

# Downtown parks become downtown parking lots

The real cost of not addressing the problems with downtown PG



DARRIN RIGO

JUL 09, 2025



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Hello! Happy July, everyone.

Summer time has arrived and with it, an uneasy line to be toed in simultaneously being grateful for all the cool, moist weather to keep the fires at bay, but also... I wouldn't mind like... a little bit of lake weather, you know?

I'll go knock on wood, just in case...

Anyways, enough weather talk. Let's get straight to today's topic.

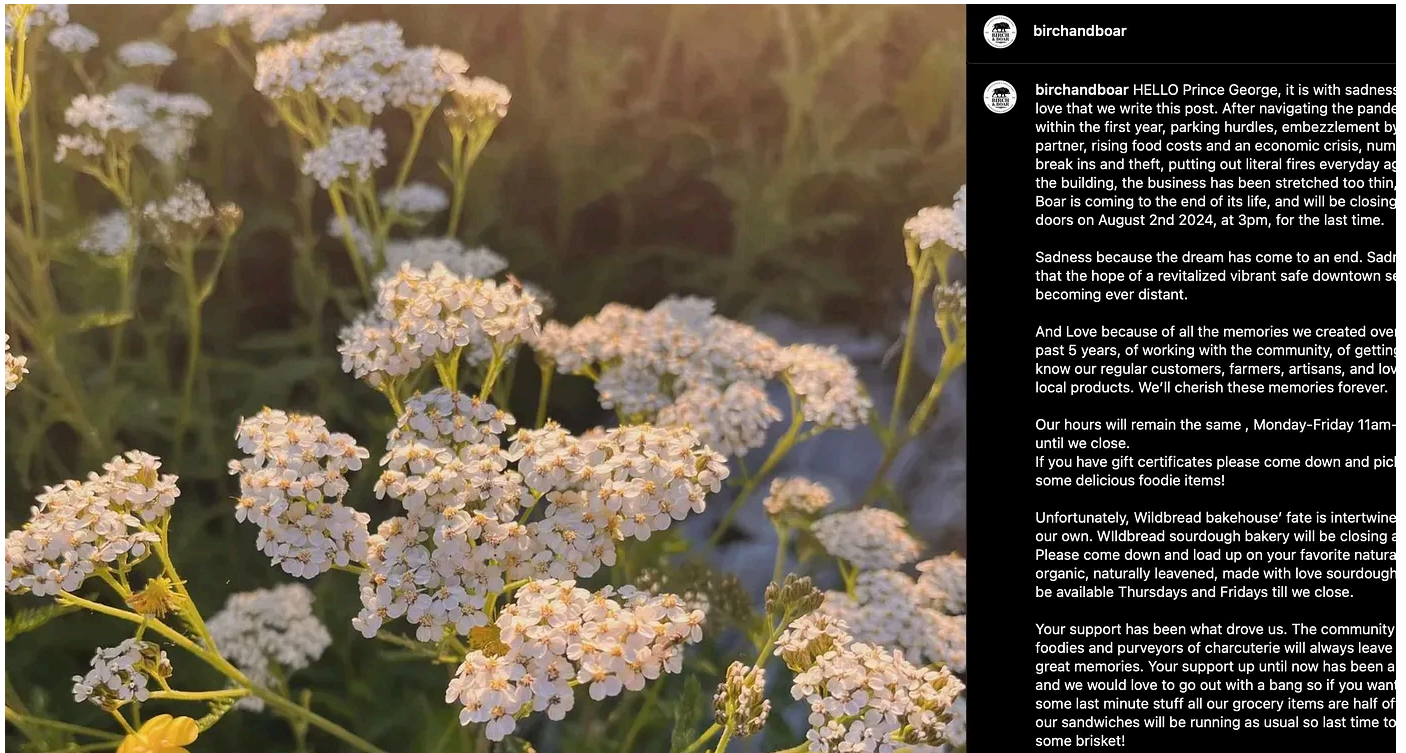
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## Recapping the state of downtown.

A year ago exactly this week, Birch and Boar closed its doors. [I wrote a newsletter about it](#) at the time, reflecting on the reasons why and its relation to the state of our

downtown.



Birch and Boar's post mortem posted a year ago.

2 years ago to this exact week, The Makerie closed its doors.

