

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024

LATEST INFORMATION AND UPDATES ABOUT NUSARNIA

**nuSARNIA**  
**CREATING SPACES FOR PEOPLE**

# Don't Just See The Change. Be The Change.

The people who live, work, and play here in Sarnia have firsthand insight into the city's needs and challenges. Chances are, you've thought of simple, effective solutions to issues in your own neighbourhood that impact the safety and well-being of your family and friends. Yet, it's easy to feel disconnected from the processes that shape our city—bogged down by red tape, bureaucracy, overthinking, and indecision. You have ideas for improvement but aren't sure how to make your voice heard or where to start.

We've been there.

Creating meaningful change can often feel overwhelming, as if the leap from our current reality to a brighter future is too far to make. That leap can feel even heavier when weighed down by outdated policies, limited budgets, and the critical need for public and political buy-in. Too often, bold visions for the future remain stuck on paper, caught in the complexities of turning ideas into reality.

But **change doesn't have to start big**. While long-term progress often requires funding and municipal support, transformative solutions can begin with small, tangible actions.

**nuSarnia is a collective of forward thinking and creative people looking to disrupt the status quo in our city and create spaces and places that inspire and connect our community.**



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# A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we reflect on the past year, I'm excited to share nuSarnia's 2024 Annual Report. This year has been a pivotal one in our mission to promote welcoming streets, vibrant public places, and connected neighbourhoods, and we are proud of the progress we've made together.

Over the past year, we have worked tirelessly to create a healthier, more active and socially connected community by spearheading bike-friendly initiatives for all ages and abilities, revitalizing sustainable urban spaces, and championing efforts at the municipal level that prioritize people and energize community.

The local movement for better streets and vibrant public spaces continues to gain momentum, thanks to the dedication of our team, partners, and engaged community members.

Here are some key highlights from this year:

- **Infrastructure Improvements:** We advocated with city planners and local elected officials to implement new cycling infrastructure such as the London Line Multi-Use Path, and the Wiltshire Park connection to Howard Watson Trail, making cycling safer and more accessible for all.
- **Community Engagement Programs:** We launched new programs like the Kids Bike Rally, monthly Glow Rides, and expanded on Ben's Bike Tours, inviting hundreds of people to experience the joys of cycling with family and friends.
- **Midtown Trail Revitalization:** we continued our revitalization efforts along the Midtown Trail, which included successfully planted over 204 trees, and the launch of our community bench program!
- **Grants & Partnerships:** We successfully forged new partnerships and grants with esteemed local organizations such as Pembina Pipeline, Blackwater Coffee, and Coldwell Banker. We successfully secured Federal funding for our final project of the year, The Festive Nutcracker Project, which opened doors for many new partnerships and initiatives for downtown revitalization in the years to come.



Looking ahead, we remain committed to expanding our advocacy efforts, supporting innovative urban design, and strengthening community partnerships to make our city more welcoming and vibrant. We believe in the power creating spaces for people to transform communities, and we are eager to continue pushing for change. A heartfelt thank you to our supporters, volunteers, local leaders, and community members who have been instrumental in this progress. Your passion and dedication fuel our mission, and we look forward to another year of creating healthier, safer, and more connected spaces for all.

*Tristan Bassett*

**TRISTAN BASSETT**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NUSARNIA



# Introduction

Strong communities are built on the foundation of engaged, organized residents. When neighbours come together with a shared vision, they become a powerful catalyst for change, driving safety improvements, beautification, and community transformation.

Every challenge presents an opportunity. Whether it's addressing a half-vacant downtown core or advocating for safer streets for walking and cycling, residents have the unique ability to identify the issues that impact their daily lives and turn them into actionable goals.

Through temporary installations and demonstrations, communities can showcase potential solutions—tangible "experiments" that offer practical insights and inspire support from city officials. These initiatives pave the way for meaningful, lasting change.

## Real projects. Real time. Real change.

nuSarnia is creating spaces for PEOPLE, be that on the street to safely move, in public places to thrive or in the community to become involved and engaged with making change locally.

