



**City of Hamilton Ground Floor Use and Vacancy Survey
2025**

Presented by:

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Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the recent publication of the City of Hamilton Ground Floor Use and Vacancy Survey 2025 by the Department of Planning.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that the City of Hamilton Plan 2025 was adopted on June 9th, 2025. In preparing that Plan, the Department undertook an extensive exercise of research and data collection to ensure that the end product was an evidence-based document, with a policy

framework equipped to respond to the real-time circumstances, needs and opportunities of the City.

Mr. Speaker, as part of that data collection exercise, the Department surveyed ground floor units across the City for the purposes of determining occupancy rates and gaining a clear understanding of the dispersal of uses across the City and how these factors impact the City's overall viability.

Mr. Speaker, ground floor occupancy surveys, or “health checks” as they are called in other jurisdictions, provide a tangible way of monitoring the vitality of a defined area, and consequently, its economic “health”. The ground floor units of any city are what shapes the pedestrian experience, serving as the interface between buildings and the public realm. Furthermore, ground floor activity can often be the principal determinant in defining the overall perception that people have of an area.

Mr Speaker, for these reasons, the Department of Planning believes that it is important to collect this data on a regular basis. Regular data collection and analysis also allow the Department to effectively monitor

the impacts of planning policy over time and respond to the findings, where necessary.

Mr. Speaker, the 2025 survey is an update of a similar exercise conducted in 2022, albeit with a refined methodology, designed to provide data with a higher degree of accuracy and reliability. Whilst acknowledging that the methodology has evolved, I am pleased to report that the Department's findings show that there has been a decline in the City's vacancy rates from approximately fifteen percent (15%) in 2022 to ten percent (10%) for 2025. For confirmation, the field surveys for the 2025 data took place in June and July of last year.

Mr. Speaker, the Survey shows that there is a total of nine hundred forty four (944) ground-level units within the City, with eight hundred forty seven (847) of those units being occupied at the time of the survey. I believe this speaks to a highly resilient City in the face of the ongoing challenging economic circumstances for high streets around the world. However, we cannot and will not rest on our laurels, as we are acutely aware of several prominent vacancies within our Retail Core.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is intent on continuing to support the economic growth of the City, as evidenced by the designation of the City’s two (2) Economic Empowerment Zones and expanding the “approved residential schemes” initiative to cover the entire City. In addition, I am optimistic about the ongoing implementation of the City of Hamilton Plan 2025 and how its discretionary approach to decision-making can assist in unlocking the City’s potential.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the ground floor uses, it is perhaps unsurprising to note that retailing is the most dominant with 220 units, followed by residential uses, which account for 188 ground floor units. As expected, retailing activity is highly concentrated in the southwestern quadrant of the City, in alignment with the Retail Core of the City of Hamilton Plan 2025. Residential uses predominate on the ground floor of properties located in the northeastern part of the City, which is again unsurprising given the long-established character of this area as a residential neighbourhood.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to emphasise the strong support offered within the City of Hamilton Plan 2025 for residential development in recognising that increasing and densifying residential uses within the City has multi-layered benefits. For example, it offers a sustainable solution to the pressures being experienced within Bermuda's housing market by encouraging residents to live close to employment generators and reducing the need to travel to access services and facilities whilst reducing pressure for greenfield development in other parts of the island. Increased residential development in the City also creates a greater catchment from which existing and prospective city-based businesses can benefit, thereby directly enhancing the City's economic conditions.

Mr. Speaker, the data has shown that there is a high diversity of ground floor uses within the City, which is a clear indication of a multifunctional urban core. The City serves a wide variety of needs, and this diversification of uses is a key factor in supporting the City's overall resilience.

Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged by the findings of this valuable data collection exercise and hope that we can continue to see a positive trend in reduced vacancy rates as the City enters a new era. Furthermore, I am also proud to see the Department of Planning delivering upon its commitments to produce key data on a more frequent and regular basis.

Mr. Speaker, the Department has previously outlined the importance of evidence-based policy formulation – an approach which I firmly believe in and support. There must be a clear correlation between what is happening on the ground and how our policies are responding to those conditions. This, **Mr. Speaker,** is what leads to the development of responsive planning policy which is truly fit for purpose.

Mr. Speaker, the Department will continue to collect data in relation to a range of topics which are impacted by planning policy to ensure that established policy frameworks are having the intended effect and are remaining relevant and current. Monitoring the long-term effects of planning policy, and consistently documenting this information, allows the Department to enter a cyclical process of policy implementation,

monitoring and refinement, constantly learning lessons and enabling the informed evolution of planning policy.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**.