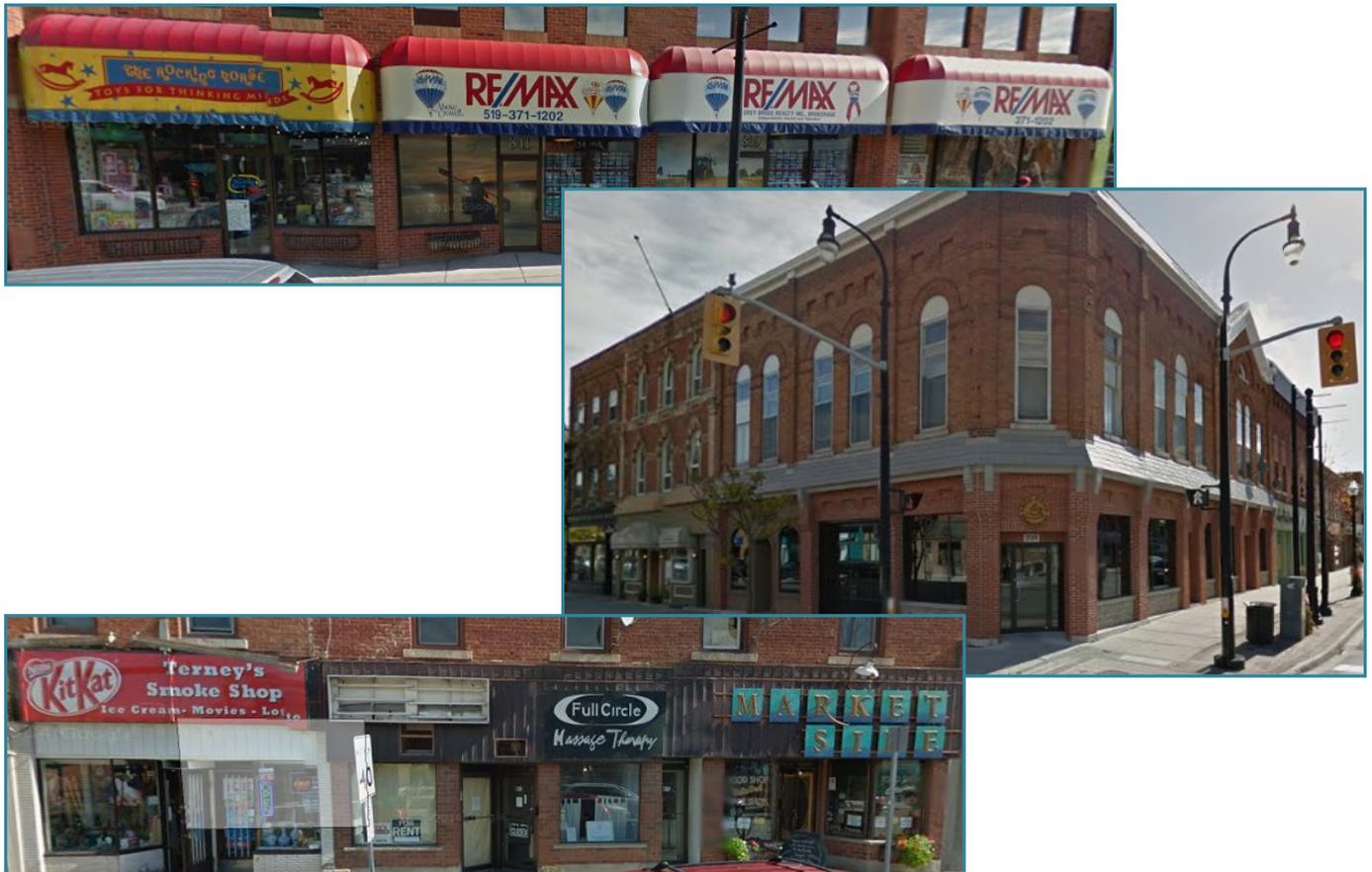


By the Numbers:

## A geo-touristic analysis of a small city's downtown core business appeal: a case study of Owen Sound

(Plain English: Does Owen Sound have downtown shopping which attracts tourists?)

May 2015



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A community's downtown (or uptown, as the case may be) has often been identified as an important draw for tourists, enhancing their overall experience of a trip to an area. In some cases tourists will, by design, seek out a particular community's downtown shopping district (DSD) because of its unique shopping, interesting historical aspects, and overall aesthetic appeal.<sup>i</sup> Often it is all about the shopping, looking for the unusual and unique shops. Municipal politicians promote the enhancement and preservation of an economically strong CBD, for residents and tourists.

Apart from the aesthetic appeal of a community's DSD, which can be quite personal and subjective, what is the range of shopping experiences that appeal to tourists? And what does touristic<sup>ii</sup> shopping look like? How many tourists engage in shopping?

It is hard to believe that a tourist does *not* shop, but a study in 2001 found that about only 30% of Ontario's tourists reported shopping as an activity, second only to visiting friends and relatives (VFR) at 55%.<sup>iii</sup> The same study reported that shopping reported as an activity was at 25% and 23% for Grey and Bruce counties, respectively. A six-year mean (1996 to 2001) for Grey and Bruce was almost 25%.

It is clear that "shopping", as reported by tourists, is not picking up a souvenir or a Pepsi and chips at a convenience store; it is bigger than that. The Travel Survey of Residents of Canada (TSRC), which replaced an older version of the survey<sup>iv</sup>, has five categories to capture the "reason for the trip", including (1) holidays/leisure/recreation, (2) visit friends or relatives, (3) attend a conference, (4) other personal reason, and (5) shopping. Tourists are also asked about what was spent on various types of purchases.

In addition to shopping, tourists purchase food and beverages. Food and beverages may be purchased at restaurants and food stores, with restaurant meals ranging from fast food style to high-end dining. Food tourism has attracted the attention of researchers for a number of years and many communities are attempting to highlight their unique, higher-end offerings in attempts to draw tourists.

As an economic development strategy, developing and maintaining a touristic or tourist-appealing, diversified, shopping district can be important to a community.<sup>v</sup> This is what is referred to as a "pull" factor in tourism research. What might such a mix look like? Is there a way to assess a community's shopping district, establish a benchmark, and then track changes, or compare to other tourism destinations? In an attempt to answer these questions, this brief study makes reference to the small city of Owen Sound's (population 21,700) downtown to illustrate an approach that can be easily applied. This approach includes spatial and quantitative indicators.

Owen Sound's DSD, for this study, is defined as 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East bounded by 7<sup>th</sup> Street East in the south, 11<sup>th</sup> Street East in the north, side streets off of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East to, but not including, 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue East on the east, and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue East on the west. (See Figure 1 for a modified map showing the study area.)