All of our work is rooted in creating better neighbourhoods that puts people first.



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## Mission

To improve the quality of life in Sarnia by advocating and inspiring change for mobility, walkability, and togetherness in public spaces throughout our community.

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## Vision

To transform Sarnia by improving the well-being of its residents, creating a connected, active, and healthy community featuring a livable, vibrant environment where every resident can feel welcomed.



### **CURIOUS:**

We are constantly expanding our awareness, gathering data, and transforming it into actionable knowledge to support and advocate for positive change. By continually asking why, we uncover insights and craft innovative solutions.



### **COLLABORATIVE:**

We believe true connection with the community begins with genuine collaboration. We see constructive feedback as a valuable gift and always take the time to listen, learn, and understand.



### **CONNECTIVE:**

We are deeply rooted in the community we call home. Recognizing the importance of strong connections, we work tirelessly to strengthen relationships and enhance the well-being of those we serve.

## **Who We Are**

We are a passionate group of social entrepreneurs dedicated to making Sarnia the best it can be—a vibrant, lively city where people are excited to live, work, play, and learn.

Sarnia is already a beautiful place to call home, but we believe in making it even better. Inspired by our travels, we ask, “What if we had night food markets like those in Thailand or beer gardens like those in Munich? How could we make Sarnia as cycling-friendly as the Netherlands? And most importantly, how do we create a city where our children want to stay and raise families of their own?”

Our team is as diverse as the city we love. We are homeowners, residents, public and private sector leaders, community advocates, and multidisciplinary professionals. We are artists, engineers, government officials, and makers. We are your neighbours, your colleagues, and your friends.

Together, we identify challenges, share bold ideas, and implement projects that inspire meaningful change. Our mission is to create healthier people, places, and a thriving community for everyone.

Simply put, we are changemakers. We are doers. We are answering the call for community action.

**And we'd love for you to join us.**

# 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

4

team members



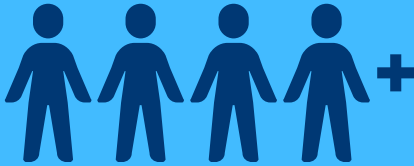
4

board members



3,128

advocates & supporters



## LOCAL INVESTMENT



**\$10,637** to local artists



**\$6,580** to garbage collection & lawn maintenance



**\$5,680** to tree planting & watering



**\$16,844** supporting local events

18+



active projects & events

## COMMUNITY PROJECTS & SPONSORSHIPS

nuSarnia has **18** active projects and currently sponsors **4** community events.



## COMMUNITY ACTION



**6** Public Presentations

**4** City Council Delegations



**30** Interviews & Published Articles

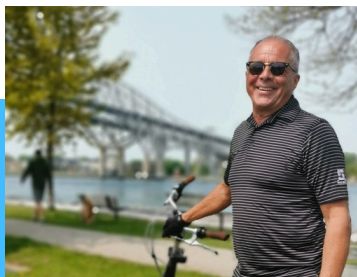
# Welcoming Streets

Walking, cycling, and public transit should be safe, convenient, and enjoyable mobility options for everyone—residents and visitors alike—regardless of age, ability, trip purpose, or time of year. Yet, in many areas of our community, people face barriers to walking safely, from a lack of sidewalks and crosswalks to missing safety features that protect both pedestrians and drivers.

We are committed to removing these obstacles, fostering a culture of healthy, active living in Sarnia. Our goal is to ensure everyone can confidently choose cycling, walking, or public transit to reach their destinations.

By making streets safer for every age and stage of life, we create a community where people spend more quality time with their loved ones and less time behind the wheel.

## GROWING AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY CULTURE



### BEN'S BIKE TOURS

This program offers free, small-group guided cycling tours through Sarnia, providing an opportunity to learn about the city's active transportation network, current projects, and future vision. It's an engaging way to explore how we're shaping a more connected, sustainable community through cycling and active transportation initiatives.



