

# ANNUAL REPORT

2025-2026





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— SURVEY SAYS —

**94%** of member respondents agree that DHBC makes a positive contribution to Downtown.



Photo credit: Ian Selig

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR & CEO



**Paul MacKinnon**  
Chief Executive Officer

This was another busy year for Downtown Halifax and Downtown Halifax Business Commission (DHBC). The Board of Directors and the team at DHBC are excited to launch our new 2026-2030 Strategic Plan, which aligns with **Downtown Halifax Vision 2030**.

As you'll see on pages 8 and 9, the new Strategic Plan sets ambitious goals in the following areas:

1. Vibrancy – A Downtown that is active, accessible, welcoming, and experience-rich year-round.
2. Advocacy – Effective policy, infrastructure, and investment decisions that support long-term prosperity.
3. Promotion – A compelling narrative that attracts people Downtown.

DHBC will work hard over the next four years to deliver on these goals and support the full realization of Vision 2030.

This report looks back on the past year, particularly highlighting our successes in the areas of Advocacy, Marketing & Communications, Membership Engagement, and Placemaking. It shares highlights from our comprehensive membership survey and outlines our budget for 2026-2027.

Through our continued work and the efforts of our 1,600+ members, we are confident that we will live up to our ambition of being Canada's Favourite Downtown.



**Marilisa Benigno**  
Chair, Board of Directors



– SURVEY SAYS –

**91%** of member respondents believe that DHBC is a knowledgeable voice to represent Downtown interests.

## 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 champions and supports a thriving Downtown Halifax.

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

## MEMBER PROGRAMS & 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 our Membership Engagement Manager, Colleen Ritchie:

[colleen@downtownhalifax.ca](mailto:colleen@downtownhalifax.ca) | 902-444-1510 | 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



**Colleen Ritchie**  
Membership  
Engagement Manager



**Alejandra Morelo Gomez**  
Office Administrator



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

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

**Joe McGuinness,**  
**Vice Chair**  
Owner  
Platinum Group

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

**Melissa Carey,**  
**Member at Large**  
Vice President  
Sales & Marketing  
RCR Hospitality Group

**Kristan Hines,**  
**Member at Large**  
Managing Director,  
Advisory, Atlantic  
NATIONAL Public Relations

**Faten Alshazly**  
Principal & Chief Creative  
Officer / CEO  
WeUsThem and HealthEMe

**Dana Beeler**  
Manager, Event Development  
Discover Halifax

**Glenn Bowie**  
General Manager  
Westin Nova Scotian Hotel

**Raeesa Lalani**  
Artistic Director  
Prismatic Arts Festival

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

**Jacob Ritchie**  
Managing Principal, Planning  
Fathom Studio

**Jeremy Smith**  
Owner  
Freak Lunchbox Inc.  
and 328 Properties

**Jake Whalen**  
Senior Advisor, Economic  
Policy & Development  
Halifax Regional Municipality

**Peter Wüensch**  
Founding Partner  
and Chief Strategic Officer  
Breakhouse Inc.

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

## 2025-2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*Photo credit: Ian Selig*

# 2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN



## MISSION

We champion and support a thriving Downtown Halifax.

## VISION

Canada's favourite Downtown.



Photo credit: Ian Selig

## OVERARCHING GOALS



### Vibrancy

A Downtown that is active, accessible, welcoming, and experience-rich year-round.



### Advocacy

Effective policy, infrastructure, and investment decisions that support long-term Downtown prosperity.



### Promotion

A compelling narrative that attracts people Downtown.



### Organizational Excellence

Strengthen organizational effectiveness through clear governance, succession planning, role clarity, and modernized systems.

Scan to read the  
2026-2030 Strategic Plan





# 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.



## HIGHLIGHTS

**Working with all Levels of Government:** DHBC annually submits pre-budget recommendations to Federal, Provincial, and Municipal leaders. At the Federal level, DHBC works with IDA Canada, a collection of downtown leaders from across the country. DHBC's CEO, Paul MacKinnon, now chairs this group, and this year there was a distinct focus on public safety and supporting Bill C-14, which introduces tougher penalties for repeat offenders. We meet regularly with our Member of Parliament, Provincial Ministers, as well as the Mayor and HRM Council. Visit [downtownhalifax.ca/advocacy](https://downtownhalifax.ca/advocacy) to view.

**Downtown Halifax Vision 2030:** Since the launch of the Vision in 2024, we continue to engage policymakers and partners on how to best realize the 17 recommendations. This year, we presented the Vision to HRM Council and assembled a Downtown Champions Table. DHBC also began to undertake actions on the recommendations we can deliver, such as wayfinding, district strategy, and Barrington Street revitalization. Visit [downtownhalifax.ca/vision2030](https://downtownhalifax.ca/vision2030) to view.

