



June 15, 2026

The Honourable Gregor Robertson

Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Re: OBIAA's Support for the FCM Big City Mayors' Caucus Vibrant Downtowns Initiative

Dear Minister Robertson,

I am writing to you again 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. We were in touch recently regarding the hidden housing opportunity above Ontario's Main Street commercial properties, and I am grateful for your office's attention to that file. I am writing today on a related but distinct matter: to formally express OBIAA's 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 your Ministry to champion these commitments through federal Budget 2026.

The BCMC's initiative speaks largely to Canada's largest cities. OBIAA's members span communities of every size - from major urban corridors to small-town Main Streets in communities with populations in the hundreds. We write to make clear that the pressures the BCMC has identified are not confined to big cities. They are the daily reality for small businesses and BIA boards in communities across Ontario, and the federal investments being requested would have meaningful impact well beyond the largest urban centres.

Why This Initiative Matters to Ontario's Main Streets

The BCMC has framed its three priorities - homelessness and housing, organized crime and public safety, and transit and infrastructure - as conditions that determine whether Canada's downtowns can attract investment and drive economic growth. OBIAA strongly agrees with that framing, and we would add one further dimension: these conditions determine whether Canada's small businesses can survive and grow on those same streets.

Our member BIAs report that visible homelessness on commercial corridors affects customer willingness to visit, employee safety, and the overall perception of our districts as destinations. Organized crime and retail extortion - an escalating concern across Ontario - are driving up operating costs and, in some cases, forcing closures. And the connection between reliable

transit, maintained infrastructure, and foot traffic is not theoretical for our members: it is the difference between a viable business day and an empty street.

The BCMC's Vibrant Downtowns initiative is welcome precisely because it names these connections explicitly and calls for the coordinated, multi-order government response they require. OBIAA is pleased to add the voice of Ontario's small business sector in support.

The Specific Commitments We Are Asking You to Champion

As Minister responsible for Housing and Infrastructure, your portfolio sits at the centre of the BCMC's three priority areas. We ask that you ensure the following commitments advance through Budget 2026:

- **Invest \$3.5 billion annually to reduce chronic homelessness by at least 50% by 2030**, as recommended by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and place homelessness prevention and Housing First solutions at the centre of an updated National Housing Strategy. These investments are essential not only for those without housing, but for the health of the commercial environments where homelessness is most visible.
- **Restore the Canada Public Transit Fund to \$30 billion** and enhance it to provide stable, long-term investment that keeps pace with the growth in communities of all sizes. Transit access is not a big-city issue - it determines the viability of Main Streets in small and mid-sized Ontario communities as much as it does in major urban centres.
- **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 supports downtown vitality. Deferred maintenance and aging infrastructure are among the most common concerns OBIAA hears from BIAs in smaller communities, where municipal fiscal capacity is most constrained.
- **Establish a federally led intergovernmental working group** with frontline and sector expertise to coordinate Housing First solutions - including mental health and addictions services, income supports, and deeply affordable housing options. OBIAA would welcome the opportunity to contribute the BIA sector's perspective to that working group's mandate.

A Seat at the Table for Main Street

The BCMC's Vibrant Downtowns initiative is built on the voices of Canada's largest municipal governments. OBIAA asks that as your Ministry designs and delivers the programs that follow from this initiative, the small business and BIA sector is meaningfully included. Our 300+ member BIAs interact daily with the conditions these programs seek to address - and we are well-positioned to identify where investments are landing, where gaps remain, and how program design could be strengthened to better serve Main Streets of every size.

We recognize that your office is engaged on the housing file through our earlier correspondence, and we are grateful for that ongoing relationship. This letter is intended to

complement that work by signalling OBIAA's broader alignment with the BCMC's priorities and our readiness to be a constructive partner as your Ministry moves from commitment to implementation.

We would welcome a meeting at your convenience to discuss how OBIAA and the BIA sector can support your work on vibrant downtowns. I can be reached at rachel@obiaa.com or 647-521-5341.

Sincerely,



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