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THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF BARRIE  
Mayor's Office

March 1, 2021

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MPP Doug Downey  
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Dr. Charles Gardner, Medical Officer of Health  
15 Sperling Drive  
Barrie, ON L4M 6K9  
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Dear Premier, MPPs and Dr. Gardner:

From the beginning of COVID, it's been my commitment to relentlessly support the recommendations of public health officials and the science they use to guide decisions. It's for that reason that I write to you today to request changes to the restrictions on small businesses in Barrie, and address areas of real concern in terms of the spread of COVID.

As stated by Dr. Gardner and Dr. Williams, the primary rationale for placing Simcoe Muskoka into the grey zone is the prevalence of variants of concern. I understand that action is being taken by the Province, on advice of SMDHU, to attempt to prevent a third wave in Barrie, which would no doubt result in a longer lockdown, hospitalizations, and severe illness. I agree with the reduction in capacity for big box stores as part of the Grey level, as we have seen a number of confirmed cases in Barrie in these stores.

However – there are other aspects of the Grey level restrictions that are unjustified and damaging particularly to the small business community in Barrie. This issue has been raised this weekend by people in my city specifically in the personal service sector, who are losing their livelihood. While large chain businesses have a corporate framework to support them, small businesses must sink or swim on their own.

The small business community in Barrie has been extremely supportive of the need for public health measures and have complied with public health restrictions through the course of two lockdowns. However, with the Grey zone restrictions being enacted on March 1<sup>st</sup>, many personal service businesses are being forced to close again. Many of these businesses, such as photographers, are sole proprietors who work with single customers at a time. Others, such as indoor recreation facilities, have enough space for every customer to maintain an

extremely large area – far more so than many open retail outlets. Restaurants are also being forced to abandon inventory and lay off staff.

If all retail environments are able to remain open with reduced capacity, there seems little reason why other small businesses cannot remain open with the same protective measures in place. I understand that there have been few, if any, cases of transmission tracked to “non essential” businesses in Barrie. However, one big box store in Barrie alone has had ten cases and as noted above I agree with the reduced capacity in these stores. We should be targeting areas of public health concern – workplaces including large retail stores with congregate settings where distancing or protection protocols are a problem or are a source of infection.

As such, I’m requesting that the Province immediately revise the business restrictions within the Grey category of the framework to permit small businesses to remain open that can operate with little or no public health risk.

While I realize this request requires the Province to move quickly to adjust regulations, we are talking about people’s livelihoods here. I believe my asks are reasonable, and the Province has demonstrated previously their ability to move quickly in adjusting regulations. Moreover, the Province has already adjusted the business restrictions to allow small or “non-essential” retailers to open if they can do so safely. Barrie’s small businesses need you to move quickly again.

Thank you for considering these changes. I am at your disposal to assist at any point. The issue is extremely urgent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Lehman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeff" being more prominent than the last name "Lehman".

Jeff Lehman  
Mayor

cc: Barrie City Council