
Reimagining Downtowns: Evaluating Current Challenges and Contemporary Strategies for a Vibrant Downtown Future.

A Case Study Comparison of Montreal, QC and
Boston, MA.

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Supervised Research Project

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Executive Summary

This SRP seeks to better understand North American downtown cores in a post-COVID-19 environment: What challenges are downtowns facing? Why are they facing these specific challenges? How has the pandemic impacted these challenges? And, most importantly, how are downtown actors responding to and addressing these challenges and changes?

To do so, this SRP is organized into four chapters. **Chapter 1** presents the methodology used in this SRP. This includes an overview of the approach used to conduct the literature review as well as the methodology to the policy analysis and interviews. **Chapter 2** presents a wide-ranging literature review in order to properly frame this SRP within contemporary understandings of downtowns and downtown challenges. This literature review specifically highlights the need to take a micro-approach that examines the local conditions and regulatory frameworks that downtowns are situated within. In response to this need, this SRP conducts a comparative case study analysis of downtown Montreal, QC and downtown Boston, MA. **Chapter 3** presents the key findings from a comparative policy and content analysis of a downtown revitalization plan from each city. **Chapter 4** shares the findings from in-depth interviews with key informants from a range of professions involved in downtown planning and development. The SRP then concludes with conclusions and policy recommendations.

Ultimately, the comparative policy analysis results in several key findings about how each city conceptualizes its downtown challenges and the distinct strategies used to address them. Notably, the findings emphasize the critical role of a residential population in enhancing both downtown vitality and addressing the broader housing crisis. The case study analysis reveals the need for downtowns to shift from focusing on traditional economic activity and office work to offering experience-based destinations. This understanding leads to three general conclusions of the study:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated pre-existing trends affecting downtown areas, such as remote work and office vacancy, which were already reshaping the urban landscape. To address these evolving challenges effectively, downtown efforts should focus on adapting to these new realities rather than attempting to revert to pre-pandemic conditions. This includes emphasizing residential growth and downtown as a diverse destination.
2. The future of downtowns should embrace a mixed-use approach, combining residential, commercial, and experiential elements to ensure vibrancy beyond traditional work hours.
3. Future downtown planning must address the needs of both housed and unhoused residents, recognizing the crucial role the downtown plays for the unhoused and ensuring that policies support all community members.

Résumé

Ce SRP cherche à mieux comprendre les centres-villes nord-américains dans un environnement post-COVID-19 : à quels défis les centres-villes sont-ils confrontés? Pourquoi sont-ils confrontés à ces défis spécifiques? Comment la pandémie a-t-elle impacté ces défis et surtout, quelles sont les solutions mises en place face aux défis et changements dans les centres-villes?

Ce SRP est organisé en quatre chapitres, en plus d'une introduction et d'une conclusion avec des recommandations politiques. Le **chapitre 1** présente la méthodologie utilisée et donne un aperçu de l'approche utilisée pour mener l'analyse documentaire ainsi que la méthodologie de l'analyse politique et des entretiens. Le **chapitre 2** présente une revue de la littérature souligne spécifiquement la nécessité d'adopter une micro-approche qui examine les conditions locales et les cadres réglementaires dans lesquels se situent les centres-villes. En réponse à cette nécessité, ce SRP mène une analyse comparative du centre-ville de Montréal, QC et du centre-ville de Boston, MA. Le **chapitre 3** présente les principales conclusions d'une analyse comparative des politiques et du contenu d'un plan de revitalisation du centre-ville de chaque ville. Le **chapitre 4** présente les résultats d'entretiens approfondis avec des informateurs clés issus de diverses professions impliquées dans la planification et le développement du centre-ville.

Les résultats soulignent notamment le rôle essentiel d'une population résidentielle dans l'amélioration de la vitalité du centre-ville et dans la résolution de la crise du logement plus globalement. L'analyse de l'étude de cas révèle la nécessité pour les centres-villes de cesser de se concentrer sur l'activité économique traditionnelle et le travail de bureau pour proposer des destinations basées sur l'expérience. Cette compréhension conduit à trois conclusions générales de l'étude :

1. La pandémie a accéléré des tendances préexistantes, comme le travail à distance et l'inoccupation des bureaux, qui remodelaient déjà le paysage urbain. Pour relever efficacement ces défis changeants, les efforts des centre-ville devraient se concentrer sur l'adaptation à ces nouvelles réalités plutôt que de revenir aux conditions d'avant la pandémie. Cela implique de mettre l'accent sur la croissance résidentielle et le centre-ville en tant que destination diversifiée.
2. L'avenir des centres-villes devrait adopter une approche à usage mixte, combinant des éléments résidentiels, commerciaux et expérientiels pour assurer un dynamisme au-delà des heures de travail traditionnelles.
3. La planification future du centre-ville doit répondre aux besoins des résidents logés et non-logés, en reconnaissant le rôle crucial que joue le centre-ville pour les personnes en situation d'itinérance et en veillant à ce que les politiques soutiennent tous les membres de la communauté.

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Introduction

Urban downtowns, once significant hubs of commercial, economic, and cultural activity, now find themselves at a crossroads, struggling to regain the vibrancy, relevance, and economic vitality they enjoyed prior to the changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (Leong et al., 2023). The 'new normal' of remote work and hybrid work models has catalyzed profound transformations in the downtown cores of major North American cities, challenging the traditional notions of office-centric urban planning. Historically, these downtowns are designed around their work-related functions, as commercial office spaces have historically dominated the downtown landscape, accounting for 71% of real estate on average (Kellerman, 1988; Loh & Kim, 2021).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic challenged this traditional role of downtowns as it introduced unprecedented disruptions to the urban landscape as social distancing measures, remote work trends, and economic disruptions reshaped the dynamics of downtowns. Empty office spaces, reduced foot traffic, and struggling businesses became symbols of the changing downtown, prompting cities across North America to reconsider their approaches to downtown planning and development. This has compelled cities to innovate, adapt, and explore new strategies to support their downtown cores.

In response to these challenges, cities and other actors involved in the downtown core are developing new policies, infrastructure, and financial incentives aimed at revitalizing their downtown areas. Policymakers and urban planners are exploring innovative strategies to transform these spaces into vibrant and attractive environments.

Evaluating the content and subsequent success of these initiatives is pivotal in shaping future urban policies. By assessing the outcomes of these efforts, cities can gain valuable insights into what works and what does not and what conditions call for certain types of responses. This Supervised Research Project (herein referred to as SRP) aims to describe and assess the various policy, design, and financial mechanisms employed by cities in North America. By examining how cities navigate these complexities and reimagine their downtowns, this research aims to contribute valuable knowledge to urban planning and policy making, paving the way for resilient, vibrant, and sustainable city centers in the future. Therefore, the objectives of this SRP are twofold. First, it will explore the challenges that downtowns across North America currently face and the historical and land-use trends that led to this point. Second, it will explore downtown revitalization and efforts to reimagine downtowns in a post-COVID-19 environment. Ultimately, this SRP will produce key findings on what future downtown

planning can and should emphasize and focus on.

To do so, this SRP answers two research questions:

1. What challenges are currently present in North American downtowns? How are different downtown actors understanding these challenges and their impacts? How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact these challenges and processes?
2. How are cities and other downtown actors addressing the identified challenges and changes in downtowns? How are they envisioning the future of downtown? What policy and planning tools are being pursued to reach said future?

To answer these questions, this SRP conducts a comparative case study analysis of downtown Montreal, QC and downtown Boston, MA. These two cities were selected for their geographic proximity as well as similarities in geographic size, populations, history, climate, and industry. Additionally, by comparing one American city and one Canadian city, it allows for the opportunity to evaluate downtown recovery and revitalization across different social and political geographies. To conduct the case study analysis, this SRP embarks on two qualitative phases of research - a comparative content and policy analysis of a municipally-led and created downtown revitalization plan from each city and in-depth and semi-structured interviews with key informants involved in downtown planning and development from Boston and Montreal.

This SRP is organized into four chapters followed by a concluding discussion and policy implications. **Chapter 1** presents the methodology used in this SRP. This includes an overview of the approach used to conduct the literature review as well as the empirical approach and methodology to the policy analysis and interviews. **Chapter 2** comprises the literature review which helps to frame and contextualize this SRP. Chapter's 3 and 4 then present the key findings from the comparative case study analysis. **Chapter 3** presents the findings from the content and policy analysis and **Chapter 4** the findings from the interviews. This SRP then concludes with a final discussion and conclusions on future research and policy recommendations.

Chapter 1.

Methods

Methodologically, this SRP is split into two general phases of qualitative research that combine to produce a comparative case study analysis of downtown Montreal, QC and downtown Boston, MA. This case study analysis provides a more nuanced and contextualized local account of downtown planning and policy making in two structurally and historically similar cities. The goal of this case study analysis is to provide a critical perspective of the specific challenges these two cities are facing and to better understand the history and planning processes that led to these challenges.

The first phase comprises a policy analysis of two municipally-led and developed downtown revitalization plans to evaluate the ways in which each city is understanding the challenges their downtowns face and the policy solutions that are being pursued in each city. The second phase involves in-depth and semi-structured interviews with seven key informants involved in downtown planning and development. Additionally, a wide-ranging literature review of both academic and non-academic sources to evaluate the current state of North American downtowns is conducted and presented. This includes the current challenges that downtowns are facing and the historical processes and planning that led to this point.

This chapter first outlines the scope and approach taken to perform the literature review which frames the empirical research and findings of this SRP and then describes the methods used to perform the empirical research.

1.1 Literature Review

A wide-ranging literature review is conducted on both academic and non-academic sources (newspapers, media, and reports) to evaluate the current state of North American downtowns. Although a case study analysis will only be conducted on Montreal and Boston, it is imperative that the literature review be pan-North American in scope. This allows for a macro-level analysis of major trends that are impacting cities all across North America. By conducting this high-level analysis across North America, it becomes easier to draw conclusions on the general state of downtowns and the reasons downtowns are experiencing said challenges. Additionally, a macro, or pan-North American, analysis allows for comparison between the United States and Canada to identify if downtown challenges change across different political, social, and geographical areas.

The literature review begins with a critical discussion on how to define downtowns and identifies how this SRP defines downtowns. Next, the literature review expands to present a comprehensive discussion on existing literature and data on what is happening in North American downtowns. This

includes an independent discussion on the different key factors, trends, and challenges occurring categorized into the following areas: offices and office vacancies, hybrid and remote work, public transit, and retail and businesses. Figure 1 presents an overview and summary of the literature review.

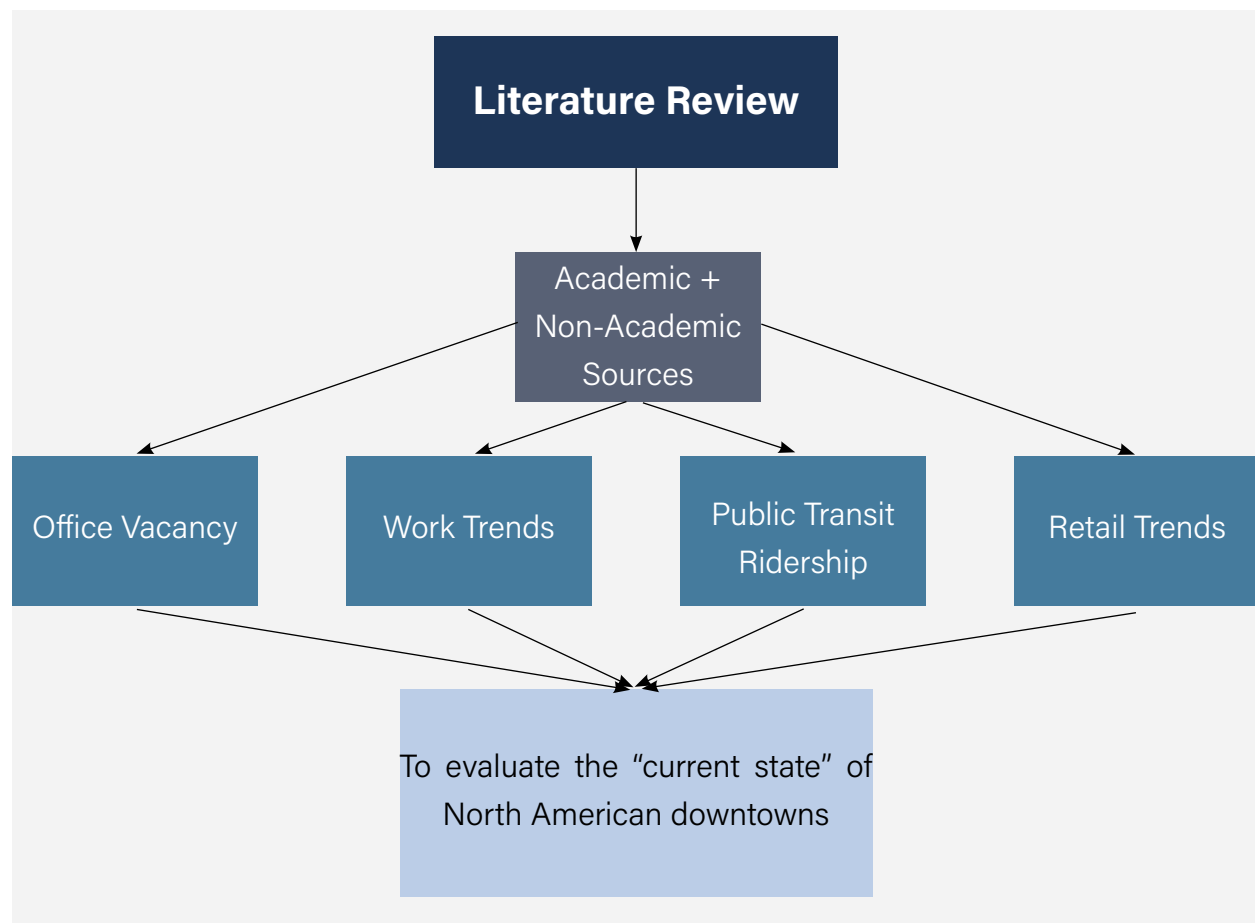


Figure 1: Summary figure of literature review

Once the current state of downtowns is comprehensively understood, a critical discussion on the key findings from the literature review is conducted, including what factors allow some cities to recover better than others, and key factors to consider in all future downtown recovery work. This section then concludes with a discussion on the gaps in the literature and the ways the remainder of this research, particularly the comparative case study analysis, address extant gaps in the literature.

Much of the material covered in this SRP requires up-to-date and recent information and data. For instance, to properly analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on North American downtowns, it is imperative to review data and analysis that was published after the lockdowns and associated direct impacts of the pandemic were completed; that is, after 2022. However, the time-consuming and rigorous process of peer-review results in a significant delay between when articles are written,

and with up-to-date available data, and when they are published. As a result, much of the existing literature on downtowns, particularly regarding the impact of the pandemic, are speculative in nature - they were written during the pandemic and speculate on what the future of downtowns will look like. In response to this challenge, the literature review was expanded to include non-academic and non-peer-reviewed literature that provides a more recent view and analysis of downtowns. This includes gray literature, newspaper articles, blog posts and opinion pieces by academics, and reports written by various actors such as research groups.

1.2 Comparative Case Study Analysis: Empirical approach and methods

Empirically, this SRP comprises a comparative case study analysis of downtown Montreal, QC and downtown Boston, MA. This case study comparison enables a deeper analysis of the challenges facing these two downtowns and the different efforts and initiatives being developed to address the challenges. Additionally, the case studies allow for comparison between the two cities to begin to understand and conceptualize what good-practice in downtown revitalization is.

1.2.1 Phase I: Content and policy analysis

The first phase of the case study includes a content and policy-analysis which reviews and analyzes a municipally-led downtown revitalization plan from each city to identify the ways each city is conceptualizing and understanding the challenges their downtown is facing and analyze the mechanisms, incentives, or strategies they are pursuing to address said challenges. Montreal's *Agir pour l'avenir du centre-ville de Montreal* plan and Boston's *Revive and Reimagine: A Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown* were analyzed. Methodologically, a mixed inductive and deductive approach was used to code each plan and produce comparative findings between the two.

1.2.2 Phase II: Key informant interviews³

The second phase of the case study analysis analyzes the two cities through interviews with key actors in downtowns. The interviews focus on downtown revitalization efforts already under way and

3. Ethics approval was granted for these interviews by the McGill University Ethics Review Board. See appendix for ethics approval

the interviewees' professional thoughts and experiences on the future of downtowns. The interviews additionally focus on evaluation of downtown revitalization efforts and how the interviewees and their respective cities or organizations are measuring success. Through the literature review and early stages of scoping research, four categories of professionals were identified as particularly important in downtown planning and policy making. This includes urban or municipal planners, the development community, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) (or equivalents), and community or housing groups. Key informants from each category were identified in each city through a combination of desk research - identifying key informants based on publicly accessible information such as newspaper articles, and citations in official plans or municipal documents - and drawing on the existing professional and expert network of this SRP's supervisor.

As a result, seven 45-minute semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with one key informant from each category and from each city. The interviews were conducted virtually on Microsoft Teams and transcribed using the built-in transcription software. The transcripts were then coded for key themes. It is important to note that due to time constraints, a community group from Boston was not interviewed for this research. It is recommended that future research on downtown revitalization and downtown Boston fill this research gap by focusing on community groups' perceptions of Boston. The key informants' job title and organization is outlined in Figure 2.

