

**An Investigation into Downtown Revitalization in Mid-Sized Cities
in the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe***

by

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A thesis

presented to the University Of Waterloo

in fulfilment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Planning

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2018

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Twenty-first century cities are facing complex environmental, economic and social challenges. In growth areas like Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe, the province has implemented a regional-scale plan to address the negative impact of unchecked urban sprawl and protect the region's natural heritage. The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario, 2006, 2017) aims to change the provincial planning paradigm by directing how and where growth can occur in cities. This effort, to create complete communities, enhance transit corridors and revitalize downtowns, is inclusive of eight standalone mid-sized cities that sit outside, or in the outer ring, of the province's Greenbelt.

This research explores the strategies that these outer ring mid-sized cities, with a history of core area decline, are using to foster local economic development, revitalize core areas, and achieve provincial population and employment targets by 2041. This research follows a three-manuscript format and offers one of the first empirical insights into how mandated growth planning is impacting mid-sized city downtowns in Ontario. The first manuscript uses the example of downtown Guelph to evaluate the impact of provincial growth targets on downtown revitalization. Findings from this case study suggest that provincial growth targets can have a catalytic effect on the planning paradigm in mid-sized cities. Through locally led community-planning efforts, and a range of site-specific incentives, mid-sized cities can begin to intensify their downtowns and reverse decades of core area decline.

Manuscripts two and three leverage a local economic development framework, to explore the role that allied groups can play in implementing strategies to foster mid-sized city downtown renewal. Manuscript two looks at the role Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) play as partners to local economic development. Findings illustrate that incremental improvements are occurring

in the downtowns of these outer ring mid-sized cities, and that BIAs, through a combination of operational activities, advocacy and broad-based coalition building, can contribute to urban revitalization by pursuing a downtown-first agenda. The final manuscript looks at the role that coworking, or shared workspaces, play in the downtown economies of mid-sized cities in Ontario. Findings tell the story of how economic change is playing out in the downtowns of these mid-sized cities, highlighting the importance of innovative, collaborative and inclusive approaches to city building and local economic development.

Together these manuscripts illustrate the change that is taking place in Ontario's mid-sized cities in the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Through a combination of top-down provincial planning and bottom-up local economic development initiatives, mid-sized cities can begin to reverse decades of core area decline. While these changes take time, this research confirms the importance of downtown allies and ongoing, incremental improvements to promote downtown revitalization in smaller metropolitan areas.

Acknowledgements

The University of Waterloo, School of Planning, was a natural fit for a research project focused on the downtowns of mid-sized cities. Located in one of Canada's thriving mid-sized cities, the City of Waterloo is undergoing rapid changes as it evolves to meet the challenges and opportunities of city building in the twenty-first century. The expertise, good humor and support of faculty and colleagues at the university were most appreciated. A special thank you to my co-advisors, Dr. Pierre Filion and Dr. Mark Seasons, and dissertation committee member, Dr. Tara Vinodrai, for excellent discussions and feedback throughout the process. Your perspectives helped me bring each of the manuscripts to life, and begin to tell the story of cities that have been on the sidelines of the urban conversation for too long.

This research would not have been possible without the participation of planning practitioners, municipal staff, city councillors, citizen groups, developers, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and coworking spaces across Ontario. Thank you for welcoming me into your cities, neighbourhoods and organizations, and sharing your thoughts on urban revitalization in the downtowns of mid-sized cities. A special thank you to Julia Grady, founder of *10 Carden Shared Spaces*, for being an exceptional collaborator and friend, and to the Province of Ontario's *Places to Grow Implementation Fund* for generously supporting research on the sharing economy and coworking in Ontario's mid-sized cities.

My parents, Ellen and Nadim Jamal, as newcomers to Canada, always prioritized education. I thank them for instilling in me a life-long love of learning.

To my husband and children, Scott, Julian and Miriam, thank you. There are no words that I can offer to repay you for the time and space you each afforded me to take on this research. I remain overwhelmed by your generosity, and grateful for your love.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Research Problem and Research Questions

As the global population continues its migration into cities, the urban studies canon remains largely focused on the urban experience in big cities (Bell & Jayne, 2009; Burayidi, 2013). While one third of Canada's population lives in the Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal regions (Statistics Canada, 2016) remaining residents call mid-sized cities, small towns or rural areas home. In Ontario, for example, over 45% of the population lives in mid-sized cities (Sotomayor & Flatt, 2017), a city defined as having a population ranging from 50,000-500,000 residents (Filion, Hoernig, Bunting, & Sands, 2004; Seasons, 2003; Sands & Reese, 2017; Sotomayor & Flatt, 2017). Despite almost half of the province's population living in cities of this size, there has been limited scholarship exploring smaller urban centres, and as such, a key objective of this dissertation is make a contribution to the body of literature on the urban experience in mid-sized cities.

Mid-sized cities were once home to thriving downtowns that were the primary social and commercial centre of their cities. However, a mid-twentieth century shift toward automobile-oriented transit, coupled with a growing population that favoured suburban living, working and retail options, soon led to downtown decline in smaller urban centres across North America (Bunting, Filion, Hoernig, Seasons, & Lederer, 2007; Filion et al., 2004; Sands, 2007). This trend toward sprawling suburbs and large-format retail on the edges of cities has continued for decades. Despite extensive attempts to curb core area decline, including large scale public investments in sports arenas and performing arts centres (Burayidi, 2013; Walker, 2009a); downtown shopping malls (Filion & Hammond, 2008); and the rise of the Business Improvement Area (BIA) movement in the 1970s (Briffault, 1999; Perez, Hernandez, & Jones,

2003), these strategies had limited impact in isolation. Research on revitalization of small and mid-sized cities speaks to the importance of coordinated, incremental improvements (Burayidi, 2013; Robertson, 2001), and the inclusion of allied groups or advocates (Sands & Reese, 2017; Filion et al., 2004) participating in urban rejuvenation.

Cities across Canada have not been immune to these suburbanizing trends and associated urban decline, and in 2006, the province of Ontario launched a regional-scale growth plan focused on curbing sprawl and building dense, transit connected communities (Ontario, 2006). The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, or Growth Plan (2006), is inclusive of eight, stand-alone mid-sized cities that sit largely on the periphery of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) commuter-shed and outside of the province's protected Greenbelt. Not only does the Growth Plan mandate these "outer ring" (2006, p. 52) mid-sized cities to grow their population and employment-base, but the majority of this growth is to be absorbed in each city's downtown core by 2031. With a legacy of downtown decline; a historic planning framework that is oriented toward suburban development; a global shift toward living and working in large urban centres (Florida, 2017); and local residents that balk at additional public spending in the core (Bunting et al., 2007), Ontario's mid-sized cities arguably face barriers to implementing Growth Plan objectives. It is important to note that the Growth Plan, after a 10 year review, extended population and employment projections from 2031 to 2041 (Ontario, 2017).

Despite recommendations from academics and practitioners to increase residential density in the downtowns of mid-sized cities (Burayidi, 2013), creating a vibrant daytime and evening population in core areas, there has been limited private investment in downtown housing. Moreover, with an economic shift away from manufacturing and toward the knowledge based activities that cluster in larger urban centres (Gertler, 2003; Gertler, Florida, Gates, &

Vinodrai, 2002; Vinodrai, 2015), smaller cities face additional challenges with respect to local economic development and job creation. With limited scholarship in the area of downtown revitalization and economic development in mid-sized cities, this research fills a gap in the literature, offering planning and policy recommendations to cities of this size, by posing the following research question: **What strategies are mid-sized cities using to foster downtown revitalization?** The area selected for this research was inclusive of eight mid-sized cities in the provincial Growth Plan area, specifically the downtowns of Peterborough, Barrie, Brantford, Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Guelph, and St. Catharines. To explore this broader question, three sub-questions were posed and form the foundation for the following manuscripts. These questions ask:

1. What impact can regional growth planning have on urban revitalization in mid-sized cities?
2. What role(s) do Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) play in downtown revitalization of mid-sized cities? Do BIAs interact with other urban actors to achieve their downtown revitalization goals?
3. What roles do coworking spaces play in downtown revitalization and local economic development in mid-sized cities? What supports sustain coworking spaces outside of larger urban centres?

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the research questions guiding this inquiry, a discussion of the context from which these questions emerged and concludes with an overview of each of the chapters in this dissertation. These manuscripts represent one of the first, primarily empirical, contributions to the literature on the experiences of downtown renewal in mid-sized cities in the context of Ontario's *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*

(Ontario, 2006, 2017). This research approaches the question of the downtown revitalization in Ontario's mid-sized cities from three unique, yet intersecting angles. The chapter on regional planning and its impact on urban revitalization in mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area (Chapter Four) offers the first look into the impact of provincially mandated planning on downtown Guelph. Findings from this chapter identify the important role that a provincial government can play in altering a municipal planning trajectory, one that previously favoured suburban development, and re-orienting it toward planning principles that favour dense, urban development. Research recommendations identify the importance of leveraging local influence over the planning process and including a broad range of stakeholders in the planning process. The inclusion of local actors in creating the city's Downtown Secondary Plan and Community Improvement Plan – illustrates how a combined 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approach to urban renewal allowed for a provincial mandate to be specifically interpreted and successfully implemented in Guelph, Ontario.

The chapters exploring the role of allied groups in downtown revitalization fill a gap in the literature with respect to the role of Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and coworking spaces in mid-sized cities (Chapters Five and Six, respectively). While BIAs have been present in downtowns since the mid-twentieth century, coworking spaces, or shared workspaces, represent a twenty-first century concept of providing amenity rich workspaces to knowledge or creative workers. Findings from the research on BIAs in the Growth Plan area confirm the important role of an advocate (Sands & Reese, 2017) in downtown economic development. While findings show that BIAs are focused largely on day-to-day operations, through a combination of advocacy and coalition building, BIAs are advancing local economic development and downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities. Recommendations from this

research offer a broader, more aspirational, mandate to BIAs, challenging BIAs to become more pro-actively involved in Growth Plan implementation; increase their support for local entrepreneurship; and to attract renewed energy and membership to their Boards of Directors and sub-committees through active engagement with the public and new members.

Research on coworking spaces has focused predominantly on the experience of shared workspaces in large urban centres (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012). As such, a focus on coworking in Ontario's mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area (Ontario, 2006, 2017) represents a key contribution to the literature (Chapter Six). Findings from this manuscript illustrate the important role of coworking spaces and coworking staff in attracting and supporting creative and knowledge workers in mid-sized cities. Not only are coworking spaces attracting a cohort of workers to these flexible workspaces (Lodato & Clark, 2016), but through the provision of networking opportunities, business services and ongoing professional development opportunities, coworking staff are providing an important economic development service in their communities. Coworking spaces are taking over underutilized or dormant spaces in the downtowns of mid-sized cities and are participating in urban renewal.

1.2 Research Context

Growth regions, such as the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) in Ontario, have been identified as important drivers of economic growth for Canada. With a population of over eight million, this region is projected to attract an additional four and a half million residents and two million new jobs by 2041 (Ontario, 2017). In the early 2000s, the Government of Ontario joined municipalities in the urban planning arena (Eidelman, 2010; Grant, 2006; White, 2007). Through the passing of the *Places to Grow Act, 2005*, and the subsequent Growth Plan (Ontario, 2006,

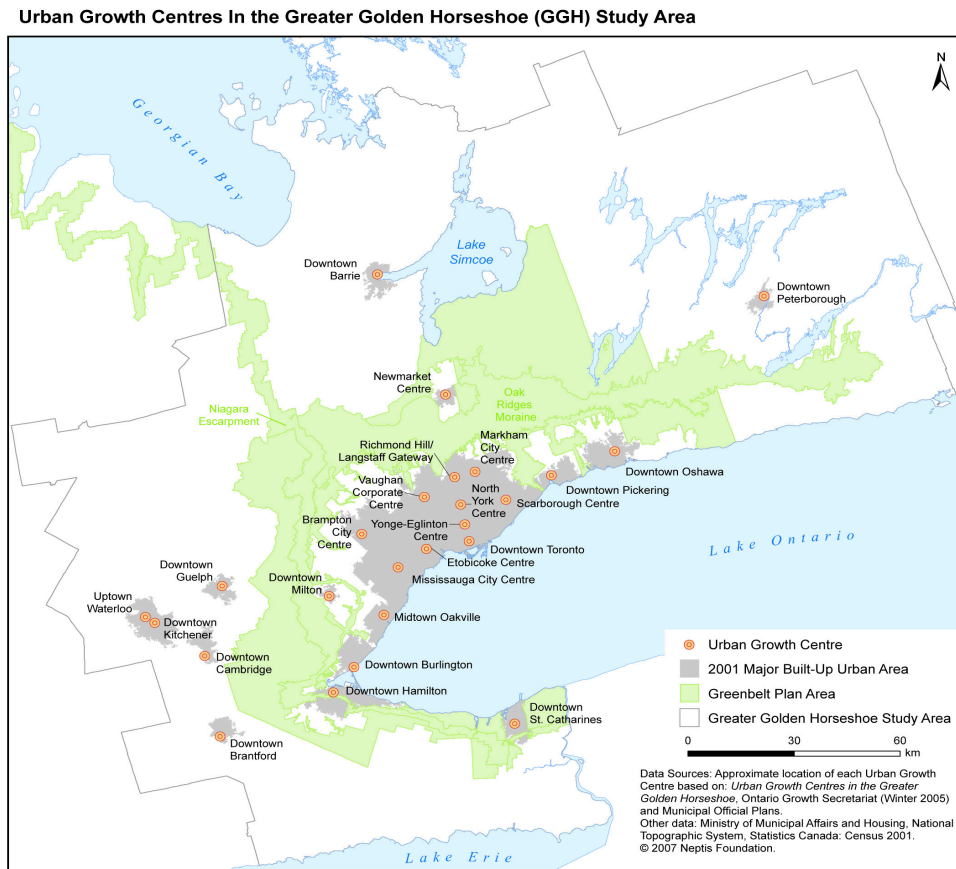
2017), the Ontario government has asserted its role as a key participant in twenty-first century regional-scale planning.

The Growth Plan sits alongside other provincial legislation, plans and policies that are collectively aimed at protecting the province's farmland and natural heritage from unchecked urban growth (Ontario, 2015); these plans include: the Oakridge's Moraine Conservation Plan (2002), the Greenbelt Plan (2005) and the Niagara Escarpment Plan (2005). Together, this legislative framework intends to protect the natural environment and agricultural land by directing both *how* and *where* population and employment growth will be accommodated in the GGH. These plans, all passed in early 2000s, represent a bold response to emerging political pressure to decrease the negative effects of rapid urbanization across the GTA (Eidelman, 2010).

With continued projected growth to the GGH in the coming decades, the Growth Plan aspires to the principles of smart growth, and seeks to reverse decades of unchecked sprawl by focusing on revitalizing downtowns, enhancing public transit and creating complete, more walkable, communities. However, to fully understand the significance of the Growth Plan, with its renewed focus on managing growth in Ontario, it is important to first explore the context from which the plan emerged. After experiencing decades of sprawling urbanization across the province, one of the key pillars of the *Places to Grow* legislation, and the subsequent Growth Plan, seeks to address the negative impact of sprawl on downtown areas (Ontario, 2006, 2017).

To stimulate downtown revitalization, the Growth Plan calls for the creation of twenty-five urban growth centres (Figure 1-1). Urban growth centres (UGCs) are located in either existing historic downtowns or emerging suburban downtowns in cities across Ontario (Ontario, 2006, p. 12), and are further subdivided into those in the "inner ring" or "outer ring" (2006, pp. 49, 52); a label that illustrates a UGCs proximity to the province's protected Greenbelt area.

Figure 1-1: Urban Growth Centres Map



Source: (The Neptis Foundation, 2015)

The UGCs are required to develop as high-density, mixed-use areas in cities that are able to attract public and private investment, employment and residential growth, and accommodate transit infrastructure. Intensification in the UGCs is to be achieved via provincial targets that mandate the number of jobs and people municipalities are to add by 2041 (Ontario, 2017). The UGCs closest to the City of Toronto, or in the inner ring, such as Mississauga City Centre and Scarborough Centre, have higher density targets to achieve (400 jobs and people/hectare) compared to those in the outer ring such as Downtown Brantford and Downtown Cambridge (150 jobs and people/hectare) (Table 1-1). The GTAs status as the province’s economic engine

makes it a natural location for industry, migrants and newcomers alike (Florida, 2017; Allen & Campsie, 2013; Ontario, 2006, 2017).

Table 1-1: Growth Targets for the Urban Growth Centres (UGCs)

400 people & jobs combined per hectare	200 people & jobs combined per hectare	150 people & jobs combined per hectare
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown Toronto • Etobicoke Centre • North York Centre • Scarborough Centre • Yonge-Eglinton Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown Brampton • Downtown Burlington • Downtown Hamilton • Downtown Kitchener* • Uptown Waterloo* • Downtown Milton • Markham Centre • Mississauga City Centre • Newmarket Centre • Midtown Oakville • Downtown Oshawa • Downtown Pickering • Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway • Vaughan Corporate Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown Barrie* • Downtown Brantford* • Downtown Cambridge* • Downtown Guelph* • Downtown Peterborough* • Downtown St. Catharines*

Note: * Outer ring UGC

Source: (Ontario, 2006, 2017)

The eight UGCs in the outer ring, extending from Downtown Peterborough in the east to Downtown St. Catharines in the southwest, share several characteristics that will present specific challenges and opportunities when implementing the Growth Plan. As mid-sized cities, with populations ranging from 80,000-200,000 they all have historic downtown core areas, active downtown Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), and post-secondary institutions within their city. Despite these advantages, cities of this size have also experienced high levels of core area decline, and have a history of low-density, dispersed urban development that favours building in suburban locations, rather than in downtowns (Bunting et al., 2007; Fillion, 2007).

Once launched, the Growth Plan required each municipality to take a leadership role in aligning their planning documents with provincial targets, and through this process, cities had the ability to define the boundary of their respective UGCs. This process allowed city officials to consult with stakeholders and designate the areas of their downtowns for additional intensification. In Downtown Cambridge, for example, the municipality, in consultation with local stakeholders and the province, chose the area along the Grand River in Galt as their UGC boundary. In addition to providing incentives to developers to intensify this area, the municipality also made public investments in river infrastructure to support new developments. Similarly, in the Downtown Guelph UGC, the growth boundary is not just the traditional BIA or larger CBD boundary, the area inclusive of what Gad and Matthew (2000) call inner-city lands, which are defined as an area around the downtown that was once home to industry and residential neighbourhoods. Through the Growth Plan, the City of Guelph aimed to reactivate and rehabilitate dormant, former industrial sites near the city's core in order to achieve new provincial population and employment density targets (City of Guelph, 2016).

While it could be argued that rapid downtown intensification was underway prior to the growth plan in the larger UGCs like Downtown Toronto and Yonge-Eglinton Centre (The Neptis Foundation, 2015), over 50% of developable land in the growth plan sits in the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Allen & Campsie, 2013). As such, the Growth Plan has provided researchers with an opportunity to assess how municipalities are responding to a provincial mandate to grow cities while developing complete communities, curbing sprawl, developing new transportation systems and revitalizing downtowns. More specifically, with eight of the twenty-five UGCs in outer ring mid-sized cities, the Plan's focus on intensifying the downtown areas of smaller metropolitan areas has cast a new light on cities of this size. As the Growth Plan is

implemented in Ontario's mid-sized cities, the strategies used will also be able to inform the urban studies literature and offer policy recommendations on downtown intensification in small urban centres outside of the Growth Plan area.

As such, through the Growth Plan, the province has provided an opportunity to explore whether mid-sized Ontario cities can reverse decades of core area decline in their downtowns and attract new jobs and residents into their city's core areas. Building on Bell and Jayne's advice to "think big about thinking small" (2009, p. 684), the re-urbanization strategies used in these mid-sized cities will serve to broaden the urban dialogue to be inclusive of the urban experience outside of big cities.

1.3 Research Recommendations

The findings from the manuscripts also lead to three over-arching recommendations (Chapter Seven) that speak to the broader research question, exploring the strategies that mid-sized cities are using to foster downtown revitalization. The first recommendation addresses the catalytic nature of provincially led regional planning in altering the municipal planning framework in mid-sized cities. Findings from Chapter Four illustrate how the advent of the Growth Plan (2006, 2017) not only mandated municipalities to realign their planning documents to achieve employment and density targets, but also motivated cities to engage community-wide public and private stakeholders in the planning process. In Guelph, the inclusion of neighbourhood groups, not-for-profit organizations, business associations and private developers in the planning process resulted in an updated Official Plan; a visionary Downtown Secondary Plan first created 2012, and then updated in 2016 (City of Guelph, 2016); and an implementation strategy embedded in a Community Improvement Plan (City of Guelph, 2011). The secondary plan took into account local issues, assets and dynamics and generated guiding principles that

would direct local growth – while achieving provincial Growth Plan targets by 2031 and later 2041. Land developers describe this revised planning framework as a type of road map, illustrating where and how growth could be absorbed in the core, allowing them to confidently invest in residential and commercial projects in downtown Guelph. While several attempts had been made to revitalize downtown Guelph through public investments throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, city officials were quick to point out that these one-off investments did little to attract parallel private investment; a finding that is consistent with other small and mid-sized city scholarship (Burayidi, 2013; Filion & Hammond, 2008).

Through local planning efforts, initially spurred by the province, the City of Guelph was able to attract private investors to develop municipally identified sites across downtown Guelph. Not only were updated local plans created, but staffing resources were also added to facilitate plan implementation. Moreover, these plans were steeped in local knowledge, and took local issues and conditions into account throughout the planning process. Beginning in 2014, downtown Guelph has seen the development of hundreds of new condominium units in the core, and the revitalization of two important commercial buildings. While it is too early to discern the impact of these changes on downtown revitalization, the addition of new residents and employees in downtown Guelph can be seen as a boost to the local economy, providing new customers for local businesses and adding residents to downtown streets (Personal communication, December 4, 2015). Despite the focus on downtown Guelph in this case study, there are findings from this research that can benefit policy makers in other mid-sized cities outside of the Growth Plan area. These include the importance of engaging local stakeholders in the planning process and building on local assets; creating visionary planning documents and

targeted incentives for downtown renewal; and creating a predictable environment for private investment.

The second recommendation stemming from this research advances the importance of fostering both cross-sector collaborations, and undertaking ongoing incremental improvements, to foster downtown revitalization. As noted above, a top-down approach can reset a planning framework across a region, but local, or bottom-up, approaches to city planning and downtown revitalization are also essential. Research on small and mid-sized cities addresses the value of engaging partners in the city-building process (Burayidi, 2013; Filion et al., 2004; Sands & Reese, 2017; Walker, 2009a) and taking an incremental, small-scale approach to revitalization (Burayidi, 2015; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009b). Two empirically based manuscripts in this dissertation (Chapters Five and Six) offer insight into the important role of non-traditional actors in local economic development and in downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities.

In the first instance, the facilitative role that Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) play in urban renewal in mid-sized cities was explored. BIAs are funded by a municipally-approved tax levy on property owners within the improvement area (Ontario, 2010), and findings show that they are largely focused on day-to-day operations in service of their membership. However, this research also confirms that the presence of a BIA, and their ability to act as an advocate on behalf of downtown issues (Sands & Reese, 2017) can advance revitalization efforts. Findings from this research confirm that BIAs are collaborative advocates for their downtowns—bringing together allied groups in support of common causes. This downtown first agenda, coupled with an ability and willingness to engage other urban actors, such as non-profit groups, private developers and neighbourhood associations, in their advocacy efforts illustrate how BIAs can

continue to be relevant, engaged urban actors in twenty-first century downtown revitalization of mid-sized cities.

In the second instance, the role of coworking, or shared workspaces, in mid-sized cities was explored. In the context of an increasingly collaborative twenty first century economy, the rise of coworking spaces opening in downtown neighbourhoods around the world has become increasingly apparent (Deskmag, 2013, 2015). Coworking spaces are amenity-rich, shared workspaces (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Spinuzzi, 2012; Surman, 2013) that emerged in the early 2000s, and grew exponentially after the global economic crisis in 2008 as workers found themselves either precariously employed, or looking to create a new enterprise after a job loss (Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2015).

Findings from this research show that coworking spaces in mid-sized cities are focused on the emergent needs of their respective memberships, providing local knowledge and creative workers with well-appointed workspaces. Coworking spaces in mid-sized cities are attracting a diverse workforce downtown that includes digital workers and tech-startups; artists and designers; and social innovators. Coworking staff in mid-sized cities are promoting downtown economic development by providing formal and informal educational and networking opportunities to knowledge workers; working with partners, such as higher education institutions and local business associations, to support the diverse needs of their coworking members; and preserving affordable space downtown for start-ups and young entrepreneurs.

As such, this research highlights the importance of engaging non-traditional urban actors (Alison Bramwell & Pierre, 2016), or allied groups (Filion et al., 2004), in downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities. Their incremental efforts are supporting both downtown revitalization and ultimately local economic development (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999; Leigh &

Blakely, 2017). When coupled with a regional-scale Growth Plan focused on adding density to downtowns of mid-sized cities, the combination of top-down and bottom-up efforts focused on urban revitalization can become a powerful driver of downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities.

While the prospect of downtown decline remains an ongoing concern for mid-sized cities (Burayidi, 2015, 2013; Bunting et al., 2007; Sands, 2007), this research has shown that changing planning and demographic trends can begin to positively impact the downtowns in smaller urban centres by attracting renewed attention and investment in the core. As the Growth Plan repositions downtowns as viable locations for public and private investments, it is important to note potential drawbacks to these intensification efforts. As such, the final recommendation from this research strikes a cautionary note, offering policy makers and local governments the opportunity to consider the impact of gentrification in their evolving mid-sized city downtowns.

The concept of gentrification has evolved from concerns over working class displacement by wealthier residents (Glass, 1964), to an understanding of how core area investments, in such things as brownfield sites and heritage buildings, have increased rents for housing and commercial spaces (Davidson & Lees, 2010; Lees, 2008). The positive impact of new development on the city's tax base can be attractive to cities, allowing them to provide increased services and supports to residents. While there is limited scholarship on gentrification in smaller urban centres, the experience of rapidly changing neighbourhoods in large cities does prove instructive. As the new, twenty-first century economy continues to divide creative and knowledge workers from service workers (Peck, 2005; Scott, 2014; Vinodrai, 2015), this schism has the potential to play out in urban centres of all sizes. As such, policy makers, politicians, residents and non-profit groups, have an opportunity to protect and build affordable housing, and to preserve affordable commercial space in rapidly changing downtowns.

1.4 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation follows an article-based format, a format that is also described as thesis by publication. It flows differently from a traditional thesis in that it contains three distinct, stand-alone manuscripts that are connected by the common theme. In this case, the theme of downtown revitalization in Ontario's mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area runs through the three manuscripts. Due to this format, the manuscripts are bookended with chapters that form the introduction, literature review (Chapter Two) methods (Chapter Three), and conclusion (Chapter Seven). However, each of the three manuscripts also contains a more detailed literature review and a descriptive methods section that is specific to the topic of each manuscript. As such, there may be some overlap in content throughout the thesis.

All three manuscripts have been submitted for publication. The manuscript on regional planning and downtown revitalization (Chapter Four) has been accepted for publication with the *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*. The manuscript on Business Improvement Areas (Chapter Five) is under review with *Planning Practice and Research*. The manuscript on coworking spaces (Chapter Six) has published with *Environment and Planning A*. As such, due to the format selected, Chapters One, Two, Three and Seven provide context to these three manuscripts.

Following the introduction in Chapter One, Chapter Two provides a broad literature review highlighting key themes in the small and mid-sized city scholarship including: downtown decline; operational steps toward renewal; economic revitalization; planning for growth and planning for decline; and the implementation of 'big city' ideas in smaller urban centres, such as smart growth and the creative economy. This chapter also identifies key research gaps that led to the creation of the three manuscripts that form the foundation of this dissertation. Additional

review of the literature, as it pertains specifically to the subject matter of each manuscript, is included in subsequent chapters.

Building on the literature in the previous chapter, Chapter Three outlines various approaches to research, highlighting their strengths and limitations. This chapter also illustrates how the theoretical framework selected for this inquiry generated research questions and led to the identification of several qualitative research methods to gather data and respond to the questions in each manuscript.

Chapter Four is the first manuscript of this dissertation, and it explores the impact of regional planning on urban revitalization in one urban growth centre located in downtown Guelph. This chapter, which aims to understand the impact of the Growth Plan on mid-sized cities, asks: What impact can regional growth planning have on urban revitalization in mid-sized cities? This question is addressed through a document review, including local media sources and municipal documents, coupled with key informant interviews including: municipal staff; local developers; the BIA; and members of the Downtown Advisory Committee. This manuscript provides one of the first assessments of planning outcomes in a mid-sized city since the advent of the provincial Growth Plan.

