

James Takeo's vision for Downtown Welland to life.

The Big Idea

Downtown Welland does not need to copy other cities. It already has great history, the canal, arts, and strong community roots. Revitalization isn't about one giant project—it's about getting people working together to make downtown clean, lively, welcoming, and full of opportunities.

The 8-Step Action Plan

1. Create a "Doers" Task Force

- **What it is:** A small, action-focused group of local business owners, residents, artists, and city staff.
- **How it works:** Instead of endless studies, this team meets every two weeks to tackle immediate fixes—like cleaning up problem spots, filling empty buildings, and tracking real results on a public dashboard.

2. Fill Empty Storefronts

- **What it is:** Turning vacant ground floors into busy, active spaces.
- **How it works:**
 - Offer temporary, low-cost "pop-up" leases for artists, bakeries, and craft makers to test ideas without huge upfront risk.
 - Help landlords turn unused upper floors into downtown apartments, bringing more residents and customers into the core.

3. Build the Welland Arts & Heritage District

- **What it is:** Celebrating what makes Welland unique instead of letting buildings sit neglected.
- **How it works:**
 - Connect key landmarks like the Welland Museum, Central Fire Hall, and the Floating Stage with clear signs and walking paths.
 - Add colorful murals and public art to make walking down the street an enjoyable experience.

4. Make It Cleaner, Safer, and Welcoming

- **What it is:** Fixing visible neglect while treating vulnerable people with compassion.
- **How it works:**
 - **Downtown Clean Team:** Dedicated staff or summer ambassadors to sweep sidewalks, clean graffiti, and care for planters daily.
 - **Better Lighting:** Brighter, warmer lights on side streets and alleyways.
 - **Community Care:** Partner directly with local outreach and housing services so people struggling with addiction or homelessness get real help.

5. Give People a Reason to Visit Every Week

- **What it is:** Focusing on small, regular events all year round rather than relying on just one or two big festivals.
- **How it works:**
 - Host simple, recurring events like monthly art walks, outdoor maker markets, open-mic nights, and sidewalk sales.
 - Make event permits fast and cheap so community groups can easily run gatherings.

6. Connect the Canal to the Core

- **What it is:** Turning the recreational canal into the front door for downtown.
- **How it works:**
 - Add clear trail signs and bike repair stands pointing trail users toward downtown coffee shops and restaurants.
 - Encourage waterfront dining, pop-up patios, and "paddle/pedal to patio" specials.

7. Team Up to Share Costs

- **What it is:** Doing more without blowing the city budget.
- **How it works:** Partner with Niagara College (for student energy and design projects), regional housing programs, and local service clubs to share resources, volunteers, and funding.

8. Change the Narrative

- **What it is:** Shifting the conversation from "what's wrong" to "what's happening."
- **How it works:** Regularly highlight local shop owners, artists, and newly opened spaces on social media and news outlets. When people see momentum, confidence returns.

The 3-Year Roadmap

Year 1: Quick Wins & Clean Up

- Launch the Task Force
- Start rapid sidewalk cleanups and better lighting
- Open the first 3 to 5 pop-up shops
- Kick off monthly community events

Year 2: Connecting the Pieces

- Launch the Downtown Arts District with murals and signs
- Add clear walking links between canal trails and Main Street
- Help property owners convert upper floors into apartments

Year 3: A Thriving Core

- Most empty storefronts filled with lasting businesses
- A steady stream of residents, visitors, and students daily
- A downtown that feels safe, active, and distinctly Welland