Barrie

COVID-19

Economic Recovery Action Plan

JUNE 18th, 2020

investbarrie

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Barrie faces a pivotal moment in its history. COVID-19 has devastated the economy. As I write this, unemployment is at the highest level since the 1970s and many businesses remain closed by Provincial order or only partially open. Across the economy, businesses have been hit by a series of supply and demand side shocks which are ongoing as the ripple effects of the pandemic lockdowns continue to impact the city.

These impacts have been felt unequally. Some sectors have experienced relatively modest disruption to date, such as the manufacturing sector. Others, such as tourism, have been devastated. Unfortunately, these disruptions have disproportionately affected lower-wage employees. As has been documented widely in the media, the closure or dramatic reduction of retail, restaurant, hotel and others has caused lower wage employees to take the brunt of the job losses. As such, our recovery plan needs to focus on these sectors, where local factors may help to make a difference in bringing these sectors back.

The Barrie Economic Recovery Plan is the middle step in a broader strategy to combat these impacts. The first step was the *Barrie Business Response Plan*, which included a series of actions designed to immediately assist businesses with survival, through such initiatives as the Going Digital Program, to get businesses online. The third step, to come later in 2020, is a *Resiliency Plan*, designed to address strategic issues in the economy and longer-term initiatives. While each plan is intended to address immediate needs, all three aim to generate long-term benefits and impacts as well.

Developed in record time – roughly 4 weeks – the Economic Recovery Plan has been built to address immediate opportunities to provide support to the Barrie Economy. Developed through extensive consultation with the business community – more than 150 businesses, thought leaders, and organizations contributed – it lays out actions for six identified priority areas of the economy: Tourism, Service, Construction, Manufacturing, Arts and Culture, and Downtown Barrie.

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Three themes are central to the recovery of the Barrie economy: **Capital, Confidence, and Capacity.**

The business community has needed emergency infusions of capital to survive. This has been provided largely by the Federal government, through the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, and the commercial rent support program. Low- and no-cost loans have also been made available. Local governments do not have the capacity, generally speaking, to provide meaningful amounts of capital support to the private sector, and so it is the last two themes which are the focus of this plan.

Confidence is about both consumer confidence and investor confidence. Consumers must believe it is safe – from both a health perspective and their own financial situation – to start shopping and spending again. Investors must see a positive economic climate in the future to invest in expanding their businesses, or investing capital in new buildings, equipment, or projects in Barrie. Marketing and communications efforts will be central to this.

Capacity means several things. Labour capacity must be supported – people and businesses need extra assistance right now to be able to work given COVID-related challenges. This includes domestic issues such as childcare, and workplace issues such as PPE and safe work environments, which may come at some cost. Further, capacity means opening new channels for sales, such as online – a focus of the Economic Support Task Force since the beginning. This capacity is being assisted through programs such as the Going Digital initiative, funded in part by the City.

In all of these areas of assistance, efforts are being made to build business resiliency, not just provide short-term support. Resiliency is building long-term capacity through strategies such as diversification of products and sales channels, investment in labour force supports which can reduce turnover, and in the community as a whole, the infrastructure for economic success. On this last point, the City's capital plan is an element, with projects such as the Downtown Wi-Fi initiative, road projects to serve employment areas, and specialized transit services supporting employers. This Recovery Plan has focused on short-term initiatives to stimulate the economy and address the unique needs of a COVID-19 environment, but in the long term the City needs to support the core elements of economic success to ensure our prosperity continues – and this requires in turn, a much broader perspective.

I want to express my thanks to the members of the Economic Support Task Force (ESTF), which has provided an invaluable sounding board and communication tool during the pandemic and provided the framework for the extensive industry consultation in this report. Specifically, thank you to the:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Barrie Construction Association
- Simcoe County District Homebuilders Association
- Tourism Barrie
- Barrie District Association of Realtors
- Downtown Barrie BIA
- The Sandbox

- Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre

In addition, thanks to all the residents, businesses, and thought leaders who contributed to this Plan. Last and most importantly, thanks to the City staff in the Economic and Creative Development Department (Invest Barrie), who have done all the heavy lifting in running a major consultation exercise, analyzing the results, and writing this plan in a very short period of time.

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The Economic Recovery Action Plan is the outcome of consultation, intelligence gathering and ideas from our community – business leaders, key sectors, stakeholders, the broader public and members of Council to provide a set of recommended actions 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.

Municipalities are uniquely positioned to leverage the *Power of Community* to unite their residents and businesses to generate news ideas, rally support for local business, and to look inwardly at innovating their own services to be responsive to community needs.

The Economic Recovery Action Plan presents the second part of the overall response plan to the COVID-19 pandemic. The third component of the process is the longer-term lens that will take further consultation and engagement with our community and stakeholders to drive resilience within our businesses and to identify actions and strategies that will position our economy into the future.

Key Actions

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Maintaining core entrepreneurial supports and continuing to drive the start-up and innovation portfolios is critical. To ensure this continues, existing programs are being reformatted and strengthened to respond to business needs. The Small Business Centre, through support of the Province has been able to increase capacity in its Starter Company Plus Program and will be in a position to accept a 50% increase in program entrants along with a 50% increase in available grant funding to the participants.

