

### WHO & WHERE WE ARE

IDA Canada works with 500+ organizations which manage Canada's business districts on main streets, in traditional neighbourhood commercial areas, and in downtowns.

These organizations are business improvement associations/districts/zones (BIA/BID/BIZs) and Sociétés de développement commercial (SDCs in Québec) with representation in every province. The skilled individuals who manage these organizations are committed to positive change within their communities and have track records of collaborating locally, provincially and nationally. The organizations we represent are comprised of over 250,000 businesses from coast to coast, with retail sales in the billions of dollars and a combined property assessment in the multiple billions of dollars. We are members of the International Downtown Association (IDA).\*

### THE COVID PANDEMIC

Businesses on main streets and in downtowns continue to struggle through the impacts of the COVID pandemic. We are not alone in the challenges we face, but we are integral to Canada's identity and are essential to the social, economic and cultural recovery and future growth of our communities.

We believe this represents a compelling reason for the Federal Government to work more closely with our BIA colleagues across the country to re-examine the Federal priorities which have been set and the means of extending assistance. In unison with this, the precarious state in which so many provinces find themselves leads us to believe there is need for national guidelines to establish clarity, cohesion and continuity as a means of addressing and suppressing this pandemic right across the country. It is time to put it all behind us, with the help of national leadership.



Celebrating Canada with 3000 strong at the corner of Portage and Main in Winnipeg on July 1, 2017.

Firstly, we are seeking more collaboration with those who are close to the issues. To date, Federal programs have largely been developed and administered in a top-down form. As a result, some of the program parameters have simply not worked, such as the CECRA Program. While the Federal Government has sought feedback, we recommend a stronger, closer and more proactive engagement with partners who are closest to the issues. We propose that the Federal Government establish sectoral working groups – that are not limited to business – but apply to all sectors impacted by COVID (social, financial, educational, cultural, environmental) as circumstances warrant. Currently, the Federal Government has the opportunity to develop partnerships and programs which can be more long-lasting than just the period of this pandemic. Please act now to include those partners in recovery planning.

Secondly, in the spirit of partnerships, we ask that the Federal Government look to those in urban areas who specifically share an interest in the importance and value of main streets and downtowns. We believe there could be stronger collaborations amongst all three levels of government and others – the private sector, universities and colleges, service providers, associations and foundations – to strengthen re-investment in these strategic locations. The Federal Government should work with the willing, look for those who will be quick to respond to partnership opportunities, but draw on the experience and insights of these groups wanting to establish equitable parameters which will best serve community and country. Through new COVID partnerships and programs, there is an opportunity to make towns and cities more socially balanced, economically energized, culturally dynamic, racially integrated, innovatively robust, and environmentally sustainable and resilient.

Thirdly, as Canadians, we are in this for the long run. This means having an eye to the immediate as well as the long-term needs of our citizens. There are two issues which are not going to go away: social harmony and environmental stability. Please develop policies and programs which directly address the need to create solutions inclusive of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. Please take bolder and more decisive actions to address catastrophic climate change and do not rest on the goals set by the Paris Climate Agreement. All pandemic recovery efforts should be shaped to support a strong, healthy, and environmentally sustainable Canada.

## CONCLUSION

**Our downtowns and main streets are the barometers of health, prosperity and vitality in every community.**

We cannot allow them to slide as a result of changing times, practices or a pandemic. Our Federal Government is key to knitting the ideas presented in this brief into a new network designed for success. IDA Canada and its members stand prepared to act now and utilize our intellectual and financial resources to affect positive change in our communities and in our country. We have the means to facilitate, collaborate, and build partnerships in communities across the country. Please contact us to work with you.

In the following pages, we identify five strategic areas which directly impact the vitality of the commercial cores of our communities – large and small – and which would benefit from new federal action, be it in policy, programming, or financial assistance.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT

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\*The International Downtown Association is the premier organization for urban place professionals who are shaping and activating dynamic city center districts. Our members are downtown champions who bring urban centers to life, bridging the gap between the public and private sectors. We represent an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations, employing 100,000 people throughout North America and growing rapidly around the world. Founded in 1954, IDA is a resource center for ideas and innovative best practices in urban place management. For more information on IDA, visit [downtown.org](http://downtown.org).





