KINGSTON



A DOWNTOWN CONFERENCE CENTRE FOR KINGSTON

A CASE FOR SUPPORT

The importance of tourism for Kingston

Kingston depends on tourism. It's an important part of the local economy, and a significant employer. In 2025, 2.65 million visitors to Kingston spent $538.9 million and booked 650,000 hotel room nights. Tourism employment exceeded 4,400 jobs, and taxes generated from tourism spending represented $64.6 million federally, $72.7 million provincially, and $24.8 million locally.

Tourism's different sectors – leisure, business events, sport & wellness, travel trade, film production, and music – each bring visitors to the city, whether for a day, for an overnight, or for multiple nights. In 2025, 54% of visitors to Kingston came for a day. But overnight visitors contribute much more to the local community, staying in local hotels, dining in local restaurants, shopping in local stores, and visiting more local sights and attractions. While overnight visitors represent just 46% of all visits, they account for 82% of total visitor spending.

The economic importance of business events

Of the different tourism sectors, business event travelers in Canada on average stay longer (3.5 nights) and spend more ($1,870 per trip) than leisure travelers, and 55% of them extend their stay beyond the business event itself (Global Business Travel Association Canada, May 2025 and August 2025).



Kingston is a highly sought-after location for national business events. Demand for conference space in Kingston now exceeds the supply.

Business event travelers also tend to visit mid-week and throughout the year, while leisure traveler activity is concentrated on weekends and in summer months. This higher spending and year-round visitation by business event travelers helps to stabilize the local economy, especially for accommodation, food and beverage, and retail businesses.

Destination Canada estimates business event economic impact spending at $47 billion annually, representing one-third of the total for tourism in Canada. Yet in Kingston, business events represent only 3% of tourism's estimated economic impact!

How do organizations select destinations for business events

Organizers plan provincial and national meetings and conferences anywhere from one year to five years in advance. They solicit hosting proposals from destinations they deem appropriate based on primary factors such as destination accessibility, accommodation availability, meeting venue capacity, and affordability. ("2026 Global Cvent Planner Sourcing Report – Destination Selection: Key Factors to Consider When Determining a Location")

Kingston's location on the Highway 401 and VIA Rail Canada corridors, combined with its downtown hotel inventory and waterfront experience, align well with these key destination-selection criteria. With a central position on Canada's most significant population corridor between Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal, Kingston has compelling accessibility, accommodation, and affordability advantages:

- Kingston is one of very few mid-sized Canadian cities located along Canada's busiest highway and its primary passenger rail corridor, thus providing direct access to Toronto, Ottawa, and Montréal while offering a safe, compelling, and walkable downtown convention experience.
- More than half of Canada's population lives within a one-day drive of Kingston, positioning the city to capture regional association, education, government and corporate meetings.
- With 25+ daily VIA Rail departures and arrivals connecting delegates to Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal, Kingston is one of the only mid-sized Canadian meetings destinations where a delegate can realistically arrive without a car from three of Canada's largest and most important business markets.
- With an average daily rate for hotel accommodation of $172, Kingston offers significant cost savings to business event planners and attendees versus downtown Toronto (105% higher), downtown Ottawa (41% higher), and downtown Montreal (57% higher) – (CBRE, Hotels|Valuations & Advisory Services – National Market Report, June 2026)

In addition, corporate, government, and association event planners know that delegate attendance relies heavily on a destination's appeal and the unique experiences it can offer. In the association sector particularly, conferences generate much-needed revenue and event registration corresponds directly to a destination's overall appeal.

What stops organizations from booking their business events in Kingston?

Kingston has so much to offer as a business event destination, including our central location between Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal, our historic and walkable downtown, our beautiful and accessible waterfront, our expansive dining scene, and our vibrant cultural life. What we lack is a centrally located and scalable event venue that can accommodate the complex needs of today's medium and large business events with 400 or more delegates.



Kingston's location between major cities, its walkable downtown, and many amenities are attractive for conference planners.

he vast majority of the business event requests for proposal received by Tourism Kingston specify a downtown location. Organizers want their delegates to be within walking distance of all that they need and desire to do. This being so, and with our current downtown hosting infrastructure, Kingston is limited to events of, at most, 300 delegates. And to do that, we must divide guest room accommodation and meeting spaces between two, and sometimes three, hotel properties. So not only are we limited by the size of the events we can host, but also by the complexity of planning.

