
TO: GENERAL COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: COVID-19 BARRIE ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACTION PLAN

WARD: ALL

PREPARED BY AND KEY CONTACT: S. SCHLICHTER, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT, x5036

SUBMITTED BY: S. SCHLICHTER, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

GENERAL MANAGER APPROVAL: A. MILLER, RPP, GENERAL MANAGER OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER APPROVAL: M. PROWSE, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

RECOMMENDED MOTION

1. That the COVID-19 Barrie Economic Recovery Action Plan be received as attached in Appendix "A" to Staff Report ECD010-20.
2. That funding in the amount of \$50,000 from the Community Benefit Reserve be allocated to Economic and Creative Development to support the resourcing of actions associated with the initial implementation of the Economic Recovery Action Plan.
3. That staff in the Economic and Creative Development Department report back to General Committee in (3) three-months with a progress update on action items and associated recommendations and additional funding requests related to the on-going implementation of the Economic Recovery Action Plan for Barrie businesses.

PURPOSE & BACKGROUND

Report Overview

4. The purpose of the report is to provide Council with an Economic Recovery Action Plan that provides an overview of the consultation process with businesses, identifies recommendations received and provides a comprehensive Recovery Action Plan to support and accelerate business recovery for local business post-isolation.
5. The Recovery Action Plan is a result of consultation, intelligence gathering and ideas from key sectors, stakeholders, the broader public and members of Council and provides a set of recommended action items for City and business stakeholder implementation. The Actions will support the acceleration of local businesses re-opening post-isolation, as well as bring employees and customers back into local establishments safely and efficiently.
6. The consultation process and plan was intended to identify meaningful actions that the municipality can undertake within their realm of governance and would include:
 - a) Advocacy to Federal & Provincial Governments for policy and business support needs.

-
- b) Municipal Policy Development that are conducive to business recovery and business innovation.
 - c) Municipal service levels that are responsive to the needs of business.
 - d) Connectivity & collaboration to build capacity, continuity, and development of community business supports and programs, including support for the accelerated adoption of new or emerging business models that can thrive in a post-COVID environment
 - e) Marketing campaigns, events, or other collaborations that can stimulate recovery

Background

- 7. Impacts on local businesses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have been deep and severe. All levels of Government have been working to deliver programming and supports to alleviate the fiscal impacts to both business and individuals
- 8. In collaboration with the Mayor's Economic Support Task Force and local business service organizations, the Economic and Creative Development Department (Invest Barrie and Small Business Centre), delivered a Barrie Business Response Action Plan consisting of immediate actions to support business in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan was presented in correspondence to Council on April 27th, 2020.
- 9. On May 11th, 2020 Council approved Motion 20-G-061 that provided a framework for consultation from key sectors, stakeholders, the broader public and members of Council to develop a set of recommended action items that will support the acceleration of local businesses re-opening post-isolation, as well as bring employees and customers back into local establishments safely and efficiently.
- 10. The Economic Recovery Action Plan is intended to focus on short-term support that will support the re-opening of business post-isolation. It is expected that long-term actions will also be identified and be further assessed in a future report.
- 11. Consultations took place the weeks of May 11th and 18th. In total,
 - Sector Consultations: 90 Businesses Consulted in addition to stakeholder representation
 - Business Leaders: 22 Leaders through Group and Individual Consults
 - Building Barrie: 15 public submissions
 - Emails to Invest Barrie Direct: 8 emails
 - Online Survey Responses: 66 business responses
- 12. There were more than 40 ideas and suggestions for actions that could be undertaken. Suggestions were assessed, prioritized, and themed for their potential economic impact, speed to implement, and resource commitment (human and budgetary). From that assessment the following priorities emerged:
 - Build on partnerships for a strong business support network
 - Introduce an online platform for buying local
 - Advocacy for Downtown as a business and community hub
 - Provide access to business experts and mentors
 - Launch marketing to promote a 'buy local' mentality and attract customers from across Ontario