Digital Capacity

Digital connectivity was identified as a key factor in keeping businesses operating through the pandemic and beyond, and an area where the City could support businesses. The City of Barrie has invested in providing Wi-Fi at the waterfront and will soon be completing Wi-Fi access in the downtown. Preparing for the future of digital infrastructure is being considered across several departments.

A partnership with Digital Main Street will launch the ShopHERE program in Barrie. This federally funded program is presented in partnership with Google, Shopify, Mastercard and Microsoft and will provide 50,000 business owners across Canada with an e-commerce capable web site, for free.

Supporting the Downtown

The Downtown Barrie BIA and City are working collaboratively to address several of the items identified through the consultation process. Through a partnership with the Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre, Barrie Chamber of Commerce, BIA and Invest Barrie, an Xcelerate Challenge was developed to accelerate the creation of a shared online sales platform for Barrie businesses. The winning 'Hey Local' solution will be launched in June 2020. Further activating the downtown and vacant spaces through the development of programming to support pop-up shops are areas for future consideration.

Supporting Arts and Culture

The inability to host public gatherings has resulted in a practical shut down of many aspects of the industry, with uncertainty around when audiences can return. From individual and independent artists practicing various forms of art, to large performance organizations who have made fiscal commitments to venues, artists, programming, staff and customers, all are facing the common issue of cash flow sustainability in both the immediate term and into the future. Given the depth and complexity of impacts to the sector, more exploration must be completed to develop a comprehensive approach to this sector. A part of assessing support tools to drive recovery in this sector is determining how best to leverage the 2021 grants program to ensure sustainability of the City's arts organizations.

Business Recovery Kit

The Business Recovery Kit 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. Invest Barrie has invested in providing spaces in certified training programs related to food safety in partnership with Tourism Barrie and BIA.

Marketing messaging has been developed with the underlying theme of "Barrie Together" and shopping local. Shared media materials/toolkit has been developed to support this unified messaging across public and private sector stakeholders making this proposal distinct from traditional marketing campaigns.

Capital Advocacy

Advocating to both Federal and Provincial governments for ongoing financial support for businesses and continually reviewing the existing programs for potential improvements is ongoing. In particular, Invest Barrie consulted directly with FedDev Ontario regarding the recently introduced Regional Relief and Recovery Fund with a view to directing specific businesses towards that fund.

As businesses move through the different phases of re-opening we will continue to monitor their needs and modify this plan to ensure that we continue to make a positive impact on their success. This plan is not meant to be static but will evolve with the situation as it continues to unfold; new action items and initiatives may be added as time goes on.

Introduction & Consultation Methodology

Introduction:

Power of Community

On April 27th, 2020 Invest Barrie presented the Barrie Business Response Action Plan, a culmination of immediate actions being undertaken by the City of Barrie in collaboration with key business support stakeholders to support our local businesses in responding to the massive, and sudden impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Federal and Provincial economic response programs continue to implement fiscal measures focused on alleviating businesses' financial burdens to minimize or offset deficits incurred throughout isolation, municipalities are amplifying this support through alleviation and deferrals of fees for property taxes, water wastewater, and transit.

Like many municipalities, the City of Barrie is facing a significant financial revenue deficit as a result of COVID-19, currently estimated at $20M. As such, municipalities must look beyond fiscal solutions to drive economic recovery.

Barrie is uniquely positioned to leverage talent, partnerships, and local resources to enable businesses to re-think traditional operations and generate new revenues — both during the crisis and throughout recovery. Barrie has the opportunity to leverage the *Power of Community* to unite its residents and businesses to generate news ideas, rally support for local business, and to look inwardly at innovating its own services to be responsive to community needs.

The Economic Recovery Action Plan is a result of consultation, intelligence gathering and ideas from our community – business leaders, key sectors, stakeholders, the broader public and members of Council to provide a set of recommended actions 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.

This is an evolving Plan that, in some areas provides clear and immediate actions, and others, more of a roadmap as we move through the future stages of reopening and learn more about the challenges our businesses are facing and support they require. As the roadmap unfolds, new actions will emerge.

The Recovery Action Plan identifies meaningful actions that the municipality can undertake across the city and by sector:

Advocacy to Federal & Provincial Governments for policy and business support needs.

- Municipal policy development that are conducive to business recovery and business innovation.
- Municipal service levels that are responsive to the needs of business.
- Connectivity and 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.
- Marketing campaigns, events, or other collaborations that can stimulate recovery.

In an effort to be responsive to the community, the consultation process was turned around in a two-week period, and with the support of our key partners, the Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre, the Barrie Chamber of Commerce, Barrie Construction Association, The Sandbox, Simcoe County Homebuilders Association, Barrie District Association of Realtors, Tourism Barrie, and Downtown Barrie BIA, we were able to gather responses from more than 150 businesses, organizations and stakeholders.

