

October 11, 2020

Province of Ontario
Economic Recovery Team
Minister Rod Phillips, Chair
Queen's Park
110 Wellesley St W,
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

RE: OBIAA Recommendations to Strengthen Main Streets

Dear Minister Phillips,

The Ontario Business Improvement Areas Association (OBIAA) works with more than 300 BIAs, 272 Municipalities and the 100,000+ main street businesses in Ontario. Collectively, these businesses and property owners, whose assessment is well in excess of 74 billion contribute millions annually in municipal property taxes.

We believe the time has come for a more wholistic approach to dealing with the current pandemic. An approach that takes the health – both physical and mental, of our population on equal footing with the economic health. Increasingly stresses over whether people will have a job, get paid or make money to pay bills and feed themselves, is significantly contributing to a breakdown in mental health. Fear and depression are now contributing to the overall health of the population. We often hear the words “*we are in this together*”, and we are, but the key is... we are not “*equally*” in this together. An analogy I have heard is “*we are all in the same storm, but we are not all on the same boat*”. Some of those boats are no more than flotation devices riddled with leaks.

Rolling back to modified Phase 2

Reversing the areas of Ottawa, Peel, Toronto and now York back to modified Phase 2 protocols has cast fears on the whole province, including areas such as Thunder Bay, who have few to no outbreaks. Not only that, but no actual scientific evidence of the increase of numbers has been shared which proves Ontario’s main street businesses, including food establishments, have been the cause. We would urge your committee to (a) share the data and/or (b) target the actual hot spots and take corrective action.

Choosing to close food establishments at a beloved holiday, such as Thanksgiving, meant that many isolated people could not come out into society to enjoy a meal when they had no one to share it with. One Irish restaurant, one that the Premier and entourage visited this summer, had to close on St. Patrick’s Day – the day they make revenues which pay January, February and March bills, and then again for this significant holiday.

Supporting Main Street Businesses with PPE Support

What we do know is that many of the measures you have taken have been effective and our main street businesses have rushed to implement them without any financial support. We thank you for the upcoming grants and hope they are retroactive, as so many have already made the cash outlays, in a time when they have no resources to do so.

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Supporting Main Street Business Food Establishments and Local Producers

Consumer trends have been changing, driven by convenience and technology factors with eating at home and delivery models tremendously impacting the foodservice sector. Prior to COVID 19, which drastically changed main streets and specifically the hospitality industry, consumers were increasingly ordering through expensive apps such as “Uber Eats” and “Skip the Dishes”. A reported increase of more than 50% in recent years.

Allowing licensees to sell liquor for takeout and delivery with a food order, as of March 26, 2020, has **empowered** licensed businesses across Ontario to recover some of their financial losses.

The initiative by the Ontario government to allow the sale of alcohol through licensed businesses has proven a positive impact over the past five months. OBIAA commends the continued modernization of laws and regulations surrounding the sale of alcohol through licensed local businesses. **These changes have been overwhelmingly embraced by Ontario consumers.**

Beer, wine, cider and spirits, *which are produced in Ontario*, thankfully are now permanently available with dine-in and takeout food orders by licensed establishments. Further to this, however, our food establishments need to increase their margins on the sale of liquor by providing them with a discounted or wholesale cost. Margins are already slim and have become minute with COVID and the current Phase 2 roll back. We need to provide food establishments with the tools available to widen those margins.

Allowing the expansion of availability by locally produced beer, wine and cider producers to open stand-alone shops in historic downtowns and main streets, other than just the LCBO and Beer Store. These local producers would be a fine pairing with an existing main street business or even as a pop-up shop in case of an increase of vacant properties.

As we look at a very uncertain future for main streets, tourism and the hospitality industry, in general, every small and successful change that can contribute to the strengthening the economy becomes a vital step on the road to recovery. As the winter weather approaches and the patios begin to shutter, we must provide maximum ability for our main street businesses and hospitality SME’s to survive and *thrive*.

The **Ontario BIA Association** recommends the Ontario Government:

1. Allow indoor dining with the table-size limits and spacing restrictions, as supported by local health authorities.
2. Allow gyms and personal training services to remain open with the group class sizes and spacing restrictions, as supported by local health authorities.
3. Retroactively support main street businesses with retroactive PPE grants.
4. Support the viability of local communities by reducing the price of alcohol food establishments currently pay to the LCBO and the Beer store by 20%.
5. Expand the availability of local producers to open stand-alone shops in historic downtowns and main streets.
6. Allow local producers to expand their retail market by enabling them to sell in main street businesses

On behalf of our BIA members and the businesses that make up the more than 300 BIAs across Ontario, we appreciate your teams’ hard work in an unprecedented time with the support programs being provided by the provincial government.

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Consumer/Customer Confidence will be a challenge going forward, but we are encouraged by the support of our local residents and being a local tourism messaging, however, these alone will not be enough to sustain our businesses, especially as the public message signals that businesses are unsafe spreaders of the virus, at the very moment where we have been promoting customer confidence in our opening protocols.

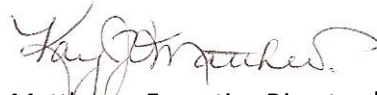
Businesses have been operating safely, following all public requirements, and have borne the majority of the financial impacts of the closures. Many have lost their livelihood, savings, and retirement plans to the closures engendered by this disease. None could have been prepared for such a significant and sudden loss of their business. Do not compound their losses with policies that are not addressing the root of the causes of the spread.

OBIAA, as always, is a partner and a network that continues to work with the Province of Ontario to find solutions. We further recommend a meeting with key members of your team, and initially with Minister Fedeli, Minister Hardeman and Associate Minister Sarkaria.

Yours truly,



Doug Sams, Advocacy Chair | OBIAA



Kay Matthews, Executive Director | OBIAA

About OBIAA

The **Ontario Business Improvement Area Association** is the network that represents unique and vibrant BIAs across Ontario. The Association, incorporated in 2001, supports and advocates on behalf of its members through the building and nurturing of strong relationships and partnerships. OBIAA is a leader in the development and sharing of information, tools, resources and best practices, and is the ONE voice on common issues.

www.obiaa.com

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