bus routes to these smaller communities would allow elderly and disabled individuals, as well as youth, the ability to access and move around the city, thereby increasing community cohesion and communication.”

The accessibility of transportation services was vitally important. Participants discussed the desire to establish more direct routes, more feeder lines operating within the city, and routes outside of the city. Of note, participants mentioned connecting Brantford to Paris, Six Nations, Burford, Hamilton, Burlington, and Cambridge. Participants discussed working with Conestoga College, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Six Nations to support advocacy efforts between cities.



“Brantford is like a bubble – a city that is floating on its own and not connected to anything else.”

To enhance the accessibility of transportation services, participants discussed the need to identify funding sources to allow for the hiring of full-time staff to support 24/7 operations. Furthermore, participants discussed diversifying transit options, such as introducing bike and scooter rentals in the city and identifying funding sources that may be available to support these purchases.

Participants also discussed enhancing the affordability of transportation services. Participants discussed exploring the benefits of the Presto Card system. Free transit passes were also discussed to remove transportation barriers for students.

“(presto cards) are more accessible for the general public and doesn't necessarily require a phone to use.”



Additionally, participants discussed the importance of education surrounding what routes are available and how best to navigate the city using public transportation. Furthermore, participants discussed the need to enhance the appeal of public transportation by reducing anxiety and fear through education. They explained that increasing the need for (or at least the knowledge of the need) for improved transit systems could impact community stakeholder and partner buy-in.

“There is a factor of public fear influencing individuals into feeling fear when they haven’t had any negative personal experiences.”



“This would allow friends to stay connected and get kids outside the house more often after school, especially if they live in rural areas and their parents are unable to drive them places.”

It was of key importance that transportation services provide students with greater connectivity throughout Brantford. Participants discussed contacting various school boards in the area to advocate for a permission slip system that would allow youth to take busses other than their assigned “home bus,” to allow students to connect with friends, family, and employment opportunities.



Summary and Conclusion

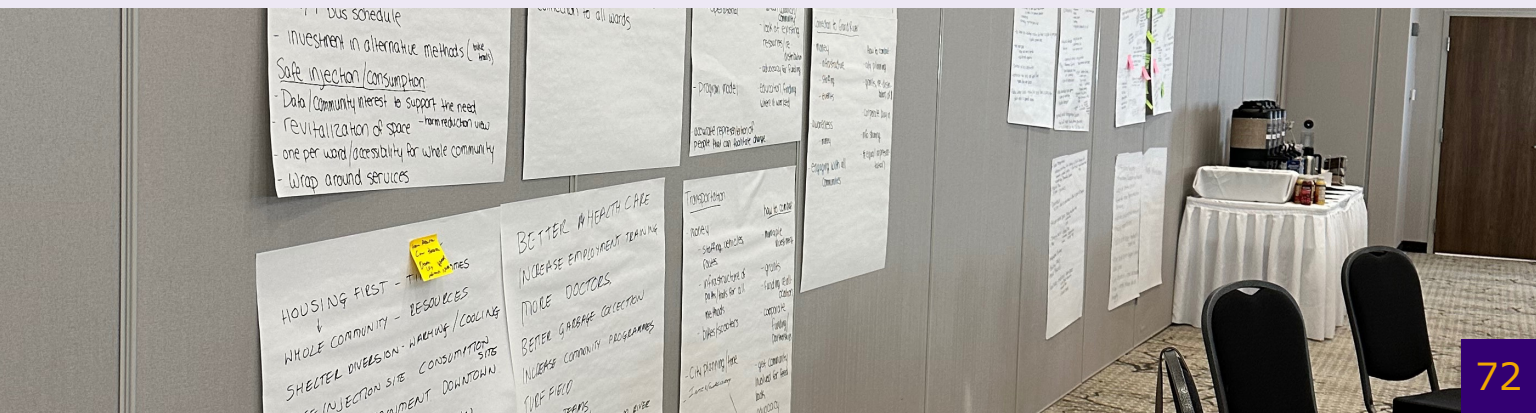
Summary and Conclusion

There were four main objectives throughout this search conference:

1. To identify, through community stakeholders, current assets in Brantford,
2. To share current research findings on crime and perceptions of safety downtown,
3. To engage community stakeholders in creating community safety action plans, and
4. To create a network of stakeholders to oversee the implementation and evaluation of the action plan through bottom-up governance systems.

