

Status of Supports for the Retail Sector

Date: September 5, 2021

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: Interim General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on Toronto's efforts to support the retail sector over the past eight months, requests authority from City Council to implement certain Toronto Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative ("MRRI") programs funded by the Government of Canada, and describes modifications to some existing City retail and BIA programs to better meet business operator and community needs.

This report is a follow-up to the report entitled "Support for the Retail Sector - Update", received by the Economic and Community Development Committee on November 12, 2020, which detailed the initial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Toronto's retail sector and small main street businesses.

Ontario entered Step 3 of its 3-step Re-opening Roadmap on July 16, 2021. This important development, coupled with a recent decline in the city's retail vacancy rates, provide grounds for measured optimism that Toronto's retail sector is now on a recovery trajectory. However, the extent, sustainability, pace, and (geographic and sub-sectoral) distribution of this recovery remains uncertain. In particular, the effect of the withdrawal of Government of Canada wage and rent subsidies for businesses is unknown, as is the long-term impact of increased digital commerce and working from home arrangements on different segments of the retail sector. While retail sales in some categories have largely recovered, sales and employment in food services and accommodation have lagged behind. Consequently, retail businesses will need continued support from the City of Toronto throughout the recovery period to minimize further business losses or the risk of widespread, extended retail vacancies.

Together, the City of Toronto's existing (with certain modifications), new (Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative) and potential retail and small business support programs, as described in this report, aim to address business operator needs during the recovery period, while strengthening the ability of Toronto's retail sector to provide employment opportunities and contribute to the vitality of the city's streets, neighbourhoods and economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Interim General Manager, Economic Development and Culture recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to receive and allocate funds from the Government of Canada (e.g., Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario) or other third parties for the purpose of supporting main street and small business recovery programs, including the six Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative programs announced on July 13, 2021 and described in this report.
2. City Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture or the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services to negotiate and execute on behalf of the City of Toronto funding, partnership, training and/or service agreements (some of which are valued at approximately \$1.000 million each) with the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, the Black Business and Professional Association, plazaPOPS or other third parties related to any Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative programs, provided that such agreements are in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
3. City Council increase the 2021 Council Approved Operating Budget for Economic Development and Culture by \$0.455 million gross, \$0 net, fully funded by the Government of Canada, to begin delivery of the Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative programs.
4. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to include an increase to the funding request for the Mural and Street Art Program through reallocation as part of the Economic Development and Culture Division's 2022-2031 Capital Budget and Plan Submission for City Council consideration.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

On July 13, 2021, the Government of Canada announced funding of up to \$18.000 million for a Toronto Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative ("MRRI") consisting of six programs, including four new programs and significant expansion to two existing programs. Expenses related to these programs can be incurred up to March 31, 2024. No incremental funding is required for Toronto to access the full \$18.000 million allocation, however there is an expectation that Toronto maintain the funding it currently provides for the two existing programs, i.e., the Retail Accelerator Program and the BIA Innovation Fund (soon to be renamed the Main Street Innovation Fund). Should the City of Toronto wish to continue the Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative programs beyond March 31, 2024, reallocation of existing budgeted City (programming and staffing) resources or new funding will be required, unless funding from third parties is secured.

To begin delivery of certain MRRI programs in the third and fourth quarters of 2021, incremental gross expenditures totalling \$0.455 million, fully funded by the Government of Canada (net \$0), are anticipated and a corresponding adjustment to the 2021 Council Approved Operating Budget for Economic Development and Culture is recommended. Funding for the six MRRI programs in 2022 and beyond will be included in the 2022 Operating Budget Submission for Economic Development and Culture. A budget adjustment for the salaries and benefits portion has been requested through the second quarter of 2021 Operating Variance Report.

The Table below identifies anticipated expenditures, funded by the Government of Canada, for the 6 MRRI programs between the third quarter of 2021 and the first quarter of 2024. There is flexibility in the City's MRRI agreement with the Government of Canada to reallocate funding across these six programs in response to program demand from business operators or other factors. Labour costs (for City staff positions) to support MRRI program delivery are anticipated to range from \$1.000 million to \$1.350 million, depending on the finalization of program requirements and timing of hiring.

