



GAME-CHANGING INNOVATION IN ACTION

Creative
Catalyst campaign

Backgrounder: Investment proposal for downtown expansion
Delivered to: Finance and Responsible Governance Committee
June 4, 2025

A history of collaboration and growth

We are trusted and loyal innovation and economic development partners

We are grateful to the City of Barrie for our longstanding partnership. Together, we have built new capacity, served our community, and created an environment where local industry partners and citizens can thrive. Our partnership has long benefitted students, alumni, employers, and community members, and we sincerely appreciate both Council and staff's continued confidence in Georgian.

City investments in Georgian and our students have supported the creation of state-of-the-art facilities home to unprecedented levels of innovation. We're proud of the outstanding return on investment the college has delivered. Support has helped fuel and diversify our local and regional economy and create opportunities for the future. With every new collaboration, we have strengthened our shared innovative spirit and deepened our commitment to being responsive, collaborative partners committed to meeting the needs of the city.

Based on analysis reflecting fiscal year (FY) 2022-23, Georgian's total economic impact in the region is \$1.7 billion; this equates to 5.3 per cent of the total gross regional product or one out of every 15 jobs in the region supported by Georgian's presence. Georgian's Barrie Campus added \$879 million in income to the Simcoe County economy, a value approximately equal to 4.7% of the total gross regional product. Expressed in terms of jobs, the Barrie Campus impact supported 12,605 regional jobs. For perspective, the activities of the Barrie Campus and its students support one out of every 18 jobs in Simcoe County.

Georgian is proud to be part of the collective strategy to invigorate Barrie's downtown core, and to have our students learn and work in the heart of Barrie's creative community. Together, we will continue to turn opportunities into long-term benefits that will serve Georgian students and Barrie now and into the future. Specifically, Georgian is expanding its presence and renewing its commitment to downtown Barrie in an iconic location. At this new location, Georgian will introduce creative programming in areas such as design, visual arts, creativity and emerging innovative technologies as well as host services designed to energize the downtown, foster entrepreneurialism and animate the neighbourhood in a new way. This is game-changing innovation fueled by strong and loyal partnership.

The seed was planted

We are now taking this earned next step

This new downtown location is a key part of Georgian's game-changing strategy to support enrolment growth in areas of strength, deliver an unrivaled student experience and cultivate thriving communities. For nearly 60 years, Georgian has delivered second-to-none arts programs to Design and Visual Arts students who have made their mark in the creative economy at home and worldwide. Much of the learning has centred on the main Barrie Campus.

Georgian's investment in downtown builds on the long-held vision shared by Georgian and the City of Barrie for a thriving college and student presence in the downtown core. Georgian first moved downtown in 2017 to a much smaller building on Ross Street with approximately 200 students in a handful of programs. When asked at that time if more students would follow, Georgian leaders promised to evaluate success before considering any additional program moves. Now the time has come.

By making a long-term investment in a secure, purpose-designed location, our downtown footprint will more than quadruple, growing from 16,700 to 82,000 square feet. When fully phased, more than 1,000 students will study and play in Barrie's downtown, invigorating the area. The dynamic new downtown setting will help programs evolve and grow by inspiring new directions and opportunities and will launch the exciting next phase of Georgian's long history of educating talented artists, innovators and changemakers.

Experience from leading Canadian cities demonstrates that ambitious urban revitalization and development projects only move from vision to reality when they are anchored by bold, upfront municipal investment and strong industry support.



Catalyst for growth

Imagine a dynamic, creative hub in downtown Barrie – a marquee presence in the very centre of the city filled with innovative, changemaking designers and artists coming together to collaborate on creating something completely new. Inside this unique centre, and spilling out into the surrounding downtown streets, more than 1,000 students and their faculty, united with the downtown arts community, join forces to combine the beauty of artistic vision with the disruption of new technologies. Students live their passions and launch into successful careers, while Barrie's creative economy is enriched and its downtown core revitalized.

This picture can come to life with the City's continued partnership and investment. Together we will create both formal and informal opportunities to propagate ideas and innovation, form new creative collaborations, help a new generation of students turn their dreams into successful careers, and revitalize the social and economic vibrancy of downtown Barrie.

Georgian seeks a critical investment of \$7.5 million over the next ten years. City investment and partnership are absolutely indispensable to the realization of this vision. Without investment, this transformative project simply cannot proceed. The requested investment is the foundational catalyst required to launch and scale the initiative.



"This is a city-making, changemaking day, one that we'll look back in years and say that's where we turned the corner ... young people going to our shops in downtown, learning for the future, getting other skills ... being able to visit our vibrant waterfront. I cannot for a second overstate how important Georgian College's movement to our downtown is."

Mayor Alex Nuttall, City of Barrie
June 2024 announcement

Return on investment is significant

For residents, who will have access to a significant suite of services to the community and programming that will inspire entrepreneurship and innovation. Partnerships and shared special events with other downtown cultural organizations, including theatres and galleries, will also promote awareness of Georgian's activities. This move will also distribute Georgian students more broadly throughout Barrie, enabling them to live, work and play in various neighbourhoods.