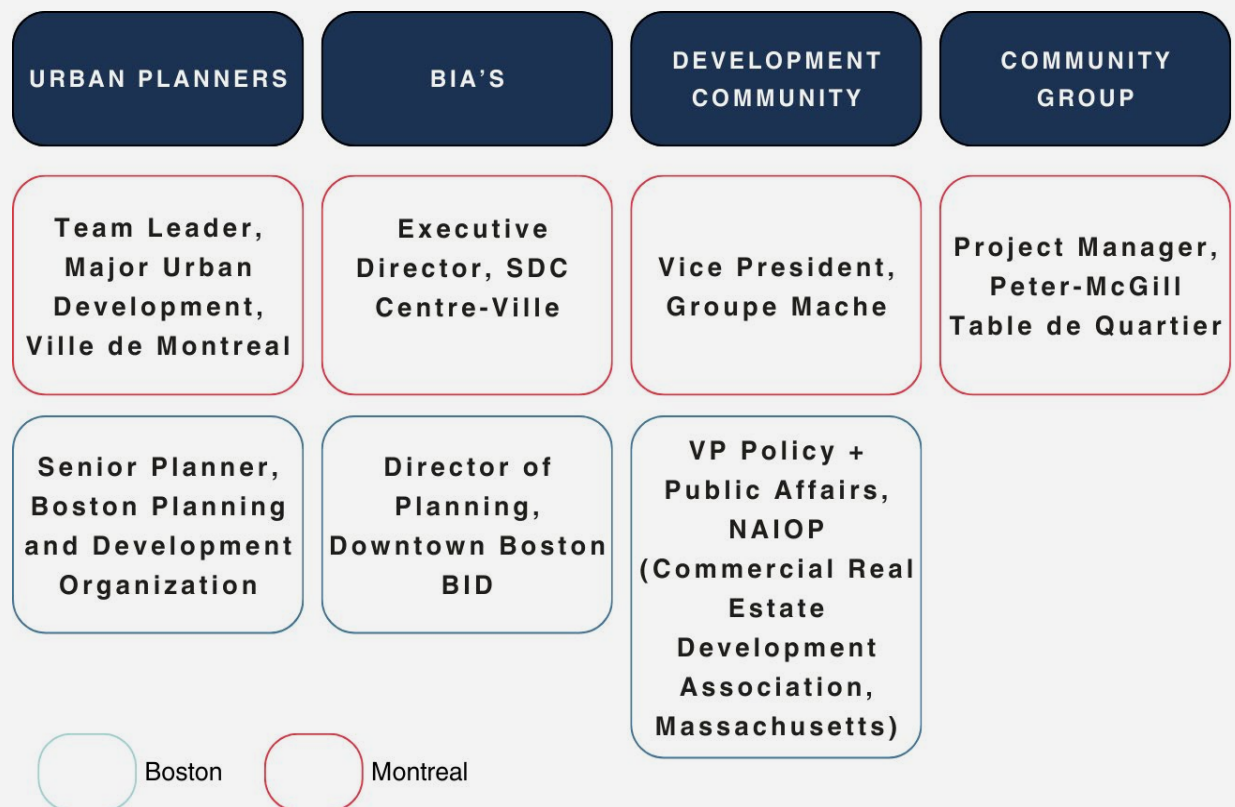


Figure 2: Key informants

To conduct the interviews with the key informants, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to help guide the interviews and ensure consistency and comparability across the seven interviews. The interview guide, and subsequent interviews, follow a primarily pragmatic interview approach; albeit with varying levels of structure. Patton (2014) presents pragmatic interviews as involving straightforward questions about real-world issues aimed at getting straightforward answers that can produce practical and useful insights. As a result, these interviews tend to be relatively short and focused interviews that often last an hour or less. The interview guide was developed within this approach. Namely, the majority of the interview guide follows a more structured pragmatic approach, whereby the interview focuses primarily on what is currently happening downtown, the participant's role, and their current efforts to address the identified challenges. However, the interview guide shifts towards a more open or semi-structured phase that aims to gain insight on the key informants thoughts about the futures of downtowns and the future of their downtown. Additionally, the interview guide was used loosely; meaning, and as the name suggests, it was used to guide the interviews and allow for relative comparability between interviews, but not every question in the interview guide was asked or answered in each interview. Instead, the researcher allowed the interviewee to lead the conversation at certain times to gain greater perspective on what they are preoccupied with and concerned with. For the complete interview guide, see appendix.

Chapter 2.

The Current State of North American Downtowns: A Review of the Literature

This chapter presents a literature review focusing on three key areas related to downtowns and their recovery post-pandemic. Firstly, it assesses the current state of North American downtowns across various categories. Secondly, it delves into literature discussing the recovery progress of different cities and downtowns, identifying those faring relatively better since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, it presents findings from an analysis of critical factors identified in the literature, which should be considered in all future downtown recovery efforts.

2.1 Defining Downtowns

Before delving into the review of the literature that evaluates the trends and challenges experienced by North American downtowns and what factors should be considered in downtown recovery or revitalization, it is important to provide a quick note on how downtowns are defined. There is subjectivity in defining downtowns and Statistics Canada does not currently provide a geographic unit representative of downtown neighborhoods within its Standard Geographical Classification (Sergeie, 2016). But defining downtowns is challenging because the boundary of a downtown neighborhood may depend on the perception of an individual and may also be influenced by physical boundaries in a city (Turcotte, 2008). As a result, there is no general and agreed upon definition in the literature or planning practice, as many cities delineate their downtowns differently.

This SRP follows a more subjective definition of downtowns that focuses more on informal boundaries. This follows the finding that, in North American cities, downtown neighborhoods usually consist of areas that contain a high concentration of commercial, residential, cultural, and historic buildings relative to other parts of the city (Canadian Urban Institute, 2013). These neighborhoods are often defined by informal boundaries that are constructed by public perception not by formal administrative boundaries (Sergeie, 2016). The one exception to this subjective definition of downtown is when referring to specific downtown revitalization plans in Chapter 3, where the downtown is specified by the policy.

2.2 What is Happening in North American Downtowns?

For ease of communication and presentation, this literature review categorizes current happenings in downtowns into a number of different subcategories: Offices, Work, Transit, and Retail. By categorizing the challenges facing downtowns into these five subheadings, this literature review allows for a more detailed and comprehensive presentation of the different challenges and trends impacting downtowns. However, it is important to note that each of these trends or challenges are not occurring

in isolation and all of them relate to, contribute to, and reinforce one another. For example, while changes to the geography of work location is its own trend that must be understood and evaluated in its own right, these changes to where people work directly impact office vacancy rates in downtowns. This increase in office vacancy is felt or experienced through reduced downtown footfall numbers as less people are commuting downtown on a regular basis. This reduction in downtown workers in turn affects business and retail vitality and streetlife. As a result, future downtown recovery, revitalization, or planning and development more broadly, must understand these trends both individually - for a more nuanced understanding - and collectively to allow for a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the current trends and challenges downtowns are facing. Only with this individual and collective understanding, will future plans be able to effectively grapple with addressing these challenges and adapting to the new trends. This SRP attempts to fill that need for a comprehensive analysis and understanding of downtowns and downtown recovery.

2.2.1 The Challenges of Public Transit in a Post-COVID Downtown

The pandemic had a distinct and significant role on public transit ridership and, as a result, on public transit systems more broadly. A number of studies highlight the devastation that the pandemic inflicted on public transit (Ashour et al., 2024; Palm et al., 2024; Paul & Taylor, 2024). Importantly, the impact of the pandemic on transit ridership changed through different phases of the pandemic. The start of the pandemic caused an initial drop of public transit ridership across the US by almost 80 percent in April 2020 (Karner et al., 2023). As a response to this reduced ridership at the start of the pandemic, public agencies responded with rapid service adjustments starting in March of 2020 (*Ibid.*). After this initial crash in public transit ridership as the pandemic initially spread in March and April 2020, transit ridership in the United States did begin to partially recover to approximately one-quarter to three-quarters of pre-pandemic ridership levels, depending on the transportation system and the specific mode of public transport (APTA, 2022). But during the rise in infections during the late fall of 2020 and early winter of 2021, ridership again dipped before returning to a slow pace of ridership recovery (*Ibid.*). However, transit ridership in the US dropped again in the late fall of 2021 and early winter of 2022, as the Omicron variant of COVID-19 brought in a new wave of the pandemic. While transit ridership did slowly recover afterward, by April 2022, transit ridership in the US remained at only approximately 62 percent of pre-pandemic levels (*Ibid.*).

It is thus clear that the pandemic impacted transit ridership, but in order to properly address this challenge, it is critical to understand how and why the pandemic impacted public transit ridership. First, however, it is important to note that while the pandemic did cause significant impacts on transit

ridership as many cities fell into lockdowns and stay-at-home mandates, transit ridership in the US had been in decline even before the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit at a slower rate. By 2017 (before the pandemic), for example, transit ridership decreased from the previous year in 31 of 35 major US metro areas (Siddiqui, 2018). Indeed, transit ridership across the US has experienced a decline over the past decade and this has only been exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Li & Rodriguez, 2024). This overall trend is important to recognize because ignoring the overall decrease in transit ridership prior to the pandemic may result in overestimating the impact of the pandemic in reducing public transit ridership. This potential overestimation can skew perceptions of transit ridership and thus lead to misrepresented policy recommendations and strategies to address these challenges.

Regardless, the impact of the pandemic in greatly accelerating and intensifying decreases in public transit ridership is imperative and cannot be ignored and it is crucial to better understand how and why this happened. Ashour and colleagues (2024) conducted focus group discussions with essential workers who were pre-pandemic transit riders to better understand how the pandemic has impacted their commute perceptions, experiences, motives, and challenges and evaluate the potential changes in their travel behavior post-pandemic. Ultimately, Ashour et al. (2024) find that public transit had multiple reliability and frequency challenges during the pandemic and this resulted in most participants switching away from public transportation. More specifically, and according to Ashour et al.'s (2024) focus groups, the increased availability of hybrid work exacerbated by the pandemic, helped driving emerge as a safer and more affordable commute mode for many pre-pandemic transit users. This significant decrease in ridership during the pandemic resulted in several service interruptions and cuts by transit agencies, which then made public transportation an increasingly unreliable commute option for essential workers who were continuing to work in person (*ibid.*). This article importantly reveals that a majority of pre-pandemic public transit riders switched away from transit as a result of the pandemic. However, while the article does briefly mention the impact of hybrid work on public transit use, it does not expand on the growing impact hybrid and remote work may have on public transit ridership and public transit agency's vitality in a post-COVID landscape, nor on the unique and poignant impact this will have in downtown cores.

To further evaluate how the pandemic impacted public transit ridership, Palm and colleagues (2024) explored peoples motivations for returning to or avoiding public transit a year into the pandemic. Palm et al. (2024) found that pre-COVID-19, frequent transit users between the ages of 18-29 and recent immigrants were more attracted to switching to driving due to the pandemic, with recent immigrants more likely to have actually purchased a vehicle. Additionally, getting COVID or living with someone who did contract COVID is a strong and positive predictor of buying a car and, most importantly,

anticipating less transit use after the pandemic (Palm et al., 2024). These results thus suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic may have increased the desirability of car ownership among previous transit riders. This finding is especially important for transit agencies who had spent years attempting to attract higher income and car-owning riders as well as millennials (Sakaria & Stehfest, 2013; Taylor & Morris, 2015). Palm and colleagues (2024) effectively highlight how giving up on transit ridership during the pandemic pushed some to purchase vehicles and that this newfound car ownership has the potential to reverse decades of efforts by transit agencies to increase public transit ridership. While these predictions are significant, this study is based on people's responses only a year into the pandemic. Consequently, Palm et al. (2024) do not expand sufficiently on the long term impact of the pandemic on transit ridership, nor on the impact of this reduced ridership on downtowns specifically.

To properly understand the consequences that a decreased public transit usage has on downtowns, it is first pertinent to recognize the ways downtown areas and public transit are intrinsically connected and the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on this connection. North American transit systems have disproportionately oriented themselves around commuting (Palm et al., 2024). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the need to commute as the pandemic pushed many jobs to remote or hybrid work models. This has the potential to have significant consequences on public transit systems, as even before the pandemic, telecommuting was correlated negatively with transit ridership across Canada and, in the US, researchers have estimated that transit commuting may decline by 40-percent after the pandemic, with half of this a result of reduced commute frequency (Diab et al., 2020; Salon et al., 2021).

Downtowns of many North American cities are primarily designed around work-related functions and land-use and therefore, the impact of reduced ridership and commuting is experienced and manifested specifically and explicitly in downtown cores. Therefore, to comprehensively understand the challenges downtowns are facing and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to review the reliance of downtowns on office work and office-centric land use, and the pandemic's impact on work.

2.2.2 Offices and Office Vacancy in Downtowns

North American downtowns revolve around office space. This is primarily due to the simple fact that downtowns are centrally located and thus serve as highly accessible concentrations of assets (Loh & Kim, 2021). From a real estate perspective, contemporary downtowns in North American cities can be defined by the dominance and prevalence of office space. Indeed, in aggregate across downtown

neighborhoods in the thirty largest US metro areas, offices make up 71% of total downtown real estate (Kellerman, 1988; Loh & Kim, 2021).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated stay-at-home mandates significantly impacted offices as many office workers began working remotely. A number of studies have been conducted that evaluate office vacancy data and conclude that there is a decreased demand in office sectors (Hutson & Orlando, 2023; Van Nieuwerburgh, 2022). For example, Van Nieuwerburgh (2022) analyzed turnstile data at the entrance of large offices to measure physical office occupancy and ultimately found significant drops in office use. Importantly, this study also found that in 2022, office occupancy peaked on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at around 56% occupancy and was lowest on Fridays at 33%. These numbers are staggering and present a grim picture of office occupancy whereby even at peak office use, office occupancy remains at just over 50%. This suggests the need to evaluate and better understand the future of office use in downtowns and what cities and other downtown actors are pursuing to address this challenge of office vacancy.

Additionally, Van Nieuwerburgh (2022) found that between December 31, 2019 and May 31, 2022, lease revenue fell by 17.5% in the US and while this is substantial, it does not present a catastrophic decrease in lease revenue. However, office leases generally have a long maturity of approximately 7.5 years on average and of all still active leases on May 31, 2022, 26.1% of tenants (by sq. ft.) face renewal decisions in 2022, 2023, or 2024 (*Ibid.*). Additionally, when looking at newly signed leases it shows a more grim picture of the future of the office market as new leasing activity has significantly slowed down (*Ibid.*). Currently, in 2024, many of these tenants have now faced renewal decisions and as such, it becomes increasingly important to understand the on-the-ground conditions of how this decrease in leasing is impacting cities and their downtowns.

Indeed, Haider and Moranis (2023), in their article for the Financial Post, argue that as a result of increased office vacancies and decreased office usage, owners of office towers in downtowns need to start to reinvent or reimagine their properties. Specifically, Haider and Moranis (2023) present the argument that office buildings should be repurposed to help the downtown become more of a destination. This leads to important questions of how - how do cities, and downtowns more specifically, achieve this transition? This SRP attempts to fill this gap and provide a nuanced understanding of both the challenges facing downtowns at a more localized and micro-level (as opposed to exclusively evaluating national datasets) and identify the strategies that city's are pursuing to achieve this transition.

2.2.3 The (Changing?) Geography of Work and the Impact of the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated stay-at-home mandates and lockdowns, greatly impacted the geography of work. Florida and colleagues (2023) identify how workplaces and classrooms transitioned to remote in response to the pandemic. Specifically, Florida et al. (2023) present estimates that remote work will increase from approximately 10-percent of the workforce in the US prior to the pandemic to roughly 20-percent of the workforce post-pandemic. Further estimates show that an additional 20-percent or more of the workforce are working on a hybrid model, whereby they work a few days of the week in the office and the rest at home (*Ibid.*). There is lots of novel data that helps to classify and show COVID-induced migration patterns and the impact of this on work, such as phone ping data which can define a location of residence based on nighttime pings (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2022). This data can be used to understand the scale and scope that work from home may have. Dingel and Neiman (2020) attempted to quantify how many jobs in the US can be performed from home. Dingel and Neiman (2020) classified the feasibility of working from home for all occupations and merged this classification with occupational employment counts. Ultimately, 37-percent of jobs in the US can be performed entirely at home (*Ibid.*). While these findings do not share how many of these jobs are actually performed remotely, it does share staggering figures on the potential impact remote work can have on the geography of work.

To better understand the potential long-term impacts of remote and hybrid work on North American cities, it is important to review the prevalence of remote work in a post-COVID-19 environment. Barrero, Bloom, and Davis (2023) conducted a critical study on remote work and why the big shift to work from home has largely endured in a post-covid environment. The authors find that as of mid-2023, full days worked at home account for 28-percent of paid workdays among Americans and, most importantly, this is four times the 2019 (pre-pandemic) rate and ten times the rate in the mid-1990s (*Ibid.*). However, there is a spectrum between the types of jobs that are more or less suitable for remote work. In general, jobs that are more analytical and computer intensive that are generally located in areas with higher population density are more likely to be able to be performed from home (*Ibid.*). These types of jobs, and higher levels of population density, are generally located in a city's downtown. This becomes especially apparent when comparing footfall data in downtowns - as of July 2022, foot traffic in downtowns had recovered to nearly pre-pandemic levels in cities with less than 150,000 employees, but to only 60-percent of those levels in cities with 1.5 million or more employees (Monte et al., 2023).

It is important to note, however, that even before the pandemic, changes in work and office behavior and technology was decreasing the importance of downtown office spaces. Indeed, prior to the

COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed that work was taking place in a wide variety of places and that economic activity was increasingly not necessarily tied to a specific location, but rather could be performed in a number of different locations (Pajevic & Shearmur, 2017). In addition, Shearmur (2017) highlights how there is a growing number of knowledge-related jobs that are becoming “hyper mobile” and, as mobile communication technology continues to advance, more jobs are becoming semi-mobile and thus many occupations do not have fixed places of work. These changes to workplace mobility and location challenge downtowns’ traditional and historic designations as central business districts.

Therefore, while the COVID-19 pandemic did have a significant impact on work and work behavior, it is imperative to recognize that many of these trends regarding the changing geography of work location and remote and hybrid-work models not only existed prior to the pandemic, but also were increasingly gaining traction. The nature of the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on these work trends, its intensity, and how cities and other downtown actors are responding, must be investigated further.

