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OPEN for Business



OPEN FOR BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE: BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREAS

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ONTARIO BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT
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January 2015



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Ontario's Open for Business Roundtables

Open for Business (OFB) roundtables establish a dialogue and enable a collaborative relationship between government and key business stakeholders.

Representatives at these roundtables are asked to identify five priorities to strengthen their sector's economic success. These priorities need to be under provincial jurisdiction, have no fiscal impact and can be implemented in the short term.

Ministries have two months to address these priorities, or explain why they can't and deliver alternative solutions. This joint understanding of priorities allows government and the sector to work together more effectively to generate economic growth, create jobs for Ontario families and protect the public interest.

Open for Business is responsible for working with ministries to ensure progress and to resolve each sector's issues within appropriate timelines.

Business Improvement Areas

Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) represent 'Main Street Ontario'. They serve as an economic and social anchor for the surrounding neighbourhood and help to stabilize and add vitality to the local community.

The first BIA legislation in the world was created in Ontario in 1970 through an agreement between the province, the City of Toronto and Bloor West Village. There are now almost 300 BIAs representing more than 55,000 Ontario businesses in small towns and large urban centres.

BIAs initially consisted of mostly small retail businesses. Today's BIA membership includes a wide variety of businesses: professional and creative services, high-tech, light industrial, restaurants, entertainment, and so on.

The unifying characteristic is an interest in enhancing their business area and improving their community.

BIAs were represented by the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA) at the OFB roundtable. The association's current membership represents more than 100 part-time staff and about 150 full-time staff who work for BIAs in Ontario. These BIAs have a combined budget of more than \$40 million that is spent on enhancing Ontario communities.

Open for Business is an initiative to make Ontario a leading competitive business jurisdiction for reducing burdens, strengthening relationships with business, and promoting efficient, targeted and smart regulations that protect the public interest.

Open for Business has three key areas of focus:

Minimizing Business Burdens – Make government services and requirements easy, accessible and predictable by reducing administrative burden for business and by avoiding unnecessary duplication or cost

Smarter Regulatory Practices – Change the way government works with business by improving regulations through innovation, evidence and creative thinking

Connecting with Business – Develop collaborative relationships with business and engage partners to help improve Ontario's competitiveness

The Business Improvement Area OFB Roundtable

The top five priorities of the OBIAA were presented at the OFB roundtable in January 2014.

The Minister for Economic Development, Trade and Employment, Dr. Eric Hoskins, spoke at the roundtable and emphasized the importance of BIAs and he highlighted the need for a strong relationship with government.

"Government benefits from the linkage between BIAs and grassroots, local communities," said Hoskins. "The work you and your members do is very important to improving the prosperity of this province. The five priorities OBIAA outlined will help strengthen partnerships between BIAs and government ministries."

Members from BIAs across the province attended the roundtable and also senior political staff, assistant deputy ministers, deputy ministers and staff from the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and

Employment/Ministry of Research and Innovation (MEDTE/MRI), Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS), Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) and ServiceOntario.

Minister Hoskins and the other government representatives discussed the five priorities put forth by OBIAA and committed to find solutions within 60 days.

Representatives from OBIAA and members of the government came back together in March 2014 to discuss the work that had taken place over the preceding two months.

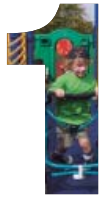
"OBIAA is delighted to have participated in the OFB roundtable process and to have had frank conversations on the five priorities," said Ellen Timms, OBIAA President. "The work and meetings completed in the 60-day period have created a positive energy and tone I'm sure will flow into the work that lies ahead for OBIAA and our partner ministries."

Key Facts About BIAs:

- There are almost 300 BIAs across Ontario — employing over 250 part-time and full-time staff
- More than 55,000 businesses in Ontario belong to a BIA
- BIAs represent a combined budget in excess of \$40 million

Executive Summary

OBIAA's Five Priorities



PRIORITY 1: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

Both BIA members and the businesses they represent report being confused and frustrated in trying to understand what's required under the AODA. BIAs would like to explore proactively communicating with their members by distributing information, templates, best practices, training, etc.