For the City of Barrie, whose Mayor calls Georgian's downtown centre "city-making and changemaking". One thousand students will make a substantial impact on the vibrancy of the downtown, and their presence will invigorate the downtown of the future. Georgian is proud to be a long-time partner of the City of Barrie and to be involved in a project that will help revitalize Barrie's downtown core.

For Georgian, who will serve the community in an even deeper way. By exposing the public directly to our programs and students, the new downtown location will increase our profile, heighten our brand presence in the very centre of the city, and solidify our reputation as a vital contributor to the Barrie community. Through busy, creative learning spaces visible from the street, services from a retail store to hair styling, and numerous events and exhibitions, the community will get to know us even more comprehensively. Several other colleges have moved creativity and design-related programming into downtown areas. These purpose-designed facilities with creative, professional space are proving very successful, and we expect the same.

For a thriving economy. Core to the City of Barrie's 2022-2026 strategic plan, this investment will drive forward a thriving community and economy, foster growth in arts and culture, and contribute to the vibrancy of downtown Barrie. Georgian's wide-ranging influence has a substantial financial impact on Barrie, Simcoe County and Central Ontario, attracting a diverse population of students who mostly live, work, contribute and make their careers in our region. Georgian already creates value in many ways and positively affects the lives of students, alumni, employees and the regional economy. This impact will grow.




Benefits and enduring impact shared by all

An impactful initiative that will enhance the experiences of our students, partners and the downtown community

Students who will hone their artistic skills in bright open spaces on the very latest technology. They'll learn inside and outside the centre, providing excellent opportunities for work-integrated and experiential learning and exciting collaboration with experts in Barrie's vibrant creative community. And they'll build professional networks to launch successful careers.

Downtown businesses that will directly benefit from increased student traffic, new collaborations with Georgian and a more vibrant downtown core.

Employers who will have access to a next generation innovative workforce needed to fuel the creative economy in our region and beyond. The unique blend of artistic competencies combined with technological understanding will prepare them to be leaders, bringing new skills, vision and ideas as employees of existing companies or entrepreneurs launching their own businesses. Local business owners will benefit from the increased student audience using their services, accessing their shops and venues.



"This investment will change our city forever. We are truly on the verge of a change for downtown. The impact of ... students on our lives, and on the lives of this community will be substantial. It will continue to evolve and the city will continue to move forward exponentially because of it."

Jamie Massie
Business and community leader

Creative catalyst for Barrie

With a project budget of close to \$32 million and a targeted completion date of summer 2026, this impactful initiative will enhance the experiences of our students, industry, employers and the downtown community. Georgian will be the largest tenant in the 11-storey building at 55 Mulcaster Street. The full benefit of our presence will be felt when our students arrive for the start of the fall 2026 term.

A key benefit of the more than 82,000-square-foot space across multiple floors is the ability to bring together numerous design and visual arts programs and introduce new offerings, all under one roof, sparking cross-disciplinary collaboration and changemaking. In a phased approach, programs will move from the current much smaller downtown location, followed by many programs currently offered on the main Barrie Campus.

We're excited about the new location's features. Renovations will reflect our commitment to sustainability, innovative learning, and creativity. Fittingly, work spaces will resemble an artists' loft with a grid of columns, high ceilings, and spaces conducive to invention, collaboration, and ideation.

By fostering engagement and real-world impact, we will ensure that creativity flows beyond the centre—enriching both the local community and the broader economy. In building this centre within the heart of arts and culture in Barrie, we will drive program enrolment and expand our partnership and impact within the downtown community and throughout our catchment.

"We're excited to strengthen our contributions to the social and economic vibrancy of downtown Barrie. This is excellent news for our students, employees, partners and the region. Georgian is proud to serve the Barrie community and we look forward to amplifying our impact. This new location will support our enrolment growth in key areas, enrich the learning experience, and build on the connections and partnerships we so deeply value."

Kevin Weaver
President and CEO
Georgian College



This impact is welcomed

"The Barrie Police Service is excited to welcome more than 1,000 Georgian College students to study and explore in our downtown core.

Through our dedicated downtown units, officers and special constables with the Barrie Police have built strong relationships with downtown businesses and service providers through our years of proactive community engagement efforts.

We know that downtown Barrie is a safe, vibrant and exciting place. The presence of students, studying, working, and living in the area will further enhance the culture and character of the area as we work together to enhance community safety."

Rich Johnston
Chief of Police
Barrie Police Service

"Georgian College's move to downtown Barrie is truly exciting news for our community. We are eagerly looking forward to the energy and vibrancy that students, faculty, and staff will bring to the heart of our city. I've seen firsthand—through my BIA colleagues in other communities—how the presence of a postsecondary institution can transform a downtown, driving economic activity, supporting local businesses, and enhancing the overall sense of place. This isn't just a relocation; it's a powerful investment in Barrie's future, and positions downtown Barrie in partnership with Georgian College, as a hub of innovation, creativity and growth. We're thrilled to welcome Georgian College as a key part of our city's evolution."

