



June 15, 2026

The Honourable Dean Allison, MP

Member of Parliament, Niagara West
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Re: Investing in Vibrant Downtowns – OBIAA Calls for Federal Action on Ontario’s Main Streets

Dear MP Allison,

I am writing on behalf of the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA), the provincial network representing over 300 BIAs and more than 140,000 small businesses across Ontario. OBIAA is the voice of Canada’s Main Streets - the commercial corridors, historic downtowns, and neighbourhood business districts where entrepreneurship takes root, communities gather, and local economies are built from the ground up.

We are writing to express our strong support for the priorities advanced by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities’ Big City Mayors’ Caucus (BCMC) in their June 2026 Vibrant Downtowns initiative, and to urge you to champion these commitments as our Member of Parliament for Niagara West ahead of federal Budget 2026.

What Ontario’s Main Streets Are Telling Us

Ontario’s BIAs are on the front lines of downtown health. Our member organizations report daily what their businesses and communities are experiencing, and the picture across the province is consistent: the challenges of homelessness, housing instability, organized crime, retail extortion, and aging infrastructure are not isolated incidents - they are interconnected pressures that directly affect the viability of small businesses and the vitality of our commercial districts.

The BCMC’s three-part Vibrant Downtowns framework reflects this reality precisely, and we are pleased to see Canada’s largest municipal governments formally connecting these issues to national economic competitiveness and investor confidence. OBIAA has been advancing the same case at the provincial and federal level - and we welcome the amplified national voice this initiative provides.

What We Are Asking of the Federal Government

We respectfully ask that you use your voice in caucus and in Parliament to champion the following specific commitments on behalf of Ontario's Main Streets and the small businesses that anchor them:

- **Invest \$3.5 billion annually to reduce chronic homelessness by at least 50% by 2030**, as recommended by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and ensure homelessness prevention and Housing First solutions are central to an updated National Housing Strategy. Visible homelessness in Ontario's commercial districts has a direct and measurable impact on the customer experience, business confidence, and the willingness of investors to commit to our downtowns.
- **Restore the Canada Public Transit Fund to \$30 billion** and enhance it to provide stable, long-term investment that keeps pace with community growth. Reliable transit and well-maintained infrastructure are the foundation of the pedestrian traffic and accessibility that sustains main street businesses in communities of every size.
- **At least double the Community Stream of the Building Communities Strong Fund** to give municipalities the predictable, stable revenue they need to build and maintain the critical infrastructure that underpins downtown vitality and supports growth.
- **Enhance the Building Safer Communities Fund and establish a federal-municipal coordination table** with the Departments of Public Safety, Immigration, and Justice to develop coordinated responses to organized crime and extortion. OBIAA member BIAs across Ontario have reported a troubling increase in the targeting of small businesses, and these pressures require enforcement solutions that transcend municipal borders.
- **Ensure the small business and BIA sector has a meaningful voice** in the design and delivery of federal downtown investment programs. Our members are the proof points - and the best positioned to help government understand what is working, what is not, and where investment will have the greatest impact.

A Note on Housing Above Main Street Shops

OBIAA also draws your attention to a related and urgent housing opportunity. Our research report, [*Turning the Lights On: Looking for the Hidden Housing on Ontario's Main Streets*](#), documents thousands of vacant upper-floor residential units sitting above historic commercial buildings on Ontario's Main Streets. These units are not being converted to housing because of longstanding barriers in building code requirements, insurance frameworks, and financing access - barriers that require federal and provincial attention to resolve at scale.

This is housing that already exists in the fabric of our communities. Unlocking it would add residential density to established commercial corridors, support local businesses, and contribute meaningfully to Canada's housing supply - without displacing a single commercial



tenant or greenfield development. We would welcome the opportunity to share this research with your office and to discuss how the federal government can help remove these barriers.

Ontario's BIAs and the small businesses they represent are deeply invested in the health of the places where they operate. When our downtowns thrive, our communities thrive - and when they struggle, we feel it first. The federal government's willingness to treat vibrant downtowns as a national priority is both timely and welcome. OBIAA is committed to being a constructive partner in that effort.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in Niagara West to discuss these priorities and how OBIAA can support your work on behalf of the communities and businesses in your riding. Thank you for your continued service and your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Braithwaite', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Rachel Braithwaite
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