

# Street Seats Pilot Program



2025 Final Report



# Putting Our Best Streets Forward

In 2025, under the direction of the Mayor and City Manager's offices—and in alignment with Councilor Troster's motion to update the *Downtown Ottawa Urban Design Strategy (2004)*—City staff partnered with Bloomberg Associates to accelerate Council-approved public realm and road safety improvements.

The Centretown Street Safety & Revitalization Action Plan was the product of this collaboration, complementing strategic initiatives in several Special Districts, including the ByWard Market, LeBreton Flats, Confederation Boulevard, Lansdowne Park, and the emerging Arts, Culture, and Entertainment (ACE) District plan. Together, these efforts aim to enhance the vibrancy, safety, and livability of Downtown Ottawa.

The Action Plan identifies over 20 near- and longer-term actions across four key themes:

- **Well-maintained** streets and public spaces
- **Greened** and resilient streetscapes
- **Safe and inclusive** streets for all users
- **Vibrant and engaging** urban environments

A central priority of the Action Plan is improving placemaking along key mainstreet corridors—particularly Bank Street and Somerset Street West—which were identified as lacking public space and community amenities.

The City successfully launched the first action in this effort, the Street Seats Pilot Project along Bank Street this summer, in partnership with the Centretown BIA and its members.

By investing in the targeted actions of the Action Plan, the City is making meaningful progress toward creating a more welcoming, dynamic, and people-focused downtown—one that reflects the needs and aspirations of residents, businesses, and visitors alike.



# The Street Seats Pilot Program

## Creating Vibrant Public Spaces in Ottawa

The City of Ottawa introduced the Street Seats Pilot Program this summer to transform small sections of our mainstreets into vibrant, welcoming public spaces that support local business, encourage community activation, ensure accessibility and inclusivity and foster a safe and sustainable environment.

Three Street Seat activations were created along Bank Street, reclaiming curb space and activating street-ends as public spaces furnished with seating, tables, shading and greenery, as well as music, comedy, chess, fitness and other events.

## The Bottom Line...

### Ottawans Love Their Reimagined Centretown

Through surveys, interviews, monitoring and evaluation before and after the implementation of the spaces, the project team found:

- **90%** had a positive impression of the new spaces, with **61%** saying they had a very positive impression
- **66%** reported visiting nearby businesses more frequently
- **62%** felt more connected to their community
- **85%** of visitors reported arriving without a car
- Street Seats created **~390 m<sup>2</sup>** of new public space
- **82%** of visitors reported feeling safe and comfortable; **77%** said the spaces were clean
- Most indicated **a desire to renew, enhance or expand the Street Seats Pilot Program**







# Changing Lanes...

## Improving Public Space

The Street Seats initiative significantly enhanced the public realm and strengthened placemaking efforts along Bank Street in Centretown. The pilots transformed three side street sites into vibrant, community-focused spaces.

Together, these interventions have added **~390 m2 of new public space** to a corridor where none previously existed; enough space to comfortably gather **over 250 people**.

Key Enhancements:

- **~70 m2 of shade added**, improving comfort and usability during the summer heat, helping reduce heat exposure and encouraging longer stays.
- **~20 m2 of greenery introduced**, contributing to air quality and visual appeal, softening the urban environment and supporting climate resilience.
- **~25 m2 of seating installed**, creating welcoming spots for rest, social interaction, and community engagement. This translates to seating capacity for ~50 people, fostering spontaneous gatherings and community placemaking.

These improvements reflect a growing commitment to reimagining Centretown's public realm and demonstrate the potential of small-scale interventions to deliver meaningful urban change. The Street Seats pilots are already showing signs of increased social interaction, economic support, and community wellbeing through positive community feedback.





# Better Streets...

**90% of visitors to the spaces shared positive feedback**

Throughout the development and implementation of the spaces, the project team maintained open communication with stakeholders and the public.

**Many respondents indicated a desire to see the spaces return next year and expand to other neighbourhoods.**

Other suggestions focused on improving the spaces and programming for future years and delivering lasting benefits to Centretown and across Ottawa's neighbourhoods.