Chapter Five is the second manuscript that is focused on the role of Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in mid-sized city downtown renewal. Since their advent in the 1970s, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) have played a central role in downtown renewal in cities around the world (Briffault, 1999; Houstoun, 2003; Mitchell, 2001; Morçöl & Wolf, 2010). With wide-ranging mandates to market, promote, beautify, and advocate, the activities of each BIA reflect the diverse needs of their respective memberships. While the numbers of BIAs continue to grow, little attention has been paid to their role in urban affairs in the context of mid-sized

cities (Morçöl & Wolf, 2010), and this paper seeks to address that gap in the literature by asking What role(s) do Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) play in downtown revitalization of mid-sized cities? Do BIAs interact with other urban actors to achieve their downtown revitalization goals? This paper explores the role of BIAs in local economic development within the context of eight mid-sized cities across the Growth Plan area by using a local economic development framework (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999; Leigh & Blakely, 2017; Wolfe, 2014) that highlights the role of community groups in urban affairs, coupled with findings from an e-survey, site visits and key informant interviews.

Chapter Six is the third manuscript in this thesis, it that explores whether mid-sized cities, in a designated growth area in Ontario, Canada, can leverage the knowledge economy to foster local economic development while also revitalizing their ailing downtowns. Through a multi-city research project, this manuscript explores the role that coworking, or shared workspaces, can play in the local economy of mid-sized cities in Ontario. Recognizing the role that community based actors can play in urban affairs, this paper relies on a local economic development framework (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999; Leigh & Blakely, 2017; Wolfe, 2014) to explore how coworking spaces and their leadership can form a part of the urban economic fabric in mid-sized cities. Survey responses, site visits and interviews, coupled with insights from global surveys on coworking and a literature review, begin to tell the story of how economic change is playing out in eight mid-sized cities, illustrating the importance of innovative, collaborative and inclusive approaches to city building and local economic development in cities of this size.

Finally, Chapter Seven provides an overview of the three manuscripts within this dissertation, synthesizes research findings and offers overarching recommendations with respect to downtown revitalization in the context of mid-sized cities. The chapter concludes with

research limitations and recommendations for future research directions for mid-sized city scholarship.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

It has been widely agreed upon, in the small and mid-sized city literature, that the urban studies canon exposes a bias toward research in larger cities (Bell & Jayne, 2009; Burayidi, 2001; Robertson, 1999, 2001). Bell and Jayne argue that small cities have been largely ignored by urban theorists, and as such, have been rendered “irrelevant” (2009, p. 684) in the discourse of the urban experience. Canadian researchers in the mid-sized city space argue that cities of this size warrant a “distinct” status (Bunting et al., 2007, pp. 46–47; Seasons, 2003).

Smaller cities are indeed distinct from their larger counterparts in several ways. They tend to have: lower land values; a history of dispersed, low-rise development; and a consumer base that favours suburban development (Bunting et al., 2007). Their economies are also often reliant on one or two larger industries and many smaller businesses (Bias, Leyden, & Zimmerman, 2015; Wolfe, 2014). Together, these factors have made downtown renewal efforts both challenging and expensive, and unfortunately, of limited interest to researchers. Moreover, downtowns in smaller metropolitan areas also have been perceived as a drain on public resources, and large scale public sector projects have not been met with reciprocity by the private sector, standing out as “islands of revitalization in sea of decline” (Filion, 2007, p. 96). Researchers have argued that cities – both large and small – need an incremental approach to downtown revitalization, rather than a single big ‘fix’ (Gratz, 1989; Gratz & Mintz, 1998; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009b), and this slow-pace toward renewal, and limited implementation of emerging urban ideas, simply has not offered enough fodder for researchers to undertake projects in smaller cities.

There are, however, emerging factors that are beginning to position smaller urban centres as viable options for research. Eidelman speaks to the confluence of “problems, policies and politics” (2010, p. 1216) that led to the creation of the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (or Growth Plan) (2006, 2017) in Ontario. Renewed provincial interest in urbanization has in turn created circumstances that are favourable to generating research on cities of this size. First, there is mounting public interest in urban living and the creation of walkable, transit-supported communities. Secondly, Ontario’s regional-scale Growth Plan (Ontario, 2006, 2017; Sotomayor & Flatt, 2017), has focused on downtown renewal in mid-sized cities. Subsequently, municipal leadership in mid-sized cities has been tasked with creating a planning framework to intensify core areas. Together, these three developments, which include people, policies and politics, encourage urban researchers to begin to understand how smaller metropolitan areas can attract growth, develop their core areas and engage their communities and the private sector in city building.

This review of the literature illustrates both the key themes in the small and mid-sized city scholarship, and the research gaps that led to the creation of the three manuscripts that form the foundation of this dissertation. Additional review of the literature, as it pertains specifically to the subject matter of each manuscript, is included in subsequent chapters. To begin, the literature review captures broad aspects of the small and mid-sized city scholarship. From this foundation the review shifts to explore the scholarship on downtowns in smaller urban centres. Due to the extensive nature of core area decline in small and mid-sized cities, there has been considerable scholarship around economic renewal in small and mid-sized cities, and a section on the rise of strategies to repair ailing core areas follows. The final section of the literature review captures the disparate aspects of research as it relates to the implementation of ‘big city’

strategies in smaller urban centres including: the rise of the creative economy; planning for smart growth; and the attraction of immigrants.

This review leads to analysis of the key gaps in the literature, and these gaps are then addressed in the manuscripts that follow. The manuscripts (Chapters Four, Five and Six) seek to address gaps in the literature by: providing a review of planning outcomes in mid-sized city downtowns in the context of a provincial growth plan; an analysis of the role of business improvement areas (BIAs) in mid-sized city downtown revitalization; and finally, an assessment of the impact of coworking spaces on local economic development in the downtowns of mid-sized cities.

2.2 Small and Mid-sized Cities Literature Review

The literature on small and mid-sized cities remains both limited and somewhat dated. In fact, the vast majority of the research immediately identifies the need for additional scholarship in this area (Bell & Jayne, 2006, 2009; Bias et al., 2015; Burayidi, 2001; Faulk, 2006; Filion et al., 2004; Robertson, 1999). Bell and Jayne (2006, 2009) argue that small cities have been largely ignored in urban studies research, and have been relegated to the lowest levels of the “urban hierarchy” (2006, p. 2). They posit that the inclusion of small cities into the urban studies canon will add a greater degree of “heterogeneity” to the understanding of urban experiences (Bell & Jayne, 2009, p. 683). Similarly, in the Canadian context, Bunting et al. (2007) argue that while nearly one quarter of Canadians live in mid-sized cities, the scholarship on cities of this size has not sufficiently kept pace in a way that conceptualizes smaller urban centres and meaningfully informs urban policy discussions.

The limited literature on small/mid-sized cities is heavily weighted toward single- and multi-city case studies (Faulk, 2006), and operational steps to repair ailing downtowns (Burayidi,

2015; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009b). While a case study based approach helps to build a fine-grained understanding of specific conditions in a wide range of mid-sized cities, cities of this size have been largely under-conceptualized. There is no specific base of theory on small and mid-sized cities that would help to explore the urban experience outside of larger urban centres. Indeed, the application of urban theory in this context has been criticized for applying a large city lens onto a small city model and failing to take local conditions into account (Bell & Jayne, 2009). As such, we must rely on the literature that exists and when viewed as a whole, it begins to provide some preliminary insight into the urban conditions of smaller metropolitan areas. The purpose of this section is to begin to stitch together the disparate research on small and mid-sized cities, and to explore the key themes that emerge. The themes are arranged as follows: the research on core area decline in small cities; efforts to revitalize downtown economies; and the juxtaposition in the literature between planning for growth and planning for decline. This literature review will largely draw on the literature highlighting the experiences of Canadian and American small and mid-sized cities.

2.2.1 A Question of Size

Prior to reviewing the literature on small and mid-sized cities, it is important to address the many ways in which small and mid-sized cities are defined. While the question of city size may at first appear to be of minor importance in small and mid-sized city scholarship, there are widely differing perspectives and no consensus on what constitutes a ‘small’ or ‘mid-sized’ city. Robertson, a leading American researcher focused on small city downtown revitalization, defines small cities in two ways: first as having a population of 25,000-50,000 (1997); and later as having a population of fewer than 100,000 people (2001). Ford’s (2003) research of sixteen American downtowns in ‘small’ cities takes an entirely different view, and he defines small

cities as having a population of one to three million residents. In contrast to the American research, leading Canadian researchers appear to have almost reached a consensus, defining a mid-sized city as having a population of 50,000-500,000 (Bunting et al., 2007; Hall & Hall, 2008; Sands & Reese, 2017; Seasons, 2003)

Arguing against creating a static definition of small cities, Bell and Jayne (2006, 2009) instead caution researchers against replicating the archetypes of ‘big cities’ in the ‘small city’ context. Instead, they invite small city researchers to think beyond population size and focus on a city’s role and strength in the regional economy; its broader cultural influence; and whether a city can hold influence beyond its own ‘small’ boundary. This idea of recognizing urban diversity, and not seeking to universalize the experience of all ‘small’ or ‘mid-sized’ cities, is reinforced by other research that advocates in favour of taking local conditions into account when planning smaller cities (Filion, 2007; Walker, 2009a). Related perspectives include seeking to capitalize on a city’s assets, such as livability and sustainability, regardless of city size (Lewis & Donald, 2010), or recognizing the challenges and opportunities with respect to attracting talent as a function of not just a city, but a region (Lepawsky, Phan, & Greenwood, 2010). What emerges as central to the small and mid-sized city size debate is the ability to define a city’s relative size, very often in relation to the size of surrounding cities, while also looking deeper to explore a city’s scope, policy framework and relevance to the broader urban dialogue.

2.3 Downtown Decline, Renewal and Economic Revitalization

The prevalence of small and mid-sized city downtown decline is widely accepted in the literature (Bunting & Filion, 1999; Bunting et al., 2007; Burayidi, 2001, 2013; Donald & Hall, 2010; Filion et al., 2004; Robertson, 1999; Sands & Reese, 2017). While the underlying political, economic and social causes for downtown decline may differ across regions and countries, and

has been far more acute in many American cities (Bourne & Walks, 2010; Filion & Bunting, 2015), it is generally agreed that the post-war dispersed built form, and associated automobile dependency, were two of the key drivers of downtown decline in Canada and the United States. Two studies, one American and one Canadian (Bunting et al., 2007; Robertson, 1999), elucidate the roots of downtown decline in small and mid-sized cities.

Robertson (1999) asks if small city downtowns can remain viable in the shadow of widespread, post-war suburbanization across the United States. Illustrating how the ongoing decentralization of retail and office space outside of the traditional downtown has led to a cycle of “disinvestment” in downtowns (1999, p. 274), Robertson’s research shows how this pattern has then reinforced the public’s image of downtowns as unsafe, dilapidated areas of the city. Robertson (1999) sought to uncover each downtown’s strengths and weaknesses through a nation-wide survey, and selected site visits to the 108 American planning departments in cities with populations between 25,000-50,000. The top three problems identified in these downtowns included: challenges attracting new development; inability to attract people during evenings and weekends; and the strong competition from discount stores, large format retailers, and suburban malls. Downtowns’ strengths included: their strong architectural heritage; the presence of a water or riverfront; and the presence of a daytime workforce (1999, pp. 274–275).

Similarly, Bunting et al. (2007) assess the factors leading to core area decline in Canada’s mid-sized cities. In the first comprehensive research of its kind, Bunting et al. argue that failed attempts to revitalize Kitchener’s downtown do not tell the whole story of urban decline. Through their research they conclude that a set of factors, including low-density built form, decentralization and extensive automobile use across the Kitchener Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) have also contributed to downtown decline. When coupled with the results of their

Canada-wide survey of planners, Bunting et al. (2007) are able to corroborate findings in the Kitchener CMA and to conclude that 90% of mid-sized city downtowns are experiencing various challenges. These challenges include: storefront vacancies and abandoned buildings; growing public concern over downtown safety; and a backlash against ongoing municipal investments for downtown revitalization projects (2007).

Robertson (2001) concluded that to remain vital, downtowns must capitalize on their natural assets and create a sense of place. This is consistent with Canadian research that speaks to the importance of both the natural and built environment in urban renewal (Filion et al., 2004), and the need to create multifaceted downtowns that are resilient to changes in the market and operate as more than retail space (Walker, 2009a). While discussions around downtown decline paint a largely negative picture of the urban experience in small cities, emerging scholarship (Bias et al., 2015; Morckel & Rybarczyk, 2015) is beginning to ask new questions about what conditions are required to make small city downtowns vital in the twenty-first century.

The research of Bias, Leyden and Zimmerman (2015) seeks to understand the policy framework that supports successful small metropolitan downtowns in the United States. They argue that mixed-use zoning, strong support for a Main Street program, and cooperation between public and private stakeholders are essential ingredients for downtown revitalization (2015). Caldwell's (2013) research on small city and rural community economic development illustrates the power of community engagement and partnerships as smaller centres work collaboratively to repair their ailing economies. New research from Sands and Reese (2017), comparing the mid-sized city experience across North America, highlights the challenges to economic prosperity, such as limited resources, facing cities of this size. Their research illustrates how certain economic and geographic conditions in mid-sized cities, such as the presence of natural

resources, a strong advanced manufacturing base or a post-secondary institution, allow them to prosper over their similar sized counterparts (Sands & Reese, 2017).

2.3.1 Operational Steps Toward Renewal

Drawing on the research documenting downtown decline, it is not surprising that much of the literature on downtown revitalization seeks to outline an operational model or provide ‘how to’ steps with respect to repairing ailing downtowns in small and mid-sized cities. Much of the literature in this area appears to be speaking to a practitioner-based audience, or those who have the ability to affect change in their downtowns including planners, local politicians and business improvement area (BIA) managers. While American researchers (Burayidi, 2015; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009b) approach the topic of downtown revitalization from slightly different vantage points, each has spent much of their academic careers undertaking primary research on smaller cities, and as such, can be viewed as some of the initial contributors to the topic of downtown renewal outside of large urban centres.

Robertson’s (2001) eight principles to lead to downtown development range from encouraging small cities to develop a vision and design guidelines, to establishing public/private partnerships, to capitalizing on downtown’s heritage assets to attract visitors. Underpinning Robertson’s recommendations is the advice to not focus exclusively on a single-ticket item to ‘fix’ downtowns. This incremental approach to downtown revitalization is consistent with other research on small and mid-sized cities that encourages researchers to embrace urban diversity (Bell & Jayne, 2009) and advocates in favour of a focus on location-specific planning solutions (Filion, 2007). Robertson also builds on the concept of “urban husbandry” (Gratz, 1989; Gratz & Mintz, 1998), an urban revitalization method that advances the idea that change within downtowns should be “gradual, natural, noncataclysmic” and be responsive to “genuine

economic and social needs” (1989, p. 147). Although Gratz’s research was on larger urban centres, like New York City, due to her focus on rejuvenation on the neighbourhood scale, her ideas about small steps toward renewal have resonance in smaller centres as well.

Walker (2009b) echoes this idea of incremental improvements in his research on planning small and mid-sized city downtowns that seeks to debunk the ‘top 10’ myths about downtown redevelopment. Key amongst these myths is the sentiment that a single, large investment, such as a shopping mall, will revive a downtown. His research has illustrated the failure of downtown “mallings” (Walker, 2009b, p. 39), and parallel Canadian research has also shown that replicating suburban malls in downtowns has not led to their revitalization (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Filion et al., 2004).

Growing out of case study research on small and mid-sized cities (Burayidi, 2001, 2013), two of the ideas advanced by Burayidi’s more recent research on ‘ten strategies’ to promote downtown vitality takes the dialogue about core area revitalization to the next level. First, Burayidi advocates for small and mid-sized cities to increase their downtown residential population via the creation of municipal incentives to attract new development. Second, he encourages small city leaders to work to attract new immigrants to their city’s core in order to both diversify the local economy and add to their labour force (2015). These two important aspects of Burayidi’s list, draw from his “en-RICHED” model (Burayidi, 2013, p. 198), which involves thinking beyond traditional retail revitalization to focus on such things as: residential development; immigration; cultural amenities; heritage; and design. This model illustrates how emerging literature on small cities is advancing seemingly big city urban strategies in the small city context and it will be further addressed later in the chapter.

While on the surface, this aspect of the literature's focus on operational steps to revitalize downtowns may appear to be targeted at a practitioner audience, the ideas advanced by Robertson, Burayidi and Walker reinforce the importance of connecting the planning and downtown revitalization research with a practitioner-based audience. These researchers also seek to focus exclusively on small and mid-sized cities, and acknowledge the distinct challenges faced when planning and developing cities of this size. Faulk (2006) is openly critical of what he describes as the overly "descriptive and prescriptive" (2006, p. 626) approach to research on small and mid-sized cities. He argues that this approach causes cities to attempt to simply replicate efforts that have worked in other areas, rather than account for local conditions. However, it is important that research on cities of this size begin to build best practice principles for planning small and mid-sized cities that are steeped in case study evidence. The research undertaken to date provides an important foundation for future researchers, and paves the way toward greater conceptualization and inclusion of the small and mid-sized city experience in the urban studies canon.

2.3.2 Economic Revitalization

The concept of downtown revitalization has been described as breathing new life back into cities (Holcomb, 1981), and not surprisingly, an important aspect of the literature on small and mid-sized cities focuses on downtown economic revitalization. The increase of vacant storefronts, abandoned buildings with absentee landlords, and struggling retailers tell the story of downtown economic decline in the small and mid-sized city literature (Bunting et al., 2007; Burayidi, 2013; Filion & Hammond, 2008; Robertson, 1999). To reverse this negative economic trend, public and private partners have undertaken a range of revitalization strategies to boost the downtown economy in the post-war period. Buoyed by government grants and programs,

downtown malls, arenas, performing arts centres, and the requisite roads and parking infrastructure were built in an effort to compete with booming suburban retailers. However, in isolation, these strategies failed to stimulate downtown economies and the decline continued (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Hernandez & Jones, 2005; Hernandez & Simmons, 2006).

In the 1970's, downtown business and property owners banded together to combat retail decline, and created merchant-led associations, or Business Improvement Districts (BID). While activities of each BID vary widely, all share a common goal of revitalizing downtown economies through collective action (Briffault, 1999, 2010; Gomez, Isakov, & Semansky, 2015; Gopal-Agge & Hoyt, 2008; Hernandez & Jones, 2005; Morcol, Hoyt, Meek, & Zimmerman, 2008). BIDs operate under a number of names, Business Improvement Area (BIA) in Canada and the Main Street Approach in the United States, but all share several common features. BIDs represent the interests of businesses within a defined geographic boundary (most commonly in downtowns); they are funded through a tax levy on property owners in the boundary; and they use a variety of marketing, promotions and advocacy strategies to improve retail activity and attract new businesses to the area (Hernandez & Jones, 2005, 2008; Lewis, 2010).

The BID movement originated in Canada in the early 1970s through the creation of the first Business Improvement Area (BIA) in a west-end neighbourhood in downtown Toronto (Hernandez & Jones, 2005; Ontario, 2010). The BIA movement has roots in big cities, and research on Canadian BIAs focuses largely on case studies from large urban centres (Gomez et al., 2015; Gopal-Agge & Hoyt, 2008; Hernandez & Jones, 2005, 2008; Hernandez & Simmons, 2006; Perez et al., 2003). However, according to the Executive Director of the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA), 44% of Ontario's 300 BIAs are located in the downtown areas of Ontario's small and mid-size cities (OBIAA, personal communication,

August 2015). As such, BIAs are an important aspect of the downtown landscape in smaller cities, yet the role of BIAs in small metropolitan areas in Canada remains largely unexamined in the literature.

In the United States, Robertson's (2003, 2004) research on small cities fills an important gap in the literature, and he addresses the positive impact of the Main Street Approach on downtown economic revitalization. With a four-point mandate to organize, promote, design and economically restructure downtowns, his research suggests that the largest uptake on the Main Street Approach has been in smaller urban centres (Robertson, 2004). Robertson (2003) argues that the success of the program in smaller centres can be attributed to the flexibility of the program, and the ability for downtown organizations to interpret and implement the four principles with a sensitivity toward local conditions.

BIDs, however, have not been without their critics. Lewis argues that they are a manifestation of neoliberal values, putting private business interests ahead of the public good (2010). Similarly, Walker (2009b), although generally supportive of the BID model, is skeptical of several of the key functions of BIDs. His research challenges the simplistic notion that additional parking and beautiful streetscapes will attract visitors downtown. Rather, Walker advocates in favour of BIDs thinking beyond retail revitalization as a strategy for downtown renewal, and instead advances the need for a multifaceted, mixed use downtown core that is able to withstand changes in the market due to its economic diversification (2009b).

This recommendation is consistent with the provincial Growth Plan's creation of mixed-use urban growth centres in Ontario's mid-sized cities (Ontario, 2006, 2017), and other research (Burayidi, 2013; Robertson, 2001) that illustrates that downtowns need to be multifaceted rather than singularly focused on retail revitalization. Filion also argues that economic recovery in

small metropolitan downtowns requires not only a retail plan, but also government involvement through tax incentives, and “constant vigilance” against signs of decline (2004, p. 399). Wolfe (2014) cautions that if mid-sized cities are overly focused on a single, declining industry, they can suffer in the new economy if they fail to innovate and partner with regional research intuitions.

Through this review of the literature on downtown decline, renewal and revitalization, several gaps become apparent in the current research. While researchers identify the important role of allied groups and champions in urban renewal in cities of this size, there remains a limited understanding of the role of such groups or champions in the urban life of smaller cities. For example, little scholarship exists on the impact of neighbourhood groups, citizen-led coalitions or other non-profit organizations in downtown renewal in mid-sized cities. In addition, the small and mid-sized city scholarship advances the idea of incremental improvements and advises against large-scale quick fixes in urban areas. Despite this recommendation, there is again limited empirical research on whether small, incremental changes can bring about downtown renewal in mid-sized cities. As such, Chapters Four, Five and Six will address questions related to these gaps by exploring questions around the municipal planning response to the provincial Growth Plan (Chapter Four) and the role of allied groups, such as Business Improvement Areas and coworking spaces, in advancing mid-sized city downtown renewal (Chapters Five and Six, respectively).

2.4 Uneven Interurban Growth

There is a tension in the literature with respect to population growth and decline in small and mid-sized Canadian cities. While Ontario’s Growth Plan outlines a case for continued population and employment growth in cities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario, 2006,

2017) the literature paints a broader picture of urban decline in smaller Canadian cities (Bourne & Simmons, 2003; Donald & Hall, 2010, 2015; Filion, 2010; H. Hall, 2009; H. Hall & Hall, 2008). While urban growth centres in the downtowns areas of Brantford, Kitchener and Guelph may experience population growth, it has been argued that it is their proximity to the Greater Toronto Area that is fueling this development, and that this has made their growth trajectory inconsistent with the urban realities of other small and mid-sized cities across the country (Filion, 2010, p. 526). Markusen's research argues that effective regional and industrial policies allow some smaller cities to develop "second tier status" in relation to "primate cities", or their larger counterparts (1999, p. 21).

Hall and Hall (2008) argue that the lack of literature on both shrinking small cities, and the need to plan for population decline, exposes bias in the Canadian literature toward scholarship that is heavily focused on growth areas of southern Ontario. Broader demographic trends show that the majority of smaller cities will not receive enough internal migrants or new immigrants to foster continued growth (Donald & Hall, 2010, 2015). Donald and Hall posit that this will lead to "uneven interurban geography" (2015, p. 258) a trend that Filion refers to as the "polarization" (2010, p. 530) of Canadian cities, describing how a handful of big cities will experience continued growth, while their smaller counterparts struggle with declining economies and populations. Bourne and Simmons argue that this differential growth will create new "fault lines" across the country, sharpening the economic and social divisions between growing and shrinking regions (2003, p. 24). This perspective is consistent with research on economic transitions in Canada, which illustrates that growth of the knowledge economy is happening largely in big cities (Florida, 2002; Gertler, 2003).

2.5 Big City Ideas In Small Cities: Creative economy, smart growth and immigration

An emerging subset of the literature on small and mid-sized cities seeks to apply theories and planning practices generally applied in big cities onto smaller urban centres. Researchers offer a cautionary note about the challenges in applying big city theory to smaller centres (Burayidi, 2013; Filion, 2007). They argue that there is no universal approach to planning cities of this size, however, if local conditions are accounted for, their application could have some benefit to smaller centres. The following themes that emerge in the literature are organized as follows: the cultivation of the creative or knowledge economy in smaller centres; the application of smart growth outside of large urban centres; and the strategies being used by small and mid-sized cities to attract and retain immigrants.

2.5.1 The Creative Economy

As the global economy shifts away from a traditional industrial base in favour of a knowledge-based economy (Bourne & Walks, 2010), it is not surprising that the leadership of cities, big and small, has become eager to attract knowledge-based businesses and creative industries in an effort to boost their local economies (Vinodrai, 2015). Florida's research on the "creative class" (2002) has identified that cities rich in urban amenities with an openness to diversity will have a competitive advantage in attracting creative industries. This new economy relies on innovations that are most often fostered in the close proximity of cities, where cross-sector clusters, or agglomerations, can be developed (Vinodrai, 2015; Wolfe, 2014). While research has shown that Ontario "city regions" (Gertler et al., 2002) have many of the important ingredients required to attract knowledge or creative workers. Gertler (2003) argues that the knowledge economy most readily develops in larger, urban areas.

While the knowledge or creative economy is deemed to be the purview of big cities, (Florida, 2002; Gertler, 2003), several researchers attempt to explore the creative cities concept in the realm of smaller urban centres. While Peck (2005) is openly critical of the quick adoption of creative city principles by municipalities and argues that strategies to attract the creative class are both elitist (fostering gentrification) and inherently neoliberal (eschewing government involvement), large and small cities continue to strategize on how to attract creative workers. Interestingly, Florida's (2017) most recent book addresses what he describes as the "New Urban Crisis", or the increased economic segregation between the service and creative classes. As this economic polarization continues to grow in rapidly gentrifying cities, Florida argues that policy options, such as building mass transit, raising wages and addressing the lack of affordable housing, can foster greater social equity and build a higher quality of life for all city residents (Florida, 2017).

While Sands and Reese (2008) share Peck's critique of the quick uptake of Florida's (2002) original creative city principles, they seek to ground their perspective in a broad 40-city case study that assesses whether the presence of talent, technology and tolerance lead to economic prosperity in Canada's mid-sized cities. Although their findings do not show a direct correlation between indicators such as tolerance and economic growth in mid-sized cities, they do advocate for additional study in this area and encourage cities to foster their own individualized local economic development strategies (Sands & Reese, 2008). Similarly, using small city case studies, Lewis and Donald (2010) seek to extend Florida's creative class concept into smaller cities. Describing a fatigue with being relegated to the "loser status" (2010, p. 30) in the creative cities narrative, and wanting to eschew big city "mimicry" (p.31), they explore the factors that can bolster the creative economy in small metropolitan areas. Their research asks

whether the creative economy can be re-conceptualized in smaller cities by changing the rubrics for success. When substituting talent, technology and tolerance (Florida, 2002) for livability and sustainability, which includes everything from green space to high quality public amenities, Lewis and Donald (2010) argue that smaller cities do provide attractive amenities to creative work. They also encourage small cities to link with regional and national urban networks.

Lewis and Donald's perspective aligns with Bell and Jayne's (2009) advice for small cities to consider their scope rather than size. These perspectives are reinforced in a report on the creative economy in Ontario cities (Gertler et al., 2002, p. 22), which found that city-regions, including several mid-sized cities (Kitchener, Hamilton, St. Catharines and London), have the capacity to compete for and attract creative industries. As Canadian city-regions, or areas defined by a core city surrounded by smaller urban centres (Bradford & Bramwell, 2014; Hodge, Hall, & Robinson, 2017; Wolfe, 2014) continue to grow, regional approaches can begin to offer "policy diversity and innovation" (Rodriguez-Pose, 2008, p. 1025) to the area. Perhaps most notably in Ontario, the planning outcomes associated with the regional-scale *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario, 2017) has had a significant impact on the planning paradigm of mid-sized cities within its boundary (Chapter Four), leading to new regional transit development and associated downtown intensification.

2.5.2 Smart Growth

Smart growth was a movement that gained momentum in the United States in the 1990's, and has since found allies in city planning departments and in the broader urban planning dialogue across both Canada and the United States (Edwards & Haines, 2007; Filion, 2003). Smart growth favours dense, walkable, transit-oriented communities, and is largely a reaction to decades of unchecked urban sprawl in larger urban centres. With a focus on altering land use

patterns by creating complete communities, mixed-use neighbourhoods and increasing urban connectivity through transit (Grant, 2002), the principles of smart growth are deeply embedded into Ontario's Growth Plan (Ontario, 2006, 2017).