The Economic Recovery Action Plan presents the second part of the overall response plan to the COVID-19 pandemic. Invest Barrie has approached response planning by working to address immediate needs, followed by a thorough consultation process to inform recovery actions that have a heavy focus on short-term measures to support the re-opening of business post-isolation. The third component of the process is the longer-term lens, that will take further consultation and engagement with our community and stakeholders to drive resilience within our businesses and to identify actions and strategies that will position our economy for the future.

In September 2020, Invest Barrie will be conducting further in-depth analysis of conditions to develop part 3 of the economic support program: Building Resilience. As with the response and recovery plans, this will be done in consultation with the Mayor's Economic Task Force, members of City Council, businesses and residents and will also consider strategies, should there be second wave of isolation measures due to COVID-19.

Conditions, information and the regulatory environment continue to change and evolve as we watch countries around the globe open up their economies and we learn more about the coronavirus. Invest Barrie will continue to monitor conditions and will make changes when necessary, ensuring businesses are receiving the most current information and up-to-date programming.

The dialogue will continue. Invest Barrie is open to feedback, ideas and recommendations for how we keep our businesses open and our economy moving forward.

The Invest *Barrie Economic Recovery Action Plan* is built on the power of collaboration

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'The proper partnerships can make all the difference. Whether it be industry and government or industry working with other industry partners, it is important to see what is in your own backyard. Barrie is a diverse area with so many opportunities for collaborations.'

- Stakeholder Community Session Participant

Methodology

Listening to the Community

The Economic Recovery Plan was developed from insights gathered from sector-specific consultations, online survey results, one-on-one interviews, public emails, and online public forums hosted on the Building Barrie website. Essential stakeholders, who represent our businesses and supported this consultation process, included the Barrie Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Barrie, Barrie Construction Association, Barrie District Association of Realtors, The Sandbox, Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre, Simcoe County Homebuilders Association, and the Downtown Barrie BIA. This broad range of stakeholders ensured that diverse perspectives from a range of economic sectors, business sizes, locations within the city, and participant demographics were represented from within our community.

Sector-specific consultations were conducted, including Arts & Culture, Construction, Downtown Barrie, Manufacturing, Service Businesses, and Tourism. Key sectors were selected based on the number of firms, volume of employment, and severity of the COVID-19 impact. Sessions were conducted jointly by Invest Barrie in collaboration with the sector stakeholders listed above. A summary of sector consultation feedback is outlined in Appendix 'A'.

Additionally, several consultations were held with business and thought leaders from the community. Across all sectors and thought leaders, 12 targeted questions were posed, and participants were asked to openly share feedback. Questions addressed participants' adaptability of business models, post-isolation recovery plans, obstacles faced, and what they saw as opportunities for the City to support recovery. Businesses were encouraged to provide further feedback via an online survey. This online survey was also shared publicly to solicit input from the sectors more broadly and can be found in Appendix 'B'.

To gather public input, a platform was created on the City's website for public participation. This tool was provided to gather a full spectrum of ideas and suggestions from Barrie's residents. The public also shared ideas directly by email and via the online survey.

Feedback from all avenues—consultations, community survey, and Building Barrie discussion board—were reviewed. Feedback and suggestions were grouped by similarity and aggregated, resulting in a list of 46 unique ideas and actions that the City could pursue and can be found in Appendix 'C'.

Suggestions were assessed, prioritized, and themed based on their potential economic impact, speed of implementation, and resource commitment (human and budgetary).

Community Priorities

In conducting a formal, quantified assessment of feedback across all avenues, 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 (including tourism sector)
- Support arts programming for downtown and sector revitalization

Throughout the consultation process, staff and stakeholders continued to deliver programs in response to business needs. As such, several predominant actions identified in the consultation period have currently been implemented or initiated. Other recommended actions will require more in-depth review and development to determine how they can best be supported. Actions identified throughout the plan will be marked as being explored; where there is more review to be undertaken, they will be marked in-progress; where action is preparing to be undertaken or delivered, the action marked as complete. As the roadmap to recovery unfolds, actions will continue to emerge.

'Adaptation will be the key to survival...New business models and production flexibility will not only benefit our organizations, but the community as a whole.'

– Stakeholder Community Session Participant

Moving Barrie's Economy Forward – Overall Themes and Actions

Capacity, Confidence & Capital

As a result of the consultation sessions, three key theme areas emerged in addressing Barrie's recovery actions, ***Capacity, Confidence & Capital.***

Capacity Building

Defined as the process by which businesses and individuals obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment, and other resources needed to do their jobs. As such, from an economic recovery perspective, ensuring businesses have access to the labour, resources and knowledge to protect their employees and customers, adapt to new regulations and leverage new opportunities in the marketplace to grow and diversify their markets and revenue, while building our overall economic and community capacity.

Confidence Building

The degree which consumers feel optimistic about the overall state of the economy and how their personal financial situation impacts spending activity in the economy. As a result of COVID-19, consumers not only need to feel optimistic about their ability to spend, they need to feel safe to go out to spend. Confidence building will be a critical driver to economic recovery for the city both for residents, and as more of the economy opens up, attracting tourism and investment to the city.

