

# ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

DOWNTOWN  
BUSINESS COMMISSION HALIFAX





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Cover photo: Tourism Nova Scotia  
Photo (left): Michelle Doucette Photography



# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR + CEO



Photo: WeUsThem

**Ashwin Kutty**  
Chair, Board of Directors

**Paul MacKinnon**  
Chief Executive Officer

This year, CBC referred to Downtown Halifax as ‘Canada’s Comeback City’ based on its continued strong recovery. This vibrancy comes in the form of visitation, ongoing private and public investment, events, and the overall pride of our businesses. Still, there is much to be done. For that reason, in the spring of 2024, we launched *Downtown Halifax Vision 2030*. It outlines four transformational moves: Everybody’s Neighbourhood, Move Smart, Harbour 365, and Entertainment Central. Together, they include 17 key recommendations to shape the future of Downtown Halifax. Following elections at all levels of government, we have consistently advocated for the Vision, urging political leaders to embrace, invest in, and advance it. Downtown Halifax stands at a critical juncture – poised to be both Canada’s Comeback City and one of the fastest-growing downtowns in the country. To realize this potential, focused and strategic investments are essential in what is effectively the “showroom of our province”. Downtown is an asset not just to Halifax, but to the province and the Atlantic region, serving as the economic hub.

In addition to championing this bold vision, Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC) is taking on a unique role in attracting businesses to the Downtown district. DHBC will work closely with partners and stakeholders to ensure continued vibrancy at both street-level storefronts and within our office towers.

This report looks back at the past year, particularly highlighting the accomplishments of DHBC as it continues its focus in the areas of Advocacy, Marketing & Communications, Membership Engagement, and Placemaking.

Through 2025 and beyond, the DHBC Board and Staff remain steadfast in our commitment to passionately pursue a more vibrant and prosperous Downtown for our 1,600 members and, more broadly, for our city and province. We are after all, as the Vision has defined, “Everybody’s Neighbourhood”!

Photo (left): Michelle Doucette Photography



## WHO IS DHBC?

Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC) is the business improvement district (BID) that represents 1,600 businesses in the urban core of Halifax, Nova Scotia. We are a not-for-profit organization that works to passionately pursue a more prosperous and vibrant Downtown.

Guided by our focus areas: Advocacy, Marketing & Communications, Membership Engagement, and Placemaking, DHBC runs programs, projects, events, and initiatives to help make Downtown Halifax a better place to live, work, and play.

## MEMBER PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

If your business is located within DHBC's boundaries, you are automatically a DHBC member. DHBC represents all organizations, including property owners and tenants, located in the area between the Halifax Waterfront and the waterside of Brunswick Street, and between the Cogswell District and the south end of Barrington Street.

For more information on the many member programs, supports and resources DHBC provides, please contact us anytime:

[info@downtownhalifax.ca](mailto:info@downtownhalifax.ca) | 902-423-6658 | 1546 Barrington Street, Suite 104 | [downtownhalifax.ca](http://downtownhalifax.ca)



**Paul MacKinnon**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Kimberly Dossett**  
Director of Finance & Operations



