

# Town of Milton Downtown Study Final Report Civic Precinct Lands

12/12/2016



# Downtown Study Final Report

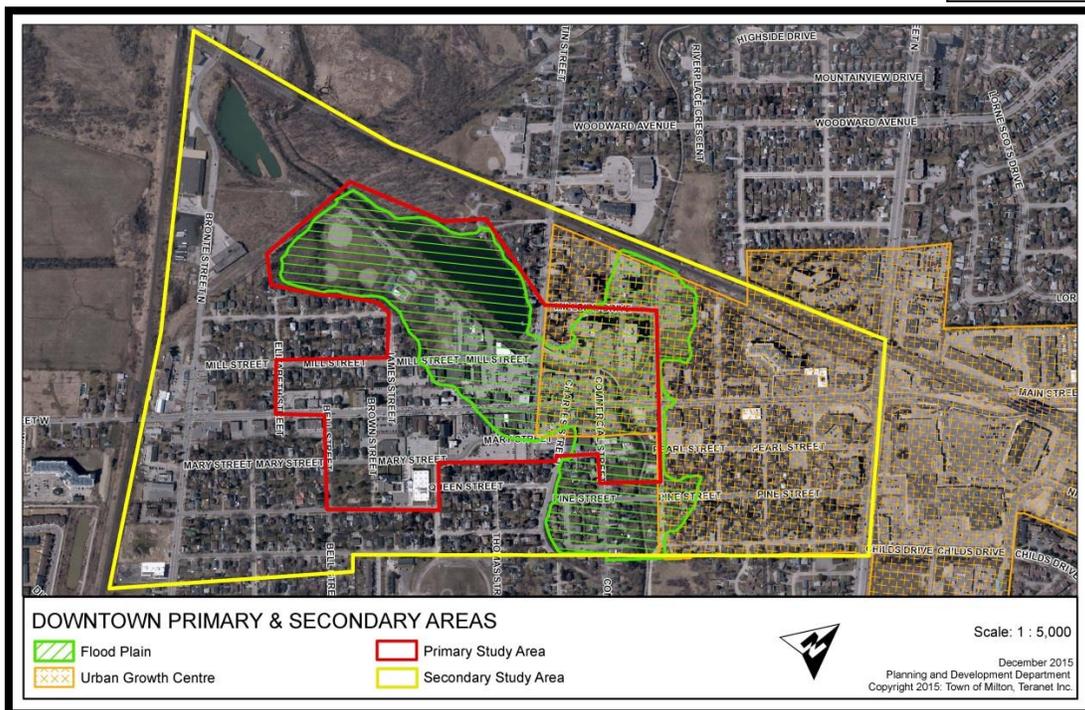
## 1.0 Introduction

Milton has experienced significant growth pressures as a result of provincial planning policy directions, such as the “Places to Grow” and the Provincial Policy Statement, which require intensification. An objective of this study is to identify how much of that intensification can be feasibly accommodated within the Downtown. In addition, the study will address compatibility of any intensification with the elements of the Downtown which are historically important and valued by the community including specific landmark and heritage buildings, the overall historic character and views to the Niagara Escarpment.

The purpose of the Downtown Study has been to examine in-depth the current state of Downtown Milton to optimize opportunity for redevelopment and revitalization and to provide a unified strategy and implementation framework to shape the future of the Downtown. This will allow the area to evolve cohesively as Milton grows. The study is built on a combination of planning analysis and public engagement.

The study area has been divided into two areas the “Primary Area” and the “Secondary Area” as shown in Figure 1. The Primary Area which is comprised of a significant portion of Town owned lands, also known as the Civic Precinct was the first area to be thoroughly examined. This primary area is prioritized in order to provide a strong civic base for Downtown revitalization to move forward.

Figure 1



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Through the Study there has been a great amount of engagement and input from the community. Through the level of interest expressed it is clear that the Downtown remains the physical and symbolic heart of the community. It provides both an important and valuable focus for the Town. It is, therefore, important to maintain and enhance the Downtown as an asset for the entire municipality, not just for the immediate surrounding area. An important element of this will be the implementation of a strategy that will not only help enhance the economic viability of the Downtown but also protect the character of the Downtown and the features that make it so symbolic to the community.

The following report details the course of the Downtown Study, outlines the objectives of the study and provides recommendations regarding how the Town of Milton can move forward to ensure that the objectives of the Study, public interest and the Vision for the Downtown are achieved. The Study was initiated with a public engagement session in June, 2015, the Interim Report followed and was received by Council in January, 2016. An additional report outlined the Market Analysis for the Downtown and was provided to Council in June 2016, with a second public engagement opportunity held seeking input regarding approaches to land use planning to achieve the desired form and function of the Downtown in September 2016.