Table 1: Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative Programs - Anticipated Expenditures funded by the Government of Canada

Federal Funding (millions)	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total Program Costs
Retail Accelerator Program	\$0.150	\$1.000	\$1.600	\$0.250	\$3.000
Main Street Innovation Fund	\$0.105	\$2.000	\$2.645	\$0.250	\$5.000
Vacant Commercial Space Rehabilitation Grant Program		\$2.000	\$3.500	\$0.500	\$6.000
CaféTO		\$0.500	\$0.500		\$1.000
plazaPOPS	\$0.100	\$0.450	\$0.425	\$0.025	\$1.000
BBPA/Little Jamaica	\$0.100	\$0.400	\$0.400	\$0.100	\$1.000
Subtotal	\$0.455	\$6.350	\$9.070	\$1.125	\$17.000
City Labour Costs	\$0.250	\$0.334	\$0.334	\$0.082	\$1.000
Total Project Costs	\$0.705	\$6.684	\$9.404	\$1.207	\$18.000

Additionally, pending reauthorization through the City's Budget process, existing City funding for the BIA Innovation Fund (to become the Main Street Innovation Fund) of approximately \$200,000 annually, and for the Retail Accelerator Program of approximately \$125,000 annually, will be maintained for the duration of the Main Street

Recovery and Rebuild Initiative (i.e., through March 2024). Current City funding for the Retail Accelerator Program is provided through a Transfer Payment Agreement with the Government of Ontario which runs through March 2022.

Expenses associated with proposed changes to the BIA Capacity Development Fund can be accommodated within the Economic Development and Culture division's base Operating Budget by reallocating \$0.067 million in funding from the Strategic Response Fund to the Capacity Development Fund, thereby increasing the Capacity Development Fund from \$0.183 million to \$0.250 million annually.

The Mural and Street Art Program budget has not kept pace with the demand for grants or the increasing costs to produce wall murals and other street art. Pending adoption of this report, the 2022-2031 Capital Budget submission for Economic Development and Culture will propose an increase in funding for the Mural and Street Art Program from \$0.050 million annually to \$0.200 million annually beginning in 2022, thereby increasing the 10-year capital plan for the Mural and Street Art Program (2022-2031) from \$0.500 million to \$2.000 million, funded through a reallocation within Economic Development and Culture's 2022 Budget Submission.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has been advised of the financial impacts associated with the initiatives to be considered along with other priorities in the 2022 Budget process.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on September 22, 2016, the Executive Committee requested the Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to report to the January 19, 2017 Executive Committee meeting on the feasibility of piloting solutions to support the ongoing sustainability of independent main street businesses, specifically raw food vendors/grocers and other small retail businesses, in Kensington Market and other areas of the City undergoing similar challenges, including potential solutions such as a new tax class for these businesses, providing financial relief in the form of tax adjustments or any other such tools they deem viable to ensure that independent main street businesses can continue to be viable in the city.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.EX17.31>

At its March 28 and 29, 2017 meeting, City Council requested the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, in consultation with the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to report to the Planning and Growth Management Committee in the first quarter of 2018, with a potential retail strategy that: ensures new retail uses better address the goals and objectives of the Official Plan; evaluates similar policies in other cities, including, but not limited to, the 2006 Formula Retail Strategy in San Francisco; and promotes flexibility and incentivizes variation in both the size and type of new retail spaces on commercial main streets.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.MM27.36>

At its October 2, 3 and 4, 2017 meeting, City Council directed the City Manager to report back to the December Council meeting on various matters pertaining to supporting a vibrant Eglinton Avenue during the construction of the Crosstown LRT. The direction includes recommendations for City, Metrolinx and Crosslinks, and Parking Authority actions to assist local businesses and Business Improvement Areas on Eglinton Avenue during the next phases of construction.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.MM32.44>

