



DOWNTOWN SNAPSHOT is a quarterly report by the **Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone** designed to give a high-level overview of key data and information about the neighbourhood. The report highlights downtown developments and aims to build understanding of the current economic landscape in the zone.



Q1 kicked off 2024 full of promise, bringing more people downtown than this time last year

In 2024's first quarter, our downtown continued to build off the momentum we experienced in late 2023. We saw new businesses join our BIZ, and more visitors make their way downtown. We heard more exciting announcements about downtown projects, and some of those projects got off the ground or wrapped up. Downtown has been in the spotlight, especially with a focus on our city's most famous intersection.

That said, we still have work to do. While on the rise, customer traffic remains unpredictable, and hasn't fully recovered since the pandemic. Despite businesses returning to in-person work, downtown continues to struggle to fill empty office space, especially in older buildings. As always, people want to know they can feel safe downtown – something we're continuously advocating for and working to help improve.

NEW BUSINESSES

Five new businesses opened in the Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone this quarter

Things are looking up! Businesses are recognizing the value in being downtown and Q1 brought great news – the first net gain in openings and closings in our zone since before the pandemic. Shoppers can grab a bite or a bouquet, get their phone or their teeth fixed and buy a gift or attend a workshop at the **five new downtown businesses that opened their doors** during the first three months of 2024.

OPENED
5

NET GAIN
3

CLOSED
2

While two businesses closed or left downtown in Q1, the net gain of three is a promising number. We're encouraged to see this growth and will continue our efforts in attracting businesses downtown – a key focus of our strategic plan.

We're excited to welcome these 5 new businesses to the zone:

FLORA CULTURE

Floral design shop in the Richardson Centre Concourse



LA PANADERIA

Mexican and Latin American baked goods at 218 Princess St.



TRUE WIRELESS

Mobile device repair and sales at B-261 Vaughan St.



POP COLAB

Workshops, local retail, games, DIY, and more in the Richardson Centre Concourse



ALFA CERAMICS

Dental lab for advanced aesthetic restorations at 201-429 Graham Ave.



OFFICE SPACE

Hundreds of workers return downtown

The reality of empty downtown storefronts and office buildings is common all across Canada these last few years, with vacancy rates high in downtowns from coast to coast. While Winnipeg is no exception – with our vacancy rate going up another 2.3% in Q1 to 18.6% – that’s still **below the national average of 19.5%**.

At the same time, our downtown has seen **new office buildings opening and existing spaces filling back up**. Workers returning downtown enhance the customer base for local businesses – especially those that serve the corporate community – and add to the vibrancy, vitality and safety of our downtown.

Q1 highlights included:

Wawanesa’s new headquarters

- Wawanesa Insurance opened the doors to its new 21-storey, 360,000-square-foot headquarters in March, bringing its **1,300 employees downtown** along with a \$136 million investment in the local economy.
- The new state-of-the-art office building features refined, sophisticated architecture and amenities, is billed as **environmentally sustainable** and is connected to True North Square and the Downtown Winnipeg Skywalk System.
- Wawanesa has continued to demonstrate its **commitment to our downtown** through a multi-year, \$450,000 contribution to Downtown Winnipeg BIZ with a focus on supporting the Enviro team, community clean-up events and the planting of seasonal flowers.



Manitoba Public Insurance staff return

- Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) **welcomed over 1,400 of its staff back downtown** to its head office in Cityplace in February.
- Downtown Winnipeg BIZ ambassadors were in the building to help welcome the employees and share information about **BIZ services and downtown events**.



RESIDENTIAL

A focus on affordable homes – and more of them

Increasing the number of Winnipeggers who make downtown their home is a pillar of Downtown BIZ's advocacy efforts – and we're encouraged that our governments

continue to show they're with us. In 2024's first quarter, three levels of government pledged new or continued **support for residential projects downtown**, including:

308 COLONY ST. – AFFORDABLE, BARRIER-FREE HOUSING OPTIONS

- The federal government joined the City and Province in supporting this \$70.5 million project, announcing \$16 million towards building the **mixed-income, mixed-use** residential tower.
- The University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation is designing the building as a nearly **net-zero greenhouse gas emissions project**, set for completion in winter 2025.
- 86 of the 214 new apartment units will be **affordable homes**, and 20% of all units will be **barrier-free or barrier-adaptable** for persons with disabilities.

HOUSING ACCELERATOR FUND GRANTS FOR MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING

- Winnipeg City Council announced a plan in March to use up to \$27.5 million of the federal Housing Accelerator Fund, a Capital Grant Incentive Program, towards a program to provide grants directly to developers to **create more housing supply**.
- The program's first phase will help fund **mixed-income multi-family housing** projects, with a focus on downtown projects and non-profit/affordable housing.
- The application-based grant program is set to **launch this June**.

VISITATION

More visitors of all kinds than this time last year

Seeing people enjoying themselves downtown is always encouraging – as is seeing visitation numbers climb. Visitors in Q1 of 2024 surpassed Q1 2023 in every way we can count them, including:

- **14.7%** more visitors overall
- **13.97%** more pedestrians*
- **7.54%** more traffic – drivers, cyclists and pedestrians**
- **Almost 5%** more street parking revenue

With spring upon us, we expect to continue to see increased visitor traffic in Q2 – and we welcome it!

