

# Windsor Blooms

Inspired Community-Driven Solutions: **People**, **Place**, and **Potential**

A Canadian Urban Institute  
Collaboration, December 2021





### Land Acknowledgement

Windsor and Essex County are situated on the traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy, comprised of the Ojibway, Ottawa and Potawatomi people.

This land acknowledgement serves as a reminder of Canada's colonial history and its violent and continuing effects on Indigenous peoples. It also serves as a reminder to settlers to be inclusive of Indigenous people, uplift Indigenous voices and support Indigenous struggles. We are all stewards of the land, and we remember First Peoples first.



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# Introduction

CUI is Canada's Urban Institute. We are the national platform that houses the best in Canadian city building – where policymakers, urban professionals, civic and business leaders, community activists and academics can learn, share and collaborate from coast to coast. We believe that it is by growing the connective tissue within and between cities of all sizes that we can make urban Canada all that it can be. *Windsor Blooms* is part of that on-the-ground sharing, connecting, and taking action.



Our **CUI x Local** series shines a spotlight on local responses to some of the most pressing challenges in Canada's large urban regions. We're collaborating with local urban leaders across the country to seek out the very best ideas that can inform city builders and be adapted in other cities. And what we're seeing are solutions that demonstrate creative, sometimes risky, yet ever-inspiring approaches that haven't received enough national attention – yet.

**Windsor Blooms** sums up what Windsorites told us is happening in their city today. We heard diverse perspectives on what it's like to live there, what people are concerned about, how they view the city and its institutions and how they are coping with and driving change. People from the arts, academia, business and industry, community agencies, municipal government and many other sectors told us what they see as their successes, where they think more work is needed and what their hopes are for a post-pandemic future.

To learn from a broad range of voices, we strove to ensure attendees came from a wide range of backgrounds, expertise and experiences. Sometimes it was the first time they were in the same space, sharing hopes and ideas. Often these interchanges led to magic as a collective wisdom emerged. In almost all cases since then, those connections and discussions have continued.

CUI started preparations for CUI x Windsor around the time of the discovery of the unmarked graves of 215 children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School. In consideration of this heavy time, and in consultation with our local partners, we did not arrange any specific sessions to centre Indigenous voices during this CUI x Windsor. We remain committed to including this core touchstone and Indigenous perspectives in our work. We will endeavour to find a way forward together when it is respectful and where appropriate. We encourage everyone to read the work of the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)** and its **94 Calls to Action**. Additional resources for survivors and families is available on the **TRC website**.

Join us on our cross-Canada city tour for inspiring stories, actions and innovations. Find us at **[www.canurb.org/CUI x Local](http://www.canurb.org/CUI x Local)**.



# Letter from Mary W. Rowe

Canadian Urban Institute  
President and CEO

**Over three packed days in June 2021, Windsorites talked to us, telling us what they love about the city, what's working well and where more work is needed.** We saw the inspiring steps people have taken to build on Windsor's history to make the city what it is today and where they hope it will go.

**We wanted to hear from people** from a range of backgrounds, so we reached out to leaders from industry, tech, government, labour, post-secondary institutions, the arts, social services and more. We also sought out young people, those who struggle to make ends meet, those working for a just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and city builders who were raised in Windsor but moved elsewhere.

**This is a remarkable moment in our lifetime.** We have been afforded the opportunity to really examine what we've been doing right in our cities and what else can be done. As we emerge from the pandemic, we can reflect. How are we? How will our lives change? How do we want to change? And how do we want our urban environments to change and be places that are inclusive of everyone?

**As with our previous CUI x Local reports, Edmonton Activates and Calgary Transforms, Windsor Blooms reflects the people, place and potential of the city.** We provide you with an opportunity to hear from dedicated Windsorites, in their own words. While this report can't possibly capture everything we heard, we've done our best to highlight the most remarkable things people told us about the city's present and future. We also share some of the best guidance Windsorites have to offer on building a strong foundation for a vital and resilient urban future.

The work in Windsor continues. Our own involvement also continues, and we invite readers to take these learnings into their own work. As a mid-sized city, positioned along the Canadian border, Windsor is a city full of promise.

**A final note about us.** As CUI enters its 31st year, the critical importance of Canada's cities is clear. Our collective ability to achieve the highest environmental, social and economic goals, at all levels of government and internationally, depends on how well our cities can manage local and systemic challenges, create and build on community-driven solutions, and take steps to secure their future well-being. CUI is focused

on driving those linkages that accelerate innovation, hasten reform and effectively direct investment, and we want to ensure local realities and experiences are integrated into government policies, plans and programs at all levels.

CUI x Windsor provides deep insights from which we can all learn. It was an illuminating visit for CUI and we hope it was enriching for those who took the time to meet with us and for you, the reader. We look forward to hearing and sharing your perspectives as we make our way to more Canadian cities in 2021 and 2022. Learn more at [www.canurb.org/CUIxLocal](http://www.canurb.org/CUIxLocal).

**Mary W. Rowe (she/her)**  
President and CEO  
Canadian Urban Institute  
@rowemw



Canadian Urban  
Institute Institut  
Urbain du  
Canada

# Summary

Windsor Blooms features the people, place, and potential of a mid-sized city that is focused on economic redevelopment, building connections that create opportunity, and a just and sustainable future. This report highlights ideas that may help shape Windsor's next steps and which can inform others looking to drive positive change in their own cities.

With over 200,000 people (and almost 350,000 in the Windsor-Essex region), Windsor is growing for the first time in a long time, presenting tremendous opportunities to develop into a Canadian urban leader. As a border city, Windsor's past, present and future are deeply integrated with that of Detroit, through shared history, family, industry and more. Today, the City is building on its strong auto and related manufacturing history, including focusing on "automobility" (the technology to create electric, zero-emission, connected, and automated vehicles), while also negotiating how to balance that with supporting other forms of innovation while protecting natural assets. This includes renewing its downtown and other main streets, forming partnerships across communities and institutions. By fostering all these strengths, Windsor is set to be a competitive and rich city.



## People

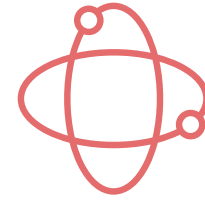
Windsorites told us they want an inclusive, equitable, green and just recovery that includes access to affordable housing and stable jobs. Young people are craving greater opportunities to stay in the city after graduation, play a role in local decision-making, work with industry, start businesses, and make their many ideas a reality. Windsor's entrepreneurs and small business community is looking to innovation as part of an economic revival. Windsorites are proud of their city's diversity and history, as a place where residents' origin stories may go back a few weeks or centuries.



## Place

Windsor is tied to Canada's historical and geographic imagination. The fertile land and temperate climate hint perhaps at its nickname: Rose City. This southernmost Canadian city is also a key border city, sitting on the banks of the Detroit river.

Within the city, people told us about sought-after opportunities to build a strong, revitalized downtown that can and retain talented, skilled people. The community has seen many successes along the riverfront and main streets. Strong efforts are being made to leverage the city's post-secondary institutions and the large cluster of manufacturing and IT companies that make the city Canada's automotive leader.



## Potential

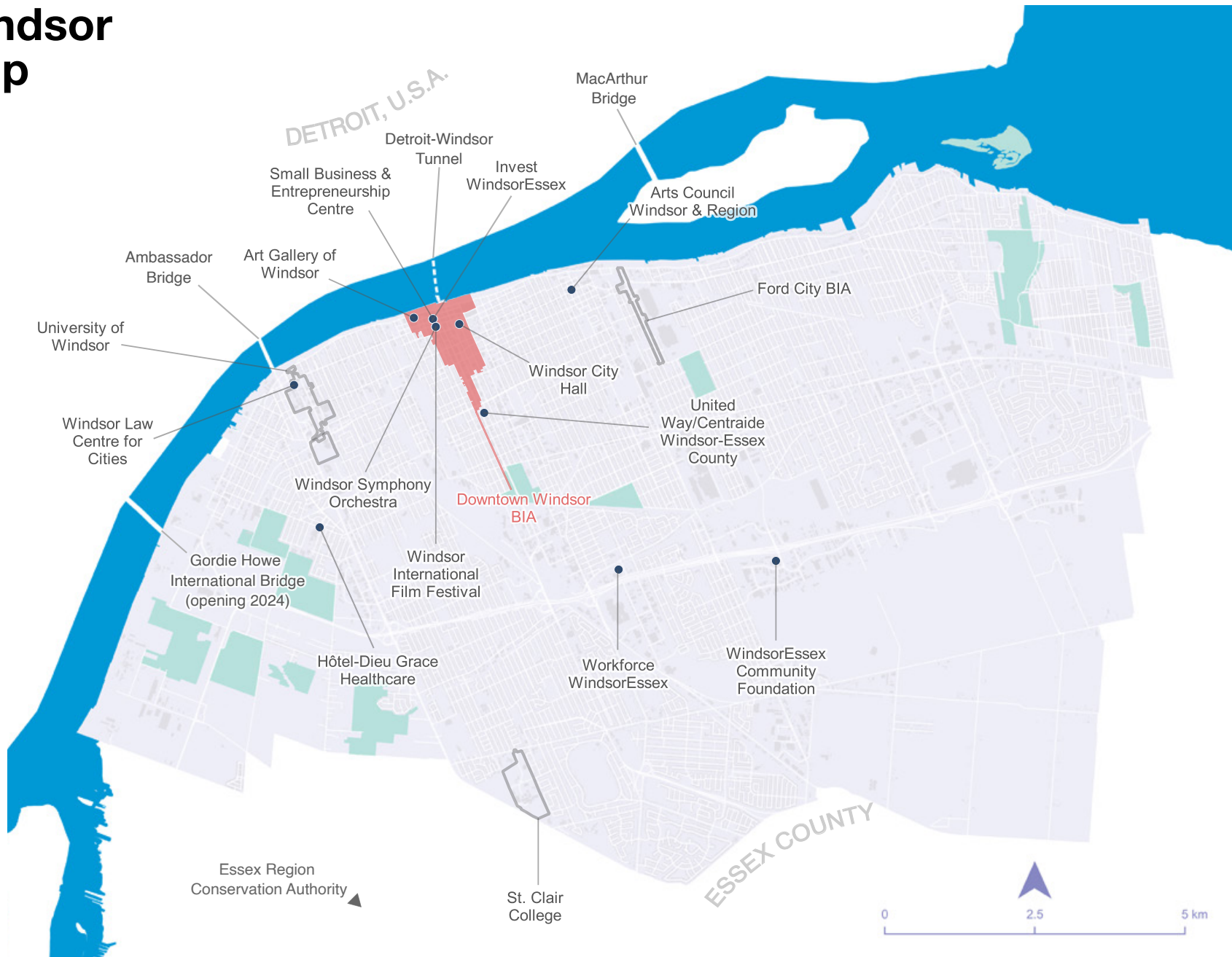
Windsorites are working to realize the full potential of their city, through projects large and small. Many local city-building initiatives have been very successful and are well-loved, like the Downtown Windsor Farmers' Market and the Windsor International Film Festival (WIFF), as well as a popular restaurant and bar patio scene that exploded during COVID. With the groundwork laid through comprehensive active transportation and transit master plans, the potential for the city to transition quickly into more sustainable forms of transportation is huge. We saw enormous energy being directed toward the creation of better social, economic, and environmental outcomes for the city, the region and all of its residents.

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read in sequence.

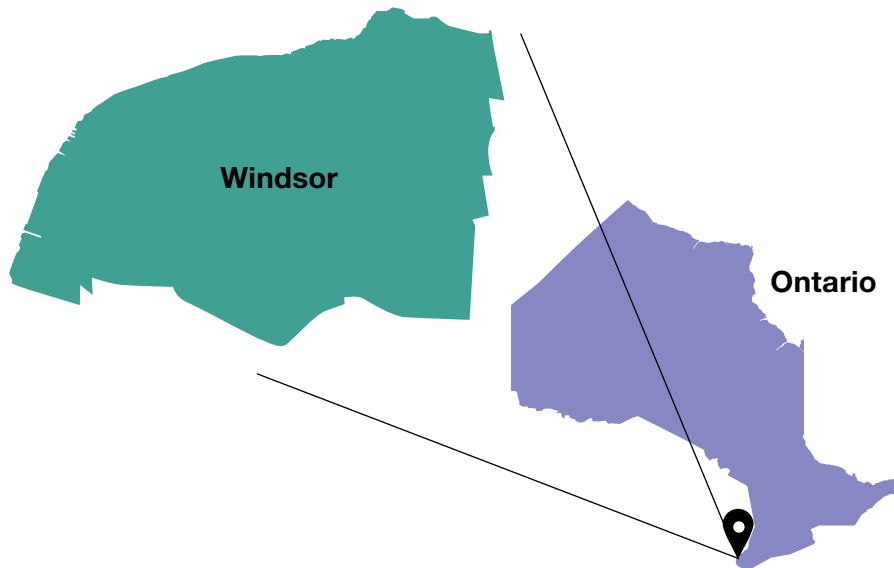
Dip in and out to  
discover more about  
the city of Windsor.



# Windsor Map



# Windsor At a Glance



**217,188**

2016 Population

**23rd**

most populous  
city in Canada

\*and the 15th  
largest Census  
Metropolitan Area

**\$55,707**

2015 median  
household income  
(\$70,336 Canada)

**26%**

Percentage of  
children (0-5 years  
old) who live in low-  
income households  
(WECHU, 2019  
(19.8% Ontario)

**16.7%**

peak unemployment  
rate (May 2020),  
highest among  
Canadian  
cities during the  
pandemic  
(Vital Signs  
report, 2020)

**18%**

of use of force  
incidents were  
experienced by  
Black people  
who comprise  
just 5%  
of Windsor's  
population  
(Windsor Police -  
Use of Force 2020  
Annual Report)



## "Affordable" Housing

The average house price increased 49% between March 2020 and March 2021, among the hottest markets in Canada. While the city is still considered to be one of the most affordable (relatively), stagnant local wages make home ownership for first-time buyers more difficult for locals. 5,400 people are on a waitlist for social housing in the Windsor-Essex region.



## Canada's 2nd National Urban Park

Ojibway National Urban Park (350 hectares) will conserve a uniquely diverse mix of rare and endangered flora and fauna.



## Black History in Windsor Essex

Windsor Essex served as a gateway for an estimated 30,000 to 100,000 freedom-seekers escaping slavery and free citizens fleeing persecution and unrest in the United States (late 18th Century to the Civil War). The Underground Railroad, a secret network of people who hid and guided enslaved people and refugees, was the largest anti-slavery freedom movement in North America.

Sandwich First Baptist Church, the oldest black church in Windsor, served as a first stop and haven for refugee slaves who crossed the Detroit River into Windsor. A hole on either side of the floor in the Sanctuary still exists, which allowed those who were being sought after by bounty hunters to escape.



# Windsor Highlights



## Automobility innovation cluster

The city has more than a century of automotive manufacturing expertise. In 2014, the industry produced vehicles and parts worth \$11 billion and almost 400,000 vehicles. (Add Source)

FedDev Ontario is providing \$5 million to support 165 companies, establish 20 new partnerships and create 665 new jobs in the manufacturing, automated and electric technology, research and development sectors.

## Talent retention

However, the city experiences a net loss of graduate talent. For every two workers with a university education who moved to Windsor-Essex from another part of Canada, three left. (WorkforceWindsorEssex report 2020).

Windsor-Essex's Ontario Works office developed a local program for foreign-trained professionals, to help them gain equivalencies and to provide referrals and financial support. To date, over 500 individuals have shown an interest in the program. Local settlement agencies are working to support these new Windsorites.

## Windsor and Detroit

Windsor's economy is closely aligned with Detroit's, just across the river. After the global financial crisis in 2007-2008, Windsor's real GDP declined by 17%, as did Detroit's. In 2015, both cities returned to their 2001 positions (Public First, 2021). Windsor enjoys relatively easy access to American venture capital and talent.

