

## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

---

### Submission of Priorities Ontario Business Improvement Area Association

---

OBIAA, since 2001, acts as an important resource for education, partnership and collaboration to each BIA across the province. OBIAA recognizes the power of networking, the strength in numbers and the value of sharing common concerns and finding resolutions specific to our individual communities.

OBIAA, through membership, represents, supports and encourages member business improvement areas to increase their effectiveness and their contribution to the economic and social well-being of communities in Ontario.

OBIAA's current BIA membership collectively represents over 100 part-time staff, approximately 150 full-time staff with a combined budget of over \$40,000,000 that is spent keeping Ontario's communities vital. There are over 55,000 businesses that are represented within Ontario's over 280 BIAs.

The first BIA Legislation, in the world, was created in 1970 in a partnership with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (the Government of Ontario), Bloor West Village and the City of Toronto. This Legislation was created to build partnerships between the Municipalities and the businesses in the Municipality's business community.

The BIA Legislation is housed in the Municipal Act for the Province of Ontario and, in 2009; the BIAs in the province became Local Boards of Council. While there is no mechanism for Municipalities to inform the Province upon the formation of a BIA, OBIAA and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs have a current database of almost 300 BIAs in the province of Ontario.

The Ontario BIA Board works closely with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Rural Affairs (OMAF and OMRA) and each Ministry provides a Liaison to the Board. The Board welcomes these Liaisons as invaluable additions to our understanding of the concerns of local business in our BIAs. It has been suggested, additionally, that a Liaison from the Ministry of Tourism be added and we would suggest that a liaison from the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment be explored as a result of these discussions.

Business Improvement Areas, in most cases, represent 'Main Street Ontario', the economic backbone of the province. When, in the 1950's and 1960's planning departments in Municipalities across the province were encouraging the growth of regional malls, our collective back was turned on 'Main Street Ontario' and as a result the heart of our communities began to crumble, the resulting BIA Legislation was penned. This forward thinking Legislation has undergone a number of changes over the years, but the intent and basic mechanism has been adopted to create BIAs, BIDs (districts) and BIZs (zones) *around the world*. Currently there are approximately 75 BIAs in Toronto alone.

## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

---

As our traditional Main Streets began to crumble, our collective voice came together and BIAs responded by creating Marketing Programs, Events and Promotions and Beautification Projects that revitalized our community core. Shop Local programs have come to fruition and BIAs have become the stewards of their community's economic, cultural and educational core. While BIAs have and are working hard to keep up with the changing world, a world of 'power centres has cropped up, creating a new threat to our cores.

Recognition by the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment of the plight of Main Street is therefore very much needed, appreciated and applauded.

In April of 2013 the Ontario BIA Association held its annual conference in partnership with the Toronto Association of BIAs. Premier Kathleen Wynne attended a portion of the conference, met with many of our delegates and addressed the conference, making it clear that she understood she was listening to concerns from Main Street Ontario. As a result of her participation in the conference, we have addressed many large and far reaching concerns on behalf of our membership, with the Premier and the Minister of Rural Affairs, the Honourable Jeff Leal This by no means an exhaustive or extensive list, but of highest ranking priority and they include:

- 1.0 Business Education Tax (BET) – needs for equalization
- 2.0 Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) – highest and best use methodology to determine property assessment is currently in effect and impacting small property owners
- 3.0 Accessibility (AODA) – Built & Customer Service. AODA vs. Human Rights Tribunal
- 4.0 Vacancy Rate Rebate – a sunset clause could/should be reviewed to discourage long-term vacant property and their property standards decline
- 5.0 Employee Health Tax (EHT) – BIAs – any business doesn't pay EHT until you hit a payroll of (accumulated) \$400,000. Municipalities, and therefore their Local Boards, are exempt from the \$400,000 threshold. Need an amnesty period for BIAs
- 6.0 Funding – ability and availability to apply and access for grants
- 6.1 Sustainable Funding for OBIAA
- 7.0 Definition of Small Business – new category – Main Street Business
- 8.0 Municipal Act – updates and/or changes that need to happen in support of BIAs

## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

**September 2013**

---

The eight (8) priorities identified by the Ontario BIA Association all impact both 'Main Street Ontario' and the BIAs that support them and we fully intend to pursue these priorities in the future.

