

Summary of Downtown Strategy

Created on March 09, 2026 by [Summary AI](#)

Action Items

Mayor Cecere Draft summary & interview sheet

Create a one-page summary of priorities and a standardized interview sheet / question set for agencies; circulate draft to committee for feedback before next meeting.

Mayor Cecere Schedule next meetings & invite agencies

Schedule the next committee meeting for two weeks from tonight (Monday at 6:00 PM), send invites and provide the summary/minutes; request BID to present first (20-minute presentation + 10-minute Q&A).

Mayor Cecere Request agency data

Ask each targeted agency (BID, LDC, IDA, Tourism groups, Chamber, City planning) to provide succinct KPIs/SWOT, annual budget (or TBD), and a short (20-min) presentation focused on specific metrics and how they support downtown (occupancy, property value impacts, event support, business recruitment).

Overview

Attending:

Don Cass

Kevin McCarty

Chad Lahr

Shawna Shell

Councilor John Brennan

Councilor James Petropoulos

Mayor Jim Cecere (presiding)

- Goal of committee outlined; advisory capacity meant to review the economic development agencies for Geneva, with a focus on Downtown. The committee will take a zero-based look at all agencies and the city of Geneva to understand their role, function, and impact on the Geneva's economic health.
- This is not an adversarial approach; this is meant to understand, support, and help build on strengths, providing recommendations to the agencies and City Council that are in the best interest of the City of Geneva.
- The Board acknowledged the hard work and dedication of all those who volunteer or work on these boards or agencies.
- A series of meetings and presentations by each of the agencies and boards will be scheduled.
- Main strengths for economic drivers: **tourism**, colleges/students, location, events, food & wine, walkability; main challenges: **fragmented marketing**, **seasonal sales variability**, **vacancies**, **parking**, **safety**.
- Agencies (BID, LDC, IDA, Chamber, Finger Lakes tourism groups, county/city offices) are active but **confused/fragmented** in roles; businesses want clearer, **unified**, marketing and a simple access point.

- Consensus next steps: produce a **one-page summary** of priorities, develop interview questions for agencies, invite agencies to 20-min presentations (20' + 10' Q&A), and meet biweekly (Mondays, 6:00 PM).
- Develop KPIs to track and annual readouts for City Council: for example, **occupancy rates**, **property values**, survey sentiment scores (BID ~2.7–2.85), etc.

Survey design & participant profile

- Survey was administered in **July 2025**.
- Survey was widely shared with downtown business and property owners; BID provided the contact list.
- **125** downtown business and property owners were contacted; **38%** response rate.
- **79%** of respondents had operated in downtown for 4–10 years or 11+ years.
- Survey collected honest feedback on challenges, opportunities, priorities, downtown development, and evaluation of agency effectiveness and transparency/collaboration with City Hall.

Downtown strengths & challenges

- Responses came from diverse sectors: **food & beverage (most common)**, retail, services, real estate, arts & entertainment, and hospitality.
- Majority of businesses rated downtown as **fair–good**; **0% rated 'excellent'**; **~16–17% rated 'poor' or 'very poor'**.
- Analysis of **8–10 pages** of comments identified top strengths: **tourism (most mentions)**, colleges/students, location, community-driven events, agriculture/food & wine, parking, BID efforts, and walkability.
- Primary challenge was lack of cohesive, city-backed marketing and branding; current efforts are fragmented across multiple agencies, causing ineffective promotion.
- Operational and physical challenges included severe seasonal sales variability (brutal winters/weak shoulder seasons), vacant/underused storefronts reducing pedestrian flow and creating a perception of stagnation, inconsistent parking availability, low weekday foot traffic, and safety concerns (noted loss of **2 businesses** on Upper Castle Street).

Agency roles & effectiveness (BID/LDC/IDA)

- Speaker focused on BID due to greater personal familiarity and also raised City Hall, LDC, IDA, and other agencies.
- Businesses reported mixed experiences with the city: majority positive-to-neutral; **6** described experience as negative; **12** reported no interaction; **13** rated city responsiveness as not very or not at all.
- BID scored highest on sanitation, maintenance, beautification, and public advocacy; scored lower on coordination with the city/other agencies, overall effectiveness, marketing/promotion, capital improvements, and ability to attract/retain businesses; survey questions were drawn from the BID's own mission.
- Businesses requested more face-to-face BID outreach, clearer communication, improved marketing and events, incentives for upper-floor redevelopment, support for new/existing businesses, transparency and inclusivity on board membership and decision-making, and better alignment among agencies.

- Awareness of economic-development agencies was low: Visitor Connection **2.85** and Tourism Alliance **2.71** were highest; most other agencies scored below **2.5**; respondents recommended improved communication or realignment and overwhelmingly favored downtown hotel, residential, and rink development.

Marketing, portal & visitor economy

- Each agency defines **succinct, measurable annual goals** and conducts end-of-year evaluations.
- Agencies operate **coordinated and aligned**, not siloed, with more frequent collaboration and unified messaging.
- Establish a one-stop **portal/ombudsman** for existing businesses, new entrepreneurs, and out-of-town investors to access resources, incentives, and legal/financial pathways.
- Measure success by tangible metrics: **occupancy rates, property values**, investment volume, year-round events, and safety improvements.
- Prioritize downtown-focused actions: attract/retain small/homegrown businesses, promote downtown housing, implement beautification, and provide proactive recruitment/incentives.

Recommendations, next steps & meeting cadence

- Group seeks to synthesize 4–6 priorities, assign specific roles to agencies (BID, IDA, LDC, City of Geneva) and recommend council oversight and accountability; deliver a one-page summary of goals and recommended agency responsibilities.
- Key focus areas identified: attract and retain businesses; reduce vacancies/increase occupancy; monetize events/visitor economy; targeted marketing to the **ideal Geneva customer**; landlord enforcement and zoning reform to ease business openings.
- Next steps: develop an interview sheet/screen with precise questions; invite **BID, IDA, LDC, Finger Lakes Visitors Connection, Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance, city, county** for **20-minute** presentations + **10-minute** Q; use first **45 minutes** of next meeting to review the document.
- Data emphasis: require meaningful KPIs, benchmarking/SWOT, leakage analysis and ROI assessment.
- Logistics and tone: meetings set **biweekly** on **Mondays at 6** with the next meeting in **2 weeks**; engagement framed as supportive and non-judgmental (avoid adversarial approach).