

The Downtown Dig is a significant infrastructure investment that supports the long-term vision outlined in the Downtown Paris Master Plan and the Paris Master Servicing Plan. Recognizing the unique challenges associated with undertaking major construction in the heart of Downtown Paris, the County of Brant implemented a comprehensive business mitigation strategy beginning in 2024, well in advance of construction activities that began in 2025.

Proactive Planning and Investment

Preparation for the Downtown Dig began in January 2024 through the development of business mitigation plans and the creation of a cross-departmental staff team dedicated to supporting businesses throughout the project. Additional efforts included stakeholder engagement with the Downtown Paris BIA, business outreach, public information sessions, securing grant funding to support initiatives, and establishing dedicated communications channels under the Downtown Dig brand.

To support mitigation efforts, the County invested approximately \$150,000 in tax-supported funding, including matching funds for a Provincial Rural Economic Development grant and a one-time grant to the Downtown Paris BIA to provide marketing support. Additional funding has been secured through external partners and sponsorships to support downtown programming and activation initiatives.

Business Support Initiatives

Recognizing that Downtown Paris faces unique geographic and construction challenges, the County implemented a multifaceted support strategy focused on communication, marketing, business continuity and community engagement. A key component was the creation of the Downtown Construction Liaison position, which serves as a dedicated point of contact between businesses, contractors and the County. This role provides weekly updates to businesses, addresses concerns, coordinates mitigation activities and supports marketing and promotional initiatives.

Additional initiatives included (see Attachment 1):

- Enhanced marketing and promotional campaigns
- Dedicated Downtown Dig branding and communications
- Business directories and signage
- Visitor and Construction Ambassador programs
- Financial advisory supports and sustainability loan opportunities through Enterprise Brant and the Brant-Brantford Business Resource Centre
- Expedited Community Improvement Plan (CIP) grant opportunities support for downtown property improvements under \$5000

These efforts have been recognized provincially through two Economic Developers Council of Ontario Awards of Excellence and a Certificate of Merit from the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association.

Measuring Success

While staff acknowledge that construction has had impacts on downtown businesses, several indicators demonstrate continued confidence and investment in Downtown Paris.

Since the beginning of 2025:

- Twelve new businesses have opened in Downtown Paris, including six in 2026.
- Downtown vacancy rates have declined from 6.7% in 2024 to 3.3% in both 2025 and 2026.

Community Improvement Plan activity has also remained strong. In 2025, the Downtown Paris CIP experienced its highest uptake to date, with 14 grant applications approved, representing approximately \$201,000 in grants and leveraging more than \$1 million in private-sector investment in downtown improvements.

While marketing initiatives have generated strong engagement and awareness, staff recognize that business performance is influenced by many factors beyond construction, including broader economic conditions, interest rates, inflation, consumer spending habits and other market pressures. As a result, it is difficult to directly attribute business performance to any single factor or initiative.

Looking Ahead

Support efforts continue in 2026 with the extension of the Downtown Construction Liaison position and the continuation of enhanced communications, marketing and business engagement activities. New initiatives include the return of Tasty Road Trips walking tours and the launch of the Downtown Paris Promenade, a pedestrian-focused gathering space featuring programming, live music, activities and opportunities for business activation throughout the summer. Additional funding has also been secured to enhance community events, including the expansion of the Paris Block Party.

On June 23, Council approved \$30,000 in funding for the BIA to support their marketing initiatives.

Conclusion

The Downtown Dig represents a once-in-a-generation infrastructure investment that will support the long-term vitality of Downtown Paris. While temporary disruptions are unavoidable, the County has implemented an extensive mitigation strategy focused on supporting businesses, maintaining communication, encouraging visitation and fostering economic resilience.

Through strong partnerships, dedicated staffing, targeted investments and ongoing community engagement, the County remains committed to balancing the short-term impacts of construction with the long-term goal of a vibrant, resilient and sustainable downtown.