### **1.1 Objectives**

The Downtown Study has been predicated upon five core objectives of for Downtown Milton. These five components have been derived from feedback collected through public engagement, approved Official Plan policies and directions, protection the historic Downtown core and technical consultation. The five core objectives are detailed below. These objectives are the building blocks that create the unified vision for the Downtown. It is important that the desire and needs of the community guide redevelopment within the Downtown. The vision and objectives should be used to assist in guiding decisions, and goals while moving forward to implement a strategy for the Downtown.

### **Vision Statement**

*Use a strong Civic presence as an anchor to build on while amplifying Downtown Milton's historic assets into a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented Downtown with a high quality public realm. Harmoniously preserve the beloved character of the Downtown while intensifying in ideal locations, creating a sense of Place for all of Milton with a space to be enjoyed by the entire community.*

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## Objectives

- 1. Civic Presence as an Anchor in the Downtown**
- 2. Build on the Existing Heritage**
- 3. Create a vibrant Public Realm – A destination for the entire community.**
- 4. Have a pedestrian friendly, interactive community**
- 5. Place making for the entire community.**

### **1. *Civic Presence as an Anchor in the Downtown***

Having Town Hall within the Downtown is a key asset that can be used as a building block supporting the revitalization of the Downtown. The potential redevelopment of the Civic Precinct lands will be a crucial step in moving the Downtown forward. It is important that the Town takes a leadership role in implementing a vision for the Downtown, and incentivizing the appropriate form of development and range of uses to attract private investment in the Downtown. The Town has the opportunity to expand the importance of the civic presence as an anchor within the Downtown beyond Town Hall and Victoria Park Square by moving forward with redevelopment options within the Civic Precinct.

### **2. *Building on the Existing Heritage***

It is imperative as the Town grows as a community that the historic Downtown core continues to evolve and remain relevant. The Downtown needs to be a place where all residents have the opportunity to appreciate and feel connected to Milton's history. There are both significant built heritage resources as well as significant history evident in the Downtown core which need to be celebrated and enhanced. It already has many attributes which contribute to its sense of place – these attributes simply need to be recognized in a more comprehensive and coherent manner.

### **3. *Create a Vibrant Public Realm – A destination for the Entire Community***

It is equally important to be able to sustain a diversity of land uses. A more diverse range of land uses will contribute to a distinct sense of identity, vibrancy and economic viability. Providing for the proper land uses in optimal locations is a critical step as the Downtown evolves.

It is important to note that commercial functions of a Downtown Core are distinctly different from master planned commercial nodes. Because of this, Downtown development cannot be treated with the same model. It is important to encourage economic development while mindfully preserving the identity of the Downtown Core. Such concepts are discussed in the Town's Official Plan through policies such as Section 2.4.3.6. c) which "encourage(s) residential and commercial intensification

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of Milton's downtown core that complements existing heritage and retail areas, while recognizing the flood susceptible areas". This direction includes the provision of a high quality public realm and spaces within the Downtown Core that can be enjoyed by all. An engaging, interactive public realm has intangible benefits to the community since it creates an environment that invites people throughout all seasons and times of day.

### **4. *Have a Pedestrian Friendly, Interactive Community***

Having a distinct sense of identity created by the function and uses within a space are important to the achievement of a vibrant downtown. However, the sense of identity needs to be supported by a pedestrian friendly streetscapes and human-scaled built form. The people coming to the Downtown need to feel safe and engaged. Historically, downtowns have been developed to cater to pedestrians and that function needs to be encouraged allowing for an interactive community and ensuring that cars do not dictate how space within the Downtown is used.

### **5. *Place Making for the Entire Community***

It was identified in the public engagement session that a key missing ingredient of the Downtown is a Civic gathering space. These types of spaces are found in many downtowns throughout growing municipalities and often serve as an anchor for a variety of year-round activities. This may be achieved through a public square that would anchor Downtown Milton as a year-round destination. A civic gathering space, such as a public square, would provide an opportunity to better connect the Downtown to the larger community.

## **2.0 Background**

### **2.1 First Engagement Session**

An initial Downtown Study public engagement session was held in June, 2015. The meeting began with a presentation outlining the purpose of the Downtown Study followed by a workshop guided by questions where the community had the opportunity to provide comments on what they value about the Downtown and what they felt could improve the quality, use and character of Downtown Milton.