Capital Investment

Critical is critical to the health of an economy and an indicator of a business's confidence in their long-term stability and future growth prospects. Capital investments for business often mean investment in real estate and equipment. From the municipal perspective capital investment in infrastructure also drives economic benefit to the local economy. Impacts of COVID-19 have resulted in significant capital investment to businesses to support their short-term stability.

The City's role in recovery is focused on capacity and confidence building while the capital investment capacity resides primarily at the Provincial and Federal levels.

Executing the Plan

The role of community stakeholders has been imperative to identifying the needs and issues facing businesses as a result of the pandemic. Their ongoing collaboration and support in delivering many of the actions outlined in this plan, will be imperative to successful implementation.

Economic Advisory Council

In February of 2020, to improve communication with the business community, the Mayor's Office invited the Executive Directors of business and industry organizations in Barrie to a founding meeting for an Economic Advisory Council. This meeting was set for mid-March but was cancelled when COVID-19 occurred – however, this group quickly pivoted into the Economic Support Task Force (ESTF), which became an invaluable sounding board and communication tool during the pandemic. It is proposed that this group become a permanent Advisory Council both during the recovery process and after the pandemic. The purpose of the task force would be to open up two-way communication between industry organizations and the City (Staff and Council), and to provide thought leadership on the major issues affecting our economy both day-to-day and long-term.

Quarterly meetings with meaningful agendas will include a roundtable discussion and a theme/key issue that we would tackle together. This body can also assist with implementing many of the short and long-term actions in this Recovery Plan, building on the accomplishments over the last three months as the ESTF.

Proposed members of the permanent Council would be the Chairs and/or Executive Directors of the:

- Barrie Chamber of Commerce
- Barrie Construction Association
- Simcoe County Homebuilders Association
- Barrie Hotel Association/Tourism Barrie
- Barrie District Association of Realtors
- City of Barrie – Business Development, Mayor's Office, Councillors
- Downtown Barrie BIA
- The Sandbox
- Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre

CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIONS

Capacity Building

Highlights of City-wide Actions

Entrepreneurship/Innovation

New ideas and business opportunities are arising, offering opportunities for businesses to pivot, innovate and meet new demands in response to COVID-19. Maintaining core entrepreneurial supports and continuing to drive the start-up and innovation portfolios is critical. Throughout the pandemic we have seen a surge in the already close bonds between Barrie's major business support stakeholders, resulting in a wealth of new programming and knowledge sharing.

A heavy focus is on supporting entrepreneurs in developing their digital strategies to establish a strong online presence, opening new revenue sources, and assessing their business models to be adaptive to new markets, opportunities and distancing protocols. Supporting this action was identified across multiple sectors' consultations as critical to supporting those businesses hardest hit by COVID-19. There are several actions being taken to support digitization that strengthen this aim.

Key stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem including the Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre, Small Business Centre, The Sandbox and Chamber of Commerce are collaborating to deliver new programming to address business needs. Examples include:

- The Virtual Learning Series, a three-part digital skills webinar series delivered by Invest Barrie in partnership with the Downtown Barrie BIA.
- The Barrie Chamber of Commerce and the Sandbox have partnered to deliver numerous weekly sessions on COVID-19 relief, particularly in areas of government support programs, HR, and legal considerations.
- The Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre has launched an e-Commerce Accelerator Program, designed to grow businesses that already have a good online presence.

Existing programs are also being reformatted and strengthened in response to business needs. The Small Business Centre, through support of the Province has been able to increase capacity in its Starter Company Plus Program and will be in a position to accept a 50% increase in program entrants along with a 50% increase in available grant funding to the participants. The grant disbursement model is also being examined to determine if relief can be targeted towards the purchase of PPE or marketing and consumer confidence building practices. The program intake will begin in September 2020. Options are being explored to expand the program further in 2021.

In addition, we continue to leverage new announcements and access funding opportunities from the Federal and Provincial governments in order to provide additional programming and expertise.

Digital Capacity

Digital capacity refers to the need for local businesses to have a digital presence and ensuring that the City is connected to infrastructure to ensure connectivity. Digital connectivity is vital to building resilience within our business community.

Throughout the consultation process and across sectors, digital connectivity was identified as a key factor in keeping businesses operating through the pandemic and beyond, and an area where the City could support businesses.

From an infrastructure perspective, respondents identified Wi-Fi access at the waterfront and downtown as important for attracting visitors and residents, supporting opportunities to connect them to downtown experiences. Waterfront vendors also identified that Wi-Fi access was an important factor in making their operations run more efficiently. It was further identified that service gaps still exist in some more mature industrial areas.

The City of Barrie has invested in providing Wi-Fi at the waterfront and will soon be completing Wi-Fi access in the downtown. Preparing for the future of digital infrastructure is considered across several Departments of the City, including Engineering, Information Technology, and Development Services.

The physical closure of businesses during the early stages of the pandemic highlighted the need for businesses to have a digital presence to engage and service their existing customer base and to build new paths to revenue generation. The gap in active online presence is significant and a key opportunity for the City to support businesses through the Xcelerate Challenge to acquire a localized platform.