**Public Safety:** We continue to coordinate with HRM on their homelessness strategy, which has been successful in closing Downtown tent encampments. We also continue to work with Halifax Regional Police to advocate for "beat" officers, gather data, and provide feedback on key safety issues, including Town Halls with the Chief.

**Access and Mobility:** Throughout the Cogswell District Redevelopment Project, we worked closely with HRM's project team to provide stakeholder input and member updates. This project is now complete. We opposed the recent changes to extend and increase on-street parking rates, and will continue to advocate for the reinvestment of parking revenues to Downtown infrastructure.

**Public Investment:** We continue to maintain, through our Vision in particular, that Downtown is now seeing a lack of public investment, and this will act as a disincentive to private investment. A strong commercial tax base is essential if HRM wishes to avoid the fiscal pressures it began to face this year. Due to anticipated investments in defence, we will focus on how to leverage those investments for a more vibrant Downtown Halifax.

**State of the Downtown:** DHBC was one of the first BIDs to enter into a partnership with the Canadian Urban Institute to gather sales, visitation, and business and customer demographic metrics. This will strengthen our understanding of Downtown trends and provide a basis for comparison to other downtowns across the country. This new data will be reflected in our 4th annual State of the Downtown report (Fall 2026).

Photo credit (left): Nick Takushi

# MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS



Photo credit: Will Yang, Differo

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 everyone.

## HIGHLIGHTS

**58** DHBC's Event Sponsorship Program invested over \$155K into **58 events** that happened in Downtown Halifax. These events had a combined event attendance of over **650K**.

Launched a new brand campaign, "**Down to Downtown**", with a comprehensive media campaign that included out-of-home, digital video, connected TV, social media, and more, from September 1 - November 30. The campaign generated 4.88M total impressions and over 21K clicks to our website ([downtownhalifax.ca/downtodowntown](https://downtownhalifax.ca/downtodowntown)).

DHBC continues to have an active following on social media, with **157K followers** across multiple platforms (including 64.2K followers on Instagram alone), and increased overall engagement by 36.5%.

Downtownhalifax.ca saw over **457K website pageviews** (8% increase), with over 46.5K views on the events page ([downtownhalifax.ca/events](https://downtownhalifax.ca/events)).

Printed and distributed 34K copies of the **Downtown Halifax Holiday Gift Guide**, which featured 111 businesses from the Downtown and Spring Garden areas, the most ever to date.

March is for Music grant program distributed **\$21K to 25 businesses** to host a combined total of 50 free live music performances across Downtown Halifax over 18 days in March.

Ran radio, print, and digital advertising campaigns throughout the year to promote various initiatives and programs on local platforms including allNovaScotia, Bell Media, Discover Halifax, Curated Magazine and Guide, Neptune Theatre, The Coast, Eastlink, Sea Nova Scotia, the Local Wishlist, and more.



# MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT



DHBC works to build strong relationships with members, serve as a resource for problem-solving, and advocate on shared issues. We strive to increase awareness and promotion of member benefits, create opportunities for members to provide input on existing and emerging issues, and foster engagement through networking events, information sessions, workshops, and more.

## AS A DHBC MEMBER, YOU HAVE ACCESS TO A VARIETY OF PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES, INCLUDING:

- Welcome Package & New Business Visits
- Bi-weekly Member Newsletter
- Downtown Halifax Welcome Centre
- Business Promotion
- Marketing Campaigns
- Graffiti Clean Up Program
- Member Grant Programs
- Advocacy & Research
- Event Sponsorship
- Online Event Calendar & Newsletter
- Placemaking
- Events for Members
- Downtown Directory
- Parking Information

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

## HIGHLIGHTS

Hosted 8 member events, including DHBC's 2025 AGM and Holiday Social, meet-and-greet events at the DHBC Welcome Centre, and member information sessions.

For Random Acts of Kindness Day (February 17), **15 members created 160 kindness rocks** that were hidden throughout Downtown Halifax. We also partnered with member coffee shops and surprised over 100 people with complimentary coffee and treats.

DHBC staff connected with more than **730 members** through in-store visits, member events, external event attendance, phone calls, and ongoing outreach initiatives.

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

Attended and represented DHBC at a variety of member and partner hosted events.

Provided members with free tickets to various events, including the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo, the 2025 Montana's Canadian Curling Trials, and more.

Comprehensive member survey completed with results showing increased membership awareness compared to past surveys.

**26** Shared **26 bi-weekly** DHBC Member Newsletters to keep members informed about Downtown updates and achieved an average open rate of 51%.



Photo credit: Richard Yang





Photo credit: Michelle Doucette Photography

# PLACEMAKING

DHBC believes that all spaces have the potential to become vibrant and meaningful places. We champion best practices in Downtown planning, design, management, and the activation of public spaces to help create a dynamic, welcoming, and connected Downtown Halifax.



Photo credit: Cooked Photography

## HIGHLIGHTS

**210** DHBC programmed and/or funded **210 placemaking** activations throughout the year, 69 more than the previous year.