While many community assets and areas of opportunity were identified, participants keenly centered upon four action plans to address community safety including affordable housing, community events, downtown revitalization, and transportation. In the action planning stages, each group committed to participating in the action planning process by sharing their contact information with fellow group members. Further, groups committed to scheduling at least one meeting outside of the conference.

Groups committed to various tangible steps to bring their action plans to fruition. For example, the affordable housing group committed to establishing better case management and resource connection services in shelters. Furthermore, they discussed establishing uniformity of procedures and operations amongst shelters. Participants also committed to enhancing community partnerships to allow for effective wrap-around supports for service users. Participants additionally committed to creating a definition of “affordable”, connecting with municipal leaders and developers, and researching best practices in the field of affordable housing.



The community events group committed to exploring various possibilities to establish police-youth relationships through various connections between group members, organizations and boards within the city. Further, the group committed to working together to establish relationships with local shops and restaurants to provide food and snacks at various youth programs. Lastly, group members committed to exploring further relationships between organizations and post-secondary institutions to identify better ways to support organizations in need of staff and volunteers.

Currently, the researchers at CRSP are leading a community safety study by surveying residents across the city. The purpose of this research is to gather residents' perceptions and experiences of community safety, particularly their perceptions and experiences of crime, disorder, and victimization. The results of this study will serve as a basis for any changes that search conference participants choose to implement through their individual organizations or group membership within this search conference.

The research team is extremely excited to see the next steps that will arise from the action planning having occurred throughout and following this conference. We encourage participants to use this document as a reminder of the valuable work that they accomplished throughout this conference and in their action planning moving forward.

We also encourage both conference participants and community members at large to engage with the findings presented throughout this report. In particular, we encourage individuals to utilize the findings presented in this report to inform, progress, and/or discover projects with the goal of enhancing community safety within the City of Brantford.



Thank you!

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Additional Resources

The below links have been hyperlinked throughout this document, but are included here for ease of reference:

CRSP - <https://researchcentres.wlu.ca/centre-for-research-on-security-practices/index.html>

MCRRT - <https://www.st-leonards.com/addictions-and-mental-health/programs/mobile-crisis-rapid-response-team-mcrrt>

BDOT - <https://www.st-leonards.com/housing/programs/brantford-downtown-outreach-team>

Outward Facing Special Constables - <https://www.brantfordpolice.ca/special-constable-recruiting>

Homelessness System of Care Panel - <https://www.brantford.ca/en/living-here/coordinated-access.aspx>

Let's Talk Brantford - <https://letstalkbrantford.ca/>

Community Safety and Well-being Plan - <https://www.brantford.ca/en/your-government/community-safety-and-well-being-plan.aspx>

Youth Fusion - <https://www.ymcahbb.ca/housing-community/youth-programs#ymca-accordion-item-title-8833055>

Y-Mind - <https://www.ymcahbb.ca/y-mind>

Equine Therapy - <https://www.libertyforyouth.org/blog/title/program-with-horses/id/28>

BL's Little Free Pantry - <https://www.littlefreepantry.org/>

Cultural Hub -

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/CHPC/Reports/RP10045531/chpcrp13/chpcrp13-e.pdf>