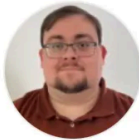


It seemed fitting to me to revisit this topic with yet another year under our belts, but especially given the news that came out a few weeks ago - that the City will be selling

the former downtown Millenium Park to the Regional District for \$1, who will then turning it into a parking lot.

## City to sell Millennium Park to regional district

Stones from the Alexander Mackenzie monument on the site will be returned to the river



[Colin Slark](#)

Jun 25, 2025 7:22 AM



Excerpt from Colin's article linked below. GO READ HIS ARTICLE.

[Read Colin's \(excellent\) full write-up in the Citizen here for the details.](#)

## Zooming out, just a bit.



The thing I am struggling with the most is that most is that these can be felt as one closures (be it parks, be it restaurants, etc) because they really don't all happen at or

There's no "focusing event" but rather, it's like being beaten to death by a pool noodle

What I mean by this is at some point, you look around and the coffee/chocolate shop you used to love is a mortgage broker office. The craft cafe has become a small private gym. The beloved BBQ restaurant is a boarded up building. The cute German baker that used to sell donuts and bread is still empty and for sale. The old Greek restaurant that exploded is a burned out empty lot. The furniture warehouse that burned down is still a pile of rubble. The cute 0 waste, 0 packaging store relocated to the highway and is now (another) barbershop.

**\*cough\*** [The old pizzeria building that the mayor owns is a boarded up eye sore, even 3.5 years after he got called out for it and apologized for its state.](#) **\*cough\***



Just a reminder: the literal mayor owns this building.

I could go on. You could honestly write a newsletter about each one of these - why it happened, how it impacts the vibe but I digress.



My point is that losing a park, or another restaurant, is not rhetorical. Honestly, even 10 years ago - before encampments were a big thing, Millennium Park was a pretty unused, and unappealing park so maybe it is better served as a parking lot for the R don't know.

What I do know is that every bench, every restaurant, every (good or crummy) park that we lose, a small piece of the soul of downtown goes away with it and it feels like we're rapidly approaching a point of no return.

Just as an aside, I don't remember "turning downtown green space into parking lots" being a part of [the OCP discussion, or the DDP discussion](#), or any of the other capital P plans that we've been humming and hawing about for the last 2+ years.

ANYWAYS.

## **"It's the homeless people's fault!"**

[I wrote a whole newsletter about this last year](#) and for the sake of not just rewriting my thoughts again, I do recommend re-reading that if you're struggling with how I tie the unhoused people, the crime, the safety - all of the really difficult, larger "society level" issues into all of this.


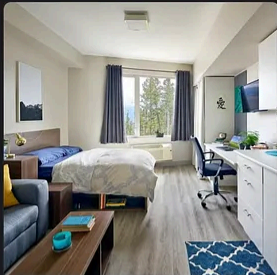




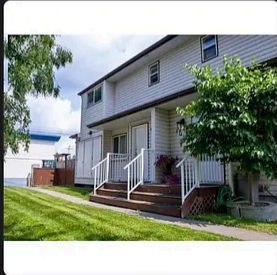



I should be clear - I also bring this up because I really don't want to be one of those "ugh lib snowflakes" who just hand waves anyone away who finds themselves asking these questions or looking at this guy writing about our downtown, and just glossing over the really visible challenges playing out on the streets of downtown PG.

That said, while pointing at folks suffering from addiction and homelessness is an easy scapegoat, the truth is that it's just so much more complicated than that.

[What macroeconomic conditions created the explosion in encampments and people who live on the streets?](#) And not just in Prince George but literally in every major

Canadian city.

Surely, you (like me) have also noticed that EVERYTHING has gotten more expensive in the last 4 years - groceries, rent, services, etc.

				
CA\$1,500 1 Bed 1 Bath - Apartment Prince George, BC	CA\$1,095 Studio 1 Bath Apartment Prince George, BC	CA\$1,250 1 Bed 1 Bath - Apartment Prince George, BC	CA\$1,500 2 Beds 1 Bath - Apartment Prince George, BC	CA\$1,450 2 Beds 1 Bath - Apartment Prince George, BC
				
CA\$1,900 New Apartment for Rent October 1st	CA\$1,136 1 bed 1 bath Townhouse Prince George, BC	CA\$1,050 1 Bed 1 Bath Apartment Prince George, BC	CA\$1,200 1 Bed 1 Bath - Apartment Prince George, BC	CA\$1,150 1 Bed 1 Bath Apartment Prince George, BC

I mean seriously - have you looked at rental options in the city lately?