## Untapped potential

Windsor is a low spender in arts and culture. A 2019 study of culture spending across eight Canadian cities found that Windsor spent the least, at \$1.37 per capita on operating costs for the arts, heritage, and festivals compared to the median of \$9.77 (MBNCanada, 2019).

Non-residents are not aware of the city's cultural vitality and its access to big city amenities in Detroit (First Public opinion poll, 2021).

There are no separated bike lanes downtown or in the wider city, but the City's plan for active transportation calls for creating a network of safe connections among city neighbourhoods (Walk Wheel Windsor).

## **Windsor Works: Key Conclusions from the City's economic development strategy for the city's future growth**

**In 2021, the City of Windsor published a benchmark report called *Windsor Works – An Economic Development Strategy for the City's Future Growth (Windsor Works)*. It proposes a strategic approach that encourages the City to “reject complacency, seize on new opportunities and grow the regional economy for the decades ahead.” It builds on the city's strengths and identifies where change is needed.**



## **Windsor Works:**

# **Key Conclusions from the City's economic development strategy for the city's future growth**

Given that this new strategy is considered by the City to be a key document that will help guide investment decisions over the coming years, this report highlights how Windsor Works aligns with the people, place and potential of the city, as shared with us during our visit. This was not always straightforward, as the strategy didn't always align with the priorities we were exploring. We did hear from many that the Windsor Works strategy missed the opportunity to be truly inclusive in its process, as well as missing opportunities to recognize the importance of good city-building to economic development and talent retention. Throughout this report we suggest opportunities where implementation of the strategy can align with good urban practice, to the benefit of all of the city's diverse stakeholders.

# **Windsor Works:**

## **Key Conclusions from the City's economic development strategy for the city's future growth**

### **On young people and talent retention**

- The city sees a net loss of young talent every year.
  - As fast-growing companies are fuelled by graduate talent, Windsor has some work to do to make it more appealing to young professionals and working families. This includes investing in cultural assets and improving amenities and leisure facilities.
- 

### **On post-secondary institutions**

- As key anchor institutions, Windsor's two post-secondary institutions energize the city offering new vision, technical expertise, and partnership in city-building including active and public transportation.
- 

### **On the workforce**

- Windsor needs to attract talent from the rest of Ontario (inward immigration) and from Michigan (offer relocation packages and support to Michigan companies).
  - Windsor Needs to elevate its reputation in Canada by leveraging its cultural assets, increasing leisure amenities and improving quality of life.
  - There is an opportunity to leverage post-secondary institutions to attract and retain talent. UWindsor does not produce enough candidates that Windsor needs.
- 

### **On downtown renewal**

- A cool, well-connected and interesting place to live attracts talented, highly educated employees and entrepreneurs.
- Infrastructure for public transit and active transportation is important from a talent attraction perspective because people who can choose to live anywhere often choose a livable, walkable city.



# **Windsor Works:**

## **Key Conclusions from the City's economic development strategy for the city's future growth**

### **On housing**

- The city will require a more diverse and affordable housing stock to attract young talent.
  - Housing should target downtown to drive revitalization and intensification.
  - Windsor's housing is perceived as affordable and should be used as an asset to attract newcomers.
- 

### **On homelessness and addiction**

- The response to these complex social problems need to be addressed in parallel with efforts to improve the downtown core.
- 

### **On innovation**

- The city is dependent on manufacturing (20% of jobs), which is in a decline due to offshoring.
  - Building on its current advantage in the auto industry, the City's new focus is on automobility.
  - The automobility and green manufacturing revolutions are positioning the city for the future as an innovation hub.
  - There is potential to leverage the proximity to the United States and become a place to explore new border technology.
- 

### **On arts and culture**

- Arts and culture are crucial to Windsor's growth, especially to improve the city's quality of life and to attract young talent.

# Windsor Works:

## Key Conclusions from the City's economic development strategy for the city's future growth

### On natural assets

- There is potential to leverage Windsor's strong natural environmental assets (including lakes and rivers) to improve the quality of life of its residents and to provide amenities and leisure opportunities to attract and retain talent.
  - Enhancing the appeal and economic potential of Windsor's riverfront will increase its ability to attract both residents and tourists, serving as a destination that will draw people to the downtown.
- 

### On sustainability

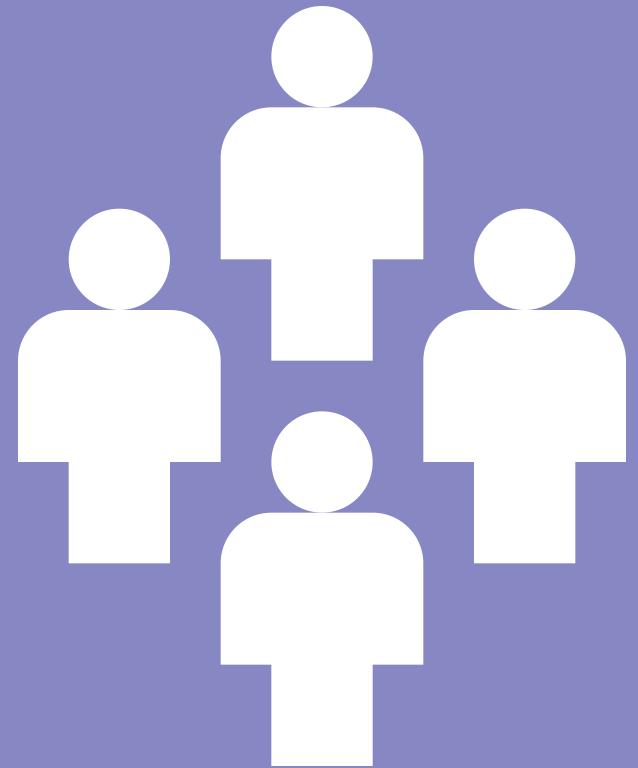
- "The new Biden Administration will position the United States and Canada as partners in a drive to a low-emissions future. Amidst these changes, Windsor can be a site of the green manufacturing revolution."
  - Industry in Windsor is already positioning itself for the future with its efforts toward "automobility", moving into sectors like electric and autonomous vehicles, hydrogen transport and green energy.
- 

### On placemaking

- "Placemaking" is a necessity to attract talent and support the City's overall economic development strategy... "to further increase the impact of civic initiatives, such as the Windsor International Film Festival" and leveraging Windsor's natural assets, such as the waterfront, to drive tourism and greater economic activity.

## People

**The people in a city are its life force. Much of the energy we saw came from a broad diversity of Windsor residents engaged with city building. It's these unique individuals who contribute on their own or alongside others, at the grassroots or within formal institutions, who are moving Windsor forward. In this section, *Windsor Blooms* profiles many of the people we met, highlighting their energetic efforts to build a vibrant, connected city.**





## People

# Creating a vibrant, energized centre of arts and culture

The people of Windsor are shaped by the land and history. As a border town on the southern tip of Canada, Windsor is tied by its geography across the river from the iconic American city of Detroit. The lives of Windsorites are entwined with their American cousin through shared family, culture, social connections and sense of community. The cities' prosperities are also tied through international trade, economies, automotive and manufacturing past and present and shared natural resources.

Windsor draws people from across the world to its region, reflected in the number of languages Windsorites speak. One in four Windsor residents were born outside Canada (compared to one in five across Canada). Civic leaders and city residents expressed pride in their city's diversity, touting the recognition communities receive. Diversity programs and committees are established and recognized at local school boards and within the municipal government. Efforts are made to address anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism, and LGBTQ inclusion. Events and festivals including multicultural observances are held city-wide. Public monuments such as the Bangladeshi Peace Clock, the Via Italia, and the Ancient Jesuit Pear Trees mark the presence of diverse groups within the city. Local institutions are also working to address the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in meaningful ways, including through better consultation with the region's Indigenous residents.

We also heard from many that communities are marginalized in substantive ways. Exclusion from economic and political opportunities is still a reality for too many. For example, disappointment remains over what many consider a shallow regard given to the historical celebration of Emancipation Day.

## People

# “Nothing about us without us”: Young people and their city

### **Building a life in Windsor**

Many of the young people we spoke to are concerned about their future in the city. They expressed their desire to stay and grow their lives and careers in Windsor but are unsure whether they would be able to find the opportunities and lifestyles they want, or eventually have to leave Windsor to attain them. They expressed concern about limited economic opportunities outside of the tech and manufacturing sectors, especially in arts and humanities. There was fear about the skyrocketing price of housing, something that is accelerating now as incomes are holding still or, in some cases, dropping. Others articulated how their independence and ability to fully enjoy and experience the city was hampered by its car culture and the limited availability of a safe, reliable and integrated transportation system which includes transit and active transportation options. In all its connotations, the word “bloom” captured the potential young people saw on their city.

On a Thursday evening in June, CUI x Windsor co-hosted a 90-minute online conversation with a group of thoughtful young people on what they love about Windsor and how the city can, from their perspectives become a better place. CUI and the Windsor Law Centre for Cities partnered with the Windsor-Essex Youth Climate Council and the Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare Youth Advisory Council for this.

## Profile

**Princess Doe** is a third-year law student at the University of Windsor Faculty of Law and a Research Associate with the Windsor Law Centre for Cities. A social worker by training, Princess has always centred critical perspectives in advancing social justice and human rights for marginalized populations in her work. Princess has been committed particularly to anti-racist advocacy in Windsor, and for the past two years served as President and Co-Chair of **Making it Awkward: Challenging Anti-Black Racism Committee** (MIA). MIA was founded in 2016 by Black and racialized social work students as a response to the lack of attention to anti-Black racism in the community across various fields and institutions. Inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, MIA's mission is to build community capacity within Windsor-Essex to address systemic racism.





## People

# “Nothing about us without us”: Young people and their city

### A role in municipal decision-making

Young Windsorites are keen for more opportunities to get involved in Windsor’s political sphere and have their voices heard by City Council. A number expressed frustration with how difficult the political system is to navigate and to get involved in. They repeated the common refrain “nothing about us without us.” This sentiment was particularly acute among Black, and other racialized young people who felt consistently excluded.

We heard there is a need for more dedicated spaces and activities for youth and more ways to hear about what’s happening in Windsor, especially about things that directly impact them. For example, one youth suggested the City of Windsor consider creating fellowships to encourage (and enable) young people to get involved in local government and civic life. Other ideas they raised included:

- Building on its rich local history and culture, especially as it relates to Black history, like the Underground Railroad or Emancipation Day.
- Increasing services, amenities and different types of businesses downtown (including activities and places that are alcohol-free).
- Improving pedestrian, cycling and transit connections and complete neighbourhoods across the city – particularly the suburbs.
- Meaningful reconciliation relationships with Indigenous communities.
- A greater role for youth in climate action.

## People

# “Nothing about us without us”: Young people and their city

### **The things young people love about Windsor**

The young people we connected with shared their love of the city and its places and spaces. They mentioned the trails, waterfront, farmers markets and the Open Streets Windsor and expressed their desire for more of these kinds of investments. We heard praise for Walkerville as a model community in design, with its walkability and compact built form, and yet also the recognition that it is one of the least ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in the urban core. They pointed out other neighbourhoods across the city that need better amenities, including more green, well-kept public spaces. They celebrated the vibrant downtown core. Proximity to Detroit was also appreciated.



We want to see more opportunities for jobs in the arts in Windsor and more arts education. While there is a push for STEM careers and funding for engineers, that's not necessarily what all young people are wanting to go into if they're living in Windsor. And that's not always going to create a well-rounded city. Some of us don't want to stay in Windsor if we don't have walkability, good active transportation and affordable housing for people to stay here during their university. So, we can't try to be Toronto, we can't try to be Montreal, but we have a lot of good things going for us and there just needs to be more focus on that."

**Participant,**  
**Young People and their City**

# People

## Post-secondary talent that energizes the city

### Linking students and employers

Windsor is a mid-sized city that benefits greatly from the presence of two post-secondary institutions. With over 30,000 students between them, these institutions add life to the city and play an essential role in developing, attracting and retaining young talent. Each also has a satellite campus in the downtown core: the University of Windsor's School of Social Work and the School of Creative Arts (SOCA) and St. Clair College's downtown campus.

To date, collaboration between the City of Windsor and its post-secondary institutions has often been piecemeal or informal. However, discussions have begun recently and work is underway to explore opportunities to improve coordination, provide structure and create mechanisms for partnerships. Relations are improving because of an alignment in vision and common goals.



**We have these wonderful individuals, these students that are in our programs and we're not able to keep them in the city.**

**And for me, a big part of that really has to do with engagement. This applies to our Black students, of which the majority are from outside of Windsor. Once they obtain their degree, they leave the city and build businesses and go on and do what they want to do outside of Windsor. Not only are you looking to get them into the environment and working and helping to build up our industries in the city, but you want them to come back and be able to speak well of your institution as well. So even though there are these great experiential learning opportunities along the way, if they haven't truly been engaged, been made to feel welcome or built solid career relationships, they will leave Windsor if they have the opportunity."**

**Marium Tolson-Murtty,  
Director, Anti-Racism  
Organizational Change,  
Office of the Vice-President  
(Equity, Diversity,  
and Inclusion), University  
of Windsor**



### Profile

**Lyra Sheldon** is the President and Co-Founder of the **Windsor-Essex Youth Climate Council**, an organization committed to advocacy and education on intersectional environmentalism and climate action. Lyra is an undergrad at the University of Ottawa, hoping to pursue a career in human rights law. She believes in the power of mutual aid and helped start the Youth Climate Council to enable local youth to collaborate and have their voices heard in the climate justice movement. Lyra seeks, through cooperation and amplifying marginalized voices, to dismantle the systems that thrive on the destruction of the planet.



# People

## Post-secondary talent that energizes the city

### Involving academics in city building

Both academics and students, across disciplines, are concretely involved in building the city around them.

Beyond the innovative work with engineering departments, other avenues have also opened up. The University of Windsor's SOCA, located in the heart of downtown, has an "open-to-community" approach with many of its public arts events, so as to make city residents feel like the campus is a place they belong. Similarly, St. Clair College's Architectural Technology department often gets involved with local communities and organizations explicitly undertaking projects to help address real-world issues. A policy clinic at the University of Windsor Faculty of Law, the Cities and Climate Action Forum, provides an interactive platform to empower youth, community builders and municipal governments to work on institutional climate mitigation action at the local level. These initiatives are led by Windsor Law students under professorial supervision.

Other suggestions to improve connections and opportunities for students and faculties include an annual conference that involves key players from community organizations, city departments and post-secondary institutions to make connections and drive opportunities for collaboration.

Windsor Works, the City's recently adopted economic development strategy, offers an ideal opportunity to engage students and faculty in the plan's implementation. We saw some agreement on the value this could bring.

A related suggestion was for the creation of a new working group to identify and explore longer term opportunities for collaboration. Already there are initiatives being planned to establish closer connections, increased opportunities for student involvement and data-sharing.



While an approach like the Automobility Strategy that brings institutions together to work toward new and greener

opportunities for the region's auto sector, is important, there are other layers of expertise that post-secondary institutions can offer to the community, especially to make the community more vibrant and livable."

**Anneke Smit, Director,  
Windsor Law Centre for Cities**



It's time for us to work together [the City of Windsor, university and college] to drive the Windsor Works plan and bring authentic experiences that will put Windsor on the map."

**Thom Hunt, Executive  
Director and City Planner,  
City of Windsor**



The University of Windsor and Wayne State University in Detroit have recently undertaken efforts to create a formal collaboration on advancing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) with a focus on urban sustainability. With a broad range of community partners, including local government and school boards in both cities, the collaboration would facilitate student placements, research partnerships, data sharing, and more.



## People

# A workforce in transition

As in other cities across Canada and around the world, many people who were in long-term, stable positions were laid off when the pandemic hit. While some of these same workers faced challenges before the pandemic, the onset of public health measures and non-essential retail closures impacted them in new and severe ways.