Dotmocracy - https://dotmocracy.org/what_is/

Grand River Employment and Training Program - <https://greatsn.com/>

Appendix A

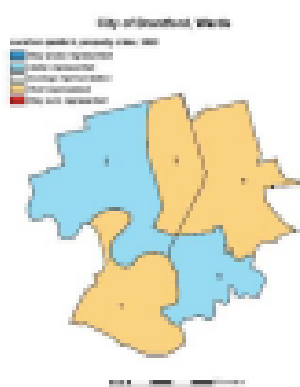


Centre for Research on
Security Practices

Wilfrid Laurier University

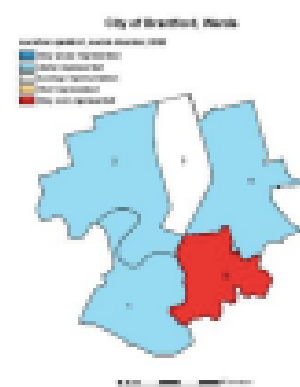
CRIME SPECIALIZATION IN BRANTFORD 2022

T. Hodgkinson
Fact Sheet
02/2023



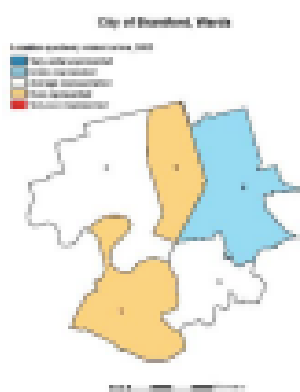
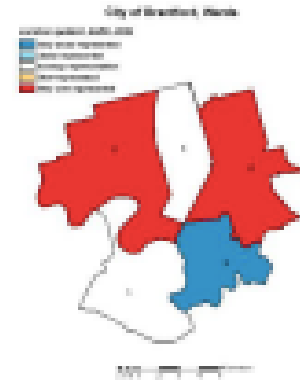
In Canada, crime rates are generally used to describe crime patterns over time. However, crime rates are calculated by taking the total amount of crime, dividing it by the population size and multiplying this number by a certain standard (ex. 100,000 people). However, crime rates are susceptible to misinterpretation. For example, small communities will often have overinflated crime rates because the amount of crime is being divided by a small population count.

Furthermore, crime rates say very little about what types of crimes are a problem in the city, and whether certain areas experience more of one crime type than others. This can make efforts to reduce and prevent crime very difficult.



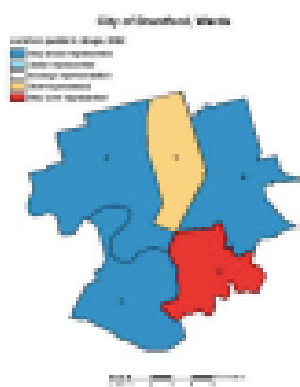
The location quotient is an alternative metric that provides practitioners and policymakers with more information. The location quotient calculates an area's crime specialization, compared to surrounding areas.

The location quotient is calculated by taking the percentage of a certain crime type (ex. Property crime) in one area, divided by the percentage of that same crime type in the study region as a whole. The ratio that is produced is measured against specific criteria to determine if an area specializes in a certain type of crime.¹



Here, we provide the location quotients for Brantford's five wards for the year 2022. We use the calls for service and incidents² provided to the Brantford Police Service, and divide them into six categories (violent crime, property crime, social disorder, drugs, traffic, and administrative) to produce five maps by crime type.

The results show that drugs and social disorder are highly overrepresented in Ward 5, while violent and property crime are overrepresented in Wards 1 and 3. Drugs are also overrepresented in Ward 3 and property crime is also overrepresented in Ward 4. Traffic is very overrepresented in Wards 2 and 4. These findings indicate that certain types of crime specialize in certain areas of Brantford and suggest that prevention approaches specific to the crime type specialization in these areas would be appropriate.