What we're losing

Between 2023 and 2026 alone, Tourism Kingston lost out on 29 major events representing 10,346 business visitors, 24,107 hotel room nights, and $17,229,385 in direct economic impact. All had meeting space requirements that Kingston could not accommodate. These events represent only direct inquiries to Tourism Kingston and do not reflect loss of potential business from organizers who a) contact hotels directly, or b) already know that Kingston cannot accommodate their requirements with current infrastructure and consequently do not request proposals from us.

Kingston's priorities

Kingston's business growth priorities are compatible with its social priorities. Healthy businesses provide steady employment for the local workforce and pay municipal taxes that contribute to infrastructure upgrades and social programs. The building of a conference centre is a key component of the Integrated Destination Strategy, a multi-year strategic plan developed by Tourism Kingston, the City of Kingston, and Kingston Accommodation Partners. The IDS outlines a series of destination development activities to further establish Kingston as a vibrant and dynamic community for residents, tourists, and investors. The IDS prioritizes pedestrian-friendly zones; animation of the downtown core; shoulder- and winter-season product development; four-season promotion; and waterfront access.

A fit with other community priorities

Once developed, a multi-use conference centre will generate new tax revenue for the municipality, which will then be allocated according to municipal priorities as determined by City Council and staff.

The ability to bring people together is also important from a community-building perspective, and not just an economic one. World-class cities, large or small, offer a place where people can gather to discuss issues, learn from each other, work out problems, build on their successes, and create institutional change. Kingston offers all the other elements required to play a part in the national and international meetings arena, except for the most important component – a place to meet.



Attracting business events to Kingston year-round helps local businesses like restaurants.

Importance of a downtown location

Kingston is known for the walkability of its downtown and the proximity of restaurants, venues, museums, and attractions pre- and post-meeting. This is particularly attractive for delegates who do not travel to Kingston by car. For almost 20 years we have seen the significant boost in pedestrian traffic downtown during nights when Slush Puppie Place (SPP) hosts events. This activity supports local businesses, enlivens the downtown by creating a vibrant night economy, and enhances resident and visitor safety. A downtown conference centre will only serve to bolster this already positive environment.Activity generated by a downtown conference centre will increase pedestrian traffic throughout the year, further supporting businesses and attractions, and stimulating the night economy through new programming and activities for visitors and residents, and extended hours for local businesses.
And lastly, organizers want to host their events in downtown Kingston. They prioritize accessibility, sustainability, and ease of planning when making decisions about where to host. Organizers are not interested in venues that require moving delegates in vehicles from hotel to meeting space and back again, or that make off-site activities challenging to access. They want delegates to be housed close to where they will meet, and where they will play.

In Kingston's case, organizers want to be in the heart of our unique, historic downtown where event attendees can walk to coffee shops, restaurants, and boutiques, and where boat cruises, live music, food tours, paddle board rentals, and a public skating rink are but a short stroll away. In other words, business event organizers and attendees want the unique and memorable experience that can only be had in the heart of our city.

Right now, Kingston has everything needed to be one of Canada's most sought-after business event destinations, save one: A modern, scalable, flexible, and accessible downtown meeting venue that will allow us to host the vast number of medium and large conferences that are currently out of reach.

To whom it may concern,

I have had the pleasure of operating restaurants in downtown Kingston for 22 years, and during that time I have seen the area transform in so many ways. In Summer and the immediate "shoulder" periods, streets almost overflow with people, restaurants thrive, and retail businesses are hopping. It really has been a remarkable shift from the days when it felt like downtown streets could be rolled up and put away at five o'clock in the afternoon.

That said, we have a long way to go in the drive to extend that degree of activity to the rest of the year. During extended periods in late Fall and early Spring, and through Winter, downtown streets tend to be quiet and bereft of pedestrian activity. When there are major events at venues like the Leon's Centre, activity picks up, but it is situational and short-lived. This certainly makes things challenging for downtown businesses, and for restaurants and bars especially.

I believe quite strongly that building a conference centre downtown will be a transformational development that helps Kingston grow into its full potential, that creates a buzz of activity throughout the year, and that allows us to go out to the rest of the country and the world with an attractive, compelling, and comprehensive pitch to bring large gatherings of all kinds - meetings, conferences, shows, and events – to the Limestone City.

At Black Dog Hospitality we know firsthand the impact business travelers can have on what we do, and we know too well how challenging things can be without them. Having a facility downtown that will allow us to expand the number and size of conferences and events that we host in Kingston, and to bring them to the city during what are now slower times of the year, will make all the difference to our growth potential, our ability to develop and retain staff, and our ability to continue investing in the community. In short, we believe it will be a true game-changer for downtown restaurants and other hospitality businesses.

