

Chris Murray  
City Manager  
City of Toronto  
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen Street West, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

February 26, 2021

Dear Mr. Murray,

As Co-Chairs of the City's Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group, we recently convened a meeting of the committee to discuss priorities for supporting business and culture over the next 2-6 months. The coming months will be critical for the future of Toronto businesses, particularly small, independent retailers, many of which find themselves at a breaking point as the devastating second wave continues. Similarly, artists and arts organizations are facing the prospect of another lost year, as public health restrictions look likely to force further cancellations during the summer season. But, with ongoing support from the City of Toronto, business and culture can not only survive the pandemic, but emerge to build back stronger.

We are writing to you to share the group's feedback on actions for the near term for your consideration. The Advisory Group is encouraged by the City's current and planned supports for business and culture, and is hopeful that staff will continue to implement mitigation and recovery initiatives tied to the four key themes of [the group's report](#) – namely economic recovery, anti-racism and inclusion, workforce and talent, and arts and culture.

**A robust public health response is the best strategy for reopening the economy**

It is clear that Toronto will face considerable economic uncertainty in the near term as the second wave continues, and as we confront the threat of new variants. In light of the continued risks posed by COVID-19, it is also clear that a strong public health response is a precursor to safely reopening our city's economy, reigniting Toronto's vibrant culture sector, and restoring consumer and investor confidence. Group members have been encouraged by the leadership demonstrated by Toronto Public Health in combatting the pandemic and its impact on vulnerable communities across the city. They were pleased to learn about Toronto Public Health's work to deliver tailored responses to racialized communities, and the much-needed support for mental health services during this highly challenging time. The group also emphasized the importance of continued efforts to build capacity for testing and tracing to manage community transmission of the virus. Maintaining these strong public health measures will plant the seeds for reopening the economy and the safe resumption of cultural activities, reviving our downtown and main streets, and restoring confidence in the transit system.

### **Continue to seek out opportunities for confidence-building and marketing initiatives**

As Toronto progresses towards a safe reopening, it is more important than ever for the City to lead the way in rebuilding public confidence through engagement and marketing initiatives. The group received a presentation from Scott Beck of Destination Toronto, and expressed strong support for his organization's plans to support hyperlocal tourism, along with the City's ongoing efforts to reconnect Torontonians with their city through the ShowLoveTO program. City Council's investment of an additional \$1 million towards such confidence-building initiatives, approved as part of the 2021 budget, is an important step towards achieving this vision. Group members encouraged both Destination Toronto and the City to explore opportunities to incorporate Indigenous- and Black-led arts, cultural and tourism initiatives as part of their programming in the coming months. Recognizing the importance of culture in the city's economic and social recovery, the group was highly supportive of efforts to engage artists in this work.

### **Support an inclusive innovation ecosystem**

Toronto is home to one of the world's leading innovation ecosystems, and has seen remarkable growth over the last decade in the number of incubators and accelerators supporting entrepreneurs across the city. Toronto's entrepreneurs are central to our efforts to build back stronger, tackling the city's most complex social, economic and technological challenges with cutting-edge products and solutions. Our Advisory Group hopes to continue to work with the City to foster this innovation ecosystem, and make strategic investments to help scale up promising initiatives, and achieve the critical mass needed to support start-up work citywide. The group also emphasized the importance of building an inclusive innovation ecosystem which provides a platform to invest in the ideas of Black, Indigenous, newcomers and youth entrepreneurs.

### **Sharing success stories through data-driven tools**

To educate, inform and engage residents in the city's recovery, group members are encouraging the City to explore the concept of creating a "recovery dashboard" to monitor and provide real-time updates on key social, economic and health indicators. Rafael Gomez, a group member and the Director of the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources at the City of Toronto, has offered to support the development of a data-driven recovery tool through his doctoral students. Information about this potential partnership has been shared with City staff for further consideration.

### **Champion small and independent business**

Small businesses are at the heart of Toronto's main streets, fostering a sense of community as well as being an economic driver. However, they also face a significant threat to their survival. A recent survey by Statistics Canada found that while the majority of businesses in Canada have been impacted by COVID-19, smaller firms with 1 to 99 employees have been more affected.

They were more likely to report a drop in revenue of 40% or more, face liquidity challenges, or lack the capital needed to make required upgrades to meet new public health standards. The Advisory Group is encouraged that efforts to support small business are a central priority of the City's ongoing mitigation and recovery efforts in 2021.

On behalf of the Advisory Group, we wish to thank you for your leadership and commitment to Toronto's economic and cultural recovery. Together, with the support of partners in the business and culture sector, we will build back stronger.

Yours truly,



Michael Thompson  
Deputy Mayor  
Chair, Economic and Community Development Committee  
Councillor, Ward 21, Scarborough Centre



Blake Goldring  
Executive Chairman, AGF Management Limited