There were a wide variety of thoughts and opinions expressed, but several common themes were evident in the feedback staff received. Some of the thoughts raised throughout the session include the following:

- The need to preserve the character and identity of Downtown Milton

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- The need to bring more people into the downtown (both living in the Downtown and visiting the Downtown)
- The need for a civic square, and space to be able to accommodate and attract people into the downtown with year round events
- The need for Main Street to be more pedestrian friendly and provide inviting public space
- The need for a diverse range of land uses that complement the historic Downtown but also keep people engaged in the downtown at all times of day and evening.
- Parking concerns were also frequently discussed throughout the evening although the comments were quite diverse; the general consensus was that parking needs should be carefully examined as the Downtown evolves

Figure 2

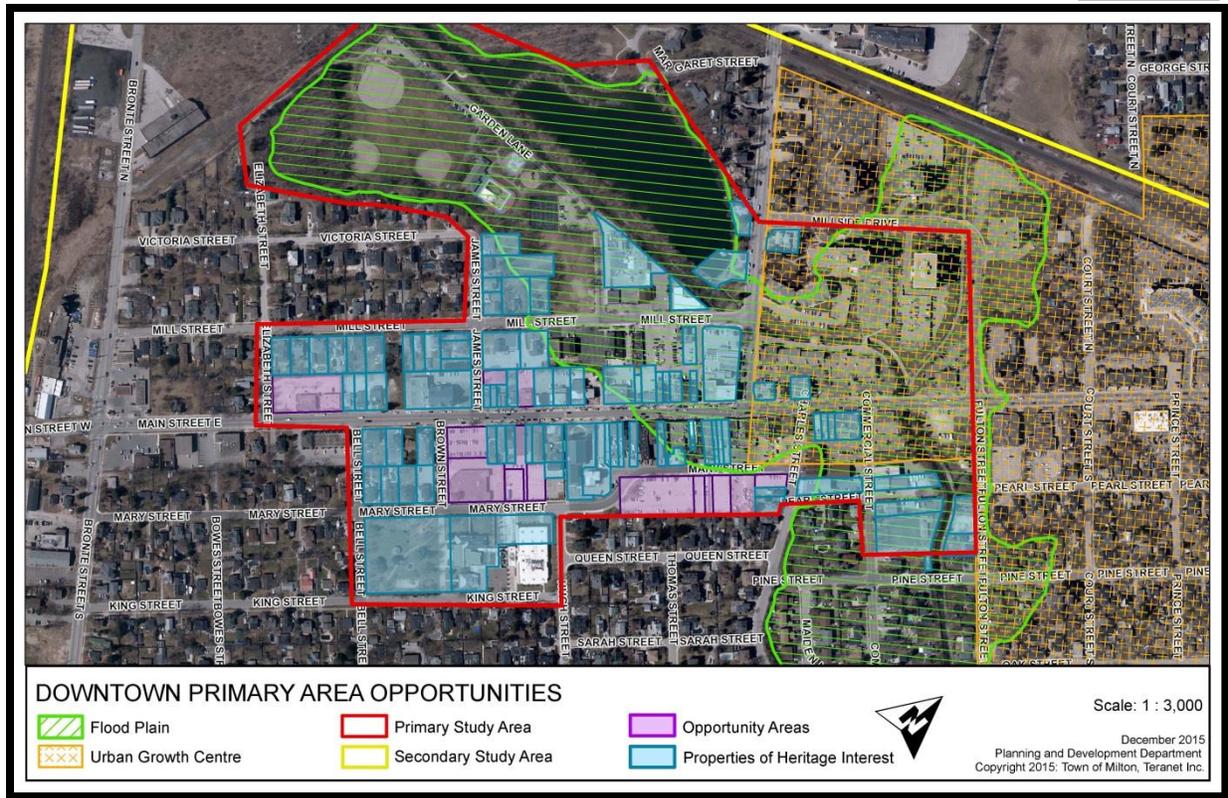


### 2.2 Modelling Winter 2015 Work

Following the first Public Engagement Session an analysis of opportunity was conducted in order to assess the amount of space available or potentially available for redevelopment. Feasible opportunity spaces were determined by identifying constraints to development such as the extent of floodplain, character elements such as heritage buildings and compatibility considerations such as height, location and context and evaluating potential redevelopment on this basis. It should be noted that the properties that were identified through the work completed to date are not necessarily the only potential redevelopment opportunities. As additional heritage assessment is undertaken, and the heritage inventory is refined, more opportunities may arise.

Once opportunity lands were identified, an assessment of the balance of the lands was completed to identify the opportunity lands which are highlighted in Figure 3. Out of the 4.2 acres of Opportunity Lands, the Town owns 2.76 acres, or approximately 65% of the land base. Ownership provides the Town with the unique ability to take a leadership role in stimulating investment in the Downtown.

Figure 3



As part of this process, 3D computer generated modelling work was completed to illustrate different massing options and concepts. This modelling assists in visualizing how the redevelopment of key Opportunity Lands could be undertaken. These concepts also enabled staff to determine the capacity of contextually appropriate built form that could potentially be accommodated on the Civic Opportunity Lands and visually communicate these possibilities.

These concepts and the accompanying analysis provided the foundation for Market Analysis work to be completed. The Market Analysis was intended to provide an understanding of use and function feasibility for these lands in a manner which contributes to implementing the vision for a healthy and economically viable mixed use Downtown in both current and future market conditions.