**Allana MacDonald Mills**  
Director of Marketing



**Jayme Lynn Butt**  
Communications Manager

# DHBC STAFF



**Jonathan Goldson**  
Placemaking Manager



**Abbie Jenkins**  
Digital Marketing Coordinator



**Becca MacAulay**  
Office Administrator



**Lucas Goltz**  
Program Coordinator,  
Navigator Outreach Program

*Membership Engagement Manager: Vacant*

**Ashwin Kutty, Chair**  
President & CEO  
WeUsThem Inc.

**Marilisa Benigno, Vice Chair**  
President  
Benigno Group of Companies

**Erin Esiyok-Prime, Secretary Treasurer**  
Manager,  
Communications & Marketing  
Atlantic Economic Council

**Issmat Al-Akhali, Member at Large**  
Owner/Operator  
Granville Hall Student  
Residence & Cameo  
Hotel & Suites

**Christian Rankin, Past Chair**  
Co-Owner  
Obladee Wine Bar

**Dana Beeler**  
Events & Strategic  
Development Manager  
Music Nova Scotia

**Trish Calder**  
Associate Partner  
Barrington Consulting Group

**Melissa Carey**  
Vice President Sales  
& Marketing  
RCR Hospitality Group

**Kristan Hines**  
Senior VP of Corporate  
& Public Affairs  
National Public Relations

**Paul Johnston**  
Managing Director,  
Government Relations  
& External Affairs,  
Chief Administrative Office  
Halifax Regional Municipality

**Raeesa Lalani**  
Artistic Director  
Prismatic Arts Festival

**Joyce Liu**  
Founder & CEO  
Lumi Studios Media  
& Production

**Joe McGuinness**  
Owner  
Platinum Group

**Blaise Morrison**  
Manager of Development  
& Planning  
The Armour Group Limited

**Courtney Ordway**  
Business Development  
& Program Manager  
Build Nova Scotia and Owner,  
Kind Bridal

**Jacob Ritchie**  
President  
United Gulf Developments Ltd.

# 2024-2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*Photo (right): Riaz Oozer*



# 2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN



## MISSION

To passionately pursue a more prosperous and vibrant Downtown.

## VISION

Canada's Favourite Downtown.

## VALUES

Agility, Community, Data Driven, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IDEA), Leadership, Professional Relationships.

## STRATEGIES

Advocacy  
Partnerships  
Placemaking  
Promotion

Photo (left): Tourism Nova Scotia & Davey and Sky



## TARGETS FOR 2026

### ATTRACT PEOPLE

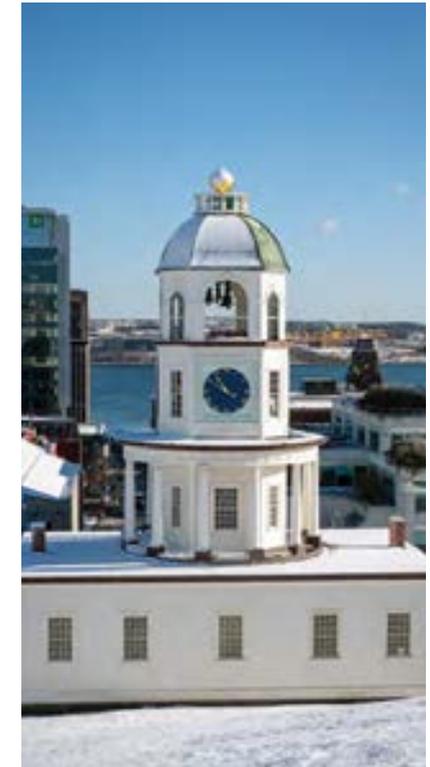
Annual visitation will exceed 19M; the residential population will be 22K with an employee base of 20K.

Photos (left to right): SailGP Canada, Tourism Nova Scotia & Alexa Cude, Michelle Doucette Photography



### INCREASE SALES

Ground floor sales will be \$430M and ground floor vacancy will be under 10%.



### INCITE INVESTMENT

Significant progress will be made on 30 new Downtown Halifax projects, there will be 1K new residential units, and HRM will have committed to a significant streetscape project.



# ADVOCACY

DHBC serves as the collective voice of our members in conversations with government, media, and key stakeholders. Guided by our Board of Directors and Advocacy Committee, we set annual priorities, collaborate with partners, stay on top of emerging issues, and keep our members informed every step of the way.



Photo: Nico Takushi

## HIGHLIGHTS

**The Year of Elections:** 2024 saw two major elections, and DHBC played an active role in each by hosting the Mayoral Debate, sponsoring the Halifax Chamber of Commerce’s Provincial Election Debate, and successfully submitting pre-budget letters to all levels of government. DHBC also participated in Advocacy Days on Parliament Hill in October.