In May 2020, Windsor faced the highest unemployment rate in Canada among large Canadian cities, at 16.7 percent, and as of July 2021 the Windsor-Essex region has the highest unemployment rate in Canada, at 11.8 percent. Analysts are hopeful that these numbers will decrease as the larger economy returns to full function. Yet, to complicate the picture, coupled with these figures are labour shortages in the trades, high tech and other fields, as discussed in this report. Windsor's economy and labour force also face the transition away from the traditional automotive sector. The move to automobility is part of that new negotiation.



**There are a lot of workers, who are now out of work, potentially for the first time as a result of the pandemic. They had long-term, safe manufacturing and retail jobs for 20 years, and now they're having to do that first job search again, almost as if they were getting a job right out of high school."**

**Tashlyn Teskey, Manager  
of Projects and Research,  
Workforce WindsorEssex**



## Profile

**Sarah Mushtaq** serves as the Indigenous Program and Patient Education Coordinator for the **Windsor Regional Hospital**. She is a community builder who works to bridge the gaps between Windsor's various communities: immigrants, the Muslim community, law enforcement, the education sector, and politics. In 2018, Sarah was a recipient of the Leadership Windsor/Essex's 40 Leaders Under 40 Award. Recognized for her civic contributions to the Windsor-Essex region, Sarah continues her work by advocating for a better public consultation process through which the City and other community organizations can meaningfully integrate the wishes and concerns of its communities. She is a guest columnist at the Windsor Star where she covers topics related to race, gender and the millennial experience in Canada.



# People

## A workforce in transition

### Accreditation for foreign-trained professionals

The situation for highly-skilled and experienced immigrants (like doctors, lawyers, engineers and accountants) in Windsor-Essex is similar to those elsewhere in Canada who face barriers to employment because Canadian regulators and employers don't recognize foreign credentials. About five years ago, Windsor-Essex's Ontario Works office developed a local program for foreign-trained professionals, working closely to help them gain equivalencies and to provide referrals and financial support. To date, over 500 individuals have signed up for the program. Local settlement agencies are working to support these new Windsorites.

### Improving services and delivery

As methods of job searching have drastically changed over the last two decades, people told us there is the need for a strategy to improve basic computer skills and broaden digital literacy. The City of Windsor provides virtual support through Workforce WindsorEssex. The Essential Worker Registry is a database for individuals who experienced pandemic job loss, supported by Employment Ontario. Caseworkers and staff determine registrants' transferable skill sets and try to connect people to employment opportunities in many essential sectors.

Early on during the pandemic, when public health measures shut down physical spaces, the City also had to find alternative ways to deliver job search-related services. For instance, Ontario Works staff in the region moved to online workshops for clients using virtual platforms (like Zoom).



**This pandemic has forced us to be more marketable as fewer clients came through our doors. As an Employment Ontario service provider funded by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, specific service targets have to be met annually. In order to address these challenges, our focus was on increasing our marketing and technology. The use of programmatic advertising was just one of the ways we were able to expand our presence and reach within the community. We continue to challenge the status quo and always look for different ways to deliver services effectively."**

**Andrew Daher, Executive Director of Employment and Social Services for City of Windsor**

# People

## A workforce in transition

### **Supporting vulnerable workers in Windsor-Essex**

The thriving agriculture and agri-tech sector in Windsor-Essex means that the region employs thousands of seasonal workers, many of them Temporary Foreign Workers. Windsor-Essex has one of the highest concentrations of migrant workers in Canada. When a crisis hits, they may turn to the local urban centre for help, relying on grassroots, charitable or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with very limited budgets.

Farmhouse workers often live and work in close quarters and have been vulnerable to the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Pathways to permanent residency are a key remedy to migrant workers' insecurity. Active throughout Essex County, her organization has been a strong advocate for conferring Permanent Residence status to essential workers in the health care sector, such as migrants working as personal support workers and expanding the definition of "essential" workers during the pandemic.



**The Diocese of London** is based in Southwestern Ontario and collaborates closely with the **Canadian Council for Refugees** to develop strategies that protect refugee rights. They offer a range of supports that includes legal assistance and helping refugees prepare, apply and present their claims. They also guide claimants through their journey from Convention Refugees to Permanent Residents to Canadian Citizens. The organization carries out advocacy work on issues such as domestic violence and human trafficking and works toward greater public awareness and changes in policy.



### Profile

Until November 2021, **Hugo Vega** was the Regional Manager of Settlement Services at the **YMCA of Southwestern Ontario**. He oversaw federal and provincial programs that assist immigrants and refugees in Windsor. Hugo has worked with migrant workers and established programs for at-risk youth and people with disabilities. He chairs multiple committees, including the Windsor-Essex Local Immigration Partnership and Legal Assistance of Windsor which operates a legal clinic for low-income residents. As part of the YMCA, Hugo oversaw WE Value Partnership, which pilots innovation in the settlement sector, through service delivery, technology and data management.



## People

# A people-centred approach to homelessness and community services

### Collaboration and cooperation

Windsor is committed to eliminating homelessness by 2028 and is well on its way to achieving “functional zero.” The City has housed 900 people since 2015 and as of March 2021, there were 476 people experiencing homelessness. Similar to other cities across Canada, Windsor’s **Point in Time 2018 Homeless Count** found that 22 percent of people surveyed self-identified as Indigenous, while only making up three percent of Windsor’s overall population. 26 percent of the people who were homeless were between the ages of 16 and 24. The disproportionate impacts of systemic racism and poverty is apparent.

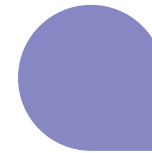
Through the national initiative **Built for Zero Canada**, the City’s **By-Names Prioritized List** keeps track of all individual city residents experiencing homelessness in the community. As of June 2021, 5,035 people were on the wait list, which includes individuals who are experiencing homelessness as well as those already housed but waiting for more affordable housing. In 2019, the City developed a 10-year **Housing and Homelessness Master Plan**, which is a comprehensive approach to ending chronic homelessness.

COVID-19 has considerably changed how people think about housing, and we heard there is more cooperation and collaboration between different agencies and sectors than ever before.



We are working more collaboratively across sectors than I have ever seen in my 18-year career. The pandemic has given us the opportunity to really put the person at the centre of everything that we’re doing. It has also provided opportunities for both the City and community partners to offer services in a different way. We’ve changed services to get out into the community, to get out of the walls of their organizations and actually work with folks in a different way. And we’ve heard from people experiencing homelessness that they appreciate the way that the services have changed and pivoted as a direct result of COVID-19 and how we’ve co-located services in one particular area.”

**Kelly Goz, from the City’s Housing and Children’s Services department.**



**The Windsor Residence for Young Men provides transitional housing for self-identified youth who are experiencing homelessness.**



## Profile

**Frazier Fathers** is currently working on a shortlisted **CMHC Housing Supply Challenge** project and consults for non-profits and organizations in Ontario. At the time CUI x Windsor, he was employed at United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County for 6.5 years where he led their public policy and advocacy research, providing significant thought leadership on the transformative ProsperUs initiative. He also led a significant community organizing and engagement effort related to the Gordie Howe Bridge Community Benefit Plan that resulted in the creation of the Windsor-Essex Community Benefits Coalition. Frazier also worked for the WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation (now InvestWE). He occasionally writes on local public policy issues for his blog [gingerpolitics.com](http://gingerpolitics.com) and is also a co-host/host for two podcasts (*Mean, Median and Moose* and *Council Conversations*). He lives in West Windsor with his dog Izzy where they explore the neighbourhood.



# People

## A people-centred approach to homelessness and community services

### Enhancing collaborative efforts to improve health outcomes

Due to the urgency of COVID-19, there has been a rapid implementation of impactful projects such as hotel-to-shelter conversions and drop-in service centres. The co-location of multiple services makes it easier for people in need to access them all at once, as opposed to going to different locations and maintaining various appointments. Furthermore, the collaborative effort around responding to pandemic pressures has brought in actors not typically engaged in the discussion around housing and homelessness, such as the hospitals.

### Filling the gaps in new ways

We heard that although there is an “all hands are on deck” mentality around eliminating homelessness, limited funding has often caused competition among organizations. Alicea Fleming from the **United Way of Windsor-Essex** told us that they are looking to build an “investors collaborative,” to bring together foundations, philanthropists and funders to fill the gaps. Together, they will align their resources and create a funding pool that small organizations can access together.

There are also opportunities for collaboration within municipal government. Stephen Lynn, Social Planning Coordinator at the City of Windsor, explained that one of his goals has been to streamline existing services and programs to create a singular access point for residents in the form of one application. He calls it “silo-busting”. At the time of our visit, the City of Windsor was pursuing the creation of a homeless shelter hub concept – a city-constructed or renovated space for a new, 60-bed homeless shelter and hub with wraparound services, in one location.



We spend a lot of time looking after a young person. We get them stabilized, their mental health is good, they're on a treatment regime. And then we discharge them to a community where there's not enough money, there's not enough food and there's not enough support. So, when you start to tie up the health care system with the community and you realize that those linkages, or the lack of them is creating a revolving door. We discharge people into a community that's not healthy and so the health care system has an obligation there.”

**Janice Kaffer,**  
**C.E.O. and President,**  
**Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare**



The expectation that charity is going to take care of everything is not realistic. You need the private sector and government as partners, even in long-term care. That has to be something more built into the system. For example, all new multi-unit construction permits should require that 10 percent be affordable, as I believe there is already a provincial requirement to have 10 percent accessible. It could even be the same units. It would be a start and may be achieved within local by-laws.”

**Anne Ryan,**  
**Executive Director,**  
**IRIS Residential Inns**  
**and Services**

## People

# A people-centred approach to homelessness and community services

### Need for a comprehensive policy approach

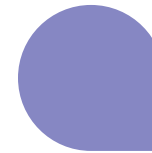
We heard that there is a need to shift municipal efforts from a charitable approach to that of a social policy approach. The City of Windsor can build on the work of the community development sector to elevate the conversation of poverty and homelessness. Truly addressing the root causes of these issues will require a holistic lens and the provision of the necessary wraparound supports. Real funding needs to be allocated within the City's budget to provide these supports and fund comprehensive studies. Yet the other orders of government are also deeply implicated in solving the challenge of deep poverty, mental health and homelessness, all issues which lie within their field of responsibilities.

High-profile charitable events, such as the June 27th Miracle, have been criticized by some for not addressing the root causes of poverty, relying on charity rather than policy and structural changes. We also heard that the prevention of poverty and homelessness should be prioritized at the same level as helping those who already are homeless.



**I haven't encountered anyone not committed to the elimination of homelessness, who doesn't think that poverty is a complete social ill. The issue is that people fail to recognize the interconnectedness of poverty to homelessness. They don't see that when they take certain actions that it leads to other things."**

**Joyce Zuk, Executive Director,  
Family Services Windsor-Essex**



On June 27th, the **Miracle Food Drive** unofficially broke the Guinness World Record for the largest single-day community food drive. During a time when food banks were receiving very low donations, people left cans of food on their porches to be collected and the Windsor and Essex County's food drive raised over two million pounds of canned food donations.





### Profile

**Katarina Kolobaric** is a mental health advocate and community changemaker in the Windsor-Essex region. As a current Jack Talks speaker and the former President of the University of Windsor chapter of Jack.org, the Canadian charity that trains young leaders to revolutionize the mental health field, she has helped to overcome the stigma surrounding mental health at the university level. She was also President of the Behaviour, Cognition and Neuroscience Students' Association at the University of Windsor and is the current Chair of the Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare (HDGH) Youth Advisory Council. The Youth Advisory Council provides feedback to the CEO and Board of Directors at HDGH on the key issues impacting youth in Windsor-Essex, including mental health, addictions, social justice and poverty. Influenced by both her science education and various involvements within the health community, Katarina aspires to be a physician assistant and global mental health advocate. She hopes to use what she has learned to benefit future generations of youth to come.

## People

# “Let’s not lose that muscle”: Envisioning a just recovery

### Eroded trust between government and community

Through conversation with Windsorites, we heard concerns about a lack of meaningful and transparent engagement between the City of Windsor and the people who call Windsor home. The locals we connected with spoke consistently about the need to build relationships between the City administration, Council and Windsor communities. People described a breakdown of trust and the need for mechanisms that would enable communities to engage with the City.

We heard that there is a desire for authentic, sincere and early-stage public participation on important issues. Windsor’s residents are offering their expertise and communities wish to engage. These are social infrastructure that the City could draw on to inform projects and plans that are equitable, sustainable and inclusive.

People told us they have a lot to contribute, but the current pathways for public engagement are not well-integrated into processes or are too late to influence the outcomes. The closure of the well-used pool at the Adie Knox Herman Recreation Complex was offered as a recent example. A public consultation survey was sent out, but the decision to close the pool had already been made. A similar concern was also raised around the City’s new Anti-Black Racism initiative being outsourced to the **Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County**.

People want to feel their input is “being used and valued” and there will be action, “not just empty words to check the box.” They expect engagement efforts to be fully accessible (e.g., culturally appropriate, with consideration for the location, childcare, language supports and more).

There were impressions that opportunities for public engagement were not well thought out or were conducted too late in the process to be able to influence decisions. The City was recently **criticized** for not including the Black Council of Windsor-Essex in consultations to determine how to move the City’s anti-racism initiative forward.



There’s a lack of trust because it feels like the city doesn’t properly engage the public. And there isn’t a proper process... even when things are maybe done in good faith, it isn’t believed to be done necessarily in good faith.”

**Just Recovery**  
workshop participant



**Windsor Works didn’t actually engage those who would be most impacted by the decisions of the report. In many ways, they just talked to the usual suspects and moved it forward. That was seen as a miss by our group.”**

**Just Recovery**  
workshop participant



Sometimes it feels like consultations or pathways for public engagement are a last-minute thought, added to the process later on when a decision may have already been made, or are too far along in the process to really change the decision if the community doesn’t like it.”

**Sarah Mushtaq, Writer,  
Community Advocate and Just  
Recovery workshop participant**



The Canadian Urban Institute, the Windsor Law Centre for Cities and the United Way of Windsor-Essex County co-hosted a two-hour community virtual workshop to explore what a post-pandemic, just recovery for Windsor looks like. The workshop focused on developing constructive, city-focused approaches to support both the process and outcome of achieving a just recovery for all in Windsor. The workshop participants included community members with lived experience and people working with community supportive organizations in the city. The YMCA of Windsor and Essex County's Hugo Vega facilitated the session which included breakout group discussions that enabled attendees to go into detail on questions around the wishes of community. The session considered the principles for a just recovery as the basis for the discussion:

- 1 Health and well-being first – no exceptions.
- 2 Strengthen the social safety net and provide direct relief to people who need it.
- 3 Prioritize the needs of workers and communities.
- 4 Build resilience to prevent future crises.
- 5 Build solidarity and equity across communities, generations and borders.
- 6 Uphold Indigenous rights and work in partnership with Indigenous peoples.



Whiskeyjack Boutique

## Profile

**Dr. Anneke Smit** is an Associate Professor at the **University of Windsor Faculty of Law**. Anneke brings her expertise in municipal law and policy, land use planning, and property law, as well as an extensive background in refugee law and policy, to her leadership position as the Founding Director of the **Windsor Law Centre for Cities (C4C)**. Established in 2019, C4C supports collaborative research, teaching, and public engagement on the legal and policy issues faced by municipalities and local institutions. As part of the Centre, Anneke is the academic advisor to the Windsor Law Cities and Climate Action Forum (CCAF) legal policy clinic. Through this and other experiential learning placements, Windsor Law students have the opportunity to work directly with municipalities and other local institutions. Their work is focused on municipalities' role in tackling climate change.



## People

# “Let’s not lose that muscle”: Envisioning a just recovery

### Efforts to reflect diversity and achieve greater equity

We heard that Windsorites would also like to see a greater diversity among City staff and consultants who are able to tap into lived experience when engaging with the community. People want to see more “people like themselves working for the City”.