### 2.3 Downtown Milton Market Analysis

The Downtown Market Analysis, prepared by Watson and Associates, provided key market information about Downtown Milton with respect to vacancy rates, turnover rates, projected take up rates, range of suitable land uses and suggestions of potential tools the Town could consider implementing to achieve its vision.

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Additionally, it contained a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Challenges (SWOC) Analysis for Downtown Milton. The Downtown Market Analysis report focused on what has been identified in the Downtown Study as the “Primary Area”.

Through the Downtown Market Analysis report, Watson reviewed the current state of Milton’s Downtown and concluded that although there is opportunity for improvement; Milton’s Downtown is a healthy downtown comparable to other municipalities of similar size. Further, the report provides a realistic expectation of the future growth potential within the Primary Study Area. This growth potential includes an additional:

- 100-200 jobs
- 25,000-50,000 square feet of office space
- 100-200 high density residential housing units accommodating a population of 150-300, and
- 4,000-8,000 square feet of new retail or service commercial space

Figure 4



Figure 5



The report provides the market potential for each of the Opportunity Land sites identified through Phase 1 of the Downtown Study, rating them “High”, “Moderate”, or “Low” for each use (Office, Residential or Retail). Finally, it recommends changes to policies and permissions within the Study Area as suggestions for the Town as it moves towards creating a more enabling policy framework.

Figure 6



The key findings from Market Analysis were used by Staff to formulate how land use policies could assist in achieving feasible development outlined in Market Analysis work.

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### **2.4 Parking Study**

A parking study is currently underway specifically looking at the parking available within the Downtown and the challenges that it may have. This Study is ongoing however it will provide an analysis of the challenges and opportunities experienced and provide the Town with options to address parking in Downtown Milton in support of the identified redevelopment opportunities. Though there are no final findings at this time the outcomes of this report will provide key recommendations regarding how and where to address parking needs as well as recommendations for changes to the Town's parking requirements and cash in lieu of parking policies.