-
- Support participation in federal and provincial programs and advocacy for rent relief programs
 - Review timely building inspection standards and services
 - Build consumer confidence to boost activity in all sectors
 - Support safety training and courses for post-pandemic business operations
 - Boost services available for entrepreneurship
 - Review by-laws to simplify business re-launch
 - Support arts programming for downtown and sector revitalization
13. Economic and Creative Development have identified City actions with the support of several departments of the City, including Communications, Development Services, Transit & Parking Strategy, Recreation & Culture, Building Services, By-Law Enforcement, Finance, Purchasing, and Information Technology. All departments have been responsive and supportive in addressing and seeking creative solutions in support of economic recovery.
14. Beyond the consultation process, staff continue engage with the key business stakeholders that are part of the Mayor's Economic Support Task Force to collaborate on support programs and collect data. In addition, staff continue to receive feedback from the local business community, and review best practices from industry associations and other municipalities (locally and globally).

ANALYSIS

15. As a result of the consultation sessions and associated priorities, three key theme areas emerged in addressing Barrie's recovery actions: Capacity, Confidence & Capital.
16. Capacity is about supporting business in improving and developing the resources to grow and thrive. Confidence is about building optimism in the community with both business and consumers about the state of the economy that will drive consumer spending. Capital investment is about instilling confidence in the future economic outlook and investment in future growth by business in building their ability to prosper through real estate and equipment.
17. The City's role in recovery is focused on capacity and confidence building. The capital investment component resides primarily at the Provincial and Federal levels although there may be some opportunity for City investment subject to the City's overall fiscal situation.
18. The Economic Recovery Action Plan outlines several actions to support business across sectors primarily in the areas of capacity and confidence building.
19. Throughout the consultation process, staff and stakeholders continued to deliver programs in response to business needs. As such, several recommended actions that were identified during the consultation time period have already been implemented or initiated. Other recommended actions will require more in-depth review and development to determine how they can best be supported.
20. Respondents across all sectors and feedback avenues voiced their desire for a City-led marketing campaign to champion Barrie businesses and build consumer confidence. Developing and delivering on a strong marketing plan Invest Barrie has the opportunity to make a resounding impact for local businesses during COVID-19 recovery efforts with our broad outreach and potential to influence the community with our messaging.

-
21. A common theme throughout all consultations was a real sense of local pride and community, and endless comments about people coming together through such a difficult time. To that end, messaging has been developed with the underlying theme of “Barrie Together”. Shared media materials/toolkit has been developed to support the unified “Barrie Together” messaging across public and private sector stakeholders making this proposal distinct from traditional marketing campaigns.
 22. As part of this campaign, ‘Buy Local’ messaging to keep consumer spending in Barrie and strengthen local purchasing habits is of utmost importance along with positioning the Downtown as a central focal point for business activity that would create ripple effects for the entire economy. A “Barrie Together” branding message can be adopted by the community and stakeholders to promote shopping local and consumer confidence in businesses operating safely. Local COVID-19 related business success stories/blogs have been created and will be housed on the new Invest Barrie website and promoted through social media channels.
 23. Combined with the marketing program, is the ongoing development of a business recovery toolkit. This is a set of tools to support businesses with their recovery efforts. Key to the City’s economic recovery is the rebuilding of consumer confidence. This goes hand-in-hand with requests from businesses for assistance with guidelines, protocols and equipment to ensure the safety of their staff and customers. The Business Recovery Kit aims to address these needs through the following actions:
 - I. The timely sharing of regulatory information from the Province of Ontario and District Health Unit
 - II. Identifying training and education opportunities for businesses on implementing safety measures. The Small Business Centre, Tourism Barrie and the BIA have recently partnered to cover the cost of a safety training webinar for the retail industry as well as a Food Safety Certification program for 200 local food handlers.
 - III. Providing floor and window decals that promote physical distancing for businesses to showcase in their establishments.
 - IV. Connecting to the Chamber of Commerce’s current listing of local PPE suppliers, with a view to exploring other opportunities to support access to PPE.
 24. There is still more work to be completed to address programming and support to sectors impacted by COVID-19, which have been identified in the report. Specifically, in the areas of arts & culture, tourism, personal services and assessing the overall need for PPE supplies and information for healthy work environments.
 25. Further analysis and consultation as economic conditions and provincial regulation will provide staff with more insight to return to Council with a more comprehensive support plan and recommendations regarding programming and funding opportunities in context with the City’s own fiscal position.