Residents described their hopes of working with the City to develop an equity engagement strategy, an equity plan and mobilizing community and grassroots to support more meaningful and inclusive engagement. Locals told us multiple approaches to engagement are needed to “meet people where they’re at” and the City should focus on relationship-building, invest the time to build real relationships with communities, be proactive with outreach and create longer runways and timelines so there can be meaningful engagement.



The city was very flexible during the pandemic. They did things rapidly and things just got done. We don’t want to lose that muscle with the city as we move forward. We want them to be able to get stuff done in the post-pandemic world. It was something that was positive, whether that was converting the aquatic centre to an emergency shelter or the patios that showed up downtown.”

**Just Recovery  
workshop participant**





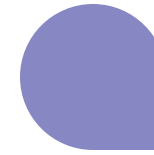
# People

## “Let’s not lose that muscle”: Envisioning a just recovery

People also shared a host of other ideas to support their vision of a just recovery:

- Balance the needs of business with community wellness and more.
- Establish more community benefits agreements with developers, to help ensure development is done well and is good for communities and the city as a whole.
- Diversify the economic base to make Windsor less reliant on one industry and create an identity separate from Detroit.
- Create more affordable and supportive housing for all (especially young people entering the market, vulnerable people and seniors).
- Improve transit and active transportation infrastructure, better understand the transportation barriers in the community and help vulnerable populations access transportation supports.
- Help people travel safely and rapidly, regardless of their mode of transport.
- Provide wraparound support that meets the diverse needs of different populations (e.g., newcomers, people with addictions and mental health issues).

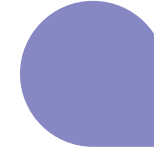
The City was praised for the way it responded to community needs during the pandemic.



**Community benefits agreements (CBAs)** are a means to bring residents and communities into the development process to extract direct economic and social benefits

from an infrastructure project. They often involve local workforce prioritization, training and funding for improvements to adjacent neighbourhoods’ infrastructure. CBAs are useful for community capacity building.

A key feature of the Gordie Howe International Bridge project is the **Community Benefits Plan** which includes a Workforce Development and Participation Strategy and a Neighbourhood Infrastructure Strategy.



The United Way’s **report on community benefits in**

**mid-sized cities** highlights the Neighbourhood Small Business

Grant, the product of a partnership with the Windsor-Essex Small Business Centre.

Businesses that opened commercial storefronts in specific, amenity-constrained neighbourhoods in Essex County were eligible for a \$5,000 grant. The requirement of the grant was to partner with local community to provide benefits beyond the regular operations of their store. A concrete example was one bookkeeping and financial service organization provided free tax filing services to low-income residents, free bookkeeping to a local resident committee, and three free budgeting workshops for the community.

# People

## “Trust the new generation”: reflections of former Windsorites

CUI and the University of Windsor convened a conversation with five of the “Windsorite diaspora” on how the city shaped them and on what their hopes are for the city they still love, even though they have moved away.



**“There are so many little things that Windsor could do to improve quality of life for people. I’ve done focus groups to ask folks what they would be excited about:**

**Muskoka chairs on the waterfront, rooftop patios, walkability, small investments like street furniture, regulatory changes for patios. Why can’t we reallocate some of the money that Windsor spends on car infrastructure? This would be good for quality of life, which is also good for talent attraction, which is also good for economic growth.”**

**Julian Villafuerte Diaz**

**“One of the great values of coming from Windsor and being in Windsor is an understanding of America that most Canadians don’t have. And that’s really valuable.”**

**Shawn Micallef**

**“There’s this kind of social mixing in Windsor that doesn’t exist in the same way in Toronto. I am still amazed at the amount of money in Toronto and that there are rich people in Toronto who live and never understand that there’s an entire working class here. That has really contributed to some of the economic disparity, because it’s easy to live in a bubble here, whereas in Windsor there isn’t as much of a bubble.”**

**Shaun Micallef**

**“There still hasn’t been bold leadership to build public transit that will move people in the ways that the present and the future requires. That is just disappointing.”**

**Tiffany Gooch**

**“There is a new generation of leadership in Windsor that’s ready to take over and has a vision for what could come next. Windsor needs to trust that group and trust in that new generation.”**

**Tiffany Gooch**

**“The African diaspora, the diaspora waves that has come over the decades, just intersect in a really incredible way in that region.”**

**Tiffany Gooch**

**“Social responsibility was taught at home ... Even when things were good, things were hard for some in this one-economy town. But you knew people had your back ... The public interest starts with one another, with each other and Windsor taught me that.”**

**Sean Hertel**



**“Social activism is the oxygen of Windsor and once you breathe that oxygen, Windsor is very much about that collective action and that history of collective bargaining and organized labour.”**

**Jodi Butts**

**“On unions and labour ... I definitely grew up watching how my father operated in that joint approach to how communities come together to build better lives for each other.”**

**Tiffany Gooch**



# Place

**Geography and built form shape cities and their cultures, informing where we live, how we move through our urban spaces and how we connect to each other. Place is the natural and built landscape around us, the formal organizations, our access to economic and institutional resources, transportation, community services, green space and more.**



**Windsor Blooms also looked at how Windsor's city residents live in these places together. Tucked in the corner of southwestern Ontario, Windsor holds a unique position in Canadian historical geography. First, people know it for its role in the Underground Railroad, providing the first breathe of freedom for those escaping enslavement in the United States. Related to its southern perch, Canadians, always taken with weather, also like to boast how the Windsor-Essex region is located at the same latitude as northern California. The city also holds cachet as a border town because it looks north, across the river, to the U.S. and the iconic American city of Detroit. Together, the two metropolitan areas have a population close to six million people.**

**The lives of its residents, current and past, are inextricably entwined, so we start here.**



# Place

## Leveraging a shared economy

### Connection to Detroit and the United States

The Detroit-Windsor urban area is North America's most populated trans-border metropolis, and the Ambassador Bridge border crossing is the busiest commercial crossing along the Canada-U.S. border, handling approximately one-third of all trade between the two countries (about \$500 million per day). At least 6,000 Ontario residents, many from Windsor, work in metro Detroit, crossing the international border regularly.

Given the proximity to U.S. markets, Windsor-Essex is home to a wide range of different sectors. This diversity of industries adds to the strength, character, and resiliency of the local economy, offering educational, training and career opportunities for thousands in the region. Known for the last several decades as the "automotive capital of Canada," Windsor's industrial and manufacturing heritage is largely responsible for how the city has developed through the years. Traditional expertise in automotive, agriculture, transportation and logistics have collided with advanced and next-generation technology to create emergent industries in agri-tech, advanced manufacturing, information and communication technology, autonomous and electric vehicles, cybersecurity and logistics.



### County connection:

Essex County is a primarily rural county in southwestern Ontario, comprising seven municipalities: Amherstburg, Kingsville, Lakeshore, LaSalle, Leamington, Tecumseh and the administrative seat, Essex. Windsor is geographically located within but administratively independent of Essex County.

# Place

## Leveraging a shared economy

### Re-invention through “automobility”

The proximity of Windsor to Detroit provides Windsor, a mid-sized city, opportunities it would not otherwise have. The manufacturing expertise in both cities is shifting their economies to include more technologically advanced pursuits such as autonomous, electric vehicles and the technology required to operate them at a commercial level. This is a concerted shift from automotive to “automobility”.

Windsor is now home to a cluster of technology companies specializing in these industry sectors. Windsor is betting and building on this newly re-defined sector being at the core of its economic development for the future. We also heard calls for caution, to ensure that this automotive focus is balanced by a focus on other sectors and economic opportunities for the community, including in the green economy and in fostering arts, entrepreneurship and innovation.



**Automobility is the secure, zero-emission movement of people and goods and all of the information technology related to do that. So, for example, when you talk about active transportation, new mobility solutions or urban planning from an infrastructure standpoint and how it relates to mobility, that’s where automobility fits in. In Windsor, the sector is supported by provincial and federal funding.”**

**Matthew Johnson,  
Executive Director,  
Invest WindsorEssex**



# Place

## Leveraging a shared economy

### Fostering a culture of innovation

Windsor is a city with a rich history of innovation. The city built and operated one of the first electrified streetcar fleets in the world at the turn of the 20th century. This willingness to try new things, innovate, and build lays the foundation for a supportive technology ecosystem. Windsor is home to a large cluster of manufacturing, information and communication technology companies. Through the **Ontario Centre of Innovation**, provincial funding is being provided to support an **Autonomous Vehicle Innovation Network**. Windsor now hosts one of six regional technology development sites across Ontario. The collaborative efforts across government, industry, universities, and local talent helps position Windsor's auto sector for the future.

Windsor is home to Canada's largest publicly accessible **Virtual Reality CAVE**, a teaching, training and research tool for the region and beyond, designed to support connected and autonomous vehicle development. It delivers simulation capabilities for advanced manufacturing simulations, virtual training, quality evaluations, component simulation, autonomous engineering and testing, virtual drive scenarios, high-end data visualizations and one-to-one scale virtual reviews. It allows industry to test products and processes without the high costs associated with final verification on physical prototypes. Take a virtual tour [here](#).

Innovation is also found in other sectors. Essex County is home to the largest and most intensive greenhouse growing area in Canada, where automation is catching up. Most of that innovation is homegrown – from the sector itself and the benchmarking between what's happening in the automotive sector and the greenhouse sector (in addition to what's happening in other greenhouse-heavy locations such as the Netherlands).

The City is bursting with glimpses of other innovative and entrepreneurial approaches, across sectors, which only need to be nurtured to blossom.



I think we'd be remiss if we didn't talk about the innovation that's also happening in another very large sector and where there is some crossover between sectors and where there's opportunity for learning. I'm talking specifically about the greenhouse sector, which also uses automation. And I think one of the key insights there is that their automation is sometimes coming from our own backyard, but also coming from other centres, mostly the Netherlands. And we use those as opportunities to look at benchmarking, between what's happening in one sector versus what's happening in another."

**Jeanine Lassaline-Berglund,**  
**President, Canadian**  
**Association of Mold Makers**  
**and Automate Canada**



**WEtech Alliance** describes itself as Windsor-Essex's technology accelerator, an industry-led non-profit focused on driving the growth and

success of the region's technology-centric companies and entrepreneurs through leadership, connections, and promotion. WEtech strives to identify, find solutions and foster the development of the technology industry. WEtech is one of 17 Regional Innovation Centres in Ontario and funded by the Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs.



The **Small Business & Entrepreneurship Centre** is a division of Invest WindsorEssex. "Since 1992, the Centre has provided entrepreneurs with a

one-stop shop for starting and growing their businesses in Windsor-Essex. The Centre provides training and support, as well as guidance and professional advice from the ideation stage, through concept to start-up and operation. Business owners are assisted in early growth phases and expansion".



Windsor Law's **LTEC Lab** "brings together university faculty, students and alumni whose research, teaching, work and experiential learning

initiatives revolve around the themes of law and technology." Its work is "firmly embedded in the Faculty of Law's institutional themes of access to justice and transnational law. The lab provides experiential learning, research opportunities, courses and community outreach."



**EPICentre (Entrepreneurship, Practice and Innovation Centre)** is an entrepreneurial hub located at the University of Windsor. The Centre

"provides students from any discipline and post-secondary institution opportunities to explore and practice entrepreneurial thinking and culture. From extracurricular activities to hands-on workshops in its makerspace, the Centre provides plenty of opportunities for students to test ideas".



**Invest WindsorEssex** is a non-profit organization

"responsible for advancing economic development to grow and sustain prosperity in the region. As the lead economic development organization, IWE provides confidential and expert assistance to companies and entrepreneurs in all sectors, with a focus on developing and executing strategies that retain, expand, attract and help start-ups. It is supported by the City of Windsor and the County of Essex".



The University of Windsor received \$4.3 million in federal and industry funding to support research into next-generation electric vehicle production.

Researchers are working on this project with industry partners, including Ford, D&V Electronics and Nemak.

## Place

# Recognizing the city's rich history and culture

Windsor has a deep and rich cultural history, still felt along its streets and in its institutions. It counts itself as among one of most diverse cities in Canada.

### Indigenous Peoples

Over the course of the past decade, Windsor's formal institutions have begun to centre the legacies, both past and present, of First Nations Peoples. The public and Catholic school boards have both brought additional resources to instructional curricula and student supports. The University of Windsor supports the **Aboriginal Education Centre, Turtle Island**. Its programming includes the Aboriginal Education Council, walking tours and brown bag series, and the Native Student Alliance. The **Art Gallery of Windsor** hosts permanent exhibits on the history of the Original People's Culture and Legacy," through the **Chimczuk Museum**. Even the regional hospital has made some steps, establishing a small Indigenous Navigator program. Most of these changes have been obtained with some struggles and are steps toward reconciliation. A number of Indigenous-led organizations also pepper the city: the Can-Am Urban Native Non-profit Homes, the Can-Am Friendship Centre and the regional network of childcare centres through the Ska:Na Family Learning Centre.

## Place

# Recognizing the city's rich history and culture

### **The Underground Railroad**

In the 1800s, Windsor was a key stop for enslaved African Americans seeking freedom through the Underground Railroad – a network of secret routes, safe houses and people throughout the United States during the early to mid-19th century. Many crossed the Detroit River to Windsor and Upper Canada to escape pursuit by slave catchers. Estimates suggest that 30,000 to potentially 100,000 enslaved African Americans and free citizens escaped via the Underground Railroad to southern Ontario, into Windsor, Niagara Falls and Toronto. Old Sandwich Town located directly on the Detroit River on the west side of Windsor, is home to Sandwich First Baptist Church, which was the first stop in Canada for many travelling the Underground Railroad. The International Memorial to the Underground Railroad is a two-part installation on both sides of the Detroit River. Equally sited in Windsor and Detroit, the 22-foot high monuments face each other and pay tribute to the thousands that searched for freedom.





#### Profile

**Yvonne Pilon** is the President and CEO of **WEtech Alliance** and a driving force behind building a diverse economy that attracts and retains top talent, business and investment in Windsor-Essex. Yvonne advocates for progressive change as Windsor-Essex strives to become the automobility capital of Canada. Identifying the underrepresentation of women in Windsor's most viable industries, she advocates for platforms that will expose young girls and women to opportunities in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields. Yvonne is calling for the development of a dedicated innovation hub to serve as a nexus of collaboration that leverages Windsor's cluster of expertise and fosters the next generation of forward thinkers. She was the 2020 Canadian delegate for the G20 Young Entrepreneurs' Alliance.



## Place

# Recognizing the city's rich history and culture

### A tight-knit, but low-profile, arts community

Windsor enjoys a tight-knit arts community with incredible artists, musicians, and poets. Sheila Wisdom, Executive Director of the **Windsor Symphony Orchestra** (WSO), describes how one of Windsor's strengths is how easily one can pick up the phone and connect with another artist. "We are willing to work together and to help one another in a way that perhaps doesn't exist in other communities." A thriving arts and culture sector is vital to a strong city and is an expression of who a city is as a people. Despite having talented artists and renowned organizations, Windsor struggles with making the arts known to a wider community in Windsor and Essex County. Robert Franz, WSO's Music Director, noted, "A huge chunk of our population doesn't know who we are, doesn't know what we do during the year." The potential for economic development and tourism campaigns to highlight Windsor talent was suggested as another positive way to attract people to the city.

The **Windsor International Film Festival** (WIFF) is centred on Canadian and international film and is the largest volunteer-run film festival in Canada, held over 10 days every year. In 2019, WIFF broke another record, selling more than 42,000 tickets. During the pandemic, WIFF further cemented its commitment to innovation by organizing a drive-in festival, WIFF Under the Stars, enabling over 7,000 Windsorites to safely enjoy films. WIFF also held a free open-air WIFF Under the Stars in Charles Clark Square, downtown, showing many films with an urban or sustainability theme. Organizations such as ArtCite and the Arts Council of Windsor Essex help to animate the local arts community, and individual venues such as Phog Lounge – a long-standing institution in the city's downtown – play an important role in supporting live music. The city's restaurants and bars, too, contribute to a rich and diverse food culture.



