

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this research was to understand how the City of St. Catharines attempted to address the challenges brought on by the decline of the manufacturing sector and lack of investment into its historic urban centre. Once known as a ‘General Motors’ city, St. Catharines experienced a significant decline in manufacturing during the 1990’s and early 2000’s. The rapid loss of jobs and number of manufacturing firms highlighted the City’s lack of investment into its existing downtown core since the 1960’s and 1970’s era of suburbanization. As the City expanded following the end of World War II, investment and new development got diverted to the periphery of the urban core, where land was cheap and abundant. As the people moved away from urban centre to the suburbs, the businesses and services that once supported them followed. This resulted in an overall bleak economic landscape in the downtown.

Research was conducted using a mixed method approach that included: document content analysis, quantitative analysis, and one key informant interview. The bulk of the research was completed by analyzing the content of numerous primary and secondary documents. The primary sources of data included: planning policy from the various levels of government, along with municipal and regional economic development based publications. Secondary sources of data included: previously recorded interviews and press conferences, promotional videos, published work on the Niagara Region stemming from newspaper articles, non-academic journals, and books. In addition to analyzing the content of written documents, the research also used descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the economic and demographic profile of the City and the various trends that have taken place. To confirm the findings, and fill any gaps in knowledge, one key-informant interview was conducted with a government official who has been involved at the forefront of the City’s downtown revitalization efforts.

The findings of this research conclude that the City has addressed the symptoms of a declining downtown by attempting to divert public and private investment through planning policy by reimagining the downtown as a Creative Cluster. This initiative was driven by two key policy documents: *Energizing Niagara’s Wine Country Communities*, and the *Downtown Creative Cluster Master Plan*. The first policy document had identified St. Catharines to be the primary urban centre within the Wine Region concept that would feature attractions and experiences to

cater to a primarily upper-class clientele that were visiting the growing Niagara wine industry. The second plan had been drafted to provide direction for the City to reimagine the downtown as a place that would attract young people, tourists, and private investment.

On the ground, the fruition of these policies were primarily driven through a mass amount of public investment aimed at supporting and growing the arts community. At the backbone of the City's efforts to revitalize the downtown was Brock University's decision to expand their campus by revitalizing a historic manufacturing building to house the new Marilyn A. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts. The second major part of the revitalization was the joint venture between the City and Province to construct the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre. Combined, these two major investments totaled approximately \$110 million, with a majority of funding coming from public coffers. To add to the revitalization efforts, the City had invested an additional \$50 million to construct a new state of the art spectator arena, adjacent to the two arts facilities mentioned above.

These findings indicate that St. Catharines has followed the footsteps of many cities across North America and Europe who have addressed lack of historical investment into downtown centres and the loss of manufacturing by attempting to diversify the local economy through public investments and marketing campaigns. These attempts were made to retain young people, market themselves to outside investors, and provide sources of culture and entertainment to tourists (Mallack, 2018). The findings also highlight the importance of 'Eds and Meds' in economic development activities.