Sponsored the creation of **16 new murals** in Downtown Halifax for the 2025 Halifax Mural Festival.

# PLACEMAKING



Photo credit: threesixfive media

The Gritty to Pretty Placemaking Grant Program celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2025 with a special video series produced by DHBC in partnership with threesixfive media. The series highlighted past and current (2025) Gritty to Pretty recipients, along with **spotlights on 11 artists** and their work. A launch event was held in February at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 to celebrate the milestone and recognize past and present program contributors ([downtownhalifax.ca/grittytopretty](http://downtownhalifax.ca/grittytopretty)).

In addition, during its milestone year, Gritty to Pretty received **57 applications** – the highest number to date. 16 projects were approved for funding, with 13 projects completed.

2025 marked the 5th year of DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN on the former Halifax Memorial Library at Grafton Park. **8 light shows** were displayed between November and January, including a new show created in partnership with Curling Canada for the 2025 Montana's Canadian Curling Trials.

Maintained tree-wrapped lighting on **46 trees across 5 locations** in Downtown Halifax as part of the DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN winter lighting initiative.

Winter-themed window decals and lighting were installed on **60 windows across 7 locations** as part of the Vacant Window Activation Program.

**66 wreaths and 46 snowflakes** were installed on the lamp standards across Downtown for the holiday season.

2 Downtown Hali Hangout events, *Carnival Night* and *Movie Night*, took place on the Halifax Waterfront in October, attracting more than **577 people** in total.

DHBC's placemaking programs, DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN and Gritty to Pretty, were featured in the Canadian Urban Institute's publication, *Let's Talk About Placemaking*.



Photo credit: Charcoal Marketing



Photo credit: Cooked Photography

**6 Downtown Halifax Crew Members** maintained Downtown public spaces and amenities over the summer. The Crew was also featured in a story on Global News, outlining the ways we reduce litter Downtown.

DHBC and OSO Planning + Design won a HRM Urban Design Award in the Urban Elements category for *The Blooming Seating* installation in Granville Mall.

Graffiti intervention was conducted across **25 Downtown Halifax streets**, including the removal of approximately 1,910 sq. ft. of graffiti, and painting over an additional 628 sq. ft.



Photo credit: Cooked Photography



Provided funding to **31 member** businesses with the Deck the Downtown Grant during the holiday season.

A total of **312 banners** were installed for 6 organizations who participated in the DHBC Banner Program.

Placed **30 picnic tables**, including wheelchair-accessible tables, across 8 Downtown locations, and maintained 16 sets of bistro tables and chairs in Granville Mall.

The **28-foot hero tree** was installed in Peace and Friendship Park as part of the DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN winter lighting initiative in that area.

# NAVIGATOR OUTREACH PROGRAM



The Navigator Outreach Program (NOP) offers direct support to homeless and street-involved individuals. Entering its 18th 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

# 421

individuals received support through a range of services, including:

- Secured housing for 47 individuals.
- Helped 14 people find employment.
- Provided financial support for medications to 84 people.
- Supported 75 people through the Halifax Public Library's Photo I.D. Clinic.
- Helped 30 individuals pay their power bills.

Photo credit: Michelle Doucette Photography

Partnered with 30 organizations to support Navigator clients, including 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, Ulnooweg Education Centre, YMCA, and Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

Delivered "Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training" to 40 member businesses, teaching strategies on how to safely and effectively manage workplace crisis situations.

Hired a formerly street-involved individual to clean Spring Garden Road weekly.

Downtown Halifax Business Commission



Photo credit: Ian Selig

## 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 (DHBC). 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, which sets the appropriate levy amount to fund it, 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 property, 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.

Learn more about DHBC at [downtownhalifax.ca/about-dhbc](https://downtownhalifax.ca/about-dhbc).

downtownhalifax.ca

# 2026-2027 BUDGET

## REVENUE

Members Levy	\$2,070,531
Sponsorships, Grants and Partnerships	\$264,746
	<hr/>
	\$2,335,277
Carry forward from 2025-2026	\$213,694
	<hr/>
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$2,548,971</b>

## OPERATING EXPENSES

Advocacy	\$296,838
Promotions	\$486,102
Vibrancy	\$699,026
Organizational Excellence	\$1,067,005
	<hr/>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$2,548,971</b>
	<hr/>
<b>SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>\$(0)</b>

Photo credit: Tourism Nova Scotia | Alexa Cude



## TOP 5

### — SURVEY SAYS —

DHBC programs that member respondents believe have the most value:

- Lobbying Government
- Event Sponsorship Program
- Member Grants
- Holiday Lighting (DELIGHTFUL DOWNTOWN)
- Murals and Public Art (Gritty to Pretty Placemaking Grant Program)

**DOWNTOWN HALIFAX  
BUSINESS COMMISSION**

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