PRIORITY 2: Tourism Oriented Directional Signs (TODS) Program

BIAs have expressed frustration about the application process for TODS and the restrictions on the number of TODS signs permitted in an area. They want to work with the province to improve the application process, including availability of signs and the criteria related to sign locations.



PRIORITY 3: Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs)

BIAs have indicated there should be a main access point for them to communicate with all the RTOs. BIAs would like to have a more direct connection and recognition when working with RTOs to help brand and market downtown shopping areas and bring attention to BIA features and events.



PRIORITY 4: Festivals and Events Permitting

BIAs say the amount of paperwork required to organize community events for residents and tourists is daunting and overwhelming. These events add vibrancy, top of mind awareness and can become a part of a community's brand. Community events have proven to bring significant economic benefits and the OBIAA would like to see the paperwork for hosting these events simplified and streamlined.



PRIORITY 5: Establish a Multi-Ministry Forum

Businesses on Ontario's main streets deal with multiple ministries on multiple issues. OBIAA would like to see the establishment of a multi-ministry forum to help address long-term and strategic priorities.

Executive Summary

Government Response to OBIAA's Five Priorities



PRIORITY 1: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The Accessibility Directorate of Ontario (ADO) provided accessibility standards training materials that BIAs can use and can also share with their members. The ADO will tailor a presentation for OBIAA's 2015 conference to its concerns. The ADO will work with OBIAA on an "EnAbling Change" project to help BIAs understand and comply with the AODA.



PRIORITY 2: Tourism Oriented Directional Signs (TODS) Program

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS) has worked with OBIAA to incorporate feedback into the 2013-14 TODS program review. Consideration will be given to OBIAA's recommendations related to the icon for the "rural downtowns" category and adjusting the criteria for "rural downtowns". The results of the TODS program review are expected in fall 2014.



PRIORITY 3: Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs)

The OBIAA has been invited to present its priorities at a RTO executive directors meeting. The appointment of a MTCS Ministry Liaison to OBIAA's Board was also confirmed.



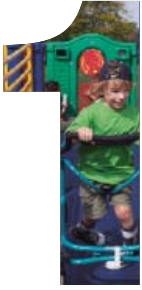
PRIORITY 4: Festivals and Events Permitting

ServiceOntario is developing a "Festivals and Events" bundle page on the ONe-Source website. The website will provide content specific to the festivals and events permitting process: a step-by-step guide and forms specific to the municipality. ServiceOntario will also explore the creation of an online "all-in-one" application for events where customers can submit the required information to all government departments (including municipalities) in a single, consolidated manner.



PRIORITY 5: Establish a Multi-Ministry Forum

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) is providing an annual forum for BIA issues with deputy ministers. The forum will allow for information sharing and shaping of common interests.



Priority 1

Provide Clarity and Improve Awareness of Compliance Obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

BIA's and their members identified two primary concerns with regard to compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act:

1. physical upgrades to their buildings; especially heritage buildings
2. awareness about accessibility standards for customer service

There is a great deal of misunderstanding and concern about the impact of the upcoming AODA deadlines on small businesses.

"For our members, the AODA compliance has been a challenging one," said one BIA member. "Some businesses are not in a geographic position on the sidewalk to get the regulated ramps and doorways needed to be compliant and they are having trouble finding solutions as the flexibility is not present for them to do so."

It is clear that small businesses need to comply with the Customer Service Standard but it's not clear who is responsible for communicating the new policies with the BIA's and their members. BIA's and their members report being confused, tentative and frustrated in trying to understand what is required.

BIA's would like to explore how they could address this gap. They are considering being more proactive in engaging and communicating with their members, for example, by distributing information, templates, best practices, training, etc. BIA's could also lead seminars to help members understand their obligations in complying with AODA standards.