2.2.4 The Impact on Downtown Retail and Business

The previously discussed research on the changes and challenges of public transit, offices, and work, particularly as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic, have significant impacts on downtown retail and business vitality. Simply, the missing office workers in downtown areas have decimated urban retail (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2022). For example, data from OpenTable showed that restaurant visits were still down 37% in New York City and 41% in San Francisco in August 2022 compared to pre-pandemic levels (*Ibid.*). Additionally, retail revenue data shows that the urban retail sector was impacted to a similar extent as the urban office sector. This is due to two primary reasons. First, retail moved to where people have moved; meaning, shopping and entertainment activities are shifting slightly away from the urban core and to the suburbs (*Ibid.*). Second, the growth of ecommerce is significantly impacting retail in downtown cores. Ecommerce sales have been increasing and impacting downtown retail for years, but this exacerbated and intensified during the pandemic as many shoppers stayed home. For example, ecommerce sales grew by 32% in 2020 and by 15% in 2021 (*Ibid.*). Therefore, it becomes clear that downtown retail, and overall economic activity in the downtown, is struggling and this needs to be examined on a more micro-scale to identify the ways cities and downtowns are specifically experiencing this and the ways they are seeking to address these challenges.

2.3 Lessons Learned for Future Downtown Recovery

This literature review highlighted a number of key lessons and understandings that may be critical for all future downtown recovery. This categorization of the literature into lessons learned allows for a greater understanding of how the literature is discussing and understanding downtown recovery and revitalization and what factors lead to its success. These lessons can be categorized into two broad categories - why some cities are faring better than others since the COVID-19 pandemic and key factors to consider in future downtown recovery work.

2.3.1 Which cities and downtowns are faring better since the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Recent research on downtown recovery focuses heavily on using national (and in some cases, pan-North American) footfall data to evaluate the visitation recovery of downtowns. This is helping to lead to the understanding that cities that were previously viewed as the most successful at attracting economic activity and generating wealth, are now struggling to attract people back to their downtowns (Haider & Moranis, 2023; Leong et al., 2023). Indeed, downtowns with higher concentrations of professional services, information, and finance fields are struggling to maintain both raw visitation numbers and overall visitation proportions (Leong et al., 2023). In contrast, downtowns with higher concentrations of industries like healthcare, education, arts and entertainment have been recovering well and, in some cases, exceeded their pre-pandemic visitation performance (*Ibid.*). As seen, there are important qualities and economic and work-related attributes that contribute to a downtown's continued vitality in a post-pandemic environment. This raises important questions regarding the potential need for downtowns to adapt their professional and economic base to draw more visitors and activity to the downtown. This SRP attempts to fill that gap through in-depth interviews and analysis of downtown Montreal and Boston.

2.3.2 Key factors to consider in future downtown recovery work

While there is general consensus in the literature regarding the challenges downtowns are facing and the ways the pandemic exacerbated said challenges, there is less general consensus about what factors or futures North American downtowns should pursue. While most of the literature review for this SRP emphasizes the need for downtowns, and cities more broadly, to adapt and diversify their downtowns, there are nuanced differences regarding how to diversify. Hutson and Orlando (2023) investigated trends in downtown real estate and urban responses to demand shifts during COVID and

post-COVID recovery periods in four major US metro areas. They found that sustained shifts in rents and vacancy rates are putting pressure on cities to reconsider the highest and best use of downtown real estate assets (*Ibid.*). Ultimately, Hutson and Orlando (2023) argue that downtowns must rid themselves of their emphasis on office uses and instead follow a path that is “unapologetically mixed-use” (*Ibid.*). Importantly, this includes the expansion and development of housing in the downtown.


Meanwhile, others point out that what is driving downtown recovery is not residents or workers, but rather visitors (Florida, 2023; Philadelphia’s Center City District, 2023). Indeed, a report conducted by the Philadelphia Center City District (2023) found that on an average day, the vast majority of people downtown are visitors at 62%, compared to 11% for residents and 27% for office workers (*Ibid.*). This is a significant finding because it suggests that it is important for downtowns, beyond becoming more mixed-use, to remain destinations and places for people to visit.

Lastly, others have suggested that the most important factor for future downtown recovery is a different economic structure that allows for increased and continued activity in the downtown. Leong et al., (2023) argue that introducing new uses to the downtown, and making it more mixed-use, is not sufficient to bring activity back. Instead, downtowns that are not over-specialized in professional services but instead have a significant presence of education, healthcare, entertainment, retail, and public administration fared best during the pandemic because these industries had higher percentages of in-person activity and work (*Ibid.*). These factors are important to consider in future downtown revitalization work; however, the lack of a clear consensus highlights that future research is necessary to understand how downtowns can recover and what factors or futures they should pursue.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature

Despite these important findings in the literature, there is a gap in research that connects the changes in work behavior prior to the pandemic to the ways the pandemic, and remote work more specifically, exacerbated those existing changes. In addition, the impact of these changes to work location and behavior has not been comprehensively analyzed in reference to downtown vitality and vibrancy. As such, this SRP expands on extant research in two general ways.

First, it seeks to better understand the relationship between pre-Covid trends in downtowns and the impact of the Covid pandemic. This SRP also includes an analysis of changes and challenges in Canadian, as well as American, cities to understand whether similar trends occur in different



spatial and political systems. This helps to better understand the roots of these changes and identify possible solutions.

Second, this SRP analyzes how cities and other downtown stakeholders are addressing the identified challenges and changes, and how they measure success. Importantly, this SRP also addresses this goal from a micro-level perspective through a qualitative case study of downtown Montreal and Boston rather than drawing on macro-level or national data sets on downtown recovery. This allows for a more nuanced understanding that emphasizes the local conditions of the two cities. This SRP therefore fills this gap in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of contemporary downtown challenges and the many mechanisms and strategies cities, planning departments, and BIA's are pursuing to reimagine their downtowns.

Chapter 3.

Reimagining Downtowns: Key Findings from a Comparative Policy Analysis

The previous review of literature and existing data highlighted the state of downtown's at a macro-level and the need for a qualitative and localized study and analysis of the 'on-the-ground' conditions in downtowns and how cities and other downtown actors, with greater nuance, are conceptualizing and understanding the challenges facing their downtowns and what they are doing to address those challenges. Additionally, it is paramount to recognize the different actors and stakeholders involved in downtown planning, development, and design and evaluate their role and thoughts on the state of their downtown and its futures. To address these gaps and needs, this chapter presents the first phase of a comparative case study analysis of downtown Boston and downtown Montreal. This case study allows for a more nuanced analysis of the challenges facing the two downtowns by focusing on qualitative and normative understandings and thoughts, from a mix of different perspectives, on the state of each city's downtown. Additionally, the case study presents a critical discussion on the different strategies that are being developed to both address the identified challenges and to reimagine the downtown area.

3.1 Policy Analysis: Key Findings

To understand the mechanisms and strategies cities are utilizing to revitalize their downtowns, a comparative policy analysis was conducted on two major and municipally-led downtown recovery plans in Montreal and Boston. Montreal's *Agir pour l'avenir du centre-ville de Montreal* plan and Boston's *Revive and Reimagine: A Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown* were analyzed. Comparing downtown recovery or downtown revitalization plans from two different jurisdictions (and in two different countries) allows for an analysis of how different cities are conceptualizing and understanding the challenges that their cities are facing, the assets that their downtowns have, the goals that they have for their downtowns and their future, and the strategies, policies, or solutions that they are proposing to achieve said goals. Additionally, a comparison of the two plans allows for identifying key policy and strategy themes that are present across different plans and in different cities, and what policy themes are omitted or missing.

The goal of this policy analysis is to begin to evaluate downtown recovery or revitalization efforts and identify good-practice in innovative revitalization strategies. This policy analysis describes Montreal's and Boston's understanding of the planning context and policy options, and will help contextualize the subsequent interviews and analysis of Montreal and Boston downtowns and their futures.

It is important to note that this policy analysis is not comprehensive nor systematic; meaning, other policies exist that fall within the realm of downtown recovery that are not analyzed in this policy analysis. Instead, the goal of this policy analysis is to review the two major municipal plans that

explicitly tackle downtown revitalization in a comprehensive and holistic sense. A second important note is that Montreal's *Agir pour l'avenir du centre-ville de Montreal* plan is originally published only in French - this policy analysis is based on a translation of the French text using a combination of DeepL and Google Translate translation services.

3.1.1 Introduction to Montreal's Agir pour l'avenir du centre-ville de montreal plan and Boston's Revive and Reimagine: A Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown

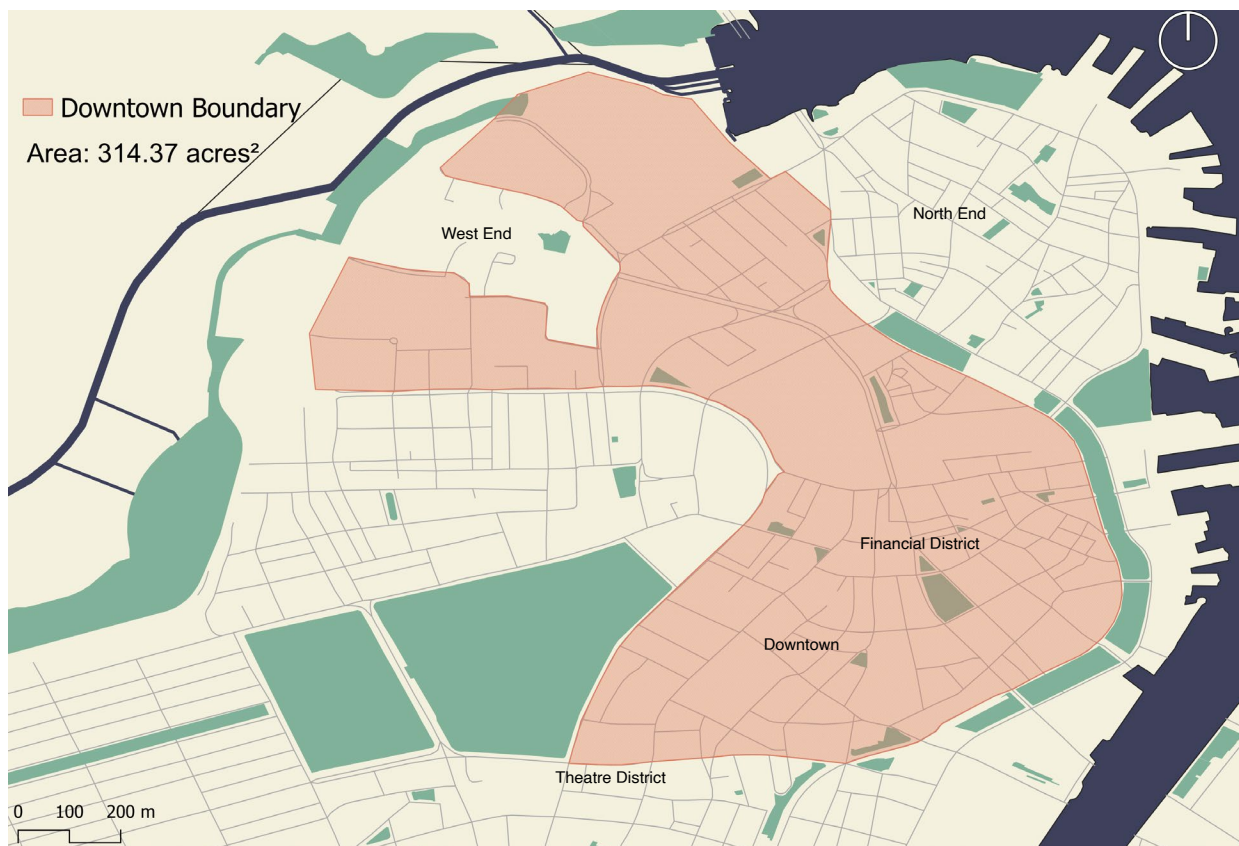


Figure 3: Map of Boston's Revive and Reimagine: A Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown's geographic focus

Boston's Revive and Reimagine: A Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown was created in 2022 in collaboration between the Boston Mayor's Office, the Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion, and the Boston Planning & Development Agency. The scope of this report is reflective of two primary considerations - its geographic focus and its policy focus. Geographically, this report focuses on a subset of Boston's central business district (CBD) with a particularly high commercial real estate density. This specific geography was selected because of the disproportionate impact that the decline in office work will have on this area. The geographic focus area thus encompasses districts that are

bounded by Tremont and Cambridge Street, Essex Street, and the Greenway and thus incorporates key areas of downtown's West End.

The policy focus of this report is centered on actions that the City has direct control over. As a result, the goal of this report is to "identify and communicate highly actionable revitalization steps that the city can take" (4). This report was developed in response to the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic uncovered. Namely, Downtown Boston felt the impact of the pandemic and its associated challenges more acutely than any other neighborhood and commercial hub in Boston (City of Boston, 2022) This is primarily because it has a daytime population and land use that is disproportionately represented by offices and office workers. Consequently, the downtown area has felt the changes to work norms most severely (Ibid.) As a result of these challenges, this report seeks to capitalize on the "unique opportunity to revitalize [Boston's] city center, and to reimagine a thriving downtown where current and new residents, workers, and visitors can come together to live, work, and play" (4). To achieve this vision, the report outlines six primary goals -

1. To ensure the continued vibrancy of office space downtown to maintain and grow building occupancy.
2. To expand housing downtown.
3. To expand downtown's cultural, art, retail, services, and hospitality ecosystem to expand the daily use of downtown beyond work.
4. To support connectivity and mobility with multi-modal transportation infrastructure and protected infrastructure for active mobility.
5. To enhance economic opportunity downtown by supporting women, BIPOC, and other underserved populations and strengthen small businesses.
6. To grow Boston as a global hub of tourism.

To achieve these six general goals, the Revive and Reimagine: A Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown report presents thirty-three policy actions that the city can control for downtown economic revitalization.

Montreal's *Agir pour l'avenir du centre-ville de Montreal: Strategie centre-ville 2030*, translated as *Acting for the future of downtown Montreal: City center strategy 2030*, was published in 2024 to present a strategy to energize downtown Montreal and ensure its long term resilience. The geographic scope of this plan incorporates the Ville-Marie borough as well as parts of the Sud-Ouest and Plateau-Mont-Royal boroughs.



Figure 4: Map of Montreal's Agir pour l'avenir du centre-ville de Montreal: Strategie centre-ville 2030 geographic focus

This strategy expresses a vision of the City that is premised on creating a renewed and strengthened downtown experience - in all seasons and at all times of the day. This city center strategy places a major emphasis on strengthening economic activities and cultural vitality in order to allow the downtown to maintain its density. This report outlines and analyzes the challenges facing downtown and as a result it presents actions that focus on the following areas of intervention: strengthen and diversify activities and maintain a good economic base in downtown; highlight the distinctive character of neighborhoods; improve the feeling of security and cleanliness; increase resident population; and, facilitate travel and create better active and public transit experiences.

To develop this strategy, the City of Montreal took into account several key documents that guide the actions presented in this plan, including the 2023-2025 Economic Development Plan, the City Project, the Montreal Climate Plan, and the Solidarity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2025. Additionally, this strategy was based on a participatory approach that included numerous meetings held since 2021 with key actors. In general, this strategy outlines three key priorities with nine specific

projects. The three priorities are:

1. Highlight the identity of the Downtown neighborhoods
2. Focus on a vibrant urban mix
3. Create green, pleasant, and safe routes

3.1.2 Analytical approach and focus

The development of the codes used to analyze the Boston and Montreal reports involved a combination of inductive and deductive methods. Deductively, the codes were built upon the framework outlined by Vogel and Henstra (2015), which delineates the fundamental elements for analyzing public policies. Thus, initial readings of the documents aimed to identify and categorize codes based on Vogel and Henstra's (2015) identified elements. Specifically, their framework highlights the importance of analyzing the goals of public policies and this guided the deductive identification of policy goals during the coding process of this policy analysis. Furthermore, this policy analysis is part of a broader study on North American downtowns, their challenges, historical context, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the codes were partially derived deductively from the literature review on the current state of downtowns. The analytical approach employed in this policy analysis was driven by the aim to comprehend how cities conceptualize and address the challenges facing their downtowns through recovery policies. Another primary objective of the policy analysis is to grasp the mechanisms employed by cities to revitalize their downtowns. Consequently, the analytical approach followed a deductive logic, focusing on identifying and analyzing the strategies or policies outlined in the plans. Inductively, the remaining codes and broader analytical approach were formulated after multiple meticulous readings of the plans, identifying patterns deemed significant for coding.

3.1.3 Outline of steps

This policy analysis followed three general steps. The first step involved coding the two documents². The coding of the two downtown revitalization plans drew on Nowell et al.'s (2017) process to conduct a thematic analysis. First, the two downtown revitalization plans were identified. Next, and following the first step outlined by Nowell et al. (2017), the researcher familiarized themselves with the data. This involved reading through each plan in depth prior to developing the codebook. The main goal of this phase was to understand the plans and their policies to start to identify possible patterns. Next, the initial codes were developed which involved revisiting the plans and developing codes that help to

2. For the complete codebook, please see the appendix

organize and understand the policies. The subsequent step involved rereading the plans in-depth and coding them according to the developed codebook. The codes were then categorized into five different groupings or initial themes - challenges, assets, solutions/strategies, goals, and procedural.

Once the codes were developed and the documents coded, the codes were then used to develop counts of the number of times each plan mentioned or discussed a particular category (or code). Importantly, if the same sentence mentioned, for example, office conversions multiple times, but all as part of the same strategy, this was only coded or identified as a fill office vacancy strategy once. However, if multiple different or distinct elements are present within the same sentence, then those different elements are counted individually. For example, if a sentence mentions two distinct types of residential goals, then each distinct goal was coded individually as a residential goal. Additionally, different aspects of the same policy recommendation may have different codes attributed to it. For example, as part of Boston's desire to encourage new and diverse businesses downtown (Economic goals), the city proposed updating "Articles 8, 38, 39, 40, 45, 47A of the Zoning Code to expand and align the definition of 'retail' establishments to include more modern use cases, including daycare, co-working space, maker-retail space, and other relevant uses" (50). In this case, the goals are economic (to support the economic vitality of businesses downtown), but the strategy pursued is a regulatory strategy (to update the zoning code). As a result, the counts of the codes can then be used as illustrations of the two plans and their contents and thus allow for a high-level comparison and analysis of the ways the different plans understand the challenges affecting their downtowns, how they prioritize their goals (in terms of how often it is mentioned), and what types or categories of strategies the plan overall supports.