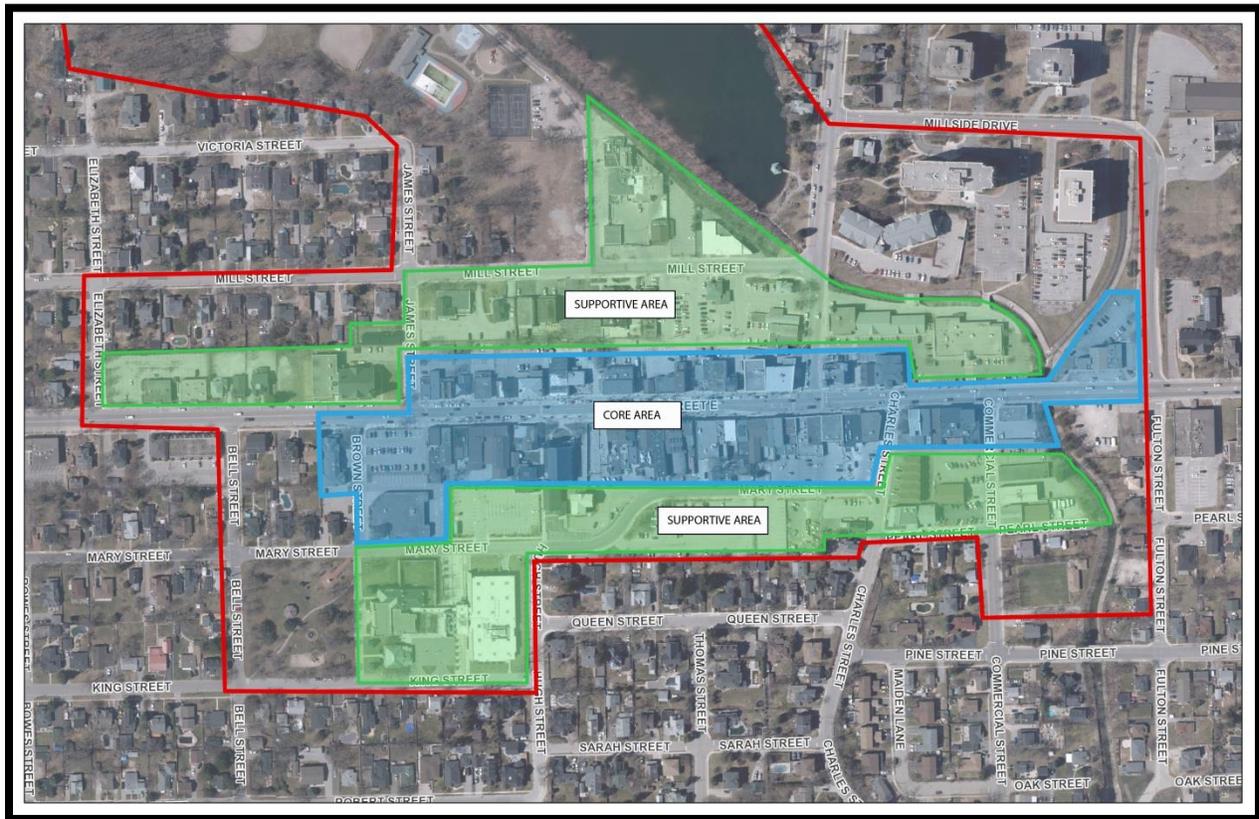
### **2.5 Heritage**

Cultural heritage resources an important aspect and contributes towards Milton's identity and history as well as the "small town feel" that the community has expressed that they value. As previously noted, as Milton grows the Downtown continues be important as the Town's historic core. A component of the Downtown Study is a heritage review which includes a review of the Downtown Heritage Character Area Study and considers options for conserving its cultural heritage resources. The Cultural Heritage Resources Report notes there are a large number and variety of the cultural heritage resources within Milton's Downtown. It considers that the unique character of the existing downtown neighbourhoods would be conserved and enhanced by dividing the existing Character Area into a number of smaller Character Areas. These would have their character assessed and defined (in consultation with the local residents and property owners) and used to amend the existing planning regulation to ensure that new development does not harm the character of these neighbourhoods. This review is ongoing and would include a review of preservation options for the Historic Main Street corridor.

### **2.4 Illustrative Concepts & Land Use Analysis**

The next step towards implementing land use changes within the Downtown was to build on the previous work and break down the Primary Area into two sections. These consisted of the Core Area on the Main Street corridor with buildings fronting onto Main Street and the Supportive Area making up the portion of the Primary Area that does not front Main Street but still contains Office and Commercial uses. These are illustrated on Figure 7.

Figure 7



As mentioned, the Core Area fronts onto Main Street and serves as the high activity area focused around the principles of achieving a community focused, pedestrian oriented space, with visually interesting surroundings and a mix of uses, particularly at grade. Supporting by market and land use analysis, it is recommended that to achieve the vision for the downtown, the land use permissions in this area be broadened to allow retail and commercial at all grades without limitations.

Residential uses are recommended to be allowed at all above grade level. Office permissions are recommended to be allowed at all above grade level. Additional Office permissions are recommended to introduce a component of “business to customer office” or offices that generate pedestrian traffic through drop-in style services within this area. The type of office ideal for this area would be those that complement the other shops and services already located in the Downtown and attract customers who will also visit other businesses as part of their trip. A proposed amendment to the zoning by-law is being drafted based upon the recommendations of the study and best practices in how to integrate limited office at grade within the Core Area while maintaining an environment supportive of the pedestrian-oriented, interactive function of that core.

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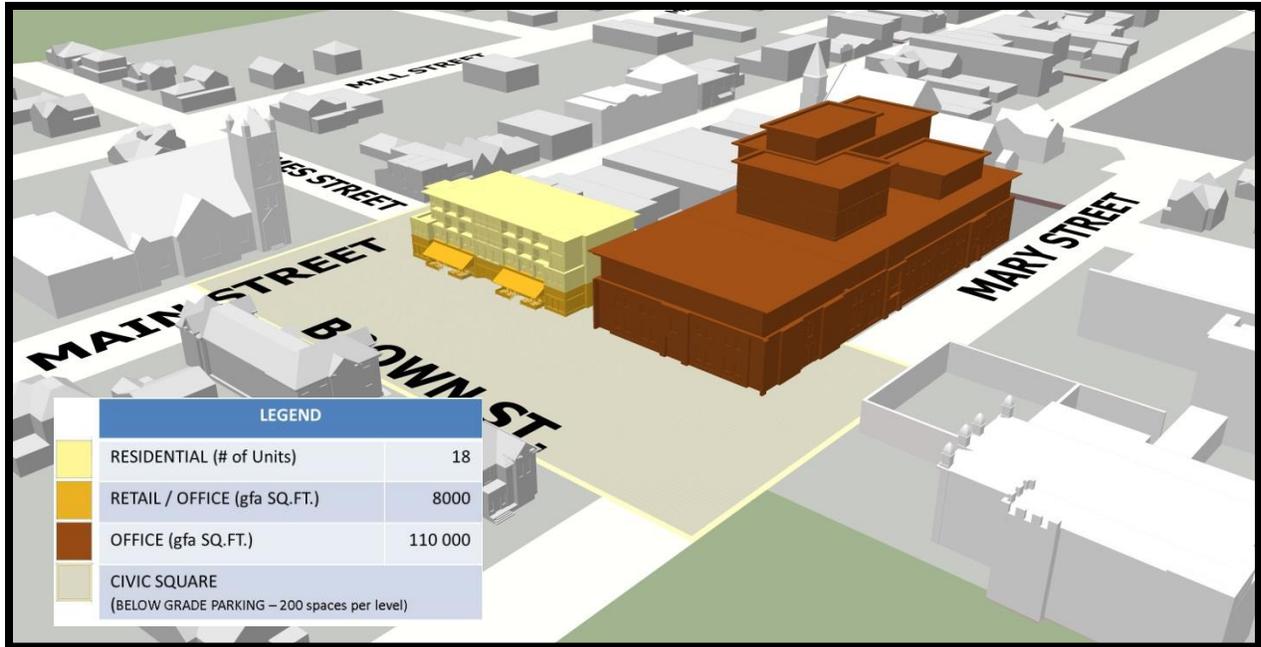
The Supportive Area directly abuts the Core Area but is offset from the Main Street Corridor. A key component of this area is that any new development and uses must be compatible with its surroundings, physically and functionally. The land use permissions for this area are intended to be more flexible in nature. Its purpose is to support the range and mix of uses within the Downtown, act as a transitional area between the high activity of the Main Street Corridor and the residential neighbourhoods, and provide more intensive development than the heritage built form on Main Street allows. It is recommended that the Official Plan policies be modified within the identified Supportive Area to allow for retail, commercial, residential and office at all grades. This change is expected to bring more people into the Downtown both as residents and employees to support the Core Area function.