# Place

## Investing in downtown renewal

### Reaching its full potential

Downtown Windsor is beginning to capitalize on its strengths, its exemplary institutional sector, its arts and culture, and its natural assets, to emerge as a more vital urban core. In recent years, the City has played a critical role in strengthening the downtown and succeeded in building strong partnerships with key stakeholders to propel these revitalization efforts forward. Despite these important gains, downtown Windsor has some way to go to reach its potential. It faces significant challenges in terms of addressing visible vacancies along its main shopping streets, attracting new businesses, growing its job base, filling its office inventory and attracting more residents. Homelessness, mental health and addictions crises have also worsened during the pandemic in Windsor, as in other cities, and are particularly acute in the downtown core.

We heard that people want to see more investment in the downtown core. Planning and investment decisions have prioritized the suburbs and left a core that doesn't meet the needs of the city or its residents. We heard that people have been left behind as inner-city programs and amenities have migrated to the suburban outskirts. Changing regional conditions have had a major impact on downtown Windsor. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Windsor's downtown core became known as a bar and hospitality district.

The core had been one of the most densely populated areas in North America on Friday and Saturday nights. With the downtown core heavily dependent on cross-border traffic and American tourists, the hospitality industry suffered deeply when those patrons disappeared after 9/11 and again after the SARS outbreak in the early 2000s.

Some of the planning decisions that were offered as examples of the disinvestment in the city core include the decision to locate the WFCU Centre, a hockey arena and entertainment complex, in the east end of the city, and closing the "Barn," the arena that had existed in the city centre since the 1920s. The new arena was seen as a vital anchor facility that would have brought more music venues, bars, restaurants, retail and commerce to the core. Similarly cited was the decision to close both hospitals within the city limits and build a new facility in a greenfield as a continuation of this trend. Another resented decision included replacing retail and placemaking opportunities with a parking garage on Pelissier Street. The downtown also does not have separated cycling infrastructure for those who don't have access to personal vehicles.





When the downtown Community Improvement Plan was approved in 2017 by Windsor City Council, it became a turning point for development downtown. 24 projects worth a total of \$135 million have been approved for grants since then, with more on the way.

Similarly, in an effort to fill unoccupied ground floor commercial spaces with new businesses, the Downtown Windsor BIA offers the Business Incentive Program which offers successful applicants 25 percent of their commercial rent for up to 12 months. An additional incentive program encourages façade improvements and the conversion of upper story space to new residential units.



## Place

# Downtown investment and missed opportunities

### A need to revitalize and invest

Both the University of Windsor and St. Clair College have established satellite campuses in the downtown core, in 2015 and 2007 respectively. The maintenance and attraction of existing and future anchor tenants will be key to continuing to activate the downtown core. Some pointed to a power imbalance which creates the strong pull to the suburbs and where race and class play out in the geography of the city.

### Missed opportunities

Recently, the proposed location of a \$2 billion hospital on farmland at the outskirts of the city, has drawn the **criticism** of some community advocates. The new 24-hectare facility replaces the Windsor Regional Hospital's two aging existing campuses, Ouellette and Metropolitan, making it difficult for downtown residents to access essential health services. Once these facilities close, there will be no full-service hospitals in the established footprint of the city. The proposed mega-hospital is to be located 11 kilometres from downtown, and further from other low-income areas such as Sandwich Town. There will be no hospital services easily accessible by transit, bicycle or on foot. People also expressed concern about the missed opportunity to continue investing in the downtown core, where revitalization is needed with a special focus on equity and accessibility, as the location is only easily accessed by car. They believe the hospital's location will encourage further urban sprawl, consume valuable farmland, is unsupportive of climate targets and will potentially contribute to flooding concerns. They also expressed concerns about the lack of meaningful consultation in determining the hospital's location. The Windsor Regional Hospital has indicated that public consultation will take place on the next phase of planning.



The City seems to have a bad habit of moving things out of the core that are needed in the core – and not just amenities like the arena. There are just little things, right now. The Adie Knox pool is being relocated to the west end, which a lot of downtown seniors use. There was some programming downtown for young people who live in Glengarry, a program really good at getting kids off the street. It's been moved away from downtown. Our major hospitals are moving away from downtown. For people who are disadvantaged and People of Colour, it appears that everything is being done to assuage the people in the suburbs and the County rather for those who live downtown.”

**Leslie McCurdy,**  
Artist and Chair, Black Council  
of Windsor-Essex

## Place

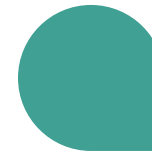
# Downtown investment and missed opportunities

### Downtown successes

Windsor has faced many economic challenges in recent years that have affected both the downtown and the city as a whole. The City and its stakeholders should be commended on the many steps they have taken to tackle these serious challenges by diversifying economic opportunities and building on the city's strengths. As Windsor reimagines and rebuilds in the coming years, the downtown will play an increasingly critical role on this road to recovery. The City has put a great deal of emphasis on strengthening the downtown in its planning policies and in a series of strategic public investments to improve facilities and quality of place downtown. For example, the **Downtown Windsor Enhancement Strategy and Community Improvement Plan** offers grants to encourage projects that will enhance downtown and includes projects such as: the conversion of existing upper storey spaces to new residential units, the development of new residential units, retail enhancements and facade improvements. In July 2021, Windsor City Council approved grants for two downtown buildings: the Canada building and Knights of Columbus building received \$600,000 for property tax incentives and facade grants. Both buildings are adding more than 120 housing units combined and accounts for \$135 million in development. Similarly, the Downtown Windsor business improvement association (BIA) reports 15 new businesses have opened since the beginning of the pandemic, with more on the horizon.




**Downtown Accelerator** is a creative entrepreneurial ecosystem that provides spaces for people and programs. The accelerator provides the tools and resources for people, artists and entrepreneurs, to change the landscape of the city. The Accelerator-to-Export program (A2X Project) creates a launching pad for Canadian high-growth technology and innovation start-ups to enter the U.S. market and vice versa. The Windsor Women Accelerate workshops create opportunities for female entrepreneurs to have candid conversations, co-create solutions and develop relationships.



**Windsor Eats** is an award-winning tourism business innovator.

The website showcases Windsor's best restaurants, local breweries, distilleries and wineries, as well as experiences for tourists and locals alike. Windsor Eats' Bird scooter tours have become a popular way to learn about and explore the city.





As part of a one-year pilot project, *Bird Canada* launched an e-scooter ride-sharing service in partnership with the City of Windsor. In May 2021, we heard positive response to the initiative. Windsor was among the first cities in the country to launch a scooter programme, and will add e-bikes in 2022. Windsorites logged the longest average rides of any Bird city during the pilot. Participants noted appreciation for rules that restrict scooters from city parks and limit speeds along the riverfront.

# Place

## Moving by multiple modes

### More than just cars

Windsor has a reputation for being a city that drives. The modern city was not only designed for the car, with sprawling and low-density development, but its economic history is tied to the development and production of the automobile. Known as the birthplace of Canada's automotive industry over a century ago and home to Canada's largest automotive cluster today, the region's industry is moving now, investing in "automobility": that is, connected, autonomous and electric vehicles.

Despite its reputation and current branding around the automobile, the region also has a long-forgotten history of cycling. Windsor has many of the elements of a walking and cycling paradise. The weather is among the mildest in cities across Canada, the terrain is flat, and committed individuals and organizations are advocating for safe and integrated active transportation. In 2018, the City launched Walk Wheel Windsor, a 20-year, integrated active transportation master plan to help increase the mode-share of non-car trips (i.e., walking, cycling, transit) from 10 percent to 25 percent by 2041. We heard that the city's challenge is to balance the needs of the auto industry, in its role as a crucial economic driver, with the wider need for sustainable, accessible, and equitable mobility options.

People also told us that to meet climate change objectives, the City's focus on automobility should not preclude it from building compact complete communities that people want to live in.



**We have strong bones in the city for cycling. The core is fantastic. It's containable. It's a flat city and the perfect size to allow for**

**people to get around. There are some really good things happening, and we'd be remiss too if we didn't point out that there have been a lot of improvements."**

**Chris Waters, Former Chair,  
Windsor Bicycling Committee**



**We know that having protected bike lanes or accessible, active transportation infrastructure will benefit our community by**

**reducing our carbon emissions and making our streets safer for cyclists, cars and our new scooters. It would facilitate a cheaper and more accessible form of transportation for working-class families living downtown. And it would even help support local businesses struggling to recover by drawing more people to the streets, to the businesses that are struggling to recover from the economic consequences of the pandemic."**

**Lyra Sheldon, President,  
Windsor-Essex  
Youth Climate Council**



**We've talked a lot about cycling, and that is an equitable form of transportation if you are able to access a bike... But there's**

**also a lot of work to be done with transit and we saw that when Windsor was the only city in Canada that shut down their transit during COVID."**

**Jessica Macasaet-Bondy,  
Activate Transit Windsor Essex**



# Place

## Moving by multiple modes

A big win for mobility advocates was the addition of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure on the new Gordie Howe International Bridge that will link Windsor and Detroit. This was not part of the original plan, but the community demanded it, and decision-makers responded to it. When the bridge opens in 2024, people will be able to walk and bike across the international border.

Another success was the 2020 redesign of the “Dougall Death Trap”. For decades, people had been calling on the City to fix this dangerous non-signalized intersection. A simple but well-designed underpass now provides a new, safe connection to downtown for people who want to walk or cycle.

Like all transit systems, Transit Windsor took a hit over the last year and was the only service in Canada that shut down for more than a month early on in the pandemic. Even before COVID-19 hit, people felt service improvements were desperately needed. Several people told us that transit operators need diversity training (addressing racism and disabilities).



The Active Transportation Master Plan is really good. It's a little less ambitious than I would like but, overall, it's strong. What's missing is solid follow up on that plan... One of the quick wins under the plan was supposed to be the development of a minimum cycling grid downtown for all ages and abilities, as a pilot project. Where's the urgency over those kinds of things?"

**Chris Waters, Former Chair,  
Windsor Bicycling Committee**



When I think about the bike lanes on the Gordie Howe Bridge, when that was first raised, people laughed at us... But it happened. It happened because we stayed focused, and we continued to advocate for the right investment decisions. We're winning. But we're not winning as quickly as we would like to and that's frustrating".

**Lori Newton, Bike  
Windsor-Essex**

# Place

## Moving by multiple modes

### Plans, plans and plans

In 2019 Windsor developed and approved *Walk Wheel Windsor*, its Active Transportation Master Plan and *More Than Transit*, its Transit Master Plan. These plans are solid in setting out the way forward for a well-connected and accessible Windsor. We heard however, that plans are falling short, in that their implementation is slowed or sidetracked by a lack of political will and the associated investments that are needed. Focusing on the actions set out in those plans would help to achieve Windsor's equity, public health and climate objectives.



**My mother had epilepsy and at various points in time, in her working life she couldn't drive because of issues related to seizures. But she was one of the most intelligent and connected human beings you could ever know. And without a transit system that can get you to your job, we are denying dignity and access to people in our community."**

**Melinda Munro, Munro Strategic Perspective, on the challenges her mother would face if she had lived in Windsor**



### Profile

**Nicole Baillargeon** is an architectural designer, developer, and artist. She is a Co-Founder, Director and Designer at **Mean Studio**, a design and development studio based in Windsor and Toronto. Nicole, like her Mean Studio co-founders, has backgrounds in both the arts and architecture. She has worked on projects that range in scale from sculpture, exhibitions and public installations to urban development and is committed to advancing the roles of thoughtful design and accessible art in the urban environment. She is currently a board member of the Ford City Business Improvement Area where she is also a property owner. Her storefront commercial building recently launched dedicated street-facing art space (Dry Goods Gallery), and she is currently organizing an exciting, large-scale public artwork and community engagement project with the Ford City BIA.

## Place

# Placekeeping: Change based on enhancing what is already there

### Nurturing new spaces and places

Placekeeping\* initiatives in Windsor stem from the community. The people we spoke to are excited about possibilities to build on the assets around them. Yet, they need resources and frameworks so that more spaces and places can be nurtured and benefit more people. We heard about wonderful places such as the **Downtown Windsor Farmers' Market** and exciting initiatives being led by BIAs and other community groups, but how can permanent spaces be created and nurtured year-round? We also heard an appetite for education - to help build local capacity for the practice of place.

We also heard that providing transit, pedestrian and cycling connections between places should be a focus. Some youth and others expressed that they are looking for places to hang out that don't involve alcohol or cost a lot of money.



It's a form and activity, a relationship. WIFF Alley has great form, but when you program it and you get activity going, that's when it cooks. When a place has good form, then it welcomes good activity. And conversely, if there is great activity organized and its place and location have great form, it has high potential to be sustainable over all the realms: economically, socially, ecologically and physiologically. But it has to be incremental. In Windsor, there is groundwork for what could be a reconnection of the disciplines to experiment, the prospect of actually formulating a Windsor-Essex initiative to build, teach, train and get into the practice of place".

**Jim Tischler, visiting Fellow  
at the Windsor Law Centre for  
Cities and Development  
Director of the Michigan Land  
Bank Authority**



**\*In the past, CUI used the term “placemaking”. We have since moved towards placekeeping, a term that is viewed as less colonial. Valerie Dawn from Glos Arch+Eng put forward, “Place is inherent to the land. And it’s actually not our job to come in and make it or put something on it. There is connection and complexity that’s innate in a place. And it’s our job to learn, build relationships, foster the strengths of the place and listen to it and enhance it, as opposed to coming in and placing something on top of it or making something as a superimposition.”**

## Place

# Placekeeping: Change based on enhancing what is already there

### Investment in the simple projects

Time and time again we heard from Windsorites that the farmers' market was one of their favourite places to be in Windsor. There seems to be an unmet demand for more of these kinds of places – those that may not require a big investment in infrastructure, but rather observance of and building on the assets and strength of communities that are already there. The new Windsor Downtown Districting Committee aims to develop a thriving downtown, building and creating places and spaces that allow placekeeping to occur naturally and organically. In the Ford City BIA, a series of 36 outdoor murals is bringing exciting grassroots placekeeping to that historic neighbourhood and helping to tell its story.

The **Green Corridor** course at the University of Windsor has been running for a number of years and brings together students from visual arts, architecture, communications, psychology, business, mechanical and environmental engineering and social sciences to work on a projects in a key district with local non-profit organizations to develop design initiatives. In the past, students have engaged with business improvement associations (BIAs) and communities to identify how they might revitalize neighbourhood main streets or develop green corridors. They are currently looking at the laneways in the city and connecting with local councillors, the BIA and the police department on design approaches.



What are those simple projects, like benches and green space, that can add vibrancy? It's not just about the expensive spectacular things."

**Pat Papadeas, DWBIA Chair,  
Board Director of WIFF**



Places that we are creating and restoring are not meant to be steered by one type of person or one type of group. They are meant to capture and then really hold space for the complexity of the communities that use them."

**Valerie Dawn,  
Glos Arch + Eng**



### Profile

Wearing many important hats in the community, **Dr. Vincent Georgie** is the Executive Director and Chief Programmer of the **Windsor International Film Festival**, the Acting Associate Vice-President (External) of the University of Windsor, on leave from his position as the Director of its School of Creative Arts (SOCA), and Chair of the Downtown Windsor Districting Committee. Vincent sees the potential of Windsor's downtown and is working toward leveraging the City's artistic talent and existing assets to transform the area into a true arts district.



## Place

# Placekeeping: Change based on enhancing what is already there

**The Windsor Riverfront Trail** is a five-kilometre trail that hugs the waterfront park, and connects downtown through the Hiram Walker distillery, sculpture gardens, festival plaza and features breathtaking views of Detroit, the river and the international bridge. It is accessible and usually busy year-round with people walking, cycling, rollerblading, running and scootering. This asset came up regularly as a favourite place for Windsorites and for those visiting the city.