The second step involved normalizing the number of "mentions" or counts of each code. This involved determining the highest total count for each category in both Montreal and Boston plans, then expressing all other counts as a percentage of that maximum. This normalization accounts for differences in report length and ensures comparability across categories.

Lastly, the goal of the policy analysis is to understand the policy directions of each city and how they conceptualize their challenges, goals, assets, and procedural elements. Thus, the focus is not on absolute counts but on relative findings regarding the importance or emphasis placed on various elements. To simplify presentation and increase comparability of these relative findings, the normalized counts were grouped into five categories based on their percentage relative to the most mentioned item in each category: 0: Not Mentioned, 1: Mentioned up to 25% of times, 2: Mentioned up to 50% of times, 3: Mentioned up to 75% of times, 4: Mentioned over 75% of times; 5: Most mentioned. These categories offer a clearer understanding of the level of emphasis each plan places

on different elements in comparison to each other.

3.1.4 Key Findings and discussion of comparative findings

3.1.4.1 Comparison in the level of detail between the two downtown revitalization plans

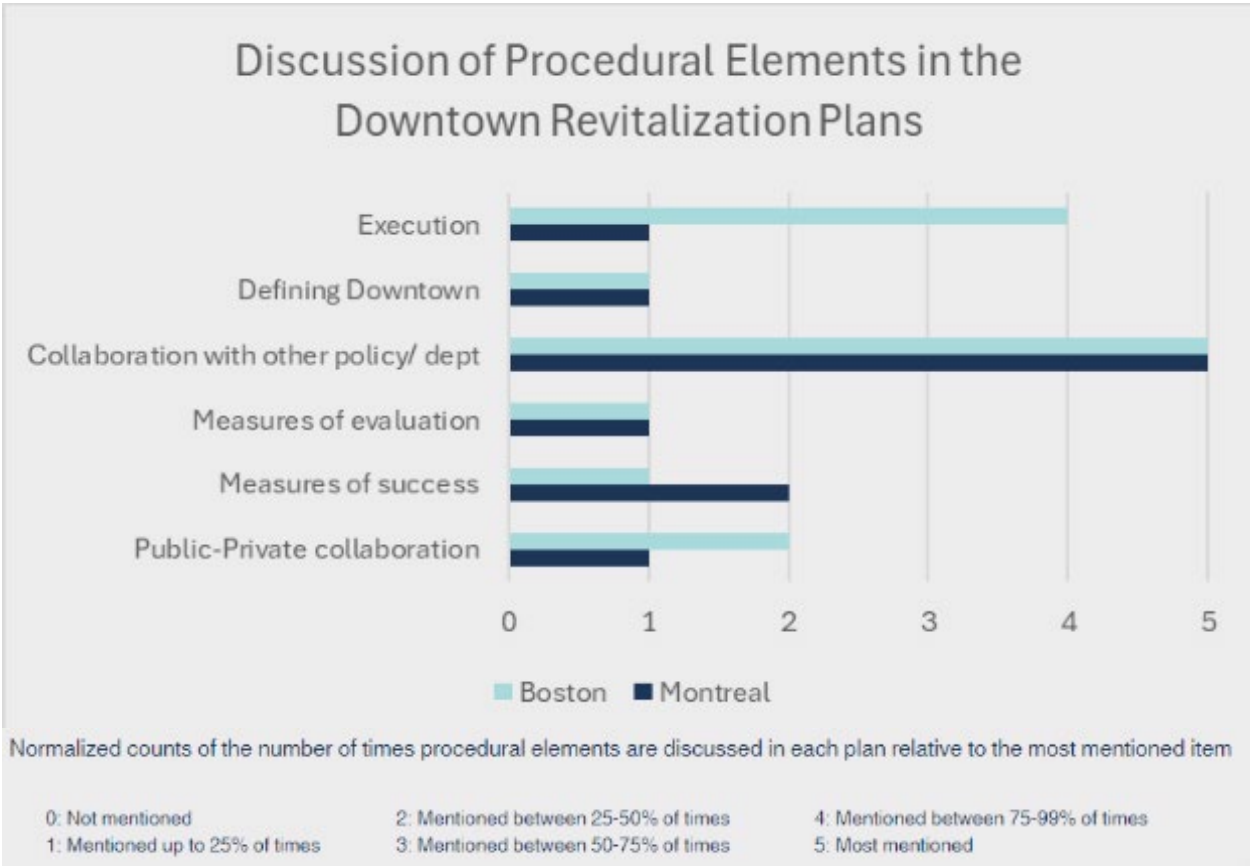


Figure 5: Normalized counts of the number of times procedural elements are discussed in each plan relative to the most mentioned item

The analysis of the two downtown revitalization plans and corresponding policies produced three key findings. First, each plan differed substantially in the level of detail of their proposed strategies or solutions, and each plan can thus be categorized based on their level of detail (level of detail, in this case, refers to the amount of detail surrounding the implementation and execution of the proposed strategies/policies). The Boston revitalization plan, which is identified as high level of detail, includes in-depth discussions on each proposed strategy (or policy) which includes the agencies responsible for implementing the strategy, the strategy’s goals, its supposed impact and rationale, a description, and examples from other cities. Montreal’s revitalization plan is characterized as medium level of

detail. Montreal's plan includes actions and benefits of each proposed strategy, but does not include the specific agencies or departments that will be involved nor specifics on how the strategies will be implemented. This difference in how each plan discusses, and at what frequency, these various procedural elements is represented in Figure 5.

It is important to note that while both Montreal and Boston discuss an interaction with other policies or departments most frequently, there still exist distinct qualitative differences between the two that impact the "level of detail." For example, Montreal rooted this downtown revitalization plan within other urban plans and strategies that the city has produced, but did not provide specific details on how this collaboration with other policies will take form. In contrast, Boston outlined the specific agencies that will be involved (and thus the collaboration that is needed between these agencies) for each proposed policy or strategy recommendation. In addition, the discrepancy between the two plans' relative mention of execution is critical - Boston mentioned or discussed how the strategies can be executed at a rate of over 75-percent that of its most frequently cited procedural element (collaboration) while Montreal mentioned execution under 25% of its mentions of collaboration.

The Boston revitalization plan also roots all of its policy recommendations and propositions in examples that have worked in cities elsewhere. While this reduces the originality of Boston's policy strategies, it does represent an evidence-based approach whereby revitalization strategies and policies are only recommended in Boston after being successfully implemented elsewhere. For example, to lower the regulatory barriers for new retail and service establishments, the Boston report recommends updating the definition of "retail" in the zoning code for first floor retail space to now include newer uses such as daycare, coworking spaces, and maker-retail.

This policy recommendation is based on New York City's "City of Yes" plan which, announced in 2022, sought to expand citywide zoning initiatives to support small business. The plan provided businesses with the ability to repurpose space, including removing geographic limitations on certain types of businesses and eliminating obstacles to repurpose space for new uses. While success elsewhere is no guarantee for success in Boston, as it is paramount to consider Boston's local conditions (planning conditions, regulatory, demographic, economic, etc.), the use of examples does signify that Boston is only considering policies that have been implemented elsewhere. Montreal's recommended strategies and policies, rather, are more high-level, such as deploying a winter entertainment and urban attraction strategy, or more localized, such as promoting the Latin Quarter as a Francophone neighborhood. In either case, Montreal's plan does not mention or discuss good-practice or examples from elsewhere.

Lastly, it is paramount to compare the “level of detail” between the two plans in terms of their discussion on mechanisms or markers to evaluate the implementation and success of the proposed policies. As previously stated, while Boston’s plan does include greater depth in its presentation of the proposed strategies than Montreal’s plan, neither plan provides much detail or discussion on how these policies can be evaluated upon implementation and how they will be measured for success. This relative lack of discussion on measures of evaluation and measures of success compared to other procedural elements can be seen in figure 5. In contrast to Boston’s report, Montreal’s plan does include a section in the plan titled “For effective implementation”; however, this section includes only half a page of text that mentions that this Downtown Strategy will be implemented over the next seven years and that the City will set the necessary milestones to coordinate these strategies and ensure their effectiveness. To achieve this, the Strategy outlines four key steps - the creation of a monitoring committee, the continuation of negotiations with other levels of government, the establishment of monitoring indicators, and the establishment of a governance system with teams responsible for the implementation of this Strategy. While it remains broad and only time will tell if the remaining steps will be completed, Montreal’s Downtown Strategy does still display promising signs of developing evaluation measures to ensure the implementation of proposed strategies and their ongoing success.

Although high level, these findings are significant in terms of future evaluations of success; specifically, does the level of specificity in the proposed strategies/policies and the discussion of or plans for evaluation impact their eventual implementation and success? From early analysis of the plans, it is concluded that more detailed descriptions of the plans, including clearly articulating the actors involved and strategies for implementation (as seen in the Boston plan), provides increased confidence for the strategy’s implementation and eventual success. This conclusion is drawn mainly from the increased clarity achieved by explicitly identifying the stakeholders and inter-departmental collaborations required, defining precise goals and objectives for each strategy, and citing successful implementations from similar contexts in other cities. This approach makes the implementation process more transparent and offers a clearer depiction of the proposed policy or strategy. Rather than presenting a high-level overview without substantive details, the Boston plan delineates the specific components and actions necessary for successful implementation.

3.1.4.2 Differences in the conceptualization of challenges in each downtown revitalization plan

The second major finding is the ways each plan conceptualizes the challenges that their cities are facing. Figure 6 shows the normalized counts of the number of times challenges are discussed in each plan relative to the most mentioned item.

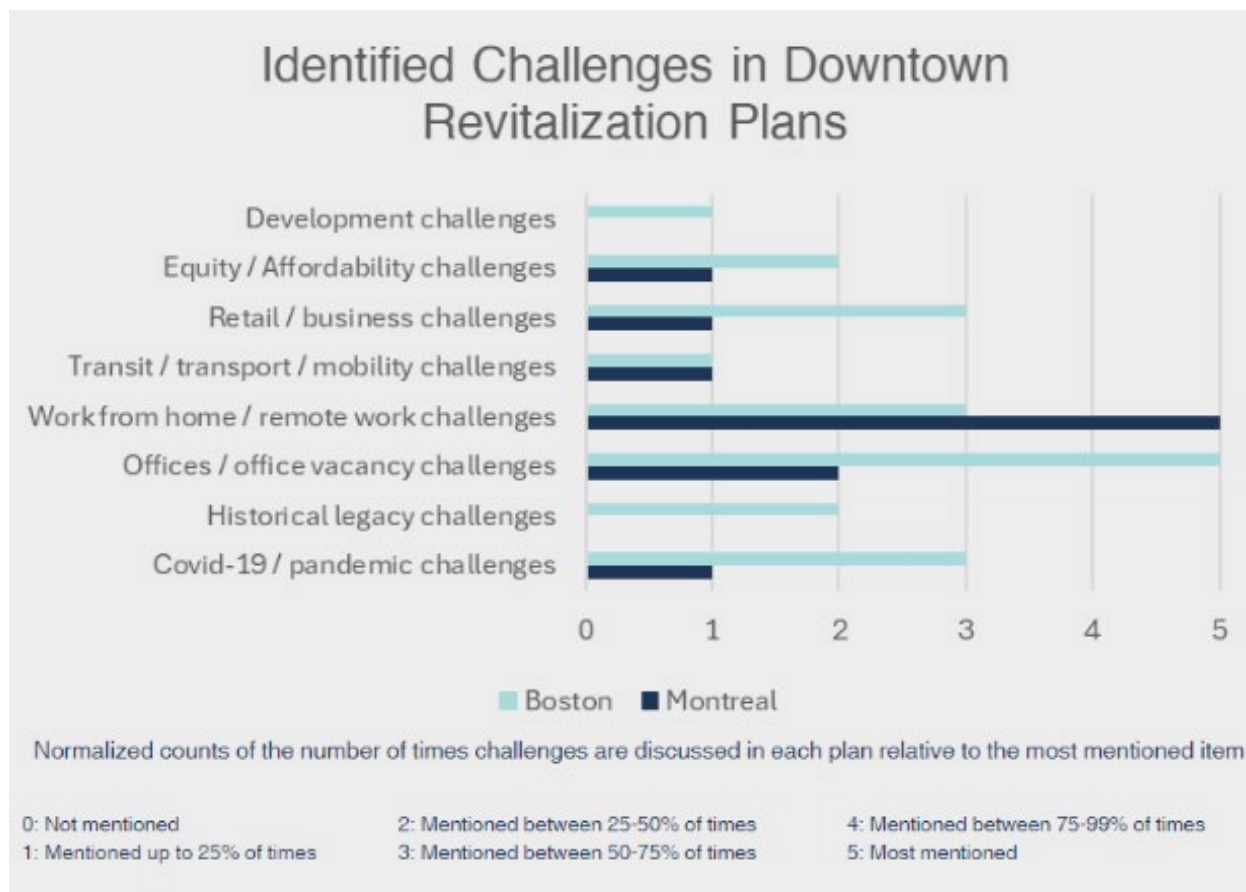


Figure 6: Normalized counts of the number of times challenges are discussed in each plan relative to the most mentioned item

Both cities identify the COVID-19 pandemic as a major contributor to the diminishing state of their downtowns. However, Boston contextualizes the role of the pandemic in exacerbating the challenges experienced in their downtown and explicitly states that the goal of the revitalization plan is not to return the downtown to its pre-COVID condition but to revitalize and reimagine it further.

It is important to note that despite this goal, and as previously discussed, Boston does include successful examples from other cities for every one of its proposed strategies. This suggests the need to review the scale at which Boston truly wants to innovate or reimagine - to reimagine its downtown beyond its current state by implementing strategies used elsewhere, or to reimagine what North American downtowns can be (moving beyond what is done elsewhere). Montreal, in contrast, mentions the impact of COVID on its downtown and the need for revitalization strategies that will help return the downtown to its pre-COVID state.

This seemingly minor distinction provides key insights into the ways the cities are conceptualizing

the problems their cities are facing. By stating the need to return to pre-COVID conditions, it suggests that the cities view COVID-19, and the surrounding consequences of the pandemic, as the primary reason for the current state of downtowns. As a result, all further policies or strategies will focus on simply returning the downtown to its pre-COVID state. However, even before the pandemic, changes in work and office behavior, and technology was decreasing the importance of downtown office spaces. Indeed, prior to the Covid pandemic, it was observed that work was taking place in a wide variety of places and that economic activity was increasingly not necessarily tied to a specific location, but rather could be performed in a number of different locations (Pajevic & Shearmur, 2017). In addition, Shearmur (2017) highlights how there is a growing number of knowledge-related jobs that are becoming "hyper mobile" and, as mobile communication technology continues to advance, more jobs are becoming semi-mobile and thus many occupations do not have fixed places of work. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important that cities understand the trajectory of their downtowns prior to the COVID-19 pandemic so that downtown revitalization efforts seek to go beyond a "return" to pre-COVID conditions (as Boston's plan does).

Beyond addressing COVID-19, both the Boston and Montreal plans specifically outline and address the challenges confronting their downtown areas. As seen in Figure 6, Montreal's plan predominantly focuses on the obstacles related to remote work and the shift towards working from home. This corresponds with Montreal's focus on the impact of the pandemic - the COVID-19 pandemic greatly influenced working behavior as many office workers who previously worked in downtown office buildings quickly transitioned to tele-work. In contrast, Boston's plan offers a more encompassing and comprehensive discussion of the challenges facing downtown Boston. The Boston plan provides a relatively equal discussion, in terms of frequency, on various challenges, including the pandemic, historical challenges, work-from-home challenges, and retail or business challenges. But, the most frequently discussed challenge in the Boston plan relates to offices and office vacancies. While office vacancies are related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the pandemic exacerbated remote work and thus decreased the need for downtown office space, the specific focus on offices and office vacancies in Boston's report sheds light on broader challenges present in Boston's downtown. Boston's downtown is disproportionately designed and reliant on office work and other commercial uses and the area boasts a considerably low downtown residential population. This is exacerbated by the relatively small geography of Boston's downtown (as shown in Figure 3). As a result, it becomes apparent that any downtown revitalization effort must address the challenges associated with the offices and office vacancies in downtown Boston.

While Montreal's focus on work from home and Boston's focus on the challenges associated with offices and office vacancies are similar, there are nuanced differences in the two that must be noted.

A focus on the challenges of remote work and work from home can encapsulate offices, but not exclusively. In this way, a focus on remote work serves as a more broad conceptualization of the challenges facing the downtown that can include the physical office buildings but also other impacts of remote work such as the impact on retail, foot traffic, and public transit usage. A specific focus on offices and office vacancy, as discussed in Boston's report, emphasizes the particular challenge that downtown Boston faces with the physical office buildings themselves. Importantly, these physical office buildings, and their disproportionate presence in the downtown core, were present prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this distinction, and Boston's focus on the physical office buildings, explains in part the difference in the ways each city discusses the pandemic. Simply, the Boston plan addresses the explicit need to move its downtown beyond its pre-pandemic state; meaning it must attempt to not simply return to a continued disproportionate dependence (in terms of land use) on office buildings and their associated consequences.