City planners in larger urban centres embrace smart growth as a means to better manage growth and curb sprawl. However, Mayer, Danis and Greenberg (2002) argue that smart growth principles can be applied in smaller American cities. Their research seeks to apply these ideas in the context of cities facing rising taxes in the face of population, employment and core area decline. They suggest that smart growth in small communities can actually launch a virtuous cycle whereby infill projects remove pressure from the tax base thereby freeing up resources to revitalize core areas (2002). However, they acknowledge that mixing land uses, and denser developments in existing residential neighbourhoods represents a significant cultural shift in small city planning.

Conversely, in a review of planning documents in small American cities, Edwards and Haines (2007) examine the disparate and often unsuccessful strategies used by smaller cities with respect to implementing state-mandated smart growth principles. Concluding that smart growth is better suited to growth areas and larger urban centres, their research exposes a limitation in simply applying big city theory into smaller urban centres. Brewer and Grant (2015) substantiate this claim in their research on smart growth and smaller Canadian cities. Their research examines differential application of smart growth principles in various neighbourhoods of a slow-growing mid-sized Canadian city.

Using suburban neighbourhoods in Halifax, Nova Scotia as a case study area, Brewer and Grant (2015) argue that there are significant barriers to implementing density in mid-sized cities, and that suburban development can continue to prosper for several reasons. First, this type of

development continues due to lower land costs, making single-family homes on large lots affordable and marketable. Smaller city populations are also unable to support mass transit, allowing car culture to continue to permeate the planning process. Finally, Brewer and Grant identify the significant staff turnover in city planning departments, coupled with a lack of leadership from city council and the influence of local developers, as other reasons that density is difficult to achieve in mid-sized cities.

While Mayer et al. (2002) illustrate the positive aspects of implementing smart growth in small cities, additional research shows mounting evidence of significant limitations in applying these principles in both larger and smaller cities (Brewer & Grant, 2015; Filion, 2003; Grant, 2002, 2006). Moreover, Edwards and Haines (2007) argue that there has been too little evaluation of plan implementation in the area of small cities, and this is consistent with Seasons' (2003) research on the dearth of planning evaluation in mid-sized Ontario cities. Brewer and Grant's conclusion that suburban sprawl will continue unchecked in smaller cities as the market continues to demand single family homes, and assuming that gridlock does not become an issue, is consistent with the dispersed built form that has been so pervasive in mid-sized cities (Bunting et al., 2007).

2.5.3 City Growth Through Immigration

Cities are becoming increasingly reliant on immigration to boost their populations and economic activity. In Canada, the most recent National Household Survey shows that immigrants are largely drawn to the country's largest urban centres or Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, (Statistics Canada, 2011). Big cities offer amenities, services, employment and cultural diversity that are attractive to newcomers. Burayidi (2013) argues that smaller American cities are not doing enough to attract immigrants. He notes that immigration can serve three important and

interrelated functions. Immigration can boost populations in declining smaller cities, help revitalize and diversify downtowns, and finally, the presence of newcomers can add to a city's overall labour force.

Carr, Lichter and Kefalas (2012) undertook research in two declining small American towns, and uncovered differential approaches to welcoming new immigrants. They argue that local leadership is instrumental in creating policies and a culture that can either divide or include newcomers. Similarly, Canadian researcher, Walton-Roberts explores the important role that government policy plays in attracting immigrants to “second tier” (2011, p. 453) Canadian cities. She illustrates how, through policy tools, smaller cities in southern Ontario are beginning to challenge the traditional “first tier” gateway cities and are becoming a viable options for newcomers. Walton-Roberts finds that universities are a key player in this dynamic. Not only are universities actively recruiting international students, but they also have been found to act as an important “buffer” with respect to mitigating discrimination experienced by newcomer students to Canada (Walton-Roberts, 2011).

Implicit in this research is the notion that small and mid-sized cities can benefit from immigration. Not only can immigration provide a much needed population boost, but immigrants can also offer additional diversity and entrepreneurial thinking to smaller centres. What emerges as a key concern in the research, however, is the varied reception that new immigrants receive in smaller cities. The history of racial segregation in the United States, and the often-homogenous nature of smaller cities in Ontario, can present challenges to new immigrant integration. This speaks to the importance of social planning at the municipal level in smaller cities, in order to create programs and provide services to a diversifying population.

When exploring the concept of big city ideas being applied in larger urban centres, there are clear gaps in the literature. These include exploring whether the sharing economy is taking root in smaller centres; strategies to attract knowledge or creative workers outside of large urban centres; and the barriers to implementing smart growth policies in cities with smaller populations. As such, Chapter Six will explore the role that coworking spaces play in activating the downtown economies of mid-sized cities across Ontario.

2.6 Conclusion

The dearth of research on small and mid-sized cities has been well-documented in the literature (Bell & Jayne, 2006, 2009; Bunting et al., 2007; Burayidi, 2001, 2013; Robertson, 2001). Moreover, the existing literature has been criticized for being overly prescriptive, under conceptualized, and too heavily weighted toward case studies (Faulk, 2006; Robertson, 2001). Accordingly, a compelling case has been made for the creation of a small cities ‘research agenda’ (Bell & Jayne, 2009). The preceding literature review has stitched together the disparate pieces of the narrative on smaller cities, illustrating the key research undertaken in cities of this size. It has also revealed several of the gaps in the body of knowledge on small and mid-sized cities. While the list of possible approaches to research in the small and mid-sized city space is seemingly endless, this section of the paper will seek to provide an overview of key gaps in the literature as they relate to the themes covered in the literature review (Table 2-1).

Table 2-1: Gaps in Small and Mid-Sized Cities Research

Topic	Selected Research	Gap
Downtown decline, renewal and economic revitalization	Sands & Reese (2017) Bell & Jayne (2006, 2008) Bias et al. (2015) Bunting et al. (1999, 2007) Burayidi (2001, 2013) Robertson (1999, 2001, 2003, 2004) Walker (2010a, 2010b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of BIAs, and other allied groups, in downtown revitalization • The role of residential development as a revitalization tool in mid-sized cities • Evaluation of the impact/uptake on CIPs and financial incentives in planning outcomes
Uneven inter-urban growth	Filion (2010, 2015) Grant (2006) Markusen (1999) Hall & Hall (2010) Hall & Donald (2010, 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore if downtown revitalization strategies in mid-sized UGCs can be reinterpreted or applied in shrinking small/mid-sized cities • Planning strategies for shrinking smaller cities • The impact mid-sized city UGCs on surrounding rural downtowns
Big city ideas meet small cities: creative economy; smart growth; and immigration	Brewer & Grant (2015) Burayidi (2013) Carr et al. (2012) Edwards & Haines (2007) Lewis & Donald (2010) Gertler et al. (2002) Walson-Roberts (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of co-working as a means to attract/cultivate knowledge workers • Small and mid-sized city-specific strategies to cultivate the knowledge economy • Evaluation of policies, programs used to attract/retain immigrants and foster diversity in mid-sized cities

This review of the literature highlights the key themes in small and mid-sized city scholarship. These themes include downtown decline and revitalization; economic renewal strategies; and the application of seemingly ‘big city’ ideas in the context of smaller urban centres. When viewed as a whole, this literature review has identified key gaps, namely around a broad-based theoretical framework from which to explore small and mid-sized cities, and empirical research to test how emerging twenty-first century trends, in urban planning and economic development, are unfolding outside of large urban centres. As such, the chapters that

follow are informed by these gaps, and draw on aspects of this literature, to frame three interrelated manuscripts focused on approaches to downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities.

CHAPTER THREE: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Context

This research was motivated by the inclusion of mid-sized cities in *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario, 2006, 2017). While there is some discussion of outer ring urban growth centres (UGCs) in emerging Growth Plan research (Allen & Campsie, 2013; Fillion, 2007; White, 2007), the primary focus of the plan, and associated scholarship, focuses on inner ring UGCs and challenges being experienced in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Yet with over 45% of Ontario's population living in mid-sized cities (Sotomayor & Flatt, 2017), smaller cities remain on the margins of the urban studies canon (Bell & Jayne, 2009). This research aims to fill a gap in the scholarship with respect to Growth Plan implementation and downtown revitalization strategies in mid-sized cities within the UGCs in the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. For the purposes of this study, a mid-sized city is defined as a city with a population of 50,000-500,000 (Bunting et al., 2007; H. Hall & Hall, 2008; Seasons, 2003).

The outer ring UGCs in the Growth Plan share several common characteristics. Most importantly, they are all experiencing year on year population growth (Table 3-1). However, this growth has had an impact on the built form of these cities, and with established patterns of low-rise, suburban development, these mid-sized cities are being challenged to reverse this planning paradigm, and begin to build in a dense, sustainable manner. Despite this challenge, these cities also have important assets; they are all home to historic core areas and at least one post-secondary institution.

Table 3-1: Population Change and Employment in Study Area Cities

City	2006	2011	2016	City population change (2011-2016)	Provincial population change (2011-2016)
Barrie	128,430	136,063	141,434	3.9%	4.6%
Brantford	90,192	93,650	97,496	4.1%	4.6%
Cambridge	120,371	126,748	129,920	2.5%	4.6%
Guelph	114,943	121,688	131,794	8.3%	4.6%
Kitchener	204,668	219,153	233,222	6.4%	4.6%
Peterborough	74,898	78,777	81,032	2.9%	4.6%
St. Catharines	131,989	131,400	133,113	1.3%	4.6%
Waterloo	97,475	98,780	104,986	6.3%	4.6%

(Source: Statistics Canada)

The eight outer ring UGCs also sit outside of the *primary* commuter-shed of the GTA (Table 3-2), and must seek to attract new residents and employment in the shadow of Canada’s largest city, Toronto. With low unemployment rates, relative to the provincial average, these cities have shown their ability to both grow their population and maintain their labour force. Six of the eight study area cities have an unemployment rate at or below the provincial average.

Table 3-2: Commute Times

City	Number of Commuters (2016)	Commuters travelling more than 45 minutes (2016)	Unemployment City (2016)	Unemployment Province (2016)
Barrie	68,290	17,020	7.4%	24.9%
Brantford	44,335	7,530	6.9%	16.9%
Cambridge	63,790	10,545	6.4%	16.5%
Guelph	66,335	10,455	6.1%	16.3%
Kitchener	114,320	12,940	6.8%	11.3%
Peterborough	33,695	4,075	8.9%	12%
St. Catharines	57,610	6,125	8.1%	10.6%
Waterloo	48,835	4,325	6.9%	8.8%

(Source: Statistics Canada)

While these UGCs share common features, it is important to also understand their diversity. Through their mid-sized city project, the Evergreen Research Collaborative has categorized cities of this size into three groups: Centre Cities, Satellite/Suburban Cities and Rural Municipalities (Table 3-3). According to these definitions, Sotomoyor and Flatt (2017) the

municipalities in the mid-sized outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe could be categorized in the following manner: Peterborough, Guelph, Brantford, Cambridge and St. Catharines as Centre Cities; Kitchener-Waterloo as Partner Centre Cities; and Barrie as a Satellite/Suburban Cities. These categorizations help us to understand that while each of these outer ring municipalities is a mid-sized city, they each need to be considered in relation to their regional context. For example, Peterborough plays an important role as a Centre City within its region, and it is an urban hub for the surrounding smaller cities. Barrie, by contrast, as a Satellite/Suburban City, has the highest percentage (24.9%) of all outer ring municipalities commuting to work upwards of 45 minutes each day (Table 3-2).

While each of the outer ring urban growth centres has its own history, challenges and defining features, their inclusion in the Growth Plan, with similar provincial targets for population and employment growth, affords the opportunity to explore strategies these cities are using to foster local economic development and urban revitalization.

Table 3-3: Types of Mid-sized Cities

Mid-Sized City Type	Description
Centre Cities (Partner Cities)	Regional hubs with historic centres that function as autonomous economies and self-standing communities. Centre cities have played important economic roles throughout Canadian history. Most of their inner neighbourhoods pre-date WWII and the rise of the automobile. As such, they have good stocks of downtown housing and a walkable down town core. Their main function is to connect a larger geographic region with regional, national and even international markets and services. Centre cities provide employment, higher education, health services, and amenities. Cities within this category have higher densities and provide employment to at least half or more of the local residents.
	Partner Cities are a type of Centre City with two or more cities of similar size and density located in close proximity to each other. Partner cities share the provision of housing, employment, services and amenities across cities. Together, partner cities fulfill an equivalent role in a region to that of Centre Cities.
Satellite/Suburban Cities	Satellite/Suburban Cities are bedroom communities or suburbs within a large metropolitan area. In contrast to center and partner cities, satellite cities depend on the main urban core of the extended urbanized region for the provision of employment and services for its residents. Most Satellite/Suburban Cities were built and designed in the post-war period, following planning models aimed to facilitate automobile circulation, home-ownership and single-family housing. As a rule, less than half of active workers in a Satellite city are also residents. Satellite cities are different from rural municipalities in that they have a population density of more than 300 person per sq. km.
Rural Municipalities	Rural Municipalities are similar to satellite cities in that less than half of its residents are locally employed. They are different from suburban communities, however, in that they have lower densities (less than 300 person per sq. km), a resource-base economic orientation and depend on Centre cities or larger Metropolitan Areas to access specialized services.

Reproduced from Evergreen Mid-Sized City Compendium (Sotomoyor & Flatt, 2017)

3.1.1 Approaches to research

While three approaches to research are available, quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, Creswell advances the idea that these should be considered on a continuum, rather than as isolated approaches to research (2014). A quantitative approach represents one end of this spectrum, it is characterized as relying on numerical data, using closed-ended questions and testing theory through an understanding of relationships between variables (Creswell, 2014). On the opposite end, a qualitative approach relies on words, open-ended questions and seeks to understand the “meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (2014, p. 4). A mixed methods approach exists in the centre of this continuum, employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches when collecting data.

While no one approach to research is superior, each helps the researcher uncover information related to the questions guiding the inquiry. Quantitative approaches are suited to answer questions that seek to uncover relationships between variables, testing a theory through such methods as experiments and surveys (Creswell, 2014). This approach can be helpful when working with large data sets, or testing an existing theory (Neuman, 2014), whereas a qualitative approach is better suited to exploratory research and “tends to be more open to using a wide range of evidence and discovering new issues” (Neuman, 2014, p. 39).

Qualitative methods can include the use of case studies, key informant interviews and document reviews (Creswell, 2014; Neuman, 2014; Yin, 2014) to collect data. A qualitative approach to research may involve fewer participants and the researcher is directly involved (Neuman, 2014) in such things as observing, facilitating focus groups or conducting interviews. The involvement of a researcher in primary data collection with human participants has been criticized for its ability to allow personal biases into data collection. A mixed methods approach

to research combines these approaches, and leverages both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data. As such, Creswell (2014) argues that this combined approach can help foster a broader understanding of a research problem than a single approach in isolation.

3.1.2 A mixed methods approach

The limited scholarship on small and mid-sized cities across North America, presented a broad research problem (Creswell, 2014), or gap in the literature, that warranted inquiry. This research problem benefited from an exploratory, mixed methods approach and the combined use of descriptive statistics and qualitative research methods to allow for open-ended engagement with local actors (Creswell, 2014; Neuman, 2014) in each city. This mixed methods approach to data collection fostered an understanding of the current conditions in each city, with respect to such things as changes in population and unemployment, and the ability to then engage with local actors, through key informant interviews and site visits, to animate the data.

To begin, descriptive statistics on the cities in the study area were generated from publicly available data from Statistics Canada. The use of descriptive statistics generated an understanding of key features of the study area including: changes to the population and unemployment rate and commuter distance travelled in the outer ring municipalities included in the Growth Plan area (Tables 3-1 and 3-2). These data informed each of the three manuscripts, and additional quantitative data was gathered on the budget and uptake on municipal incentives (Chapter Four) the size and budget of Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) (Chapter Five).

From this foundation, qualitative approaches data collection followed. In Chapter Four, a case study approach, using case a single-city case study, was selected because it allowed for what Neuman describes as an examination of both the details of the “case’s internal features” as well as the surrounding situation” (2014, p. 42) or a detailed (Flyvbjerg, 2006) or nuanced

(Stake, 1995) understanding of an issue or dynamic within a particular context. The case study approach allowed for an analysis that has led to a broader understanding (Stake, 1995) of the urban dynamics in individual mid-sized cities in the context of a regional-scale, provincially mandated growth plan. Moreover, the case study approach to research can be replicated (Yin, 2014) in other mid-sized city downtowns in other growth and non-growth regions. While Faulk (2006) is critical of the over reliance on case studies in small and mid-sized city research, case studies do allow for data collection and analysis that can generate theories on smaller urban centres.

To gather data for each of the three manuscripts a range of qualitative methods was employed to engage participants and gather data. These included content analysis of municipal planning and economic development documents and reports; site visits; electronic surveys (see Appendices A and B for survey questions); and key informant interviews. It should be noted that a total of 57 independent interviews were conducted for the three manuscripts, and there were four interviews that offered insight across multiple manuscripts. Throughout the data collection process, presentations on emergent findings were made. This included public presentations in municipalities and at municipal conferences attended by practitioners, community groups and politicians. This allowed for the testing of emerging ideas and themes, as well as ongoing conversations with local, engaged actors throughout the research process. In addition, three publications sharing preliminary findings on growth plan outcomes, BIAs and coworking in mid-sized cities appeared in *Municipal World* (Jamal, 2015a; Jamal & Grady, 2016). Findings on coworking spaces were also shared through Evergreen's *Mid-Sized City Research Collaborative Compendium*. Publications led to ongoing email exchanges, phone calls and requests for meetings with local planners, politicians, citizens and developers in each city.

While these manuscripts focused on cities in a provincial growth region, this approach to research, exploring the roles of regional planning and urban allies in mid-sized cities, is generalizable across other mid-sized cities in both growth and non-growth regions. Moreover, the case study approach followed in Chapter Four can be replicated in other mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area. The following sections detail the theoretical framework and specific research methods used to collect data in the three manuscripts (Chapters Four, Five and Six) that form the foundation of this dissertation.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The first manuscript in this dissertation (Chapter Four) was largely inductive in nature, guided by an interest to explore and understand a new dynamic (Creswell, 2014; Gibbs, 2007) that was taking place in a mid-sized city—namely, the creation of a provincially mandated Growth Plan, and its impact on local planning processes and outcomes. This manuscript was influenced by the existing small and mid-sized city downtown revitalization scholarship which suggests that small-scale, continuous improvements (Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009a), the presence of residents (Burayidi, 2013, 2015), and partnerships with cross-sector, allied groups (Filion, Hoernig, Bunting, & Sands, 2004; Sands & Reese, 2017) are central ingredients for downtown renewal in smaller urban centres.

The second and third manuscripts (Chapters Five and Six), exploring the role of BIAs and coworking spaces in the downtowns of mid-sized cities, were guided by a local economic development framework, a perspective that highlights the important role a wide range of actors can play in urban economic rejuvenation. Leigh and Blakely (Leigh & Blakely, 2017) describe how traditional models of economic development, focused largely on wealth generation, have led to growth that has fostered social inequality and environmental degradation. First and second

wave, or twentieth-century, economic development was characterized by “smokestack chasing and giving [corporate] incentives” (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999, p. 229), and had little regard for broad-based community development. This second wave of economic development involved state subsidies that would help mitigate costs for businesses, rather than focus on developing a robust labour market (Glasmeier, 2000).

In response to an evolving twenty-first century, knowledge-intensive economy, Leigh and Blakeley advance a renewed definition of LED that seeks to improve a community’s overall standard of living; reduce social and economic inequality; and promote environmental protection (Leigh & Blakely, 2017, p. 87). This approach is consistent with third wave economic development which is described as a strategy that builds “the capacity of the entire local economy” (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999, p. 231). Examples of third wave economic development include forging public-private partnerships; the creation of diverse, interdisciplinary networks; and the development of ‘soft’ infrastructure required to foster economic development (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999). Glasmeier (2000) describes how third wave economic development evolved to offer education and training of workers. Bramwell and Pierre describe how “new community spaces” (2017, p. 604), or organized, collaborative cross-sector groups, are now beginning to foster economic development in cities. This new approach to economic development affords the exploration of the role of non-traditional actors, such as non-profit groups, in local economic development efforts.

Emerging from this context, Leigh and Blakely (2017, pp. 103–107) offer a renewed conceptual and theoretical framework for understanding local economic development. A pillar of their model suggests cities need to move beyond support for “single purpose organizations” and be inclusive of “collaborative partnerships of many community groups...to establish a broad

foundation for competitive cities”. A local economic development framework is also compatible with recommendations stemming from small and mid-sized city scholarship that speaks to the important role that cross sector collaborations (Sands & Reese, 2017), allied groups (Filion et al., 2004) or local champions (Burayidi, 2015) can play in the city planning and downtown rejuvenation processes.

3.3 Manuscript One – Planning Outcomes

The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario, 2006, 2017) has provided researchers with the opportunity to understand the impact of provincially directed growth on planning outcomes in the downtowns of mid-sized cities. Through an exploratory case study focused on the urban growth centre located in downtown Guelph, this manuscript (Chapter Four) sought to explore whether provincially directed growth planning can begin to reverse decades of downtown decline in mid-sized cities by asking: What role does mandated growth planning have on the planning outcomes and revitalization of mid-sized city downtowns?

As noted above, a case study approach allowed for a detailed (Flyvbjerg, 2006) or nuanced (Stake, 1995) review of planning outcomes to provincially mandated growth within a municipality. In the absence of broad-based research on planning outcomes in mid-sized cities, an “instrumental case study” (Stake, 1995, p. 3), in this case located in downtown Guelph, allowed for a broader understanding of planning outcomes in mid-sized cities. This approach can be replicated (Yin, 2014) within the other seven mid-sized city downtowns with an urban growth centre in the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Data collection for this manuscript took place between 2015-2017.

Guelph, Ontario is home to more than 130,000 residents and has a provincially designated urban growth centre located in its downtown core. As a stand-alone, single-tier

municipality that sits both outside of the Greenbelt and the primary commuter-shed of the Greater Toronto Area; Guelph shares similar characteristics with other mid-sized cities in the area. To understand the broader trends impacting mid-sized cities, a literature review (Chapters Two and Four) was undertaken. This review, coupled with findings, confirmed that downtown Guelph shared similar challenges with cities of this size across North America – extensive low density, suburban development (Bunting et al., 2007), and subsequently, a significant degree of downtown decline (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Filion et al., 2004).

To understand Guelph's response to the Growth Plan, a review of local media, websites and social media was undertaken. In addition, a review of the planning documents created since the inception of the Growth Plan was also completed. This document review included an Official Plan amendment; the creation of a Downtown Secondary Plan in 2012, which was later updated in 2016 (City of Guelph, 2016); and the roll out of brownfield and downtown Community Improvement Plans (City of & Guelph, 2012; City of Guelph, 2011) in 2011-2012. To complement the data collection, in person key informant interviews were held with a range of urban actors including: downtown planners; city councillors; citizens and business representatives on the Downtown Advisory Committee; the co-founder of the downtown coworking space; private sector land developers; and the Executive Director of the Downtown Guelph Business Association (Guelph's BIA). These interviews also included site visits to particular projects, events and neighbourhoods in downtown Guelph. As a resident of Guelph, another key aspect of this work involved participant observation (Creswell, 2014), and the opportunity to live and work in the city during this period of change.

During the period of 2015-2017, a total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted, and detailed notes were taken or the conversation was recorded and then transcribed. The data

collected were then coded to identify themes that would comprise the findings and foundation for the recommendations in this manuscript. A key limitation of this approach is the use of a single-city case study to explore planning outcomes in mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area. As such, future research would benefit from a comparative case study approach that contrasted experiences in either multiple mid-sized cities with the Growth Plan area, or between cities in growth and non-growth regions (Donald & Hall, 2015).

3.4 Manuscript Two – Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)

In Ontario, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) were first established in the 1970s with a mandate to beautify, promote and market the businesses and services within their geographic boundary (Ontario, 2010). Generally located in the downtowns of cities, BIAs were first created as a merchant-led response to growing suburban development on the outskirts of cities (OBIAA, 2017; Ontario, 2010). Each of the mid-sized cities in the outer ring of the Growth Plan (2017) area is home to at least one BIA located in their historic downtown core or urban growth centre. To understand the role that BIAs were playing in downtown revitalization in cities within the Growth Plan area, this manuscript asked the following questions: What role(s) do Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) play in downtown revitalization of mid-sized cities? Do BIAs interact with other urban actors to achieve their downtown revitalization goals?

Table 3-4: BIAs with an UGC

Urban Growth Centre	Business Improvement Area
Downtown Barrie	Downtown Barrie BIA
Downtown Brantford	Downtown Brantford BIA
Downtown Cambridge	Downtown Cambridge BIA Preston Towne Centre BIA Hespeler Village BIA
Downtown Guelph	Downtown Guelph Business Association
Downtown Kitchener	Downtown Kitchener BIA
Downtown Peterborough	Peterborough DBA
Downtown St. Catharines	St. Catharines Downtown Association
Uptown Waterloo	Uptown Waterloo BIA

The study area for this inquiry included BIAs in the downtowns of Peterborough, Barrie, Brantford, Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph, and St. Catharines. At the time of this study, these cities were home to 10 downtown BIAs, and Cambridge, Ontario stands out for having three BIAs representing each of its historic downtown areas: Galt, Preston and Hespeler. In addition to having a BIA, these mid-sized cities also share other common features including a historic downtown core and at least one post-secondary institution, they also sit outside of the primary Toronto commuter-shed and are home to a provincially designated urban growth centre (UGC). Moreover, these mid-sized cities have experienced varying degrees of core area decline, and they have a shared history of low-density, dispersed development (Bunting et al., 2007; Fillion, 2007).

To explore the role of BIAs in downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities, qualitative research methods were employed. In addition to an extensive literature review, a document review was undertaken to understand the environment within which BIAs operated. This included a review of local media, websites and municipal plans related to the study area, including Downtown Master Plans, Downtown Secondary Plans and Community Improvement Plans. Initial outreach to BIAs occurred via an electronic survey, via Survey Gizmo, and follow-

up telephone interviews and site visits followed. A total of six semi-complete survey responses were received. In addition, 24 semi-structured interviews were held with BIA managers, municipal planners, the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA), municipal economic developers, civic leaders and private developers either in person or by phone between 2015-2017 in the study area. These interviews were either recorded or extensive notes were taken, and then recordings and notes were transcribed. Responses were coded; emergent themes were identified in the findings section and inform the manuscript's recommendations.

A limitation of this approach was studying the role of BIAs exclusively in the Growth Plan area, and having only a relatively small sample size of 10 BIAs. Future research could build on this approach, expanding the research to other cities across the province, or juxtaposing the role of BIAs in both growth and non-growth regions.

3.5 Manuscript Three – Coworking

Coworking spaces first emerged in the early 2000s amongst California-based technology workers (Botsman & Rogers, 2010), but grew exponentially in big cities around the world after the global economic crisis in 2008 (Avdikos & Kalogeresis, 2016; Deskmag, 2015; Merkel, 2015). As economy shifts in favour of knowledge intensive industries (Gertler, 2003; Vinodrai, 2015), coworking spaces have emerged in downtown locations to support a new generation of knowledge workers, independent workers and entrepreneurs. Through a multi-city study, this research examines the role that coworking, or shared workspaces, can play in the local economy of mid-sized cities in Ontario. This paper used a local economic development framework advanced by Leigh and Blakely (2017) to explore whether coworking spaces can form a part of the urban economic fabric in mid-sized cities by asking: What role are coworking spaces playing

in downtown revitalization and local economic development in mid-sized cities? What supports can help to sustain coworking spaces outside of larger urban centres?

While this number has since grown, at the time of writing, of the 40 coworking spaces across Ontario, 24 are located in mid-sized cities. Of these coworking spaces, 10 sit within the study area (Table 3-2). The area selected for this manuscript was inclusive of seven mid-sized cities that sit in the outer ring (Ontario, 2006) of the Province of Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) including: Peterborough; Barrie; Waterloo; Kitchener; Brantford; Guelph; and St. Catharines. Of this cohort of outer ring urban growth centres, at the time of this research, only Cambridge, Ontario did not have a coworking space.