### SLOW ROLL

A free, community bike ride open to all ages and abilities. Ride with hundreds of others and leisurely explore the beauty of our city, celebrating Sarnia's vibrant streets and landscapes in a fun, inclusive ride for everyone.



### CYCLING WITHOUT AGE

This program offers residents of retirement homes the chance to enjoy trishaw rides through the city, providing them with access to the outdoors and helping to reconnect them to the community. It's a meaningful way to promote mobility, independence, and social connection for older adults.



### YOUTH SPOKES

A free program for youth ages 11-14 that focuses on teaching road safety skills, building self-confidence, and fostering self-reliance. This initiative empowers young people to experience the freedom of cycling while promoting the integration of healthy, active living into their daily routines.





## CANADA DAY POP UP PROTECTED BIKE LANES

In partnership with the City of Sarnia and Bluewater Trails, we brought back our pop-up protected bike lanes for the second year, with an impressive increase in ridership from 500 to over 900 families and community members. These lanes provided a safe route to Canatara Park, allowing more people to enjoy the festivities while embracing active transportation.



## KIDS BIKE RALLY

The Kids Bike Rally is a fun and educational event designed for young riders to learn essential bike safety skills, develop confidence, and explore their community. Participants are introduced to the Midtown Trail and taught how to safely navigate city streets, all while enjoying a fun, active experience. This rally encourages children to embrace cycling as a healthy and exciting way to get around, helping them build self-reliance and a love for outdoor activity.



## GLOW RIDES

Glow Rides are themed community bike rides where participants decorate their bikes with neon lights and glow accessories. Together, we navigate downtown Sarnia, cycling along the waterfront path through Centennial Park, city streets, and around the marina. These family-friendly rides offer a fun way to explore the city, promote active transportation, and bring the community together.



## BILL 212

We opposed Bill 212, educating our followers on why the bill threatens Sarnia's Active Transportation Master Plan and could lead to the removal of existing bike lanes. Our advocacy focused on protecting progress toward safer, more accessible transportation options for our community. We encouraged citizens to share their opinions and feedback with local government to ensure their voices were heard.



# Vibrant Public Places

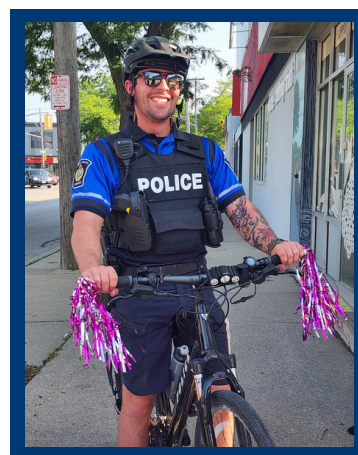
People need spaces to connect—places to step outside their homes, offices, or schools and experience a sense of community. When such spaces are lacking, it becomes difficult for neighbours to truly know one another, with interactions limited to brief waves from passing cars.

Through a citizen-led approach, we bring community members together to reimagine and repurpose underused spaces—like parking spots, vacant storefronts, or empty lots—into vibrant public gathering places. These pop-up spaces, such as block parties, markets, or parklets, are designed to draw attention to overlooked areas and offer opportunities for social interaction that were previously unavailable. They transform vacant spaces into colourful, people-friendly destinations that invite everyone to gather, engage, and connect.

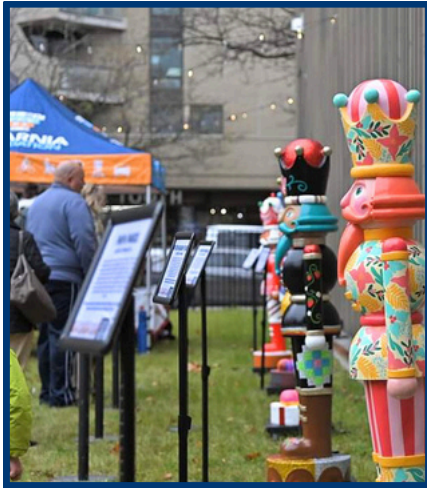
Pop-up projects inspire action, foster a strong community identity, and catalyze the kinds of improvements that make a neighbourhood, town, or city a better place to live, work, play, and learn.