For further information, contact Dr. Tarah Hodgkinson at thodgkinson@wlu.ca

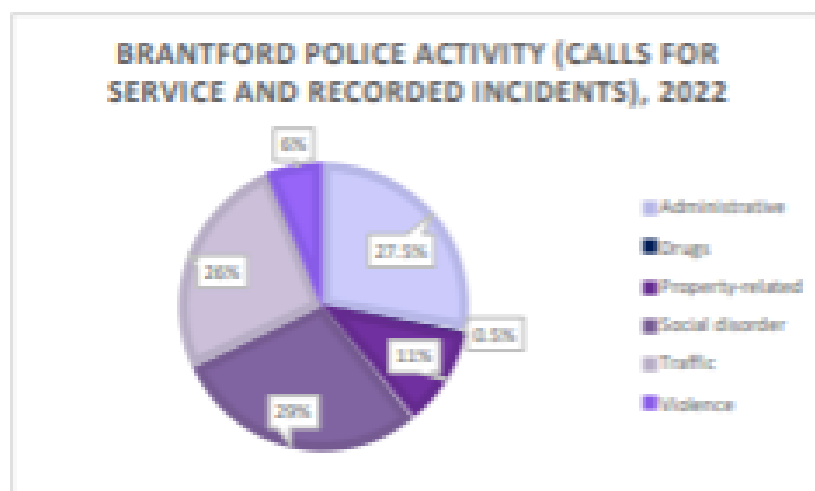
¹ These criteria are as follows: > 1.30 is a very over-represented area (high crime specialization), > 1.10 to 1.30 is moderately over-represented, > 0.90 to 1.10 is averagely represented, > 0.70 to 0.90 is under-represented, and 0.00 to 0.70 is a very under-represented area (low crime specialization).

² Issues related to social disorder, (ex. aggressive panhandling, public drunkenness, public mental health crises, etc.), often do not always become recorded incidents. However, these issues can elicit fear and perceptions of crime in residents and others. This demonstrates the importance of using both calls for service and incident data.

Appendix B

 Centre for Research on Security Practices	Wilfrid Laurier University BRANTFORD POLICE ACTIVITY, 2022	T. Hodgkinson Fact Sheet 02/2022
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The police respond to a range of issues, both criminal and social. Understanding the types of calls police respond to during the year, can help us to identify the kinds of issues that are most prominent in the community and how policing resources are being used. These data will somewhat differ from the UCR data reported to Statistics Canada, because much of what the police respond to is not crime related. However, these findings still provide important information about police activity in Brantford.



This pie chart shows the breakdown of calls for service to the Brantford Police Service in 2022. Here we see that social disorder accounts for the majority (29%) of these calls/incidents. Administrative calls/incidents account for approximately 28% of all calls/incidents and Traffic accounts for approximately 26%. However, the kinds of issues we often worry about most (ex. violence, property-related and drugs) only account for 17% of call calls/incidents.

In 2022 the Brantford Police Service recorded approximately 46,000 calls and incidents. This is up slightly from the eight year average (2015-2022) of approximately 45,000.

These percentages are fairly consistent with the average breakdowns of calls for service/incidents in Brantford between 2015 and 2022. For example, social disorder generally accounts for 27% of all calls and incidents to the Brantford Police Service, as does traffic. Approximately 25% of all calls/incidents are administrative, 13% are property-related, 6.5% are violence, and 0.5% are drugs.


Certain call and incident types account for a large proportion of these calls. Here we have highlighted the top five call/incident types for each category in 2022 and the percentage of that category accounted for by that each call/incident type.

Table 1: Top five calls/incidents to Brantford Police Service by category type, 2022

	1	2	3	4	5
Social disorder	Unwanted persons at commercial property (6.7%)	Subject identified at a commercial property (5.3%)	Subject not identified at residential property (5.3%)	Subject not identified at commercial property (5.1%)	Unwanted persons at residential property (4.9%)
Administrative	Wellbeing check (22.8%)	Medical service (9.6%)	Fail to appear in court (5.9%)	Assist other service (4.6%)	Federal warrant (4.1%)
Traffic	Vehicle stop – charge (29.6%)	Vehicle stop – warning (16.8%)	Motor vehicle collision – property damage (8.4%)	Driving complaint (6.7%)	Highway motor vehicle collision (5.7%)
Property-related	Shoplifting – theft under (18.6%)	Commercial property alarm (18.6%)	Theft from motor vehicle – under \$5000 (7.1%)	Commercial property theft – under \$5000 (7.6%)	Residential property theft – under \$5000 (5.6%)
Violence	Verbal assault – no clear aggressor (10.4%)	Domestic – child-parent – no measurable grounds (12.7%)	Assault level one (9.5%)	Domestic dispute – male suspect – female victim (8.2%)	Utter threats to cause bodily harm or death (3.8%)
Drugs	Found drugs (18.12%)	Possession (11.7%)	Accidental overdose (10.5%)	Drugs (7.9%)	Possession for the purpose of trafficking (6.1%)

While some of these call/incident types might be surprising, they also suggest that much of the issues driving each category type are not directly crime related.

