

# Downtown facelift

By Mitch Ward

Belleville city council recently announced a multi-million dollar revamp to the downtown core and to city infrastructure. The city has laid out their proposal in a brochure, as well as on a new website, both titled Build Belleville.

Plans for the renewal of city infrastructure have been in the works for years, and multiple smaller projects have been completed. Others are already set to begin construction.

The overall project is broad in scope and includes improving major roads in the community, like the roads around the North East Industrial Park, Bay Bridge Road, and Maitland Drive, improving Bay Bridge, and revamping the police station and local fire halls.

The overall essence of the project can be divided into two parts. The first is the improvement of underground infrastructure, and the second is to do storefront to storefront streetscaping.

"Any renovation to downtown is welcomed. Anything that's going to make it better and more inviting I'm all for it. It's far better than it was nine years ago when I came here," says downtown business owner, Alain Kechichian.

City council has been working towards the changes since 2006, when Mayor Neil Ellis began pushing the provincial and federal governments for more money to put towards improving the city, rather than simply doing regular maintenance every year.

The council's wish for downtown is to turn it into a vibrant place that can be unique and serve as a viable city centre. Downtown, especially Front Street, is in rough shape. Walking along, a passerby will see multiple empty storefronts, boarded-up doors and signs saying a business has moved or closed indefinitely.

The vast majority of retail in Belleville lies to the northeast, with the hub being along North Front Street and Bell Boulevard.

The challenge is to draw businesses back to the downtown. Building more residential buildings close to the new core will help attract people to live, work and play downtown.



Photo by Natalie McMullen

**Sharon Huckle is a stylist, spa therapist, and owner of The Cat's Meow Salon and Spa in Belleville. Huckle has owned the business for almost ten years. She also helps manage her husband's catering company. She says being an entrepreneur is rewarding, but leaves little time for anything else, even a cup of coffee.**



Photo by Guillaume Nolet

**Richard Courneyea, owner of Richard Davis, poses in his store located on Front Street. In the clothing business since he was 15, Courneyea said that there is a lot of accountability to be able to navigate a brick and mortar business in a new media world.**



Photo by Sarah Taylor

**Alain Kechichian owns eyewear store Essenzia located on Front Street. Kechichian has owned the store since 2004 and says he is very passionate about making people look and feel good.**



**(Left) David Cooney is one of the co-owners of Cooney Auto Sales in downtown Belleville. He and his brother Brian co-own the family business, which they inherited from their father Howard Cooney. The business started in Stirling before moving to Belleville. Photo by Adam Dietrich**



Photo by Justin Chin

**Belleville native Anne MacKinnon, 45, is the fifth generation owner of Barber's Flower Shop on Front Street. She enjoys her work because everyday is different.**



Photo by Solana Cain

**Richard Belanger, owner of Scalliwag Toys, originally wanted to open a bookstore with his wife in 1985.**