



March 31, 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: COVID19 and Priority Support for Vancouver's Small Businesses Neighbourhoods

On behalf of the Vancouver BIA Partnership (representing the 22 Vancouver BIA's), we greatly appreciate the City's immediate response and recovery efforts to support the small businesses community, including deferring operating fees and the payment date of property taxes.

We are following up with a priority list of relief measures to aid the survival of local small businesses and thousands of livelihoods during this pandemic crisis:

**In the immediate future:**

- **Property taxes:**
  - Extend property tax deferrals on an interest-free basis until year-end (December 31), with mechanisms for commercial tenants to benefit from the deferral. Consider forgiving 50% of the property tax as a grant to small business.
  - Businesses will be struggling to recover and property taxes are one of the largest financial burdens. The savings would be realized by tenants with triple net leases, and we want to ensure that regardless of the lease arrangement, the deferral is passed down from property owners to small business leaseholders. This deferral and forgiveness approach will provide the tenant and the landlord with an excellent starting point to negotiate longer term commercial recovery.
  - We believe that small businesses may not approach normal operations again until the end of 2020. Delaying and forgiving costs will give them the "runway" they need to reach sustainability.
  
- **Other taxes:**
  - Eliminate the empty homes, school and speculation taxes (and lobby other levels of government for this relief), to leave as much money in the local economy as possible. Businesses and consumers will need the funds to help resuscitate, reinvest and keep funds in the local economy.
  - In addition, removing these taxes will revitalize the economy and provide the government with an essential and more stable tax base, and we will need all tools that will attract investment and spending in the near and long-term.

- **Commercial Operating fees:**
  - As business operations continue to slow or completely halt altogether, small businesses are no longer consuming many of the operating fees that they are paying for. Please continue to provide relief from operating fees, by deferring or waiving fees, including alarm fees, dumpster fees, patio fees, business licenses and city utilities.
  - We believe that as restaurants are permitted to re-open, it is likely that the initial dine-in will be on outdoor patios as we ease into small gatherings. Expediting the patio applications and renewals, and forgiveness of the annual fees will contribute to the re-opening of our local economy and is essential to keep our beloved and independent eateries from going out of business.
  
- **Permits and licensing, tenant improvements:**
  - Fast track tenant improvement approvals and inspections that are currently in play, to assist the property to be ready to open for business. This improvement and policy change can save small businesses hundreds if not thousands of dollars.
  - Expediting this process also expedites the employment opportunities and the ability for both the business and staff to contribute to the local economy.
  
- **Street Maintenance and safety:**
  - Due to social isolation and business closures, neighbourhood retail streets do not have the same level of 'eyes and ears'. Increased maintenance and safety measures are a priority to prevent property crime, mitigate safety incidents that will drain civic resources, and help local staff and residents feel safe in these uncertain times.
  - Ramp up City services and maintenance, including safety and clean-up crews. All BIA micro cleaning services have ceased, yet the litter and debris is still accumulating. BIA's would be open to City loaning (short term) micro cleaning equipment to us, so that we can effect some cleaning.
  - Increase VPD services, especially in the evening hours, to make our communities safer and address prevalent property crimes due to social isolation and business closures.
  - There are camps forming and debris to be removed that are beyond the capacity of micro-cleaning services. City will need to increase their removal of large debris that is beyond litter pick up.
  - Deploy porta-potties for public use to keep the neighbourhoods cleaner. With the closure of cafes and restaurants, there is a shortage of restrooms available for general public use.
  
- **Relaxation of bylaw and parking enforcement:**
  - Remove obstacles from customers visiting small businesses.
  - Once the businesses begin to open again, and the local economy begins to flow, we ask that City lower parking fees or offer a 2 hour free parking "shop local" incentive. Our collective challenge is not encouraging turnover, it's giving people a reason to return to their neighbourhoods, and making it financially feasible to do so.

- **Loans and grants for small business:**
  - Provide forgivable loans to small business, or grants in the form of 50% of the property tax forgiveness. Deferring to a later date does not help small businesses that are running on low profit margins or no profit at all due to business closures. Without forgivable loans, the City is at risk of losing even more small businesses that can no longer contribute to the local economy, increasing the unemployment rate, and deterring investment and growth across the City.
  
- **Grants for arts/cultural groups:**
  - Proceed with the 2020 grants for arts/cultural groups. These groups are economically fragile and will need the granted funds to ensure their continued operations, and hopefully their readiness to return to public performances. If they don't use the grant this year, allow it to carry over to build resiliency for the future. Arts provide both the window and the stage for our communities, and we will need them during this period of uncertainty and recovery.
  
- **Collaboration among all levels of government:**
  - Continue to advocate for conducive small business policies that may be outside of the City's mandate, such as Provincial and Federal tax and rent breaks to small businesses. Eg. cancellation of the employer health tax, cancellation of the increase of the minimum wage and cancellation of the provincial sales tax.
  - BIAs have a provincial body and national representation. Please liaise with us to help move provincial and federal policies forward.

**In the future / longer term:**

- **Partner with the BIAs to co-develop a small business community recovery plan:**
  - Commitment to include BIAs in the planning process to restart local economic initiatives - when we can do so - with matching grants, funding and support for new "WE'RE OPEN AGAIN" initiatives.
  - Partner with BIAs to provide a team of consulting experts to assist small businesses address question and concerns, including landlord relations, accessing funding, negotiating with banks, communicating/negotiating with suppliers.
  - Involve BIAs and small business organizations as representatives on your task force. We remain available to provide our expertise and knowledge on the advisory committee.
  
- **Develop workable policies for commercial property owners:**
  - It is imperative that policies also consider commercial property owners, so that the commercial landlord can support their business tenant, and the business tenant can support their staff. Many property owners are also small business owners, and they have a vested interest in their community.
  
- **Develop innovative and timely business models:**
  - All of us are seeing changes in how our City functions and how many people are working from home. After such long period of people working from home the idea of office and home will start evolving and city needs to be flexible and progressive in recognising the need for possible live/work spaces, and developing and/or adapting small business policies. We look forward to having conversations around these models.

We look forward to continuing to work together to support small business neighbourhoods, provide small businesses with the immunity they need to survive pandemic challenges, and implement measures that will allow our communities to recover and rebuild the economy.

The Vancouver BIA Partnership is a coalition of 22 BIAs in the City of Vancouver representing approximately 22,000 commercial businesses and property owners.

Our constituency is suffering greatly on many fronts during this pandemic: as a closed business the revenue flow has ceased, yet the fixed costs have not; as a local employer and community member the business owners are isolated from the very community that they are dedicated to; and, as Vancouverites, they are also dealing with the anxiety of trying to stay healthy personally, and economically.

Yours 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*