



MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, October 16, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

City receives grant to help small businesses leverage online opportunities

Barrie, ON – The City of Barrie, with support from the Downtown Barrie Business Association (BIA), have received a \$50,000 grant from Digital Main Street Ontario for a Digital Service Squad (DSS) to help small businesses, primarily in the downtown area, improve their online presence. Digital Service Squad members support small businesses through their digital journey. Funding for the grant is provided by FedDev Ontario, a federal program.

Stephannie Schlichter, Director Economic and Creative Development at the City of Barrie, notes, "Extending the Digital Main Street program allows us to continue to assist our Barrie business community recover and grow, amidst the pandemic."

"Smart recovery programs help build capacity for businesses that can give them lasting strength. Digital Main Street has proven to be effective in supporting small business at a time when many of them need it," said Mayor Jeff Lehman. "I'm delighted to see the program expanding here in Barrie."

Established in 2018, the Digital Main Street Ontario program was extended thanks to an investment of \$42.5 million from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) and \$7.45 million from the Ministry for Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT). The almost \$50-million investment will help small businesses across Ontario pivot their operations to include online business models, regain lost revenue and become more resilient and competitive as the economy recovers. The Ontario BIA Association administers the DMS grant program for Ontario's main street small business.

"Ontario's small businesses are the backbone of our economy and the keystone of our economic recovery," said Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. "That is why we have invested in Digital Main Street to help these enterprises adapt to doing business in a digital world and take advantage of the record number of people shopping online. Congratulations to The City of Barrie for partnering together on this initiative. The work you're doing with small businesses in your community will help keep our main streets vibrant, support good local jobs and help our economy come back strong."

Digital Service Squads are fundamental to Digital Main Street's design and success, with trained specialists who meet with small business, at no cost, to help them improve their online presence. The squads assist with a number of activities, including developing a Google My Business profile, enhancing their social media presence and providing support of basic website and e-commerce set-up. Squads will also assist qualified small businesses through the application process for a \$2,500 Digital Transformation Grant, which includes an online assessment, online training modules and the development of a Digital Transformation Plan (DTP).

"The COVID-19 pandemic hit Ontario's main streets hard, so Digital Main Street is needed more than ever," said Kay Matthews, executive director of OBIAA. "We know that businesses that participated in Digital Main Street last year were better able to cope when the pandemic hit, and we're excited that FedDev Ontario and MEDJCT are providing the funding to extend this important program to help businesses in communities like Barrie."

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ABOUT the City of Barrie

Barrie is an exciting, caring, and progressive community that 149,964 people call home. Situated 90 km north of the Greater Toronto Area on beautiful Kempenfelt Bay, Barrie offers an excellent lifestyle and multitude of



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recreational opportunities. We are committed to the growth of prosperity of Central Ontario's leading City and most dynamic waterfront community.

ABOUT OBIAA

OBIAA is the network that represents unique and vibrant BIAs across Ontario. The Association supports and advocates on behalf of its members through the building and nurturing of strong relationships and partnerships. OBIAA is a leader in the development and sharing of information, tools, resources, and best practices, and is the one voice on common issues.

ABOUT Digital Main Street

Digital Main Street is an innovative program designed to help main street small businesses achieve digital transformation. The program is built around an online learning platform, structured training programs, grants and Digital Service Squads teams of street-level experts that help main street small businesses manage and grow their operations through technology adoption. The program was originally created in 2016 by the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA) and a group of strategic partners including Google, MasterCard, Microsoft, and Shopify. For more information, please visit digitalmainstreet.ca.

ABOUT Digital Main Street Ontario

Digital Main Street was expanded across all of Ontario in 2018 with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs through the \$38 million Main Street Revitalization Initiative. It has been further extended through a funding from FedDev Ontario and MEDJCT. The new round of funding includes \$42.5 million from the Government of Canada's Regional Relief and Recovery Fund, a national recovery initiative delivered by Canada's regional development agencies. With \$7.45 million from MEDJCT, this combined federal and provincial project will strengthen Ontario's economic capacity for innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration, and will promote the development of a strong and diversified Ontario economy. For more information, please visit digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants.

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