

OBIAA'S PRIORITY ISSUES TO HELP BOOST ONTARIO'S ECONOMY:

1. **Funding for Ontario's Main Street revitalization program**
2. **Safe and Fully Utilized Infrastructure - utilization of vacant buildings and properties on Main Streets for housing, while maintaining the unique character of many of our Main Streets**
3. **Healthy and Sustainable Main Streets**

1. Funding for Ontario's Main Street revitalization program

Main Street Revitalization Program - A multi-faceted program focused on supporting both entrepreneurs and Main Streets through incentives to collect data, fill spaces, and educate and support businesses, reducing the turnover seen on Main Streets.

This program will:

- a. Develop tool kits and educational workshops for new entrepreneurs.

These will include topics such as:

- Building a Business Case
- Commercial Leases for the business owner
- Converting home base businesses into bricks and mortar businesses
- Small Business Accounting
- Small Business Marketing (Digital Technology)

- b. Incorporate a "Win This Space" type initiative: a proven business recruitment initiative that encourages and inspires business incubation through advancing entrepreneurship, and equipping participants with the tools and skills needed to open a business in a Main Street storefront. It was developed and implemented to address two challenges common to Main Streets communities: filling storefront vacancies in the Main Streets (core) and fostering local entrepreneurship and the Main Street culture of free enterprise.
- c. Provide grants to BIAs to support data Collection and analysis: Data is a barrier to understanding the role of Main Streets in the Ontario economy and their role as community developers. OBIAA's MainStreet RM database will enable BIAs to draw reports on the state of their Main Street, to better determine gaps on their Main Streets and better support their businesses and residential communities.

2. Safe and Fully Utilized Infrastructure - utilization of vacant buildings and properties on Main Streets for housing, while maintaining the unique character of many of our Main Streets

There are mounting reports and studies speaking to the negative impact that social issues have on the community, the main street businesses and the negative impact to fostering entrepreneurship and business expansion. By implementing programs to alleviate social issues and reducing vacancies our Main Streets will be safer for all.

- a. **Ensuring properties on main streets are utilized.** Many of our main streets have vacant residential units and/or commercial spaces, incentivizing property owners to fill these spaces will support more vibrant main streets. To support this the following initiatives must be supported by the Province providing:
 - An inventory and/or registry (Teranet / MPAC) of vacant properties in main streets that could be utilized for housing.
 - Matching municipal CIPs as financial incentives for re-introducing residential units to downtown properties.
 - Requirements for redevelopments of vacant properties within commercial areas to provide 'right-sized' commercial opportunities on the main floor.
- b. **Unique Character of Main Streets** - The unique character of the area *must* be maintained and therefore OBIAA encourages the Government to include BIAs in the discussion around the consultation of Ontario's heritage conservation framework.
- c. **Welcoming Streets** – “Welcoming Streets” development is a partnership with local agencies to provide supports to those struggling with social issues while also being an advocate and support for the businesses.
- d. **Priority Infrastructure funding for “Main Street” BIAs** - As identified in the 2024 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: “Ontario’s infrastructure was deteriorating and failing to meet the needs of people and businesses.” A funding stream to support the following improvements is needed:
 - Public Washrooms (purchase and maintenance)
 - Lighting improvements
 - Animation/activation of public space
 - Beautification (such as benches, planters, signage (wayfinding))
 - Accessibility improvements: While many of our Main Streets are extremely accessible and are transportation hubs, many of our buildings and infrastructure are aged infrastructure that results in streets that are challenging for those with accessibility challenges and to update the public space to comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

3. Healthy and Sustainable Main Streets

Tourism Attraction Initiatives - Main Streets are places where tourists often centre their visits around. Beautification efforts, public space activation, and other creative initiatives that revitalize Main Streets would have a tremendous impact on tourism. In order for Main streets to be healthy and sustainable the Province needs to initiate the following:

- **Ontario Trillium Foundation** – Our name, under the Municipal Act, is a Business Improvement Area, however, the work of the BIA focuses mainly on public realm investment and special events, promotions and activations that invite residents and the visitor economy to the area. Recommend that BIAs be reconsidered for eligibility as a Lead Applicant.
- **MAT Tax** – BIAs are the only Local Board that raises additional funds for the betterment of the whole local community. Through a special levy to property owners in the area, the work of the BIA is to invest in the public realm, and in doing so they develop and enhance tourism offerings. Propose between .5% and 1% be recommended for provision to the local “tourist-ready” BIA to augment their investment in the tourism offering.
- **Tourism Data Tools** - Fund research into the economic impact of local events and activations, which will provide OBIAA and our Main Street BIAs with access to a data collection tool to identify the number of visitors to Ontario Main Streets. This data will allow OBIAA to share trends, reports and recommendations with both the Province and Main Streets.