At its December 5, 2017 meeting, City Council directed the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the Acting Chief Financial Officer and Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director City Planning to conduct a study of the current state and future of Toronto's retail main streets and report back on potential policies and programs that could support small, independent businesses in Toronto. The report also directed the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the Chief Engineer and Executive Director of Engineering and Construction Services, Acting Chief Financial Officer and the City Solicitor to report to the Executive Committee in the second quarter of 2018 on a construction mitigation program to support small businesses on retail main streets affected by major infrastructure projects.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.ED25.6>

At its January 29, 2020 meeting, City Council directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the Church-Wellesley Village BIA, other BIAs, TABIA, and the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to develop immediate and long-term recommendations to support the retention and growth of independently owned and operated LGBTQ2S+ small businesses and cultural space.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.MM14.8>

At its October 27, 2020 meeting, City Council adopted a report from the City Manager entitled "Towards Recovery and Building a Renewed Toronto", which included the report of the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild (TORR), "COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities".

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EX17.1>

At its meeting on November 12, 2020, the Economic and Community Development Committee received for information report ED17.7 Support for the Retail Sector, which provided an overview of ongoing initiatives to support the retail sector including a review of the Commercial Façade Improvement Program to consider funding for interior renovations and the option to expand the program to non-BIA areas.

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/ec/bgrd/backgroundfile-157922.pdf>

At its meeting on December 16, 2020, City Council adopted EC18.15 Building Back Stronger: Report of the City of Toronto's Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group, which included a recommendation to incentivize and facilitate local retail innovations.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EC18.15>

At its meeting of April 29, 2021, the Executive Committee received for information item EX23.8 Caf  TO Update providing an update on assistance to Toronto's restaurant and bar operators through Caf  TO.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.EX23.8>

At its meeting on June 8, 2021, City Council adopted MM34.44 authorizing the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to apply for Federal and Provincial funding that supports COVID-19 recovery initiatives for business and culture, and report to City Council on successful applications.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.MM34.44>

COMMENTS

In November 2020, the Economic and Community Development Committee received a report from the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture on Support for the Retail Sector amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The report highlighted the importance of Toronto's main street independent retail businesses, described issues affecting main streets prior to the pandemic and initial pandemic impacts on the city's retail sector, and outlined City support for the retail sector (March to October 2020) and next steps.

This report provides an update on actions to support Toronto's retail sector since November 2020 and provides information about the Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative ("MRRI"), which will receive up to \$18.000 million from the Government of Canada over the next 2.5 years.

Pandemic Impacts of Retail Main Streets

On July 16, 2021 Ontario entered Step 3 of Reopening, allowing businesses to open with capacity limits and social distancing measures in place.

While aggregate sales in traditional retail categories for June 2021 were 3.7 percent higher than in June 2020, some categories such as food and beverage stores and major food related general merchandise stores have benefited more than others. Categories such as furniture and home furnishings and sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores have witnessed some positive growth over the pandemic but these categories are still off their 2019 averages. Sales for clothing and clothing accessory stores are well below pre-pandemic levels.

For the purposes of this report "retail" also includes eating establishments and the food services sector (restaurants, bars, etc.) along with professional services. Sales amongst full services restaurants and drinking places remain well below pre-pandemic levels, due largely to successive restrictions and lock-downs. Total food service sales in June 2021 were 21.6 percent lower than in June 2019.

According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Toronto nonessential retailers were closed for 224 days between March 11, 2020 and August 12, 2021, or 43 percent of the time. The respective shares for indoor restaurant and bar service, and personal and wellness services were 411 days/79 percent and 312 days/60 percent. Ontario's small businesses faced longer closures than businesses in other jurisdictions in Canada.

Employment in accommodation and food service in June 2021 was 19.7 percent lower than pre-pandemic levels (January 2020).

Retail Main Street Case Study Data

In 2017, the Economic Development and Culture division commissioned a study titled the "Current State and Future of Toronto's Retail Main Streets" to gain a better understanding of the issues impacting main streets and to identify practical and tangible actions to support independent retailers.