Robson Street in Vancouver, BC.

## COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

### PREMISE

For any community to thrive, it must ensure a healthy, stable and inclusive environment for residents and businesses, co-existing in social and economic balance. This comes in the form of affordable housing, equal training and employment opportunities, food security, and personal safety.

### GOAL

To ensure Canada is comprised of healthy, thriving and inclusive communities in which there is respect, equal opportunities, affordable and accessible housing, and appropriate services to support community wellness and employment.

### COMMENT

IDA Canada generally supports the Federal Government's income-oriented COVID programs, however we note there are some unintended negative effects that still need to be addressed. In our larger cities, it is reported that "the supply of cash from provincial and federal relief programs has added to the demand for drugs" [Global News]. Even in smaller communities, colleagues are encountering increasingly untenable situations where social issues have spread to the streets and directly into businesses through vandalism and crime. We must not only work together to address COVID, but to address the most important underlying issues which are impacting Canadian society. The Speech from the Throne stated that "The Government will also continue to address the opioid epidemic...and increase access to mental health resources." It is not just access to mental health resources, but a more in-depth examination of what is creating this problem. Our downtown and main street businesses are on the front lines of social change and feel the full brunt of these societal maladies. We need to work together to provide the necessary framework for a more stable environment in which our core business communities can rebuild.

## PROGRAM PROPOSALS

- 1 Create an Urban Working Group – comprised of health and service professionals, the judiciary, business associations and local government – to identify the root causes of systemic social breakdowns in cities and towns. This group should be a "high-level" examination by those with the skills and experience to not only spot the problems, but identify solutions, many of which could be woven into longer-term urban growth strategies.
- 2
  - A. Commission a National Strategy on Mental Health. This commission should draw on the experiences of service providers, police, the judiciary, business improvement associations, and municipal councils and staff to create a co-ordinated five-year strategy which will result in increased, targeted funding to significantly reduce mental health issues.
  - B. Establish a National Task Force on the growing, national opioid crisis. The Task Force should focus on creating co-ordinated solutions and funding to mitigate the causes and effects of addiction.
- 3 We appreciate the allocation of \$1 billion for the Rapid Housing Initiative, but would appreciate more detail. As with other programs, this must not only address short-term needs, but provide well-thought out, long-term remedies which include more co-op housing and even rent-to-own initiatives which are formulated in partnership with experts in the field.



A park gathering in Ottawa, ON.

## COMMUNITY VITALITY

### PREMISE

Communities at their core are shaped by people and defined by a sense of place based on a vibrant public realm, historic character, arts and culture, and unique, street-level and neighbourhood-serving businesses.

### GOAL

To revitalize – without displacement – city and town centres and the public realm and socio-economic fabric which comprise them.

### COMMENT

Most of Canada's larger downtowns are functioning with only one-third of their normal daytime working population. COVID has left virtually all downtowns and main streets largely under-populated and vying for every footfall and dollar spent in the local economy. The recent Throne Speech said that the Federal Government will be "introducing further support for industries that have been hardest hit, including travel and tourism, hospitality, and cultural industries like the performing arts." The industries referred to are largely located in our downtowns and on main streets, yet there is no mention in the Throne Speech of the collective businesses of downtowns and main streets which, in their own right, may be understood to comprise an industry unto themselves.

Without an overall strategy for rebuilding the exciting and critical dynamic that has historically been found downtown and on main streets, Canadian communities will quickly become the poorer – economically, socially, culturally and physically. Not only do well thought-out physical distancing standards have to be uniformly implemented, but programs must be created which re-imagine public spaces and ground-floor spaces to strengthen the on-street/in-store and restaurant experiences and thereby draw visitors back to our main streets and downtowns. Going forward, we ask the Federal Government to recognize main streets and downtowns of Canada as strategic priorities for COVID funding and that tailored programs be created to ensure their recovery and future vitality.

