

Ontario's Big City Mayors urge Federal and Provincial governments to emphasize supportive housing and small business in restarting the economy.

March 19, 2021 – As vaccines begin to roll out more steadily, the Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM) caucus is calling for the federal and provincial governments to work together to develop a flexible plan to re-open that supports small business, increases well-being, and allows for a gradual return to normalcy.

OBCM recognizes the importance of public health measures in keeping Ontarians safe throughout the pandemic and is grateful for the supports from the Federal and Provincial governments thus far. As we mark the one-year anniversary of the pandemic, it is time to take stock and rethink our approach to public health restrictions so that small business owners can rebuild their businesses.

“Our locally owned businesses and restaurants are vital to the fabric of our communities. We must begin examining lessons learned and safe adjustments to the restrictive lockdown measures that were necessary at the start of the pandemic,” said Mayor Jeff Lehman, OBCM Chair. “We look forward to continuing our work with both levels of government in finding more ways to support small businesses while continuing to support vaccination and recovery efforts.”

At its caucus meeting, OBCM also discussed the importance of the Rapid Housing Initiative that has allowed municipalities to provide much needed housing for vulnerable residents. Compared to the need, this program is woefully underfunded. OBCM members are grateful for the support to housing projects in our cities, and would like to encourage the Federal government to consider additional funding as we move towards recovery.

Below is a list of motions passed at the March 19, 2021 OBCM meeting.

1. Rapid Housing Initiative Funding

Whereas: The Government of Canada, through CMHC, [launched the Rapid Housing Initiative \(RHI\)](#) to invest \$1 billion to help address urgent housing needs of vulnerable Canadians, especially in the context of COVID-19, through the rapid construction of affordable housing;

Whereas: This program allowed municipalities to create, develop and enhance important partnerships and new opportunities for more successful investment outcomes;

Whereas: The RHI program was extremely successful in attracting proposals and created opportunities for projects in many communities across Ontario, so much so that the initial \$1Bn investment falls well short of what is required;

Whereas: Without additional funding, there will be missed opportunities to support vulnerable populations and address the growing housing crisis in Ontario's cities;

Now Therefore Be it Resolved That Ontario's Big City Mayors support an immediate additional investment in RHI funding to allow more projects to be approved, and encourage the Minister of Finance, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to continue to advocate for further funding for an expanded RHI program for similar projects in the future.

And further that as the program was underfunded relative to the overwhelming need for this program, that OBCM ensure funding envelopes in future reflect the demand.

2. Supportive Housing Funding

Whereas an effective solution for many of those experiencing homelessness is represented by supportive housing.

And whereas the government of Canada has allocated capital funding for supportive housing and has been requested by OBCM to allocate further funding to accommodate additional applications.

And whereas historically the operating funds needed to finance the actual supports offered in supportive housing units has come from the province specifically the Ministries of Health and Municipal Affairs.

And whereas the province has not yet committed to finance these operating expenses for a number of more recent supportive housing projects and those future projects where the capital is financed by the federal government.

Therefore OBCM requests that the government of Ontario take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity for all three orders of government to join together and significantly increase the supply of supportive housing across the province by committing to the operating funding which will accompany capital funding coming from the government of Canada, and which will be necessary to operate these supportive housing units which will benefit some of our most vulnerable residents in communities across Ontario.

3. Safe Restart Agreement Phase 2

That Ontario's Big City Mayors supports the request by the Ontario Public Transit Association to have unused (provincial) funds currently slated to expire on March 31, 2021 remain within the transit program and be allocated as needs arise later this year to help keep systems whole and able to serve the Ontarians who depend on them each day.

4. COVID Business Restrictions

Whereas: When the Province of Ontario went into lockdown and enforced a Stay-at-Home order on December 26, 2020, all restaurants across the province were forced to close in person dining for over 7 weeks;

Whereas: the Provincial COVID-19 Response Framework: Keeping Ontario Safe and Open placed hard cap restrictions on in person dining regardless of the size of the restaurants. Feedback from restauranters continues to be that in most cases the hard cap does not make reopening their businesses viable;

Whereas: Restaurants and the hospitality sector continue to be one of the most impacted sectors by COVID-19 public health measures and according to the latest Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses (CFIB) data, will take 8 plus years to recover from the impacts of COVID-19. The industry requires specific short and long term supports to remain viable;

Therefore, Be It Resolved That Ontario's Big City Mayors call on the Federal and Provincial governments to provide the following supports and address the issues identified by Ontario's restaurant community:

- Address the key fixed costs facing the restaurant industry while they face steep revenue declines including the following actions:

1. Expand small business relief measures including the *Small Business Relief Grant* and *Property Tax and Energy Cost Rebates* to the hardest hit sectors including restaurants beyond the period when they are placed under grey/lockdown level;
 2. Provide wholesale pricing from the LCBO to restaurants to help increase margins on alcohol sales;
 3. Investigate and potentially legislate for the significant increases that restaurants and other businesses have seen (up to 30%) in insurance premiums despite no significant changes to the risks that are being insured;
- Establish capacity limits based on the safe, socially-distanced customer floor area of restaurants, rather than a fixed number of patrons
 - Provide supports and guidance to the restaurant industry and the public to increase consumer confidence and make it clear what is permitted/safe to do for residents and consumers to support the local restaurant industry while ensuring we stop the spread of COVID-19;
 - That the Provincial and Federal governments develop a long-term strategy of a minimum of three and up to five plus years that outlines what recovery is expected to look like for the Hospitality industry and long-term supports of one plus years that will be available to the industry to support their long-term survival and recovery.

5. COVID Business Restrictions

That the Province be urged to amend business restrictions to consistently apply a floor-area based approach to capacity restrictions across business sectors and organizations, when able to open safely.

About Ontario's Big City Mayors

Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM), formerly known as the Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario, includes mayors of 29 single and lower-tier cities with a population of 100,000 or more, who collectively represent nearly 70 per cent of Ontario's population. OBCM advocates for issues and policies important to Ontario's largest cities.

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