3.1.4.3 Differences in the goals and strategies in each downtown revitalization plan



Figure 7: Normalized counts of the number of times goals are discussed in each plan relative to the most mentioned item

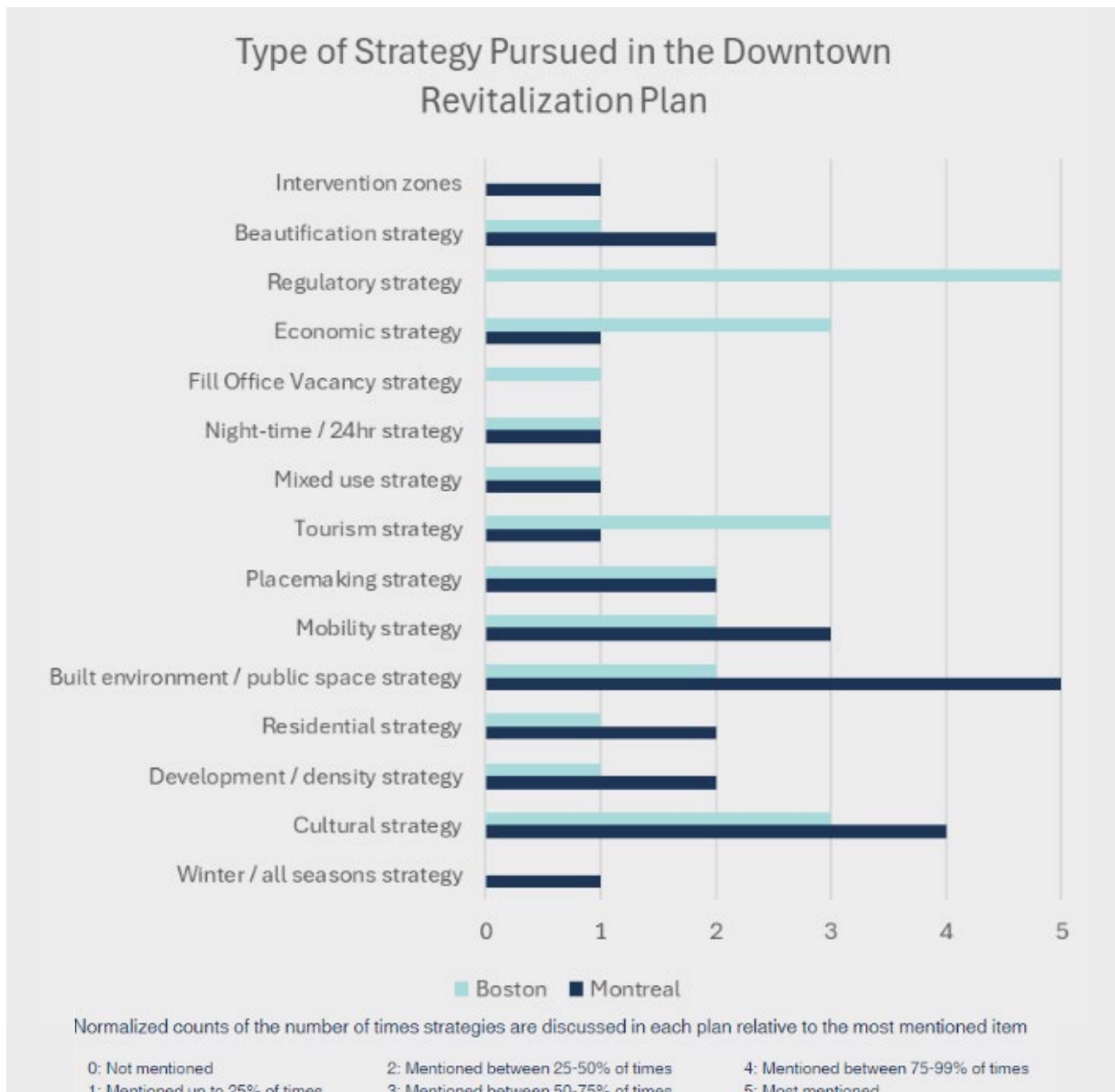


Figure 8: Normalized counts of the number of times strategies are discussed in each plan relative to the most mentioned item

The final major finding concerns the goals and *types* of strategies identified in each downtown revitalization plan. While both plans mention economic goals most frequently, there are key differences in the ways and relative frequency each plan discusses their goals. Overall, Boston's plan primarily emphasizes economic, tourism, and mobility-related goals. As will be further detailed, these goals align with the strategies proposed in the Boston plan. It is crucial to highlight that Boston's plan also places significant emphasis on equity-related goals, primarily manifested through economic strategies, such as providing support or regulations for BIPOC business owners.

In contrast, Montreal's plan places a particular emphasis on transportation and mobility goals. These goals are primarily manifested through efforts to increase transportation and mobility both to, and within, the downtown core. As will be further discussed, this aligns with Montreal's overall emphasis on promoting the downtown core as a destination.

Figure 7 represents the relative distribution that each plan discusses goals in their plan. This figure helps to highlight what types of goals each plan is emphasizing. In addition to this relative comparison, it is paramount to highlight key distinctions in the ways and at what frequency the two plans discuss or mention their goals. In absolute terms, the Boston plan explicitly discusses its goals at a greater frequency than the Montreal plan. This is primarily the result of the Boston plan outlining the goals of each proposed strategy or policy, whereas Montreal's strategy does not. For example, Boston's report outlines the policy recommendation of piloting 'pedestrianization' of certain streets downtown and, along with the rationale & impact, program description, agency responsible, and examples from other cities, the report also outlines the clear goal of the proposal. In this case, "to enhance the pedestrian experience downtown by piloting programs that reserve specific streets for pedestrian use" (61).

In terms of the strategies or solutions proposed in the plans, Boston mentions significantly more strategies, and in far greater depth and detail, than Montreal. This increased depth and detail allows for further parsing out the specific types of strategies proposed.

Montreal's downtown revitalization plan underscores the importance of diversifying reasons for people to visit downtown beyond work-related activities. This involves implementing beautification projects, public space initiatives, and establishing specific intervention zones, such as a Francophone zone. The most frequently mentioned strategy types are cultural, built environment/public space, and mobility strategies, with built environment/public space strategies being the most prevalent. Consequently, Montreal's plan primarily focuses on "external" or physical interventions to attract people to downtown. This involves improving accessibility, enhancing movement within the downtown area, and making it a compelling destination through cultural initiatives. By transforming the downtown into a cultural hotspot and facilitating ease of movement, Montreal's plan appears to address the highlighted challenges associated with remote work by creating new attractions for other visitors to explore the downtown area. It is important to recall that the analysis of Montreal's discussion of COVID-19 highlighted that Montreal called for a return to pre-COVID vitality. This suggests that already pre-COVID-19, downtown Montreal was already concerned with making their downtown a destination for non-work related activities. This finding is also supported by the fact that Montreal has been steadily increasing its residential population downtown over the last 20 years (and thus diversifying its land use). This anticipated finding is explored in greater depth in Chapter 4:

Reimagining Downtowns: Key Findings from Key Informant Interview

Boston's plan similarly underscores the importance of cultural and tourism-related strategies to attract new visitors to downtown areas, including mobility and placemaking initiatives. However, it is crucial to highlight notable differences between the two plans. The most prominent distinction in the Boston plan is its emphasis on economic and regulatory strategies. Unlike Montreal's plan, Boston's approach overwhelmingly involves utilizing economic, financial, and regulatory tools to boost economic activity in the downtown area and mitigate regulatory barriers. For example, to create more business and economic activity in the downtown area, Boston's strategy seeks to improve the process of opening and operating a business downtown. To do this, the report recommends centralizing a review of fine schedules, inspections, and enforcement data systems for business. This regulatory strategy thus seeks to improve the ease of which one can open and operate a business by "speeding up the approval process, helping business owners better understand and navigate the approval process, and... [create] ways for business owners [to] more easily fulfill and respond to city requirements" (57).

Another key finding in Boston's plan revolves around addressing their most frequently cited challenge – office vacancies. Specifically, these strategies are tailored to tackle office vacancies through measures such as incentives or conversions. For example, to address the challenges associated with office vacancies, and address some of the equity goals outlined in the plan, the Boston plan recommends to create low or rent-free spaces for startups, nonprofits, and Minority and Women-Owned Businesses (M/WBEs) in the "upper floors" of vacant office buildings. In this way, organizations who have not historically had access to downtown space due to cost barriers will now be able to access this space and, importantly, will fill empty office buildings and increase the diversity of commercial uses in the downtown. To achieve this, the plan outlines specific options that other cities have supported such as providing direct supports through rent subsidies or subsidized in-kind space, filling vacant space through matchmaking vacant leases with specific organizations, and providing tax incentives to property owners to house smaller businesses.

It is pertinent to again reiterate these differences in the strategies presented in the two plans in reference to the way that each city conceptualized and discussed the role of the COVID-19 pandemic. Boston's plan appears to be more forward thinking, and to innovate the downtown area beyond its pre-COVID-19 conditions. However, pre-COVID-19, Boston's downtown was more exclusively work-dependent, and thus a 'return' would simply imply filling up the offices again. As a result, Boston must pursue alternative strategies to reimagine the downtown core. In contrast, downtown Montreal was already more festival and culture oriented, with a far greater residential population, and thus a 'return' would signify a return to the festivals and cultural vitality that does help to make the area a

destination.

This policy analysis of Montreal's Agir pour l'avenir du centre-ville de Montreal plan and Boston's Revive and Reimagine: A Strategy to Revitalize Boston's Downtown shed light on the ways each city is conceptualizing the challenges that their downtown is facing and the ways that each city imagines, or aspires, to address these challenges. This analysis is essential for establishing the policy and planning context within which Montreal and Boston are positioned. It serves to contextualize the subsequent interviews and analysis of the downtown areas of both cities, shedding light on their respective futures. The following sections seek to uncover these findings further and, through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and actors in each downtown, further analyze how the two cities and other downtown stakeholders are addressing the identified challenges and happenings in their respective downtown.

An overview and summary of the policy analysis is presented in Figure 9. This table shares every element that was coded for in the two plans as well as a brief explanation of how the element was featured in each city's plan.

Code:	Boston	Montreal
Covid-19 / pandemic challenges	Identified COVID-19 as a major contributor to the diminishing state of their downtown. Goal is to move beyond pre-COVID-19 conditions and revitalize and reimagine downtown further	Identified COVID-19 as major contributor to challenges in the downtown and need to return to pre-COVID environment
Historical legacy challenges	Discusses historical challenges in downtown such as disproportionate amount of office space that has historically been built and prioritized in this area	No Mention
Offices / office vacancy challenges	Most frequently cited challenge. Challenge of empty office space, lack of economic and land use diversity.	Briefly discusses the challenge of office vacancy and dependence on office workers.
Work from home / remote work challenges	Mentioned - often in reference to challenges associated with office vacancy	Most frequently cited challenge. Particularly in reference to decreased footfall and visitors to downtown

Code:	Boston	Montreal
Transit / transport / mobility challenges	Briefly mentioned in reference to challenges of congestion and noise in downtown from delivery services	Mentioned with greater emphasis regarding need to better mobility within and to the downtown
Retail / Business challenges	Mentioned in reference to decreased retail activity in downtown. Also in reference to need to diversify business and incentive BiPOC businesses	Briefly mentioned in reference to the consequences of not investing in downtown vitality
Equity / Affordability challenges	Equity mentioned primarily in reference to under-representation of BiPOC businesses and employment.	Briefly mentioned in relation to the confounding challenges in downtowns related to the vulnerability crisis in public spaces
Development challenges	Mentioned briefly regarding challenges with a potential continuation of a under-index on residential space downtown	No Mention
Geographical assets	No Mention	Mentioned once in reference to the city's strategic location in Eastern Canada and connection to American markets
Economic assets	Briefly mentioned in reference to level of employment in the downtown and its asset as an economic hub	Mentioned in reference to downtown Montreal as an economic hub.
Cultural assets	Mentioned primarily in reference to Boston's historic sites and landmarks	Mentioned primarily in terms of Montreal's role as a cultural hub in Quebec and as a center of Francophone culture in North America
Residential Development	Briefly mentioned in terms of high residential demand in downtown	No Mention

Code:	Boston	Montreal
Mobility / Transit assets	Mentioned once in terms downtown being the most connected area of Boston	Mentioned once in terms of downtown being well served by public transport
Density assets	No Mention	Mentioned once in reference to downtown's density as serving as a main point of attraction.
Winter / all seasons strategy	No Mention	Mentioned regarding a plan to deploy a winter entertainment strategy
Cultural strategy	Mentioned primarily in reference to enhancing downtown Boston as an attraction and cultural destination	Mentioned particularly regarding enhancing the cultural appeal of downtown to promote visits
Development / density strategy	Mentioned primarily regarding strategies to increase residential density in downtown	Mentioned primarily regarding strategies to increase residential density in downtown and supporting new neighborhoods
Residential strategy	Mentioned in reference to increasing residential development, particularly with regards to empty office buildings	Mentioned particularly along with development/density strategies to increase residential density
Built environment / public space strategy	Mentioned frequently, often along other strategies (mobility, placemaking, beautification) to redevelop/reimagine public spaces	Most mentioned strategy in Montreal. Often mentioned along other strategies aimed at beautification of public spaces and enhancing downtown as a destination
Mobility strategy	Often mentioned in reference to other strategies (built environment/ public space strategy) to improve streetscape and optimize movement and delivery services	Mentioned regarding improving mobility within and to/from the downtown. Also in reference to specific mobility projects

Code:	Boston	Montreal
Placemaking strategy	Often mentioned in reference to other strategies (built environment/public space strategy) to support street-life and cultural activities	Often mentioned in reference to other strategies to help make downtown an engaging destination
Tourism strategy	Mentioned particularly in reference to creating and supporting new events and activities to stimulate the downtown core post-COVID	Briefly mentioned, particularly in reference to promoting the Latin Quarter as a Francophone zone
Mixed use strategy	Briefly mentioned in reference to continuing PLAN downtown to promote mixed-use development downtown	Briefly mentioned in reference to creating new residential neighborhoods in the Faubourgs and Bridge-Bonaventure sectors
Night-time / 24hr strategy	Mentioned in reference to creating/ supporting a night-time economy downtown	Briefly mentioned in reference to creating new residential neighborhoods in the Faubourgs and Bridge-Bonaventure sectors
Fill Office Vacancy strategy	Mentioned often in reference to regulatory strategies to convert office buildings to residential or incentivize new commercial uses to fill vacancies	No Mention
Economic strategy	Mentioned frequently, in terms of diversifying economy downtown, stimulating commercial growth, and expanding economic opportunities for minority people and businesses	Briefly mentioned in reference to specific projects - the "international district" and developing life sciences and health industry
Regulatory strategy	Most frequently cited strategy. Primarily regarding leveraging planning and regulatory tools to pursue goals (e.g., incentives, zoning changes)	No Mention
Beautification strategy	Mentioned alongside other strategies, particularly regarding streetscape enhancements - pedestrianization and public spaces	Primarily mentioned regarding improving the cleanliness of public spaces and the maintenance of buildings

Code:	Boston	Montreal
Intervention zones	No Mention	Mentioned in terms of creating specific areas of intervention within the downtown where the majority of strategies will target. This is situated between the Latin Quarter and International Quarter
Live, work, play goals	Mentioned in reference to supporting the growth of BIDs downtown	No Mention
Economic Goals	Most mentioned goal. Often mentioned regarding expanding economic opportunities and vitality downtown	Most mentioned goal. Often mentioned regarding goals to expand the economic vitality of downtown
Security goals	Mentioned alongside transportation and mobility goals, in reference to safety and security of movement	Mentioned briefly either in reference to public spaces and cleanliness, or in terms of safety for active mobility users
Cultural goals	Mentioned most often alongside other goals aimed at increasing downtown as a destination and expanding commercial vitality	Mentioned specifically in terms of supporting and expanding cultural assets of downtown
Tourism / attraction goals	Briefly mentioned in terms of promoting downtown as a tourist destination	Briefly mentioned in terms of promoting downtown as a tourist destination
Residential / density goals	Mentioned in reference to expanding residential population downtown	Mentioned regarding goals to increase residential population and create new residential neighborhoods downtown
Transportation / mobility goals	Mentioned particularly in reference to supporting pedestrian and active mobility and improving last-mile delivery	Along with economic goals, transportation goals are the most mentioned type of goal in Montreal. Particularly in relation to improving movement within and between downtown and other neighborhoods

Code:	Boston	Montreal
Human scale goals	Mentioned in reference to improving the pedestrian experience downtown to try to draw more visitors (and residents) to the downtown	No Mention
Affordability goals	Mentioned primarily either in reference to supporting affordable housing or providing commercial space to those who have historically not had access to downtown space due to cost barriers	Mentioned once in reference to developing affordable housing in the Faubourgs and Bridge-Bonaventure sectors
Equity goals	Equity goals mentioned frequently in terms of increasing equity for minority business owners, affordable housing, and creating subsidies and programs to diversify the downtown	Mentioned primarily in reference to connecting this downtown plan with other equity-driven plans in Montreal
Environmental / Green goals	Mentioned primarily in reference to improving transportation and mobility	Briefly mentioned in reference to improving active mobility and in reference to connecting this plan to the Montreal Climate Plan
Democratic / Participatory Goals	No Mention	Briefly mentioned regarding the role of consultation with various stakeholders
Development / Investment goals	Mentioned briefly in reference to supporting developers and investors in converting office space and including more housing in downtown	Mentioned once in reference to prioritizing investments in existing buildings
Public-Private collaboration	Mentioned in reference to the agencies and groups that will be involved with various strategies. Also that this report was produced in partnership with BCG	Mentioned once in reference to the different partners the city works with to promote the downtown

Code:	Boston	Montreal
Measures of success	Mentioned once regarding the success of the All-Inclusive Boston tourism campaign and thus the need to continue it	Mentioned in terms of certain statistics (pedestrian traffic, tourism, student population) that show a recovery of downtown Montreal
Measures of evaluation	Briefly mentioned in terms of collecting and tracking economic indicators that will help inform future City policy interventions	Mentioned once in the next steps - that a next step includes the creation of a monitoring committee
Collaboration with other policy/ dept	Mentioned in reference to the agencies and groups that will be involved with various strategies	Mentioned primarily regarding the other municipal policies and plans that the downtown plan interacts with
Defining Downtown	Brief discussion on the geographic focus and scope of this plan	Brief discussion on the geographic focus and scope of this plan
Execution	Mentioned in terms of clearly outlining the agencies that will be responsible for each proposed strategy	Mentioned once in terms of next steps

Figure 9: Summary table of policy analysis and all identified elements

Chapter 4.