In 2019, one downtown Windsor laneway went through a revitalization process. The idea came from **Windsor International Film Festival (WIFF)** patrons who were using the lane as a shortcut to travel between theatres. In fact, it was patrons who started referring to the lane as WIFF Alley. To build on the momentum, with financial support sourced by Ward 3 Councillor Rino Bortolin and in partnership with WIFF, the alley was transformed and has become one of the most photographed places in the city.



Why fight against that? Patrons of the festival were using the alley as their shortcut – we just built upon the organic ‘desire path’ of users who had already decided what works best for them. Our job was only to make that journey more vibrant.”

**Vincent Georgie,**  
**Executive Director, WIFF**









## Place

# Placekeeping: Change based on enhancing what is already there

The Brain Injury Association of Windsor and Essex County has created **Butterfly Lane** in Walkerville, an initiative planned by and for people with brain injuries to bring awareness, reduce stigma, create beautiful and accessible spaces that the public can enjoy and stimulate local business.

We also learned about a resident- and business owner-led initiative just outside the city. **Thrive Amherstburg** is building the vibrancy of the town with active transportation measures (like encouraging cycling open streets and lowering the speed limit), creating affordable housing, addressing climate change, recognizing its heritage, building great parks and lowering parking minimums in development.



## Place

# Managing growth and protecting natural assets

### An abundance of natural assets

“The River and the Land Sustain Us” can be found on Windsor’s Coat of Arms and is the name of the city’s official plan. The environment is central to the story of Windsor and its motto is a celebration of its natural heritage and beauty. From the experience of Indigenous peoples to the arrival of European settlers, the Detroit River and the surrounding landscape have played central roles in the development of the region’s peoples and cultures. Windsor is rich in natural assets like freshwater access, urban forests, parks, conservation areas, wetlands and marshes, farmlands and Pelee Island.

We heard repeatedly how the Detroit River is an incredible asset that is a marvellous public space and forms a core part of the identity of the city, but also that it is somehow isolated from the city. Riverside Drive acts as a barrier and “tentacles” are needed to provide better connections to downtown and the rest of the city.

### Canada’s second national urban park

The Ojibway Prairie Complex is almost 900 acres of protected forest, wetland and savannah. The Windsor-Essex region is host to a unique diversity of flora and fauna not found elsewhere in Canada, providing rich biodiversity worthy of protection. Endorsed by City Council and Parks Canada, the National Urban Parks initiative will see the Ojibway Prairie Complex and associated parks consolidated into the **Ojibway National Urban Park**, the second of its kind in Canada. The region is also host to the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge where conservation efforts straddle both sides of the border – the only one of its kind in North America.





#### Profile

**Panayota "Pat" Papadeas** is a Professor at **St. Clair College**, member of the Downtown Windsor business improvement association (BIA), and on the Board of Directors for the Windsor International Film Festival and the Downtown Districting Committee. She teaches courses in business law, employment law, law and ethics in the digital age, and business ethics. She also developed the curriculum of St. Clair's Paralegal Program, which was accredited by the Law Society of Upper Canada in 2009. Pat is a co-host of the very popular Rose City Politics podcast, focused on Windsor's political "movers-and-shakers". As a trusted local personality, Pat breaks down, discusses, and educates people on the political scene in Windsor-Essex.



# Place

## Managing growth and protecting natural assets

### Managing growth

Within a 20-minute drive of anywhere in the city, Windsorites can access natural landscapes, farmland and fresh produce markets. The City has worked closely with stakeholders and agencies to bolster development standards through a consideration of environmental impacts.

However, some people are worried that the city is growing by “eating away” at agricultural land and those important natural assets. Many, for example, were disappointed that the new hospital was being located on undeveloped land rather than in the already built-up area of Windsor.

Windsorites recognize that one cannot have a conversation about protecting natural assets without acknowledging the city’s development patterns and car dependency over the last few decades. We heard that more conversations are needed and tools should be put in place to encourage denser settlement patterns. We also heard there are good starts related to “missing middle” housing, accessory dwelling units and city policies to support these. This is intertwined with the work to address and support people to “age in place,” transit and active transportation infrastructure, the housing crisis and climate action.



**We’re seeing huge amounts of money being passed down for things around nature-based solutions. And certainly, I think there’s an alignment there for land use planning and some of the flooding issues that we’re seeing and maybe solutions.”**

**Claire Sanders, Climate Change Specialist,  
Essex Region Conservation Authority**



**One of the key reasons we’re so passionate about advocating for a better hospital plan is because by building more sprawl on the outskirts of the city, we’re just eating away at that agricultural land that we should be preserving for future generations... The more we eat away at our natural spaces, the harder it becomes for people without cars to access any of that.”**

**Philippa Von Ziegenweidt,  
Spokeswoman, Citizens for an  
Accountable Mega-Hospital  
Planning Process**



**Some recent initiatives by Council and city administration, regarding the promotion of missing middle housing and density in the core, are leading us toward a solution that builds in that density allowing us to reclaim some of that land or ensure that any appropriate lands are protected from development.”**

**Kenneth Acton, Professor at St. Clair College,  
Windsor Region Society of Architects**

# Place

## Approaching climate change as an opportunity

### Need for local government leadership

Windsor's institutions are taking steps to address climate change. The City was an early adopter of climate mitigation measures, starting with its greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory in 2010. In 2015, it launched a community task force, and it joined and now reports to the **Global Covenant of Mayors**, a global alliance for climate leadership and action. In 2017, Council approved its **Community Energy Plan**, focused on the economic advantages of transitioning to a low carbon economy. The plan strives to establish Windsor as a community energy centre, while also paying attention to local jobs and energy poverty. In 2019, the City of Windsor and Essex County each declared a climate emergency, joining 2,012 other jurisdictions in 34 countries. These declarations have had evident influence on approaches to policy, planning and asset management, however current funding levels and structuring of the City's climate department and lack of resources affects the ability to drive deeper change. In May 2020 city council unanimously approved a plan to accelerate climate action in response to the climate emergency. Among other measures, it mandated a climate risk analysis be included in every administration report to council.

In addition to this climate lens, the City is articulating how asset management and capital investments relate to GHG reduction or improvement and developing other indicators to measure impact. This extends to **natural asset management**, a new approach that the City is currently developing.

To date, its climate work had been more on adaptation and responding to historic flooding than mitigation. So this was introduced with the recognition that trees and natural areas help mitigate climate change and reduce the heat island effect, but also remain vulnerable to severe weather.



One of the things that is really unique about our municipality is we have a climate lens in our Council reports. Report authors look at their project through a mitigation adaptation lens to report on climate and resiliency impacts.”

**Karina Richters,**  
Supervisor of Environmental  
Sustainability and Climate  
Change, City of Windsor



Essex County just approved its **Regional Energy Plan**, developed with the Essex Region Conservation Authority.



### An international resource

City staff have provided advice to other cities in Canada and internationally. This includes collaborating with Mannheim,

Germany to advise on its Sustainable Development Goals review and action plan. Windsor is also connected with Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain, another mid-sized city built up around the auto sector and other European and north American cities.

## Place

# Approaching climate change as an opportunity

### UWindsor leadership

Outside of government, there is some positive thinking and action on climate initiatives.

The University of Windsor is in the process of developing its own long-term sustainability plan with specific measurable outcomes to reduce its carbon footprint, and support teaching and research on climate change. Researchers across a variety of faculties are engaged in community-based collaborations on climate research and advocacy. In 2019, the Windsor Law Centre for Cities launched the **Cities and Climate Action Forum** with funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada's Climate Action Fund that aims to empower youth and community leaders from across Ontario to seek meaningful policy-related climate action in their own communities. In February 2021, the Forum partnered with the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA)'s climate specialist, Claire Sanders, Windsor Law's Transnational Environmental Law Programme, and the Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research (GLIER) to organize **Climate Week at UWindsor**. In the opening session, leaders from several Windsor-Essex anchor institutions including school boards, hospitals, higher education and municipal government shared their organizations' work and plans on climate mitigation. These programmes and more - including the University's Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Science's School of the Environment – are offering education and research pathways with a focus on climate science and policy. In 2020, the university's **Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research** partnered with Detroit's Wayne State University's Transformative Research in Urban Sustainability Training to host a seminar series delivered by graduate students from both universities, with a focus on connecting the virtual graduate student and early-career research communities and sharing global examples of impactful climate science, practice and policy.

# Place

## Needing affordable housing options

### Increasing costs of ownership and a lack of social housing

Canada is undergoing a housing affordability crisis, and it is being felt acutely by Windsorites. In Ontario, Windsor is considered one of the most affordable cities (with a population over 100,000) according to [market research](#). Yet, the recent booming price increases have left many aspiring first-time homebuyers in Windsor locked out of the home ownership market. On the rental side, the social housing [waitlist](#) in Windsor-Essex grew to 5,400 by the end of 2021, signalling a vital lack of supply for low-income earners.

Like in many Canadian cities, there are two sides to the housing crisis. From the outside, Windsor is attracting new residents with one of the hottest and affordable housing markets in the country. But from the inside, stagnant wages, insecure employment, and skyrocketing housing prices have Windsor residents worried they will never be able to afford a home.



I think the largest reason for coming back and moving back home to Windsor is we just have a very different culture locally and definition of affordable. I'll put it out and I still get all my friends from Toronto messaging me, 'I'm going to come to Windsor' because according to [blogTO](#), Windsor is the most affordable place in Ontario. We, as Windsorites still feel like this is unaffordable, and yet we're considered the most affordable city in Ontario."

[Bradley Ouellette, Lauter Holdings Inc.](#)



Home values have gone up, but average incomes have not. Some of the higher-end incomes have increased, but not the average across the community. And so that gap is getting wider."

[Rino Bortolin, Councillor, City of Windsor](#)



### Profile

**Jessica Macasaet-Bondy** is an **environmental advocate** who celebrates Windsor's bountiful natural assets. As a resident of Spring Garden, Jessica enjoys easy cycling access to natural trails and landscapes. She is excited about the National Urban Park initiative to conserve and protect the Ojibway Prairie Complex. In May, Jessica and her partner led a virtual Jane's Walk showing people how to get to the Ojibway Prairie Complex on foot from the Capri Pizzeria Recreation Complex. Jessica feels that education is an important component of addressing challenges around Windsor's growth and environmental stewardship. Jessica is a recent grant winner, through the 8-80 Cities Changemakers' program, for her work on transit advocacy, leading Activate Transit Windsor-Essex.



# Place

## Needing affordable housing options

### Limited housing options

We heard that Windsor is lacking a true mix of housing choices that can cater to all demographics, including low-income earners, international students, urban professionals and seniors needing to downsize or move into housing that better meets their health, financial and lifestyle needs. Typical of Canadian post-war city planning, Windsor sprawled out into the surrounding countryside. Forty years ago, Windsor had the same population as today while using 30 percent less space. Residential lots have gotten larger and more spread out, stretching out amenities and infrastructure to a point where life without a car hinders access to the city. Wealthier residents have largely settled in the suburban neighbourhoods, abandoning the city core.

Echoing the debate in other cities, we heard suggestions that “missing middle” housing types can be permitted and scaled in a way that respects the character and massing of existing single-detached homes.

People also pointed out that moving elsewhere is a privilege not many have. Many living in Windsor’s urban core are lower-income families and people of more limited means. So residents are calling for the City to invest in initiatives to improve the livability of the core, promoting the infusion of businesses and services that existing and future residents need now. Historically, more attention has been paid to outer-lying areas of the region.



**The conversation that has to be had is if you want to bring your techie, your high-income tech person downtown, the need for housing stock. But then you have to have a conversation about how you gently gentrify those neighbourhoods in a way that doesn’t displace people because there’s nowhere else for them to go.”**

**Frazier Fathers,  
Institutional Strategic  
Planning Project Manager,  
University of Windsor**

# Place

## Needing affordable housing options

### **A deficit of rental housing**

The availability of rental housing is also affected by the annual influx of 4,000 students (many international) from outside the city. The University of Windsor and St. Clair College have been criticized for not coordinating this with other local institutions including the City of Windsor before accepting dramatically increased international student enrolment numbers.

In addition, in 2015 and 2016, Windsor was one of 36 Canadian communities that welcomed many of the 25,000 Syrian refugees that sought asylum in Canada. Well over 1,000 people settled in the Windsor-Essex region, and more have come afterwards, putting additional pressure on rental housing availability in Windsor, especially in the core neighbourhoods. Residents and community groups stepped up to organize supportive responses, but Windsor's reputation as a place where it is cheaper to settle has waned.

Both the cost and supply of rental housing remain a problem.

**Sandwich Lights**  
**A Poem by**  
**Alexei Ungurenasu**

I map Sandwich between two lights.

To the east, the Ambassador Bridge,  
its imposing red sign and smaller white lights  
flow from it; to the west,  
an orange, pulsing cloud of smoke  
rises from Zug Island.

We live beneath these lights,  
and every night the lights observe us –  
while a third, smaller light,  
a white neon sign on a windmill  
says “all we are is all we were.”

When I walk home in the evening,  
or when I meet my friends at a bar  
on Sandwich Street,  
my eyes meet the orange cloud  
or the bridge’s sign.

But they are not guiding lights.

Under the bridge,  
the barren side of Indian Road  
feels darker than the inside of the bar.

Lights go on and off in Sandwich,  
people move in and out,  
but these three lights remain.

The windmill’s sign reminds me  
of who I was. Sandwich is part  
of all I am and its lights  
will always be a glimmer in my eyes.



### Profile

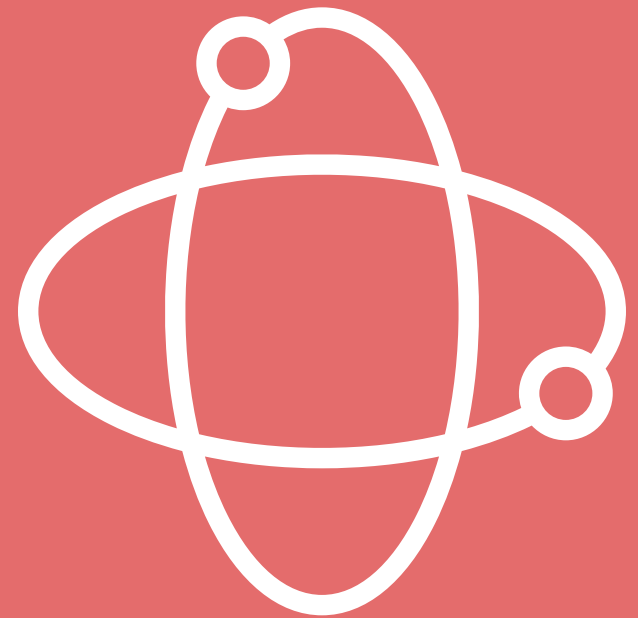
**Alexei Ungurenasu is a Romanian-Canadian poet and artist and Windsor's youth poet laureate (2021-2023). Alexei studies English and philosophy at the University of Windsor and is an active member in the local arts community, volunteering and working with organizations such as the Vanguard Youth Arts Collective, the Art Gallery of Windsor and the Humanities Research Group on the university's campus. In their poetry, Alexei provides the perspective of an outsider-become-insider as they describe various places, images and people from their life. Alexei opened the CUI x Windsor session on the arts by reading this poem that speaks to their experiences in the historic Windsor community of Sandwich. They kindly granted permission to publish this poem.**



## Potential

**This section focuses on what Windsorites told us they see for the future of their city and particularly the opportunities and the strengths they want to build on. The choices that are made by locals are critical. The city's future will be shaped by those who claim the space, those who listen, and those who work together.**

**The final part of this report highlights the things we heard that may influence and shape the city's future.**



# Potential

## Building trust between the city and communities

### Leveraging communities' groundwork

Throughout the three days of virtual roundtables, we heard over and over the need to build greater trust between municipal government and community. We listened to residents express the need for more and better mechanisms to engage with the City and be heard. There are opportunities for political leadership and municipal staff to tap into the lived experiences of communities to make better informed and more responsive investments. Community organizations, non-profits and foundations have already laid the groundwork for tackling a series of concerns whether they be related to growth management, homelessness, enabling youth, economic prosperity and anti-racism efforts.