Craig Stevens
Executive Director
Downtown Barrie BIA



An expanded Georgian in downtown

A dynamic learning environment blending creativity with purpose, passion, and practical applications

The spaces in the expanded downtown location will allow for merging of art, design and technology to leverage human-centred design and disruptive technologies positively. They will facilitate exciting internal and external collaborations at even greater levels. For example:

- Museum and Gallery students worked with Computer Programming students to create a virtual art gallery.
- Digital Content Creation and Strategy students employed artificial intelligence-generated images, photo composition and video special effects to create more than 30 virtual sets – backdrop to live actors in a local theatre.

In the larger new location, purposefully renovated and remodeled to facilitate creative work and collaboration, there is so much more opportunity. Visibility from the street will showcase these unrivaled learning experiences in action. And public spaces including the art gallery, retail store and hair salon will bring the community into the experience. The key program clusters for downtown will include a mix of design, visual arts, digital media and technology programming.

This mix offers significant opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration among the programs, connectivity with the surrounding community, and innovative projects that will enhance the economic, social, and cultural life of the downtown community.



“Georgian’s Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre is looking forward to activating a downtown Barrie space and will engage, support and celebrate the region’s entrepreneurs, through programming and events.”

Dr. Mira Ray
Executive Director, Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Georgian College

We can't do this alone

City investment and partnership are crucial to this vision's realization

We are building a vibrant new Georgian presence in downtown Barrie. And the greatest value to the community will be measured in the years ahead. It will be the most forward-looking educational institution in the province for design and visual arts fused with immersive technology and the paramount impact will be in the contributions and leadership of students and alumni to the creative economy for decades to come.

The city and our region will benefit, as will students as their education directly contributes to productive, meaningful lives.

We can't do it alone. The City of Barrie, along with other generous donors, will be the foundation of this success. Significant investment in our expanded downtown presence is crucial to harnessing the limitless potential right here at home.

It is well understood that the availability of postsecondary education is a proven way to elevate and safeguard the quality of life in a community. Often described as a fundamental building block for a flourishing, thriving and competitive economy, a robust and local postsecondary offering directly contributes to supporting city-building initiatives and combating social challenges.

This transformative project is about creativity, and you can be part of creating it – providing a lasting legacy for a flourishing design and arts community for our city and beyond for decades to come.

We are partners. We share similar values and hopes for our city. This is the time to innovate and be bold.



A resilient and vibrant downtown

“Georgian’s commitment to enhancing its presence in the downtown core is a significant investment in the long-term growth and vibrancy of our city. The acquisition of significant space in the Barrie City Centre and plans to make it into a central hub for creative programming and emerging innovative technologies aligns directly with our collective vision for a thriving, accessible, and economically resilient downtown. It will help strengthen the connection between education, local business, and community development.

This learning centre will play a critical role in workforce development by offering more opportunities for hands-on learning, collaboration with industry partners, and real-world experience for students. These are key ingredients in building a skilled workforce ready to meet the evolving needs of our region. It also brings increased foot traffic and energy to downtown businesses, while contributing to the overall economic health of the area.

The Barrie Chamber admires Georgian College for its vision and leadership for consistently taking the lead in helping to build a stronger Barrie. We look forward to supporting Georgians continued success.”

Paul Markle
Executive Director
Barrie Chamber of Commerce



Thank you for your consideration. This is game-changing innovation in action.

Kevin Weaver
President and CEO
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Appendix: the great need for creative changemakers

The creative economy is an evolving economy

The dire talent shortages in careers from health care to technology are well publicized. It's why Georgian recently launched the region's first stand-alone nursing degree to help meet the desperate shortage of nurses, and it's why we're investing in facilities and equipment to address the critical lack of skilled trades workers. What may not be as well-known is the ever-increasing need for the diverse talents of artists, innovators and changemakers to fuel the creative economy. There's a worldwide demand for inventive, artistic individuals to craft and design products, media, visual arts and more.

Around the world:

- The United Nation's Creative Economy Outlook 2024 underscores the pivotal role creative industries play in trade and economic growth, generating annual revenues of almost US\$2.3 trillion globally and accounting for 3.1 per cent of the entire global GDP (gross domestic product).
- According to G20 Insights, by 2030 the creative economy will encompass 10 per cent of global GDP.
- UNESCO estimates the creative economy comprises 6.2 per cent of global employment – with a higher percentage of young workers than many other industries.

In Canada:

- Creative industries are a key sector of the national economy. According to the Government of Canada, in 2020, they provided over 600,550 jobs and contributed \$55.5 billion to Canada's GDP.
- Canada's export of creative goods and services was valued at \$19.4 billion.

"The creative economy has the right forces pushing its sails. This is not just art. It is an economic powerhouse that we must harness together, leaving no one behind."

Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General
United Nations Trade and Development