The **Open For Business Roundtable**, however, provides an opportunity to implement immediate priorities with the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. Through your **Open For Business** process we are presenting five (5) priorities that we believe will aid our BIA members and their members (Main Street Ontario) in the immediate future.

## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

---

### Priority 1: Provide Clarity and Improve Awareness of Compliance Obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

---

BIAs and their members have two primary concerns with regard to compliance: 1) physical upgrades to their buildings especially heritage buildings, and 2) awareness about accessibility standards for customer service.

Physical upgrades to heritage buildings are a common BIA issue. Many, if not most, BIAs or Main Street Ontario began organically and represent Ontario's historic, economic and cultural core. There is therefore, a great deal of misunderstanding and fear on the upcoming AODA deadlines on physical AODA deadlines. As one BIA states: *"For our members, the AODA compliance has been a challenging one as some businesses are not in a geographic position on the sidewalk to get the regulated ramps and doorways needed to be compliant and they are having trouble finding solutions as the flexibility is not present for them to do so."* How does a small business owner, especially those who lease, make the AODA standards on a heritage building? And, if the standards are 'grandfathered' for heritage buildings, who is communicating and assuaging the fears of the small business?

It is clear that small businesses need to comply with the Customer Service Standards that have been enacted, what is not clear is who is communicating the new policies with the BIAs and their members. As a Local Board of Council, is it the role of the BIA to play an active role in helping their members understand and comply with AODA requirements? Both BIA members, and their business members, report being confused, tentative and frustrated in trying to understand what's required of them.

To help address this gap, BIAs would like to explore how or whether they should be more proactive in engaging and communicating with their members by distributing information, templates, best practices, training, etc. BIAs could also lead seminars to assist members.

**Recommendation:** A communications chain should be developed for the implementation and training of the required AODA that clearly outlines who is providing the training, how it is provided and providing the tools and templates at little to no cost to BIAs and their members.

**Lead Ministry:** Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministry of Research and Innovation, Accessibility Directorate

## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

### Priority 2: Improve Understanding and Engagement on the Tourism Oriented Directional Signs (TODS) Program

Making the application process, including availability of signs, and criteria related to sign locations, more accessible and applicable.

BIAs have indicated that there are different processes when applying for signage through the smaller regional TODS (smaller, regional roads) approvals versus the larger Canadian TODS (400 series highways) process. BIAs, through OBIAA, would be interested in exploring what mechanisms and tools there are to execute a more integrated approach to TODS icons for “downtown”/ “main street” destination signage in order to help brand BIAs as an attraction. And another area for exploration is how this could be done in cooperation with provincial Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs).

BIAs do not identify cost as a significant barrier to participating in TODS, however, there has been frustration expressed about the application process and limits related to the number of TODS signs permitted in an area.

*“Our biggest challenge are the restrictions placed on us by the TODDS signage system. Getting travelers off of Hwy 10 is a challenge really good attractive signage would help. Our main intersection (Hwy 10 and 9 or Broadway) is unattractive and does not accurately represent what visitors will find once they pull off the highway.”*



In reviewing the TODs Icons, we note that there is one for Rural Downtowns, but it shares its definition with a number of other aspects that are the same. The Rural or Urban Downtown has no icon that identify itself (See Appendix A). As our Main Street Ontario Downtowns are often a collection and collective of shopping, heritage, culture, education and community the identified Icon does not reflect their unique attributes. The Ontario BIA Association has created a Marketing Campaign recommending a branding that supports our Main Street Businesses, via their BIAs. The Brand is call “Go ON” or Go Ontario.



**Recommendation:** That the TODs Signage program be reviewed so the National, Provincial and Municipal programs work together and complement each other and further that a Main Street Ontario Icon be developed or adopted to encourage economic growth and vitality of our Main Streets. Further that the RTO’s work with the TODs system to explore cooperation through partnerships.