**There are Windsorites who are desperate to give you their thoughts but don't have mechanisms for doing so. But until they [city administration backed by Council, school boards, etc.] get down to the people, the real issues will continue to be missed."**

**Just Recovery  
workshop participant**

# Potential

## Building trust between the city and communities

### Revisiting public consultation, engagement and participation

Meaningful participation can help the city better understand and service the needs of Windsorites. Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic may offer an opportune time to rework the consultation process to incorporate anti-racist and new equity approaches. This means going beyond administering surveys, to identifying opportunities for meeting people where they are and building relationships.

A transparent process is key to gaining the trust of the people and determining if feedback is being meaningfully gathered and integrated into public policy. Considering the trends in anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Asian racism and Islamophobia, is there a better way to counteract these trends than consulting with these communities directly? On a positive note, City officials also shared that their departments and employees would benefit from equity and diversity training. For example, Transit Windsor has been rolling out anti-racism training for drivers and staff.

The City is just starting the implementation of its economic development strategy, Windsor Works. This is an opportunity for the City to connect and engage with the people and communities who are directly impacted by the strategy and who were not engaged during the development of the strategy, to leverage the wealth of knowledge and experience they demonstrate.



# Potential Transitioning to a new economy

## **An industrial base to build on**

As Canada's automotive capital, Windsor stands out compared to U.S. "rust belt" cities when it comes to retaining manufacturing jobs. But like other cities, it remains vulnerable to market shifts. However, people feel it has a lot of potential to evolve, building on its past and its ability to adapt, as demonstrated in recent years. Matthew Johnson, Executive Director of Mobility Partnerships and Innovation at Invest WindsorEssex, emphasized, "When you overlay the ICT (information and communication technology) sector and manufacturing sector, there's no greater concentration of the two coming together. And that "automobility" term really is the definition of those two sectors coming together."

## **Leveraging the green transition**

As Windsor's cluster of automation and manufacturing companies shift from the production of internal combustion engine to the commercial adoption of autonomous and electric vehicles, these companies enjoy access to a wide pool of qualified workers in the city. The skills developed as part of the traditional manufacturing sector could be transferrable to the automobility sector. The industries of the city have an opportunity to re-train the workforce to benefit from and carry out the green manufacturing revolution.

# Potential

## Creating a sustainable future through STEM and more

Windsor is building on its economic history and its strengths by focusing on “automobility,” the secure, zero-emission movement of people and goods and the related information technology. Automobility is centred in Windsor Works, the city’s new economic development strategy. A call for a broadened approach was also something we heard. Arts and culture-related industries, or “creative industries,” provide direct economic benefits to communities: they create jobs, attract investments, generate tax revenues, and stimulate local economies through tourism and purchasing.

We heard support for the region’s higher education institutions fostering career paths that will help create a well-rounded and sustainable city. The University and the College provide training in a variety of fields that contribute to strengthening the connective tissue of good city-building. While the University no longer has a degree programme in urban planning, programmes in visual arts and the built environment, political science, sociology and other humanities, law, and business, environmental science, and engineering (in particular the Faculty’s focus on sustainability) to name a few, all have a role to play.

Climate science and policy is one area where it was clear that researchers at the University of Windsor have the opportunity to lead. Participants told us that climate action in Windsor, as elsewhere, is often viewed as political and counter to economic development. Researcher participants noted that better “marketing”, reframing the discussion to emphasize the economic benefits of climate action and a green transition, and specific business case examples would be helpful to demonstrate how good climate policy also has positive returns on investment. We also heard from participants that as anchor institutions, the University and the College can provide important leadership by example on climate action.



**We need far more transparent, historic business cases of success, so people can understand that it’s good business to transition to a low carbon economy, because it really is. It’s not enough to just say, oh, you know, it’s going to pay off in the end. We need these business cases. Climate needs better marketing.”**

**Rupp Carriveau, Director,  
Environmental Energy  
Institute and Professor,  
University of Windsor**

# Potential

## Creating a sustainable future through STEM and more

### Research in action

Windsor's post-secondary institutions are also reaching outside their walls in building research collaborations. The University of Windsor established the Cross-Border Institute (CBI) to examine policy challenges related to the movement of people, goods and funds across borders. CBI serves as a centre of excellence in border management and security. One of their most recent initiatives, a \$206,000 project supported by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and the Ontario Research Fund, includes monitoring one of the city's busiest intersections leading into and away from the Ambassador Bridge in hopes of better understanding traffic flow and improving safety for all road users near border crossings.

WE-SPARK Health Institute is a collaboration between Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare, University of Windsor, St. Clair College and Windsor Regional Hospital. This partnership brings together health research, expertise and infrastructure across Windsor-Essex to develop research streams that tackle health issues and advance discoveries, innovation, technology and professional training.

The Centre for Cities (C4C) at the University of Windsor's Faculty of Law has gained both national and local attention for its focus on the legal and policy tools related to municipalities and local institutions. The Centre provides opportunities for students, faculty, municipal governments, community organizations and advocates to collaborate, exchange ideas and work together to achieve the goals of sustainable and inclusive local governance. Both C4C and the CBI were collaborators on a recent \$200,000 Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Housing Data Challenge-funded project led by Family Services Windsor Essex (FSWE), with collaboration and governance oversight by a number of other community stakeholders. The project also provided employment for several UWindsor law and engineering students, providing experiential education related to good city-building.



Some of these issues, like climate change, are big issues with which people will not be able to identify. So we need things individuals can relate to that that will coalesce into a larger grand plan.”

**Edwin Tam, Acting Associate Vice-President Academic, University of Windsor**

# Potential

## Creating an ecosystem for collaboration

### Interest in greater collaboration

In order to unlock the full potential of Windsor's economy and vitality, more and closer collaboration could be pursued between actors and stakeholders in the municipal, academic and industrial sectors along with other community partners.

We heard from senior people across Windsor's post-secondary institutions that they strongly support the creation of platforms and frameworks to foster organic collaborations, whether it be between the university and the college, or among the institutions and the City, local businesses and employers. We heard a similar interest from City of Windsor senior administrators. Such frameworks would help to encourage further the types of community-facing collaborations profiled above. Kenneth Acton from St. Clair College highlighted how the architecture program often gets involved with local communities or organizations to provide support. For example, instructors will assign students mock projects that concern real issues related to the built environment to generate ideas for communities in need.

We also heard from Windsorites that they feel educational institutions have a responsibility to neighbourhoods and communities. We also heard suggestions about ways in which post-secondary institutions could be better "neighbours" to the community. This includes readjusting strategies to make campuses more of a welcoming space for people living in adjacent neighbourhoods. It also includes rethinking how institutions communicate and consult with the wider community. The University's School of Creative Arts (SOCA), located in the heart of downtown Windsor, was praised for its open-to-community approach, through lots of public events, which creates a sense of belonging.



Do the needs and the demands of our community warrant radical change? And by that I mean fast, impactful, tangible improvements.

The answer is yes, right. And if you want to make real progress, we need something more. It means boxing the risk. I think we need to say, look, we're going to do this. We know it's not perfect. We haven't figured it all out and there's going to be unintended consequences. But let's go. Let's do it. And if people can start to accept that level of iteration, give us feedback. Tell us it isn't working or we've missed the mark here. That's how I think we can actually make it happen. I think this Council and this community want that."

**Jason Reynar,**  
**Chief Administrative Officer,**  
**City of Windsor**



# Potential

## Creating an ecosystem for collaboration

### **A central hub to support innovation**

There was wide support expressed for a centralized hub for innovation, or “sandbox”, to create a core for innovative activity. Creating a wider ecosystem for innovation includes key ingredients such as space, critical mass and access to capital. These elements are pivotal to attract and keep entrepreneurs and young people in Windsor. We also heard that innovation should be defined broadly, rather than focusing solely on technology – that it should include innovation in housing form, urban planning, public engagement, small business incubation, and more.

### **Creating an attractive place to live and work**

Most local high school students continuing to post-secondary stay in Windsor for university or college. But for every two university graduates that the city attracts, three leave. We heard about the need to strengthen the pipeline of talent from the university and college into local employment. But we also heard that residents – including young people – want quality of life too, things like strong neighbourhoods, public transit, local amenities and more, to encourage them to stay or return. Further, with more people working from home, spaces outside of the workplace are becoming more important than ever to attracting and retaining talent.



[University of Windsor and St. Clair College] do have a research collaboration agreement in place. We would have liked to see more collaborative activity in terms of joint research and innovation projects. It's been a bit challenging because there are few funding programs available to support collaborative research projects for both the college and the university.”

**Heather Pratt,**  
**Executive Director of**  
**Research and Innovation,**  
**University of Windsor**

# Potential

## Creating an ecosystem for collaboration

### Achieving gender equity in industry

Many people told us about the need to increase opportunities for women in what is a heavily male workforce. Among Canada's largest cities, Windsor came 20th on gender parity using a host of indicators, including economic and personal security, health and leadership. People told us there is a need to find ways to boost women's participation. A number of things are already happening to boost women in tech, including a Canada Learning Code chapter in Windsor that aims to get women and girls interested in coding, a Women in Cybersecurity community at the University of Windsor, and in 2019 WETech Alliance created a new 'Women in Tech' award category to celebrate and acknowledge female leadership in Windsor.



When it comes to the tech community, you need a street address that matters. You need a clubhouse where the tech community comes to be inspired, to work on their businesses, to be supported with wrap around supports, to be collided with industry, and to be collided with one another. It's about bringing together entrepreneurs, industry, and talent in meaningful collisions and creating a sense of community. The space needs to be connected. And that means actually connected in terms of having a number of service providers under it, but also connected to all the other innovation districts and talent outputs, the Automotive and Innovation Centre, the university, the college."

**Yvonne Pilon,**  
**WEtech Alliance**



**When it comes to attracting talent and investment, we need to find ways to collaborate across sectors. We need to focus both on the concrete spaces and opportunities for investment, and on what makes the city a place people are really excited to come to.”**

**Dr. Anneke Smit,  
Director, Windsor Law  
Centre for Cities**



**Working remotely is not binary for younger generations. Companies that locate their office space in walkable, vibrant neighbourhoods can use these places as an extension of the office to attract and retain talent.”**

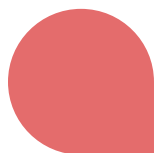
**Steven Pressacco,  
President and Owner,  
SHIFT Interiors**





As we strive to become the automobility capital of Canada, let's strive for change. Women are underrepresented in tech, STEM fields and automotive. There is the need for 'cradle to career' programs in order to foster interest in tech for women long before the start of university. Young women need to be supported and given a platform. A more diverse and inclusive tech community means access to more talent, more innovation, growing and thriving companies, and products built for everyone."

**Yvonne Pilon,**  
**President and CEO,**  
**WEtech Alliance**



In 2019, Invest Windsor Essex received \$692,000 from the Government of Canada through the **Women Entrepreneur Strategy** to provide coordinated

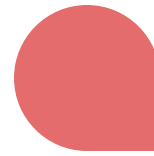
support to female entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses in emerging technologies.

Using this funding, Invest WindsorEssex, partnered with the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Centre, the University of Windsor's EPICentre, Workforce WindsorEssex, WEtech Alliance, Build-A-Dream and Windsor Essex Capital Angel Network (WECAN) to create RISE.

RISE is a network of organizations that are empowering women in entrepreneurship and women in STEM in Windsor-Essex County.







**Build a Dream**  
delivers specialized  
programs to  
encourage and  
empower female

students to explore careers where women are under-represented, while also working to create a gender-balanced workforce and change global perspectives on women's contribution to society. To date, they have connected with 20,000 students and parents to explore careers where women are under-represented like skilled trades.



**Very few programs**  
in Canada actually  
specialize in  
automobility at an

undergrad level. So why not add a specialization, whether it's EV [electric vehicles] or autonomous vehicles within our mechanical engineering or computer science programs? Lots of local institutions across the province have certificate programs. And I think that's a really great choice for those that are possibly career changers or already graduates. I think Windsor has an opportunity to bring in high school grads who are looking to get into a really new and interesting and growing field."

**Tashlyn Teskey, Manager of  
Projects and Research,  
Workforce WindsorEssex**



**We run a large  
event every year  
for emerging  
technologies and  
automation, always conscious  
to have gender parity with  
speakers and panellists. It's a  
challenge in such a heavily  
male industry. We need to put  
programming into place  
and continue to speak about the  
issue and give opportunities  
for women to participate. First  
Robotics (where students  
compete in Canada's largest  
high school robotics  
competition) is a good example  
of this and it's big in Windsor,  
Essex. But are we reaching all  
of the women we need to and at  
what age do we need to start?"**

**Lee McGrath,  
Program Director  
of the Women  
Entrepreneurship  
Strategy, Invest  
WindsorEssex**

# Potential

## Revitalizing the downtown core and main streets

### Success stories in many sectors

Many people we met shared a sense of momentum for Windsor's downtown and main streets. In 2020 during the pandemic, more than 15 new businesses opened in the downtown core, and there continues to be an uptick of commercial vacancies being filled. Commercial buildings are also being converted to residential. Developers are now finding it profitable to build, due to incentives like the City's CIPs, on top of the hot real estate market and a growing demand for residential density.

Windsor is full of success stories that are creating further opportunities. The Downtown Windsor Farmers' Market was praised as an incubator for vendors that eventually find spaces of their own. Even Ford City, which historically has never had a central business district feel, has attracted many new businesses taking advantage of the ample space for patios and new traffic calming measures.

Riverside Drive and the linear waterfront parks system, which runs parallel to the shores of the Detroit River, was touted as a huge success, but it remains disconnected from the core. Debi Croucher, Executive Director of the **Downtown Windsor BIA**, says that there are four significant asphalt parking lots and a four-lane highway on a billion-dollar waterfront, which cut off access from downtown. Croucher identifies the Windsor Civic Esplanade project as an opportunity to bridge City Hall and Charles Clarke Square to the waterfront.



There're a lot of good buildings downtown that used to serve a great purpose as office buildings and they don't anymore for whatever reasons, and there's a huge demand for residential density in the downtown core. Now that there's been this red-hot real estate market and the housing prices have come up enough, it's now profitable between that and between the City's programs through the community improvement plan. So, between the two it allows us a certain threshold of profitability now to convert those buildings to the desired uses of the citizenry."

**Rhys Trenhaile, CEO,  
Walkerville Capital**



The City of **Windsor's Arts, Culture and Heritage Fund (ACHF)** provides financial assistance to locally developed arts, culture and heritage projects that provide exciting, surprising and meaningful opportunities to strengthen Windsor's creative community. The program supports the City of Windsor's priority to build a strong and stable creative community that contributes to a prosperous creative economy. Since launching in 2014, the ACHF has awarded \$626,800 to 310 arts, culture and heritage projects in Windsor.

# Potential

## Revitalizing the downtown core and main streets

### Small investments for big impacts

Many participants expressed that even small investments could be key to revitalizing the downtown. According to Councillor Bortolin, small things add up to a very livable area. Something as simple as a power box in the farmers' markets can provide vendors with convenient access to electricity. Providing public electricity outlets along the waterfront could attract musicians to parks. The revitalization of Pelissier Street and Maiden Lane West began with a coffee shop, cocktail bar, new residences and murals. The City can continue to build on this momentum and make these small but highly impactful infrastructure and public realm investments. The \$50,000 the City spent on activating the WIFF Alley turned it into a destination by building upon its ongoing use as a desire path and shortcut.

Leveraging the city's artistic potential was identified as a means to revitalize the downtown and improve the attraction of the area. According to Nicole Baillargeon, board member of the Ford City BIA and architectural designer at Mean Studio, art that is accessible to all makes a place "interesting, vibrant, and adds character. Art can be so much more than just decoration – it can imbue places with meaning, cultural value, tell stories, evoke mystery, and elevate a sense of pride in one's neighbourhood – leading to all kinds of positive ripples".