Initial Funding Request

26. The return of staff resources currently on lay-off, and adding additional human resource to work closely with identified sectors to further develop specific programming and supports is critical to the success of the economic recovery plan.
27. Specifically, returning the FTE Culture Development Officer and the Part-time Culture Development Assistant from lay-off and temporarily increasing the part-time Culture Development Assistant to full-time hours will provide the resources necessary to complete and deliver on the assessment of:

-
- i) how to best leverage the 2021 grants program to ensure sustainability of the City's arts organizations;
 - ii) additional supports for City theatre and performance space, once audience gatherings are permitted and associated impacts of health standards on operations;
 - iii) leveraging existing budgeted activities including Culture Days, Arts Awards and educational programming to support retaining audience, artist development and explore new audience engagement opportunities;
 - iv) the role of public art and the Barrie Public Art Committee in the recovery process.
28. Staff are also requesting the temporary movement of the Part-time Office Services Assistant with the Small Business Centre to full-time to support the additional programming needs in entrepreneurship and innovation portfolio to support and deliver on program initiatives, including expanded digital and online support programming, tourism and service sector actions, health training supports and PPE needs.
29. Both part-time positions are requested to be converted to temporary full-time through to the end of 2020 at an estimated cost of \$18,000.
30. Further, staff are requesting an additional \$32,000 to support the marketing and development of the elements of the recovery toolkit and marketing and promotions promoting consumer confidence and shop local.

Three-Month Review

31. As of the writing of this report, the Province has moved to Stage 2 in the Simcoe-Muskoka area, resulting in the opening of more businesses and unlocking certain sectors of the economy. As a result, there is an ongoing need for the recovery actions to be consistently revisited and updated to reflect changing economic conditions.
32. Staff will continue to work with partner business organizations to revisit business needs and respond and adapt accordingly.
33. In order to ensure relevance and that the Recovery Action Plan is meeting the needs of business, a re-consultation process will take place in September, 2020 with the intent of updating and revise actions as needed, followed by a report back to General Committee.

Future Planning – Long-term Resilience Strategy

34. Health regulation and the behaviour of consumers will be forever changed as a result of COVID-19, and the need to develop long-term strategies and supports for businesses to adapt their business models, and build resilience will position the City's economy to withstand future disruptions. The third component of the economic recovery plan will be to deliver an action plan related to developing long-term strategies to promote business resilience.
35. The role of the business community stakeholders, who have been integral to the development of Parts 1 and 2, will remain integral to the resilience development plan. It is expected that this work will be completed in fall of 2020, with a report back to General Committee in December, 2020.

ALTERNATIVES

36. The following alternatives are available for consideration by General Committee:

Alternative #1

General Committee could choose not to endorse the Recovery Action Plan.

This alternative is not recommended as staff have been actively engaged with business and business service organizations to respond to their needs. Staff believe the Barrie Business Recovery Action Plan reflects the feedback received from the consultation process and delivers a set of meaningful recommendations that the City can practically implement in support of business and the economy.

FINANCIAL

37. Staff have worked to leverage existing budgets within the Economic and Creative Development budget where possible, and have re-allocated several budgeted items, such as conference & trade shows and deferred program elements that cannot be delivered in 2020 to fund the Response Action Plan and some of the actions identified in the Economic Recovery Action Plan.
38. Staff are requesting funding from the Community Benefit Reserve in the amount of \$50,000 to provide the additional internal human resources needed to delivery on the Recovery Action Plan and to support the initial tools and resources in the recovery toolkit and marketing plan.
39. Action items requiring further investigation that result in a need net new funds will be brought back to General Committee for consideration as required.
40. Staff will continue to identify where opportunities exist to leverage existing allocated budgets, other governmental funding sources, and strategic partnerships to deliver on recommendations.

LINKAGE TO 2018-2022 COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN

41. The recommendation(s) included in this staff report support the following goals identified in the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan:
- Growing Our Economy
42. The Economic Recovery Action Plan is a community effort that provides a set of meaningful recommendations that the City can practically implement in support of recovering the economy from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.