The study provided a baseline of the state of main streets in 2017, with specific focus on nine representative case study main streets in Toronto. Subsequent updates of retail data for these areas in June 2020 and July 2021 provide insights into the impact of the pandemic on the retail sector and the extent of recovery to date.

During the early stages of reopening, pedestrian traffic increased, boosting retail activity in the main street case study districts. However, data from July 2021 indicate that vacancies have risen considerably in the case study areas located in the downtown core. This impact is not surprising given that the number of visitors, students, and office workers downtown have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. Outside of the downtown core, vacancies appear to be stable but business turnover has been high. Vacancies in six of the nine case study areas were lower than one year prior. However, there are legitimate concerns that vacancies may rise when federal wage and other business support programs end in late October, 2021.

Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative ("MRR")

In July 2021, the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) announced that it will invest \$18.000 million between July 2021 and March 2024 in a Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative to support new and existing small (retail) businesses and augment commercial activity in local Toronto neighbourhoods.

Reflecting advice the City has received from business associations and retailers, as well as recommendations from the Building Back Stronger and Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild reports, the 6 programs comprising the Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative will, together:

- Support small business (retail) formation and sustainment;
- Enable small business (retail) innovation, transformation and growth;
- Transform and animate up to 15 (older) strip plazas to advance small business and retail growth, BIA formation, and community development in lower income suburban neighbourhoods; and
- Mitigate the risk of commercial streetscape blight associated with widespread, long-term retail space vacancies.

Vacant Commercial Space Rehabilitation Program

To help commercial property owners and new commercial tenants re-lease space left vacant due to the COVID-19 pandemic or at risk of closing once subsidy programs end, up to \$6.000 million will be made available to offer matching grants for interior leasehold improvements. Under the *City of Toronto Act* and *Planning Act*, a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is required to provide grants to commercial enterprises. A staff report to be considered by the Planning and Housing Committee in September 2021 recommends the CIP required for the establishment of a new Commercial Rehabilitation Grant Program. If approved by Council, this program will enable Toronto to offer matching grants of up to \$20,000 per property for interior leasehold improvements to support retail space (re-)occupancy, including upgrades to meet health standards and AODA requirements.

Support for Restaurants and Bars Participating in CaféTO

Launched in the summer of 2020, CaféTO enabled hundreds of restaurant and bar operators to open patios in curb lanes and along sidewalks, providing additional space for physical distancing and customers. CaféTO helped operators generate revenue and enliven nearby public spaces. Complementing efforts by Transportation Services and Municipal Licensing and Standards, staff from Economic Development and Culture supported the implementation of CaféTO by providing logistical and design assistance, mediating conflicts, sharing program information, and providing grants to BIAs for landscaping and patio planters.

City Council will have an opportunity in the fall of 2021 to approve the continuation of CaféTO for 2022 and beyond. Through the Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative, total funding of up to \$1.000 million will be available to businesses participating in Café TO in 2022 and 2023 for cost-shared improvements to patio space to meet accessibility and public safety requirements. Authority to offer matching grants to commercial enterprises for the purposes of CaféTO installations, cafes on private property, and other site and property improvements needs to be approved by Council through its adoption of a new Commercial and Industrial Property Improvement Program (CIPIP) and Community Improvement Plan for the Renovation and Rehabilitation of Commercial Properties. These enabling instruments are recommended to and will be considered by the Planning and Housing committee at its September 21, 2021 meeting.

Main Street Innovation Fund

As businesses continue to cope with the pandemic and begin to focus on longer-term recovery, a new Main Street Innovation Fund will help local community organizations, BIAs and business associations engage in creative place-making activities, introduce innovative solutions to retail challenges, and re-animate main streets, among other initiatives to support small business and main street recovery. Building on the success of the existing BIA Innovation Fund and responding to Council direction to further incentivize and facilitate local retail innovation, up to \$5.000 million will be distributed through the Main Street Innovation Fund.