I encourage you to throw your support behind this all-important city-building initiative.

Sincerely,

Tim Pater
President
Black Dog Hospitality
69 Brock Street
Kingston, ON
K7L 1R8

Conference Centre Case for Support

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Karen Cross, CEO, Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce

Subject: Proposed conference centre

On behalf of the members of the Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce, I am pleased to announce our support for the creation of a downtown conference centre and the resulting benefits it would provide Kingston's economy.

Given the increasing interest in Kingston as a potential conference destination, we are faced with a significant opportunity to increase the size and frequency of conferences hosted in Kingston, thereby attracting additional outside dollars to Kingston and opening up new markets and customers to Kingston businesses.

We understand the desired outcome for this development would include a high-end hotel as well as some additional residential units. It would further create learning opportunities for St. Lawrence College students in relevant disciplines and provide an economic boon to local firms and businesses through local construction activity.

As we consider the planned location for this centre, we wish to highlight the support of businesses and hotels in the area and the fact they have no immediate concerns that this would harm their businesses or draw existing business away. Rather, many are excited at the idea of drawing in new business outside of the peak season to help sustain them through quieter periods.

Past Councils have received several delegations and presentations on this topic, and we are approaching 10 years since the idea of a downtown conference centre was first studied and proposed. In that time, a prime plot of land downtown has sat largely idle, construction costs have increased, and opportunities have passed Kingston by while new rounds of study were commissioned.

We urge council not to allow this opportunity to pass by yet again and to instead begin the process towards creating this important community resource that will ultimately strengthen our local economy and businesses.

Sincerely,

Karen Cross
Chief Executive Officer

Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce

Downtown Kingston.ca
a true original.

c/o Ted Robinson, Business Events Specialist
Tourism Kingston
366 King St E, Suite 460 I Kingston, ON K7K 6Y3
(613) 532-3495 I VisitKingston.ca

RE: Letter of Support — Downtown Conference Centre, Kingston, ON

To whom it may concern,

Downtown Kingston Business Improvement Area (BIA) is pleased to provide support for the proposal of a downtown conference centre. The proposed plan has broad support in the downtown business community and has the support of our Board of Directors.

Downtown Kingston BIA believes that a conference centre located in the downtown core will contribute to building year-round tourism and drive growth for local businesses. A conference centre is essentially "weather-proof" and will be utilized most often during the shoulder and winter seasons – times when businesses would welcome the traffic – and have the capacity to do so.

We also believe that Kingston provides a desirable destination for meeting planners and companies. Kingston's historic downtown is situated where Lake Ontario meets the St. Lawrence and Cataraqui rivers and provides a wealth of activities and possible itineraries for conference delegates. As one of the oldest & fastest growing cities in Ontario, we are a top culinary, entertainment and arts destination.

The Downtown Kingston BIA has a long history of conceptualizing, organizing, and executing programming, festivals and events that attract thousands of visitors each year, such as the internationally renowned Kingston Buskers Rendezvous and the Limestone City Blues Festival which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2022. Accustomed to partnering with large events teams using Downtown Kingston as the venue, the team at the BIA and our 700 businesses would welcome high impact conferences and events and would look forward to collaborating with meeting planners to deliver a top-drawer experience for their delegates, organizing teams and guests.

Downtown Kingston is a large supporter and partner of Tourism Kingston, Kingston Accommodation Partners and the City of Kingston. We have absolute confidence in the abilities of these partners to fully

KINGSTON

Accommodation Partners

November 17, 2022

Support Letter: Kingston Conference Centre

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of Kingston Accommodation Partners (KAP), I would like to express my full support for development of a purpose-built conference centre in downtown Kingston.

Kingston's hotel, motel, and short-term rental community supports building a conference centre downtown as it will help Kingston grow economically, will promote greater and more consistent activity throughout the year, and will allow us to expand our tourism outreach with a compelling pitch to bring large gatherings of all kinds to Kingston. A purpose-built conference centre will bring more activity to Kingston, increase visitation in less-busy times of year, and spread out where guests stay while in the city. We work closely with Tourism Kingston on a daily basis and have complete confidence in the TK team's ability to create a truly unique and exciting experience.

Please feel free to contact me if you require further information or have any questions about KAP's commitment to this endeavour.