Table 3-5: Coworking spaces in study area

Coworking space	City	Membership focus
Creative Space	Barrie	Freelancers, start-ups, micro-businesses in all disciplines
RCity Coworking	Brantford	Unemployed and underemployed workers
10 Carden Shared Spaces	Guelph	Creative workers, researchers, social innovators, non-profits
The 349	Guelph	Technology and digital workers
Innovation Guelph	Guelph	Entrepreneurs, with a special focus on women, new ventures in all disciplines
Treehaus	Kitchener	Consultants, start-ups, non-profits and telecommuters in all disciplines
Workplace One	Kitchener-Waterloo	Telecommuters in all disciplines.
Cowork Niagara	St. Catharines	Cooperative business, independent workers
Peterborough Per Diem	Peterborough	Diverse members: telecommuters, entrepreneurs, newly located companies
Hatch PTBO	Peterborough	Social purpose businesses, enterprising non-profits

To answer these research questions a range of qualitative research methods were employed. To gather the perspectives of coworking and municipal leaders across Ontario’s mid-

sized cities 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2017 with: municipal planners; economic development officers; city councillors; coworking leaders; downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA) managers; and local developers. A document review of coworking websites, municipal downtown plans and local media was also undertaken. In addition, an electronic survey, using Survey Gizmo, was deployed to all coworking spaces across Ontario's mid-sized cities. Contact information for coworking staff was found on their websites and a link to the survey was sent via email. It is important to note that this research was supported by the province of Ontario's *Places to Grow Implementation Fund*, and as such, surveys were sent to mid-sized cities across the province that were home to multiple coworking spaces including: Hamilton, Burlington, Sudbury, London and Ottawa. Site visits and semi-structured interviews were also held in Hamilton and London. A separate report was sent to the Ontario government sharing these broader provincial findings.

A total of 10 responses were received representing all but one of the coworking spaces. These included responses from coworking spaces in Guelph (3), Kitchener, Waterloo, Peterborough (2), Barrie, Brantford and St. Catharines. The insights in the survey and interview responses, when coupled with the results from global surveys on coworking and a literature review, begin to tell the story of how economic change is unfolding in mid-sized cities. A workshop to present survey findings was hosted in downtown Guelph in 2016. This was an opportunity to present findings and refine analysis. The workshop was attended by 20 coworking, business, municipal, political and community leaders from across the province. However, as with the BIA manuscript, a key limitation of this study was a focus on southwestern Ontario, and this research could be expanded to compare the role of coworking spaces in both growth and non-growth areas of the country.

3.6 Conclusion

Together, these three manuscripts offer one of the first explorations of the changes unfolding in Ontario's mid-sized cities located within the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe in the provincial Growth Plan area. Through a combination of descriptive statistics, qualitative research methods, including an extensive literature review, document review, site visits, key informant interviews and an electronic survey, these manuscripts begin to illustrate how mid-sized cities are adapting to mandated growth planning; leveraging long-established partnerships; and welcoming the new economy into their downtown core areas. The provincial Growth Plan in Ontario (2006, 2017) has presented researchers with an opportunity to explore the strategies being used by mid-sized city governments, and local non-profit groups, to respond to mandated growth planning and urban renewal.

CHAPTER FOUR: Regional Planning and Urban Revitalization in Mid-Sized Cities: A case study on downtown Guelph

Overview

With over a decade having passed since the inception of the provincially led growth plan in Ontario, there is an opportunity to explore how cities have adapted to meet the challenges of this regional-scale plan. The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* seeks to mitigate the negative effects of decades of sprawling development by focusing on building dense, urban, transit-connected communities. While the growth plan has a primary focus on municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area, it is also inclusive of smaller urban centres that sit outside of the province's Greenbelt. These mid-sized cities have a history of downtown decline and dispersed urban form. With the inclusion of mid-sized cities in the growth plan, however, there is an opportunity to explore the strategies smaller municipalities are using to attract public and private investment and achieve residential and employment provincial targets in their core areas by 2041. Through a case study approached, focused on downtown Guelph, Ontario, this paper argues that the growth plan can serve as a catalyst to alter the planning paradigm in mid-sized cities, and that through locally led community planning efforts, and a range of site-specific incentives, mid-sized cities can begin to revitalize their downtowns and reverse core area decline.

Keywords: Downtowns, mid-sized cities, growth plan, regional planning

4.1 Introduction

As the global population becomes increasingly urbanized, cities are grappling with sprawling suburbs, increasing highway congestion and the loss of environmentally sensitive land. While these challenges have been most acutely experienced in larger urban centres, smaller urban centres are also feeling the negative effects of dispersed, low-density development (Bunting et al., 2007; Sands, 2007). Where downtowns used to be the primary civic and commercial node of small and mid-sized cities, a mid-twentieth century shift toward residential and commercial development on the periphery of these cities has resulted in depleted downtowns, a loss of viable farmland and automobile dependency in cities of this size (Burayidi, 2013; Filion et al., 2004; Sands, 2007).

In Ontario, a regional-scale growth plan is seeking to preserve natural heritage and agricultural land by reversing planning trends that have created low density, car-oriented development. The plan favours the creation of high-density, mixed-use, transit-connected communities. While the primary focus of the *Places to Grow Act* (Ontario, 2005) and the subsequent *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Growth Plan) (Ontario, 2006, 2017) is on large cities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the plan also includes eight stand-alone “outer ring” (2006, p. 52) mid-sized cities that sit outside of the primary GTA commuter-shed. Through the creation of “urban growth centres” the province has challenged mid-sized cities, with a history of low-density, dispersed development (Bunting et al. 2007; Filion et al. 2004; Sands 2007) to alter their suburban planning practices and direct public and private investments to their built-up areas, or downtowns.

With a decade having passed since its inception, there is an opportunity to explore whether the Growth Plan has altered traditional, suburban approaches to planning in mid-sized

cities. Specifically, through a case study focused on the urban growth centre located in downtown Guelph, this paper will examine whether provincially directed growth planning can begin to reverse decades of downtown decline in mid-sized cities by asking: What impact can regional growth planning have on urban revitalization in mid-sized cities?

4.2 Mid-Sized City Downtowns

To better understand the emergence of growth planning in Ontario, it is important to first step back and explore the rise and fall of rise and fall of downtowns, especially those in smaller urban centres. In the early twentieth century, downtowns were of central importance to Canadian cities; downtowns were home to civic buildings and were the predominant area of commerce within a city. In the post-WWII period, however, the primacy of Canadian downtowns was challenged by the creation of residential and commercial districts outside of the downtown area (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Gad & Matthew, 2000; Grant, 2006; Hodge & Gordon, 2008; Sands & Reese, 2017; White, 2007). Suburban neighbourhoods appeared in the post-war period due to rapid economic growth, coupled with the need to build housing for a booming population with an increasing dependency on cars.

By the 1970s early signs of downtown decline began to emerge in both large and small Canadian cities. With automobile-friendly neighbourhoods popping up further from the city's core, the arrival of regional shopping malls followed. In the next decades, large format retail centres, and employment lands easily accessed by highways, continued to expand while downtowns faced increased competition to fill vacant retail and office space (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Filion et al., 2004). By the 1970s, Canadian downtowns, especially those in smaller urban centres, were showing significant signs of decline. A sustained consumer preference for suburban living, coupled with a planning framework and a development industry

that fueled greenfield building (Filion, 2007; Grant, 2006; Hodge & Gordon, 2008), would erode the commercial and residential viability of downtowns for decades.

As such, it is not surprising that much of the literature on downtown revitalization speaks to a practitioner audience, offering operational steps toward repairing ailing downtowns in small and mid-sized cities. Robertson's (2001) eight principles promoting downtown revitalization range from encouraging smaller cities to develop a vision and design guidelines, to establishing public/private partnerships, to capitalizing on downtown's heritage assets to attract visitors. Burayidi's (2015) research advocates for small and mid-sized cities to increase their downtown residential population through the creation of incentives to attract new development. This recommendation draws from Burayidi's "en-RICHED" model (2013, p. 198), which involves thinking beyond traditional retail revitalization to focus on: residential development, immigration, cultural amenities, heritage and design. Underpinning both Robertson and Burayidi's recommendations is the advice to not focus exclusively on a single-ticket item to 'fix' downtowns. This incremental approach to downtown revitalization is consistent with other research on small and mid-sized cities that encourages researchers to embrace urban diversity (Bell & Jayne, 2009) and favours a focus on location-specific planning solutions (Filion, 2007). In addition to small scale, continuous improvements research on urban renewal in mid-sized cities also supports the important role of a downtown champion or advocate (Burayidi, 2013; Sands & Reese, 2017) who ensures that downtown issues remain on the municipal agenda.

While scholarship on small and mid-sized aims to capture the trends impacting cities of this size, scholars have called for additional research in order to better understand the urban experience outside of larger urban centres (Bell & Jayne, 2006, 2009; Bunting et al., 2007). Bell and Jayne argue that smaller cities have been under conceptualized and relegated to the lowest

level of the “urban hierarchy” (2009, p. 683). Arguably, cities with smaller populations and a preference for suburban approaches to planning offer little fodder to urban researchers, however, in Ontario, a regional-scale growth plan (Ontario, 2006) that aims to halt decades of urban sprawl in favour of dense, mixed-use, transit oriented development is inclusive of eight mid-sized cities that sit outside of the primary commuter shed to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The focus of mandated smart growth in mid-sized cities provides an opportunity for researchers to explore how regional planning impacts local planning and economic development initiatives in these smaller urban centres.

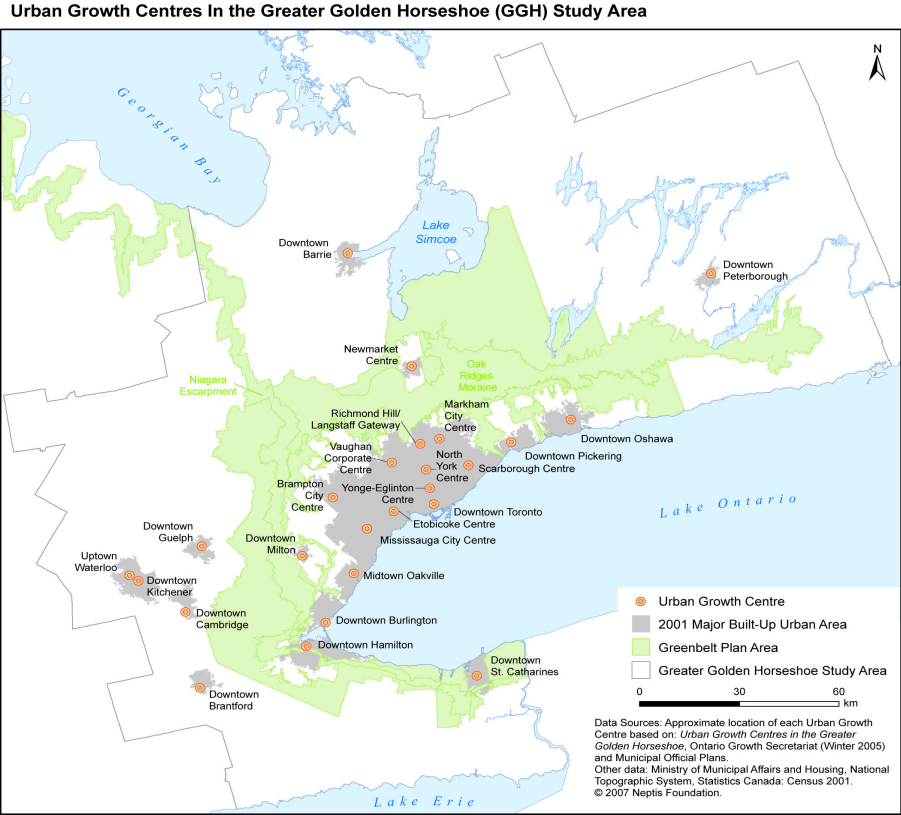
4.3 Provincial Growth Planning

In Ontario, land use planning had been largely the purview of individual municipalities throughout in the latter decades of the twentieth century (Eidelman, 2010; White, 2007). As the GTA continued to sprawl outwards, impacting both the environment and viable farmland, the province moved back into the regional planning arena (Eidelman, 2010) in order to direct growth to existing built up areas, promote transit use and protect Ontario’s natural heritage (Ontario, 2006). While each municipality has updated their planning framework to meet the targets of the provincial growth plan, this new approach to land use in Ontario has created an opportunity for researchers to explore the impact of regional scale planning on mid-sized cities.

Not only have mid-sized cities been specifically highlighted in the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Growth Plan), but also one of the key pillars of the plan is focused on stimulating downtown revitalization. The Growth Plan calls for the creation of 25 urban growth centres (UGCs) (Figure 4-1), which are located in either existing historic downtowns or emerging suburban downtowns in cities across Ontario (2006, p. 12). These UGCs are further

subdivided into those in the “inner ring” or “outer ring” (2006, pp. 49, 52); a term that illustrates a UGCs proximity to province’s protected Greenbelt.

Figure 4-1: Urban Growth Centres Map



(Neptis Foundation 2015)

The UGCs are required to develop as high-density, mixed-use nodes that are designed to: attract public and private investment; employment and residential growth; and accommodate transit infrastructure (Filion, 2007; Ontario, 2006). Intensification in the UGCs is to be achieved via provincial targets that mandate the number of jobs and residents municipalities are to add by 2041. Predictably, the UGCs closest to the City of Toronto, or in the inner ring, such as Mississauga City Centre, have higher density targets to achieve compared to those in the outer ring such as Downtown Brantford (Table 4-1).

Table 4-1: Growth Targets for the Urban Growth Centres

400 people and jobs/hectare	200 people and jobs/hectare	150 people and jobs/hectare
Downtown Toronto	Downtown Brampton	Downtown Barrie*
North York Centre	Downtown Burlington	Downtown Brantford*
Scarborough Centre	Downtown Hamilton	Downtown Cambridge*
Yonge-Eglinton Centre	Downtown Kitchener*	Downtown Guelph*
	Uptown Waterloo*	Downtown Peterborough
	Downtown Milton	Downtown St. Catharines*
	Markham Centre	
	Mississauga City Centre	
	Midtown Oakville	
	Downtown Oshawa	
	Downtown Pickering	
	Richmond Hill/Langstaff	
	Vaughan Corporate Centre	

* denotes and outer ring UGC

(Ontario, 2006, 2017)

The eight UGCs in the outer ring, extending from Downtown Peterborough to Downtown St. Catharines, share several characteristics that present specific challenges and opportunities when implementing the Growth Plan. As mid-sized cities, with populations ranging from 80,000-200,000 they have: historic downtown core areas, downtown Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), and at least one post-secondary institution. These cities have also experienced a decline in their manufacturing base; core area decline; and dispersed suburban development (Bunting et al., 2007; Filion, 2007).

4.4 Regional Planning and Local Economic Development

Applying a regional lens to the planning process creates the ability to address broad, systemic challenges and opportunities across a geographic area (P. Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2011; Hodge & Gordon, 2008; Hodge et al., 2017). This can include creating policies around infrastructure investments, environmental protection (De Sousa, 2017) and growth management (Hodge et al., 2017). In Ontario, the regional-scale Growth Plan aspires to the principles of smart

growth (Edwards & Haines, 2007; Goetz, 2013) with a goal of mitigating sprawl, creating walkable neighbourhoods and connecting communities through transit. These principles exist in contrast to the low-density, dispersed planning approach (Bunting et al., 2007) that has become so prevalent in mid-sized cities. Now, with the provincial mandate to add jobs and residents to their downtown core areas, Ontario's mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area have updated their planning frameworks, as well as their approach to local economic development, in order to meet this objective.

Arguably, transitioning a mid-sized city with prolific suburbanization and a stagnant downtown requires more than a change to land use regulations. While the Growth Plan's regional scope was designed to reimagine development the Greater Golden Horseshoe, it did not offer financial support to municipalities to achieve these smart growth objectives (Allen & Campsie, 2013). As such, in addition to updating their planning frameworks, many municipalities also chose to realign their local economic development programs with Growth Plan goals. The creation and use of financial incentives to attract investment in cities has been widely debated in the literature.

In the twentieth century, with an economy focused on manufacturing, incentives were used to attract new businesses to cities; this "smokestack chasing" approach to economic development was targeted toward wealth generation for cities (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999). As the economy shifted away from manufacturing toward a new, knowledge-based economy, emerging thinking about local economic development advances the idea that incentives must be carefully used by cities and should focus on enhance the quality of life for all residents, not just on wealth creation (Leigh & Blakely, 2017). Reese's (2014) research explores the effectiveness of incentives used by municipalities to foster local economic development. Her research finds

that the use of incentives, such as tax increment financing (TIF) or tax abatement, has little impact on the economic health of citizens, especially in smaller cities. However, Reese also finds that municipal investments in programs that support local job creation and entrepreneurship, or those designed to improve a community's overall quality of life, can develop a city's potential in the new economy.

In their research on “the successful few” small metropolitan downtowns, Filion et al. find that “constant vigilance” (2004, p. 339) is required to sustain municipal interest in small city core areas. They argue that due to the prevalence of greenfield, or suburban development, the use of incentives an important tool for municipalities to use to draw private investment to downtowns (Filion et al., 2004). De Sousa's (2017) research finds that the presence of incentives to build on brownfield, or contaminated, sites in the core areas of Waterloo and Kingston, Ontario are helping to unlock urban sites and encourage developers to build more sustainably. The recognition that downtowns in smaller urban centres require resources to combat “pro-suburban” (Filion et al., 2004, p. 339) forces is shared in the small and mid-sized city literature (Burayidi, 2013, 2015; Filion, Bunting, Frenette, Curry, & Mattice, 2000; Robertson, 1999; Seasons, 2003). While there is support for the use of targeted incentives amongst scholars, researchers also caution that there is a need for additional resources to monitor and evaluate plans and programs impacting mid-sized cities (Momani & Khirfan, 2013; L. A. Reese, 2014; Seasons, 2003). This review of the literature illustrates that while there is some scholarship on the urban experience in smaller urban centres, there remain significant gaps in the literature. Through the inclusion of mid-sized cities in the regional-scale provincial Growth Plan, and the new focus on smart growth in smaller urban centres, this research will explore the role of regional planning on downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities.

4.5 Research Methods

To explore the role of regional planning on downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities, a case study city was selected, and a range of qualitative research methods was used to collect data. The City of Guelph was selected because it represents a stand-alone, single-tiered municipality with a historic downtown that has experienced significant levels of core area decline due to suburban development. Guelph sits outside of both the provincially protected Greenbelt area and the primary commuter-shed to the Greater Toronto Area. The city is home to over 130,000 residents and in 2006 its downtown was designated a provincial urban growth centre (UGC) in the Growth Plan. This UGC status means that Guelph will need to achieve a minimum of density of 150 residents and jobs in its core area by 2041 (Ontario, 2006, 2017).

While Guelph has experienced core area decline it also has several assets that include: the presence of well-established residential neighbourhoods abutting its downtown; two post-secondary institutions, the University of Guelph and Conestoga College; an active agri-food business sector; and a low unemployment rate of 6.1% compared to the provincial average of 7.4% reported by Statistics Canada in 2016. Downtown Guelph has also had a Business Improvement Area (BIA) that has been active since the 1970s. The BIA represents the interests of the largely small and medium sized independently owned businesses located in the core. While there are over 400 business and property owner members of the BIA, there is limited housing downtown; according to a 2017 report on Growth Planning presented to Guelph City Council, its downtown density has sat at between 90-96 people and jobs per hectare for the last several years.

While scholars have been critical of the largely case study approach in the small and mid-sized city literature, (Faulk, 2006), selecting a single mid-sized city for a case study on

downtown revitalization allowed for what Neuman describes as a detailed examination of the case's "internal features" (2014, p. 42). It should be noted that for the purposes of this study, a mid-sized city is defined as a city with a population of 50,000-500,000 (Bunting et al., 2007; H. Hall & Hall, 2008; Seasons, 2003). Data collection for this research took place throughout 2015 and 2017 and included: a literature and document review, site visits and key informant interviews. A key limitation of this study is its focus on a single city; however, this research can be replicated in other mid-sized cities with an urban growth centre in both the inner ring and outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Moreover, it can be replicated in other parts of the country, in both growth and non-growth areas, where regional plans aim to direct land use planning in smaller urban centres.

To understand the Guelph's response to the Growth Plan, a review of municipal documents was undertaken. This included a review of the content of presentations offered to city council by staff as the city's planning documents were being updated, as well as a review of the content of Guelph's Official Plan update, the Downtown Secondary Plan (DSP) and two new Community Improvement Plans (CIPs). Where the DSP offered a broad vision for downtown renewal, highlighting key sites that could absorb increased density, the CIPs offered incentives to private developers to undertake key projects on sites such as underutilized brownfields as well as gateway locations to the downtown. To explore the community's response to the Growth Plan, a review of local on-line newspapers including the Guelph Tribune and the Guelph Mercury Tribune was also undertaken using search terms: downtown, population and growth plan. A review of content showed articles, letters to the editor and editorials detailing the community's response to Guelph's plan to grow its population to 191,000 by 2041. This review of the grey literature offered a lens into the community's concerns with respect to growth, these included:

impact on the water shed, increased traffic and congestion, and the presence of tall buildings impacting pre-existing residential neighbourhoods. On a positive note, it also highlighted community support and interest in public realm improvements and investments in regional transit.

To complete the data collection, interviews were held with a range of urban actors including: downtown planners (2); citizens and business representatives on the Downtown Advisory Committee (3); the co-founder of the downtown coworking space (1); private sector land developers (3); and the Executive Director of the downtown Business Improvement Area (1). Interviewees were selected through purposeful sampling for their in-depth knowledge on one or more of the following issues: the growth plan, urban planning, downtown economic development, urban revitalization, and private sector investment downtowns. During the period of 2015-2017 a total of 10 key-informant, semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or over the telephone, detailed notes were taken or the conversation recorded, transcribed and then coded for themes.

Conversations lasted between thirty minutes to two hours, but the majority of interviews were one hour in length. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth conversations with each urban actor, and while set questions were prepared in advance, this style of interviewing allowed new information to come forward in each interview. In addition, as a resident and former Executive Director of the Downtown Guelph Business Association (BIA), this research also involved what Creswell describes as “participant observation” (2014), a qualitative research method that can be employed when immersed in the day-to-day activity of a place; such an approach allows observations to inform the analysis of research findings.

4.6 Findings

The City of Guelph is a single-tiered municipality with over 130,000 residents located an hour west of Toronto in the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. With a historic downtown core, a top-ranked comprehensive university and an industrial base rooted in agri-business and advanced manufacturing—Guelph has a low unemployment rate and a high quality of life for residents. Despite these positive attributes, Guelph has followed other mid-sized city planning trends, growing in a largely low density, dispersed fashion (Bunting et al., 2007). According to the downtown Guelph Business Improvement Area (BIA), the proliferation of suburban development and the prioritization of large format commercial and retail nodes outside of the city’s core has affected the health of the downtown (Business Improvement Area Executive Director, personal communication, December 4, 2015). Despite new public investments in a downtown mall, performing arts centre and sports arena throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, these large projects were single or one off investments, and were not part of a broader plan focused on overall downtown renewal. As such, they did little to generate subsequent private investment (City of Guelph, personal communication, February 11, 2015).

In 2006, when the Growth Plan was announced, there was mixed reaction in the local media to growing Guelph to 175,000 residents and 92,000 jobs in the coming decades. Despite initial skepticism and concerns over the impact of growth on the local groundwater system, after extensive consultations throughout 2009-2011, the city aligned its planning framework with provincial targets, updating its Official Plan, drafting multiple versions of a Downtown Secondary Plan (City of Guelph, 2016), and creating financial incentives through a Downtown Community Improvement Plan (City of Guelph, 2012) to attract private sector investment to the city’s urban growth centre in its historic core. The City of Guelph shared that the consultation

process was inclusive of: design charettes; public meetings; open houses; and regular consultations with residents, business and other stakeholder groups (City of Guelph, personal communication, February 11, 2015).

The Downtown Secondary Plan (DSP) was first created in 2012, and then consolidated in 2016 after challenges at the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). The DSP, as a part of the city's Official Plan, replaced the land use policies that previously existed for the city's Central Business District (CBD). As the city updated its planning framework to respond to the presence of an urban growth centre (UGC) in its downtown, the DSP outlined key principles and outcomes, ranging from a focus on attracting small and medium sized businesses downtown to reconnecting people to the river system, to reach its goal. The plans calls for the creation of a downtown that is a "thriving high-density urban centre and a popular destination still minutes from the countryside" (2016, p. 5).

The outcomes in the DSP were consistent with provincial goals in the Growth Plan (Ontario, 2006), and illustrated how the Downtown Guelph UGC could achieve a minimum density of 150 people and jobs per hectare by 2031. However, to operationalize this vision, downtown planners in the city described the need for private sector partners willing to invest in the core (City of Guelph, personal communication, February 11, 2015). After extensive consultations with downtown citizens, local and regional developers, local business associations and surrounding municipalities, the City of Guelph launched the Downtown Guelph Community Improvement Plan (City of Guelph, 2011, 2012), or CIP, and a Brownfield Remediation Community Improvement Plan (City of & Guelph, 2012).

Based on the uptake on both CIP programs, it was not surprising to learn that private developers cite the creation of these programs as "the reason we chose to develop downtown"

(Land developer, personal communication, March 13, 2015). The Executive Director of the BIA shared that “Talking with the community first, local businesses, citizens and developers allowed us [municipal staff] to create incentives that reflected the needs of our community” (Personal communication, December 4, 2015). A regional land developer described how “Consultations for the Downtown Secondary Plan were a great start, because downtown has a lot of constraints with heritage buildings, and there are not a lot of sites to develop on” (Personal communication, March 13, 2015).

Fusion Homes is currently building 133 residential units in the core and the site it is building on has benefited from grants from the Brownfield Remediation Community Improvement Plan as well as the Major Activation Grant program in the Downtown Guelph Community Improvement Plan. The Fusion Homes development, also known as *Metalworks*, achieves several core principles embedded in the Secondary Plan, offering variety of housing types, including high rise condominium and town houses; reconnecting residents to the river through the reactivation of a river walk; and is restoring a heritage property on site to become a distillery and restaurant. Publicly celebrated ground breaking ceremonies, overnight camping at the sales centre, and sold out condominium developments illustrate this project’s success.

Table 4-2: Selected quotes from interviews

Theme	Selected Quotes
The Growth Plan was a catalyst for change to the municipal planning framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BIA: “Ten years ago this level of [residential] development would have been unthinkable in downtown Guelph”. • Downtown Advisory Committee: “There have not been this many cranes downtown for many years”. • City Planner: “The creation of a Downtown Manager position helped the city understand our [private sector’s] perspective”. • BIA: “It [the Downtown Secondary Plan] had a major role, without P2G this would not have happened”. • City Planner: “Proactively allowing for 18 stories on selected sites was a huge step forward for intensifying [residential development in] downtown Guelph”. • BIA: “[The Growth Plan] set the stage for growth in downtown Guelph”.
Community engagement is essential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Developer: “The early [2009] consultations and drafts of the secondary plan with changes to land use and building heights was really important, it allowed us [local developers] to create economies of scale”. • Private Developer: The Secondary Plan set the stage for growth in downtown Guelph”. • City Planner: “Talking with the community first, local businesses, citizens and developers allowed us [municipal staff] to create incentives that reflected the needs of our community”. • Private Developer: “Consultations for the Downtown Secondary Plan were a great start, because downtown has a lot of constraints with heritage buildings, and there are not a lot of sites to develop”. • BIA: “Talking with the community about their downtown first allowed for broader buy-in to the changes that were about to happen, it wasn’t perfect, but it went a long way to building bridges”.
Targeted financial incentives can help municipalities reach their intensification goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Planner: “In the first year, all 1.5 million allocated to incentives for downtown Guelph were spoken for, we [the municipality] could have not predicted this quick uptake, but it shows the pent up market demand for downtown housing”. • Coworking Founder: “The funding we received [municipal incentive] enabled us to attract other investors, it was a foundational piece in the early days” • Private Developer: “Brownfield incentives allowed our project to happen”. • Private Developer: “Getting the tax increment grants was really important to making our project work”. • Private Developer: “These incentives [in the Community Improvement Plan] sent a clear message to the development industry that the city was ready to intensify downtown”. • Private Developer: “The funding we received enabled us to attract other investors, it was a foundational piece in the early days that helped launch our vision”.

The *Metalworks* project, has not, however, been without its detractors. According to the Downtown Advisory Committee (DAC), the initial neighbourhood response to the development was highly contentious. Through extensive community consultations, negotiations and height and density amendments, the developer and neighbourhood residents found a workable solution, and the project has moved ahead with the support of both the city and local residents. While the owner of Fusion homes is quick to point out “high-rise [condominiums] equals high risk [to the developer]” as local developers, they are “extremely proud to be taking on this signature project in downtown Guelph” (Land Developer, personal communication, March 13, 2015). A member of the Downtown Advisory Committee, who is a long term resident and business owner downtown shared that “there have not been this many cranes downtown for many years” (DAC Board Member, personal communication, January 5, 2017).