**Lead Ministry:** Ministry Tourism, Culture and Sport

## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

---

### Priority 3: Build Collaborative Relationships with Regional Tourism Organizations

---

#### 1. Regional Tourism Organizations

BIAs have indicated that there is no one access point for them to engage with all the RTOs. BIAs would like to have a more direct connection and recognition when working with Regional Tourism Organizations to help brand and market downtown shopping areas and bring attention to BIA features and events.

The TODs signage, as identified above, is one aspect of where these organizations.

Membership with OBIAA is annual and last year on our basic Membership Application we asked our members to identify what RTO their BIA fell under and 44% left this area of their application without an answer. This lack of response on this question of the four questions asked is indeed telling. 44% either didn't know or did not have 'top of mind' awareness of their RTO and the work that it is doing.

From a provincial organizations' point of view, there is no one entity for the Ontario BIA Association to speak and work with. If the RTO system is to work, we need to be able to encourage engagement with the BIAs/Main Street Ontario.

RTO's seemingly encourage competitiveness between the regions, there is no sharing of best practices or understanding of who the stakeholders are or could be.

**Recommendation:** Encourage open forums for the RTO across the Province. Encourage stronger communications, sharing of best practices and partnerships with provincial organizations, such as OBIAA and their community stakeholder.

**Lead Ministry:** Ministry Tourism, Culture and Sport

## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

---

### Priority 4: Streamline and Simplify Information related to Festivals and Events Permitting –To Be Confirmed

---

BIAs are often frustrated with the volume and variety of permits and approvals required to host a one-day or temporary event—one of the greatest frustrations is not knowing what permits are even required. Rules and process differ from one municipality to another, but there are standards that are either being or are created, such as the Electrical Safety Act, the ON1Call system and more.

Some municipalities ease the process by having BIAs submit one detailed application in advance and then circulating notices to the relevant departments (fire, public health, traffic, etc.)—but in most cases BIAs are on their own to find out what approvals are required.

BizPal allows business to search for necessary permits and licences based on their business type and municipal location. OFB suggested that one of the areas that could be explored as a solution is adding a temporary event/festival component to the existing BizPal tool as a solution or create a recognizable tool that can be used by all Special Event Planners, using the BizPal as a template. A tool like this could be created with collaborations with OBIAA, Festivals and Events Ontario and an umbrella RTO organization. While not every municipality in Ontario currently offers BizPal (approx. 130), but if this has more value added, more participation could occur as a “one-stop shopping tool” for all Event Planners and their Municipalities.

OBIAA continues to explore examples of specific provincial permits or approval processes, such as the On1Call (for locates and digging) and the Ontario Safety Act, there are so many levels of Government for Event Organizations to work through in often repetitive and duplicate applications, the municipality (fire, traffic, bylaws), the region (health, traffic, police) and the province through provincial legislation.

When our members responded to our call-out, here is what they had to say:

*Example One: For our BIA, I would have to say that we currently only have one burden related to your e-mail below and that is the amount of permits and forms needed to hold an event (e.g. event permit, road closure permit, tent permit, water permit, hydro permit, noise by-law exemption, event insurance and all this has to be done more than 120 days in advance or there is a \$150+ in fees).*

*Example Two: Time frame and communications with regards to street closure and sidewalk sale permits. “In June the BIA ran a Food and Music Festival, part of which required sidewalk sale and street closure permits. This permit is required 8 weeks in advance; we put it in 10 weeks in advance and still had to constantly follow up on it. I*

## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

---

*feel like if we hadn't asked a week before the event, they would not have contacted us. Also any feedback was given at the last minute, making it frustrating to for the participating businesses, as they needed to prepare in advance for the event. Some of the business had to withdraw, as they didn't want to go to the expense of moving their cooking stations outside, in the event that the permit was declined."*

Example Three: Public health procedures for sidewalk sales. *"In June the BIA ran a Food and Music Festival. A number of the businesses in our BIA are restaurants. For the sidewalk sale they wanted to cook food/ have samples as part of the sidewalk sale. We had 14 different tasting stations – where food was provided either free, or for a small price. The forms required were very cumbersome, and on top of that, it wasn't until the last minute that we received approvals. Again, some of the business had to withdraw, as they didn't want to go to the expense of moving their cooking stations outside, in the event that the permit was declined."*

Community events are what add vibrancy, top of mind awareness and the community together and can become a community's brand. These events have been proven to bring huge economic benefits and residuals (Tourism Regional Economic Impact Model - [TREIMS](#)) and yet the level of red tape in order to offer these events to our residents and tourists is daunting and overwhelming.

