

March 27, 2020

Dear Premier Horgan,

I am writing on behalf of Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC), the provincial umbrella organization representing more than 60 business districts across B.C. Collectively, this constitutes hundreds of thousands of retail, service and office employees – mostly small and medium-sized businesses – the backbone of B.C.'s economy. Since its inception in 1991, BIABC has been committed to championing strong, vibrant and successful downtowns, main streets and commercial districts across the province.

Firstly, we would like to recognize the strong, prompt response by your government in the face of this ongoing pandemic. The announcement of the first phase of the COVID-19 Action Plan contains a number of important measures to support households, workers, and businesses impacted by the ongoing pandemic and will provide much needed relief for British Columbians, including those who are most vulnerable during these exceptional times.

As we continue to hear directly from our member BIAs and their small business members, the need for assistance with cash flow is critically important to their survival and recovery. With that said, we must also be cognizant of not overloading small businesses with more debt when their revenue streams have been significantly reduced or completely cut off for an indeterminate period of time. Reducing the provincial property tax rate (i.e. School Tax), deferring tax filings until the end of September and delaying the carbon tax increase are all welcomed relief measures.

Furthermore, we appreciate the government's willingness to work with the business community to resolve issues as they emerge and would welcome the opportunity to be included in regular conference calls with key business stakeholders.

Below are some additional measures our members are looking for your support on:

1. Provide support to commercial landlords and renters, including clear, coordinated messaging to large and small commercial landlords that they will be backstopped by federal and provincial governments if/when they provide deferrals or rent reductions to commercial tenants.
2. Expand the Provincial Property Tax Deferment Program to include commercial properties and provide easement for payback periods to allow businesses to rebound before being hit with bulk tax and/or repayment notices.
3. Provide support and resources to alleviate the safety and security issues that have increased as a result of mass business closures in our downtowns and neighbourhood commercial areas, which are at heightened risk of property crime and commercial break and enters.

4. Create additional assurance for employers with respect to the Employment Standards Act. Specifically, we are asking for clarity that employers will not be subject to constructive dismissal claims due to COVID-19 related layoffs.
5. Provide additional protection for those businesses worried about not being able to pay rent (especially with the April 1st deadline soon approaching).
6. Expedite government payments to those who have government contracts to ensure they can keep their doors open.
7. Ensure that the details on how to access government relief is clear, concise and easily accessible. Such communications should also be translated into multiple languages, as there are many business owners whose primary language is not English.
8. Create a dedicated line for small business owners to help them get answers quickly and efficiently.

BIABC is working hard to support our members and their small businesses during this challenging time. We will also continue to work with our respective municipalities and the Province to ensure that British Columbia can recover from the current crisis. Those business members that are open and providing essential services to our communities are ensuring they meet all regulations and guidelines while supporting their employees and community members. Those that have closed have done so in support of the public interest and to help reduce the spread of the virus, however, they will need support and financial assistance to weather this storm.

We'd like to reiterate our appreciation to the government for their tireless work and look forward to being part of any stakeholder communications moving forward to address both the small business needs of now and in support of recovery efforts as well.

Sincerely,



Teri Smith  
President, BIABC

cc: Honourable Carole James, Minister of Finance  
Honourable Michelle Mungall, Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Competitiveness  
Honourable Harry Bains, Minister of Labour  
Honourable Selena Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Honourable Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General