While *Metalworks* illustrates how a development can meet multiple objectives of both the Growth Plan (Ontario, 2006, 2017) and the DSP (City of Guelph, 2016), this project has not occurred in isolation. In addition to the 133 units being added in Phase One of the *Metalworks* development, London Ontario based, Tricar Group has also built and fully sold-out two 18-storey mixed use condominium towers downtown, housing 270 residential units. These developments were supported by two financial incentives in the Community Improvement Plan – tax increment and brownfield remediation grants. An executive at Tricar describes how the Downtown Secondary Plan “set the stage for growth in downtown Guelph” by removing the six storey height limits and identifying key sites that could absorb up to 18 storey buildings (Tricar executive, personal communication, May 19, 2017). He also spoke to the challenges of developing downtown sites that can be contaminated or have outdated underground infrastructure. Through city incentives, Tricar was able to clean up and build two 18-storey

condominiums on previously dormant sites in downtown Guelph – Tricar indicated, “brownfield incentives allowed our project to happen” (Personal communication, May 19, 2017).

According to Tricar, hundreds of residential units are being purchased by a demographic that is not currently represented in the downtown core, “You’ve got the empty-nesters, the baby boomer types who are downsizing” and “young professionals are also buying in...[t]hey really like the vibrancy and the culture the downtown provides” (O’Flanagan, 2013). Fusion Homes indicated that their site also appeals to a similar demographic, and that two-way all-day regional rail and the investments in Guelph Central Station “helped make their project a reality” (Land developer, personal communication, March 13, 2015).

In addition to these residential projects, the Community Improvement Plan has funded several Minor Downtown Activation Grants that have been received by two commercial developers in the downtown core: Tyrcathlen Partners, owners of the historic Petrie Building; and 10 Carden Shared Spaces, owners of the local coworking space – a location that offers shared workspace to a diverse membership. Both developments are focused on revitalizing previously underutilized buildings to create new commercial and office space in downtown Guelph – spaces that will help the city achieve its employment density targets in the Growth Plan and achieve a DSP principle of attracting small and medium size enterprises downtown. A co-founder of *10 Carden Shared Spaces* describes the impact of the grant, “The funding we received enabled us to attract other investors. It was a foundational piece in the early days that helped launch our vision to expand our coworking space in downtown Guelph” (Personal communication, May 12, 2017). As a coworking space, *10 Carden Shared Spaces* provides affordable, amenity-rich shared workspace to local entrepreneurs (Merkel, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012), small businesses and social enterprise organizations. Its co-founder describes how the

space is “future proofing downtown against impending gentrification”, preserving affordable space for new enterprises in a downtown that is slowly intensifying (Personal communication, May 12, 2017).

The renewed focus on downtown planning in Guelph not only created changes in the planning framework, adding financial resources to CIPs, but also served to add dedicated municipal resources to the core. In addition to a Downtown Renewal Corporate Manager, there is also a dedicated Downtown Planner focused on implementing the vision of the Downtown Secondary Plan. As one local land developer shared, “The creation of a Downtown Manager position helped the city understand our [private sector’s] perspective” (Personal communication, May 19, 2017). To support a team of staff, a committee of Council called the Downtown Advisory Committee (DAC) was also created. DAC is comprised of local residents, businesses and property owners with an interest in downtown development and renewal. Established in 2011, the role of DAC is to “provide strategic input and advise to Council and Staff on matters pertaining to issues impacting the economic, social, cultural, environmental, physical and educational conditions in Downtown Guelph” (City of Guelph, 2017). As these developments begin to emerge in downtown Guelph, stakeholders are hopeful that the hundreds of new residents downtown will support local businesses and ensure a vibrant downtown in the decades ahead.

4.7 Analysis

Despite decades of core area decline, and limited private sector investment in downtown Guelph, the first theme that emerged from the research speaks to the catalytic role that a provincially-led, regional scale plan, the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario, 2006, 2017) can play in changing municipal planning and charting a path towards

downtown revitalization. The literature illustrates how a regional planning lens can offer a broader perspective on land use, environmental protection and infrastructure needs (Hodge et al., 2017) than can be achieved by planning within the boundaries of individual municipalities (Hodge & Gordon, 2008). In this case, the regional growth plan mandated the use of smart growth principles, including dense, mixed-use, transit connected urban form, in the downtowns of Ontario's mid-sized cities within the Greater Golden Horseshoe area. While significant public investments, in the form of a downtown shopping mall, arena and performing arts centre, had occurred in Guelph throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, these investments were not a part of a broader plan focused on downtown revitalization. As such, in isolation, they did little to attract reciprocal private investments. This finding has resonance with the small and mid-sized city literature which actively discourages the use of single, 'one off' projects to repair ailing core areas (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Filion et al., 2004; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009a)

However, since the advent of the Growth Plan, which triggered a realignment of the municipal planning framework, private developers attribute the creation publicly endorsed downtown land use plan as creating a "predictable" investment environment for the core. According to a 2018 staff report to City Council, the Downtown Secondary Plan and an initial \$32 million municipal investment in a Tax Increment Based Grant Reserve has leveraged: \$316 million in new construction projects; generated \$3.4 million annually in new tax revenue; and resulted in 827 new residential units have been built by private developers in the core. The presence of residents in the core areas of smaller urban centres is a key revitalization strategy outlined in the literature (Burayidi, 2013; Robertson, 2001), and while it is too soon to establish a causal link between the residents in the core and downtown revitalization, the increase in downtown residential density has added vitality to city streets.

The second theme illustrates the importance of community engagement in the local planning process. Through extensive public consultation, or collaborative planning (Healey, 2003), the creation of a Downtown Secondary Plan and a Community Improvement Plans provided a road map to the public and private sector investors, and allowed for a shared understanding as to how and where the municipality would direct growth downtown. This process afforded the opportunity to engage local stakeholders including residents, business owners, community groups and developers in the downtown planning process, creating a space to share ideas and brainstorm the future of downtown Guelph. The plans were vetted through multiple audiences, and despite initial concerns, are being implemented. Land developers attribute the success of the plan to pro-active community engagement and the creation of a predictable, pre-zoned environment for future development sites.

The final theme that emerged from the findings illustrates the impact of creating targeted, location-specific financial incentives to achieve municipal planning goals (Burayidi, 2013, 2015; Filion et al., 2004), but also highlights the importance of their ongoing monitoring and evaluation (Momani & Khirfan, 2013; L. A. Reese, 2014). Findings show that the creation of incentives offered through the Community Improvement Plans served to defray initial start up costs, helping developers and property owners initiate key projects that were consistent with the downtown planning goals. With a primary goal of expanding the downtown tax base, the immediate uptake on Community Improvement Plan incentives allowed the municipality to scale back incentives each year as the downtown market became increasingly attractive to developers and consumers alike. Moving forward, it will be important for the City of Guelph to evaluate the overall health of the downtown, and while initial investments in brownfield remediation and residential development are important steps toward downtown revitalization, the other key metric

of the Growth Plan involves creating new jobs in the city's core. As such, Guelph could consider providing incentives that foster local entrepreneurship and employment programs that serve to improve the overall quality of life and economic health for local residents (L. A. Reese, 2014).

The three themes that emerged from the research findings illustrate how the confluence of a regional-scale growth plan, coupled with strong community engagement and locally curated financial incentives have altered the planning paradigm, and can begin to chart a path toward revitalization of downtown Guelph. However, this research has also identified an important cautionary note. As mid-sized downtowns begin to experiment with planning for growth, and seek to reverse decades of core area decline, the impending impact of gentrification of mid-sized city downtowns, especially those in growth areas, cannot be ignored. In downtown Guelph, the condominium market is appealing to young professionals and retirees, but with prices ranging from \$300,000-1,000,000, there has been little local discussion of the importance of creating affordable or family housing units in these developments. Moreover, as real estate prices continue to rise in the Greater Toronto Area, cities like Guelph will continue to see rising real estate prices. As such, in Ontario, it is essential for cities to consider how they will work with federal and provincial partners to carve out space for affordable housing downtown.

4.8 Conclusion

Bell and Jayne challenged researchers to “think big about thinking small” (2009, p. 684) and to developing scholarship focused on smaller urban centres. Indeed, one of the key themes that emerges in the small and mid-sized city literature is a criticism of urban studies for not exploring the urban experience outside of big cities (Bell & Jayne, 2006; Burayidi, 2013; Robertson, 2001; Simard, 2005). In Ontario, the creation of a regional-scale plan focused on sustainable growth and development of both large and mid-sized cities has provided an

opportunity to generate research on how provincially mandated planning impacts planning outcomes and downtown revitalization in the province's mid-sized cities.

Through a case study based approach focused on the urban growth centre located in downtown Guelph, this research has illustrated how the Growth Plan has become a catalyst for change in this mid-sized city. While far from being the sole solution to reverse decades of core area decline in Guelph, the advent of the Growth Plan has altered the planning paradigm, allowing the city to: envision sites that could absorb downtown intensification; put financial incentives in place to attract private investment; and allocate staffing resources to assist with downtown project design and implementation.

The creation of a Downtown Secondary Plan and Community Improvement Plans were identified by developers and local property owners as important signals about the city's willingness to focus and invest in downtown renewal. Indeed, developers in Guelph claim that in the absence of these incentives, which included brownfield remediation and tax increment grants, they would not have made substantial investments in the core (De Sousa, 2017). Through the use of initial public investments to leverage private developments, in the form of targeted financial incentives, Guelph has joined other municipalities in using this planning tool to attract new development and expand the city's tax base (Burayidi, 2015; Canadian Urban Institute & International Downtown Association, 2013).

Since the advent of the Growth Plan (Ontario 2006; Ontario 2017), urban development in downtown Guelph is taking place in a manner that is consistent with recommendations stemming from the small and mid-sized city literature. Not only are these changes incremental (Gratz, 1989; Robertson, 2001), but they are part of a broad-based, long-term strategy focused on downtown renewal (Walker, 2009a) and are inclusive of important new constituents in the

downtown environments – namely downtown residents (Burayidi, 2013). Throughout the planning process, the municipality has engaged a range of urban actors including: local residents, non-profit groups; business associations; university students; and private land developers. Guelph’s experience illustrates how collaborative approaches to planning (Healey, 1997, 2003) can lead to positive outcomes for cities. Amidst growth and change in downtown Guelph, research findings also consider how these developments can lead to downtown gentrification, making it difficult to find affordable housing and commercial space in the core area.

This research, while focused on a single city case study in downtown Guelph, begins to explore the role that mid-sized cities can play in urban affairs. Through the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Province of Ontario has applied current urban planning trends, which favour dense, walkable, transit-connected cities, onto mid-sized cities. With a history of low density, dispersed development and associated downtown decline, the Growth Plan has been a catalyst to help launch urban planning in mid-sized cities into the twenty-first century. While the Growth Plan is not a panacea, it has the ability to begin to positively alter the trajectory of urban planning and downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities.

CHAPTER FIVE: From Operational to Aspirational: Reimagining the role of Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in mid-sized cities

Overview

Since their advent in the 1970s, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) have played a central role in downtown renewal in cities around the world (Briffault, 1999; Houstoun, 2003; Mitchell, 2001; Morçöl & Wolf, 2010). With wide-ranging mandates to market, promote, beautify and advocate on behalf of their membership, the activities of each BIA reflect the diverse needs of their respective downtowns. While the number of BIAs continues to grow, little attention has been paid to their role in urban affairs in the context of mid-sized cities (Morçöl & Wolf, 2010), and this paper seeks to address that gap in the literature.

Using a local economic development framework (Leigh & Blakely, 2017) that highlights the role of community allies in urban affairs, this paper explores the role BIAs can play as partners to downtown revitalization within the context of a series of mid-sized cities in a designated growth area in Ontario, Canada. Findings from this research show that incremental improvements are occurring in the downtowns of these mid-sized cities, and that BIAs, through a combination of operational activities and broad-based coalition building, are contributing to downtown revitalization by pursuing a downtown-first agenda. However, as the scholarship continues to evolve around downtowns, this research explores the limitations of business-led associations, and offers recommendations that re-envision the BIA model to meet the challenges of revitalization in the downtowns of mid-sized cities.

Key words: downtowns; mid-sized cities; business improvement areas; local economic development

5.1 Introduction

Downtowns tell the story of a city. Municipalities with strong support for their city centres are home to active public spaces, renewed infrastructure and vibrant business ecosystems. The urban studies literature illustrates how amenity-rich big cities are able to attract creative industries to their downtowns, fueling steady population and employment growth (Florida, 2002; Gertler, 2003; Vinodrai, 2015; Wolfe, 2009). While the story of urban growth and renewal unfolds in big cities around the globe, the twenty-first century urban experience in smaller urban centres remains under-examined (Bell & Jayne, 2009). In North America, the primacy of downtowns in mid-sized cities has ebbed and flowed. Where downtowns were once the central location for commercial activity, mid-twentieth-century suburbanization had a negative impact on the vibrancy of downtowns (Bunting *et al.* 2007; Burayidi, 2001, 2013; Robertson, 1999; Sands, 2007). However, recent trends in planning, favouring dense, transit-connected development, have challenged mid-sized cities to rethink decades of suburban-style planning and begin planning for intensification.

Altering the trajectory of the planning paradigm in mid-sized cities is complex and requires a multi-faceted approach (Momani & Khirfan, 2013; Seasons, 2003). Filion, Hoernig, Bunting and Sands believe that downtowns in mid-sized cities are fragile ecosystems, and that there is a need for “constant vigilance” (2004, p. 339) by allied partners to maintain positive momentum. Researchers also caution planning practitioners against seeking a ‘quick fix’ with respect to urban renewal, arguing that single, one-off investments rarely revitalize downtowns (Burayidi, 2013; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009a). Instead, incremental improvements, or ongoing “urban husbandry” (Gratz, 1989, p. 148), are required to rehabilitate ailing core areas.

Since their advent in the 1970s, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) have played a central role in downtown renewal in cities around the world (Briffault, 1999; Houstoun, 2003; Mitchell, 2001; Morçöl & Wolf, 2010). With wide-ranging mandates to market, promote, beautify and advocate, the activities of each BIA reflect the diverse needs of their respective memberships. While the numbers of BIAs continues to grow, little attention has been paid to their role in urban affairs in the context of mid-sized cities (Morçöl & Wolf, 2010; Sands & Reese, 2017), and this paper seeks to address that gap in the literature. The cities selected for this research are located in a provincially designated growth region in Ontario – the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Through the creation of a long-term growth management plan, the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario 2006, 2017) aims to curb sprawling development, build transit infrastructure and create complete communities, in both large and mid-sized cities, across the region. Using a local economic development framework (Leigh & Blakely, 2017), that highlights the role of community-based actors in urban affairs; this paper seeks to explore the role of BIAs within the context of mid-sized cities.

5.2 Theoretical Framework

An emerging body of research speaks to the growing need for collaboration and partnerships in the urban affairs of twenty-first century cities (Bramwell & Pierre, 2017; Leigh & Blakely, 2017). Local economic development (LED) scholarship helped framed this inquiry on the role of BIAs as a partner to downtown revitalization. Leigh and Blakely (2017) describe how early models of economic development were focused largely on wealth generation, and argue that this approach has led to both growing social inequity and environmental decline. For example, in the twentieth century, first and second wave economic development showed little regard for improving quality of life in cities, and was characterized by governments providing

financial incentives to companies and “smokestack chasing” the next big factory (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999, p. 229).

To improve the overall quality of life for citizens in the twenty-first century, Leigh and Blakeley advance a renewed definition of LED that seeks to improve a community’s standard of living; reduce social and economic inequality; and promote environmental protection (Leigh & Blakely, 2017, p. 87). Emerging from this framework, Leigh and Blakely offer a conceptual and theoretical framework for understanding local economic development in the twenty first century. One aspect of this approach seeks build “collaborative partnerships of many community groups...to establish a broad foundation for competitive cities” (2017, pp. 103–107). This perspective is resonant with mid-sized city scholarship that suggests that the inclusion of allied groups (Filion et al., 2004) in urban affairs is essential to promoting downtown renewal. This perspective is reinforced in Sands and Reese’s (2017) research on economic revitalization in mid-sized cities where they argue in favour of collaboration between public, private and non-profit interests. Gratz describes this phenomena as the need for “the hands of many participants” in what she describes as “urban husbandry” (1989, p. 148). While Gratz’s concept of urban husbandry, or favoring continuous, low-cost improvements over large-scale developments in urban rejuvenation (Gratz, 1989), was conceived of in New York city, her focus on the neighbourhood-scale allows for a resonance with the mid-sized city experience.

Robertson (2001) argues that there is no quick-fix to repair core areas of smaller urban centres, a sentiment echoed by Burayidi (2013, 2015) and Walker (2009a, 2009b) who believe that single one-off investments, like performing arts centres, malls or sports arenas, do little for the overall revitalization of downtowns. As such, it is through the lens of a local economic development framework that favours the inclusion of a collaborative, incremental approach to

city building that this research asks: What role(s) do Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) play in downtown revitalization of mid-sized cities? Do BIAs interact with other urban actors to achieve their downtown revitalization goals?

5.3 Methods

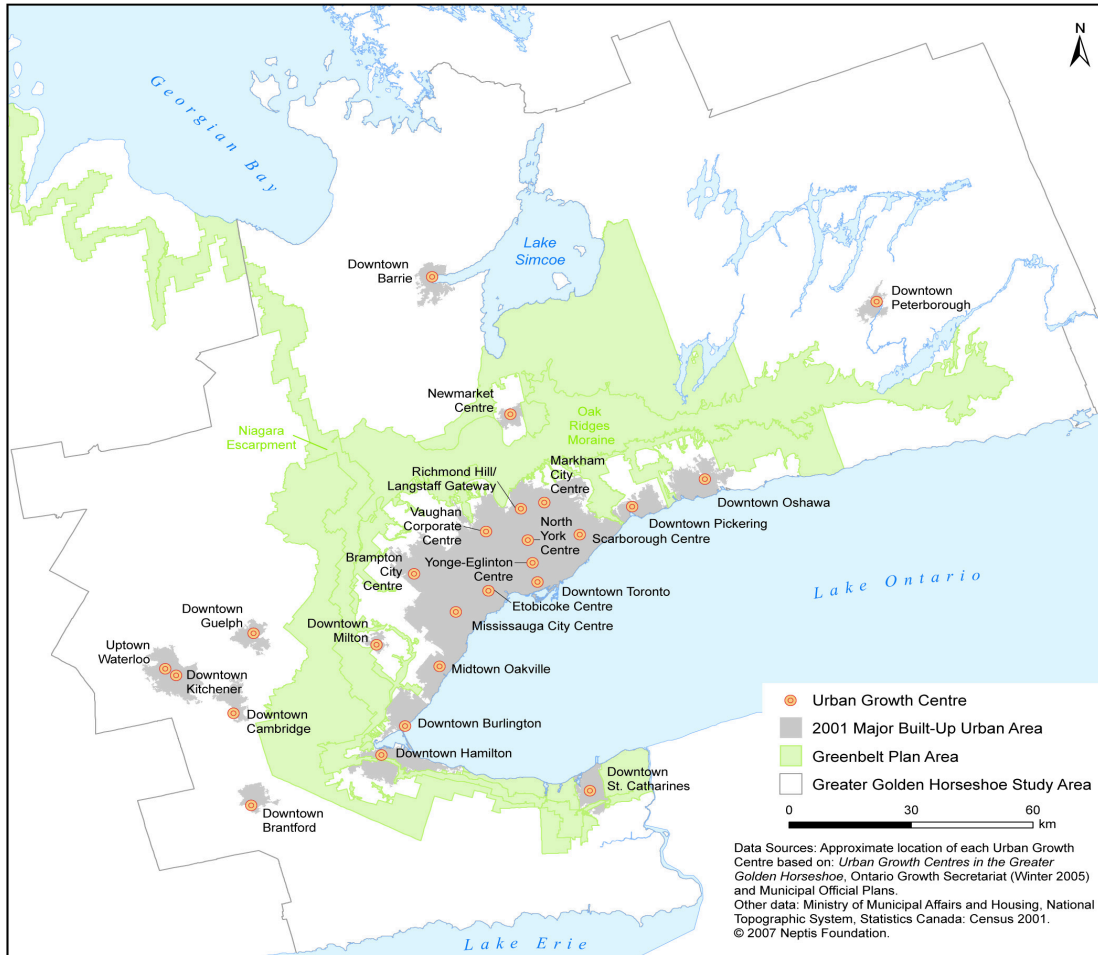
The study area for this research was inclusive of eight Ontario mid-sized cities. These cities were selected as they are each home to a provincially designated urban growth centre and are located in what is described as the ‘outer ring’ of the Greater Golden Horseshoe – a provincially designed growth region. The *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Growth Plan) (Ontario, 2006, 2017) was created to reverse urban sprawl, and direct new growth to built-up areas of the rapidly growing Greater Golden Horseshoe area, while protecting the province’s natural heritage and agricultural lands. Within the Growth Plan, urban growth centres (UGCs) were created to focus new population and employment growth in *existing* built up areas, specifically downtowns, and to ensure that new public and private investments were also directed to these areas (Ontario, 2006, 2017). While the majority of the 25 UGCs in the Growth Plan are located in large cities in the Greater Toronto Area, eight are located in the downtowns of mid-sized cities that sit in the outer ring of the province’s Greenbelt (Ontario, 2006).

A range of qualitative research methods allowed for an exploration of the role of BIAs in downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities within the Growth Plan region. A document review enabled an understanding of the environment within which BIAs operated. This included a review of local print and on-line media using key word searches with the terms: downtown, BIA, Growth Plan. A review of news releases, position papers and notices of public meetings on downtown issues on BIA and municipal websites provided insight into emergent issues within each municipality. Finally, in order to understand the broader context of growth planning in each

city, municipal Downtown Master Plans, Downtown Secondary Plans and Community Improvement Plans also formed a part of this document review.

Figure 5-1: Urban Growth Centres Map

Urban Growth Centres In the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) Study Area



Source: (The Neptis Foundation 2015)

Initial outreach to BIAs occurred via an electronic survey, however due to a limited response rate, six partial responses were received, follow up emails were sent to the Executive Director of each BIA to arrange telephone or in-person interviews, including site visits. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to three hours, but most were one hour in length. A total of 24 semi-structured interviews were held with BIA staff, municipal planners, municipal economic

developers, civic leaders and private developers between 2015-2017 in the study area, these interviews were either recorded or extensive notes were taken, and then recordings and notes were transcribed.

The following mid-sized cities were included in the study area: Peterborough, Barrie, Brantford, Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph and St. Catharines. For the purposes of this study a mid-sized city is defined as a location with a population of 50,000-500,000 (Bunting et al., 2007; H. Hall & Hall, 2008; Sands & Reese, 2017; Seasons, 2003). At the time of this study, these cities were home to 10 downtown BIAs (Table 5-1). Cambridge, Ontario stands out for having three BIAs representing each of its historic downtown areas: Galt, Preston and Hespeler.

In addition to having a BIA, these mid-sized cities also share other common features including a historic downtown core and at least one post-secondary institution. While many of these cities are close to the Greater Toronto Area, they also sit outside of the primary Toronto commuter-shed and are home to a provincially designated urban growth centre in their downtown core. These mid-sized cities have also experienced varying degrees of core area decline, and they have a shared history of low-density, dispersed development (Bunting et al., 2007; Filion, 2007). The BIAs in the study area are all located in historic downtowns, and their memberships are comprised of a range of businesses including: small independently owned retail stores and restaurants; large government and private office buildings; as well as a handful of regional and national chains.

Table 5-1: Outer Ring Mid-Sized Cities in Ontario with a BIA

Outer Ring City	Urban Growth Centre Location	Business Improvement Area	Staff	Members	Annual Budget
City of Barrie	Downtown Barrie	Downtown Barrie BIA	2	400	\$496,000
City of Brantford	Downtown Brantford	Downtown Brantford BIA	1	-	\$202,000
City of Cambridge	Downtown Galt	Downtown Cambridge BIA Preston Towne Centre BIA Hespeler Village BIA	3	-	\$152,000 (for three BIAs)
City of Guelph	Downtown Guelph	Downtown Guelph Business Association	3	450	\$573,000
City of Kitchener	Downtown Kitchener	Downtown Kitchener BIA	5	450	\$903,000
City of Peterborough	Downtown Peterborough	Peterborough DBA	2	400	\$304,000
City of St. Catharines	Downtown St. Catharines	St. Catharines Downtown Association	2	600	\$212,000
City of Waterloo	Uptown Waterloo	Uptown Waterloo BIA	2	460	\$432,000

5.4 Downtown Decline and the Rise of BIAs

To understand the conditions in the study area, it is important to explore the evolution of downtowns in smaller urban centres, and the advent of the BIA movement. The rise and fall of downtowns in small and mid-sized cities has been well established in the literature (Bunting & Filion, 1999; Bunting et al., 2007; Burayidi, 2001, 2013; Donald & Hall, 2010; Filion et al., 2004; Robertson, 1999). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, downtowns were the primary civic and commercial district within cities. While the underlying political, economic and

social causes for downtown decline differs across regions, and has been far more acute in American cities (Bourne & Walks, 2010; Filion & Bunting, 2015), it is generally agreed that the drivers of downtown decline in both Canada and the United States were the rise of the post-war dispersed built form and the automobile dependency that supported this growth.

As signs of downtown decline appeared, a public backlash against municipal investment in downtown revitalization ensued. As cities continued to sprawl outward, suburban residents became increasingly opposed to municipal spending in core areas (Bunting et al., 2007; Robertson, 1999). The prevalence of vacant storefronts, abandoned buildings and struggling retailers served to reinforce a negative public perception of downtowns and perpetuate economic decline in core areas (Bunting et al., 2007; Burayidi, 2013; Filion & Hammond, 2008; Robertson, 1999). To reverse this negative trend, public and private partners launched a variety of revitalization projects in the post-war period. Downtown malls, arenas and performing arts centres were built, however, in isolation, these one-off strategies failed to stimulate downtown economies (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Hernandez & Jones, 2005; Hernandez & Simmons, 2006).

By the 1970s, downtown business and property owners banded together to create merchant-led associations, or Business Improvement Districts (BID). Today, while the activities of each BID vary widely, all share a common goal of revitalizing downtowns through a tax on business and property owners in the district to facilitate collective action (Briffault, 1999; Gopal-Agge & Hoyt, 2008; Hernandez & Jones, 2005; Houstoun, 2003; Mitchell, 2001; Morcol et al., 2008). While BIDs operate under a number of names, Business Improvement Area (BIA) in Canada, and the Main Street Approach in the United States, they all: represent the interests of businesses within a defined geographic boundary; are funded through a tax levy on property

owners in the boundary; and use a variety of marketing and promotions strategies attract businesses to the area (Briffault, 1999; Hernandez & Jones, 2005, 2008; Lewis, 2010).

The first recorded Canadian BIA was formed in the 1970s in Toronto's Bloor West neighbourhood by a group of businesses who wanted to improve their streetscape to compete with the growing number of suburban malls (Hernandez & Jones, 2005; Ontario, 2010). While the BIA movement has roots in big cities, and research on Canadian BIAs focuses largely on large urban centres (Gomez et al., 2015; Gopal-Agge & Hoyt, 2008; Hernandez & Jones, 2005, 2008; Hernandez & Simmons, 2006; Perez et al., 2003), the BIA movement in Canada has expanded rapidly in smaller urban centres. According to the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA), 44% of Ontario's 300 BIAs are located in the downtown areas of Ontario's small and mid-sized cities (Personal communication, OBIAA, 2016).

In comparing Canadian and American business associations, Sands and Reese find that Canadian BIAs play an important role in smaller urban centres, where their activities are seen as "complementary to" rather than "competitive with" their respective municipalities (2017, p. 192). One of their key recommendations for downtown economic success in mid-sized cities is the presence of a "downtown advocate" in the form of a BIA. Sands and Reese argue that effective BIAs foster strong ties with the municipality; maintain traditional activities, such as marketing and promotion; and can adopt a broader mission that is inclusive of "physical and fiscal planning, research and advocacy" (2017, p. 107).

Despite the exponential growth of the BID movement around the world, BIDs have not escaped criticism. Lewis (2010) argues that BIDs are a manifestation of neoliberal values, and risk putting private business interests ahead of the public good. Similarly, Ward likens the BID model to the city transferring governance of neighbourhoods over to urban "business elites"

(2007, p. 801). Briffault (1999) highlights other criticisms leveled at BIDs, namely that through their model of governance and associated powers, and limited public oversight, they can circumvent democratic processes in cities. BIDs have also been challenged for unfairly incenting certain neighbourhoods that are willing to pay an extra tax to improve their district. For example, Rankin and Delaney's (2011) research on BIAs in Toronto highlights the inequities that BIAs can create between the city's neighbourhoods, fostering increased gentrification and economic development in resource-rich areas able to pay a levy for extra services. They argue that BIAs, as inherently neoliberal structures, can evolve to become more "deliberately progressive" and "mitigate inequities across city spaces" (Rankin & Delaney, 2011, p. 1387) by building more inclusive boards of directors and providing business incubation services to lower income neighbourhoods.

