

# Hamilton is a happenin' place

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<http://www.thespec.com/news/business/article/475520--downtown-is-a-happenin-place>

## The face of downtown jobs

It's a surprising picture of Hamilton's downtown.

The city's core is adding jobs and residents — a total of 2,700 since 2001. More than 1,600 businesses now employ 23,400 people, making average salaries well above the city and provincial averages. The majority of those jobs are in government or professional, scientific or financial fields.

And more downtown people work in creative sectors such as design, music, digital media and the arts than in education and manufacturing combined. That all points to Hamilton making the transition from a manufacturing-based city to a player in the new knowledge economy.

These are some of the major findings of a report, *Working in the Core*, commissioned by the city to shed light on Hamilton's downtown employment. It calls the core an “economic powerhouse” and says “downtown will be Hamilton's calling card to attract next generation talent and provide diverse and well-paying economic opportunities.”

More than three-quarters of the jobs downtown are full-time and the average salary was \$53,926, according to 2006 data. That's well above the city and provincial averages of \$39,500 and \$37,700.

The study will be an important marketing tool for the city's economic development team, says Glen Norton, acting director of the city's downtown and community renewal division. It paints a new picture of the core for the major retailers and other employers the city wants to attract, he says.

“This shows the vibrancy of the downtown and how it's growing. That's important to companies like Nike or Lululemon or Apple.”

The job numbers surprised even Paul Shaker, planner with the Centre for Community Study, a Hamilton-based urban research firm that produced the study.

“This shows the downtown is a major employment node and it's not often recognized as that. It's the single biggest cluster in the city.”

He said the numbers should counter the prevailing misconception that Hamilton's downtown is in decline. “It's important to send a message within Hamilton and outside about the opportunities in our downtown and what exists there already.”

Shaker said the city must treat the downtown as a business park to be developed, and focus on helping existing clusters grow. That includes, he says, making strategic investments in light-rail transit and a creative catalyst that will attract knowledge-based companies and workers.

It also means making decisions about development in all areas of the city based on what it will mean for the downtown, says Shaker. “For example, should new office developments be allowed on the urban periphery when there is office vacancy in the downtown commercial office district? All decisions should reinforce the renewal of the core to ensure its long-term vibrancy as an economic engine.”

Hamilton already has interesting urban architecture, lots of space for intensification, plenty of downtown amenities and development incentives and high affordability, he says.

No one needs to tell Josh Gordon, 24, that Hamilton's downtown is a great place to work. He's one of the much-sought-after “next generation” of talent. His age group is highly mobile and motivated by quality of life considerations more than job openings, say experts.

A designer at Kitestring Creative Branding Studio on James Street South for close to a year, Gordon says he feels connected to the city by living and working downtown.

“I love the character of the downtown. There is so much personality ... Downtown is exciting and