

Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming 2022 Federal Budget



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

August 6, 2021

Recommendations:

1. That the economic and social recovery of Canada's downtowns and main streets become a foremost priority of the federal government. Due to the importance of rebuilding our downtowns/main streets, the manner in which we approach the complex issues needs to change. We need a focused national effort with the federal government taking the lead and working in collaboration with provincial and municipal governments and the private sector. Given the dramatic impact of COVID on downtowns and main streets, we also recommend that the federal government create a panel, utilizing urban experts from across the country to help create a pan-Canadian recovery strategy and guide the economic and social recovery of our downtowns.

2: That federal actions and programs related to the recovery of Canada's downtowns and main streets contribute to stemming climate change, be socially balanced, culturally dynamic, racially integrated, and innovatively robust.

Context

IDA Canada believes that business improvement districts and the businesses which they comprise are integral to Canada's identity and are essential to the social, economic, and cultural recovery and future growth of our communities. Our recommendations focus on strengthening downtowns, main streets, and traditional neighbourhood commercial districts and the impact Federal incentive programs can have in creating jobs and helping entrepreneurs grow their businesses.

Re-starting the economy will require businesses and the government to work together and important investments from the government will help downtowns return to helping grow the economy.

What is IDA Canada?

IDA Canada is a national coalition of the International Downtown Association, representing over five-hundred organizations across the country that manage Canada's business districts, making them vital places in the nation's identity and key centres of economic, social and cultural vitality.

Who we are:

- Our partner 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.

Recommendation 1: *That the economic and social recovery of Canada's downtowns and main streets become a foremost priority of the federal government. Due to the importance of rebuilding our downtowns/main streets, the manner in which we approach the complex issues needs to change. We need a focused national effort with the federal government taking the lead and working in collaboration with provincial and municipal governments and the private sector. Given the dramatic impact of COVID on downtowns and main streets, we also recommend that the federal government create a panel, utilizing urban experts from across the country to help create a pan-Canadian recovery strategy and guide the economic and social recovery of our downtowns.*

Canadian downtowns and main streets have been brought to their knees by COVID-19. The small businesses in our downtowns and our main streets exist in all manner of municipalities. Many of them have been able to remain open because of Federal funding programs such as CEWS and CERS, but there remains a need for Federal support to overcome the lingering impacts of COVID and to help rebuild the downtown and main street environments in which businesses return to being key employers and the building blocks of their community.

The development of a pan-Canadian recovery strategy with a focus on economic and social recovery will benefit all Canadians.

Ensuring the economic recovery of downtowns will allow them to continue to be a key driver in the Canadian economy and the development of a pan-Canadian strategy will be critical to so many small and medium businesses remaining open and, ultimately, expanding. A key element in the development of a strategy is data collection and research to find out what truly is happening with small businesses and the environments in which they operate. The shared funding of this research should be undertaken by business associations with the support of the federal government. Within the strategy which will be created, we believe the re-building of downtown and main street infrastructure will play an important role in economic recovery.

Recommendation 2: *That federal actions and programs related to the recovery of Canada's downtowns and main streets contribute to stemming climate change, be socially balanced, culturally dynamic, racially integrated, and innovatively robust.*

Our downtowns and main streets are the heart of our cities and towns, both small and large. We have an opportunity, within recovery, to harness the creative and operational forces of business associations and their members to play their role in taking action to stem climate change and make their working environments more sustainable. This summer, we have once again seen the devastating impact that climate change is having with the 'heat dome' and fires hitting Western Canada, the droughts impacting Prairie provinces, the fires in Northern Ontario, and rainfall in Atlantic Canada. Our downtowns and main streets will ultimately be revitalized, but it will be more impactful and made all the more lasting if actions are designed to be sustainable. We all must have an eye to the immediate as well as the long-term future of our communities and our country.

We recognize this government's commitment to supporting critical municipal infrastructure investments. IDA Canada and its members want to be a part of the development and redesign of Federal programs – where relevant – to ensure that all

BIAs/SDCs and municipalities can avail themselves of programs based on their own unique, pressing needs.

From the creation of new street designs, to sidewalk renewal, to the construction of public performance venues and restroom facilities, we recommend that municipal infrastructure take a broad-based approach that captures the range of urban and rural municipal needs. Further, the inclusion of BIAs/SDCs and neighbourhoods in the program planning will help ensure that funding is reaching intended audiences and being disbursed expeditiously towards needed improvements.

The government's announcement of a national child care program in budget 2021 was an excellent step in the social recovery. The opioid, mental health crisis, and lack of affordable housing facing Canadians are other critical social issues which impact a socially balanced society. The National housing strategy is an important development and while we welcome the many recent announcement of affordable housing, more needs to be done. Having a safe place to call home is important for Canadian's facing difficult situations and IDA supports the government in its efforts to ensure all Canadians have a place to call home.

There are so many groups which have been impacted by COVID, but amongst the hardest hit are performers – both musical and dramatic - and the venues in which they play. Funding has been provided for some, for which we are appreciative, but there are additional opportunities which the federal government can support which integrate and encourage inter-sectoral leverage and promotion by business and tourism associations. Allowing the public to return and enjoy cultural performances will help revitalize communities.

We applaud the financial programs to support black and first nations enterprises, but we encourage a more complete BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Colour] approach in which all persons of a visible or cultural minority are supported in their existing businesses or with their entrepreneurial aspirations. Of particular note are those who are new to our country who operate businesses, but have not been able to access COVID support funding because of their language or technological challenges. Our business associations are finding there is no one in government to support them.

Small business employs approximately 70% of private sector employment, but COVID has had devastating impacts. To ensure a continuation of Canada's entrepreneurial spirit, we ask that the federal government work with provinces to support post-secondary school and university grads with programs which support their remaining in the communities in which they grew up and/or were trained.