Walker (2009b), though generally supportive of the BID model, is skeptical of several key functions of BIDs. His research challenges the notion that additional parking and beautiful streetscapes will attract visitors downtown. Rather, Walker advocates in favour of BIDs thinking beyond retail revitalization, and advances the benefits of promoting a multifaceted, mixed use, and robust downtown core that is characterized by economic diversification (2009b). This recommendation is consistent with Burayidi and Robertson's research (Burayidi, 2013; Robertson, 2001) that illustrates that downtown revitalization strategies should be complex and nuanced rather than singularly focused on retail revitalization. Filion (2004) argues that economic vitality in small metropolitan downtowns requires not only a retail plan, but also government involvement through tax incentives to attract private investment.

Gomez, Isakov and Semansky's (2015) research on the Canadian business landscape argues that a focus on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in cities, rather than on large

corporations, can yield economically significant results (Gomez et al., 2015). Through case study research in Canadian cities, Gomez et al. conclude that support of emerging entrepreneurs and SMEs fuels local economic development in cities, a factor that increases quality of life for residents, especially in smaller urban centres (Filion, 2009; OBIAA, 2017; Sands & Reese, 2008). Gomez et al. (2015) argue that BIAs play an important role in this landscape; as nimble, quasi-governmental organizations, BIAs, through their ability to implement a tax levy, can take emerging ideas for downtown improvement and quickly transform them into action. Despite the fact that BIAs have been in existence for over 40 years, limited attention has been paid to their role as a partner to economic revitalization in the declining downtowns of mid-sized cities.

5.5 Findings

The findings from this study begin to illustrate the ways in which BIAs are participating in downtown revitalization in Ontario's mid-sized cities. The first section highlights the activities that the majority of BIAs are focused on – namely day-to-day operations in support of their membership. When asked about the successes and challenges facing their downtowns, and the BIAs role in affecting change, the findings that follow illustrate the ways BIAs work as advocates, in partnership with networks and allied groups to advance downtown revitalization.

Findings illustrate that BIA staff spend the majority of their time on day-to-day operations in service of their membership. With staff size ranging from one to five employees, and memberships ranging from 200 to 600 members, BIAs across the study area all reported offering a range of services to their membership. These services include: marketing and promoting the downtown through local and social media channels; dining and shopping campaigns; and seasonal events. The goal of these activities was to attract residents, visitors and new businesses downtown. For example, Uptown Waterloo is undergoing construction as a light

rapid transit line (LRT) is built through the core. The BIA created a communications strategy to inform residents of what streets are open, as well as an “Uptown Open” campaign to help businesses retain customers through a period of construction. Similarly, in downtown Guelph, the BIA launched “Weekend Music”, a promotion to encourage attendance at cafes, pubs and restaurants on weekend afternoons. In St. Catharines, the BIA manager described how their efforts work to “fill the gap” with respect to the “ongoing and changing needs of our membership”. This level of service and attention to member needs and concerns is central to the BIA mandate.

To run successful events and promotions, the BIA manager in downtown Guelph described how they must be, “tuned into the street”, implying that ongoing contact with members was essential to their provision of appropriate services. The majority of BIA leaders also described the importance of acting as “unabashed”, “tireless” or “dogged” voices for their downtowns. All BIAs described the importance of a strong relationship with the municipality, and especially the planning and economic development staff. In addition to meetings with city staff to advance their members’ perspectives, each of the BIA managers identified the importance of conducting local media interviews and drafting position papers, for local media and their memberships, on key issues.

BIAs also report undertaking advocacy initiatives to advance their mandates, and their efforts have resulted in several successful projects in mid-sized city downtowns – from new public spaces to incentive programs for façade improvements. BIAs describe using networks to amplify their objectives, which allow for a stronger, collaborative voice for projects. The amount of time spent on formal “advocacy” activities ranged from 10-45% across BIAs in the study area.

Groups that were identified as “advocacy partners” to BIAs included: Chambers of Commerce; post-secondary institutions; other downtown advisory groups; and non-profit organizations.

When asked what recent successes had occurred in their downtowns, BIA leaders shared a range of responses (detailed in Table 5-2) that included: the creation of new public spaces, retaining and attracting employers, historical preservation and business support programs. In all of these downtown success stories, BIAs reported working in concert with a partner to achieve their objectives. In downtown Barrie, the newly built Meridian Place will provide a venue for events and concerts. The Executive Director of the Downtown Barrie BIA describes the impact that this space will have on their downtown, “Our event roster brings down 325,000 people. With this new space, we’d like to shoot to draw 1 million people to downtown” (Watt, 2015). This project represents an important pillar of the City of Barrie’s Waterfront Master Plan, and through a partnership between the BIA, the City of Barrie, and Meridian Credit Union the project was moved toward completion.

In Peterborough, the BIA was involved in maintaining the employee base in the downtown. The BIA manager described launching an, “advocacy campaign with local media and council” to ensure that the federal public health unit chose a downtown location for their operations. Working with property owners and politicians, the BIAs position leveraged the language in the provincial Growth Plan, which promotes added downtown employment and population density, to advocate for employers to choose a downtown location for their offices. As a result, the BIA reported that, “we were able to attract a key employer downtown”.

In downtown Guelph the BIA, recognizing the importance of heritage architecture to downtown, shared that they have, “...partnered with the Architecture Conservancy of Ontario to preserve the façade of the Petrie building [iron clad building]”. Together, the BIA and the

Conservancy have launched a fundraising campaign to restore an important downtown building. Similarly, an innovative program being promoted by the Downtown Kitchener BIA is the Digital Innovation Skills Certificate (DISC). DISC is a partnership between the Waterloo region's small business enterprise centre, Laurier, Conestoga and two local technology companies. Its goal is to leverage the skills of graduate students to assist small businesses in developing an e-commerce platform. In St. Catharines, the BIA has become a member of the local coworking space, a shared workspace specifically focused on attracting independent workers and cooperatives; together they promote events and share resources with downtown businesses to jointly promote downtown as a location for new ventures. The BIA reports that in partnership with the coworking spaces, they are helping make St. Catharines, "...a regional hub for cooperative businesses".

Table 5-2: Downtown success in mid-sized cities

Theme	Category	Quotes from BIA Staff
Downtown successes	Overall downtown improvements	<i>“[We are seeing] YMCA’s recreation centre being built, post-secondary expansion and other new partnerships as per our strategic plan”; “They’re building the Fashion History Museum downtown”; “Completion of [the city’s] streetscaping plan”; “We are moving inside activity outside with our new patio program”.</i>
	Downtown employment/business mix	<i>“We have over 6000 employees downtown”; “We were able to attract a key employer downtown”; “We have a new developer bringing tech workers downtown”. “We are becoming a regional hub for cooperative businesses”; “We are the restaurant mecca for the city, but our retail is lacking”. “We take an active role in business recruitment in our BIA”.</i>
	Heritage preservation and promotion	<i>“Façade improvement grants for heritage buildings have increased”; “We have partnered with the Architecture Conservancy of Ontario to preserve the façade of the Petrie building [iron clad building]”.</i>
	Partnerships with post-secondary institutions	<i>“The university is building a community classroom downtown”; “We have a lot of students who access local businesses”; “A local college announced they’re moving a part of their campus downtown”</i>
	Residential developments	<i>“A new ten story apartments and condo unit is being built. This will bring a lot more people downtown”; “In the last five years we have three new condos downtown, this is building the daytime population”. ““There are 13 applications in the [planning] office for residential mid-rise buildings downtown!”</i>

When specifically asked about the impact of the Growth Plan on their downtowns, a range of responses followed. There was unanimous support for the increase in residential development occurring in downtowns across the study area. Condominiums are being built in the downtowns of all of these cities, and BIA managers believe that having additional residents downtown will serve to enhance to the city’s vibrancy. In Barrie, the BIA manager shared,

“There are 13 applications in the [planning] office for residential mid-rise buildings downtown!” and in Guelph the BIA believes that, “Downtown residents will become great supporters of the downtown, and we are already beginning to see their impact”. Moreover, there was much support for municipal incentives in the form of a Community Improvement Plan to help foster residential development. For example, newly created tax increment grants (TIGs) in Guelph and the removal of development charges in Barrie were identified as catalysts for growth and downtown renewal, the downtown manager in Guelph said that, “without these [municipal] incentives, we would not have seen this level of growth downtown”.

When asked about the challenges facing their downtowns (Table 5-3), BIA managers reported that visitors could be intimidated by: panhandlers; the presence of graffiti; derelict buildings; and visible drug use in the city’s core. One BIA manager juxtaposed their desire to improve the downtown public realm against a shopping mall’s ability to hire security and cleaning staff, and have consistent hours for their visitors. Other challenges included: lack of short and long-term parking, business closures and the constant need for pro-active business recruitment. A BIA manager in Brantford shared that, “The city’s economic development focuses 99% on industrial, not downtown”, a sentiment that was shared by other BIAs in the other mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area.

The BIAs in the study area have responded to challenges through various advocacy initiatives, special programming and partnership creation. For example, the Downtown Galt BIA created the Cambridge Core Area Patrol. Funded by all three Cambridge BIAs, the City of Cambridge and the Waterloo Regional Police, the program hires former police officers and college students to bike-patrol city streets, acting as good-will ambassadors.

Table 5-3: Downtown challenges in mid-sized cities

Theme	Category	Quotes from BIA Staff
Downtown challenges	Public safety and security	<i>“Perception of safety”; “Obvious drug use on the streets”; “There is a perception of crime”</i>
	Parking infrastructure (short and long term)	<i>“Parking. [We have a] narrow main street road”; “We need long-term parking spaces for employees”; “People don’t want to pay for parking”; “Demand is so high for permits, we increased our rates”; “We are putting our parking lots up for sale to attract development”</i>
	Real estate vacancies	<i>“Several businesses have closed due to a seasonal student population”; “Vacant spaces downtown allow landlords to opt-out of the BIA levy”; “Vacancy rebates and write offs take from your levy when you need more to help promote and attract businesses to locate in your BIA”.</i>
	Limited downtown visitors and proactive economic development	<i>“A lack of things to do, other than shop”; “A lot of drive though traffic but not enough customers who stop and make the effort to get out and shop”; “Our Farmers market is new. We desperately need more people to come Friday afternoons to visit the Market”; “[We] have a lack of customers in winter months for business”; “The city just cut our CIP [Community Improvement Plan] from 100,000 to 0!”; “The city’s economic development focuses 99% on industrial, not downtown”.</i>
	Construction (street closures)	<i>“Construction, both current and future”; “Constant construction is leading to business closures”.</i>
Role of BIAs	Advocacy	<i>“BIAs play a very important role. They are the voice of businesses, similar to what mall management would have”; “BIAs are an unabashed champion of downtown revitalization”; “I position myself as a mediator between the membership and the city”; “We tell our story in circles of influence: Rotary Clubs, Chamber etc.”</i>
	Marketing and businesses promotion	<i>“A combination of many roles: to market and promote the BIA, but also to be a voice for the membership (advocacy)...”; “We’re continuously working on Christmas lighting and decorations. Events are getting better, but still need a lot of improvements”; “We have just started Music Weekends downtown to bring people into bars and restaurants during daytime hours on Saturdays and Sundays”.</i>
	Facilitate downtown improvements	<i>“Beautification, promotion of businesses, event sponsorship. Closer connection from the city to the small businesses within the BIA”.</i>

The need for additional parking infrastructure emerged as one of the key challenges faced by downtowns in mid-sized cities. BIAs pointed out that there are both short and long-term parking challenges. Short-term parking issues relate to consumer preference whereby visitors, accustomed to vast, free parking at shopping malls, express difficulty shopping downtown due to limited, paid on-street parking. A BIA manager in Guelph illustrated this point by sharing, “Shoppers have so many choices, and we need to provide a level playing field downtown with respect to parking”. The second parking concern was over long-term, or employee/resident parking, the lack of which poses a challenge to downtown intensification. While the parking challenge is unique in each city, downtown Guelph stands out for the advocacy undertaken by both the BIA and the ancillary Downtown Advisory Committee (DAC). DAC is a municipal committee comprised of both downtown business owners and stakeholders, as well as by local citizens and special interest groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the public library. Together, the BIA and DAC have argued in favour of increased parking inventory in the core and have created a Parking Master Plan and successfully lobbied for a new parking garage.

While a partnership with a post-secondary institution has proven to be a boon for downtown Brantford’s real estate and preservation of heritage architecture, the presence of a large institution in the city’s downtown core is not without challenges. The BIA manager shared that the presence of a student population from September to April has led to several new businesses that cater to this population, however, she also indicated that, “these businesses often close in the summer months when the students are no longer living and studying downtown”.

As the Growth Plan takes hold of mid-sized city downtowns, adding additional density to the core, there is a parallel need for infrastructure improvements to provide upgraded services to building sites and public transportation to a burgeoning urban population. The impact of

construction on businesses was raised as a key concern in downtowns. To combat this, Uptown Waterloo lobbied for additional resources to be added to the municipality's Community Improvement Plan (CIP) during construction. The CIP offers grants to property owners, to improve such things as their façades and signage. Increases in downtown vacancies, while not entirely attributed to construction, are a very real concern for BIAs. Retail trends that allow consumers to shop online are impacting mainstreet. Downtown Kitchener economic development staff reported that in one month they had lost 14 businesses from their core, including one large anchor business. These vacancies have a direct impact on BIAs as owners can receive a property tax rebate for empty spaces. This rebate has a two-fold impact, it not only decreases the BIA levy, but it also hinders active tenant recruitment. As one BIA manager argued, the vacancy rebate is, "a disincentive for property owners to fill space, since they are already receiving a significant tax reduction". Another BIA shared that these funds, rather than being returned to the property owner, "could be funneled into a program that promoted downtown economic development".

Despite the evolving landscape in downtowns of mid-sized cities, the BIA manager in Barrie summed up his sentiment toward downtown renewal in mid-sized cities, "[It's] not all perfect, there are highs and lows throughout – and it [revitalization] definitely doesn't happen overnight".

5.4 Analysis and Recommendations

The BIA model emerged in the 1970s as a merchant-led movement with a mandate to promote, beautify and advance the needs of the businesses and property owners within a defined geographic boundary (Ontario, 2010). Without the weight of a bureaucracy, and with direct and steady access to its membership (Gomez et al., 2015), this research highlights how BIAs are

responsive advocates for their downtowns, and remain largely focused on emergent issues within their membership. With activities ranging from local events, to media promotions, to streetscaping improvements, BIAs in the study area are working toward fulfilling their mandate of beautifying, marketing and promoting their districts.

Findings confirm the operational focus that BIAs bring to downtown revitalization can create noticeable improvements, and enhance the quality of life in the city's core (Sands & Reese, 2017). The literature tells us that while larger cities can create business clusters and compete for the creative or knowledge-based economy (Florida, 2003; Gertler, 2003; Porter, 2000), smaller urban centres, with a high quality of life can also become attractive locations for knowledge workers and can attract new economic development opportunities (Lewis & Donald, 2010; Sands & Reese, 2008). Vibrant downtowns and programmed public spaces improve quality of life, especially in smaller urban centres (Lewis & Donald, 2010; Waitt & Gibson, 2009), and BIA focus and leadership in these areas is important to creating and maintaining downtown vibrancy. Moreover, research on downtown rejuvenation advocates for an incremental improvement, or ongoing "urban husbandry", rather than large-scale overhauls of downtowns (Burayidi, 2015; Gratz, 1989, p. 148; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009b); an approach that is central to the genesis of the BIA model. As such, the BIA focus on streetscape improvements, downtown marketing and retail recruitment confirms Sands and Reese's (2017) argument that the presence of BIAs adds vitality to their respective mid-sized city downtowns.

In smaller urban centres, findings show that BIAs can take also on an important role as advocates on a range of issues that affect their downtowns. BIAs can act as "unabashed" defenders of their downtowns, undertaking advocacy initiatives as a means to advance the interests of their respective memberships. While it is difficult to trace a direct line between the

activities of each BIA and successful downtown revitalization outcomes, this research, confirms Sands and Reese's (2017) findings that the presence of a downtown advocate, in the form of a BIA, is central to promoting economic development in mid-sized city downtowns.

Advocacy projects in mid-sized city downtowns in the study area have taken various forms, with BIAs lobbying to have: downtowns be a citywide employer of choice, additional funding for municipal incentives or parking infrastructure to meet the diverse needs of employers and residents. To achieve these goals, BIAs have found success by seeking out allied groups (Filion et al., 2004) or coalitions (Bramwell, 2012) to garner broader-based support. Similarly, where BIAs faced challenges, around public safety, vacancies, and infrastructure shortfalls, they sought out partnerships to help facilitate broad-based solutions. BIAs in mid-sized cities have established partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders including: non-profit groups, post-secondary institutions and citywide business associations. This research highlights that BIAs are collaborative in nature, and do not function in isolation. These partnerships demonstrate the important role that BIAs play in mid-sized cities as conveners of community-based actors focused on downtown economic development (Leigh & Blakely, 2017; Sands & Reese, 2017), and reinforce the important role of collaboration in third wave economic development approaches (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999).

As with any revitalization initiative, however, it is difficult to isolate the exact contribution that each actor makes to downtown rejuvenation. Nevertheless, this research does illustrate two important points about BIAs that are reinforced both in the literature and in research findings. First, through their founding mission, BIAs have an inherent downtown-first agenda. In declining mid-sized city downtowns, where municipal priorities have favoured suburban developments, this downtown-first perspective has positioned BIAs as a consistent

voice, or advocate (Sands & Reese, 2017), for urban rejuvenation. Secondly, and due in part to this downtown-first mandate, BIAs have the ability to pull together disparate community-based actors whose interests converge on downtown improvements. The literature on small and mid-sized cities speaks to the importance of downtown allies (Filion et al., 2004) and collaborations of public and private sector groups (Sands & Reese, 2017) and findings from this study reinforce the ability of BIAs to act as conveners to achieve shared downtown revitalization goals.

BIAs however, are not without their challenges. Not only are they operating in a declining retail market, with members struggling to compete against larger and online retailers, but also with new infrastructure investments in downtowns, such as Light Rapid Transit in Kitchener-Waterloo, business viability is being challenged by ongoing construction. In addition to these contextual factors that impact the viability of small, mainstreet businesses, BIAs can also face governance challenges that include being dominated property owners whose self-interest, in their own properties or businesses, can influence BIA activities.

As such, this research offers three recommendations to expand the advocacy, collaborative activities and transparency of BIAs in mid-sized cities with a goal of ongoing downtown revitalization. First, Ontario BIAs, with a provincially designated urban growth centre, could amplify their advocacy work by establishing a joint-committee of BIAs focused on sharing best practices with respect to Growth Plan implementation. The Growth Plan mandates increased residential units and employment targets in the downtowns of mid-sized cities; these priorities have been proven to facilitate urban renewal in mid-sized cities in other jurisdictions (Burayidi, 2013). Moving forward, a joint-committee would ensure that BIA advocacy efforts (Sands & Reese, 2017) are well-informed and steeped in shared knowledge from their mid-sized city counterparts province-wide.

Secondly, BIAs could focus on pro-actively cultivating and supporting local entrepreneurship. Not only are BIAs currently comprised of small- and medium-sized entrepreneurial businesses (Gomez et al., 2015), but the ability to attract, market and retain new businesses is a core component of the BIA mandate (Ontario, 2010). By providing services and programs that support emerging enterprises, BIAs serve a secondary function of attracting and encouraging new businesses to locate in downtowns. This in turn speaks to the criticism that BIAs unfairly incent areas of the city that can afford an extra tax to improve their district (Rankin & Delaney, 2011). These business development services could be offered in collaboration with local employment service agencies, coworking spaces or post-secondary institutions.

Finally, to achieve the two preceding recommendations, BIAs must become more transparent, attracting new and diverse ideas to their boards and committees. The BIA mandate and mission of can be elusive new businesses (Rankin & Delaney, 2011), and BIAs could consider promoting and advertising their board meetings as public. By opening conversation to the full membership, or the general public, BIAs can foster transparency on a range of issues impacting downtown. Moreover, these open meetings can also serve as a recruitment tool to attract new board and committee members, serving to bring innovative ideas into the BIA culture.

5.5 Conclusion

After weathering decades of decline and disregard, current trends in urban planning—that favour amenity-rich, walkable neighbourhoods—have once again begun to favour downtowns. In the Greater Golden Horseshoe area of Ontario, the province has challenged cities, large and small, to intensify and revitalize their core areas through increased population and employment

density (Ontario, 2006, 2017). As the first effects of the growth plan are beginning to be felt in mid-sized cities across the province, a renewed interest in downtown revitalization has emerged (Jamal, 2015a).

Urban scholarship illustrates how city-building and local economic development is complex and multifaceted, requiring incremental change (Filion et al., 2004; Gratz, 1989; Robertson, 2001) and broad based community support (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999; Leigh & Blakely, 2017) to achieve its objectives. Since their inception in the 1970s, BIAs, as membership-based, non-profit organizations with a mandate to improve conditions in their district through collective action (Briffault, 1999), have played a role in maintaining core area vitality. This research has illustrated how BIAs, spanning public and private sector interests, can be an important player in downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities. BIAs, however, have been criticized for favouring areas willing to pay an additional tax to revitalize their neighbourhoods (Rankin & Delaney, 2011). While the majority of BIA activities are largely operational in nature, marketing downtowns and convening events to attract visitors, this research and a review of the literature show how BIAs are fostering downtown renewal in mid-sized cities (Sands & Reese, 2017) by acting as active coalition-builders and advocates for their downtowns.

BIAs have formed alliances with public and private partners to advance a downtown-first agenda. Recommendations from this research challenge BIAs to move from operational to aspirational, and encourage BIAs to become proactive participants in their municipality's growth planning and downtown revitalization efforts; amplify their support for local entrepreneurship; and expand their organizations with fresh perspectives and members. As a construct of the mid-twentieth century, BIAs were created to respond to rapid suburbanization and the advent of a retail landscape that directly challenged the primacy of downtowns as a viable commercial

business district. Through decades of downtown decline, that was especially acute in smaller urban centres, downtowns have emerged as a key focus in twenty-first century city planning. As such, there is an opportunity to reimagine the role that BIAs can play in downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities.

CHAPTER SIX: Coworking Spaces in Mid-sized Cities: A partner in downtown economic development

Coworking Spaces in Mid-sized Cities: A partner in downtown economic development

Published in Environment & Planning A: Economy and Space (February, 2018)
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18760857>

Overview

The twenty-first century economy is knowledge-intensive, creative and flourishing in larger urban centres. Less is known about how smaller urban centres are faring in this new economy. This research aims to fill that gap by exploring whether mid-sized cities, in a designated growth area in Ontario, Canada, can leverage the knowledge economy and foster local economic development to help revitalize their ailing downtowns. This research looks at the role that coworking, or shared workspaces, can play in the local economy of mid-sized cities in Ontario. Recognizing the role that community-based actors play in urban affairs, this paper uses a local economic development framework to explore the role of coworking spaces in the urban economic fabric of mid-sized city downtowns. Survey responses and interviews, coupled with insights from global surveys on coworking and a literature review, begin to tell the story of how economic change is playing out in mid-sized cities, illustrating the importance of an innovative, collaborative and inclusive approaches to city building and local economic development.

Keywords: Local economic development, coworking, sharing economy, mid-sized cities, downtowns, growth planning

6.1 Introduction

At the outset of the twenty-first century, cities are experiencing changes to the labour market firsthand. Once purpose built to support the manufacturing and transportation of goods, competitive cities are now transitioning to welcome a new, knowledge-based economy (Blakely & Leigh, 2010; Madanipour, 2011; Scott, 2014). The knowledge economy relies on the presence of highly skilled knowledge or creative workers, many of whom are drawn to the amenities, lifestyle and business opportunities found in large urban centres (Florida, 2002; Gertler, 2003). The successful confluence of innovation, investment, proximity to research institutions and talent in big cities has been well established in the literature (Gertler, 2003; Storper & Scott, 2009; Vinodrai, 2010; Wolfe, 2014).

This shift to the new, knowledge-based economy has seen the formation of successful business clusters, or agglomerations (Porter, 2000; Scott, 2014; Wolfe, 2014), in larger urban centres. This evolution, however has not been universal, and cities have not experienced the knowledge economy equally (Scott, 2012; Vinodrai, 2010). While large, economically diversified urban regions thrive (Gertler, 2003), and now struggle with increasing gentrification and social inequality (Florida, 2017; Leigh & Blakely, 2017), less is known about the experience of smaller urban centres in transitioning to the post-industrial, knowledge based economy. This paper seeks to address this gap in the literature by exploring whether mid-sized cities, in a designated growth area of Ontario, can leverage coworking spaces as a means to attract knowledge workers, promote local economic development and help revitalize ailing downtowns.

The growth of the post-industrial, knowledge-intensive economy is changing how we work, live and experience cities. As the global population gravitates to urban environments, cities are transforming spatially to accommodate knowledge or creative workers (Madanipour,

2011). Emerging urban forms, like coworking spaces, innovation hubs and maker spaces, are providing shared, collaborative spaces to a new type of worker (Merkel, 2015; Schmidt, Brinks, & Brinkhoff, 2015). At its core, coworking is a membership-based, shared-office-space movement that provides tenants with “access to amenities and facilities they otherwise would not be able to afford” (Surman, 2013, p. 189). Coworking, recently described as a “new urban social practice”, differs from traditional offices spaces because it organizes labour to allow for “mutual support amongst freelancers and self-employed persons” (Merkel, 2015, p. 122). Moreover, coworking provides affordable, amenity-rich shared workspaces to knowledge or creative workers who choose to work alone or seek collaborations with other individuals and organizations (Pohler, 2011; Spinuzzi, 2012; Surman, 2013)

Deskmag, a publication dedicated to coworking, reported that in 2015 there were 7,800 coworking spaces around the world, a marked increase from the 3,400 spaces reported in 2013 (Deskmag, 2015). Often located in heritage buildings in downtown neighbourhoods (Deskmag, 2013, 2015), coworking spaces sit at the intersection of a global urbanization movement (Florida, 2003; Storper & Scott, 2009) and the rise of the sharing economy (Belk, 2014; Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2015; Johal & Zon, 2015). While the prevalence of coworking spaces accommodating knowledge workers in large urban centres is well established (Deskmag, 2013, 2015), less is known about whether smaller urban centres can leverage coworking spaces, as a means to foster downtown local economic development.

6.2 Theoretical Framework

To explore the potential of coworking spaces as a driver of mid-sized city downtown economic development and revitalization, this inquiry was influenced by local economic development (LED) scholarship. Leigh and Blakely (2017) describe how traditional models of

economic development, focused largely on wealth generation, have led to growth that has fostered social inequality and environmental degradation. First and second wave, or twentieth-century, economic development was characterized by “smokestack chasing and giving [corporate] incentives” (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999, p. 229), and had little regard for broad-based community development.

In response to an evolving twenty-first century, knowledge-intensive economy, Leigh and Blakeley advance a renewed definition of LED that seeks to improve a community’s overall standard of living; reduce social and economic inequality; and promote environmental protection (Leigh & Blakely, 2017, p. 87). This approach is consistent with third wave economic development, which is described as an approach that builds “the capacity of the entire local economy” (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999, p. 231). Examples of third wave economic development include: forging public-private partnerships; the creation of diverse, interdisciplinary networks; and the development of “soft” infrastructure required to foster economic development (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999). Bramwell and Pierre describe how “new community spaces” (2017, p. 604), or organized, or cross-sector collaborations, are fostering economic development in cities.

Emerging from this context, Leigh and Blakely offer a renewed conceptual and theoretical framework for understanding local economic development. A pillar of their model suggests cities need to move beyond support for “single purpose organizations” to be inclusive of “collaborative partnerships of many community groups...to establish a broad foundation for competitive cities” (2017, pp. 103–107). This perspective is resonant with mid-sized city scholarship that suggests that the inclusion of allied groups (Filion et al., 2004) in urban affairs is essential to promoting downtown renewal. As such, it is through the lens of a collaborative, community-based approach to local economic development, focused on improving the quality of

life in cities, that this research asks: What roles are coworking spaces playing in downtown revitalization and local economic development in mid-sized cities? What supports can help to sustain coworking spaces outside of larger urban centres?

6.3 Methods

To answer these questions a range of qualitative research methods were employed. To gather the perspectives of coworking, community and municipal leaders across Ontario's mid-sized cities 23 semi-structured interviews, between 2015 and 2017, were conducted with municipal planners, economic development officers, politicians, coworking leaders, downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA) managers and local developers. A document review of coworking websites, municipal downtown plans and local media was also undertaken. In addition, an electronic survey was deployed to coworking spaces in the study area. For the purposes of this paper, a mid-sized city will be defined as a city with a population ranging from 50,000-500,000 residents (Bunting et al., 2007; H. Hall & Hall, 2008; Seasons, 2003).