Appendix C

 <p>Centre for Research on Security Practices</p>	<p>Wilfrid Laurier University PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY IN DOWNTOWN BRANTFORD</p>	<p>N. Martino Fact Sheet, 11/2023</p>
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The City of Brantford has been struggling with increasing social disorder, visible homelessness, businesses relocating, and community members expressing a fear of crime in the downtown area. To better understand these issues, researchers at the Centre for Research on Security Practices compared perceptions of safety downtown with official police recorded incident and calls for service data.

Between November 2022 and May 2023, our team conducted 24 walking focus group interviews with 43 Brantford participants who reside, work, and/or study in the downtown area. The sample included 13 law enforcement officers or staff, 10 Brantford residents, 8 Wilfrid Laurier University students, 6 Wilfrid Laurier University employees, and 6 downtown business owners or employees. We used geotagged body worn cameras to capture audio, video, and geographic coordinate data from each interview. Hotspots and counts of violent and social disorder-related crime and calls for service were compared to locations identified during the interviews.

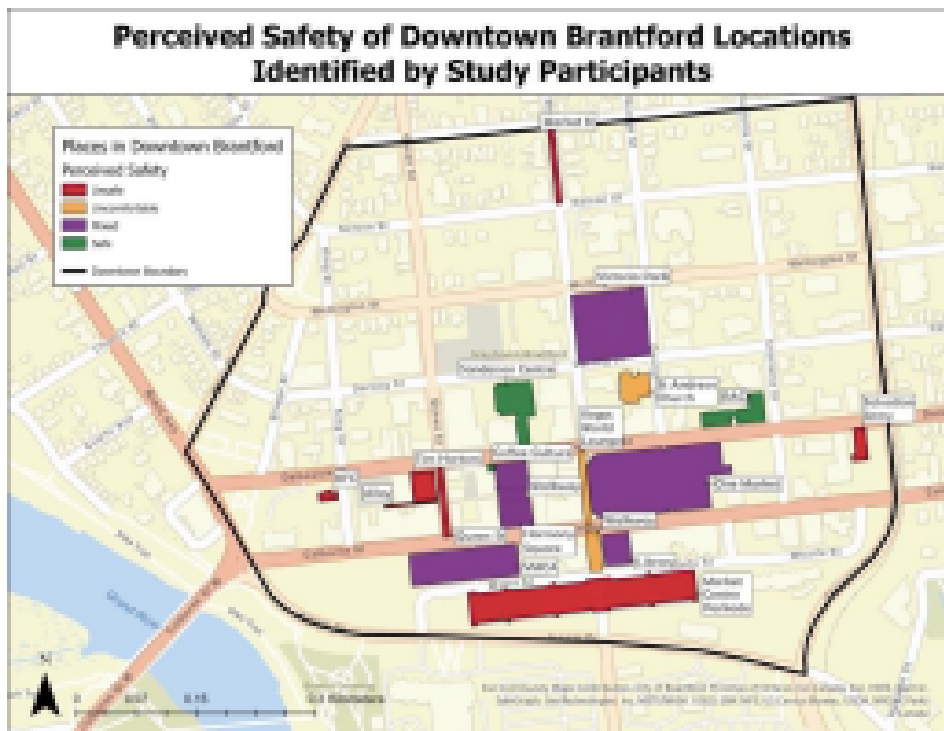


Figure 1: This map shows the places identified by participants during the interviews and their perceived levels of safety. Places that were identified as safe are shown in green, places that were identified as uncomfortable are orange, places that were identified as unsafe are red, and places that were identified as a mix of safe, uncomfortable, or unsafe are shown in purple.