Through the Small Business Centre, Chamber of Commerce, Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre and Sandbox, continual education, programming and tools are being developed and delivered to businesses in the community drive new revenue generation sources for those sectors most deeply impacted by having to remain closed due to Provincial regulation.

The City has recently partnered with Digital Main Street to launch the ShopHERE program in Barrie. This federally funded program is presented in partnership with Google, Shopify, Mastercard and Microsoft and will provide 50,000 business owners across Canada with an e-commerce capable web site, for free.

‘Construction businesses are ready to work. People, workers, suppliers are ready to work. This is the economic stimulus that we need.’

– Stakeholder Community Session Participant

Supporting Downtown

The importance of the downtown to Barrie's overall health and vitality was identified by several sectors throughout the consultation process. Keeping downtown businesses open and thriving during and post COVID-19 is key to the economic and community well-being of the City.

Advocating for landlord take-up of rent subsidies, making it easier for downtown patrons to access curbside pick-up, promoting free parking downtown, and overall promoting and championing buying local were key needs and roles identified that the City could support downtown businesses with.

Gaps in an online presence for downtown retailers also led to the demand for a web solution that could provide an online sales platform for businesses to generate revenues. Ideas were also generated for leveraging City park space to provide space for businesses to provide distanced programming for their clientele if their existing spaces could not accommodate. Activating the downtown and vacant spaces through developing programming to support pop-up shops were also identified.

The Downtown Barrie BIA and City are working collaboratively to address several of the items identified through the consultation process. The City has waived patio application fees, provided free parking options throughout parking lots in the downtown, and transitioned Dunlop Street parking spaces into temporary loading zones to facilitate curbside pickup. The City is continuing to assess these measures and make recommendations to support downtown merchants.

Through several joint initiatives, connecting businesses to digital development programming and providing spaces in a food safety and handling certification program will help owners prepare for future stages of the economy opening.

Development Approvals

There was concern among the development community through the consultation process that there would be a backlog of applications and inspections due to the construction restrictions during COVID-19 and new projects coming in once restrictions were lifted. There has been an increased demand for inspections as restrictions ease, but Development Services has been able to avoid most backlogs as Building Services consistently maintained its permit review services throughout the pandemic.

Planning applications also continued to be processed. Planning Services has also been successful in transitioning its public meeting process on-line in addition to Committee of Adjustment, keeping applications moving forward.

The City is continuously searching for ways to make the development process more efficient, convenient, and delivering a solutions-based approach. Focus continues on improving the online development application process, facilitating more efficient transfer of information to approving departments, in addition to providing more real-time information back to applicants on the status of their applications.

Providing clear expectations to applicants and the City championing an consistency and overall 'how can we get to yes' attitude has continued to be of utmost importance to the development community. Staff are exploring with Development Services new education tools and checklists for applicants to help make

the processes more clear, particularly for smaller businesses that may be working through a development process for the first time.

Labour

Throughout the consultation process, some sectors identified they are experiencing shortages, while others have indicated that they are looking to staff their businesses more efficiently. Some respondents feared that current government stimulus funding for individuals, combined with school and daycare closures are creating a lack of incentive for individuals to return to work.

During the manufacturing consultation process it was identified that there is a need to provide overnight transit service for industry who are introducing more shifts to accommodate distancing measures.

Data collection to assess the demand for overnight transit service needs will be required to determine appropriate actions. The City will be engaging with the industrial community to review and discuss the need for overnight transit services. As part of the 2020 Business Plan, Council endorsed a pilot program to offer a Transit on Demand model, where staff are currently developing the program. Transit on Demand is designed to focus on providing transit services to areas of the City or times of the day when there is low demand for these services. One of the future options to provide overnight service could be the introduction of Transit on Demand. There will be service and cost implications that will need to be considered as part of this program

As the economy begins to open up more businesses and standards to provide child care, Invest Barrie continue to engage with employers, Georgian College, Lakehead University and local Ontario Employment Centres to monitor skill and labour demands, and unemployment rates to determine opportunities to connect residents with employment opportunities and close skill gaps. Invest Barrie works closely with the County of Simcoe on several labour force initiatives and will continue to invest in programs and initiatives in response to changing labour demands.

Supporting the Arts & Culture

The Arts community has been dramatically impacted by COVID-19. The inability for gatherings has resulted in a practical shut down of much of the industry, with a lack of certainty as to when audiences can return. From individual and independent artists practicing various forms of art, to large performance organizations who have made fiscal commitments to venues, artists, programming and staff, all are facing the common issue of cash flow sustainability in both the immediate term and into the future.

While some have been able to develop online strategies to remain engaged with their audiences, this is often at no revenue generation.

Throughout the consultation process, supporting the return of live performance and championing capacity in the Arts through both the return of existing audience and expanding to a broader demographic will be paramount. Economic conditions will stretch to all forms of revenue generation for many arts and culture organizations, including the cancellation of granting programs, and retaining and attracting sponsorship dollars. Longer term impacts to audience capacity in support of distancing measures, health

standards and practices will require fundamental shifts in an organizations development of audience experience.

