

July 21, 2020

The Honourable John Horgan, MLA
Premier of British Columbia
PO BOX 9041
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Victoria, BC
V8W 9E1

Re: B.C. Restart and Recovery Consultation

Dear Premier Horgan,

On behalf of the Burnaby Board of Trade and our 1,100 members from across the business community, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on BC's recovery, and to participate in this BC Restart and Recovery Consultation. I would also like to commend your government, and in particular the staff at the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, for the handling thus far of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we move through our pandemic experience and move past the initial closures and curtailments, we must look to economic and societal recovery. In this submission, the Burnaby Board of Trade will encourage you and the provincial government to consider and embrace new mindsets and new actions that will serve to support our economy, our communities, and ultimately our workers and families in the months and years ahead.

The BC Recovery Mindset

Firstly, the Burnaby Board of Trade urges the provincial government to adopt a new mindset by embracing the "orientation to yes" that we have seen so far during the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments at all levels have moved faster than ever before, have acted on files long considered dormant, and have been willing to revisit positions that were no longer tenable. We have witnessed government programs developed with the ease of roll-out and uptake as priorities, and then recalibrated and refined from there, a model that resulted in delivering legislative solutions at an unprecedented pace. This is a positive development that the Burnaby Board of Trade hopes will continue. There is no reason this more nimble and responsive model of government cannot persist beyond COVID-19.

Secondly, we recommend the provincial government focus its \$1.5 billion in recovery funding, and future programs as well, on delivering more direct, tangible, hands-on supports for small businesses. We have witnessed small businesses struggling with three common barriers in regards to government programs – scale, complexity, and cost. Programs are sometimes delivered on a scale that excludes true small businesses, have administrative barriers to entry that cause businesses to forgo applying, and require up-front spending by applicants in order to access cost-sharing arrangements or rebates. In the best of times these barriers were challenging, but during COVID-19 the Burnaby Board of Trade fears these may be insurmountable.

Lastly, we recommend the provincial government focus on helping employers and the broader business community both 'adapt' and 'adopt' in the future. We need to support businesses to 'adapt' to new realities that may persist beyond COVID-19 -- a larger share of revenue coming from online sales, smaller physical offices or storefronts, greater acceptance and expectation of remote-work, and a wildly changed job market and talent pool. In order to adapt to these new realities, businesses will need to 'adopt' new technologies, strategies, and perspectives that will position them to succeed. This adoption will vary for different aspects of our business community.

Some micro and small businesses still need support to build and maintain their online and social media presence, whereas other small businesses need support in uncovering and understanding new strategies to manage, train

and develop staff and teams in an era of work-from-home and telecommuting. In comparison, medium to large employers will need guidance in adopting new perspectives, where appropriate, that can pivot their businesses to new modes of thinking and can serve as a source of energy and innovation. Ideas such as embedding sustainability and localization into supply chains, or embracing and enacting social purpose in a business will be important parts of the economy moving forward. Adopting these new technologies, strategies, and perspectives will be key to our long-term recovery and businesses will require support and guidance to get there.

The BC Recovery Actions

Beyond the above embrace of a new mindset, the Burnaby Board of Trade has several specific recommendations for actions the provincial government could take to support BC's recovery.

Informing these recommendations is the dedicated work of the *Burnaby Business Recovery Task Force*. In May 2020, the Burnaby Board of Trade struck this Task Force with a mandate to identify tactics that will support the immediate to medium-term needs of our business community. The Task Force, comprised of 15 members representing major employers, small business, local government, non-profit, labour, and education, developed and recently released a Final Action Plan of 13 recommended actions to support economic stabilization and recovery. From this action plan, the Burnaby Board of Trade would like to highlight four fundamental actions which we recommend the provincial government pursue.

1. We encourage the province to identify, support and fund *local* business support programs. While the instinct may be to deliver programs provincially or even regionally, we've found that programs delivered at a local level result in deeper, more sustained results. The Burnaby Board of Trade and the *Burnaby Business Recovery Task Force* has a plan to develop a 'Centre for Business Recovery & Resilience' which would serve as a home for a diverse suite of support programs, resources, and guidance for the business community. This is the type of local programming we recommend the provincial government support.
2. The Burnaby Board of Trade has long believed that childcare is an economic and workforce issue, and COVID-19 has made this apparent. The availability of childcare, both through the K-12 school system and through private and non-profit childcare centres, will be a pivotal determinant in our economic recovery – if parents are not able to find childcare for their children then they will not be available or productive employees. The Burnaby Board of Trade encourages the province to allocate some of the \$1.5 billion in recovery funding to expand childcare options for parents by:
 - continuing temporary emergency funding if necessary to ensure childcare operators survive where enrollment has decreased and/or costs increased
 - incentivising and streamlining new employer-based childcare options
 - continuing and expediting the creation of new permanent childcare spaces in BC communities
3. The Burnaby Board of Trade recommends the provincial government support and fund programs to help businesses with digital transformation and adoption. As noted above, such programs should be easy to use, localized, and very cost-effective for businesses, especially small businesses, to access. The Burnaby Board of Trade and the *Burnaby Business Recovery Task Force* has a plan to develop a local "digital development program" in partnership with BCIT and Simon Fraser University that would facilitate students in developing and implementing digital strategies for Burnaby businesses. This is the type of program we feel the province should support through its recovery efforts.
4. COVID-19 has the potential to have a chilling effect on entrepreneurialism for a generation as prospective entrepreneurs watch businesses struggle to survive. That is why we strongly suggest the provincial government identify and support locally-delivered programs that will seek to support new businesses with hands-on coaching, mentorship, and guideposting to resources that encourages the next generation of

business owners and entrepreneurs. Through our *Burnaby Business Recovery Task Force*, the Burnaby Board of Trade has plan to develop incentives, supports and resources to attract entrepreneurs to start new businesses, and is a locally-developed and locally-delivered example of what the province should prioritize supporting with the \$1.5 billion in recovery funding.

A shift in mindset to adopt an 'orientation of yes', a bolstering of childcare, and a focus on locally-delivered supports that help business 'adapt' and 'adopt' are our top priorities, and we appreciate this opportunity to engage with the provincial government through this consultation. We would welcome further opportunities to work with your government more directly on any of the above items and priorities.

Sincerely,



Paul Holden
President & CEO
Burnaby Board of Trade