**Downtown Halifax Vision 2030:** DHBC publicly launched *Downtown Halifax Vision 2030* in June 2024, drawing over 200 attendees. Since then, we have engaged all levels of government, stakeholders, and members to build broad support, including presenting to the Halifax Regional Council in December. Visit [downtownhalifax.ca/vision2030](https://downtownhalifax.ca/vision2030) to view.

**Public Safety:** We successfully worked with partners to have Grafton Park and Grand Parade re-designated as areas not permitted for tent encampments, helping to ensure these important public spaces remain accessible for all.

We have also built strong ties with Halifax Regional Police leadership, giving our members streamlined access for feedback.

**Access and Mobility:** To minimize disruption from the Cogswell District redevelopment project, we have worked closely with HRM’s project team through monthly stakeholder sessions and direct member updates.

We also advocated to maintain current parking rates and hours, while shaping future parameters for change.

**Public Investment:** Working alongside the eight other Halifax BIDs, we helped secure:

- A commercial tax rate decrease by HRM Council.
- Support for a provincial fund to offset business impacts from major construction projects.

**State of the Downtown:** We also released the second annual *State of the Downtown* report. This work led to an invitation to join the “Equitable Development Data Insight Training” (EDDIT) program with the University of Toronto, UC Berkeley, and TheCaseMade.

Photo (left): Chris Geworsky Photography



# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

*DHBC's Marketing & Communications team collaborates with members, partners, stakeholders, event organizers, and media to drive awareness and get more "feet on the street".*

*Through the promotion of local businesses, attractions, events, and more, we help position Downtown Halifax as a vibrant, welcoming destination for all.*

## HIGHLIGHTS

**48** DHBC's Event Sponsorship Program invested over \$140K into **48 events** that happened in Downtown Halifax. These events had a combined event attendance of **480K**.

**Social Media: 152K followers (11% increase), and increased engagement rate by 16%.** Hit the milestone of 60K followers on Instagram in January.

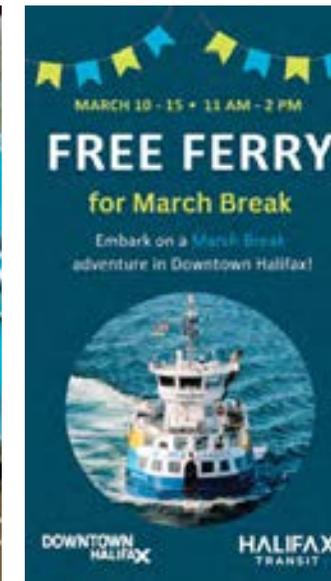
**Website: Over 421K website views on downtownhalifax.ca; 48K views on the Events page alone (downtownhalifax.ca/events).**

Ran radio, print, and digital ads with Bell Media, allNovaScotia, Discover Halifax, Curated Magazine and Guide, Neptune Theatre, PostMedia, The Coast, Eastlink, Family Fun Halifax, Sea Nova Scotia, the Local Wishlist, and more.

Printed and distributed 34K copies of the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the *2024 Downtown Halifax Holiday Gift Guide*, which featured 103 businesses from the Downtown and Spring Garden areas.

*Michelle Doucette Photography*

# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS



Noah Tye



Michelle Doucette Photography

Partnered with Halifax Transit to offer free ferry service to over 6.5K passengers during March Break.

Created and launched a new music grant program, “March is for Music”, distributing 20K to 21 member businesses to host over 30 musical performances throughout the month of March.

Led the organization of Open City with the 4 other urban BIDs. 150 businesses participated across the Halifax peninsula and downtown Dartmouth, with almost 50 member businesses participating in Downtown Halifax alone.