Throughout the consultation process, fear and uncertainty was prevalent. There was a sincere appreciation for the City's decision to retain grant funding allocations for 2020 and a desire for the City to look at increasing support in 2021 in order to sustain organizations and support recovery. Independent artists recommended the City reconsider opportunities through granting programs to support individual artists, including the expansion of the Emerging Musicians Program to include additional art forms and mature artists.

Given the depth and complexity of impacts to the sector, more exploration must be completed to develop a comprehensive approach to this sector. As part of assessing support tools to drive recovery in this sector, staff will be assessing:

- how to best leverage the 2021 grants program to ensure sustainability of the City's arts organizations;
- additional supports for City theatre and performance space, once audience gatherings are permitted and associated impacts of health standards on operations;
- leveraging existing budgeted activities including Culture Days, Arts Awards and educational programming to support retaining audience, artist development and explore new audience engagement opportunities;
- the role of public art and the Barrie Public Art Committee in the recovery process.

This work will be completed in consultation with the arts community and any funding recommendations presented to City Council in September, 2020.

Localized Supply Chains

There is a strong desire to support and champion local business. Businesses expressed an interest in better understanding local suppliers and what they offer to improve local supply chains. There is also a need for better education and information sharing regarding how to do business with local government, including clearer guidelines around how to approach the City, pilot programming and procurement procedures.

Through the Xcelerate Challenge the stakeholders responded to a request from the business community for a virtual marketplace, one that would allow consumers to search through and shop from a number of local businesses on one site. This is intended to be live by the end of June and will complement marketing efforts towards 'Buy Local'.

In addition, as a complement to the efforts to localizing supply chains, restoring confidence and guaranteeing safety, the Chamber of Commerce has developed a list of local suppliers of PPE. This list has been shared publicly via all stakeholder partners.

Capacity Building Actions

Action	Description	Status	Stake-holder Partners	Budget Impacts	Timeline
ShopHERE Program	The City has recently partnered with Digital Main Street to launch the ShopHERE program in Barrie. This federally funded program is presented in partnership with Google, Shopify, Mastercard and Microsoft and will provide 50,000 business owners across Canada with an e-commerce capable web site, for free.	Delivered	Chamber of Commerce, BIA, Sandbox, HBEC, Tourism Barrie	FedDev Funded Program	Launched June 10th, 2020
Entrepreneurial Programming for Small Business Supports	Development of programs and supports designed to promote and assist small business owners. This is a constantly evolving and ongoing practice. The Small Business Centre will be applying for funding from the expanded Digital Main Street program when applications open on July 1st. This program provides grants of $2500 as well as up to 10 hours of expert digital assistance to registered businesses with a physical presence.	In-Progress	The Sandbox, Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre (HBEC), Chamber of Commerce,	Currently operating within existing budget. Pursuing new program opportunities. Budget may be required for Digital Main Street application process and program administration.	July 2020
Expanded Starter Company Plus Program	The 2020 Starter Company Plus program has been expanded to accept a 50% increase in program entrants along with a 50% increase in available grant funding to the participants. The Small Business Centre is working with the Province to explore ways that this can be tailored to provide an increase in COVID-19 supports.	In Progress	Province of Ontario (MEDJCT)	Existing Budget	Intake – September 2020
Online Marketplace Platform	In May 2020 the Xcelerate Challenge called for solutions to provide a Virtual Marketplace, where shoppers could purchase from multiple locals stores on one web site. The Challenge attracted 11 entries, and an independent panel of judges selected the *Hey Local* platform, an existing shopping platform based in the Kitchener/Waterloo Region. As this platform already exists, the delivery time for a Barrie site is very short (2-3 weeks). This program fits seamlessly with the ShopHERE program and the announcement of the Sandbox's partnership with Shopify, as the *Hey Local* platform is designed to work hand-in-hand with Shopify's technology.	In Progress	HBEC, BIA & Chamber	$6,500	Delivery by July 1st, 2020