Sincerely,



Krista LeClair
Executive Director
Kingston Accommodation Partners
151 Wellington St., Suite 2
Kingston, ON

KINGSTON Construction ASSOCIATION

1575 John Counter Blvd., Kingston, ON K7M 3L5
Phone: (613) 542-9431 | **Fax:** (613) 542-2417

Tourism Kingston
460-366 king Street East,
Kingston, Ont. K7K 6Y3

November 30, 2022

Re: Proposed Downtown Convention Centre

Dear Megan and Tourism Kingston Team,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Kingston Construction Association (KCA), please consider this letter as support for the proposed Kingston Downtown Convention Centre. The KCA Board was impressed with a convincing presentation outlining the rationale and need for a Convention Centre to expand year-round tourism, support local businesses and provide residents in the Greater Kingston area a venue to host and enjoy a myriad of community centric events. It would also provide an opportunity to acquire more "share of wallet" through the ability to attract corporate, social and recreational events from across North America and beyond. The KCA has experienced firsthand lost opportunities to host provincial and national industry trade association conferences for lack of a large, centrally located convention centre.

As a local Association involved in all aspects of construction and construction services, a project of this scale and scope would undoubtedly have a positive impact on our local labour market and community partners. Many of our over 400 member firms are well known and well-regarded residents, community supporters and employers and would welcome the opportunity to help turn this vision into reality.

A Convention Centre would also fit well within the City's Integrated Economic Development Strategy and would compliment already committed initiatives being pursued with respect to a deep-water cruise dock and expanding air and rail service to this wonderful City.

Sincerely,

Harry Sullivan,
Executive Director, KCA
On behalf of the Board of Directors

Wanda M. Costen, PhD
Dean

The Stephen J.R. Smith School of Business
Queen's University
143 Union Street West
Goodes Hall, Suite 320
Kingston, Ontario
Canada K7L 3N6
613.533.2305
wanda.costen@queensu.ca

Smith
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
Queen's University

November 1, 2022

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to endorse the development of a downtown Kingston conference facility. For a city of Kingston's size and economic profile, the lack of a significant downtown conference site is a key missing element.

From my seat on the board of Kingston Economic Development Corporation, I see the exciting ambitions to attract business and support local economic sustainability. Having a central conference site will bring many business leaders and decision-makers into the Kingston environment where they will be able to see its attraction for investment, and generate significant incremental spending with local businesses.

Filling the gap of a conference facility will allow Kingston to host important events and discussions that will advance business, engage the community, and support Kingston's position as unique mid-sized city with an impressive entrepreneurship and innovation capacity.

Sincerely,

Wanda M. Costen, PhD
Dean



November 15, 2022

St. Lawrence College

To whom it may concern,

It is my pleasure to write this letter on behalf of St. Lawrence College (SLC) in support of the City of Kingston developing a downtown conference facility.

At SLC, we pride ourselves on providing our students innovative, real-world learning experiences where they develop the skills and knowledge to confidently enter the workforce. We are also committed to helping our shared communities to thrive and grow, and to engaging with partners to collaborate on solutions.

The development of a downtown conference facility could provide SLC students with access to training facilities and work placements, both of which are integral to the practical education SLC provides. In addition, with the majority of SLC graduates choosing to stay, work, and live in the Eastern Ontario region area after graduation, I am confident that students from our Hospitality, Tourism, Culinary Management, Advertising, Office Administration, and Marketing programs, and many others, could support the ongoing operational success of a downtown conference facility once they join the workforce.

As a resident of Kingston, I am proud of the collective efforts I see being made to advance local strategic priorities, including the ongoing development of adequate housing, the continued commitment to sustainable business practices, and the importance in attracting business travelers and tourists to support our local businesses. With so much to be proud of including quality dining, shopping, attractions, and our picturesque waterfront downtown core, the addition of a downtown conference facility in Kingston could not only augment our students' educational journeys, but it would bolster local business, create more employment opportunities for Kingston citizens, and help bring more people to Kingston all year round.

Sincerely,

Glenn Vollebregt
President & CEO
613-544-5400 ex 1591
gvollebregt@sl.on.ca

2288 Parkedale Avenue
Brockville, ON K6V 5X3
T 613-345-0660 **F** 613-345-2231

2 St. Lawrence Drive
Cornwall, ON K6H 4Z1
T 613-933-6080 **F** 613-937-1523

100 Portsmouth Avenue
Kingston, ON K7L 5A6
T 613-544-5400 **F** 613-545-3920

www.stlawrencecollege.ca