* data from counter at Donald & Portage

** data from counter at Donald & York.



Q1 HIGHLIGHTS

PORTAGE & MAIN TO RE-OPEN TO PEDESTRIANS

In Q1, City Council voted to open Portage and Main for pedestrian crossing starting July 1, 2025. We know more street-level activity increases vibrancy and safety downtown, and a major and historic intersection in our city should be inclusive and accessible to all Winnipeggers.

While we're excited we understand the City will be further studying the steps, costs and traffic impacts required to decommission and close the city-owned portion of the underground concourse. Our hope is that the City-owned portion of the concourse that connects the underground and skywalk system with all four properties at Portage and Main can remain open.

A GOUNDBREAKING STEP FOR MARKET LANDS

Construction on the Market Lands development, a unique partnership between CentreVenture and the University of Winnipeg Renewal Corporation 2.0, broke ground in January.

Expected to open in 2026, the \$40 million mixed-use project at the site of the former Public Safety Building is projected to include around 100 mixed-income and affordable rental units, public arts spaces and a second building centered around food produced by smaller producers. This will be Canada's first locally designed net-zero carbon emissions mid rise building.



DOWNTOWN BIZ SPEAKERS' SERIES DRAWS A CROWD

More than 70 representatives from both small and big businesses gathered downtown at WAG-Qaumajuq for our first speakers' series of the year, to hear Premier Wab Kinew share the Province's plans for Winnipeg's core. The premier shared his desire to see more workers downtown, his government's plans to end chronic homelessness and how critical downtown is for the success of our entire province.



HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING AND ON DECK IN Q2

CHEERING FOR THE HOME TEAMS

Sports games and events bring tens of thousands of people – both Winnipeggers and visitors to the city and province – downtown every year, driving economic activity.

- The **Winnipeg Sea Bears**, which set Canadian Elite Basketball League (CEBL) attendance records in the team's first season, swish into their **second season** on May 24.
 - » Exciting news for downtown next year: the CEBL announced that Winnipeg and the Canada Life Centre will host the league's 2025 Championship Weekend (CW25) in August 2025 – a celebration of culture, music, community and Canadian basketball that should pump more than **\$5 million into Winnipeg's economy**.
 - » The Sea Bears' pre-game parties at True North Square will return again this season. Join in on the free, family-friendly action before each home game!
- The **Winnipeg Goldeyes** throw out the season's first pitch at Shaw Park on May 21, kicking off **50 home games of professional baseball**.
 - » Each game – which this year will include promos like Ukrainian Night, Métis Night and Soirée Francophone – can seat **nearly 7,500 fans**, plus more in 30 luxury boxes.



THE WHITEOUT RETURNED

In late April, the Winnipeg Jets took off in the first round of the NHL playoffs and thousands of hockey fans took over the downtown streets with the return of the **#WPGWhiteout Street Parties** and **Party in the Plaza**. While the Jets playoff run was short-lived, it was a WIN for downtown restaurants and bars who welcomed passionate fans to cheer on the home team!

COMING UP IN Q2

Spring is buzzing in the BIZ

Bring on spring and summer – we're getting ready for the warmer weather, sunny days and annual outdoor events!

DOWNTOWN WINNIPEG BIZ SPRING CLEANUP

Businesses and community members come together each year to help make our downtown look its best after the spring melt.

This year's CleanUp, presented by Manitoba Hydro and also generously supported by Wawanesa Insurance, took place on May 7, with record attendance of nearly 700 participants.

OUTDOOR FARMERS MARKET

The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ outdoor farmer's market – a vibrant community hub where shoppers can connect with producers and makers from across the province – will return Thursdays in June, starting June 13. Stay tuned to downtownwinnipegbiz.com and our socials for more info!

DOWNTOWN SOUNDS CONCERT SERIES

Downtown will come alive with free lunch-hour entertainment once again with this concert series that features local artists performing at various locations all summer long. Watch for the 2024 schedule of performances soon!



LOOKING AHEAD

Q1 revealed exciting announcements and expanded partnerships for upcoming projects

RAILSIDE AT THE FORKS

The project to transform two parking lots into a mixed-use neighbourhood of 10 buildings at The Forks is expected to begin construction this summer. Plans include:

- **10 buildings with more than 300 suites**, including affordable and income-based rental units
- business spaces open to the public on the lower level of each building
- **3.5 acres of publicly accessible green spaces**, courtyards, alleyways and public art

SUTTON PLACE HOTEL AND RESIDENCES

Construction is set to resume in June on this new development at the corner of St. Mary Avenue and Carlton Street adding:

- **288 hotel rooms** in the 18-storey Sutton Place Hotel
- **130 residential units** in a 13-storey luxury apartment block

WEHWEHNEH BAHGAHKINAGOHN

The Southern Chiefs Organization's (SCO) redevelopment of the former Hudson's Bay Company building is making progress with expanded partnerships, and we expect to see some exterior work begin in Q2.

PORTAGE PLACE

In early April, True North Real Estate Development and the SCO signed a letter of intent to build and co-own a 15-storey block of 200+ multi-family units.

- 40% of the units are targeted to be **affordable and accessible**.
- Plans were announced to include a **skywalk bridge** connecting the residential tower with the Wehwehneh Bahgahkinagohn project/building. Construction is expected to start next year.



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#FindItDowntown

Our downtown is on Treaty No. 1 territory and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis.

This publication is available in alternate formats upon request. For more information, contact: info@downtownwinnipegbiz.com

**DOWN
TOWN**
WINNIPEG BIZ