Wi-Fi Access Waterfront & Downtown	Wi-Fi infrastructure has been installed for waterfront connectivity between Southshore Centre through Heritage Park. Downtown Wi-fi infrastructure installation will begin later this summer.	In Progress	City IT Department	Existing Budget	Summer 2020
Rental of City Park Space for Commercial Use	Explore the potential to utilize public park space to allow businesses that required distancing measures to utilize.	Explore	Internal City Departments	To be assessed.	Summer 2020
Pedestrianization of Dunlop Street Pilot	Pending approval from Council and the BIA, a working group consisting of members of the BIA, merchants, and City staff would be created with the purpose of creating the framework and implementation plan associated with a pilot project to pedestrianize a portion of Dunlop Street in the downtown. Development of the plan will determine the opportunity to execute a pilot for 2020. The purpose of the pilot would be to activate the downtown core to increase foot traffic and attract new visitors to the downtown core.	Explore	BIA, leverage Tourism Barrie	To be assessed.	August 2020
Promoting Curbside Pick-up Downtown through Temporary Loading Zones	In May 2020 Council approved changing downtown parking spaces into temporary loading zones. This allows consumers to park for short periods on downtown streets without the need to pay for parking in order to better enable curbside pickup of meals and other purchases. A further expansion of the zones to side streets to the north and south of Dunlop Street is to be presented to Council for consideration	Delivered	BIA	Existing budget to support signage.	Through Summer 2020
Promoting accessibility of downtown through the provision of free parking in downtown parking lots.	In response to COVID19- the city did not enforce downtown parking lots. Staff are presenting a report to City Council to further extend the free parking options, to further promote traffic and patronage to downtown businesses.	In Progress	BIA Transit & Parking Services	Net revenue loss.	Through Summer 2020
Expanding Transit to Overnight Service - Data Collection with Industry	Work with industry to gather data on shift schedules, current and potential demand in order to assess service solutions.	Explore	Chamber of Commerce, Local Industry	Under Review. Pending outcome of data analysis	Data Gathering – June, 2020
Development Services - Increase online and paperless application activities	COVID-19 has resulted in all application activity being received online only. This has resulted in no service disruptions in application submission and review and efficiencies in the review process. Staff are continuing to inerate the APLI application to improve utility and user experience.	In progress	Barrie Construction Association, Simcoe County Homebuilder Association	Existing Staff Resources	Immediate

Development Action Team	Regular development review meetings with Planning, Economic and Creative Development and Chief Building Official to identify discuss current and upcoming projects to support resource planning. Early issue identification and development timelines, allows for improved customer responsiveness and solution driven approach that supports "getting to yes" culture with staff.	In progress	Internal City Departments	Existing Staff Resources	Immediate
Better preparing new businesses for the building permit process	Development of tools and resources that better prepare business, especially new business, to submit complete applications. Better supporting businesses with information pre-application of City's requirements, ensures more robust submissions that can be processed more efficiently. Building on the informational bulletins, and checklists, Invest Barrie will work with Building services to develop a series of tips and instructional videos to better prepare businesses pre-lease and pre-application.	In-Progress	Barrie Construction Association, Development Community	$8,000 for material development and promotion in addition to staff resources.	Ongoing through 2020.
Program review and adaptation of Arts & Culture Programming for sector recovery.	Adaptation and development of programming that will support sustainability of the arts & culture community in Barrie. • Use of 2021 grants program to ensure sustainability of the City's arts organizations; • Provision of City's theatre and performance spaces • Opportunities to leverage Culture Days, Arts Awards and educational programming to drive recovery • How public art and the Barrie Public Art Committee can drive initiatives in the recovery process	In Progress	City Staff, Barrie Public Art Committee, Artists and Arts & Culture Organizations	Additional Staffing Resources: $18,000 Existing programming budgets to be assessed. Additional funding requests to be determined with review process.	Report back to Council, September 2020.
Care Kitchen	Create efficient food systems for at-risk community members through public-private partnerships. Funds raised for collaborative meal preparation and grocery distribution programs, with food banks and shelters, commercial kitchens, restaurants, and other community organizations and foundations.	In Progress	Barrie Community Foundation, Barrie Colts Foundation, Downtown Barrie BIA, Barrie Food Bank, Ontario Musician's Co-op Inc	Philanthropic Review required to determine opportunities for shared resources.	Ongoing

'We want the downtown to thrive, and many people support the downtown. As the revitalization of the downtown corridor continues, this desire seems to be growing.'
– Stakeholder Community Session Participant

CONFIDENCE BUILDING ACTIONS

Confidence Building

Highlights of City-wide Actions

Business Recovery Kit

The Business Recovery Kit 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:

- The timely sharing of regulatory information from the Province of Ontario and District Health Unit
- 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.
- Providing floor and window decals that promote physical distancing for businesses to support businesses in providing a safe shopping environment.
- Connecting to the Chamber of Commerce's current listing of local PPE suppliers, with a view to examine opportunities to provide additional support to ensure businesses have access to required PPE to meet health guidelines safe customer service.

Marketing Program

Respondents across all sectors and feedback avenues voiced their desire for a City-led marketing campaign to champion Barrie businesses and build consumer confidence. This messaging helps to establish public assurances and perceptions that Barrie businesses have high standards for operations and are making public safety a priority with new processes and protocols. There was also a desire by specific sectors to expand this campaign to include talent recruitment for professionals who typically commute and may be attracted to local opportunities while working from home in isolation.

By 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. A common theme throughout all consultations was a real sense of local pride and community, and consistent 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.

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.

'We're finding that being in Barrie, a lot of people who were commuting south now see us as an option. We're starting to see they're inquiring now when they've never reached out in the past. These are great stories about how to stay local.'

