



GOVERNMENT & BUSINESS FORUM

Provincial and Federal Dialogue: Summary Report

On March 5, 2021 the Burnaby Board of Trade held a special *Government and Business Forum* event to foster dialogue between major employers and key business stakeholders, and our local elected officials representing the provincial and federal governments.

Held digitally, the event saw 45 businesses attend representing a diverse cross-section of the Burnaby economy. In addition, all four Burnaby provincial MLAs and all three Burnaby federal MPs participated. The event featured facilitated roundtable discussions where attendees shared the business issues that were top of mind for them, and discussion was held on how best to move our economy forward through the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery. The general themes of those discussions were captured and have been condensed into this summary report:

Re-Opening, Vaccines and the Return to Normal

There was broad discussion about the need to "get back to normal" for businesses to truly recover, and the role that vaccines would play in this. As vaccines are central to achieving a full economic re-opening, attendees voiced the need for continued focus on fast and effective vaccine administration.

There was significant discussion around the disparity of impacts on different sectors. Some sectors noted more limited economic impacts from the pandemic, while other sectors have been devastated. Several attendees pointed to tourism, hospitality, gaming/casinos, and sports/fitness as sectors that have been most negatively impacted from both government orders and changes in consumer behaviour.

There was discussion about the need to start rebuilding consumer confidence now as there will be a portion of the population which will not be comfortable with a return to normal, and will resist increasing their travelling, spending, and shopping, even after full vaccination. If not mitigated, this lack of confidence could act as a drag on the recovery.

Top Discussion Points

Re-Opening, Vaccines and the Return to Normal

Business Supports and Subsidies

Labour and Workforce Challenges

Affordability and its Impact on the Economy

Childcare and Business

Economic Development



The Burnaby Board of Trade is one of the largest and most active business networking and advocacy organizations in the region, and has a unique economic development role in the City of Burnaby. Find out more about the

Burnaby Board of Trade at BBOT.ca

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Business Supports and Subsidies

As this was a group of employers, there was support for and appreciation of the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, as well as the other core COVID-19 support programs. There is broad recognition that these programs provided fundamental support allowing businesses to not only survive, but to continue operating and employing workers.

There was discussion of the options available for continuing some of these support programs to continue providing an underpinning for businesses to grow from. Alternatively, the possibility was also discussed of continuing the programs for the hardest hit sectors while phasing them out for those sectors that are quicker to recover.

Labour and Workforce Challenges

Several businesses in attendance noted that the labour shortage was a top concern prior to the pandemic, and is emerging once again as a challenge. Some attendees promoted greater integration between local post-secondary institutions and businesses as a way of addressing labour challenges, while others suggested more streamlined, economically-focused immigration programs would be beneficial. There was also interest in re-training programs to assist displaced workers in upgrading skills for new, more in-demand jobs.

In addition to general access to labour, the employment of traditionally under-represented groups, and increasing diversity and inclusion in the workforce, was highlighted as an area of interest and need.

Affordability and its Impact on the Economy



There was discussion around growing affordability challenges in the region, with specific focus on two causes: rising fuel prices and rising house prices.

Some businesses commented that rising fuel prices risked increasing costs and creating inflation, absorbing residual disposable income which otherwise could be spent in the broader economy.

Housing affordability was also raised as an issue in light of continued increases in regional house prices. Attendees voiced concern that as prices continue to rise, home ownership will require greater portions of household income to support -- income which then cannot drive consumer spending.

There were also concerns with house prices pushing more workers to move further afield and away from local employers.

“We need to get back to normal, and rolling out vaccines and rebuilding confidence is the only way there.”



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Childcare and Business

The role of childcare in supporting the economy was raised during the discussions, with businesses recognizing that access to childcare is key to allowing employees to return to work and to continue to maintain productivity. There were questions raised on the governments' plans to support investment in more childcare spaces, and on helping workers to find supports when they have childcare or family care issues.

Economic Development and Recovery

There was discussion around how the pandemic has illustrated the value in having diversified local economies which are not reliant on any one sector. Some attendees voiced the need for governments to make greater strategic investments to ensure large employers locate here, and to support local businesses to scale and grow in Burnaby instead of moving to other jurisdictions. In addition, there was specific discussion about investments in innovative sectors such as clean technology and bio-technology, and on the importance of supporting manufacturing to ensure we retain a local manufacturing base in the future.

There were some concerns raised on how -- and if -- the debt accumulated by governments during the pandemic would be repaid, and balancing both a return to more normal spending levels, and further need for supports for businesses and workers and stimulus for the broader economy.

Some attendees expressed optimism regarding how well BC has handled the pandemic compared to other jurisdictions both inside and outside of Canada, and the opportunities that might exist for developing competitive advantages compared to competitors in those other jurisdictions once our pandemic has subsided.

Thank you to our local elected officials for participating:

Terry Beech

MP-Burnaby North-Seymour Parliamentary
Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and
the Canadian Coast Guard

Peter Julian

MP - New Westminster-Burnaby

Jagmeet Singh

MP - Burnaby South

Leader - New Democratic Party of Canada

The Honourable Raj Chouhan

MLA - Burnaby-Edmonds

Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

The Honourable Anne Kang

MLA - Burnaby-Deer Lake

Minister of Advanced Education

The Honourable Katrina Chen

MLA - Burnaby-Lougheed

Minister of State for Childcare

Janet Routledge

MLA - Burnaby North

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