OBIAA Recommendation: A communications plan should be developed for the implementation and training of the required AODA standards. The plan should clearly outline who is providing the training, how it will be provided and include tools and templates at little to no cost to BIA's and their members.

Government Response

(Lead: Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment)

The Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment's Accessibility Directorate (ADO) has worked closely since the roundtable meetings with OBIAA to address member questions and concerns.

The ADO provided OBIAA with templates and training materials about the accessibility standards that BIAs can use and share with their members. The ADO also provided OBIAA with resources created specifically for small businesses, such as "Accessible Main Street" guides and the "Accessibility Works" compliance toolkit. These were prepared through past "EnAbling Change" projects with business associations.

The ADO also committed to host a booth at the 2014 National BIA Conference (April 27-29, 2014), and will distribute a short survey to gauge members' knowledge of accessibility.

The Accessibility Directorate will work with OBIAA to establish an "EnAbling Change" partnership project that would:

- Ensure BIAs understand and comply with the AODA and can educate local small businesses about it, including compliance requirements.
- Highlight best practices and creative solutions about breaking down barriers to accessibility in businesses.
- Recognize accessibility leaders through an OBIAA Accessibility Awards program.

The ADO has also arranged for a joint presentation to OBIAA board members by the ADO and the Ontario Human Rights Commission. The meeting will focus on the intersections between the AODA and the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Accessibility Directorate will host a one-hour presentation on the AODA tailored to OBIAA members' concerns at the 2015 National BIA Conference. The inaugural OBIAA Accessibility Award will be presented at the conference.

Key Outcomes

- ADO participation at 2014 National BIA Conference and OBIAA Annual General Meeting
- Distribution of templates and training materials on AODA standards to OBIAA, including resources created specifically for small business
- A commitment to work with OBIAA to establish an "EnAbling Change" partnership project to help BIAs understand and comply with the AODA and educate local small businesses about it, including compliance requirements



Priority 2

Improve Understanding and Engagement on the Tourism Oriented Directional Signs (TODS) Program

BIAs have indicated that the TODS application process, including availability of signs, and criteria related to sign locations, could be improved to make it more accessible and applicable. BIAs are interested in exploring what mechanisms and tools exist to execute a more integrated approach to TODS icons for “downtown”/ “main street” destination signage in order to help brand BIAs as an attraction.

“Our biggest challenge is the restrictions placed on us by the TODS signage system,” said one BIA member. “Getting travelers off Hwy 10 is a challenge; really good attractive signage would help. Our main intersection (Hwy 10 and 9 or Broadway) is unattractive and does not accurately represent what visitors will find once they pull off the highway.”

As a collection of shopping, heritage, culture, education and community facilities, the existing icons do not reflect main street Ontario downtowns’ unique attributes. The OBIAA has created a marketing campaign recommending branding that supports main street businesses, via their BIAs. The brand is called “Go ON” or Go Ontario.



OBIAA Recommendation:

The TODS program should be reviewed so the national, provincial and municipal programs work together and complement each other. A main street Ontario icon should be developed to encourage economic growth and vitality of Ontario’s main streets. The RTOs should also work with the TODS system to explore cooperation through partnerships.

Government Response

(Lead: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport)

MTCS is conducting a program review of the TODS program which is expected to be completed in fall 2014. MTCS has worked with OBIAA to incorporate its feedback into the program review using the results of a survey distributed to OBIAA members and through an information sharing meeting in February 2014. Ministry staff met with OBIAA to discuss potential TODS policy opportunities to support BIAs.

MTCS is continuing to analyze program feedback and engage with other tourism stakeholders. As part of the TODS program review, it will consider program improvement opportunities that include:

- Improving the icon for the “rural downtowns” category to better align with the OBIAA brand.
- Adjusting the eligibility criteria for “rural downtowns” and/or add a new “Main Street Ontario” category.
- Reviewing opportunities to address capacity under the TODS policy

Key Outcomes

- Commitment to explore an improved icon for rural downtowns to attract visitors to main street shopping areas
- OBIAA’s feedback incorporated into the TODS program review



Priority 3

Build Collaborative Relationships with Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs)

BIAs have indicated that there is no main access point for them to engage with all the RTOs. BIAs would like to have a more direct connection and recognition when working with RTOs to help brand and market downtown shopping areas and bring attention to BIA features and events.