Reimagining Downtowns: Key Findings from Key Informant Interviews

To better understand the current state of downtown Montreal and Boston and to more critically engage with efforts at revitalizing and reimagining the two downtowns, this SRP conducted seven interviews with key informants from the two cities. These interviews provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges downtowns are facing, the impact of the pandemic, the local context, and efforts to support the downtown. By conducting interviews with a key informant from different industries, professions, and perspectives, this SRP aims to provide a more holistic understanding that considers the many interests and goals of various actors involved in downtown planning and development. Ultimately, the interviews produced three overarching and key themes: 1. The challenges downtowns are facing, the impact of the pandemic, and the creation of a 'new normal'; 2. The importance of a downtown residential population and its implications; and, 3. Downtowns as destinations: but a changing type of destination.

4.1 Key Finding I: Downtown Challenges, the Impact of the Pandemic, and the Creation of a “New Normal”

4.1.1 Challenges

As discussed in the literature review and in the policy analysis of the two downtown revitalization plans, downtowns are facing immense challenges. These challenges, and the realities of these challenges, were similarly echoed by most key informants from the two cities. Importantly, while there do exist nuanced differences between the ways the challenges are discussed, overall the key informants from each city discussed the challenges facing their downtowns in similar terms and ways. Furthermore, this key finding, regarding the challenges downtowns are facing, is further nuanced by the ways the different professions characterize and emphasize the challenges facing their downtowns.

The most significant challenge, as mentioned and discussed by the key informants in Boston, regards the challenges associated with office vacancy and the impact this has on overall economic and commercial activity in the downtown core. This challenge stems from the reality that “we’re seeing people not returning to the office the way we thought” (Boston Development Community key informant). As a result, this is “having a massive impact on Boston’s downtown” (Development Community key informant, Boston). It is critical here to reiterate the key finding from the policy analysis that found that Boston, through its downtown revitalization plan, overwhelmingly identifies challenges associated with office vacancy. Indeed, this is poignantly reiterated by the key informant from the Boston BID, “we are at probably a historic high around commercial vacancies.”

While the challenges associated with office vacancies were highlighted by the key informants in Montreal, there were a number of additional challenges of note that were mentioned by the Urban Planner key informant in Montreal. It was found that the pandemic highlighted three main challenges or processes that are affecting downtowns and creating specific challenges for the city. The first one regards the COVID-19 pandemic itself and the new role that the City of Montreal must now take on as a consequence of the pandemic and changing Provincial politics. Namely, the Urban Planning key informant from Montreal highlighted that the usual split between the province and the city states that anything that “touches” or relates to public health is a provincial responsibility. But, during the COVID-19 pandemic and in its aftermath, “the city [now] is playing a first responder role... which was not exactly something [the City] used to do in the past”. Importantly, this also means that the City must now also assume this responsibility within their budget. This new role of “first responder” is oftentimes manifested in the downtown and thus poses significant challenges for the downtown area.

The second key challenge currently facing downtowns, as stated by the Urban Planning key informant, are the challenges associated with homelessness and housing affordability. While the challenges associated with homelessness and corresponding cohabitation is not comprehensively discussed in this SRP, it is important to highlight that this is a major challenge currently facing downtowns - there is rising unaffordability of rents in Montreal and a growing unhoused population and this “had a huge impact downtown” (Urban Planner key informant, Montreal).

Lastly, the Urban Planning key informant from Montreal highlighted the crisis of public transportation as the third major challenge impacting downtown Montreal. Similar to the challenges associated with the pandemic and public health, it was stated that public transportation was also historically a competence of the Provincial government. However, the current Provincial government is investing less in public transportation in Montreal, and as a result, it is becoming the responsibility of cities, such as Montreal, to assume that public transportation budget (especially as it relates to its day-to-day operations and management). Therefore, “combine these three main things [and] they make a huge pressure on downtown”; a huge, “negative pressure”.

While these findings regarding the challenges faced by downtown Boston and Montreal do generally relate to the challenges facing North American downtowns as discussed in the literature, the analysis of the key informant interviews highlights the need to conceptualize and nuance the challenges downtowns are facing and to avoid blanket or macro-level statements on downtowns put broadly. This is primarily due to the nuance provided by the in-depth interviews with key informants from

different professions involved in downtown planning. Indeed, in Montreal, while the pandemic did “hurt office space and very much hurt all commercial activities surrounding the downtown [Montreal] area because no one came in to work” (Development Community key informant, Montreal), this primarily came to bear on Class B+C buildings rather than Class A buildings. Additionally, in the Class A buildings in Montreal, generally filled with top firms, the tenants continued to pay rents throughout the pandemic. What that meant is that the property (office building) owners did not experience the brunt of the impact of remote work; rather, “what hurt is all our food courts, all the business that were underneath those towers that had no more clients anymore” (Development Community key informant, Montreal).

In a post-COVID environment, this differentiation in the challenges of office vacancy are similarly split along the different asset classes of the commercial real estate building. While remote work has decreased compared to during the peaks of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, the presence of hybrid work is still impacting the use of office space. However, in Montreal, this is manifesting primarily through the movement of firms from Class B and C buildings towards Class A buildings. For example, the Development Community key informant mentioned how the city is currently experiencing a 17% office vacancy rate, but that this is primarily located in Class B and C buildings, rather than Class A. This is due to a downward pressure on rents for Class A buildings as firms “that were in Class B buildings can now afford being in a Class A building and not pay that much. Or, the fact that now they are in hybrid mode [means that] they need a little bit less space” (Development Community key informant, Montreal). Therefore, while downtown Montreal is facing challenges associated with office vacancy, the key informant interviews highlighted that this challenge is primarily coming to bear on Class B and C buildings, rather than the Class A buildings. This nuance is critical to understand because it can impact the type of solution or strategy that cities should pursue to address this challenge; simply, that perhaps strategies that particularly target Class B and C buildings should be pursued or emphasized.

Similar trends and concerns were expressed by the Development Community key informant in Boston regarding the lasting impact of hybrid work on downtown office use. Specifically, Boston saw “a lot of people let go of their large footprints during COVID or immediately after anticipating a hybrid work schedule. So, if someone had 100,000 square feet, maybe they cut that back to 75. Maybe they cut that back to 50” (Development Community key informant Boston). The development community in Boston is also specifically concerned with the challenge that this then poses on surrounding businesses that support the offices and office workers: “our members [commercial real estate owners and developers] are really worried about that first floor retail, those restaurants, how they are going to survive...the dry cleaners and the pharmacies” (Development Community key informant,

Boston). This highlights the particular concern that the development community, from both cities, have regarding the impact of hybrid work.

Additionally, and as previously stated, the impacts of hybrid work are felt most severely in Class B and C buildings as firms are able to move into the Class A buildings. This is posing significant challenges in Boston because the city has “a ton of Class B and C buildings” (Development Community key informant, Boston). As a result of this, the development community is particularly “worried about and watching very closely the devaluation of the office market in Boston... [because] we’ve seen buildings in the City of Boston go for less than they did during the 2008 recession, even adjusted for inflation” (Development Community key informant, Boston) and this devaluation is also coming to bear in very few transactions in the last year. This devaluation and decrease in transactions leads to the concern that it could “cause a paralysis and therefore the buildings will sit empty” (Development Community key informant, Boston). However, the most significant worry that this causes, one which would pose significant challenges to the City of Boston and beyond, is the impact that reduced leasing in existing office buildings (particularly those Class B and C buildings) will have on debt maturities as “there is a record number of debt [maturity], basically loans that are going to be called in the year. And given the current market, there is massive concern that owners will just give the keys back to the bank” (Development Community key informant, Boston).

The review of the literature highlighted that much of the literature on downtowns emphasize the challenges that downtowns across North America are facing, such as challenges of office vacancy, affordability, and public transportation. While many of these challenges were corroborated by the interviews, the key informants, and particularly those that represent the development community, further nuance these challenges and provide key insights into the ways these challenges, particularly the changing geography of work and increase in hybrid work, impact the Montreal and Boston’s downtowns and their specific real estate markets and environments. While it is imprudent to assume that all cities face similar realities to Boston and Montreal, these findings do present a significant contribution and emphasize the ways that greater nuance, from those that are actively engaged in downtown planning and development, is critical in order to provide effective recommendations and informed futures.

4.1.2 Is COVID the Cause?

With the challenges present in the two downtowns understood, the question then turns to the impact of the pandemic in creating these challenges. Among the key informant interviews, there was

general agreement that the pandemic did not create the challenges downtowns are facing, but rather exacerbated existing trends and processes that were already present prior to the pandemic. This was especially prevalent when comparing the goals and operations of the various key informants before and after the pandemic. For example, the Urban Planning key informant from Boston emphasized that the current planning initiative for downtown, which is guiding future downtown development post-pandemic, spanned from 2018 (pre-pandemic) until it was approved in December of 2022. So while in some capacity this planning process did “[deal] with downtown in different forms post-pandemic [and] pre-pandemic. But in many ways, a lot of the challenges downtown was facing [pre-pandemic], the goals remained the same” (Urban Planning key informant, Boston). The pandemic did have an impact in the sense that these challenges became more “widely talked about and a bigger issue post pandemic” but that in general “that discussion was always there in terms of activating downtown outside of working hours” (Urban Planning key informant, Boston). Therefore, the planning initiative did not change significantly, highlighting the ways that the Boston Planning department regarded the pandemic as exacerbating existing trends and challenges rather than creating new ones (which would require a new planning initiative).

In Montreal, the key informant interviews shared similar remarks, whereby the pandemic may have exacerbated existing challenges, but it did not cause the challenges. Similar to the downtown planning initiative in Boston, much of Montreal’s current downtown revitalization policy, as stated in the *Agir Pour l’Avenir du Centre-Ville de Montreal*, were in plans produced prior to the pandemic and “have just been amplified... [But] those were all things that were discussed pre pandemic” (BIA key informant, Montreal). Unlike the remarks from the Urban planner in Boston, the BIA key informant in Montreal did emphasize that the role of the SDC did change as a result of the pandemic, because the current realities of downtowns require that the SDC “enhanc[es] consumer experience and generat[es] foot traffic for downtown” in ways that perhaps they did not prior to the pandemic, but that “many of these ‘realities’ were present way before the pandemic and have been accelerated by [the pandemic]” (BIA key informant, Montreal). Similarly, and corroborating the existing literature on the changing geography of work (prior to the pandemic), many of the key informants highlighted that while their downtowns are facing challenges from remote and hybrid work, “that transformation was already happening. It was accelerated by the pandemic” (BIA key informant, Montreal).

In conclusion, the key informant interviews largely corroborated the discussions in the literature on the challenges downtowns are facing albeit with greater nuance to the specific impact these challenges will have and how they will come to bear in the two cities. Regarding the impact of the pandemic, the key informants largely agreed that the pandemic did not cause these challenges, but rather exacerbated existing trends and processes. This understanding of the impact of the pandemic

influences the types of strategies and futures that cities may pursue to address their downtowns. By acknowledging that the pandemic did not cause said challenges, it stipulates that the challenges downtowns are facing is not a fleeting consequence of the pandemic, but rather representative of the new reality of downtowns - “we don’t talk about post-pandemic revitalization anymore. It’s much more. We are back to normal and it is a new normal and we just have to continue the transformation that had started pre pandemic” (BIA key informant, Montreal).

4.2 Key Finding II: The Importance of a Downtown Residential Population

The second key finding that emerged from the key informant interviews is the importance of a downtown residential population on both current and future downtown vitality. This includes critical discussions and understandings of the reasons downtown residents contribute to overall downtown vitality, the processes and policies that have either been successfully pursued or currently implemented to increase the residential population, and critical findings on the implications of having an increased residential population in the downtown on both the downtown itself and the broader city at large.

4.2.1 Why are residents important for a downtown?

A number of reasons and explanations were highlighted by the key informants regarding why a downtown residential population is particularly important for overall downtown vitality. The majority of the key informants highlighted the need for residents in the downtown as one of the primary drivers of overall downtown vitality and its future goals. It is also important to note that Boston and Montreal are at different scales and on different timelines regarding their residential population. Since the 1990s, downtown Boston’s population increased modestly by 5,500 residents between 2000 and 2015, rising from 11,500 to 17,000. In contrast, downtown Montreal experienced a more pronounced growth, with over 40,000 new residents recorded between 1991 and 2016, increasing from 69,000 to 90,000. Subsequently, an additional 20,000 residents were added between 2016 and 2021. As a result, Montreal is currently the fastest growing downtown in Canada in terms of its residential population. In many ways, therefore, Montreal can be understood as already achieving a significant downtown residential growth that Boston is now striving for.

In Montreal, there was general consensus amongst all key informants that the presence and existence of a substantial downtown population has been critically important to the area's overall activity and vitality. As stated by the BIA key informant from Montreal, "we are extremely lucky to have that demographic growth... if we didn't have that demographic growth we would be in big trouble." This sentiment about the importance of the residential growth was echoed by other key informants in Montreal as, "broadly speaking, Montreal is very lucky to have the residents downtown" (Community Group key informant, Montreal).

More specifically, having a downtown residential population in Montreal has allowed for a greater diversity of activities and retail to better support the residents. This is significant because it helps to minimize the dependence on traditional nine-to-five office workers and associated businesses, such as food courts and laundromats. Importantly, this finding was shared amongst all key informants from all different professions and industries, highlighting that regardless of the profession or perspective, all see value in a healthy and sizable downtown residential population. For instance, the development community key informant in Montreal highlighted that "having residents in a neighborhood makes it feel more dynamic throughout the day. So you have activities from breakfast to sundown, bars at night, and more activities". Also, the population density "makes the little shops viable, but also a destination for the wider public" and in this way the rise in the residential population downtown over the last 20-30 years "really helped the economy in terms of all the restaurants, retail, cultural activities, recreational activities... you have a lot more that was built because you have a local population" (Development Community key informant, Montreal). A residential downtown population thus allows for a greater diversity of economic offerings, and the rise of Montreal's downtown population has led to specific changes to the types of businesses in the downtown core as "we now have three supermarkets in our territory and we used to have only one. You see it a lot in the smaller types of businesses when it comes to restaurants [there are now] much more accessible restaurants [and] cafes that are busy" (BIA key informant, Montreal). And this "busy-ness" of the cafes and restaurants is not just during traditional business hours, but "are now open seven days and are packed on weekends. Basically, some of the elements you would normally see in central neighborhoods like Le Plateau Montreal, you are now starting to see downtown" (BIA key informant, Montreal). This increase in economic activity in downtown Montreal is largely attributed to the rise in the residential population. As a result, the rise in downtown residents has led "some people [to] say [that] what you see is a soul coming back to downtown" (BIA key informant, Montreal).

In Boston, a city which has not seen the same rate of residential growth as Montreal, the key informants largely discussed the importance of growing their residential population in the coming years. This emphasis on the importance of a residential downtown population and goals to grow it

can be organized into three general subcategories: increased 24/7 activity, the housing crisis, and increased economic activity. Importantly, and as will become apparent, these goals share similarities with the proven impacts and benefits experienced in Montreal.

Increased 24/7 Activity:

There is a strong emphasis among many of the key informants in Boston on trying to activate the downtown outside of traditional working hours and to reduce the dependence of downtown activity and foot traffic on traditional office workers. This preoccupation was present long before the pandemic, but the pandemic did exacerbate the intensity at which the City of Boston was discussing this goal. One specific approach or goal to activate the downtown outside of working hours includes “a greater mixed use, more residential uses downtown” (Urban Planner key informant, Boston) which will then help stimulate the number of people downtown at off peak hours.

The Housing Crisis:

The key informants in Boston also highlighted the desire or goal of increasing downtown’s residential population as a response to the growing housing and unaffordability crisis in Boston. This becomes increasingly important downtown because so much of the state’s economic activity happens in and around downtown Boston and many people prefer to live where they work. However, “Boston’s downtown does not have a lot of housing. It is a traditional downtown. It is your financial district center” (Development Community key informant, Boston). This is especially significant because “over 80-percent of the entire state works in Eastern Massachusetts... So I think that the issue of the housing crisis statewide feeds into [downtown] Boston” (Development Community key informant, Boston). This does not entail that the whole housing crisis and housing need statewide falls on the downtown exclusively, or even on the city of Boston, but the downtown, as the economic hub, should shoulder some of that responsibility.

Increased Economic Activity:

Lastly, the key informants in Boston highlighted the potential for increasing the residential population as a mechanism or strategy to increase or reinvigorate commercial activity and overall economic vitality in the downtown. Indeed, when relaunching the downtown planning initiative and the Plan Downtown plan after the pandemic, the City placed a significant emphasis on how to better support small businesses in the area.

To do so, this included “looking for ways to bring more residential uses that could help balance some of the challenges of the change of office work culture” (Urban Planning key informant, Boston). Additionally, one of the reasons housing is so important, beyond that it provides a more 24/7 downtown population, is that encouraging large scale business growth requires those businesses or companies to have their employees living nearby. Therefore, the commercial development community is particularly focused on workforce housing because “places like Microsoft and Google, are not going to continue to expand their footprint here if they can’t find housing for their people” (Development Community key informant, Boston).

So, in terms of companies that are looking to invest in Boston, the lack of housing for their employees is a major consideration and “if we can’t get those companies to come here, it doesn’t really matter what’s happening with our office space because it’s still going to be empty” (Development Community key informant, Boston). As a result, even those that represent the commercial development community in the downtown state that “I think the economic viability of downtown is very much tied to whether or not we can address our housing crisis” (Development Community key informant, Boston).

4.2.2 How can downtowns increase the population?

One key finding emerging from the key informant interviews pertains to the mechanisms and strategies adopted by each city to address and achieve their desired residential population in downtown areas. This finding holds significance due to its potential policy implications and its contribution to best practices in downtown policy-making. By identifying and detailing the specific strategies and policies pursued by each city and its key stakeholders, a deeper understanding is gained regarding the methods through which downtown areas can revitalize and expand their residential populations.