## MITTON VILLAGE BLOCK PARTY



We are proud to support the Mitton Village Citizen Collective (MVCC) and events like the Block Party, which make the most of existing public spaces and community assets to create environments that foster health, happiness, and well-being. These projects play a vital role in strengthening neighbourhood identity, building community spirit, and celebrating the history and cultural significance of Mitton Village. By sponsoring the MVCC, we are helping to create spaces that people want to linger in, not just pass through.



## FESTIVE NUTCRACKER PROJECT

The Festive Nutcracker Project, organized by nuSarnia, brought a touch of holiday magic to downtown Sarnia. This community-driven initiative featured six 5-foot-tall nutcrackers, each transformed by local artists into unique, vibrant works of art. The project aimed to enhance the festive spirit of the city and create a welcoming atmosphere for residents and visitors alike. By showcasing the creativity of local artists, the Festive Nutcracker Project not only brightened the streets but also fostered a sense of pride and connection within the community.

Made possible with funding from FedDev Ontario, My Main Street, and the Canadian Urban Institute, this project celebrated art, culture, and community spirit. The nutcrackers were on display from November 16 to December 27, with an official kick-off event held on November 16 to unveil them to the public.

In addition, an online auction for the nutcrackers was held during this time, with all proceeds raised benefiting the Sarnia Women's Interval Home. The initiative transformed the downtown area into a lively, festive destination and supported a vital community cause.



# Flagship Project: Midtown Trail

In 2024, we continued to build on the success of the Midtown Trail project with significant community-driven improvements. This year, we added benches, each painted and built by local residents, as well as strategically placed trash receptacles to maintain cleanliness. Trees were planted to enhance the greenery along the trail, and regular maintenance efforts, such as trash clean-ups and shrub and grass care, helped keep the space inviting and well-kept. We also installed path signage to guide visitors and raise awareness of the trail's existence and benefits.

The design of our city plays a crucial role in the health and well-being of our community. Access to essential services such as employment, education, housing, healthy foods, transportation, social supports, recreational activities, and green spaces are key factors in determining health outcomes and behaviours. By improving access to these resources, we promote independence and enable residents of all ages, abilities, and economic backgrounds to engage in a thriving community.

Over the past three years, we've worked alongside many community partners to develop a safe and connected infrastructure network that spans from Lambton College to Centennial Park. While the City of Sarnia has spearheaded the construction of the main infrastructure, the ongoing opportunity for grassroots, community-led efforts to evolve the space is vast. These initiatives help transform the Midtown Trail into a playful, attractive, and welcoming destination for everyone to enjoy.

Our vision for this project is to create a beautiful and vibrant trail that weaves through the heart of our city, linking residents, students, and visitors to businesses and services through active transportation modes such as walking, cycling, and wheeling. **We aim to turn this previously underutilized asset into a dynamic and thriving hub that fosters connection, movement, and community.**



**BENCHES**



**SIGNAGE**



**TREES**



**TRASH RECEPTACLES**



# UNITED WAY DAY OF CARING BENCH BUILDING



As part of our ongoing commitment to revitalizing public spaces and creating more inviting areas for the community, we're excited to introduce the Midtown Trail Bench Project! Along the trail, you'll find a series of beautifully crafted benches, each one uniquely designed and commissioned by local artists. These benches not only provide a place for people to rest, relax, and enjoy the surrounding, but they also bring a touch of creativity and local culture to the trail.

We're proud to share this project was made possible through the tremendous support of United Way's Day of Giving. During this event, employees from Pembina Pipeline generously volunteered their time and energy to help build and paint 19 benches. It was inspiring to see how the community came together—not just artists and volunteers, but everyone who walked by as these benches took shape, adding their encouragement and excitement for what the project would bring to the trail.