In order to better communicate the implementation of this recommendation with the community and stakeholders, design concepts were prepared. Staff developed these concepts illustrating different land use options. These conceptual interpretations of policy were then used as the main conversation generator in public engagement. An example of the design concept is in Figures 8 and 9 below.



Figure 8: View from Main Street and Brown Street looking toward Town Hall, Civic Centre Opportunity Design Concept

Figure 9



## 2.5 Public Engagement 2016

The Downtown Study’s Public Engagement sessions took place in September 2016. Not only was a meeting held but staff launched a more interactive public engagement campaign. This included a formal engagement session at Town Hall, Stakeholder meetings and presentations, staff outreach to the community at locations around the Milton, a twitter chat, email communication, a booth at the Farmer’s Market and Interactive Engagement Boards displayed at key locations within the Downtown inviting people to write their feedback directly on the boards.

There was a tremendous response from the community showcasing their interest in the Downtown. This is a relationship that moving forward the Town should foster by keeping the community engaged through subsequent implementation activities.

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Feedback received through all channels was analyzed and considered. As stated, it is clear that the Downtown is the symbolic heart to the community and evokes great interest. Many of the comments received support a mixed-use viable downtown achieved by bringing people into the Downtown and by creating a space that people feel comfortable and welcomed. This is best achieved through:

- supporting land uses
- creating a gathering space for people and events (i.e. a public square); and
- bringing in amenities that are vital to the use of the Downtown

Additionally, the need for activities and visually appealing space for pedestrians figured prominently in the responses received.

It was equally and strongly noted that the preservation of the heritage character of the area is also very important to the community, and that the community would not support redevelopment that negatively impacts the Downtown's existing heritage. Specifically such concerns as building height were identified. However, it is clear that the community supports contextually-appropriate redevelopment which enhances the existing character of the Downtown.

Traffic and parking issues were also clearly identified through the engagement process. Concerns about traffic generation and how to address parking when bringing more living, working and playing in the Downtown figured prominently in many of the comments received. These concerns will need to be address when the Town further considers specific development applications, and through the on-going Parking Study.

Overall, the response from the community was outstanding and should be thoroughly considered as implementation initiatives are undertaken.

In conclusion, the main themes that were identified through the Study process include but are not limited to:

- the importance of creating a pedestrian friendly and inviting Downtown
- the need for an adaptable mix of uses supporting the Downtown long-term
- traffic management
- parking sufficiency
- heritage preservation and
- attracting people to live, work and visit by creating a lively Downtown with an appealing range of activities and sights

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### **3.0 Moving Forward**

#### **3.1 Improvement Opportunities: Next Steps Recommendations**

The following section provides recommendations on how to achieve the overall vision for the Downtown:

##### ***Land Use Amendments and Urban Design Guidelines***

###### *Zoning*

To address current land uses challenges identified, the next step would be for the Town to initiate amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law. These Amendments would widen land use permissions within the Downtown to support a mix of uses that create the vibrancy that is key to the long term health of Milton's Downtown as well as revise regulations to allow for the built form illustrated through the modeling exercise. These amendments will additionally seek to recognize legally existing land uses in heritage buildings such as churches. Consideration of revisions to the zone boundaries is also recommended in order to better fit the direct needs of the community, while still supporting the overall goals and objectives for Downtown Milton.

###### *Public Square*

It is recommended that the Town reserve space similar to that illustrated in Option \*\* to allow for the opportunity for the future development of a public square to link Town Hall and Victoria Park to Main Street, further anchoring the civic presence within the Downtown. This space will have the potential to incorporate multiple features and serve a variety of community functions such as year round markets, year round activity programming and a space to enjoy, bringing people into the Downtown and contributing to its economic health and vibrancy.