The approaches taken by the two cities to enhance their downtown residential populations can be categorized into two groups. The first group focuses on the challenges associated with downtown development and regulatory changes to stimulate and accommodate increased residential development. The second group regards office-to-residential conversions as a key municipal strategy to address both growing office vacancies and achieve the desired residential growth in the downtown.

Development Challenges and Regulatory Changes

As previously noted, Montreal’s residential population downtown has been steadily growing over the last 20 to 25 years. However, this residential growth did not happen organically, but rather “it

happened on purpose. We noticed about 25-30 years ago that if we wanted to keep the downtown alive, we needed to increase the population” (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal). To do so, the City updated their zoning to allow for increased residential density through, for example, allowing mid-rise and high-rise residential towers and providing incentives to redevelop old buildings in Old Montreal into residential.

Despite the benefits of a downtown residential population, and the success the City of Montreal has had over the last two decades to increase this population, there still exist significant challenges that impede or make more difficult continued residential growth. These new challenges then require additional regulatory changes and developments to better support a growing residential population. For example, regarding the new residential towers in the downtown and in Old Montreal, “the only thing now [is that] we are facing that some of these [residential] towers are sold, but they are not occupied. They are empty” (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal). These “empty” towers, the Urban Planning key informant suspects, are being used primarily for short term rental - as airbnbs or as short term company housing. In response, the City of Montreal is pursuing new legislation and regulations against short term rentals with the goal that “every unit we build is occupied by someone living there” (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal).

Furthermore, from the standpoint of real estate development, especially within the commercial sector, while residential growth is generally seen as advantageous for both commercial real estate and the overall economic vibrancy of downtown areas, there are crucial factors that need to be considered. These factors can significantly hinder downtown development and include high interest rates, high construction costs, shortages in construction workers, and “municipal delays [that] take forever to get a project approved, even [despite] the [housing] crisis” (Development Community key informant, Montreal).

In response, the development community is looking for additional financial breaks in the form of tax breaks to increase density and development downtown. Although the specifics of these tax breaks and financial incentives need to be conceptualized and evaluated in greater depth, the Development Community key informant in Montreal did offer some examples of tax incentives that would significantly help spur development in downtown; such as, providing tax breaks for developers who build in certain key areas (such as the downtown) and caps on increases in municipal taxes for a certain fixed amount of time. While it’s crucial to contemplate the broader social, economic, and equity implications of offering substantial tax breaks or incentives to large-scale developers, this finding is significant as it underscores the challenges perceived by developers and their proposed solutions.

In Boston, the key informants highlighted an outdated zoning code and development process significantly hinders new development in the city. The impacts of this archaic zoning code is particularly experienced in the downtown core and has played a role in the limited residential development in the downtown. Importantly, this sentiment is shared by both the municipal urban planner and the real estate development community. For example, the urban planner key informant highlighted that as a result of “zoning [being outdated], it becomes a very project by project negotiation - a long conversation between the development developer and the community” (Urban Planning key informant, Boston). The development community key informant similarly echoed the difficulty of Boston’s zoning code and emphasized that “Boston’s zoning... is so complex and so wonky... There are so many hoops to jump through to make sure any kind of development happens in Boston” (Development Community key informant, Boston). Additionally, this impact of out-dated zoning “is certainly harder with housing development, especially in an area that has not traditionally built housing” (Development Community key informant, Boston). This lack of a streamlined development process has hindered residential development at scale in the downtown.

In response, the City of Boston is currently pursuing a complete zoning overhaul that would simplify the city’s regulatory system and allow for a more streamlined development process. While this zoning reform is city-wide, its ramifications will significantly impact the downtown core and allow for more development. This zoning overhaul process is evaluating the ways in which the City can “modernize the definition of different uses within the zoning code and simplify the way some of those are defined” (Urban Planning key informant, Boston) as well as eliminating outdated and archaic zoning regulations. It is important to note that this approach also aligns with the key findings from the policy analysis in Chapter 3, which found that Boston is particularly focused on pursuing regulatory strategies and approaches as part of their downtown revitalization.

Therefore, although working on different timelines and with different scales in terms of their current downtown residential population, both Montreal and Boston are pursuing residential growth in their downtown by reevaluating and revamping the regulatory structures and procedures in their respective cities.

Office-to-Residential Conversions

Another important tool highlighted by the key informants is the potential of office-to-residential conversions as a mechanism or strategy to both address increased office vacancy and provide more housing in the downtown core. While this strategy was discussed and identified in both cities, Boston is much more explicit and intentional in their discussions of office-to-residential conversions. This

finding correlates with the key findings from the policy analysis, which found that Boston is particularly concerned with the challenges associated with the physical office buildings themselves. In response, Boston launched an office-to-residential conversion program in the fall of 2023 in an attempt to “encourage more growth and development in the area” (Urban Planning key informant, Boston). Additionally, office-to-residential conversions were identified as a mechanism to promote residential growth while still maintaining the historical buildings in Boston’s downtown to help “preserve the character of the area” (Urban Planning key informant, Boston). While the environmental benefits of office conversions were only briefly discussed, it is imperative to note that office-to-residential conversions also help maintain the embodied carbon of buildings and significantly reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions.

A significant aspect of this program focuses on fast tracking the approvals of office conversion projects to reduce the regulatory barriers that previously existed for office conversions. Although the program only recently launched, at time of the interview, two projects had been submitted that are expected to bring over 100 additional residential units to the downtown core. These two projects represent an important achievement for the City of Boston and its Planning department, as a major goal of this pilot project was educational and informative in nature and to “really bring up interest within the development community” (Urban Planning key informant, Boston). Indeed, even from the Business Improvement District’s perspective, who, it should be noted, represent commercial interests, view the efforts by the city regarding office-to-residential conversions as an important development for the downtown that will help it transition as “people think about how they work and how they live and the access that our downtown provides and the activity it provides” (BIA key informant, Boston). While office conversions do not and can not serve as the primary solution to increasing the downtown population, they serve as an exciting tool that will help achieve this aim.

However, office-to-residential conversions require striking an appropriate balance regarding the type and amount of incentives the City of Boston provides developers to undertake these projects. The Urban Planning key informant in Boston did highlight this need, and emphasized that part of the preliminary study into office-to-residential conversions, prior to the launch of the pilot project, was to strike a “balance between what is an appropriate tax abatement for these projects... and the threshold at which projects actually need that support [compared] to what developers can hold on their own” (Urban Planning key informant, Boston). While the City of Boston appears hopeful that the two projects in the works represent a successful balance of incentives, the development community is not as optimistic. For example, the Development Community key informant highlighted that they have received a lot of feedback from the commercial developers and property owners in Boston that “the incentive that the program puts out are not enough to cover the cost, the true cost of converting

a building” (Development Community key informant, Boston). This is primarily because the “floor plates on these old buildings are massive... and [the buildings] are just very different from how houses or housing complexes are built. So there are a lot of concerns” (Development Community key informant, Boston). As a result, there is “an enormous cost [for conversions], and the tax abatements that have been offered do not offset the enormous cost” of conducting the conversion (Development Community key informant, Boston). Similarly, the development community in Montreal similarly expressed concern over the financial feasibility of these conversions and cited the lack of sufficient (in their perspective) incentives to support developers conducting these conversions.

Therefore, it is apparent that office-to-residential conversions offer an exciting possibility to help increase the downtown population in a more environmentally sustainable way; however, the specifics of these municipal programs must be evaluated in greater depth. It is also important to note the two conversion projects currently in the approval process will be paramount to any future evaluation of success of office-to-residential conversions and, if successful, may provide the confidence other developers and financiers need to pursue said development projects (even under current incentives).

4.2.3 Implications of a Downtown Residential Population

It thus clear that the presence of a downtown residential population is significant for overall downtown vitality, economic activity, and general activity outside of traditional working hours. Additionally, both Montreal and Boston are investing heavily, in terms of pursuing new regulatory frameworks and office-to-residential conversions, to increase and support this need for residents in the downtown. However, a growing population in the downtown does not come without additional implications and potential complications. Three particularly significant implications were identified in the key informant interviews, and each will be discussed in turn. This includes the need for more affordable housing (not just market rate), the need for increased social infrastructure, and the impact a growing residential population has on municipal finance.

Implication 1: The need for affordable housing

While all key informants discussed the positive impact that an increase in housing will have on the overall vitality of the downtown, the Community Group key informant from Montreal strongly emphasized and nuanced the need for housing to not only encompass market-rate housing, but also include affordable and family housing. However, part of the current challenge with building affordable housing regards the current real estate development environment and market as “the construction

costs have been rising so much that anything new is going to be quite expensive and developers are using the downtown as a way to get more and more high rises; more and more luxury developments" (Community Group key informant, Montreal). This emphasis on luxury apartments is troubling, especially considering that there is a significant disparity in the amount of social housing present in the downtown. Indeed, much of the "Peter McGill district³ is at 2% social housing whereas the whole city of Montreal is at [an average of] 5% and some places are even up to 20%" (Community Group key informant, Montreal). Further contributing to the unaffordability of the downtown is the presence of Airbnb's which further reduces the total number of available units for residents of downtown. Additionally, due to the high cost of construction and land in the downtown and desire for maximum returns on the open market, developers prioritize smaller-sized apartment units; that is, primarily studio and one-bedroom luxury apartments.

The development and introduction of family and affordable units can further support the overall economic vitality of the neighborhood. Specifically, the Community Group key informant from Montreal highlighted that if prices continue to rise in and around the downtown, downtown Montreal faces the prospects that "coffee shops may have to close because they can't find a barista because the barista can't live close enough to the coffee shop to work there". Therefore, for the downtown to truly support a residential population and for it to support overall economic activity in the downtown, an increase in affordable and family units must be prioritized.

These high costs also importantly hinder the City's ability to build and provide much needed affordable housing in the downtown. Affordable housing capital stacks are complex and often require financial support from the City to help buy the land. However, high development costs coupled with high land costs in the downtown means that "we [the City] cannot buy all the land downtown - it is \$11,000 per square meter, so extremely expensive. So if you want to buy a piece of land to, for example, build 100 units, we are talking about at least 10 to 15 million dollars" (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal). To address this, the City is seeking the financial support from the Provincial and Federal government to purchase the land and then "we [the City] can give the land to some cooperative or non-profit organization to build affordable housing downtown" (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal).

Implication 2: The need for increased social infrastructure

Residents require different social and public services than commercial establishments, office

³ More precisely, this refers to the Peter-McGill Table de Quartier district. This includes most of the downtown along with some additional neighborhoods to the West and to the North. However, for the purposes of this comparison, the boundaries are similar enough to compare.

buildings (and workers), and tourists. As such, if the residential population of downtown increases, then it is paramount that the amount and quality of social infrastructure and social amenities increases representatively as well. For example, in Montreal currently “in terms of public amenities, there is no public school right now... and without schools, parks, public recreational facilities, public spaces, [places] where people can enjoy themselves, it makes it hard for people to use the space as a neighborhood all the time” (Community Group key informant, Montreal). This need for social infrastructure and public amenities, and the planning and financing that is required, must therefore go hand-in-hand with all current and future increases in the residential population.

Implication 3: The impact a growing residential population has on municipal finance

The final key implication to a growing residential population in the downtown is the negative impact that this will have on overall municipal finance and the city’s budget. Simply, in both Montreal and Boston, as well as most cities in North America, the city relies heavily on property taxes as one of the primary and major sources of income. However, not all properties pay equal rates of property tax; in fact, commercial property tax rates are significantly higher than residential rates. As a result, both Montreal and Boston rely heavily on the downtown, with its strong commercial base, as a significant contributor to the city’s overall budget. To quantify the difference in property taxes in Montreal, for every dollar of the municipal value of the property, residential properties pay one cent per dollar in tax, but “when it is commercial, it is three and a half cents” (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal) and thus the city receives three times more money in taxes from commercial, industrial, or office buildings than residential. The impact of this is significant as “if you convert all the office space into residential, you are going to diminish by 300% the tax revenue from downtown, which is extremely, extremely, important in terms of money for the city. This will be enough to really jeopardize our budget” (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal).

Despite this potential impact on the budget, the Urban Planning key informant from Montreal emphasized that the City’s priorities are still primarily housing-related, emphasizing both the housing crisis more broadly, the rise in the unhoused population, and the need for increased residents in the downtown. But, this does mean that a substantial decision has to be made between balancing the municipal budget and attempting to build more housing: “do we want to receive the [commercial] property tax to equilibrate the budget, or do we want to transform commercial offices into residential so people can have a roof over their head? Obviously the second choice is the only choice we can make, but the consequence is that we are going to lose a lot of money and our budget is already really, really tight” (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal). The challenges associated with striking this equilibrium between balancing the budget and providing necessary services and housing cannot be

understated, however one solution does become apparent - the city transition away from being so dependent on property tax revenue. Put simply, “we need to be less and less dependent on property tax. We need to diversify our social revenue and this is a long negotiation we’re having for years and years with the government of Quebec to maybe have some part of the sales tax. So for example, they could give us like a percentage of the TVQ (sales tax) which is more dynamic. So when the economy is going up, the tax revenue is going up. This will help us a lot and will be more stable than the property tax” (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal).

4.3 Key Finding III: Downtowns as Destinations

As seen, the presence of a downtown residential population, bearing in mind its implications, does serve a critical role in a downtown’s current and future vitality. Despite this finding, the majority of key informants still emphasized the importance of the downtown as a destination; while a residential population in the downtown will help support local businesses, shift the economy away from one centered and dependent upon office workers, and help downtowns become more complete neighborhoods, it is still imperative that downtowns maintain their status as a place people visit. This includes visitation from both local populations (from within the same municipality or area) and from tourists. Simply, without drawing in visitors or individuals from elsewhere, what differentiates the downtown from any other neighborhood? However, almost all key informants discussed the changing role of the downtown and the changing definition of what it means to be a destination and what kind of destinations people are now looking for. It is important to note qualitative differences in the discussion of downtowns as destinations between Boston and Montreal. As the policy analysis in Chapter 3 highlighted, Montreal’s plan is more focused on public space initiatives to increase the experiences present in the downtown to help draw more people in. Boston, in contrast, is focused more heavily on regulatory and economic strategies and on increasing the residential population. This difference is similarly present in the interviews, albeit to a lesser degree; while both cities do emphasize the need for the downtown to be an experiential destination, the key informants from Montreal are more explicit about it.

In Boston, the Boston Downtown BID developed a new program, Level Up Downtown, to help revitalize downtown by supporting emerging entrepreneurs and creatives and help reduce office vacancies. According to the Downtown Boston website, “Level Up Downtown is committed to establishing downtown Boston as a hub for entertainment and nightlife, enriched with the city’s emerging creative practitioners and modern retail offerings, making it a prime destination for residents, office workers, and visitors” (Downtown Boston | Level Up Downtown, n.d.). What this program shows is an effort

to recognize and promote the downtown as a destination, but through new efforts and initiatives, such as popups and public art, rather than just drawing office workers in. Indeed, this initiative is representative of a new direction for the Downtown Boston BID because “we had not really had [this] focus [before]” and while “supporting our members [is our] primary goal, diversifying who is downtown and the retail mix” (BIA key informant, Boston) is also an important priority for the BID.

Indeed, the BID, who’s mandate it is to support the downtown businesses, is “really focused on the things we can leverage to encourage that diversity of people on the street... but also people on the street for different reasons. [This means] more public art, more pop-ups, more events, you know, paying attention to all that kind of programming, which people really do want to see” (BIA key informant, Boston). So as illustrated by this quote, and the broader emphasis the BID places on drawing people to the downtown through the use of events and street-level programming, is the recognition that people are seeking experiences in the downtown. Therefore, to draw people to the downtown, the area needs to provide more experiences - more events, more pop-ups, and more programming. This becomes especially important when considering the changes to work in downtowns. Prior to the pandemic, the BID’s programming (to draw people to the downtown) primarily focused on the “nine to five workforce” and thus “we had a lot of programming at lunchtime and when the weather got nice... programming after work” (BIA key informant, Boston). While downtowns are still key destinations for office work and “there is still a place for some of that [9-5 programming], our focus has become much more destination focused and bigger events... destination events... [and] economic activities to getting different groups of people coming down and visiting” (BIA key informant, Boston). As a result, it becomes apparent that the downtown Boston BID is increasingly recognizing the importance of, and promoting, downtown as a destination for experiences.

In Montreal, the key informants highlighted that the downtown is starting to recover from the pandemic and current footfall data does leave them relatively optimistic of the downtown’s future. But it is important to recognize that the purpose of the trip to the downtown may be different, especially considering the impact that pandemic had on retail and commercial vitality and vacancy in the downtown. As a result, the question then becomes, “do [these visitors] just go to walk [in the downtown], or are they spending money?... Did they entirely change their behavior and stop shopping? [Do they now] treat downtown more like an entertainment area? We need to study this more. But it is possible that we have to evolve the mix of commerce and entertainment downtown to face the new reality” (Urban Planning key informant, Montreal). In terms of what this ‘new reality’ might look like in downtown Montreal, the urban planner key informant highlighted that “we have to offer downtown what they cannot find elsewhere. We need to make it a destination... not only because of the commercial offer, but also the animation on the street” (Urban Planning key informant,

Montreal). This also includes new experiences, like restaurants and food markets that they cannot experience elsewhere.