We have sparks of energy, intermittent sparks of energy, in our city centre right now from the WIFF festival to the downtown [farmers'] market. And those are where people who live here have proven that they love what's going on. So how do we take those sparks? How do we build on what those people are, by their behaviours, telling us and create a place that is dynamic...? So it's a long haul. But the beauty of it is that there are no big projects and that it actually is true to what people are doing..."

**Sheila Wisdom,**  
**Executive Director, Windsor**  
**Symphony Orchestra**



# Potential

## Revitalizing the downtown core and main streets

### Downtown theatre district

Inspired by the success of several simple and organic downtown placekeeping initiatives, the Windsor Downtown Districting Committee was formed in August 2020 to leverage the existing assets of the downtown community. Pat Papadeas and Vincent Georgie, both members of the committee, described its formation as organic. The committee brings together a representative group of key downtown stakeholders, from the arts organizations and post-secondary institutions to business owners, investors, and residents. Papadeas states, “What we want to see is a thriving area with a lot of people.” Efforts to revitalize the downtown district tie into the objectives of the Windsor Works report. Georgie expressed delight for how the report confirmed the arts as “mission-critical” to the City’s objective of improving quality of life. The involvement of arts organizations will be key to turning the downtown into a dynamic destination that attracts and retains talent.

We heard that a problem with the downtown environment is that, while there are performances and events that bring people into the core, people don’t remain and linger. The committee is spearheading efforts toward transforming the downtown into a theatre district based around existing arts and entertainment assets. To achieve this, the committee is proposing initiatives that are rather simple. Georgie, Chair of the committee, admits that their ideas aren’t revolutionary, “It’s not about spectacular, mysterious things that are coming from Jupiter.” The committee aims to keep the district clean, improve the perception of safety, beautify, add urban greenery, and to install lights, wayfinding, and street furniture. These small streetscape improvements together will help foster a sense of place and facilitate unplanned behaviours.



I think that a lot of life could be brought with just a little investment in the arts in the downtown area and to develop some nightlife that people from the suburbs would like to come and partake in, rather than just the bar scene.

**Leslie McCurdy,**  
**Performing Artist, Black**  
**Council of Windsor Essex**





# Potential

## Revitalizing the downtown core and main streets

### A renewed approach to planning and design

Real estate developer Rhys Trenhaile calls for creative solutions that encompass planning and design considerations. The downtown's superblock structure does not lend itself well to pedestrians wandering through the commercial district. Dividing city blocks and paving laneways provides more porous connections throughout the community. On the development side, Trenhaile says he is starting to see builders consider the air rights above single-family and two storey buildings. He would also like to see more mixed-use retail at grade, another indicator of a healthy downtown.

The Centre for Cities professor Anneke Smit notes that the vitality of downtown "cannot be separated from the availability of active transportation and transit". The lack of separated bike lanes presents a challenge, considering there are no separated routes for cyclists between downtown post-secondary campuses and anchors. The City has an opportunity to re-evaluate the active transportation network and plan for Windsor's shift from automobile dependency to more sustainable modes. One upcoming opportunity is through the environmental assessment process for the redevelopment of University Avenue. The City's approach to active transportation and the public realm there has the potential to improve the quality of life for downtown residents along the corridor. The City's active transportation and public transit master plans are highly-regarded and the result of extensive public consultation. Prioritizing their funding and implementation will allow quick progress in these key areas.

Another aspect we heard is the need to consider the generational impacts of planning decisions. Downtown can be a place for those who live and work there and everyone else who is visiting. The challenge is to find the balance between improving the quality of life of current residents versus displacing them when new residents of a higher socio-economic status are attracted to the renewed amenities. By working closely with downtown communities and through meaningful participation, the City has an opportunity to strike that balance and oversee sustained long-term improvements to the downtown core.

### Windsor's Business Improvement Associations:

- Downtown Windsor
- Ford City
- Walkerville
- Olde Riverside
- Olde Sandwich
- Ottawa Street
- Pillette Village
- Erie Street
- Wyandotte Town Centre

# Potential

## Building up the arts and culture sector

### Recognizing the value of the arts and culture

Individual artists and community arts organizations are eager to receive more financial investment and resources that support arts and culture at a municipal level. Over the past few years, the Canada-wide Municipal Benchmarking project has reported the city consistently invests less per capita in arts and culture, compared to other cities surveyed of similar size. According to those in the sector, a lack of the professionalization of the arts in Windsor is driving away many established and young artists.

Municipal investment in the arts can go a long way to not only making Windsor a more vibrant city, but also provides employment opportunities to artists, performers, technical crews, designers, carpenters and many other skilled people associated with the sector. This, in turn, would enable them to become contributing members of the local tax base, rather than needing grants to continue their work. The calls for this wider vision came from a range of Windsorites. Collaboration with economic development and tourism bodies to help tell the story of Windsor's rich arts, music, and food cultures to an outside audience was also highlighted as an opportunity.



There's a lot of push for STEM careers and there's a lot of funding for engineers or people going into STEM. But that's not necessarily what a lot of young people are wanting to go into if they're living in Windsor. And that's not going to create a well-rounded city. There are artists who would love to stay in Windsor but can't because the art scene is just not what it should be and people need to go to bigger cities to get that."

**Lyra Sheldon,**  
**President, Windsor Essex**  
**Youth Climate Council**



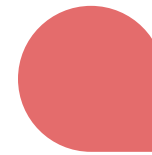
We need to talk about having the college and the university's professionally train musicians, actors and performers, but where are they going? So many of them, when they graduate, disappear instantly because we don't have the infrastructure here in Windsor, Essex, to support them."

**Kristen Siapas, Marketing and**  
**Public Relations Coordinator,**  
**University Players**



**We need help and we need investment. And not thinking that five hundred dollars is enough for art supplies, we need to honour the professional skills that artists bring. We need to create industry and support them to earn a living in their own communities. And then we need to invest to really market it and use the talents that we have to market it.”**

**Charlotte LeFrank, Artist and Equity Specialist, Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society**



In 1995, the Windsor Endowment for the Arts (WEA) was established to create a permanent funding base for community artists and arts organizations. WEA is a non-profit charitable organization, run by a volunteer board made up of artists and professionals. They support Windsor-Essex artists in community, literary, performing and visual arts to grow and flourish.

# Potential

## Building up the arts and culture sector

### Local efforts to build on

Many artists in the community have become involved in advocating for the arts. Tracy Paterson, who is both an artist at POP Hair Gallery Ink and a member of the Uptown Ottawa Street BIA, has started an arts group within the BIA and encouraged the City to create projects that hire local artists. Their first project hired 13 local artists to paint municipal garbage cans, a beautification which saw increased foot traffic in the downtown area. The season after, they commissioned artists to paint murals on Ottawa Street, which then attracted bike tours and e-scooter tours led by Windsor Eats.

People we spoke to expressed how important and integral the arts are to Windsor's downtown fabric and that support for the development of arts is crucial. They pointed out that setting out a long-term strategy to improve the downtown, making it livelier, more livable and a destination that people want to visit, hinges on the arts sector. The arts need the downtown as much as the downtown needs the arts. Jason Grossi, who is the coordinator of the university's Visual Arts and the Built Environment program, put forward that the arts and Windsor's robust group of artists is what has held the fractured Windsor core together. We also heard calls for inclusion of the arts in urban planning rejuvenation projects. For example, the revitalization of University Avenue will provide a better link from the University's main campus (and Sandwich Towne) to the School of Creative Arts, passing the Capitol Theatre, WIFF Alley, and UWindsor's bio-art Incubator lab. It will provide linkages to the arts institutions for some of the neighbourhoods with the highest levels of poverty.

Among other ideas we heard, one was a call for a centralized website to gather, collate, and promote arts-related activities that would help those living and visiting Windsor to discover all its arts and culture. Windsorites also talked about integrating the arts with the city's education system to nurture both artists and patrons.



In the midst of the pandemic, with a stay-at-home order in effect, Post Productions and Windsor Feminist Theatre (WFT), partnered – drawing on each other's strengths

to produce live local theatre. The partnership is based on collaboration, sharing resources and supporting each other. Their first collaboration was WFT's production of *Dominatrix on Trial* at The Shadowbox Theatre in the spring of 2021.

WFT was founded in 1980 and is recognized as one of the nation's first feminist theatre organizations, it's also among Canada's oldest.

Post Productions offers intimately staged and often provocative theatrical experiences, with the goal of helping audiences understand the world, other people and themselves with fresh insight.



# Potential

## Diversifying housing for an equitable future

As part of its efforts to increase housing supply, the City has been pursuing projects which encourage gently density and intensification. Doing so also allows a focus on diversifying the housing stock inservice of this goal, thereby increasing livability, reducing dependence on cars, and providing housing options for all needs and stages of life.

### **City-led policies and plans**

To increase its housing supply, the City is introducing gentle density. Intensification is an important ingredient to increasing the housing supply. More importantly, the City has encouraged the implementation of **Community Improvement Plans** (CIPs) to incentivize building up core areas and specific neighbourhoods. CIPs have been utilized in tandem with general growth management and policy decisions to increase density. Windsor is beginning to see many more multi-family residential developments, thousands of units, coming down the pipeline at quicker rates. In particular, a CIP for brownfields redevelopment has enabled development on former industrial sites that would not have been feasible otherwise.

# Potential

## Diversifying housing for an equitable future

### City-led policies and plans

In 2020, the City revised its official plan and zoning by-laws to allow additional dwelling units (ADUs) (that is, secondary suites in basements, laneway housing and detached cottages). Auspiciously, George Robinson, a Planner with the City of Windsor, reports that the City has seen “unprecedented interest” in these types of housing options (tripling in 2021), as well as an unprecedented growth in planning applications for new housing. According to Sarah Cipkar, consultant at Cipkar Development, Windsor is one of the more progressive cities within Ontario in terms of municipal by-laws around ADUs and what is permitted.

We heard about initiatives and financial tools that could help increase housing supply and diversify the existing stock. For example, could tax increment financing (TIF) be employed as a way to deliver affordable housing through private developers? TIFs are a way municipalities are able to encourage local redevelopment and revitalization, offering site-specific grants in anticipation of a higher property tax base in the future. If adopted, the city could see units being built by private developers and subsidized through tax rebates creating more rent-geared-to-income units. TIFs are not widely used in Canada (currently TIFs are only found in some municipalities in Alberta), and people suggested Windsor could be a test case.

Jim Tischler warns that most cities operate on the market knowledge of local developers, the police and data from building permits, all of which he calls “rear-view mirror data.” The City of Windsor would benefit from developing its own target market analysis. Doing so would equip city planners with the information necessary to set Windsor’s planning and regulatory scheme.

Liberalizing residential zoning, developing in-house market research, implementing TIFs, creating development corporations and using other nascent but promising tools such as community land trusts are all being discussed as ways to increase and diversify Windsor’s housing stock.



**So rather than just looking at downtown versus everything else, we should be thinking about how we can create more complete communities in neighbourhoods that frankly aren’t complete now.”**

**Valerie Dawn, Architect,  
Glos Arch + Eng**



**Ontario has a tax increment finance law, which hasn’t been used yet. It’s probably worth some conversation and I think Windsor’s a perfect laboratory for this to take place.”**

**Jim Tischler, Visiting Fellow,  
Windsor Law Centre for Cities  
and Development Director,  
Michigan Land Bank Authority**

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For more information on **CUI x Windsor**

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## Lead Local Partner



## Lead Local Supporters



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# Canadian Urban Institute Team

**Mary W. Rowe**  
President & CEO

**Lisa Cavicchia**  
Program Director

**Diane Dyson**  
Senior Director,  
Research

**Selena Zhang**  
Senior Director,  
Strategic Initiatives  
& Partnerships

**Ariana Holt**  
Senior Planner,  
Applied  
Solutions Lead

**Jennifer Barrett**  
Senior Planner

**Benjamin Bongolan**  
Research Planner

**Rupal Shah**  
Community  
Solutions Lead

**Dhaneva Skogstad**  
Communications  
Manager

**Jill Fairbrother**  
Director,  
Communications

**Jamie Basian**  
Marketing Specialist  
and Event Producer

**Gay Stephenson**  
Project Consultant

**Hannah McLean**  
Operations  
Coordinator

**Coco Wang**  
Intern

**Maria Alonso Novo**  
Intern

**Adam Dhalla**  
Intern

**Myles Chan**  
Intern

**Anjuli Perera**  
Intern

**Kari Whitehead**  
Intern

**Allison Ashcroft**  
Regional Lead,  
Victoria

**Robert Plitt**  
Regional Lead,  
Calgary

**Michael Redhead**  
Champagne  
Regional Lead,  
Winnipeg

**Catherine  
Craig-St-Louis**  
Regional Lead,  
Gatineau

**Kourosh Rad**  
Regional Lead,  
Halifax

**Leilani Farha**  
Senior Fellow,  
Housing  
and Homelessness

**Jay Pitter**  
Senior Fellow,  
Equity-Based  
Placemaking

**Glenn Miller**  
Senior Research  
Associate

**Daniel Liadsky**  
Purpose Analytics

**Lisa D. Orchard**  
Scribe Technical  
Writers and Editors

**Leandro G. Santos**  
Researcher

**Sali Tabacchi**  
Graphic Design

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## CUI x Local Program Funders

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**McConnell Foundation,**  
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Through CUI x Local, CUI is connecting with cities across Canada to gather interpretations, data, assessments, priorities, bright spots and stories from on-the-ground voices to help deepen our collective understanding of the interconnected and interdependent issues facing urban Canada. Alongside local partners, we are organizing these visits involving a combination of public and invitation-only meetings and activities. By looking at local issues and connecting them nationally, CUI x Local will strengthen the connective tissue within and across communities from coast to coast to coast.

More at:

[canurb.org/cuixlocal](http://canurb.org/cuixlocal)

# Afterword

From 15-17 June, we revelled in CUI x Windsor: 17 (virtual) sessions, from public panels and keynote speakers to medium-size sector-specific conversations, to small working meetings. We at the Windsor Law Centre for Cities were delighted to be the lead local partner, but countless other local individuals and organizations were involved in the organizing as well.

Each session focused on a different aspect of good city building. Being a mid-size city, most people working in a particular sector in Windsor often know – or know of – each other. From that perspective, these sessions were not really about introductions. Rather, they were about bringing people and organizations – municipal government (admin and politicians), economic development, higher education, BIAs, school boards, artists and arts organizations, community organizations, climate and sustainability experts, active transportation advocates, front-line service providers, and more – together. They were about encouraging and facilitating open, honest, constructive, and creative conversation about our city and how we can work together on even better city building. CUI's collaborative and deferential approach all the way through the planning process – allowing the community to lead – coupled with their expert facilitation during the event itself, made all the difference. This report tells that story.

As I write this, we are at the four-month anniversary of CUI x Windsor. In countless ways, the effects of these three incredible days continue to be felt, in having both initiated new projects and fuelled ongoing ones. Conversations around active and public transportation have sparked projects and advocacy led by young changemakers in the city, including a request to the City of Windsor for the city's first protected bike lane pilot project. Ideas exchanged on city building and the Windsor's vibrant arts and food culture scenes have led to plans for a summit focused specifically on this nexus (post-COVID so that live music, food and art exhibitions can be incorporated). The City of Windsor and the University of Windsor continue to work toward a partnership

agreement to facilitate collaboration, including on research, teaching, and community engagement related to good city building. A new Indigenous steering committee has been approved for the City of Windsor. New collaborations have sprung up that bring economic development actors into conversations with other stakeholders on how we work together to tell the important stories of our city better.

As the community continues to innovate in response to the pandemic, prepares for a post-COVID reality, grapples with the need for transformation to the green economy, and comes to terms with legacies of systemic racism and our role in seeking reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, CUI x Windsor could not have come at a better time. At its base, CUI x Windsor reminded us that our community is better when we listen to each other and work together. And it helped us renew a collective commitment to do just that.

**Dr. Anneke Smit**  
**Director, Windsor Law Centre for Cities**