

March 23, 2020

To your BIA Members and your Municipality

Now is the best time to support your local BIA, as they will be key in your local recovery.

On behalf of the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA) and the many businesses and property owners that make up our BIA areas, both as traditional main streets and non-traditional areas, we ask our members and municipalities to support their BIAs in this time of crisis. *How can you support them?*

- **Invite them to the table** – make sure your BIA is speaking on behalf of its members by having them as a key member in any Ad Hoc committees that are being created to guide us through this crisis
- **Communicate** – answer resources, surveys and provide feedback
- **Provide their levy or expedite the approval and release of their 2020 levy request** (BIAs cannot go into unforeseen debt, nor borrow monies). Additionally, consider providing marketing funding as a part of the recovery plan.
- **Give them the tools to work with stakeholders**, such as providing temporary ability to make decisions electronically and allow quorum to be achieved electronically

In this new world of COVID 19, OBIAA and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, have been implementing **Digital Main Street** across the province - a program that directly assists Main Street Communities and Businesses in teaching and implementing digital skills. Through this program, we have, as of December 31, provided municipalities and BIAs funds for **100** Digital Service Squads and those squads had reached out to more than **15,000** main street businesses to assist them with their digital transformations and provided **27,300** training hours, helping them be educated consumers in digital technologies. We received more than **2,500** grant applications as this Government funded project provided **\$2,500** per successful main street small business. *This program put funds and knowledge directly into the hands of main street businesses which may be the only lifeline they presently have.* Digital Main Street is critical in helping small businesses and main street communities, through the BIAs and their Municipalities on business continuance through this time.

The work of BIAs has never been more critical as it is today during this unprecedented time in history, the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Our BIAs are part of the framework of the Ontario community and economy. Many of our BIAs represent the founding villages, towns and cities that make up Ontario. While BIAs have only been a part of the Canadian landscape for the past 50 years, they are responsible for providing their business areas an almost 100% return on investment of local funds. Our BIAs and OBIAA are therefore key industry partners. Our BIAs are Public Realm Investors, Area Marketers and Event Facilitators. The businesses within our BIAs are innovators, entrepreneurs and part of the creative community. *Our BIAs most often are the 'heart' of their community, representing heritage, economy, arts, revitalization and tourism.*

BIAs can provide true leadership and stewardship, they have 'their ears to the street' and the ability to communicate directly with their local property owners and businesses. They are a single conduit for the exchange of information and are partners with all stakeholders, and they are catalysts for positive change.

**A BIA IS INTEGRAL TO ADVANCING A DISTINCT, LIVABLE,
VIBRANT AND RESILIENT BUSINESS DISTRICT WITHIN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY.**



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As the trickle-down effects of this current global pandemic hit our main street communities, BIAs and their economic development partners are going to need marketing funds in order to promote their area.

The BIA communities are resilient, but their response to business continuity and recovery is more important now. We urge you to work closely with your local BIA(s) as we begin the work of rebuilding.

Thank you,

Kay Matthews
Executive Director
Ontario BIA Association

Traditional downtowns and main street areas are a significant contributor to the economic, physical, and social well-being of the community, particularly in small and rural communities. In many areas, it is the BIA that plays the lead organizational role in the development and revitalization of these key economic and community assets. As a result, the marketing, communications, physical improvements, and other economic development actions you undertake over the coming weeks and months will be critical in helping downtowns and traditional commercial areas respond to the current challenges posed by COVID-19.

Darren Shock Economic Development Specialist
OBIAA Board Liaison

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