OBIAA asked its members to identify which RTO their BIA fell under. About 44 per cent could not identify their local RTO. The lack of response to this question is concerning since it shows the BIAs did not have 'top of mind' awareness of their RTO and the work it is doing. If the RTO system is to work effectively, it needs to be able to encourage engagement with the BIAs/main street Ontario.

OBIAA Recommendation: Encourage open forums for the RTOs across Ontario and also encourage stronger communications, sharing of best practices and partnerships with provincial organizations, such as OBIAA and its community stakeholders.

Government Response

(Lead: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport)

RTOs play an important role in supporting competitive and sustainable tourism regions. Tourism contributed more than \$23 billion in 2012 to Ontario's economy — and it supported over 300,000 direct and indirect jobs in Ontario.

Each RTO provides regional leadership and coordination and works with industry partners to grow tourism through activities like strategic planning, research, product development, training, investment attraction and marketing.

As part of the roundtable process, MTCS staff met with OBIAA to provide an overview of regional tourism and the roles and responsibilities of the RTOs. OBIAA members were encouraged to contact their local RTO to exchange information on priorities and discuss potential opportunities for collaboration. MTCS has also shared contact information for all the RTO executive directors with OBIAA's executive director.

One outcome of the OFB roundtable was for MTCS to confirm the appointment of a ministry representative to OBIAA's board. This link supports a more formal connection between MTCS and OBIAA beyond the OFB roundtable process and will improve ongoing collaboration between OBIAA, MTCS, OBIAA members and RTOs.

OBIAA members and RTOs have other opportunities to collaborate including an OBIAA presentation on priorities at an in-person RTO executive directors meeting (May 2014), and RTO executive directors have been advised of OBIAA's 2014 National BIA Conference in Hamilton on April 27-29.

Key Outcomes

- Improved information sharing between OBIAA, MTCS, OBIAA members and RTOs
- OBIAA to present at the RTO executive directors meeting in May 2014
- MTCS Liaison appointed to OBIAA board



Priority 4

Streamline and Simplify Information related to Festivals and Events Permitting

Festivals and events add vibrancy and the top-of-mind awareness that can become part of a community's brand.

They can represent as much as 30 per cent of small businesses' annual revenue.

BIA's organize these events for their members but they are often frustrated with the volume and variety of permits and approvals required to host a one-day or temporary event. The level of red tape required to organize these events is often overwhelming. One of the greatest frustrations is not knowing what permits are even required, and rules and processes also differ from one municipality to another. Ontario BIA's say excessive paperwork and a lack of clear requirements can almost derail community events.

"In June the BIA ran a Food and Music Festival which required sidewalk sale and street closure permits," said one BIA member. "Any feedback was given at the last minute, making it frustrating to for the participating businesses, as they needed to prepare in advance for the event. Some of the businesses had to withdraw, as they didn't want to go to the expense of moving their cooking stations outside, in the event that the permit was declined."

OBIAA Recommendation: Move towards creating a seamless process, either through the BizPal tool or through a newly developed and communicated tool.

Government Response

(Lead: ServiceOntario)

Festivals and events are a source of fun and community celebration and they also support over 22,000 jobs in Ontario every year.

ServiceOntario worked with OBIAA to identify major ‘pain points’ in the event application process. It found that overall, there are multiple applications, and that it is very difficult to find the information required online. Business Improvement Areas (BIA) have a relationship with the municipality, but business owners trying to complete the permitting process on their own find it difficult to navigate the system.

ONE-Source for Business provides easy online access to the government services, forms and information that entrepreneurs and businesses need to start, operate and grow their businesses. Users can search and access the services and information they need, saving relevant items to their secure ONE-Source account.