Participants identified eight places as **unsafe**, including KFC, Market St. (from Chatham St. to Nelson St.), Market Centre Parkade, Queen St. (from Dalhousie St. to Colborne St.), Salvation Army Hostel for Males, Tim Hortons, Tim Hortons Alleyway, and Vegas World Lounge. Three places were identified as **uncomfortable**, including Market Centre Parkade walkway, Market St. walkway (from Colborne St. to Dalhousie St.), and St. Andrews United Church. Three places were identified as **safe**, including Coffee Culture, Laurier's Research and Academic Centre, and the Sanderson Centre. Finally, places that were a **mix of unsafe, uncomfortable, and safe** included Harmony Square, One Market, the Public Library, Victoria Park, and the YMCA. Participants characterized these places based on concerns of social disorder, physical disorder, violence and harassment, and familiarity.

Social Disorder

The most prominent theme to emerge from the walking focus groups was that of social disorder, including concerns about visible homelessness, homeless encampments, drug use, and unpredictable behaviour. For example, the following student stated:

“Victoria Park is definitely a hub for homeless folks because there’s benches there and it’s a space that’s not really regulated. The main thing about the park is just when you have certain people with mental illnesses who behave in a certain way that make you feel uncomfortable.”

Concerns about homelessness centred around congregation in public spaces, vacant spaces and buildings, and in alleyways. Participants also described active drug use, drug paraphernalia, and overdoses. Finally, participants discussed concerns about unpredictable behaviour related to homelessness, drug use, and mental health, witnessing incidents of yelling and violence. Concerns related to social disorder negatively impacted participants’ perceptions of safety, and were most common around Tim Hortons, the Market Centre Parkade, Harmony Square, the Market St. walkway (from Colborne St. and Dalhousie St.), St. Andrews Church, the Public Library, the Tim Hortons alleyway, Salvation Army Hostel for Males, and Queen St. (from Dalhousie St to Colborne St.).

Physical Disorder

Participants’ perceptions of safety also relied on physical disorder, such as dilapidated buildings, vacant spaces or buildings, and the presence of garbage. Participants associated ‘run down buildings’ that are not taken care of with feelings of discomfort, making them feel ‘on edge.’ Moreover, participants explained that vacant spaces and buildings made them feel uncomfortable, with the following participant noting that a section of Colborne St.,

“...just looks run down. To me, it looks unsafe. Look at all of this, it needs a facelift. All of these nooks bring a lot of activity. So, when there’s a bunch of them in a row... it seems unsafe to even look at.”

Other vacant spaces were noted as dumping grounds, places for people to congregate, isolated, and abandoned. Participants felt particularly unsafe when walking around these spaces alone. Finally, participants described how the presence of garbage impacted their perceptions of safety. While concerns about dilapidated buildings and vacant spaces were prevalent across the downtown core, complaints of garbage, including cigarette butts, refuse, syringes, urine, feces, and graffiti, were most evident in Victoria Park and around the Tim Hortons.

Violence and Harassment

Many participants described hearing stories of violence downtown, such as stabbings, shootings, and robberies, impacting their perceptions of safety and potential victimization. As the following participant explains,

“I have definitely heard of stabbings and shootings happening near the downtown Brantford area. Knowing that that does happen and hearing sirens very, very frequently, for me, it’s knowing that things have happened and knowing that they could happen again.”

Participants also described verbal harassment when walking by Vegas World Lounge and Brando’s bar, causing them to take another route to their location to avoid street harassment. Others experienced physical violence, such as a student who was followed and grabbed by a man near the Royal Bank of Canada, and another whose friends were grabbed in alleyways downtown, including the Market St. Walkway (from Colborne St. to Dalhousie St.).

Familiarity with Spaces

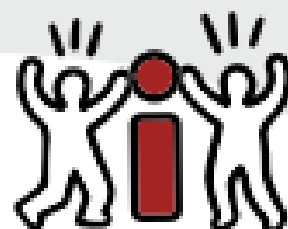
Finally, participants felt safe in spaces they were familiar with. For example, the following participant explains,

“I would say I feel safer in general because of my nature of spending more time here. I’m getting to know people who are downtown often, and the owners of properties and businesses. So, all of those things help me feel safer here, but that’s all due to exposure.”