###### *Urban Design Guidelines*

The study has identified a number of opportunities for intensification, public realm improvements and cultural heritage conservation and enhancement. It is considered that a comprehensive and consistent approach to realizing these opportunities is required in order to ensure that the historic Downtown continues to evolve as a coherent and well-designed urban environment with a strong sense of place.

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The existing Central Business District (CBD) Secondary Plan Urban Design Guidelines (1999) and the complementary CBD Streetscape Design Study (2001) are somewhat out of date and no longer reflect current best practice. Staff recommends that the existing guidance should be updated in order to:

- Create a public realm that is an attractive, accessible and safe destination for all modes of transportation (walking, cycling, vehicular), including consideration of a flexible or shared street approach in key locations;
- Provide clear and investment ready built form performance standards for private and public sector developments; and
- Further refine the urban design concepts to illustrate the vision, principles and general design elements for the proposed civic square and associated development.

As community 'place-making' is likely to be a core principle that will influence and be embedded throughout the comprehensive Official Plan Review, staff will consider whether the updated guidance should be informed by that work or whether there is a need to prioritize some aspects of the updated guidance in advance of the Official Plan Review.

DM3- Vibrant and Connected Community, Economic Growth

### ***Economic Development Business Case***

As an immediate next step, it is recommended that Executive Services staff complete a business case for the redevelopment of Town-Owned Opportunity lands generally, and specifically for the development of a mixed use, multi-storey building with either underground or structured parking. These plans should be developed using the recommendations of the Downtown Milton Market Analysis, and the land use findings of this study as a basis. Additionally, as the business is developed consideration of the recommendations of the Downtown Milton Parking Study should be included, particularly with respect to any recommendations addressing the need for development of a parking garage within the Downtown. Redevelopment of the Town Owned Lands would provide a new building and comprehensively provide additional mixed use floor space and/or residential units and parking solutions. Further, it will provide concrete evidence of the Town's commitment to the Downtown.

DM3- Economic Growth, Financial Sustainability

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### ***Address Parking within the Downtown***

Throughout the Study it has been evident that there is a need to address parking within the Downtown, particularly through public engagement. The next steps to address parking within Downtown Milton will be to finish the ongoing Downtown Milton Parking Study, implement parking solutions from the Study in an appropriate timeframe, and use findings regarding Parking Structures, underground or at grade, to inform the parking components of the above-referenced business plan for redevelopment of the Town Owned Opportunity Lands. (Note: There will be additional public consultation undertaken specifically regarding parking within the Downtown)

DM3- Vibrant and Connected Community

### ***Protect Heritage***

It is recommend that staff continue to move forward with the Character Area Study, advancing past the “Primary Area” identified into the broader “Secondary Area”. Further heritage work needs to be undertaken in this regard. Additional work would consider options for replacing the large Character Area that currently covers the whole of the downtown area with a series of smaller well defined character areas. These smaller character areas would have reasons why they are considered significant clearly defined and the forms of development that are appropriate/inappropriate within these areas clearly articulated. The findings of this study would then be used to develop additional new official plan polices, zoning provisions and design guidelines that would be precisely tailored to the areas in question. The views of the community and findings of the ongoing heritage studies will assist in this process. Following the implementation of these measures, and after further public consultation, the upgrading of these character areas into Heritage Conservation District could then be considered.

DM3- Vibrant and Connected Community

### ***Coordinate Objectives and Relationships***

A further recommendation coming from the Downtown Study is that greater emphasis be placed upon building or fostering relationships within Town Hall and with external agencies and groups. There was an incredible response through the public engagement avenues with the Study, some of the most compelling responses came from various agencies and groups that have a willingness and desire to work with the Town to improve their community generally and specifically to improve the Downtown. Moving

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forward with implementation of the vision, whether it be by developing plans or programming, it is recommended that staff place more emphasis on outreach to agencies and groups, such as the Downtown Milton Business Improvement Association and Arts Milton, and look for opportunities to work collaboratively with these groups to achieve better co-ordination of projects and mandates and therefore better outcomes within the Downtown.

DM3- Enhanced Community Engagement, Vibrant and Connected Community, Organizational Effectiveness

### ***Continue Community Engagement***

It is recommended that moving forward staff keep the community engaged through every step in the process. Through the Study there was a significant amount of community engagement and a profound interest for the Downtown. For a Downtown to be successful it needs to be bringing people in to live, work and visit. To ensure this is achieved, the Town should make sure that decisions made include significant and meaningful public engagement. Using innovative approaches in addition to traditional meeting formats, staff were able to attract far greater participation in this study than is normally experienced. This is a goal that is consistent with the strategic Town direction identified through Destiny Milton 3, Enhanced Community Engagement.