**"I think these are a great addition to Bank Street and would be a great thing to expand or make permanent..."**

*Engage Ottawa  
Survey Respondent*

**"...It shows so much of the potential and kind, creative people the city has. The events going on there have sounded STELLAR."**

*Engage Ottawa Survey  
Respondent*


**"Please bring it back next year! Our children enjoyed the space with their friends."**

*Engage Ottawa Survey  
Respondent*

**"Sincerely one of the highlights of my summer. I would come across activities on my regular walks and it brought so much joy... it felt good to be able to consistently celebrate and highlight the neighbourhood in this way."**

*Centretown resident*





"...This initiative has had a meaningful and energizing impact. A local business owner told me this summer that the BIA and these activations are “saving Centretown”, and I agree."

*Michael Wallack,  
Wallack's Art Supply*

"The Street Seats program became a real connector ... Neighbours became friends, and a shared sense of community began to grow."

*Lindsay Machinski,  
Urban Art Collective*

"Our sales were up about 12 percent in July and 25 percent in August, this allowed us to hire and retain two full time employees and one part-timer, which is a feat of magic in the current job market in the restaurant industry."

*Jon Svazas,  
Fauna*

## ...Better Business

The Street Seats spaces showed a measurable impact on local economic activity.

**66% of respondents reported visiting nearby businesses more frequently, a sign of increased foot traffic and engagement with local retailers.**

On Frank Street, the activation of public space helped to attract a new business, The Booj, which has experienced a steady rise in sales since opening in early August.

Fauna restaurant continued its seasonal outdoor patio and introduced an ice cream bar, helping drive **an increase in profits** compared to the summer of 2024.

Additional activations on MacLaren and Florence Streets included vintage clothing sidewalk sales and a book vendor, demonstrating the flexibility of the spaces and their success in supporting small-scale, pop-up retail activity in Centretown.

"The Street Seats program has been transformative for Centretown and Downtown Ottawa... This has ignited a new excitement and dynamism in an area that is still struggling to recover from pandemic-related changes in travel patterns and remote work. Key to the success has been an investment in animation and programming, as well as dedicated maintenance, outreach and security. I am hearing excitement about this part of the city for the first time in years. I can't wait to build on and expand Street Seats into Chinatown next year."

- Councillor Ariel Troster

# More active spaces...

During the Street Seats pilot, the City partnered with the BIA to recruit local artists, performers, and facilitators to bring life to the spaces through engaging public programming. The initiative also allowed community members to reserve the spaces for their own events. All programming was free and promoted by the BIA via their website and social media, with links provided through on-site signage.

Highlights included public art installations, live music, comedy performances, DJs and dance parties, yoga and fitness classes, chess nights, and arts and crafts workshops.

By early September, the Street Seats initiative had hosted **166 events, drawing over 2,500 attendees**, which highlights the strong community interest and engagement in the program.







## ...are more social places

The project team completed intercept surveys with people at – or walking past – the spaces, before and after implementation. An award-winning Public Life Study methodology from [Happy Cities](#) was used to understand how the public spaces influenced trust, connection, and belonging in the community. This approach recognized that social isolation and declining trust are increasingly viewed as public health epidemics.

Across all pilot sites, responses showed an **average 11% increase in reported levels of trust, social connection, and sense of belonging** after implementation.

**62% reported feeling more connected to their community while using these spaces, underscoring their value as social infrastructure.**



Photos: Urban Art Collective (@urbanartcollective.ca) & Capital Content (@capitalcontent.ca)





# More people are attracted to...

Visitors voiced excitement for the Street Seats pilots with enthusiasm.

**66% visited the area more frequently specifically because of the Street Seats public spaces.**

The data also highlights the multimodal accessibility of these spaces. **74% of respondents walked, 28% biked, 25% used public transit**—with many using more than one mode of transportation. **Only 15% reported arriving by car.**

This suggests that the pilot spaces are supporting sustainable and active mobility options.







