



Monday, October 30, 2017

Minister Leal  
**Minister Responsible for Small Business**  
**Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs**  
11th Floor  
77 Grenville Street  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1B3

Dear Minister Leal,

Susan Nicholson and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to meet with you, on behalf of the OBIAA Board, on Thursday, October 26.

During the course of an hour, we were able to speak about many different aspects of the work of a BIA. As mentioned, the BIA Legislation created in 1970, was a small, quiet but powerful piece of legislation that has now been utilized in many countries around the world.

There are presently approximately 311 BIAs in the province of Ontario; however, there is no mandatory notification to any central location on the implementation of a BIA. Indeed during over the 45 plus years since the legislation was implemented in Ontario the first Return On Investment (ROI) project centering on this legislation and its impact was undertaken by OBIAA and MMA from 2016 to 2017. The full report is found at OBIAA's website (<http://obiaa.com/return-on-investment-of-bias-study/>). We certainly hope you will find the time to review the copies we left with you, as the findings have important policy implications. OBIAA will be presenting the full report to the Planning, Environment, Resources and Land (PERL) Deputy Ministers next week and *we hope you and/or your representatives will be able to attend. Please contact me if you require further information regarding this meeting.*

The role of the BIA has changed throughout the years and one of our key findings from the ROI project was the important function a BIA plays in Community Development as a key community hub. While most BIAs fit the traditional model of the 'historical main street' the legislation has been used in non-traditional areas, such as business parks, industrial parks and tourist areas (i.e. Kanata North BIA, Carp Road Corridor, Liberty Village and Fallsview BIA).

BIAs cross all Ministries of the Province and so our annual work with the PERL Deputy Ministers and Assistant Deputy Ministers is pivotal to our success.

Working with the Ministry of Economic Development and Growth, and its Open For Business program, we were lead to this important annual meeting with PERL. During the years we have achieved a number of successes, which include but are not limited to:

1. **Accessibility** – OBIAA has managed two projects with the Accessibility Directorate championing the AODA to our BIAs and their member businesses and properties



2. **Vacant Unit Rebate** – OBIAA advocated for a change to this section of the Municipal Act (364). Now Municipalities can opt out of providing this rebate. We feel a great opportunity is available to track the return to vitality of many vacant properties across the province as municipalities begin their devolution of providing the rebate. *However, we would also suggest a strengthening of Property Standards Policies around Vacant Properties should be implemented, in companion to this legislative change.*
3. **Tourism Oriented Destination Signs (TODS)** – working with the Ministry of Tourism, OBIAA advocated for a new TOD sign to be created, showing a “Rural Downtown”. The threshold for the use of this sign was raised, at the same time, from populations of 10,000 to 20,000. The rural sign (seen to the right) is the first of its kind in the world! *Ultimately, we would like to see the threshold raised to coincide with OMAFRA’s definition of rural, so all ‘rural downtowns’ would be able to apply, if they are tourism ready.*



An area which we would hope to see additional changes be considered would be the Municipal Act, which oversees the BIA Local Board. In 2015, OBIAA submitted a number of suggestions to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs asking for specific changes to the Municipal Act. Unfortunately we did not see any of what we considered much needed changes implemented. A copy of our submission is attached for your review. *We continue to suggest changes that would help our BIAs clarify their status as a volunteer Local Board and acknowledge this Local Board as the only board that is self-funded...a key Private-Public partnership.*

As mentioned, during our meeting, in the 1970’s the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (and Housing) initially monitored and funded the work of the BIA Association, followed by a devolution process transitioning to the first self-funded provincial association. In 1999, this organization failed, however 18 months later the current OBIAA arose through a grassroots need for BIAs to collaborate. We are funded by membership (voluntary) and by our annual Conference which helps to build the capacity of BIAs and is supported, with thanks by the OMAFRA. *However, our organization is lean and needs financial support to continue the work that is so necessary to build capacity within BIAs across the province.*

In those early days, when MMAH ran the provincial organization, a small Infrastructure Funding called the Community Area Improvement Program (CAIP) was available. This Provincial Grant/Municipal Grant/BIA LOAN made available up to \$500,000 and allowed BIAs to undertake small infrastructure projects. *By allowing a BIA to leverage its municipal relationship and its self-funding ability, small infrastructure funding could assist a BIA area to revitalize its community’s core.*

A BIA is only as good as its relationship with the Municipality that creates it. It is a partnership which needs to be fostered and whose governance needs to be strengthened. *For BIAs assurance that their Municipality has the best interest of their ‘core’ at heart means that they adhere to their Official Plan, Planning and Economic Development priorities.*

OBIAA applauds the work of OMAFRA and sees itself as a partner in promoting the Downtown Revitalization tools that are offered. There are many BIAs that do not qualify for these tools, but are challenged by the same issues that rural communities encounter. *We would ask that the Province consider offering Downtown Revitalization tools to all BIAs and that the OMAFRA applications ask whether a BIA is in place in the area that*



*is undergoing the Downtown Revitalization program. This would allow the Province and OBIAA to track required data.*

OBIAA, with support from MMA, has just completed Return on Investment of BIAs (see link above). In October, we submitted a proposal to MMA to continue the work of gathering data on BIAs, to build 5 to 10 Case Studies with representative BIAs using the agreed upon indicators from the first project. These case studies could:

- (a) be used as proxies for the whole province,
- (b) provide the framework, tools and education for other BIAs to undergo their own study, to;
- (c) determine the Return on Investment of BIAs and their “GDP” (Gross District Product).



*A copy of this second proposal is attached.*

In conclusion, we would like to thank you, Minister Leal, your Chief of Staff - Jason Easton and Daniel Skilleter – Senior Advisor, Policy for the Office of the Premier for allowing us the opportunity to talk and work with you to improve and foster Ontario’s BIAs and their member businesses.

We understand that Bill 148 is now passed. We know this will have a significant impact on Ontario’s Small Businesses. *We hope that in passing this important bill consideration will be given to Ontario’s Small Businesses and specific consideration to what OBIAA refers to as our “Main Street Class” of small businesses. It is these small, generational, incubator and entrepreneurial businesses that are the backbone of Ontario and they require special consideration.*

We invite you to attend our annual conference, being held in Blue Mountain, ON, hosted by the Collingwood BIA - April 15 to 18, 2018. We will follow up with more information and a program in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Kay Matthews  
Executive Director

Cc:  
Daniel Skilleter, Senior Advisor, Policy – Office of the Premier  
Jason Easton, Chief of Staff – Office of the Honourable Jeff Leal, Minister Responsible for Small Business  
Susan Nicholson, Collingwood BIA (OBIAA Treasurer and 2018 BIA Conference Host)