The gap between living on the street and finding any kind of affordable housing has never been so huge. If you are someone who is living on the edge(s), and something happens in your life that shakes you loose - I just don't know how the heck you're supposed to claw out of it right now...

I say all of this, not to give our city government (or the prov/fed government) an excuse to shrug their shoulders, but to say that these "downtown problems" are not going to be fixed by our City Council in the next 2 years. I also say all of this because these people deserve our empathy and compassion first, not to be scapegoated as the sole reason why downtown is dwindling.

# It's sprawl.

I know I just wrote a whole section about why "it's complicated" but in another way it's dead simple.

You know what helps revitalize a slowly failing downtown?

**Money.** Ideally, lots of it - but even just a little goes a LONG way.

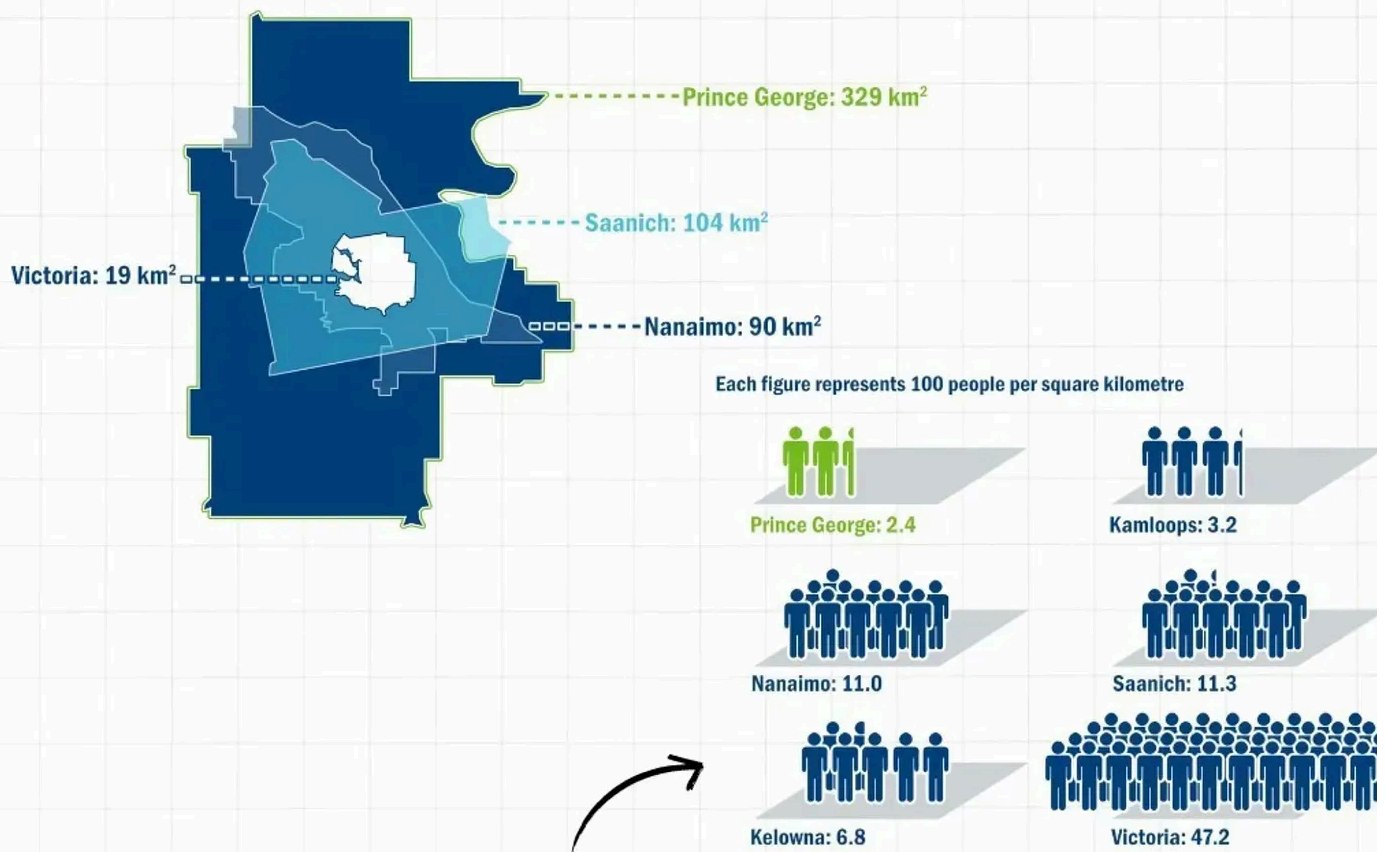
Allow me to jam out some ideas real quick here:

