

April 20, 2020

Honourable Mary Ng

Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion
and International Trade
Government of Canada

Honourable Melanie Joly

Minister of Economic Development
and Official Languages
Government of Canada

Honourable Bill Morneau

Minister of Finance
Government of Canada

Honourable Michelle Mungall

Minister of Jobs, Economic Development
and Competitiveness
Province of BC

Honourable Selina Robison

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Province of BC

Honourable Carole James

Minister of Finance
Province of BC

Dear Ministers,

On behalf of Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC), the provincial umbrella organization representing more than 60 business districts across BC, we are writing to you as the voice of tens of thousands of small businesses that make up our downtowns, main streets and commercial districts. These businesses are the economic engines that drive our economy and the lifeblood of our communities.

We appreciate the collaboration between governments to provide support to workers and businesses through this crisis and were pleased to hear of a new commercial rent relief program being implemented by the federal and provincial governments, as well as expanded eligibility requirements for the CEBA program.

The necessary requirements placed on all non-essential businesses to close and other essential services to reduce operations during COVID-19 mean that many Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are unable to pay their commercial rents, property taxes and other expenses. A recent survey conducted by CFIB has indicated that only half of business owners believe their business will survive if current conditions continue through to the end of May. Consequently, the temporary closures will increasingly turn permanent and the recovery of BC's economy will be severely impacted.

The window of opportunity to provide meaningful help is now and we need the federal and provincial governments to collaborate to ensure appropriate supports are put in place. Below are four areas of assistance we believe are needed to counter these unparalleled threats to businesses and jobs.

1. Commercial Rent Relief

We respectfully ask that the Province of BC work with all levels of government, landlords and tenants towards implementation of a commercial rent relief framework for SMEs that are closed or have significantly reduced operations due to COVID-19. This framework should stabilize the important landlord-tenant relationship and include an incentive that ensures any benefits provided to commercial landlords are passed on to the tenants immediately, thereby keeping both whole during this challenging time.

Consideration also needs to be given to the many property owners that are also small businesses. Some may not be inclined to take on debt in such an uncertain time and therefore the forgivable terms of the proposed CECRA loan need

to be easily accessible and sufficient to provide meaningful relief such that small property owners feel confident to take on the risk to help their tenants.

Additionally, expansion of property tax deferral program to include commercial properties is required and a necessary step to ensure municipal revenues and core services are protected.

2. Financial Aid, Not Debt Deferral

We ask that all levels of government prioritize access to financial aid including grants rather than debt deferral measures to ensure that capital expenditures, and all incurred costs during COVID-19 closures are covered. Eligibility requirements must be expanded to include the many businesses that are family-owned and operated. Approximately 22% of businesses in B.C. have only 1 to 4 employees, many of which do not qualify for the various financial aid currently available. Both of the above measures will help to ensure SMEs have appropriate access to financial aid that will not lead to insurmountable debt thereby hampering their ability to re-open.

3. Technology Development Funding

The ability to bring operations online and have a digital presence has never been more critical for SMEs. Unfortunately, many businesses do not have either, nor the resources to invest in technology or the know-how to navigate website development, social media and e-commerce platforms that are necessary in this day and age. At a time when non-essential businesses are completely closed or operations are significantly reduced, the ability to fulfill important product and service needs, as well as maintain customer connections is vital for business relevancy and survival. Government funding to support a program similar to Digital Main Street in Ontario would not only provide invaluable resources for SMEs now, but will set them up for future success and increase resiliency in uncertain times.

4. Economic Recovery Task Force

We appreciate the Province's action in establishing an Economic Recovery Task Force comprised of leaders from business, labour, First Nations and not-for-profits to provide guidance regarding the cross-government economic response to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the long-term economic recovery efforts. A request was made to Deputy Minister Meggs for inclusion of BIABC on this task force and we would like to reiterate the value we can bring to this important discussion, given our direct connection to the small businesses and commercial property owners throughout the province.

To conclude, we need greater and urgent economic relief for both SMEs and commercial property owners to protect our neighbourhood-level serving businesses and to ensure our economy is in a stronger position as we build towards recovery.

Yours sincerely,



Teri Smith
President, BIABC

CC: John Horgan, Premier, Province of BC

BIABC Members:

Abbotsford Downtown Business Association, Abbotsford
City of Abbotsford, Abbotsford
Heights Merchants Association, Burnaby
Burnaby North Road BIA, Burnaby
Downtown Chilliwack BIA, Chilliwack
Comox Business in Action, Comox
Austin Heights BIA, Coquitlam
Downtown Courtenay BIA, Courtenay
Cranbrook Downtown Business Association, Cranbrook
Tsawwassen BIA, Delta
Fort Langley BIA, Langley
City of Fort St. John, Fort St. John
Kamloops Central BIA, Kamloops
Kamloops North Shore BIA, Kamloops
Downtown Kelowna Association, Kelowna
Uptown Rutland BIA, Kelowna
Downtown Langley Business Association, Langley
Downtown Maple Ridge BIA, Maple Ridge
Mission Downtown Business Association, Mission
Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce, Nanaimo
Downtown New Westminster BIA, New Westminster
Lower Lonsdale Business Association, North Vancouver
Town of Osoyoos, Osoyoos
Parksville Downtown Business Association, Parksville
Downtown Penticton Association, Penticton
Penticton Industrial Development Association, Penticton
Downtown Port Coquitlam BIA, Port Coquitlam
Downtown Prince George BIA, Prince George
Quesnel Downtown Association, Quesnel
South Quesnel Business Association, Quesnel
West Quesnel Business Association, Quesnel
Salmon Arm Downtown Improvement Association, Salmon Arm
Sechelt Downtown Business Association, Sechelt
Sidney BIA, Sidney
Downtown Squamish BIA, Squamish
Cloverdale BIA, Surrey
Downtown Surrey BIA, Surrey
Fleetwood BIA, Surrey
Newton BIA, Surrey
Terrace Downtown Improvement Area, Terrace
Cambie Village Business Association, Vancouver
City of Vancouver – BIA Program, Vancouver
Collingwood BIA, Vancouver
Downtown Vancouver BIA, Vancouver
Gastown Business Improvement Society, Vancouver
Hastings Crossing, Vancouver
Hastings North BIA, Vancouver
Mount Pleasant BIA, Vancouver

Point Grey Village BIA, Vancouver
Robson Street Business Association, Vancouver
South Hill Business Association, Vancouver
Strathcona BIA, Vancouver
Vancouver Chinatown BIA, Vancouver
West Broadway BIA, Vancouver
West End BIA, Vancouver
South Granville BIA, Vancouver
Downtown Vernon Association, Vernon
Downtown Victoria Business Association, Victoria
Oak Bay BIA, Victoria
White Rock BIA, White Rock
Williams Lake Central BIA, Williams Lake