Additionally, the City of Montreal, and the downtown more specifically, is leveraging the attraction power and success of festivals to draw people to the downtown. These outdoor experiences serve as an important example of the type of destination downtown Montreal is aiming to become; that is, more of an experiential destination. For instance, “all those outdoor festivals is part of the lifestyle of [downtown]” and “the Jazz Festival, just for laughs festival” among others represent the “attraction power that [Downtown] Montreal has over tourism” (Development Community key informant, Montreal). These festivals, and outdoor activities more generally, are now being used as year round programming and as a source of winter activity as well as “all those activities that we have, we are even doing them almost year round. There are some outdoor shows in the middle of winter like Igloofest” (Development Community key informant, Montreal). Importantly, these outdoor activities, or experiences, help to “bring life to Montreal” and these experiences are what distinguish the downtown from other parts of the city and surrounding areas. These activities, or experiences, represent exactly the type of destination that downtown can become. Simply, “people are gathering up and going to festivals. And no one really is doing that in the suburbs. All those festivals are in downtown Montreal. They are not in Laval. They are not in Longueuil” (Development Community key informant, Montreal).


Similar to the experiences reiterated by the Downtown Boston BID, the Montreal downtown as an experiential destination really comes to bear in the downtown Montreal SDC’s work. This finding is significant because the mandate of the SDCs is to support their members — the businesses and retailers. By emphasizing the promotion and support of downtown as a destination, particularly highlighting the unique experiences it can offer visitors, it underscores the economic potential and significance of maintaining downtown’s status as a destination. It also emphasizes the importance of shaping downtown into a destination that directly aligns with the experiences it offers. Specifically, the SDC “invests in... music programming and supporting various festivals that happen on our territory” (Development Community key informant, Montreal). The main goal or objective of these investments and efforts is to “generat[e] foot traffic and ensure that consumers and visitors and residents and workers, all the types of users that we have downtown, are having a good experience”. The key word here is experience as it highlights that one of the goals or objectives of the SDC is to draw people to downtown, to generate that ‘foot traffic’ through the programming of experiences. The SDC is shifting in this way because,

“Our data demonstrates or shows that the main reason for users

to be downtown... is for entertainment. Whether they are here for work or to study or to shop, they are all here because they want to have a good time. And they want to have a good time while working, have a good time while shopping, they want to have a good time while living here. A 'good time' and 'entertainment' means a lot of [different] things. It does not necessarily mean going to a club or to see a show. It means going for a walk, enjoying public arts, enjoying the restaurants, and enjoying the public spaces. That is the number one reason for them being here" - Development Community key informant, Montreal

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the need for downtowns to be more experiential, but this transition is not solely a pandemic-related consequence. Rather, this "transformation... has accelerated with the pandemic" (Development Community key informant, Montreal). And perhaps more importantly, the changes to the geography of work that the pandemic accelerated; that is, the reduced number of office workers to the downtown, made the need to invest in the downtown as an experiential destination more critical - "you could be lazier pre pandemic, in the sense that not investing in experiential amenities would be mitigated by the fact that a lot of foot traffic would be present by obligation, [by] people [who] have to go to the office from 9 to 5... Now the pandemic made that non-negotiable" (Development Community key informant, Montreal). This is primarily because the downtown no longer has the "effortless traffic that was there by obligation" and as a result it made it easier to prove that downtowns need to start investing more in providing experiences to draw people to the downtown.

This shift towards a focus on downtown as an experiential destination is also being recognized by the downtown businesses themselves. Indeed, the SDC reported that their member businesses are beginning to recognize the importance of providing experiential opportunities in the downtown rather than attempting to maintain its traditional role as serving the nine-to-five office workers. Indeed, "many of the same businesses that would have said it's useless to invest in green spaces and public art [are now starting to] say maybe it is a good idea to start beautifying public space" (Development Community key informant, Montreal). This is a significant finding because originally "the first reaction was to force people to come back downtown, which obviously did not work" (Development Community key informant, Montreal). By forcing people back to the downtown, this primarily refers to the office workers - to force office workers back to the office. But this thinking fails to recognize the existing trends that were moving away from full time office-based work even prior to the pandemic.



Therefore, it becomes increasingly apparent that the 'future of downtowns' does need to maintain its status as a destination, but not a destination in its traditional sense (an employment destination) but rather a destination based on experiences. This will help bring visitors to the downtown and support the economic and commercial vitality of the area.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This SRP sought to uncover and better understand North American downtown cores in a post-COVID-19 environment - what challenges downtowns are facing, why they are facing these specific types of challenges, how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted these challenges, and, most importantly, how downtown actors are responding to and addressing said challenges and happenings in downtowns. The goal of this endeavor is to contribute towards a more holistic understanding of downtowns, one that considers various viewpoints, professions, and perspectives in order to allow for more evidence-based and informed recommendations for downtown planning and development.

To do so, Chapter 2 presented a wide-ranging literature review in order to properly frame this SRP within contemporary understandings of, put simply, what is happening in North American downtowns and what should be done. This literature review specifically highlighted the need to take a micro-perspective or approach that examines the local conditions and regulatory frameworks that downtowns are situated within. A micro or more localized perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of how the identified challenges and trends are experienced in the city and by different actors. Importantly, this micro-approach then enables more specific recommendations for future downtown planning that consider the specificities of each city. In response to this need, this SRP conducted a comparative case study analysis of downtown Montreal and downtown Boston. Chapter 3 presented the key findings from a comparative policy and content analysis of a downtown revitalization plan and Chapter 4 the findings from in-depth interviews with key informants from a range of professions involved in downtown planning and development.

Ultimately, the comparative policy analysis resulted in a number of important key findings, particularly regarding the ways that each city is conceptualizing the challenges that their downtowns are facing and the different strategies to address said challenges. Of particular importance are the findings relating to the role of a residential population in supporting both overall downtown vitality and the housing crisis more broadly. Additionally, the case study analysis identified the need for downtowns to change the *type* of destination that they offer visitors from one that relies on economic activity and office work, towards one that is based on experiences. This understanding leads to conclusions, policy recommendations, and implications that aim to guide downtown planning and development towards a more vibrant future.

Conclusion I: The role of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to move beyond a pre-pandemic conceptualization of downtowns

The literature review largely highlights that many of the challenges downtowns are experiencing actually find roots in trends and processes that began long before the pandemic

(Li & Rodriguez, 2024; Shearmur, 2017, 2021; Siddiqui, 2018). However, there was an identified gap that connects the changes in work behavior prior to the pandemic to the ways the pandemic exacerbated or accelerated these trends and, specifically, how this has come to bear on cities and other downtown actors. This SRP found that downtowns were already witnessing the consequences of a changing geography of work and dependence on office workers prior to the pandemic. With that said, the role of the pandemic in accelerating these trends should not be understated. The challenges associated with remote work and office vacancy, as discussed by the key informants and as highlighted in the policy analysis, was largely experienced at this current intensity and at this time due to the pandemic. However, both Montreal and Boston were implementing plans and measures aimed at 'revitalizing' or 'reimagining' the downtown beyond its traditional nine-to-five role prior to the pandemic and associated changes. The pandemic can thus be understood as having a dual role: it both accelerated and exacerbated the reality of remote and hybrid work along with their associated challenges, while also hastening the recognition among all downtown actors that this shift in downtown dynamics and associated uses is necessary.

This SRP argues that understanding the role of the pandemic in this way is critical because it emphasizes that cities cannot wait and hope for the "status quo" of downtowns to return. The future of downtown areas is not a return to the pre-pandemic downtown because the pre-pandemic downtown also needed to reckon with the reality of a changing geography of work and associated changes in downtown uses. As a result, it becomes apparent why understanding the challenges downtowns are facing, not just in the short term as a reaction to the pandemic, but the roots of these trends, is significant. Simply, a misunderstanding of said challenges leads to misdirected policies that will not address the challenges at hand. A "return" to office work as seen and experienced prior to the pandemic, for example, still requires land use and policy changes to support the downtown amidst changing office usage. It is thus recommended that all future downtown-related policy and planning recognize this role of the pandemic and aim not to guide the downtown return to its pre-pandemic status, but to expand into a new direction that recognizes the importance of a downtown residential population and the role of the downtown as an experiential destination.

Conclusion II: The future of downtowns is mixed-use

The policy analysis of the two downtown revitalization plans revealed that although both cities have slightly different perceptions of their challenges and consequently pursue different strategies, they share a common concern of increasing downtown activity beyond traditional working hours. Boston places particular emphasis on the regulatory and economic strategies to boost economic activity and minimize regulatory barriers to development. Additionally, Boston focuses specifically on addressing

their most frequently cited challenge of office vacancies through incentives or conversions. The key findings from the interviews largely nuance these findings further and highlight that much of the regulatory work that Boston is pursuing to update the zoning and development process seeks to accelerate the transition of the downtown into a more residential neighborhood with a more diversified economic base. This is considering the reality that, as stated in Chapter 4, a downtown residential population is critically important to the overall vitality of a downtown area.

Meanwhile, Montreal's downtown revitalization plan is primarily concerned with diversifying the reasons people visit downtown beyond work-related activities through the use of cultural, built environment and public space, and mobility strategies. These strategies primarily focus on improving the public realm to increase visitation and activity in the downtown. The key informant interviews then provided greater perspective on this goal and associated strategies; namely, that downtowns do need to maintain their role as a destination, but that the type of destination has changed to become one that is more focused on providing experiences.

Therefore, it is concluded that the future of downtowns must be more mixed-use; however, it must still distinguish itself from other mixed-use neighborhoods. This means, at its most simplest, that it is an area that maintains (and supports) a lively and healthy residential population while also serving as an experiential destination. Indeed, when asked about their idealized future of their downtown, the majority of key informants clearly stated their belief in a mixed-use future for downtowns.

These findings largely confirm contemporary discussions in the literature regarding downtowns (Hutson and Orlando, 2023). Importantly, however, this SRP confirms these findings from a qualitative perspective that focuses on the local experiences of those involved in actively planning and developing the downtown. Meanwhile, Leong et al., (2023) found that, rather than focusing on creating more mixed-use spaces, downtowns need to emphasize diversifying their economic base to reduce the dependence on specialized professional services. While this SRP did not find this to be a particularly strong point of concern among the key informants, the emphasis on converting office buildings to new uses and diversifying the retail mix discussed in the policy analysis does generally agree with Leong et al.'s (2023) findings. In this way, this SRP, and its qualitative and micro-level approach, highlights that while cities are primarily focused on diversifying their uses in the downtown (increasing the residential population and creating more experiences) they are also concerned with diversifying their economic base. It is thus concluded that the future does still need to be more mixed-use, but that this mixity does need to extend to the business type as well.

It is imperative to note, however, that this "mixity" refers not only to a mix between residential and

commercial, but also to the qualitative differences in terms of mixed incomes, types of housing, and commercial offerings. As found in Chapter 4, it is critical that cities not only emphasize the development of market-rate and luxury housing in the downtown, but also support the development of social and affordable housing. Additionally, the increase in housing alone is not sufficient to support a residential population, and thus efforts must be made to include a greater 'mixture' of commercial offerings and social and public institutions to better support a growing downtown population. However, and as elaborated in Chapter 4, there are a number of significant implications that hinder residential development in downtown, such as the city's dependence on commercial property taxes, and thus complicate the potential for a mixed-use future.

Policy Recommendations and Implications for Future Research regarding a Mixed-Use Future

To overcome these challenges and implications, this SRP puts forth a number of policy recommendations that, coupled with the policies outlined in the downtown revitalization plans, will help to enable more mixed-use development and support a healthy residential population. It is important to note that these recommendations vary in their feasibility and scale, but are generally broad in nature. This SRP does not present a nuanced discussion of these recommendations, nor an implementation plan for Boston or Montreal, but recommends that future research and policy consider these recommendations:

1. The role of property tax for overall municipal finance and budgets must be reevaluated and reconsidered. It was highlighted that this is a conversation that the City of Montreal is already engaging with the Province of Quebec on, but further emphasis needs to be placed, in both Montreal and Boston (and all other cities), on removing the dependence on property taxes as a primary source of the municipal budget. By alleviating the dependence the City has on property tax, it eliminates the City's dependence on commercial and office uses in the downtown as a key source of their municipal financing, which then allows for a greater emphasis on the development of (more affordable) housing, and development of alternative, and experiential, uses. It is recommended that future research evaluate the plausibility and feasibility of this changing municipal tax and finance structure.
2. To truly support a residential population in the downtown, there must be a greater emphasis on creating more affordable housing options. Many of the key informants recognized that the development of housing in the downtown is not just to support overall downtown economic vitality, but also in response to the overarching housing and cost of living crisis. However, high land costs, high construction costs, and limited space in the downtown coupled by the presence of multinational firms and international money in downtowns leads to the reality that most of

the housing in downtown is small in scale and high in cost. In response, it is recommended that the City emphasize the creation of family and more affordable housing and to eliminate the possibility for developers to pay out of affordable and family housing requirements. This will ensure that the downtown, like any other neighborhood in the city, becomes a more livable neighborhood. Additionally, it is recommended that policy makers and researchers alike pursue additional measures and research to limit the number of short-term rentals in the downtown core.

Conclusion III: Downtowns must consider all users and residents, both the housed and the unhoused

It is important to recognize that in both Montreal and Boston, as is the case in many North American cities, the downtown is an important space for the unhoused. While this did not emerge as a key finding in the key informant interviews and the two municipal policies did not discuss this, it is critical that any future downtown planning and research consider this reality. Indeed, a number of the key informants mentioned the tensions of cohabitation between the housed and the unhoused and the impact that this has on the wellbeing of housed residents, unhoused residents, and the ground-floor commercial establishments. While this exploration and analysis was outside of the scope of this SRP, it is imperative that any future research on downtowns and any future downtown planning considerations and policies also consider, recognize, and support the unhoused residents of downtown. As such, this SRP presents three policy implications and recommendations for future research exploration that will help fill the gaps presented by this SRP and contribute towards more equitable downtown futures:

1. Downtown public space development should recognize different users of the space. This means that inclusive design principles should be emphasized to ensure that the public spaces can be enjoyed and used by different users with different needs.
2. While inclusive architecture and public space design is important in ensuring that downtown spaces are welcoming to different users of the space, it is equally important to balance this with sufficient investment in permanent and supportive housing solutions for the currently unhoused residents of downtown. As mentioned by the key informants, cohabitation is often difficult between different groups downtown, and permanent and supportive housing not only helps to house unsheltered individuals, but also can help with overall downtown vitality. Future research and policy on downtowns should prioritize evaluating supportive housing initiatives and developing new supportive housing in and around the downtown.
3. While a community group was consulted as a key informant, this SRP did not engage with unhoused residents or with homeless service providers downtown. As such, this SRP recommends and

encourages that future research fills this gap and prioritizes conducting key informant interviews with unhoused residents of downtown areas and homeless service providers or other relevant service providers. This approach ensures that the needs of the unhoused are equally considered in future downtown planning.

In conclusion, downtowns are facing challenges and as the city-centers, many of the city's broader challenges are manifested or experienced in the downtown. Despite these challenges, or perhaps as a result of these challenges, cities and other downtown actors are presented with a unique opportunity to think more critically about what downtowns are, who they serve, and how we can get there. This SRP highlighted the importance of considering a holistic approach towards downtown planning and futures, one that considers various viewpoints, professions, and needs to argue that the future of downtown is a more livable and mixed-use downtown. That is, a downtown that recognizes the importance of residents of all types and with various needs; but, that also recognizes that downtowns must still maintain a destination for many. The type of destination, however, has shifted towards more experiential activities rather than purely commercial and professional.

Appendix

Policy Analysis Codebook:

Challenges:

- Covid-19 / pandemic challenges
- Historical legacy challenges
- Offices / office vacancy challenges
- Work from home / remote work challenges
- Transit / transport / mobility challenges
- Retail / business challenges
- Equity / Affordability challenges
- Development challenges

Assets:

- Geographical assets
- Economic assets
- Cultural assets
- Residential Development
- Mobility / transit assets
- Density assets

Solutions / Strategies:

- Winter / all seasons strategy
- Cultural strategy
- Development / density strategy
- Residential strategy
- Built environment / public space strategy
- Mobility strategy
- Placemaking strategy
- Tourism strategy
- Mixed use strategy
- Night-time / 24hr strategy
- Fill Office Vacancy strategy
- Economic strategy
- Regulatory strategy

- Beautification strategy
- Intervention zones

Goals:

- Live, work, play
- Economic goals
- Security goals
- Cultural goals
- Tourism / attraction goals
- Residential / density goals
- Transportation / mobility goals
- Human scale goals
- Affordability goals
- Equity goals
- Environmental / Green goals
- Democratic / Participatory Goals
- Development / Investment goals

Procedural:

- Public-Private collaboration
- Measures of success
- Measures of evaluation
- Collaboration with other policy/ dept
- Defining Downtown
- Execution

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CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

REB File Number: 23-12-036
Project Title: Reimagining Downtowns: Evaluating Historical Legacies and Contemporary Strategies for a Vital Downtown Future
Student Principal Investigator: Toma Beit-Arie
Department: Urban Planning, School of
Supervisor Name: Professor Richard Shearmur
Sponsor/Funding Agency (if applicable): -
Research Team (if applicable):

Name	Affiliation
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Approval Period:

FROM	TO
18-Dec-2023	17-Dec-2024

The **REB-1** reviewed and approved this project by Delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans.

* Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described.

* The PI must inform the REB if there is a termination or interruption of their affiliation with the University. The McGill REB approval is no longer valid once the PI is no longer a student or employee.

* An **Amendment** form must be used to submit any proposed modifications to the approved research. Modifications to the approved research must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented. Changes to funding or adding new funding to a previously unfunded study must be submitted as an Amendment.

* A **Continuing Review** form must be submitted before the above expiry date. Research cannot be conducted without a current ethics approval. Submit 2-3 weeks ahead of the expiry date.

A total of 5 renewals are permitted after which time a new application will need to be submitted.

* A **Termination** form must be submitted to inform the REB when a project has been completed or terminated.

* A **Reportable New Information** form must be submitted to report any unanticipated issues that may increase the risk level to participants or that may have other ethical implications or to report any protocol deviations that did not receive prior REB approval.

* The REB must be promptly notified of any new information that may affect the welfare or consent of participants.

* The REB must be notified of any suspension or cancellation imposed by a funding agency or regulatory body that is related to this study.

* The REB must be notified of any findings that may have ethical implications or may affect the decision of the REB.

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