City-funded street festivals, adding new benches and comfort amenities, revitalizing downtown parks and squares, having the time/staff to quickly process permits, funding collaborative events that draw people downtown, bigger and more abundant trees and gardens, incentive programs for things like patio expansions, marketing grants, building facade improvements, the time/resources to think of strategies that might force slumlords to sell or lower prices, widening sidewalks to increase walkability, building out better transit systems, having protected bike infrastructure, etc etc etc

[You know what doesn't help? Draining millions of tax dollars to pay for more roads and failing road infrastructure across the decaying sprawl at the city's corners.](#)



# Prince George is really big... and our people are really spread out



*This means that, per taxpayer, there are a LOT of roads, pipes, and other infrastructure to maintain.*

A well-funded city can take care of its businesses, its downtown, its parks, and actu be pro-active in how it develops the downtown.

It is REALLY hard to be a well-funded city when you are stuck paying for ongoing relentless urban sprawl. It is even harder when you KEEP making that mistake by paying for sprawl with even more sprawl.

“But Darrin, no one is going to go to these things if there’s homeless people everywhere!”

LITERALLY every time the City or Crossroads or Tourism PG or some entity HAS on some sort of downtown festival, the whole damn city arrives so that is just not tr

Remember the “Light Up The Plaza” festival last winter?



Or every weekend’s Farmer’s Market or the annual Crossroads Street Festivals?



I don’t accept that our downtown is just “bad” or not a destination for events and markets - that no one goes downtown because it’s so unsafe or whatever.

We REGULARLY disprove that theory.

# What's the plan?

As always, it's hard to pull all of this into focus but hopefully I can get all of this into something that resembles a conclusion.

The problems with our downtown are many-faceted. Those who want to simply scapegoat the demise of these local businesses and parks on the unhoused need to understand that these are cataclysmic societal factors [affecting every downtown city that I have visited in Canada in the last 5 years.](#)

These problems are not going to be solved by writing hateful and racist comments on Facebook about how we need to force people into rehab/institutions [\(which we know based on the data only creates worse outcomes for people\).](#)

I'm not asking for everyone to suddenly become a bleeding heart empath (although even a couple ounces more that would be nice).

What I'm trying to ask for is **pragmatism**.

There ARE so many aspects of improving our downtown that are within our control and there's an abundance of research that tells us what we should be doing to increase foot traffic and thereby staunch the bleeding and stop losing our beloved local restaurants and cafes.

Are wider sidewalks alone going to keep Ritual in business? A couple more nice benches going to help Nancy O's keep their doors open? One more summer street festival to help Dandy Lines and Zoe's bottom line?

No, but all of these together have a cumulative effect and I think much the way downtown feels like its dying a slow death, it might also be able to slowly be resuscitated, CPR given one breath and chest compression at a time.



Maybe, one day, you look around and there's benches and patios, and live music, a couple extra bus routes, some protected bike lanes - and maybe having more people downtown helps keep people feeling safe to walk around but also keeps some extra eyes out for anyone who might need an ambulance called or some Narcan administered.

It's idealistic but I also don't feel like it's out of reach.

Have a wonderful Wednesday!

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Jess Endress Jul 9

♥ Liked by [Darrin Rigo](#)

Speaking of fun, free downtown events.... Community Art Days returns this weekend, 11 & 12 Jul  
Come check out all of our amazing Artists-in-residence, live music, art activities and more from 2  
on Friday and 11-4pm on Saturday!

See you all there!

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1 reply by Darrin Rigo



Heather Sapergia Jul 9

♡ Liked by Darrin Rigo

Don't forget the new container market at the Civic Plaza. Ice skating in the summer.

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