DM3- Enhanced Community Engagement

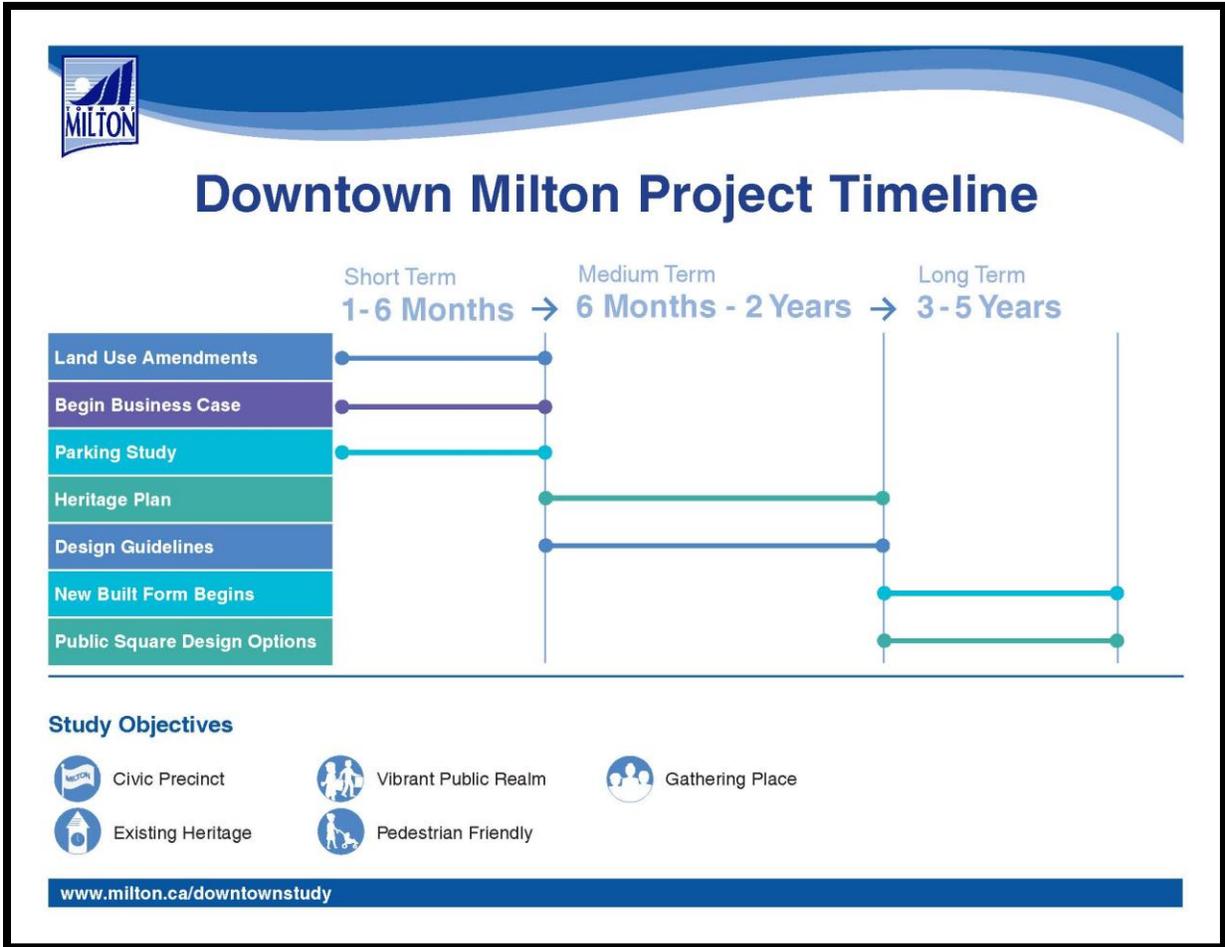
### ***Town Leadership Role***

It is strongly recommended that the Town take a leadership role in moving the Downtown forward by both setting up a policy framework and guidelines to direct Downtown redevelopment and utilizing key civic lands to stimulate private investment. This approach is consistent with the actions identified in Destiny Milton 3, specifically to develop a comprehensive policy and operational framework to support the revitalization and sustainability of the Downtown as a focal point for the community.

### **3.2 Chart of Goals (Attached, but having working on an easier to understand graphic display)**

The following is a chart outlining goals and milestones to be implemented over the short, medium and long terms. These outline specific timelines associate with the next steps of progressing forward with work in the Downtown.

Figure 10



### 3.3 Next Steps

The immediate next steps resulting from the Study will be to introduce proposed Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments in January 2017, conduct public consultation on parking within the Downtown through the Downtown Milton Parking Study, present heritage conservation options for the Downtown, and complete a business case for the redevelopment of Town-Owned Opportunity Lands. The proposed amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law are proposed to be brought forward for Council consideration in the first quarter of 2017. Other projects such as the redevelopment business case for Town-owned lands and the Downtown Milton Parking Study will establish more detailed timelines for the implementation of the recommendations contained therein.

These immediate next steps are not the last steps: revitalization of Downtown Milton is a long term project that will continue to evolve over time.