The Bench Project is more than just functional seating. It's a reflection of the spirit of collaboration and the creativity that defines our community. Each bench tells a story through the hands of local artists, making the trail not only a route for active transportation but also a vibrant public space where people can gather, connect, and enjoy the outdoors. Whether you're walking, cycling, or even passing by, these benches offer a welcoming spot to pause, appreciate the artwork, and maybe even strike up a conversation with someone new.

Projects like this remind us of the power of community-led initiatives. By working together, we're transforming spaces, creating moments of connection, and leaving a lasting impact for everyone to enjoy. We're excited to see how the Bench Project will continue to foster a sense of belonging and bring more life to the Midtown Trail for years to come.



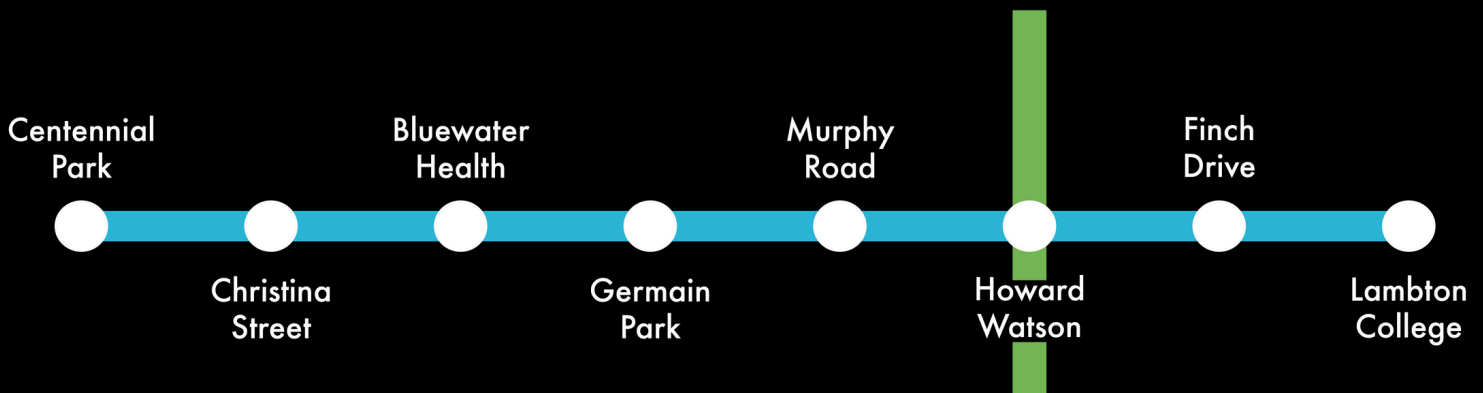


## BRANDING CAMPAIGN



In 2024, nuSarnia partnered with designer Tom Flood to develop a dynamic brand identity for the Midtown Trail. This collaboration focused on creating a visual representation that reflects the trail's essence—connecting people to places by transforming spaces. The new branding incorporates a logo and design elements that highlight the trail's role as a key connector in Sarnia, blending the city's history, natural beauty, and active transportation culture.

The tagline "Connecting people to places by transforming spaces" perfectly encapsulates the mission of the Midtown Trail, positioning it as not just a route, but a community-focused space that fosters connections. The new branding enhances the trail's visibility, making it a more inviting and recognizable destination for pedestrians, cyclists, and residents alike. This work sets the stage for further development, ensuring that the Midtown Trail continues to thrive as a central and vibrant part of the city.



# 2024 In Numbers



## 2024 Financial Highlights



**\$3,758**  
Tactical Urbanism Supplies



**\$16,000**  
Supporting Local Events



**\$32,995**  
Video Production Assets



**\$875**  
School Active Travel Grants



**\$31,772**  
Global Expertise Consulting



**\$8,483**  
Professional Development & Learning Opportunities





# THANK YOU

## OUR TEAM

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ben Prins

Paul Eastman

Margaret Eastman

Brad Cullis

### STAFF

Tristan Bassett, Executive Director

Sam Eastman, Placemaking & Communications Manager

Kerry Gabriel, Events & Community Partnerships Manager

Sydney Clark, Project Coordinator