It will not be necessary for a community or business association to be associated with an existing BIA in order to receive support from the Main Street Innovation Fund. In this manner, it is anticipated that businesses and commercial areas in downtown Toronto, mid-town neighbourhoods, as well as inner suburban communities will benefit from the programming, services, place-making, and retail innovation enabled by the Main Street Innovation Fund.

plazaPOPS (Privately-Owned Public Space)

plazaPOPS is a community-led place-making approach to transforming sections of strip mall parking lots into free, safe, and green community spaces, while directly supporting small businesses in the process. It is an innovative and demonstrated economic and community development strategy tailored to the urban form of Toronto's inner suburbs. Funding of up to \$1.000 million will support the implementation of up to 15 plazaPOPS locations in Etobicoke, Scarborough, North York and other inner suburban areas of Toronto.

The plazaPOPS concept was first tested in Scarborough's Wexford Heights BIA in 2019 (WexPOPS). The award-winning 6 week pilot occupied 10 parking spaces with modular planters, benches, tables, umbrellas and a stage, creating a comfortable and sheltered space. The space hosted music and dance performances by local artists, co-curated by Scarborough Arts, and urban ecology workshops led by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

This report recommends that City Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture or the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services to execute on behalf of the City a funding and/or service agreement with plazaPOPS or other third parties to support the implementation of this program.

Support for Businesses in Little Jamaica

Through the Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative, up to \$1.000 million in funding is available for the City to partner with the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA) to provide a suite of technical assistance supports to businesses impacted by COVID-19 and the construction of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT line in the Little Jamaica Eglinton West corridor. Among other services and benefits, through this program the BBPA will provide area branding and marketing, assist businesses with e-commerce solutions and their social media presence, facilitate connections to accounting and legal services, and offer one-on-one support to businesses with financial literacy, tax filing, business plan writing, borrowing, and property purchase.

This report recommends that City Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture or the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services to execute on behalf of the City a funding and/or service agreement with the Black Business and Professional Association to enable the implementation of this program.

Retail Accelerator Program

The Retail Accelerator Program provides retail businesses with training and micro-grants to assist them to build and grow their businesses. Since October 2019, the program has been delivered in seven Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in Toronto, with a focus on hard-hit retail areas outside the downtown core with a high percentage of diverse business owners. As part of the Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative, funding of up to \$3.000 million will be available to expand the Retail Accelerator Program to an estimated 250 businesses. This program will support entrepreneurs and diverse-owned small businesses in neighbourhoods and retail centres across Toronto.

Small Business Tax Relief

As part of the 2020 provincial budget, municipalities were afforded the authority to create a small business tax sub-class to provide a lower property tax rate to small businesses within the commercial tax class. Earlier this year, City Council directed City staff to define and develop a small business tax sub-class to address the preservation and rebuilding of Toronto's Main Streets. The City of Toronto's Revenue Services division is currently consulting with businesses and residents on the terms of a small business tax class and will report back to the Executive Committee and Council later in 2021 on additional tax policy options.

On-going Initiatives to Support the Retail Sector -- Adjustments and Next Steps

The Economic Development and Culture division periodically introduces new programs and grants, or makes adjustments to on-going programs to ensure they remain relevant and provide maximum reach, value and benefit. Proposed program changes are based on direction from Council, feedback from businesses and business associations, and are informed by the Retail Strategy and other relevant reports.

Examples of key on-going retail support programs and initiatives are highlighted below, along with information about recent changes to better support businesses.

Commercial Façade Improvement Program Amendments

The Commercial Façade Improvement Program provides matching grants to property owners and businesses in BIAs to renovate their commercial properties. A review of the program was undertaken based on the findings of the Retail Main Streets study.

As part of the Community Improvement Plan for the Renovation and Rehabilitation of Commercial Properties, to be considered by Planning and Housing Committee in September 2021, the following amendments to the Commercial Façade Improvement Program have been recommended.