Even in creating a recommendation for this and determining which Ministry could or should spearhead this, it became apparent that this crosses a number of Ministries, such as the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, the Ministry of Infrastructure and more.

**Recommendation:** Move towards creating a seamless process, either through the BizPal tool or through a newly developed and communicated tool. This topic is one that should be brought to the Roundtable for discussion.

**Lead Ministry:** TBD



## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

---

### Priority 5: Establish an OBIAA Forum for Working Across Provincial Government

---

In 2013, the City of Burlington created a report entitled [Core Commitment: Downtown Vision and Action Plan](#). The Plan clearly and succinctly identified many of the strengths of Downtown. While their report deals directly with Burlington, the message relates to all of Main Street Ontario. The report states:

#### **Downtown: It matters**

Downtown matters. It matters to the overall health of a city. Research and the literature consistently report on the connection between a healthy downtown and a healthy city....

Downtowns:

- Represent sustainable development, making the best use of our existing infrastructure and creating compact communities that encourage walking, cycling and transit use
- Provide for diversity of choice in housing forms and employment opportunities
- Have historic connections to the origins of the community
- Have symbolic significance as the centre of civic life
- Are a central hub for festival and celebrations
- Reflect a positive image of the entire city
- Provide opportunities for local and incubator business
- Offer an experience not found in newer malls, plazas

This is just one report of the many that are finding their way into the public psyche. Another report - Canadian Urban Institute's – [The Value of Investing in Canadian Cities](#) outlines the value of 10 Downtown's across Canada, but speaks of the importance and strength of investment to our collective core(s).

These reports and more are making the direct link to small businesses as **the** economic backbone. The **Ontario BIA Association** (OBIAA) is the province's direct link to these small businesses through their BIAs. We are in a position to both communicate to our BIAs and, therefore their member businesses, but to the many Government ministries as well. OBIAA is a conduit that to date has not been recognized fully.

Positive impact on the whole economy depends on clear communications. Main Street Ontario, through their BIAs and OBIAA need to deal with multiple ministries on multiple issues. Many Ministries have been noted in this submission, but we would surmise that there are few

## Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

---

Provincial Ministries that **do not** touch Main Street Ontario. The OFB Roundtable is well positioned to help address these defined priorities and more through a multi-ministry forum.

We would contend that, by working with MMAH to establish an annual multi-ministry forum, OBIAA could bring forward members' shared strategic policy concerns and priorities to key ministries. It has been noted that similar forums have been established following the financial sector and agricultural OFB Roundtables.

An annual multi-ministry forum would:

- Alleviate the fears and miscommunications between the Government and Main Street Ontario,
- Streamline communications between the Government and Small Business Ontario,
- Identify tools and solutions, as well as best practices,
- Identify partnerships and collaborations; thereby

Strengthening the economy of Ontario's BIAs and Main Street Ontario

**Recommendation:** That an annual Open For Business Roundtable be created, through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (as BIAs are Local Boards through the Municipal Act) with the Ontario BIA Association.

**Lead Ministry:** Ministry Municipal Affairs and Housing

### Conclusion

---

Main Street Ontario grew organically beginning when Canada was Upper Canada. It grew from the pioneering need for community building and economy building, and businesses grew to strengthen survival initially and not for economic growth. Survival is still a basic need and that need is apparent in Main Street Ontario. Our community cores need to be vibrant and be given the tools to position themselves for the new economy. Working together, alongside and at the table with our Provincial Ministries will encourage understanding and recognition of the paradigms facing Main Street Ontario.

This is the first time that "Main Street Ontario", through the collective voice of the Ontario BIA Association has been heard. We applaud and thank you for this opportunity to submit this report to you for your consideration.

### Open for Business Roundtable with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA)

OBIAA Board of Directors

September 2013

### APPENDIX A –TODs