Produced 67 Downtown LOWDOWNS on downtownhalifax.ca covering topics ranging from practical guides like “Washrooms in Downtown Halifax” to seasonal features like “Celebrate the Spooky Season in Downtown Halifax”. These LOWDOWNS were featured in the twice-weekly newsletter *This Week/Weekend Downtown*, sent to nearly 6K subscribers.

Ran seasonal marketing campaigns promoting various things to do each season in Downtown Halifax.

Worked with partners including Sail Nova Scotia, Discover Halifax, Build Nova Scotia, HRM, and more to help support and promote the *ROCKWOOL Canada Sail Grand Prix* that attracted over 50K spectators to the Halifax Waterfront in June.

Launched a Business Attraction strategy that included collaboration with key stakeholders, the creation of a vacant space directory on downtownhalifax.ca, and the release of the *Choose Downtown Halifax* promotional handout. Visit [downtownhalifax.ca/dataandreporting](https://downtownhalifax.ca/dataandreporting) for more information.

Selected a new marketing agency to develop a refreshed brand campaign for Downtown Halifax, set to launch in 2025.

Photo (left): Tourism Nova Scotia & Alexa Cude

downtownhalifax.ca

# MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT



Photo: Michelle Doucette Photography

DHBC works to build relationships with members, be a resource for problem-solving, and advocate for common issues. We strive to enhance awareness and promotion of member benefits, provide opportunities for members to give input into existing and emerging issues, and create engagement opportunities through networking events, information sessions, workshops, and more.

As a DHBC member, you are entitled to many member programs and resources, including but not limited to:



Please contact [info@downtownhalifax.ca](mailto:info@downtownhalifax.ca) for details on member programs and resources.



Photo: Stoo Metz Photography



Photo: Chris Geworsky Photography

## HIGHLIGHTS

6 member events hosted: DHBC's 2024 AGM, Member Holiday Social, Cogswell Redevelopment Information Session, and DHBC Welcome Centre activations (3).

**24** Shared 24 bi-weekly DHBC Member Newsletters to keep members informed about important Downtown updates, and achieved an open rate of over 59%.

DHBC staff spoke to and met with over 400 members one-on-one through in-store visits, member event activations, and external event attendance.

36 targeted e-blasts and communications were sent to members regarding street closures and other Downtown advisories, special events, marketing, grant opportunities, etc.



# PLACEMAKING

DHBC believes that all spaces have the potential to be “places.” We champion best practices in Downtown planning, design, management, and utilization of public spaces that inspire vibrancy in Downtown Halifax.



Photo: Stoo Metz Photography

## HIGHLIGHTS

**108** DHBC programmed and/or funded **108** placemaking activations throughout the year, 27 more than last year.

4 projects were completed through the Gritty to Pretty Placemaking Grant Program worth 40K. Visit [downtownhalifax.ca/arttour](https://downtownhalifax.ca/arttour) to view.

Photo (left): Stoo Metz Photography



# PLACEMAKING

# 7

**DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN** light shows at Grafton Park from mid-November to mid-January, attracting over 100K spectators.

- Sponsored the creation of 4 murals for the 2024 Halifax Mural Festival.
- Maintained tree-wrapped lighting on 46 trees across 5 locations in Downtown Halifax as part of the DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN initiative.
- Launched a new winter window activation pilot project, featuring the installation of winter-themed decals and lighting in 30 vacant storefront windows along Barrington Street.
- 16 sets of bistro tables and chairs were maintained in Granville Mall.
- Placed 28 picnic tables (including wheelchair-accessible tables) across 8 Downtown locations.
- A new 28-foot hero tree was installed in Peace and Friendship Park as part of the DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN winter activation lighting initiative in that area.
- Established a new fall activation series called *Downtown Hali Hangouts*. We hosted one event, per week (for 4 weeks), on the Halifax waterfront, attracting over 1K visitors.
- A total of 162 banners were installed for 3 different organizations who participated in the banner program.
- Installed 23 snowflake diamonds alongside 118 wreaths on light poles for the holiday season.