## ...a cleaner, safer street

Survey results also reflected strong public satisfaction:

**82% reported feeling safe and comfortable while visiting the spaces.**

**77% said the spaces were clean.**

**89% agreed the spaces made the area more inclusive and accessible.**

To support these outcomes, a daily maintenance crew was piloted in Centretown as part of the Centretown Street Safety & Revitalization Action Plan. This team helped ensure the spaces remained clean, safe, and welcoming throughout the pilot period.





## **...a “third space” to meet with friends and neighbours**

The City worked with Environics Analytics to assess who is coming to the spaces and where they are coming from. Key takeaways from this data include:

### **Most visitors to the spaces were from nearby.**

People living in the K2P postal code (where the spaces were located) visited these space more than others by a large margin (56k visits). The pilot program provided public spaces for local residents to enjoy and connect with others in their community.

### **People visited these spaces more often.**

The pilots created spaces that people wanted to return to time and time again. There was a 7% increase in visits per person year-over-year.

### **Shifting when people visit the area.**

There was a 10% increase in the share of trips on weekends and a shift to more visits during the evening year-over-year.



# Street Seats Beyond Bank Street

## A City-Wide Public Space Program

The goal of the Street Seats Pilot Program is to create a city-wide framework for seasonal public space pilots to:

- Define what is needed for successful public spaces
- Expand access to public spaces, particularly in underserved BIAs
- Establish a replicable “playbook” for future pilot projects
- Determine a clear process for evaluating successful initiatives and opportunities for scaling up pilots

By learning from each pilot, the City aims to create a more inclusive and accessible network of public spaces across Ottawa’s BIAs.

## Supporting Broader Community Goals

The Street Seats Pilot Program is layered with various efforts to improve social wellbeing, safety, and economic development in Ottawa’s urban core, and aligns with targeted investments in Centretown for:

- Mental health access and outreach for unhoused populations
- Improved street lighting and safety features
- Support for arts, culture, and local businesses

Many initiatives outlined in the Centretown Street Safety & Revitalization Action Plan are designed to support the Pilot Program to make Centretown’s main streets more welcoming, safe, and accessible for everyone.





# Taking Action on Centretown's Public Realm...

The Centretown Street Safety & Revitalization Action Plan outlines a comprehensive 3-year strategy to enhance the Centretown community in response to ongoing social and economic challenges post-pandemic. The Plan focuses on the following ten key projects, supported by other ongoing initiatives throughout the downtown core area.

## Key Projects:

1. Launching the Street Seats Pilot Program, allowing a variety of street uses to spur economic activity in BIAs
2. Redesigning Laurier Avenue West as a safer, more attractive and inviting street
3. Designing and landscaping improvements to change the look and feel of Albert, Slater, and Kent streets
4. Implementing safety projects to make Centretown crossings safer for people walking
5. Planting trees, updating street fixtures, and supporting active streetscapes across Centretown main streets
6. Re-imagining the Metcalfe Street extension and initiating a programming pilot in partnership with the Canadian Museum of Nature
7. Expanding and formalizing the downtown planter program, enlivening the streetscape with greenery
8. Establishing new partnerships for enhanced maintenance, safety, and social supports, to sustain projects for the long term
9. Developing a private sponsorship program to support new improvements and activations
10. Designing and building a new public washroom in Centretown



## Centretown Street Safety & Revitalization Action Plan





# Partnerships make the difference...

The City of Ottawa thanks all stakeholders and partners for their collaboration and support in delivering a successful Street Seats Pilot Program.

Through your collective efforts, the pilot was executed smoothly and received largely positive feedback from residents, visitors, and local businesses. We look forward to continuing this strong collaboration as we work together to refine and expand the Street Seats Program, both within Centretown and City-wide in future years.

## Special thanks to:

Centretown BIA  
Province of Ontario  
Mayor Mark Sutcliffe  
Councilor Troster  
Wallack's Art Supplies  
Urban Art Collective  
Third Place Studio  
Fauna  
The Booj

ENTTX  
Ottawa Police Service  
Somerset West Community Health Centre  
Operation Come Home  
Centre 507  
Toersa Security  
DanWill

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