The study area selected for this research was inclusive of seven mid-sized cities that sit in the "outer ring" (Ontario, 2006 p.52) of the Province of Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) including: Peterborough; Barrie; Waterloo; Kitchener; Brantford; Guelph; and St. Catharines. These are stand-alone mid-sized cities that sit outside of the Greenbelt and share a number of similar characteristics. Each sit outside of the primary Greater Toronto Area commuter-shed. Each has a historic downtown core, and all are home to at least one coworking space. At the time of writing there were 11 coworking spaces in the study area (Table 6-1), and of this cohort of "outer ring" mid-sized cities, only Cambridge, Ontario was excluded, as it did not have a coworking space.

Survey responses were received from 10 coworking spaces the study area. The insights in the survey and interview responses, when coupled with the results from Deskmag's (2013, 2015) global surveys on coworking and a literature review, begin to tell the story of how economic change is unfolding in mid-sized cities. A workshop to present survey findings was hosted in downtown Guelph in 2016. This was an opportunity to present findings and refine analysis. The workshop was attended by 20 coworking, business, municipal, government and community leaders from across the province.

As Leigh and Blakely's (2017) approach to local economic development would suggest, the findings from this research illustrate the importance of collaboration and community engagement in economic development as a strategy to begin to reverse decades of core area decline in mid-sized cities. Findings also confirm that community-wide engagement, and the participation of allied groups (Filion et al., 2004), can augment traditional, municipally led, approaches local economic development efforts in mid-sized cities. Emergent findings, however, also show that having a physical space for coworking in the downtown of a mid-sized city in a growth region can help future-proof against impending gentrification by providing supportive, affordable space for new social enterprises and young entrepreneurs. Moreover, this research affirms the value of a third wave economic development approach (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999) in smaller urban centres, namely the important role of community-based actors forging networks that advance downtown economic development.

6.4 Literature Review

To better explore research findings it is important to examine the literature on global trends in: mid-sized cities, downtowns coworking and the sharing economy.

6.4.1 Mid-sized city downtowns

To understand the current conditions in mid-sized city downtowns, it is important to step back and understand their historical evolution. In the early part of the twentieth century, downtowns in North America were of central importance to cities and urban economies. Downtowns were the site of important civic buildings and were the predominant commercial area in the city. In the post-WWII period, however, the primacy of Canadian downtowns was challenged by the creation of residential and commercial districts outside of the downtown area (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Gad & Matthew, 2000; Grant, 2006; Hodge & Gordon, 2008; White, 2007).

In North America, suburban neighbourhoods appeared in the post-war period due to rapid economic growth, coupled with the need to build housing for a booming population. As automobile use grew, so too did the suburbs, and this gave rise to extensive suburban sprawl throughout the twentieth century (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Wachs, 2013). It was during this period that early signs of downtown decline emerged. With automobile-reliant neighbourhoods popping up further from the city's core, and the arrival of shopping malls and employment lands easily accessed by new highways, downtowns – especially those in small and mid-sized cities – faced increased competition, and ultimately decline (Filion & Hammond, 2008; Filion et al., 2004).

In Ontario, after experiencing decades of unchecked suburbanization across the province, one of the key pillars of the Ontario government's *Places to Grow* (Ontario, 2005) legislation seeks to address the negative impact of sprawl on downtown areas. To stimulate downtown revitalization, the regional-scale *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario, 2006, 2017) called for the creation of urban growth centres (UGCs). The 25 UGCs are located in either

existing historic downtowns or emerging suburban downtowns in cities across Ontario (Ontario, 2006, p. 12), and are further subdivided into those in the “inner ring” or “outer ring” (2006, pp. 49, 52); labels that correspond to a UGCs location vis-à-vis the Greenbelt, a swath of environmentally protected land.

The UGCs are required to develop as high-density, mixed-use nodes that can: attract employment; public and private investment; residential growth; and accommodate infrastructure improvements (Ontario, 2006, 2017). Intensification in the UGCs is to be achieved via aggressive provincial targets that mandate the number of jobs and people municipalities are to add by 2041. The UGCs in the inner ring, closest to the City of Toronto, have higher density targets to achieve.

The eight UGCs in the outer ring share several common characteristics that will present specific challenges and opportunities when implementing the Growth Plan’s prescriptions. Each is a mid-sized city that benefits from having: a historic downtown, an active downtown association and at least one post-secondary institution. Despite these advantages, these mid-sized cities have also experienced: some degree of core area decline; a history of low-density; dispersed suburban development (Bunting et al., 2007; Filion, 2007); and a municipal planning paradigm that favours the status quo (Momani & Khirfan, 2013). As such, the Growth Plan has provided researchers with an opportunity assess how municipalities are responding to a provincial mandate to grow cities and add jobs while building complete communities, curbing sprawl, developing new transportation systems and revitalizing downtowns. More specifically, with eight of the twenty-five UGCs in outer ring mid-sized cities, the plan’s focus on intensifying the downtown areas has cast new attention on economic development in smaller urban centres.

6.4.2 The sharing economy and emergence of coworking

The concept of shared community spaces is not new. Oldenberg's (1999) research on "third spaces" speaks to the importance of spaces that individuals seek out outside of their homes (first spaces) and traditional offices (second spaces), such as libraries, cafes and public squares. Oldenberg highlights the importance of third spaces for their ability to accommodate a range of diverse user groups. While the rise of technology and the ability for people to work remotely led to the proclaimed "death of distance" (Cairncross, 1997), growing interconnectedness and the importance of urban spaces in the new economy is challenging this concept (Madanipour, 2011; Scott, 2014; Vinodrai, 2015). While the growth of coworking has been significant, and there are over 500,000 coworkers worldwide (Deskmag, 2015), there has been limited scholarship on its impact in smaller urban centres. As such, it is not surprising that *Forbes* magazine recently labeled coworking the largest start up movement "hiding in plain sight" (Desai, 2016).

As the economy shifts under a new category of workers, the gap between the knowledge and service classes continues to grow, and the prevalence of precarious (Avdikos & Kalogeresis, 2016; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Merkel, 2015; Vinodrai, 2013), or unstable, employment continues to increase; it is not surprising that new models of enterprise have emerged to support this emerging category of workers. The rise of the sharing economy has been described as a "disruptive innovation" (Johal & Zon, 2015, p. 14) that leverages technology to connect people with people, cutting out the traditional "middleperson", in the sale or sharing of largely underutilized goods and services (Belk, 2014; Botsman, 2015; Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Hamari et al., 2015).

The values that underpin the sharing economy, such as community empowerment, openness and collaboration, are similarly associated with the growing community of coworkers (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Merkel, 2015; Surman, 2013; Sykes, 2014). Most notably, coworking

taps into the sharing economy in two ways: through sharing space or “physical assets”; and the sharing of resources or “intangible assets” (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018, p. 5). As cities look for strategies to attract and retain knowledge workers, coworking spaces are emerging globally (Deskmag, 2013, 2015). Coworking is a part of a broader economic trend that has seen growth in the number of knowledge workers freelancing, consulting and working outside the confines of traditional offices (Avdikos & Kalogeresis, 2016; Johnson, 2003; Spinuzzi, 2012). The term coworking first emerged in the early 2000s and traces its roots to digital media and technology communities in San Francisco and then New York (Gandini, 2015; Waters-Lynch, Potts, Butcher, Dodson, & Hurley, 2016).

As the economy embraces knowledge intensive labour and value added goods and services, coworking has emerged as a post-Fordist solution to support a new generation of what Pohler (2011) terms atypical workers. According to Deskmag’s global surveys of coworkers, the average coworker is 35 years old and 67% are self-described freelancers or entrepreneurs (Deskmag, 2013). One other consideration closely associated with coworking is geography. Coworking is taking hold in hip downtown neighbourhoods and is connecting cities with a new generation of independent workers and entrepreneurs (Deskmag, 2013, 2015). In 2015, 49% of coworking spaces reported that they opened in a space that had been previously vacant for at least six months (Deskmag, 2015).

At its core, coworking is a shared office space movement. Memberships to coworking spaces provide: affordable, amenity-rich shared workspaces; access to services such as mentorship and business planning; and the opportunity to foster collaborations with other coworkers (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Spinuzzi, 2012; Surman, 2013). Despite advances in technology, knowledge and creative workers are choosing to cowork because of the communal,

educational and collaborative environment created by the staff in coworking spaces (Spinuzzi, 2012; Surman, 2013) as “urban sociomaterial infrastructure” (Merkel, 2015, p. 133), members value the ability to socialize, share ideas and establish new ventures with other coworkers. Emerging European scholarship is beginning to identify links between coworking spaces and the rise of innovation outside of traditional firms (Capdevila, 2015).

Coworking is tied to the concept of collaborative consumption, which Belk describes as, “people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation” (Belk, 2014, p. 1597). However, it was not until the economic downturn in 2008, that coworking began to emerge as a movement in cities around the world (Avdikos & Kalogeresis, 2016; Gandini, 2015). As the economic recession denied young workers stable employment opportunities and displaced others already in the workplace, it gave rise to a generation of freelancers and entrepreneurs. Moreover, the precarious nature of this type of employment made affordable office space that much more attractive to workers (Avdikos & Kalogeresis, 2016; Merkel, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012). For example, in Greece, coworking and “work collectives”, or groups made up freelancers (Avdikos & Kalogeresis, 2016, p. 36), emerged out of a need to better collaborate and market businesses while mitigating overhead costs.

As the population of mobile, knowledge workers grows, coworking spaces have emerged with distinct governance structures. Some for-profit spaces offer workers an office outside of the home, where members have a desk, wireless connection and access to shared meeting spaces. The second category of coworking spaces has a mission to create animated, curated spaces, or what coworking leaders call, an “intentional community” (Coworking leader, 2016, personal communication). With goals ranging from providing mentorship to emerging entrepreneurs to

creating social enterprise through cross-sector networks, these coworking spaces each have a distinct culture that reflects their membership (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Gandini, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012; Surman, 2013; Sykes, 2014). These spaces can be structured as non-profit, for-profit or cooperative entities.

6.5 Findings

Of the 40 coworking spaces across Ontario, 24 are located in mid-sized cities. Of these coworking spaces, 11 sit within the study area. Surveys were received from 10 coworking spaces within the study area including responses from: Guelph (3), Kitchener, Waterloo, Peterborough (2), Barrie, Brantford and St. Catharines. At the time of writing, Cambridge, Ontario was the only outer ring provincial urban growth centre that did not have a coworking space. The diversity of these spaces and their respective memberships are detailed in Table 6-1.

Findings indicated that 90% of coworking spaces were located in historic downtowns. Citing the need to provide access to transit, a “cool vibe in an old building”, and proximity to urban amenities to their members, locating coworking spaces in downtowns was an intentional decision by coworking leaders. The Kitchener coworking space described the benefits of their location as, “...very centrally located downtown, directly across from the main bus station and on the entrance to [the park]. The location and accessibility attract a lot of people”. A coworking space in Guelph described how members choose their space because of the amenities found nearby in its, “cool downtown location in the central business district”.

Table 6-1: Coworking Spaces in Study Area

Coworking space	City	Governance	Members	Membership focus
Creative Space	Barrie	Non-profit	86	Freelancers, start-ups, micro-businesses in all disciplines
RCity Coworking	Brantford	Non-profit	40	Unemployed and underemployed workers
10 Carden Shared Spaces	Guelph	Non-profit	128	Creative workers, researchers, social innovators, non-profits
The 349	Guelph	For-profit	25	Technology and digital workers
Innovation Guelph	Guelph	Non-profit	22	Entrepreneurs, with a special focus on women, new ventures in all disciplines
Treehaus	Kitchener	Non-profit	22	Consultants, start-ups, non-profits and telecommuters in all disciplines
Workplace One	Kitchener-Waterloo	For-profit	450	Telecommuters in all disciplines.
Cowork Niagara	St. Catharines	Cooperative	45	Cooperative business, independent workers
Peterborough Per Diem	Peterborough	For-profit	57	Diverse members: telecommuters, entrepreneurs, newly located companies
Hatch PTBO	Peterborough	Non-profit	49	Social purpose businesses, enterprising non-profits

Of the spaces surveyed, two had been in operation for 1-2 years, one had been in operation for 3-5 years and the remaining seven had been open for 5+ years. With their physical space ranging from 1,100 to 17,000 square feet, all respondents indicated that one of their top priorities was to ensure that they were providing high quality space to their coworking members and organizational tenants. However, all of the coworking spaces had goals with regard to space improvements that included: adding more workstations; ongoing site maintenance; or improving

physical accessibility. Over half of coworking leaders indicated that they would welcome a new space, additional “hot desks”, or a second location to meet the growing needs of their members.

Several coworking leaders described how coworking spaces are helping provide affordable offices for start-ups while also reactivating dormant real estate in the downtown core. For example, in Guelph one of the coworking leaders shared that coworking, “offers the key to revitalizing large, underutilized spaces downtown”. In Barrie, the coworking space founder indicated that they, “had space, couldn’t afford it alone -- and POOF -- [the space] was born”. Through the sharing of affordable space, a tech-focused coworking space in Guelph indicated that their location had become, “a place for new and early stage companies to have low cost, low commitment spaces to work and build community and gain support from others”. Another respondent shared that, “There is a lot of empty space commercially downtown. However, there is little in the way of high quality, affordable office space. Like many other mid-sized towns we have high unemployment, so advancing entrepreneurialism with social impact is making a big difference”.

To illustrate this point, *10 Carden Shared Spaces*, a coworking space in downtown Guelph, is taking a leadership position in downtown real estate. They purchased a 15,000 square foot building through a combination of traditional financing, private donations, partnerships and community bonds. The *10 Carden* team described how one of their goals is, “To retain affordable, flexible space for new enterprises and community benefit organizations in the downtown core as the city continues to intensify and the real estate prices downtown climb”.

All of the coworking spaces in the outer ring of the GGH stated that individual coworking members are their core tenants, representing a key source of income for the space. In addition to individual members, 80% of the spaces indicated that they also housed organizations

and business tenants. Barrie's coworking space is home to over 40 businesses that employ over 65 full time equivalents (FTEs). *Peterborough Per Diem* has several business tenants and indicated that they are proactively trying to recruit small businesses and entrepreneurs in their membership, describing how coworking allows new companies, "To try [their city] and give their businesses an opportunity to grow here using our services".

In addition to revenue from individual and organizational memberships, 50% of the coworking spaces cited rental and events income as an important source of revenue. Not only was space rental a viable source of income, all of the coworking spaces indicated that they provided a range of services to their membership. This ranged from business incubation services to partnering with the local Business Enterprise Centre or Regional Innovation Centre to offer skills training and mentorship for new enterprises and young entrepreneurs. The coworking space in St. Catharines indicated that, "We have become a hub and resource centre for social enterprise and cooperative businesses in the region". Workshops and services were also found to be a small, but important source of revenue for coworking spaces. Only 30% of respondents indicated that government grant revenue was a source of income for their centre, albeit a precarious one.

With regard to the composition of their coworking membership, all respondents indicated that their membership was diverse, representing the following sectors most strongly: freelancers and entrepreneurs; digital/information technology; arts and culture; and social services. The majority of spaces had an application process for members, but were open to a diversity of members. While all centres had aspirations of attracting certain types of coworkers, these groupings specifically included: "digital nomads", social enterprises, entrepreneurs and small businesses, and start-ups. Two of the ten centres had a sub-focus in their membership. *Cowork*

Niagara in St. Catharines wanted to provide a location for independent workers to congregate, and were intentionally not seeking members who wanted to grow their employee base. *RCity Coworking* in Brantford indicated that they had a social purpose, “To support those who identified as unemployed and underemployed”, and tailored programs and services to this specific coworking audience.

While the outlook for coworking in the coming year in the study cities was characterized as overwhelmingly positive (80%), only four of the spaces were operating with staffing resources, while the others relied on volunteers to program and animate space, welcome new members, and maintain the overall coworking site. Since the majority of spaces operated with limited staff and volunteer time, 100% of spaces reported that they value working in partnership with organizations in their city and were looking to increase collaborations. Partner groups and collaborators included: municipal governments; universities and colleges; Chambers of Commerce; Regional Innovation Centres (RIC); Business Enterprise Centres (BEC); Business Improvement Area (BIA); and other non-profit organizations. Partnership opportunities included: hosting joint workshops with the local business enterprise centre; housing university faculty/students in the space; and cross promoting events with the downtown BIA.

By way of example, one coworking space in Guelph, with a mandate to support social enterprise, established a partnership with their local university to build the city’s first community classroom, designed to host both academic and community lectures in the city’s core. Another coworking space in St. Catharines, focused on supporting independent workers, established an arrangement with the BIA whereby the BIA is a paying member of the space, refers potential coworkers, and promotes the space’s events and workshops. In Kitchener, the founder of the coworking space describes how they collaborated with their municipal government to embed

coworking in the city's *Downtown Action Plan*. Moreover, Kitchener created an incentive, called the Start Up Landing Pad Program, for property owners to renovate second storey units to house newly formed businesses emerging from coworking spaces.

In addition to working in partnership with a cross-section of the community's stakeholders, not-for profit coworking centres report a high engagement from downtown businesses, higher education institutions and local citizens on their boards of directors. Several coworking spaces, with active boards and staff, report engaging with local council and business groups to advocate on behalf of: the coworking model; fostering increased entrepreneurship; enhancing downtown renewal; and developing a creative cluster in their cities.

When asked what benefits coworking offers their communities, leaders identified a range of perspectives: "Coworking can be the heartbeat of the business ecosystem in the city," and, "[Coworking is a] safe and supportive space to allow anyone to work on their business, project or idea". Another space asserted that coworking provides, "Massive value. We grow companies. We mentor and nurture start-ups and "'treps [entrepreneurs]. Our members spend cash downtown. When they grow too big, they move into other spaces in town". Other coworking benefits include, "networking, networking, networking". Almost all of the spaces spoke to the formal and informal ways that members connect to create new initiatives, businesses and support each other's projects. While all of the centres had declared a goal of increasing internal and external collaborations in the coming year, other goals included: becoming a, "hub for creative collaboration"; undertaking more, "research and advocacy for independent workers"; "collaborative grant-making"; becoming the, "B-Corp capital of Canada"; and "growing the number of women entrepreneurs in our city".

Despite the fact that most coworking spaces are operating on shoestring budgets, and only 23% indicated strong financial stability, 85% indicated that the outlook for coworking in the coming year was positive. When asked what challenges coworking faces, there were a range of responses that included: a lack of understanding of the coworking model; lack of affordable space; inadequate space; limited physically accessible space; and the ongoing need to attract new memberships. This is illustrated by one coworking leader's remark; "We are continually concerned about our rent going up. If it did, it could put us out of business". Another respondent shared that in smaller cities, "People don't even know what "coworking and collaboration" means".

Conversely, many of the comments about coworking were both aspirational and positive. They included comments such as, "Coworking spaces are fantastic for the economies of mid-sized cities – they provide an ecosystem for small businesses to flourish, grow and succeed in ways that are would not possible working alone". Similarly, another respondent stated, "Coworking is vital. Large businesses do not fuel these towns, and they are then too important to the economy if they [large businesses] fail". One coworking staff member summed up the work they do noting that, "Coworking is a stimulator of the creative economy in our city".

From these findings, several important themes emerged (Table 6-2) that resonate with broader global trends in coworking while also speaking to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by coworking spaces outside of large urban centres. The four common themes emerging from interview and survey data include: downtown locations matter; coworking is revitalizing downtowns and boosting local economic development; coworking fosters entrepreneurship and innovation; and partnerships are essential to create success.

Table 6-2: Research themes

Theme	Selected quotes
Downtown locations matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “[We have a] cool vibe in an old building”. • “[We are] very centrally located downtown, directly across from the main bus station...”. • “[We are in a] cool downtown location in the central business district”.
Coworking is revitalizing downtowns and fostering local economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Coworking offers the key to revitalizing large, underutilized spaces downtown”. • “There is a lot of empty space commercially downtown. However, there is little in the way of high quality, affordable office space [provided by coworking]. • “Like many other mid-sized towns we have high unemployment, so advancing entrepreneurialism with social impact [through coworking] is making a big difference. • “[Coworking] allows new companies to try our city and give their businesses an opportunity to grow here using our services. • “Coworking spaces are fantastic for the economics of mid-sized cities. They provide an ecosystem for small businesses to flourish, grow and succeed in ways that are not possible working alone. • “Our members spend cash downtown. When they grow too big, they move into other spaces in town.
Coworking fosters entrepreneurship and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “[Coworking is] a place for new and early stage companies to have low cost, low commitment spaces to work and build community and gain support from others”. • “[Our goal] is to support those who identified as unemployed and underemployed in our community”. • “Large businesses do not fuel these towns, and then they are too important to the economy if they fail”. • “Coworking can provide flexibility for new businesses to launch”. • “Coworking is a stimulator of the creative economy”.
Partnerships are essential to create success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We had space, couldn’t afford it alone -- and POOF -- [the space] was born”. • “Coworking can be the heartbeat of the business ecosystem in the city”. • “We have become a hub and resource centre for social enterprise and cooperative businesses in the region”.

6.6 Analysis

The four themes that emerged from this research illustrate that coworking spaces in mid-sized cities share several similarities with their global, big city counterparts. Coworking spaces in mid-sized cities are: intentionally located in downtowns; home to a range of knowledge and creative workers who support downtowns; foster entrepreneurship; and thrive on partnerships built across sectors. Although there is a certain amount of overlap in the characteristics of coworking spaces and types of coworkers in cities both large and mid-sized, it is important to understand these themes in the context of mid-sized cities. Recognizing that mid-sized cities have been acutely impacted by a history of dispersed, suburban development and downtown real estate vacancies, coupled with a public distrust of downtown investments (Bunting et al., 2007) and poorly resourced planning departments (Momani & Khirfan, 2013), these findings take on an increased importance.

The first two themes highlight the value of a downtown location and the subsequent role that coworking plays with respect to downtown revitalization and local economic development. These themes further illustrate the leadership that citizens play in creating and curating coworking organizations to support entrepreneurship, social innovation, independent workers, and ultimately bolster local economic development in mid-sized city downtowns. This represents an organic, community-led approach that resonates with Blakely and Leigh's (2017) framework of twenty-first century LED that is inclusive of a broad range of stakeholders and occurs outside of traditional channels, such as business associations. Coworkers and coworking spaces in mid-sized cities are a welcome "soft infrastructure" (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999) addition to a local landscape with mainstreet and second-storey vacancies—the influx of downtown workers

animates the street and increases patronage of local businesses, adding much needed economic activity into the downtown core.

Despite decades of decline, mid-sized downtowns in outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe are becoming a renewed focal point for redevelopment (Jamal, 2015b). Several coworking leaders highlighted their growing concern over increasing real estate prices, and associated rental costs, and how this trend could begin to stifle emerging companies. As such, coworking spaces are future-proofing downtowns against impending gentrification by providing affordable, collaborative spaces to young entrepreneurs, artists and community groups to grow their businesses and ideas. As mounting concern over the impact of gentrification grows in rapidly urbanizing larger cities (Florida, 2017; Leigh & Blakely, 2017; Vinodrai, 2015), if LED is about increasing the standard of living and promoting equity – these spaces function as “new community spaces” (Allison Bramwell & Pierre, 2017), generating new collaborations and offering an affordable launch pad for new businesses, social enterprises and community groups.

A third theme highlights the role that coworking plays in advancing entrepreneurship and innovation in the context of mid-sized cities. All of the coworking leaders described the importance of collaboration and interaction amongst their respective memberships. Indeed each space sought to provide customized workshops, information sessions or direct business services to coworkers. It is important to note that coworking leaders, or hosts (Merkel, 2015), are intentionally curating these spaces to support the ongoing needs of their membership. While some spaces had a specific focus within their membership, such as digital or independent workers, the majority sought members from a diverse pool of potential coworkers, and all of the spaces saw themselves as a part of the city’s business ecosystem. As one respondent indicated, “Large businesses don’t fuel these towns...”. The ability for coworking spaces, and the

networks that they create in the community, to foster new enterprises and support burgeoning entrepreneurs is an important contribution to local economic development in mid-sized cities. Such a finding is consistent with the important role that allied groups (Filion et al., 2004) and partnerships play in downtown rejuvenation in smaller urban centres.

The final theme that emerged reinforces the important role of partnerships in fostering success. Findings illustrate that the concept of coworking remains elusive in mid-sized cities, and while coworking can trace its roots to the rise of collaborative consumption and the advent of the sharing economy (Belk, 2014; Botsman, 2015; Botsman & Rogers, 2010), as a relatively new means of organizing workers (Schmidt et al., 2015), coworking remains largely on the fringe of the business community in mid-sized cities. While some coworking space leaders spoke about partnership programs with their municipality or local post-secondary institution, a broader acceptance and understanding of the coworking model could expand these networks and foster increased access to new membership and funding for coworking spaces in mid-sized cities.

Despite the growing presence of coworking spaces in mid-sized city downtowns, these spaces exist on the edges of mainstream economic development. While municipal leaders show some knowledge of the model, the concept of coworking and shared spaces remains new and largely untested as a source of mid-sized city economic development. Regardless, the staff, board and coworkers in these spaces are working to raise the local profile of their spaces; fostering links to other coworking spaces regionally and nationally; and are tireless champions for the coworking model. Through these linkages, and support for new and emerging enterprises, coworking leaders in mid-sized cities are offering a vision for a renewed, community-led approach to local economic development (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999; Leigh & Blakely, 2017) that is beginning to attract knowledge and creative workers to the downtowns of mid-sized cities.

6.6.1 Future Research

This research speaks to a change that is unfolding in the downtown areas of mid-sized cities. With support and a broader understanding of the coworking model, coworking can become a significant downtown revitalization strategy and a booster to local economic development. While this inquiry has focused on the role of coworking spaces, future research could include: (1) Surveying coworkers to understand why they chose shared space, rather than working from home or cafes; (2) Interviews with coworkers to understand why they have chosen to locate or remain in a mid-sized urban centre rather than moving to a big city; and (3) Conducting a longitudinal analysis of coworking outcomes to see: how many businesses are being created through coworking, and to track whether coworking businesses transition out of shared spaces and become a feeder system to downtown real estate.

6.7 Conclusion

As the twenty-first century employment landscape shifts in favour of knowledge-based, creative industries, urban areas are the nexus around which new collaborations and innovations will thrive (Florida, 2002; Gertler, 2003; Vinodrai, 2013). The parallel rise of the sharing economy has given way to a global, urban coworking movement that is supporting a new generation of knowledge workers. Coworking spaces provide affordable, amenity-rich spaces to their membership. By offering services that enhance business effectiveness and foster collaborations, coworking has emerged as meaningful way to organize labour in the twenty-first century (Schmidt et al., 2015).

In the Ontario context, the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario, 2006) has challenged cities to reverse decades of sprawling development in favour of dense planning that prioritizes urban connectivity and downtowns. The province is challenging big

cities to rethink their urban development, just as it is compelling several mid-sized cities that sit outside of the Toronto commuter-shed to do the same. Throughout the twentieth century, mid-sized cities, with a history of dispersed suburban development and downtown decline (Bunting et al., 2007) were not key locations for investment and renewal. Research has shown that incremental improvements (Gratz, 1989; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009a) with the support of allied groups (Filion et al., 2004) can begin to rehabilitate ailing core areas in smaller urban centres.

With mandated goals to reach residential and employment targets in the coming decades, coworking provides a unique lens through which to view how community-based partners, outside of traditional municipal-business networks, can contribute to local economic development. The four interconnected themes that emerged from this study highlight how, in the midst of a twenty-first century labour market transition, coworking spaces and their leadership can: foster local entrepreneurship; support knowledge and creative workers; and contribute to downtown revitalization in Ontario's mid-sized cities.

Coworking leaders and the spaces that they animate are helping foster local economic development. As the providers of affordable, well-resourced spaces to new organizations and businesses, coworking spaces offer services and support to a new generation of freelancers and local entrepreneurs. Moreover, global and local data illustrate that the majority of coworkers are knowledge or creative workers. As such, coworking spaces are providing a home for knowledge industries and creative workers in mid-sized cities. Having a physical coworking space in the downtown of a mid-sized city promotes urban renewal and preserving affordable space for new enterprise in rapidly gentrifying downtowns in a growth region of the province.