ServiceOntario has committed to develop a “Festivals and Events” bundle page in ONE-Source for Business within three months of the project kick-off (spring 2014). The page would include:

- Content specific to the festivals and events permitting process.
- A “top five events step-by-step” process guide.
- Links and forms specific to the customer’s municipality.

ServiceOntario will partner with two municipalities and it’s recommended the Town of Collingwood and the Town of Huntsville participate in the pilot.

ServiceOntario will work with OBIAA to explore an online application for festivals and events as part of its longer-term approach to improve communication and customer experience when planning and applying for permits. This “all-in-one” application would allow customers to submit all required permit information online, one time, to all relevant government departments (including municipalities).

To improve customer experience with business permits and licenses through BizPal, ServiceOntario will explore how to update available content, expand the search functionality and enhance usability through content organization, training and communication.

Key Outcomes

- “Festivals and Events” bundle page on ONE-Source
- Participation of two municipalities in a pilot project
- Exploration of an all-in-one festival/event application on ONE-Source



Priority 5

Establish an OBIAA Forum for Working Across Provincial Government

Strong BIAs have a positive impact on local economies. The OBIAA can help provide clear communication between BIAs and their member businesses, and government ministries. The roundtable process helped the OBIAA connect with many ministries and it is clear that most ministries intersect in some way with main street Ontario.

The OBIAA could bring forward members' shared strategic policy concerns and priorities by working with MMAH to establish an annual multi-ministry forum. The multi-ministry forum would:

- Improve communications between the provincial government and main street Ontario.
- Streamline communications between the government and small businesses.
- Identify tools and solutions, as well as best practices.
- Identify partnerships and collaborations to help strengthen the economy of main street Ontario.

OBIAA Recommendation: A multi-ministry annual forum could be created by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (as BIAs are Local Boards through the Municipal Act), where OBIAA could bring forward policy issues that are cross-ministerial in nature.

Government Response

(Lead: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing)

The Government of Ontario recognizes that establishing two-way and on-going communication with provincial ministries and ministry staff related to OBIAA matters has been an ongoing challenge. To address this gap, MMAH has worked collaboratively with OBIAA to identify objectives, organizational capacity and desired outcomes for an annual forum on BIA issues. Both sides agreed that the best fit was an annual meeting with OBIAA board members and deputy ministers from the Planning, Environment, Resource and Land (PERL) Committee. PERL, as an executive committee, includes deputy ministers from ministries responsible for infrastructure, rural affairs, economic development and tourism — representatives from other ministries like finance and transportation can be invited to join as the subject matter requires.

This forum model fits well with OBIAA's operating model and will allow for constructive two-way information sharing and exchange to influence how issues of common interest are framed and shaped. In addition, it will raise BIA concerns that can support Ontario businesses more broadly.

MMAH's staff liaison will work closely with OBIAA to identify priority issues for the first forum meeting, to take place in fall 2014.

Key Outcomes

- Initial annual forum scheduled for fall 2014
- Developed Terms of Reference for the annual OBIAA forum with the provincial government



The Government of Ontario delivered tangible recommendations and outcomes by working with OBIAA and the more than 55,000 businesses it represents.

Accessibility requirements will be clarified and communicated to small businesses by their local BIA. Businesses that are leading the charge to make their services accessible will be recognized with an annual award.

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport will continue to work closely with OBIAA via their liaison position on the Board to address issues related to the TODS program and the RTOs.

ServiceOntario is committed to putting more forms, permits and information related to festivals and events online to save organizers time and simplify the process of bringing fun and community based events to Ontario's main streets.

In addition to the priorities addressed through this OFB roundtable, OBIAA will also be able to work with the provincial government on larger, strategic policy issues through the newly established annual forum.

The ministries look forward to further collaboration with OBIAA, and their small business members, to deliver on these solutions.

For more information, please visit our website at: ontario.ca/business-and-economy/business-and-economy.



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www.ontario.ca/business-and-economy/business-and-economy