Participants thereby felt safe in places they frequently spent time. While many students felt uncomfortable downtown, people who were more familiar with the area, such as community members or law enforcement officers, felt safer and more comfortable.

Appendix D

Understanding Homelessness



Perspectives from 3 Mid-Sized Cities in Ontario

COMMUNITY MEMBERS WE TALKED TO:

People experiencing homelessness,
Service providers,
Business and Community Organizations,
Fire Department,
Police officers and
Bylaw officers.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS WE TALKED TO:	Total number (n = 86)
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People with lived experience of homelessness	29
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Service providers	10
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Business and Community Organizations	24
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Fire Department	3
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Police officers	11
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Bylaw officers	9
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Background

Visible homelessness in mid-sized cities (pop. 50,000 - 500,000) is a relatively new problem. Misconceptions about homelessness have led to divided opinions about how to address homelessness and the general public's feelings of unsafety. This research explores how different community members make sense of the issues underlying homelessness in their mid-sized cities.

What We Did

We interviewed **86 people** across three cities in southern Ontario. We asked about what they thought of their community, interactions with other actors, daily challenges they experience, and their views on the issue of homelessness.



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Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Here's what we have learned so far...

People experiencing homelessness feel marginalized in communities that otherwise pride themselves on taking care of one another.

Communities have invested in "disciplinary" processes, such as complaint-driven responses to encampments and private security companies. These processes create a cycle of displacement for people instead of long-term solutions:

"There are different security companies around here now. You can't do anything. You're stopped and they're like 'move along,' right? It's freezing cold and in the middle of the night sometimes. No, I'm not bothering anybody. But [private security] tells me I have to leave because they will call [police]"

- Person Experiencing Homelessness

Many community members perpetuate stigma even if they mean well: For example, online groups that were intended to foster safety have become spaces that breed hostility toward people experiencing homelessness.

"It's a little concerning with the amount of people that are actively hunting just looking for these people to try to report them and get them out."

- Law Enforcement Officer



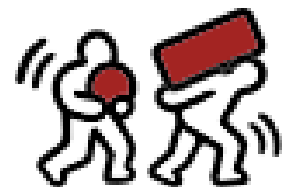
Communities need different first responders.

Many communities rely on law enforcement as first responders because there aren't always appropriate resources available in mid-sized cities for specific situations:

"They're getting paid to help the people, not put them in worse situations. But other than that, they're not social workers, they're not psychologists, they're police officers."

- Person Experiencing Homelessness

Some communities are finding success in public health supports to address the opioid overdose crisis, as opposed to law enforcement. This demonstrates that non-traditional response options can fill an important void in the current response system.



Here's what we have learned so far...

We Need Responses that Build Community Resilience.

Contrary to popular belief, people experiencing homelessness are much more likely to be residents who have lived in an area for a long time, rather than people relocating from other cities.

Over 3 in 4
are locals.

Across the three cities, an average of 76% of people who are homeless had lived in the city for 5 years or more.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE - harmony, a sense of belonging and ability to get along - is built through the inclusion of all community members, including people who are vulnerable, marginalized, and underserved.

It is in the best interest of all community members to invest in structural solutions rather than only individual responses:



"I think the biggest problem with everything that's going on right now is everybody is so focused on being an individual and meeting their needs and living their life and doing things on their terms... we've lost a sense of compassion. We only look out for ourselves, and nobody else... Homeless people are not disposable. They all have stories, they all have circumstances that caused them to be there. And if you just stop looking at them like a disease and cared enough to help, maybe we could [help]."

— Business Owner

Misunderstandings about person-first approaches, (e.g., consumption and treatment sites and Housing First) can lead to people opposing supports with long-term benefits. However, communities finding the most success are those that have focused on building strong connections between community members.

So What's Next?

This research highlights pressure points among community stakeholders about the issue of homelessness in their communities. To learn what practical steps we can take to address this issue, check out the [NIMBY to Neighbour](#) series on the Homeless Hub.



Hub Solutions is a social enterprise embedded within the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH). Income generated from Hub Solutions fee-for-service work is reinvested into the COH to support research, innovation, policy recommendations and knowledge mobilization.