## PROGRAM PROPOSALS

- 1 Create Urban Development Agreements in which the three levels of government would equally contribute funds to focus on those employment/training/ infrastructure/investment initiatives considered most strategic to any community. This type of initiative stimulates greater buy-in by other levels of government, investment from the private sector, and most importantly, innovation. Program parameters could stipulate a "first-come, first-deserved" basis in which the partnering three levels of government must agree with strategic priorities and shared financial responsibility in any given community. We propose that \$2 billion be allocated for this purpose. This was initially done with creation of the \$196-million Winnipeg Core Area Initiative.
- 2 Allocate funds for the creative re-shaping of the main streets of smaller communities and traditional commercial neighbourhoods. This would be a continuation of former national and provincial "Main Street" programs which focus on enhancing the appearance of store-fronts, strengthening local commerce, intensifying upper floor uses, and redesigning public spaces. As above, the program could be based on partnerships with other levels of government. Based on the number of potential partners, we suggest that a budget of \$500 million be allocated for this purpose.
- 3
  - A. Provide matching funding to BIA/SDCs and Chambers of Commerce to educate and promote the value of 'shopping local' in these COVID times. *Digital Main Street* is a platform which warrants national support and the signatories of this document fully support their request for funding.
  - B. Also partner with BIA/SDCs and Chambers of Commerce to both research and track the health and prosperity of downtowns and main streets; and provide a national annual report which would track relative progress amongst provinces and cities/towns. Based on previous work done by BIA/SDCs in this realm, it is proposed that a budget of \$10 million be allocated.





Public transit lined up in Downtown Fredericton, NB.

# URBAN MOBILITY

## PREMISE

In a country and a world in which organizations and individuals are increasingly conscious of environmental impacts, innovative and well-designed transportation networks and affordable transit are key to the on-going vitality and viability of communities.

## GOAL

To create transportation frameworks designed to decrease dependence on individual vehicles while intensifying multi-modal transportation networks.

## COMMENT

The COVID pandemic has been punishing for public transit agencies and the municipalities which support them. In normal times we would encourage the Federal Government to devote more resources to re-thinking and re-working intra-urban and inter-urban transportation systems and to strengthen rail connections between urban and rural communities while removing dependence on fossil fuels. But these are not normal times and any Federal assistance in keeping public transit operating would be extremely valuable. Related to the demand for public transit is the “return to work” of government employees who make a contribution to the daily working population of any town or city. In the same manner that school boards are developing careful and creative ways in which students are returning to school, we request that the Federal Government do the same with its employees. By so doing, it helps return downtowns and main streets to a more vibrant place and returns office spaces back to more dynamic, collaborative and team-building environments.

## PROGRAM PROPOSALS

- 1 Provide direct operating grants to transit authorities and municipalities to keep public transit operating. We support the request of FCM to the Federal Government earlier this year for \$2 billion to offset soaring operating costs.
- 2 As part of any COVID job-creation strategy, allow for inclusion of those capital works projects which involve the creation of complete streets, designed to safely include pedestrians, public transit, bikes and cars, all in the context of improving civic sustainability standards and enhancing street amenities. We make this proposal with the understanding that strategies would be tailored to local needs and circumstances.
- 3 Accelerate the implementation and articulate the specifics of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change to support an increasingly efficient and low-carbon transportation system.



Laying sidewalks on Fisgard Street in Victoria, BC

## INFRASTRUCTURE

### PREMISE

An appealing and efficient community is comprised of infrastructure which is kept in top condition; public spaces and parks which are well-designed and maintained; buildings which exude the character of the community; and sustainability innovations that are encouraged and supported.

### GOAL

To strengthen the physical, social, economic and cultural role of city and town centres and traditional commercial neighbourhoods through innovative federal investment programs designed to replace or create new infrastructure.

