



May 13, 2020

Mayor Kennedy Stewart and City Council
City of Vancouver
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC
V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor Stewart and City Council:

Re: COVID-19 Crisis in Vancouver's Retail Sector

The pandemic crisis continues to take a tremendous toll on our formerly vibrant retail sector. A recent survey of 1,000 BC businesses by the Mustel Group reports that only about half of the businesses now closed expect to ever reopen, and of those that are still open, 50% believe they may not last another 3 months. This is an unprecedented and most difficult situation that calls for a serious intervention. We are writing you with a proposal for your urgent consideration.

We first want to express our appreciation for Council' support during these dire times. The BC Restart Plan and its associated principles and orders are also welcome, providing retail operators with an understanding of the measures needed to ensure customer and employee safety. However, even if businesses make all these necessary changes, there is a very real fear that customers may not return in sufficient numbers fast enough to save our sector. The public has taken to heart the message, which we agree with, that physical distancing outside is far safer than inside. We expect that our customers, particularly those in high risk categories, will be reluctant to enter the tiny or tightly confined spaces that small businesses tend to operate in. The perception is these are unsafe no matter what. And when customers do appear, the slower flow of people due to physical distancing means daily sales are less likely to be enough for some businesses to survive.

We believe there is a partial solution where you and Council can help. We propose that the same options requested by Vancouver's restaurant sector, currently scheduled for debate by City Council, be extended to include the retail sector: namely, allow retailers to expand their businesses outside into pre-approved public spaces (eg., sidewalks, laneways, etc.). If this proposal receives approval and can be achieved soon without experiencing fees and administrative barriers, the retail sector stands a better chance of quickly attracting and serving customers in sufficient numbers to survive. Vulnerable customers and those most concerned about safe physical distancing may well also feel more comfortable and willing to interact with our businesses. Employees will be kept safer as well. We believe that, like Vancouver's farmers markets, the retail sector can do business safely outdoors while following all the advice, guidance and orders issued by health and other authorities.

It is our sincere hope that we can work with government and health officials to secure the necessary permissions needed to help our critically important retail sector revive. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. Together we can succeed!

Sincerely,

The Vancouver BIA Partnership:

Cambie Village Business Association

Chinatown BIA Society

Collingwood Business Improvement Association

Commercial Drive Business Society

Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association

Dunbar Village Business Association

Gastown Business Improvement Society

Hastings Crossing Business Improvement Association

Hastings North Business Improvement Association

Kerrisdale Business Association

Kitsilano 4th Avenue Business

Marpole Business Association

Mount Pleasant Commercial Improvement Society

Point Grey Village Business Association

Robson Street Business Association

South Granville Business Improvement Association

South Hill (Fraser Street) Business Association

Strathcona Business Improvement Association

Victoria Drive Business Improvement Association

West Broadway Business Improvement Association

West End Business Improvement Association

Yaletown Business Improvement Association