- 5 Downtown Halifax Crew Members maintained Downtown public spaces and amenities over the summer.
- Conducted graffiti intervention across 25 Downtown Halifax streets, including the removal of approximately 1,600 sq. ft. and painting over an additional 580 sq. ft.
- Provided funding to 36 member businesses with the Deck the Downtown Grant during the holiday season.



Photo (left): Stoo Metz Photography

Photos: Ezabriell Fraser & Cooked Photography

# NAVIGATOR OUTREACH PROGRAM



The Navigator Outreach Program (NOP) offers direct support to homeless and street-involved individuals on the streets of Downtown Halifax. Entering its 17<sup>th</sup> year, NOP is a partnership between DHBC and Spring Garden Area Business Association (SGABA) and is partially funded by HRM. This program is just one essential part of a broader, comprehensive strategy needed to address homelessness in our community.

## HIGHLIGHTS

# 443

individuals received support through a range of services.

- Secured housing for 38 individuals.
- Helped 9 people secure employment.
- Provided financial support to 107 people needing medications.
- Supported 104 people through the Halifax Public Library's Photo I.D. Clinic.

Photo: Michelle Doucette Photography

Delivered "Non Violent Crisis Intervention Training" to 50 Downtown Halifax businesses, teaching them ways to manage crisis situations at work.

Spoke to students at the Dalhousie School of Social Work.

Partnered with 29 community organizations to support Navigator clients, including the Mobile Outreach Street Health, Shelter Nova Scotia, Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, Access Nova Scotia, Halifax Regional Police, Salvation Army, Dalhousie Legal Aid, Adsum for Women & Children, United Way, and Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

Hired a client (a formerly street-involved individual) to clean Spring Garden Road weekly, and his success story was featured on CBC to inspire others.



Photo: Tourism Nova Scotia & Davey and Sky

## THE HISTORY OF ATLANTIC CANADA'S LARGEST BID

### WHAT IS A BID?

A business improvement district (BID) is created when businesses in a defined area, typically a downtown or commercial main street, hold a vote and agree to create a special levy which is added to their commercial taxes. This levy goes to an organization with a mandate to conduct projects of common interest, including advocating on behalf of and promoting the businesses in the district.

### DHBC WAS FORMED IN 1987

Downtown businesses voted in 1987 to establish Downtown Halifax Business Commission. HRM collects the levy from businesses and remits it to DHBC. Though the

levy is DHBC's primary revenue source, the organization leverages it to raise additional revenues in the form of grants, sponsorships, project revenues, etc.

DHBC is led by a Board of Directors, consisting of members who are elected to their positions at the Annual General Meeting each June. The annual budget is created by the Board, who sets the appropriate levy amount to fund, and is then brought to HRM Council for approval.

DHBC always seeks to provide excellent value for members. Whether you are a large multi-tenant, a business owner, or an employee, we are happy to meet with you to discuss the return on investment you are getting from your DHBC membership.

# 2025-2026 BUDGET

## REVENUE

Members Levy	\$1,886,037
Sponsorships, Grants and Partnerships	\$260,690
	<hr/>
Carry forward from 2024-2025	\$198,647
	<hr/>
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$2,345,374</b>

## OPERATING EXPENSES

Advocacy	\$287,100
Marketing & Communications	\$475,800
Member Engagement	\$103,742
Placemaking	\$461,428
Administrative	\$1,017,304
	<hr/>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$2,345,374</b>
	<hr/>
<b>SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>\$(0)</b>

Photo: Riaz Oozer



**DOWNTOWN HALIFAX  
BUSINESS COMMISSION**

1546 Barrington Street, Suite 104

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3J 3X7

Tel: (902) 423-6658

Email: [info@downtownhalifax.ca](mailto:info@downtownhalifax.ca)

Social: [@DowntownHalifax](#)

**DOWNTOWNHALIFAX.CA**