### COMMENT

The vehicular and pedestrian circulation patterns of many main streets and downtowns dramatically changed as a result of the COVID pandemic. While most were initially seen as temporary, there is now a groundswell of belief that these temporary patterns should become permanent. As our fight against COVID evolves, so will our strategies for creating “combative environments” which can successfully ward off spread of the virus. This will require short-term and long-term strategies. Short-term strategies have been developed and are in place, but the longer term strategies will require further evaluation and planning. While the September announcement of \$31 million allocated to urban infrastructure is appreciated, it is a short-term solution and should be expanded significantly. We believe federal consultation with municipalities and business improvement, neighbourhood and professional associations is in order. This will require a redefinition of working relationships, but it could lead to a transformational effectiveness of

programs. National strategies can need to be developed which share and honour values such as sustainability while being fine-tuned to the specific needs of a community. This is an opportunity for tri-level government and private sector partnerships as described in the Community Vitality section of this paper. We look forward to participating in these discussions.

### PROGRAM PROPOSALS

- 1 Partner with provincial and municipal governments to focus on infrastructure improvements to sidewalks, roads and parks which will make businesses on main streets and in downtowns more economically viable year-round. Also use this opportunity to include arts and cultural organizations which need to redesign interior and exterior spaces to be more COVID resilient and economically viable.
- 2 Job-creation strategies must target downtowns, main streets and traditional commercial areas to be more sustainable and better equipped to face dramatic climate change. Urban power generation, building design and placement, run-off water reduction and recapture, and burying overhead wiring are all examples of how are towns and cities can be better designed to reduce and withstand dramatic climate change.
- 3 Prioritize the sustainable redevelopment of federally-owned urban lands for mixed-use development which complement adjacent areas and surrounding neighbourhoods.



Putting the finishing touch on a delightful meal in your local downtown/main street restaurant.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

### PREMISE

To support and sustain entrepreneurship, our communities need to provide start-up business support, create incubation incentives and develop urban cluster strategies, all in the context of heightened sustainability objectives.

### GOAL

To continue kindling the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of Canadians by developing and expanding creativity hubs in urban cores by ensuring close working relationships with the private sector and the business improvement area associations which represent them.

### COMMENT

Small business is the backbone of the Canadian economy, employing approximately 70% of private sector workers and as such, deserves the fullest support of the Federal Government. The COVID pandemic has had a devastating impact on small business, with most employers and employees being forced to remain at home for the first three months. As employers and employees try to navigate through this recovery, training as well as employment grants are essential. Many business owners will need help and training to adapt to a totally new business environment and build new skills. New entrepreneurs need to understand self-employment and how to run a business, not to mention how to be enterprising and opportunity-focused. As some owners are forced to close and others choose to close their businesses, we need to ensure there is a succession of entrepreneurs

who are sufficiently skilled to continue on with new enterprises. This will require tailored training, mentorship, and match-making which we believe should be included in any employment and training grants.

### PROGRAM PROPOSALS

- 1 Reinforce a culture of entrepreneurship throughout Canada by focusing on training and re-training programs, micro-loans and location grants which in turn will benefit downtowns, main streets and traditional commercial neighbourhoods.
- 2 Develop a pilot program for BIAs and SDCs to create local, specific-sector training programs in partnership with local colleges, universities and the private sector. The full spectrum of skill levels should be eligible for both inside and outside workers. An example of this is the Downtown Victoria Business Association which created a Clean Team staffed solely by marginalized individuals who were given employment opportunities requiring modest training, but which provide a sense of pride and purpose through their work.
- 3 Partner with BIAs, SDCs and municipalities to create capacity-building incubation centres for retail innovation in downtowns and on main streets. Funds could also be made available to help subdivide large, vacant ground-floor spaces for less costly retail space. As another part of this initiative, a microloan or loan guarantee program could be developed for the crafts and maker community.





Servers welcoming guests safely in Charlottetown, PEI.



IDA Canada, a national coalition of the International Downtown Association, represents organizations across the country that manage Canada's business districts, making them vital places in the nation's identity and key centres of economic wealth. Visit [www.downtown.org/ida-canada](http://www.downtown.org/ida-canada) for more info.