



FALLSVIEW BOULEVARD

June 22, 2020

Dear Mr. Chair and Members of the Standing Committee:

Good afternoon, my name is Sue Mingle & I am Executive Director of the Fallsview BIA in Niagara Falls, as well as the President of the Ontario BIA Association.

I send this document as a follow-up to my presentation on June 11, 2020. Mr. Chair and members of the Standing Committee, thank you for this opportunity to share with you the impacts that COVID-19 is having on our industry and community. I want to express our gratitude for the dedication and work of our government to help our province to be safe and to recover from this terribly disorienting time. The only thing we know for certain is that life will never be the same again.

Niagara Falls is unique in that our tourism industry is comprised of close to 100% private entrepreneurs, families that have invested their entire lives in this community and built this industry over the past several decades, to make it what it is today. These families have weathered many storms, from 9/11 to SARS, economic downturns, the fluctuating value of the dollar, passport requirements, and quite literally, the weather! But this, is by far the most devastating and monumentally disruptive challenge yet.

Everyone agrees that health is our number 1 priority. In Niagara Falls we have sacrificed our economy to protect the health of our people. The tourism industry represents approximately 40,000 jobs in Niagara, and 98% of the tourism industry is laid off, the majority of businesses are closed, and we are running out of time.

Although, in recent years Niagara Falls has increasingly welcomed visitors year-round, the summer is still our significant season. Our goods are perishable, we can not recoup what is lost, we can not sell tonight's empty room or dinner on another day.

Businesses are barely hanging on and some are closing their doors permanently. We understand that likely nothing is going to dramatically change until there is a vaccine. We need to find ways to survive now.

We recognize your support of tourism's role as an economic driver for our province, your contributions that fosters economic development. The most recent announcements of Minister McLeod on Friday give us hope.

It is with great appreciation we are now partially open in Phase 2 which was so critical for us. Although this weekend did not see the influx of overnight visitors that we need to start recovery,



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it is a step forward. We look forward to continuing with clear criteria, and on a planned basis, open further.

When tourism businesses are open & thriving, we directly support many other local jobs and businesses, culinary, agricultural, wineries & breweries, and many other types of suppliers. Indirectly, we & our staff support a plethora of other services and businesses with our wages, from salons, to vehicles & services and everything type of business in between.

In addition our business owners are suggesting the following, and we recognize that some of these suggestions may already be in the planning process, or do not fall under the provinces purview so we want to provide the information for you to take this up to the federal level as well & we support expediated measures to put them into play.

- Supply mortgage relief, many businesses are not tenants but property owners who are not able to meet mortgage payments. Hoteliers in particular have extremely large mortgages, some in the millions of dollars in payments per month. When they have zero income for not only an extended period of time, but leading up to and into what should be our busiest season, it's compiling financial trauma on top of financial trauma.
- Provide access to government backed loans at zero or very low interest rates, with lenders that are within our Region, to help with liquidity so businesses have the ability to cover immediate and short-term debts and obligations. Make them easily accessible to those in need.
- Provide property tax relief, not deferment, as that only pushes the pain further along, but for the province to provide funding to the city to allow them to give businesses that have been hardest hit by this a property tax holiday for one year.
- Keep gas prices low, in order to help people, afford to travel.
- Community Improvement plans – CIPs, at present are limited in how & who has access to them. We request opening these up to more businesses and to include whatever is needed to get establishments retrofitted, or compliant for opening up & increasing capacity. The current uses are restrictive, and there are new needs that have emerged since Covid-19.
- Continue the wage subsidy until we are on our feet again, open it to more employers. Currently municipalities/government agencies are not eligible, which has an unintended



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consequence in that those organizations that are 'related' to government agencies but are in fact not financially supported by them can not access funds. An example of this are BIAs, because they are a board of the city we are not eligible for wage subsidy for staff, however 100% of our monies come directly from the business owners with the city as a flow through for the funds. Those same business owners have no or almost no income at present and for the last several months.

- Really & truly cut out red-tape, the biggest comment we hear about the rent relief program for example, is the onerous & complicated application process, which is causing landlords to shy away from it.
- We know from the data collected in the surveys that the social crisis is what will threaten our recovery. Many Ontarians are nervous to resume what used to be normal activities such as visiting attractions, going out to bars & restaurants, attending large events, meetings & public transit. We need a comprehensive plan in which we can all participate to create safe environments, build consumer confidence and reduce the stigma Covid has produced. This can be done through marketing campaigns, but also need the support in funding support for PPEs, other supplies or equipment to assist in physical distancing.
- On another note – a different side. This pandemic has created more than loss of business, jobs and financial stress... as you know it has created great emotional stress, mental stress, and we have barely scratched the surface.

This emotional stress will impact generations to follow. People are petrified of going out, of having a live human connection. Our children are forevermore scarred by what this pandemic has created. If you asked my grandchildren what they want...they will tell you, they want to go to the playground, to see their friends, to play... even my little ones, 3 & 4 years old, miss those interactions with their friends.

Parents & grandparents alike are terrified of allowing this for fear of illness. Let's face it, over- stressed adults are not fun or beneficial to children. So we must find other ways of bringing joy into their lives & into our lives.

Because of the impact that has for every single one of us, for me, for you on this committee, for every person watching ... I ask you to ponder this tonight – when was the last time you had fun, real joy, real stress relieving enjoyment.... How about your families?



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Well, Niagara Falls knows about fun! We supply fun, we can help relieve the pressure that is weighing people down and creating emotional stress...because that's what we in Niagara Falls know how to do... but its going to take your help. Help us help our people of Ontario.

Lastly, let me say, I am sincerely grateful to all of the brave people who have literally put their lives on the line for us, for their commitment and their many, many hours of work.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit.

Sincerely,

Sue Mingle
Executive Director Fallsview BIA