Coworking leaders, advocating change in their downtown neighbourhoods, are selling community bonds to purchase iconic real estate; advocating for municipal incentives to launch newly formed business into the community; and are active members of the civic and business infrastructure of their respective cities. As the values of the sharing economy and new models of local economic development illustrate, collaborations and partnerships are essential to success, and it is vital for coworking leaders to tell their success stories, illustrate their challenges and advocate for additional resources and incentives to support coworking spaces in Ontario's mid-sized cities. While the concept of coworking might be "hiding in plain sight" (Desai, 2016), its ability to support entrepreneurs, support the precariously employed, foster the creative economy and reactivate downtown real estate should be seen as an important contribution to the urban economies in Ontario's mid-sized cities.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

Much of the narrative in twenty-first century city building focuses on the importance of attracting knowledge-based industries and forging business clusters to foster economic development. In this new, knowledge-based economy industries and workers are attracted to amenity-rich locations that offer a high quality of life (Florida, 2002). While these characteristics are deemed to be the purview of larger urban centres (Gertler, 2003), this research aimed to explore how mid-sized cities, in a mandated Growth Plan area, are evolving their planning and economic development functions to welcome new residents and jobs into their downtowns. While the literature on smaller urban centres is largely case study oriented, under conceptualized and lacking a theoretical framework from which to begin to understand the urban experience in small and mid-sized cities, Bell and Jayne have challenged researchers to begin to create what they describe as a small cities research agenda (Bell & Jayne, 2009). This chapter revisits the research questions guiding this inquiry, highlights findings and recommendations from each manuscript, and closes with broad-based recommendations to foster mid-sized city downtown revitalization.

7.2 Research Questions Revisited

One of the goals of this research was to contribute to the literature on mid-sized cities by exploring the impact that the provincial *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (or Growth Plan) (Ontario, 2006, 2017) has had on downtown revitalization in Ontario's mid-sized cities. This angle of inquiry grew out of an extensive literature review (Chapter Three) that illustrated key gaps in the literature on smaller urban centres (Bell & Jayne, 2006, 2009). These

gaps included the need for research in the areas of downtown revitalization, urban planning and local economic development in mid-sized cities.

Moreover, the advent of a provincial Growth Plan in 2006 provided a timely opportunity to investigate how provincially directed growth planning, with a specific focus on attracting residents and employees to downtowns, was playing out in mid-sized cities over a decade after its inception. It is important to note that the Growth Plan (2006, 2017) includes 25 urban growth centres (UGCs), eight of which are located in the downtowns of Ontario's outer-ring mid-sized cities. UGCs are required to be built as dense, mixed-use developments, creating complete, transit connected communities (Filion, 2007; Ontario, 2006). Sitting in the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe, and outside of the primary Greater Toronto Area (GTA) commuter-shed, the inclusion of these eight stand-alone mid-sized cities with an UGC has shone a light on core areas of mid-sized cities; providing fertile ground for an inquiry in this area. While these cities each have a unique economic history, their inclusion in the Growth Plan does allow them to be considered as a grouping and to assess downtown economic development and revitalization through a common lens.

While the scholarship on smaller urban centres has been criticized for being overly “descriptive and prescriptive” (Faulk, 2006, p. 626), and lacks a specific mid-sized city theoretical framework from which to guide a research agenda, the literature does offer insight into how to frame an approach to research on downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities in two important ways. First, research on smaller cities speaks to the importance of incremental improvements (Burayidi, 2013; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009a) or what Gratz originally termed “urban husbandry” (Gratz, 1989) – an approach that favours small-scale, continuous steps toward downtown revitalization, rather than large, disconnected attempts to rejuvenate city

centres. Secondly, the literature also speaks to the importance of engaging cross-sector or allied groups (Filion, Hoernig, Bunting, & Sands, 2004; Sands & Reese, 2017) in downtown renewal in mid-sized cities. This approach resonates with a twenty-first century, or third wave (Bradshaw & Blakely, 1999), approach to local economic development that considers the important role that collaborations and partnerships can play in improving the overall quality of life for all city residents (Leigh & Blakely, 2017)

A review of the literature, coupled with the advent of the Growth Plan that included mid-sized cities, led to the creation of three interconnected manuscripts that explored how a group of mid-sized cities in a growth region were approaching downtown revitalization. The first manuscript explored planning outcomes in the context of a provincially led growth plan targeted at increasing urban density and downtown renewal. The second manuscript approached the concept of downtown revitalization through an assessment of the impact of Business Improvement Areas (BIAs). The final manuscript explored the role of coworking spaces, or shared workspaces, in downtown economic revitalization in mid-sized cities.

The three manuscripts were guided by an overarching research question that asked: **What strategies are mid-sized cities using to foster downtown revitalization?** Sub-questions and key findings are highlighted in Table 7-1.

7.2.1 Overview of manuscripts

The first manuscript explored how the City of Guelph responded to the creation of an urban growth centre, with mandated targets for intensification, population and employment growth, in their downtown. To assess the role of regional planning on downtown revitalization, a case study approach was taken to review the impact of provincial planning on local planning processes. Through extensive community consultation, updated planning documents, ranging

from a Downtown Guelph Secondary Plan to a tactical Community Improvement Plan, the City of Guelph was able to re-set their planning framework; add additional downtown staffing resources; and attract unprecedented levels of private development to their downtown core. Developers spoke to the important role of the Secondary Plan as a road map for development, and the Community Improvement Plan as an important tool to offset the initial costs of remediation and infrastructure servicing, in an untested downtown real estate market. Arguably, the regional-scale Growth Plan (2006, 2017) was a catalyst for this development; in addition, an inclusive approach to local planning led to positive outcomes for the downtown of this mid-sized city.

This second manuscript was informed by the literature on small and mid-sized cities and urban renewal that cautions against a ‘quick fix’ in downtown redevelopment and argues in favour of incremental, continuous improvements (Burayidi, 2013; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009a), or what Gratz originally termed, “urban husbandry” (Gratz, 1989). Through a multi-city research project, focused on eight mid-sized cities in the outer ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe, this research sought to understand the role that BIAs play in downtown revitalization in smaller urban centres. Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) have played a role in downtown renewal in cities around the world since the 1970s (Briffault, 1999; Houstoun, 2003; Mitchell, 2001; Morçöl & Wolf, 2010). BIAs have a wide-ranging mandate to market, promote, beautify, and advocate on behalf of their membership. That said, little attention has been paid to their role in urban affairs in the context of mid-sized cities (Morçöl & Wolf, 2010), and this manuscript sought to address that gap in the literature.

Findings show that incremental improvements are occurring in the downtowns of the mid-sized cities, and that BIAs through a combination of operational activities, advocacy and

broad-based coalition building, are contributing to downtown revitalization by pursuing a downtown-first agenda. This manuscript, however, seeks to re-imagine BIAs for the twenty-first century and encourages BIAs to move beyond day-to-day operations, and as key, stably-funded downtown stakeholder (Gomez et al., 2015), to become increasingly engaged in growth planning activities; support for emerging entrepreneurs; and engage a broader subset of their membership in BIA governance.

While the literature tells us that the twenty-first century economy is knowledge-intensive, creative and flourishing in larger urban centres (Gertler, 2003; Spencer, Vinodrai, Gertler, & Wolfe, 2010; Vinodrai, 2015), less is known about how smaller urban centres are faring in the new economy. As such, the third manuscript aimed to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the role that coworking spaces could play in fostering local economic development, and ultimately downtown revitalization, in mid-sized cities. Building on research that speaks to the importance of allied groups in urban affairs, coupled with a local economic development framework that recognizes the important role of collaborations and partnerships (Leigh & Blakely, 2017; Bramwell & Pierre, 2016), this inquiry illustrated that coworking leaders are advancing downtown economic development in Ontario's mid-sized cities. This occurs by providing amenity-rich, affordable space to start-ups, entrepreneurs and independent workers. Moreover, these spaces foster collaborations and networking opportunities that create new interdisciplinary ventures.

Table 7-1: Overview of key research findings and recommendations

What strategies are mid-sized cities using to foster downtown revitalization?	
Manuscript 1: Planning Outcomes	
Research Questions	Findings
What role does regional planning have on the urban revitalization of mid-sized city downtowns?	<p>Prior to the Growth Plan downtown investments were largely publicly funded and did little to attract parallel private investment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Growth Plan led to extensive public consultations, community buy in and ultimately the creation of a Downtown Secondary Plan and Community Improvement Plan • City plans served to map out where the city would grow and provided incentives to attract and direct private development • These incentives proved popular with developers and led to several downtown residential and commercial projects • While it is too early to understand how these planning outcomes will impact downtown revitalization, downtown stakeholders remain optimistic that residents and employees in the core can begin to undo decades of core area decline
Manuscript 2: BIAs	
Research Questions	Findings
What role(s) do Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) play in downtown revitalization of mid-sized cities? Do BIAs interact with other urban actors to achieve their downtown revitalization goals?	<p>BIAs are focused largely on operational or day-to-day activities aimed at supporting their membership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities are tied to short-term downtown revitalization (e.g. street scape improvements, special events, marketing) • BIAs engage with other urban actors to achieve broader objectives related to downtown improvements (e.g. downtown safety, construction infrastructure) • Due to their largely operational focus, BIAs have limited involvement in broad-based, future-oriented downtown growth planning, but are keen implementers of incremental improvements in mitigation and parking
Manuscript 3: Coworking Spaces	
Research Questions	Findings
What roles are coworking spaces playing in downtown revitalization and local economic development in mid-sized cities? What supports can help to sustain coworking spaces outside of larger urban centres?	<p>Coworking spaces are finding a home in mid-sized city downtowns across Ontario:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coworking spaces are home to knowledge/creative workers • Coworking spaces are fostering collaborations across sectors • Coworking leadership are providing business services to their memberships and fostering local economic development in their respective downtowns • As these mid-sized city downtowns continue to revitalize coworking spaces have the ability to preserve affordable space in gentrifying downtowns

7.3 Emergent Themes in Research Findings

Together, these manuscripts begin to illustrate the importance of a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities. The first manuscript, focused on downtown planning outcomes, speaks to the importance of a provincial, top-down planning framework to act as a catalyst for locally led planning processes. However, manuscripts two and three explore how bottom-up activities, initiated by non-governmental urban actors, such as BIAs and coworking spaces, can play a vital role in downtown rejuvenation in mid-sized cities. When considered together, government initiated planning, coupled with community-based leadership can begin to leverage new approaches to downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities. As such, the following broad-based recommendations are offered, and each will be discussed detail in the sections that follow.

1. A regional planning framework can act as a catalyst by helping individual municipalities to attract growth and development to the downtowns of mid-sized cities. However, local conditions matter;
2. Collaborations with allies and champions, and ongoing incremental improvements, are essential to foster downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities; and
3. After decades of downtown decline, mid-sized cities must turn their attention toward the possibility of impending gentrification.

7.3.1 Regional planning with a local context

In 2005, when the Province of Ontario passed *Places to Grow Act* (Ontario, 2005), and announced the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario, 2006) the following year, it was responding to decades of unchecked growth across the Greater Toronto Area and a growing public concern over the impact of this growth on the region (Eidelman, 2010; Filion,

2007; White, 2007). The combined impact of increasing gridlock, the loss of viable farmland and the impact of development on the environment were driving the province back into regional-scale planning. In addition to the protectionist *Oak Ridges Moraine Act*, *Niagara Escarpment Plan* and the *Greenbelt Plan*, the Growth Plan was a document aimed at guiding development across the region to create dense, walkable and transit connected communities (Ontario, 2006).

While the Growth Plan's primary focus was on municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the inclusion of several mid-sized cities, eight of which sit outside the Greenbelt, and primary commuter-shed of the GTA, presented an opportunity for change in these cities. Mid-sized cities, with a history of low-density, dispersed urban form (Bunting et al., 2007), coupled with downtown decline (Burayidi, 2013; Filion et al., 2004; Sands, 2007) and a planning framework that had limited evaluation and expertise (Momani & Khirfan, 2013; Seasons, 2003), were challenged to alter their city-building trajectory and plan for dense, urban growth – largely within their downtown cores.

Through a case study approach, this research examined the role of regional planning on urban revitalization in downtown Guelph. Planners in Guelph shared that they updated their planning documents, including official plans, secondary plans and community improving plans, in consultation with stakeholders across their communities. The inclusion of neighbourhood groups, not-for-profit organizations, business associations and private developers in the planning process led to the creation of a city-made, and widely supported, Downtown Guelph Secondary Plan (City of Guelph, 2016). This plan took into account local issues, assets and dynamics and generated overarching principles that would guide local growth—while achieving provincial Growth Plan targets by 2041 (Ontario, 2017).

Although several attempts had been made to revitalize downtown Guelph through public investments (e.g. sports arena, performing arts centre), City officials were quick to point out that these one-off investments did little to attract parallel private investments – a finding that is consistent with other small and mid-sized city research (Burayidi, 2013; Filion & Hammond, 2008). Through local planning efforts, initially spurred by the province, the City of Guelph was able to attract private developers to purchase and develop municipally identified sites across downtown Guelph. Developers were keen to point out that the Downtown Guelph Secondary Plan was a key signal from the city about where and how growth in the core could be absorbed. This downtown-focused plan created a predictable environment for private investment, and when coupled with a municipal investment strategy, in the form of a locally curated incentive-based Community Improvement Plan, led to hundreds of new residential units being built the core, and the full revitalization of two iconic downtown commercial buildings.

While the focus of this research was on downtown Guelph, there is an opportunity to explore how other mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area are approaching the implementation of a top-down, regional-scale plan. This is important since each city has different conditions that they must account for in their planning framework, for example, the City of Waterloo sought to increase their growth targets from 150 to 200 people and jobs per hectare. Waterloo also confirmed that they had enough single-family homes in the city to meet future demand, and indicated that their future development would focus on mid- and high-rise developments (The Neptis Foundation, 2015). Other municipalities with urban growth centres have created Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) and developed targeted financial incentives to attract private development into their downtowns. Urban growth centres (UGCs) in downtown Guelph, Galt (Cambridge), Peterborough and Barrie have all had uptake on these programs, and a scan of

the local media shows that mixed-use developments, including both residential and commercial aspects, are underway in their core areas. These new developments have the ability to capitalize on previous public sector investments, such as libraries and performing arts centres, and time will tell if residents can begin to breathe new life back into declining downtown streets.

In the context of twenty-first century city building, collaborative approaches to planning and local economic development in the context of the research findings in downtown Guelph confirm the benefits of an inclusive approach to downtown revitalization (Sands & Reese, 2017). In this case, citizens, businesses, politicians and municipal staff worked to define a shared vision for downtown renewal in the context of a broader provincial mandate to intensify the city's historic core. While not without local and Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) challenges, this process of providing a roadmap to both the community and the private sector created predictable conditions showing both how and where growth could be absorbed in the city's most historic neighbourhood.

7.3.2 Collaboration and incremental improvements are essential

The previous recommendation spoke to the catalytic role that regional-scale planning could play in downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities. While a top-down approach can reset a planning framework across a region, local, or bottom-up, approaches to city planning and downtown revitalization are also essential to turn plans into action. Research on small and mid-sized cities speaks to the importance of engaging partners in the city-building process (Burayidi, 2013; Filion et al., 2004; Sands & Reese, 2017; Walker, 2009a) and taking an incremental, small-scale approach to revitalization (Burayidi, 2015; Robertson, 2001; Walker, 2009b). Two empirically based manuscripts in this dissertation (Chapters Five and Six) explored the role of non-traditional urban actors in downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities, and through this

research offer a recommendation to regional and municipal governments to foster engagement with a range of local partners to assist with downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities.

7.3.2.1 Business Improvement Areas

Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) were a construct of the mid-twentieth century. Created in the 1970s as merchant-led groups to beautify and market downtowns in the face of growing suburban retailing, the BIA movement grew globally in the subsequent decades (Bias et al., 2015; Briffault, 1999; Gomez et al., 2015; Perez et al., 2003) as businesses and property owners worked together to revitalize core areas. While BIAs have been criticized as neo-liberal institutions that favour certain, wealthy areas of a city over others (Lewis, 2010), in most small and mid-sized cities there is only a single BIA focused on downtown revitalization. As such, a research project on the role of BIAs as an urban actor in mid-sized cities filled an important gap in the literature, and allowed for an exploration of BIA activities and impact in the context of a designated growth area.

While this research confirmed that BIAs are largely focused on the emergent, day-to-day needs of their respective memberships, it also showed that BIAs have some level of participation in advocacy initiatives focused on advancing long-term downtown renewal. BIAs are funded by a tax levy on property owners within the area (Ontario, 2010). BIAs are collaborative, engaged advocates (Sands & Reese, 2017) for their downtowns that bring together allied groups in support of common causes. This downtown first agenda, coupled with an ability and willingness to engage other partners, such as like-minded non-profit groups and neighbourhood associations in their advocacy efforts, illustrate how BIAs can continue to be relevant, engaged urban actors in twenty-first century downtown revitalization of mid-sized cities.

BIAs can be viewed as one-dimensional organizations focused exclusively on beautifying downtowns. However, this research has shown that BIAs play more complicated roles. This includes advocating on behalf of their downtowns with city councils and local media and engaging in cross-sector collaborations with other groups to create a safe, healthy downtown environment. The ability to leverage both civil society groups and their membership positions BIAs as an important driver of urban renewal and local economic development in mid-sized cities.

7.3.2.2 Coworking Spaces

Twenty first century economic development trends favour and promote collaboration. The rise of the knowledge based economy, steeped in the connections made between industries, ideas and individuals (Gertler, 2003; Hutton & Vinodrai, 2015; Spencer et al., 2010), has been accompanied by business clustering or agglomerations (Porter, 2000, 2011) in big cities around the world. This new, knowledge based economy has also affected how cities are adjusting spatially (Madanipour, 2011) to accommodate creative and knowledge workers, and new types of urban spaces are emerging. Coworking spaces are amenity-rich, shared workspaces (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018; Spinuzzi, 2012; Surman, 2013) that emerged in the early 2000s, and grew exponentially after the global economic crisis in 2008 as workers found themselves either precariously employed, or looking to create a new enterprise after a job loss (Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2015). While the rise in the coworking movement is evident in large cities around the world (Deskmag, 2015, 2017), a growing number of coworking spaces have emerged in mid-sized cities.

This research highlighted the challenges that mid-sized cities face in attracting large employers to their municipalities. Moreover, emerging scholarship encourages municipalities to

focus their economic development efforts on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) (Gomez et al., 2015). Coworking spaces have provided high-quality, collaborative workspaces in the downtowns of mid-sized cities. While there has been criticism of the implementation of seemingly 'big city' strategies in the context of smaller urban centres (Burayidi, 2013; Lewis, 2010; Walker, 2009a), the flexible, location-specific nature of coworking spaces appear to counter that narrative. Coworking spaces in mid-sized cities are focused on the emergent needs of their respective local memberships and provide knowledge workers with quality workspace in smaller cities that can offer a high quality of life (Sands & Reese, 2008). This study has shown that these spaces are attractive to a range of knowledge workers including: digital workers and tech-startups; artists and designers; and social innovators. In addition, coworking staff are animating these spaces, by providing formal and informal educational and networking opportunities to a cohort of knowledge workers that are choosing flexible, affordable workspace in the downtowns of mid-sized cities. They are also working with other groups, such as higher education institutions and local business associations, to support the diverse needs of their respective coworking members.

This research has highlighted the importance of engaging a range of champions (Burayidi, 2013) or allied groups (Filion et al., 2004), in downtown revitalization in mid-sized cities. Their incremental efforts are supporting downtown revitalization and fostering broad-based local economic development. When coupled with a regional-scale Growth Plan focused on adding density to downtowns of mid-sized cities, the combination of top-down and bottom-up efforts focused on urban revitalization can serve to revitalize core areas.

7.3.3 Mitigate Impending Gentrification?

The downtowns of small and mid-sized cities have been in decline for several decades (Bunting et al., 2007; Robertson, 1999; Sands, 2007), and have not been able to attract private sector investment despite large investments in public projects (Filion & Hammond, 2008). Changing planning and demographic trends have the potential to positively impact downtowns in smaller urban centres. A planning framework that favours dense, mixed use development (Filion, 2009; Gertler, 2003), and walkable, transit-connected communities, coupled with incentives to rehabilitate brownfield sites and heritage buildings, has the potential to reposition downtowns as prime locations for residential and commercial development in mid-size cities.

As mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area alter their planning strategies, the impact of rising residential and commercial real estate values will need to be addressed. While there is limited scholarship on, and arguably experience with, gentrification in smaller urban centres, the experience of evolving neighbourhoods in large cities is instructive. As the new, twenty-first century economy continues to divide creative and knowledge workers from service workers (Peck, 2005; Scott, 2014; Vinodrai, 2015) the impact of this economic divide will be seen in urban centres of all sizes. Residents, non-profit groups, policy makers and politicians in mid-sized cities would be wise to design and implement programs, such as expanded affordable housing, that can help mitigate the impact of growing downtown gentrification. Findings from Chapter Six open a new line of research inquiry and begin to illustrate how coworking spaces could play a role in future proofing downtowns against future gentrification by providing affordable workspace for startups and new entrepreneurs in mid-sized cities.

7.4 Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitation of this work is its focus on mid-sized cities in a growth region of Canada. Since the Greater Golden Horseshoe is home to Toronto, the mid-sized cities in the outer ring invariably benefit from proximity to the country's largest urban centre (Sands & Reese, 2017). As regional transit becomes increasingly available in the coming years, the ability for people to live, work and establish companies within a convenient transit-commuting radius will grow. This in turn will benefit the downtowns of mid-sized cities in this fast-growing region.

Another limitation of this research is my position as the author. As a resident of a mid-sized city in the growth plan area, and a former Executive Director of the Downtown Guelph Business Improvement Area (BIA), researching downtown revitalization represents a personal and professional interest. This personal bias could have influenced my approach to selecting the research questions, participants and the framing of recommendations.

This project has led to findings and recommendations that illustrate how downtown revitalization can be facilitated outside of larger urban centres. The importance of place-based or local approaches to planning in the context of regional-scale planning; partnerships with allied groups; and ongoing urban improvements appear to be central tenants of mid-sized city core area revitalization strategies. This research has also highlighted the need to consider gentrification as a future issue in rapidly changing mid-sized cities in the Growth Plan area. While these manuscripts have made a contribution to the mid-sized city literature, there remains a robust list of topics to be addressed in cities of this size. The following section will offer four recommendations for future research as they relate to the manuscripts embedded in this dissertation.

First, throughout this research, there were continual reminders of the importance of allied groups, or non-municipal partners, in the city-building process. These non-profit groups, business associations and citizen-led coalitions are important to advancing complex, democratic urban agendas. In addition, the caliber of leadership and individual engagement within these groups was extraordinary. As such, a project that examines the role of leadership, and the important role that individuals play in connecting ideas with institutions, including municipalities, universities, businesses and the non-profit sector, would prove a topic worthy of additional research in the mid-sized city context.

Secondly, as the economy continues to shift in favour of knowledge intensive industries, and the sharing economy continues to exert its influence, there is an opportunity to extend the research on coworking spaces in mid-sized cities by looking at the role of coworking outcomes. As the knowledge economy continues to evolve, and industry continues to cluster in urban centres, an enhanced understanding the role of coworking spaces in mid-sized cities, and the role that they can play in local economic development becomes increasingly important. As such, a study that looked at coworking outcomes, or whether coworkers were developing businesses and locating them in mid-sized cities, would provide the opportunity to test whether coworking spaces are future-proofing their downtowns against gentrification. In addition,

The third avenue for future inquiry could test these recommendations, for mid-sized city downtown revitalization, in a non-growth area of the country. As noted in the limitations, these questions were being asked of mid-sized cities within a provincially designated growth region with a proactive plan to attract residents and jobs while creating complete, transit connected communities. A research project asking questions about the role of locally-created financial

incentives or about the role of allied groups in downtown economic revitalization in a non-growth region would prove worthy of further study.

Finally, during this research, the war in Syria escalated, and thousands of Canadians responded by providing private sponsorship to Syrian families. Hundreds of families were welcomed into cities across Canada through both publicly and privately funded sponsorship channels. While many of these families landed in Canada's large, or gateway cities, many were also sponsored by families and organizations in mid-sized cities. In Guelph, for example, a local philanthropist sponsored 57 Syrian families. Burayidi (2013) encourages smaller cities to consider the important role that immigration can play in city building and urban renewal. Emerging scholarship on the role of immigration to small and mid-sized cities (Caldwell, Labute, Khan, & D'Souza, 2017; Sands & Reese, 2017) also confirms the importance of attracting newcomers as a means to foster local economic development. As such, a research project that explores the role of immigration and diversity in mid-sized cities, and the strategies that cities of this size can use to support newcomers, would prove worthy of additional research.

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Appendix A: BIA Survey Questions

1. Tell us a bit about yourself:
 - a. City
 - b. Name of BIA
 - c. Your name
 - d. Your title
 - e. Number of staff in the BIA

2. What are the key functions of your BIA? Answer yes/no to all that apply:
 - a. Marketing
 - b. Promotion
 - c. Events
 - d. Business recruitment
 - e. Business retention
 - f. Advocacy
 - g. Other (write in)

3. If you undertake advocacy, please check all of the initiatives that you are working on:
 - a. Overall urban renewal
 - b. Downtown incentives
 - c. Parking
 - d. Streetscaping
 - e. Public health
 - f. Public safety
 - g. Other (write in)

4. Approximately what percentage of time does your BIA spend advocating for change/improvements in your downtown?

5. What strategies do you use to advocate your BIA's position on important issues? Answer yes/no to all that apply
 - a. Local/regional media
 - b. Meeting with municipal staff
 - c. Meeting with councillors
 - d. Board member networks
 - e. Policy papers
 - f. Council presentations
 - g. Other (write in)

6. Do you work in partnership with other organizations on downtown revitalization projects/issues? Answer yes/no to all that apply:
 - a. Chamber of Commerce
 - b. Municipal downtown committee
 - c. University/college
 - d. Non-profit organizations
 - e. Other (write in)
7. Describe any revitalization projects/issues that your BIA is currently working on. Who are your partners? What are your successes/challenges?
8. How would you characterize your BIA's level of success in making positive change in your downtown?
9. Please describe three great things (e.g. events, new developments, partnerships etc.) that are happening in your downtown.
10. Please describe three challenges (e.g. parking, business loss etc.) that your downtown is facing.
11. In your opinion what role do BIAs play in the downtowns of Ontario's mid-sized cities?
12. What challenges do BIAs face? What resources (financial or otherwise) do BIAs need to support their efforts?

Appendix B: Coworking Spaces Survey Questions

1. Name/Title/City
2. Name of Coworking Space
3. Location of coworking site:
 - a. Downtown
 - b. 1-3KM from downtown
 - c. 5+KM from downtown
4. Years in operation:
 - a. 1-2 years
 - b. 3-5 years
 - c. 5+ years
5. Status:
 - a. For profit
 - b. Not for profit
 - c. B-Corporation
 - d. Other (write in)
6. Approximate number of staff (FTEs) in the coworking space (working for your organization AND member organizations)
7. Number of active volunteers
8. Revenue sources (check all that apply)
 - a. Coworkers
 - b. Organizational members
 - c. Student members
 - d. Events
 - e. Other (write in)
9. Annual Operating Revenue

10. Sectors represented in your membership (check all that apply):
- a. Arts & Culture
 - b. Environment
 - c. Small business/professional service
 - d. Technology
 - e. Community and social service
 - f. Education
 - g. Health & Wellness
 - h. Retail/service
 - i. Law/advocacy
 - j. Social Enterprise
 - k. Other (write in)
11. Are you seeking particular sectors in your membership?
12. Do you track how many jobs/businesses are supported through your coworking centre?
Please comment
13. How is your coworking space funded:
- a. Memberships
 - b. Events
 - c. Projects/grants
 - d. Donations
 - e. Services
 - f. Other
14. What is your centre's most reliable source of revenue? What are its biggest financial challenges?
15. How would you characterize your coworking centre's financial stability?
- a. Very strong
 - b. Strong
 - c. Moderate
 - d. Weak
 - e. Very weak
16. Is your coworking centre planning an expansion or move in the coming year/s? Check all that apply.
- a. Yes, need more desks
 - b. Yes, adding second site
 - c. Other (write in)
17. Is your site physically accessible?

18. Describe your coworking site. What attracts people to your space?

19. Does your coworking centre work in partnership with any of the following? Please comment.
 - a. Universities/colleges
 - b. Municipality
 - c. Small business centres
 - d. Chamber of Commerce
 - e. Business Improvement Association (BIA)
 - f. Other (write in)

20. Does your coworking space offer any incubation services to its members (e.g. business plan development, business workshops, mentorship etc.) to help generate/expand local enterprise?

21. What value does your coworking space offer to your city's economic prosperity?

22. What are the benefits of operating a coworking space in a mid-sized city?

23. What are you working on now? Describe your centre's goals with respect to:
 - a. Space improvements
 - b. Revenue
 - c. Membership
 - d. Other

24. What resources are needed to meet these goals, and who could provide them?

25. With respect to growth and development, what barriers or obstacles does your centre experience?

26. What is the outlook for coworking in your city in the coming year?
 - a. Positive
 - b. Neutral
 - c. Negative

27. Would you be interested in participating in a workshop with other small city coworking centres?