- Rename the program from Commercial – Industrial Façade and Property Improvement Program to the Commercial Façade Improvement Program;
- Expand the program city-wide to include commercial properties not in a BIA;
- Encourage rear laneway activation and beautification by funding improvements to rear facades that are visible to public;
- Provide funding for architectural and design fees, up to \$2,000 per application; and

- Eliminate the provision requiring "no outstanding property taxes", which may discourage businesses in economically distressed retail areas from taking advantage of the program.

The proposed expansion of the program city-wide will increase demand for funding. Pending approval of the Community Improvement Plan, Economic Development and Culture division will request an annual increase of \$0.500 million (from \$0.521 million per year to \$1.021 million per year) for the Commercial Façade Improvement Program as part of the 2022 Capital Budget and 2022 - 2031 Capital Plan.

Outdoor Mural and Street Art Program

The Outdoor Mural and Street Art Program provides grants to BIAs and other business associations to beautify commercial streets through wall murals and other street art initiatives. The program also provides funds to local artists and the opportunity for artists to showcase their work in highly visible locations. The budget for the Outdoor Mural and Street Art Program has remained consistent for many years despite rising demand for funding and increasing costs for artists' fees and materials. This report recommends City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, as part of the 2022 Capital Budget and 2022 - 2031 Capital Plan, to request an annual \$0.150 million increase (from \$0.050 million per year to \$0.200 million per year) for the Mural Program. If additional funding is approved, there will be flexibility to increase the maximum grant available under this program from \$5,000 to \$7,500.

CaféTO BIA Grant

The CaféTO BIA Grant Program provides matching grants of up to \$5,000 to BIAs participating in the CaféTO Program for beautification expenses (including planting and floral displays) and to support the costs associated with public parklets installed as part of CaféTO. In 2021, 37 BIAs were approved for CaféTO BIA Grants, totalling \$165,629.67.

Amplified Live Music Pilot

On June 8, 2021 Council approved the development of a pilot for amplified live performances by musicians on patios in the public right of way located within Wards 9, 14 and 19. Additional CaféTO grants of up to \$5,000 have been made available for BIAs to enroll businesses and engage artists for a series of performances in CaféTO patio zones. These performances are scheduled to run from July 31, 2021 to October 31, 2021.

De-escalation Training for Storefront Businesses

Economic Development and Culture now offers de-escalation training sessions for street-front retailers. The sessions are geared to managers or employees of retail based businesses who interact with the general public regularly and would like to learn strategies and skills for communicating with individuals who may be street involved or display agitated behaviours. Training is facilitated by the Downtown Yonge BIA and a mental health educator. Originally focused on BIAs, the training was expanded to include all businesses across the city beginning in August. Additional "Level 2" sessions have also been offered for retail staff and professionals wishing to further develop their de-escalation skills. Over 300 individuals have completed the training to date.

BIA Pop-Ups Training and Mentoring

The BIA Pop-Ups program, delivered through the Downtown Yonge BIA, provides intensive training and mentoring to BIAs to develop and launch programs to animate vacant retail spaces with temporary pop-ups. Pop-ups can provide opportunities to incubate new businesses or may serve cultural, arts or community functions. The purpose is to animate and bring back vitality to main streets while showcasing vacant spaces to new tenants. Six BIAs enrolled in the first round of training beginning in April 2021 --Kensington Market, Leslieville, Little Italy, Mount Dennis, Queen Street West and Weston Village.

ShowLoveTO

To strengthen civic pride and engagement and drive economic and cultural development, ShowLoveTO was created as a means to address the lingering effects of the pandemic and loss of tourist visits. ShowLoveTO includes a broad range of initiatives welcoming Torontonians and others to explore the city and support local businesses, using creativity to inspire hope and engagement:

- DriveInTO - partnership program with not-for-profit film festivals to create free-to-the-public film screenings in compliance with Public Health restrictions.
- HistoricTO - guided neighbourhood walking tours anchored at Toronto History Museums.
- City Hall Live Spotlight - a weekly series of professionally produced, live-streamed videos that showcased local musicians performing across music venues that are vital to the local live music ecosystem.
- StrollTO - self-guided tours of 25 neighbourhoods covering each Toronto ward. The program will be expanded to include 140 neighbourhoods.
- Soundtracks of the City - music playlists that feature artists who have called Toronto home, reflecting connections to an individual ward or the city as a whole.
- Poems for Your Path - in select StrollTO neighbourhoods, across Toronto's 25 wards, messages of strength, hope and resilience will be displayed in the form of colourful text based visual art installations.
- NoVacancy - a city-wide program to animate storefronts, partnering BIAs with arts and cultural organizations.
- LoveTO - generate local tourism for main street businesses by adding lighted 3-dimensional hearts on the streets of Toronto in each Toronto ward.
- BigArtTO - a 10 week program across all 25 City wards activating 30 sites with curated public art installations.
- DineTOgether - a promotional campaign to encourage Torontonians to support local restaurants.
- Dine With Your Neighbours - a one night city-wide event inviting all of Toronto to dine with their neighbours on a driveway, porch, front lawn, balcony or local restaurant patio.
- Indigenous/Newcomer Community Gathering - alongside Dine With Your Neighbours, this event invites and brings together Indigenous and Newcomer communities to dine with their neighbours and learn about each other's cultural food traditions.
- ActiveArtsTO - a free program presented with OpenStreetsTO to support recreation, cultural animation and community engagement along ActiveTO's Lake Shore Boulevard West route on Sunday, September 26.

- Cultural Hotspot Tours - a web app providing easy-to-navigate tours that can be walked, cycled or explored by TTC, encouraging Torontonians to discover all that East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough and York have to offer.

Connect Youth TO Employment Program

In partnership with the Social Development Finance and Administration division, Economic Development and Culture has secured funding of \$0.400 million to administer a youth placement program, the Connect Youth TO Employment Program.

The program provides human resources support to BIAs to assist with achieving COVID-19 recovery initiatives. Eligible program candidates, unemployed youth ages 15-29, will be placed with and report directly to the BIA partners.

BIA Capacity Building Program

On December 5, 2017, Council approved the report "Potential Policies and Programs to Support Toronto's Retail Areas", which established the Program to Promote Economic Revitalization through BIA Capacity Building, following a pilot of the program in two areas, Oakwood Vaughan and Rogers Road.

The BIA Capacity Building Program recognizes that a significant impediment to creating successful BIAs in distressed retail areas is a lack of organizational and funding capacity in the local business community. The Program provides additional assistance to new BIAs that meet criteria for being located in a distressed retail area.

Capacity Development Fund

The Capacity Development Fund is available to BIAs enrolled in the Capacity Building Program to hire a coordinator or other professional services to support the implementation of an Economic Revitalization Plan.

Previous reports have highlighted the challenges faced by Main Streets in low income communities and Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. BIAs in these areas sometimes struggle to raise sufficient funds or achieve the level of volunteer participation required to operate effectively. BIAs serving a catchment area with a lower assessment base often lack the resources to hire a full time staff position. A full time staff person, in turn, is instrumental to driving BIA initiatives and taking advantage of programs available for BIAs projects and individual business needs.

To take advantage of the programs offered through the Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative and other available programs and resources, it is recommended that the Capacity Development Fund be offered to all small BIAs in NIAs. Small BIAs for the purposes of this calculation would be those with under \$200,000,000 in commercial rateable assessment.

There are two BIAs currently receiving Capacity Development Fund assistance, Oakwood Village and Rogers Road. Six additional areas would be eligible based on the criteria above. Additional funding for the BIA Capacity Development Fund can be secured by reallocating existing funds within the Operating Budget for Economic Development and Culture.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected small and independent retail- and service based- businesses on main streets. The Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiative will provide Economic Development and Culture with new tools and resources to expand support for retail main streets during this difficult period. Economic Development and Culture will continue to monitor and adjust as required its existing retail support programs to address the evolving needs of main street businesses.

CONTACT

David Hessels, Manager, BIA Office (Acting), Economic Development and Culture, 416-392-6837, David.Hessels@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Cheryl Blackman
Interim General Manager, Economic Development and Culture