– Stakeholder Community Session Participant

Confidence Building Actions

Action	Description	Status	Stake-holder Partners	Budget Impacts	Timeline
Marketing Program "Barrie Together"	Respondents across all sectors and feedback avenues voiced their desire for a City-led marketing campaign to champion Barrie businesses and build consumer confidence. With Communications and with support from local stakeholders, Invest Barrie will be launching a marketing and messaging campaign to rally busines and community in building consumer confidence and shopping local. The 'Barrie Together – the Power of Community' will be a series of messages, demonstrating the power of shopping local, highlighting local businesses that have adapted their business models to adapt to cleaning protocols, tips for business on developing customer experience and champion confidence in business recovery. A tool kit will be available to businesses to use shared media materials and messages.	In-progress	All	$17,000 – campaign execution	Campaign will evolve with Provincial opening measures.
Recovery Toolkit	As part of the recovery marketing messaging, businesses will be able to receive floor decals with branded messaging and physical distancing messaging and window decals championing shopping local. The SBEC, BIA and Tourism Barrie have sponsored 'Safe Service' training and a 5 Hour Food Safety Certification Course for up to 200 participants. Invest Barrie and stakeholders are reviewing other health and safety programming to support businesses with educating themselves and their employees. Provincial and Health Unit health and safety guidelines are being communicated to local businesses. Invest Barrie continues to update the Resources for Business web page to provide a single source of reliable, up-to-date, easy to assimilate information regarding supports, programs and relief efforts.	In-Progress	BIA, Tourism Barrie, Sandbox, Chamber of Commerce, HBEC	$8,000 for distancing materials and training spaces. Additional assessment of PPE program and training needs to be determined.	Ongoing

Getting a "One Voice" message out for the Tourism Industry	Ties to the Marketing Plan but important to separately identify one consistent message for tourism that will be used by all stakeholders once the City is at a stage to welcome Tourist to the area (the City, Tourism Barrie, Chamber of Commerce, BIA, etc.).	In-Progress	Tourism Barrie, Chamber, BIA,	To be assessed.	To be released when local and Provincial restrictions permit.
Improving Wayfinding Signage to Downtown	Identified in Tourism Master Plan and the Downtown Parking Strategy as recommendations to attract patrons to the downtown. Aligning recommendations between strategies, in consultation with BIA and Tourism to determine project scope, timeline and costs	Explore	BIA, Tourism Barrie	Staff resource to complete analysis. Costs of implementation to be determined.	Both plans to be presented to Council in Fall, 2020

CAPITAL BUILDING ACTIONS

Capital Building Actions

Highlights of City-wide Actions

Capital Advocacy

The City of Barrie continues, along with our stakeholders, to advocate to both Federal and Provincial governments for ongoing financial support for business and also to continually review the existing programs for potential improvements. In particular, Invest Barrie consulted directly with FedDev Ontario regarding the recently introduced Regional Relief and Recovery Fund with a view to directing specific businesses towards that fund.

City Capital Investment

The capital investments the City makes in 2021 will also contribute to Barrie's overall economic recovery. The City is reviewing and preparing their 2021 capital plan to be prioritized and ready to target capital investment at the Provincial and Federal levels. Opportunities to drive downtown revitalization, accelerating servicing of employment lands and projects that keep people moving throughout the City for their health, education, employment and consumer needs remain priorities.

There are several components that will drive future recommendations to Council on capital investment opportunities in support of recovery: Tourism Barrie is currently completing recovery planning work; staff will be reviewing current arts and culture programming; and, a further understanding of business needs resulting from health, safety and PPE is needed as the Province moves through economic opening stages. In addition, all capital investments must be considered in context of the City's current and overall fiscal position.

City of Barrie Purchasing Initiative

The theme "buy local" or "support local" appeared numerous times during the consultation process and through public comments provided. There were suggestions that the City could promote local businesses and procure locally for City products and services. Local vendors do have a competitive advantage given their proximity to the City in terms of travel/shipping requirements, knowledge of the City's requirements, access to supplier outreach activities, and understanding of the City and its processes.

However, like all municipal governments, there are constraints to the City's ability to procure locally due to legislative frameworks, trade agreements and best practices including the concept of reciprocal non-discrimination, geographic neutrality and avoidance of preferential treatment of local suppliers. Despite the restriction on explicit local vendor preference, the City's purchasing activities can and do support the local vendor community.

The Purchasing Branch is increasingly seeking out opportunities to connect with the local vendor community to support local vendors doing business with the City. Invest Barrie and procurement staff are exploring the idea of hosting a local internal trade show exhibiting products and services available within the City of Barrie. This opportunity would provide staff the opportunity to speak directly with vendors and expand their knowledge about local suppliers which can prove beneficial to vendors as the City is permitted to select directly local vendors for low value procurements (<$10,000) and release invitational competitive bids for goods and services up to $50,000 and consulting up to $100,000. Hosting an event such as this would draw a large audience and would take financial resources to execute.

In addition to an internal trade show there will be continued messaging to City Staff to remember to support local vendors and continued external initiatives promoting how companies can work with the City of Barrie.

'The key to ensuring businesses stay afloat is to look at what you're great at and finding partners to do what you're not great at… Collaborative relationships, whether joint venture or supplier-customer to fill in gaps, is the only way we can move forward in an environment like today.'

– Stakeholder Community Session Participant

Collaborating Partners

The Economic Recovery Action Plan is a collaborative effort of several business community stakeholders. The City's Economic & Creative Development Department (Invest Barrie and Small Business Centre) are grateful for their support and partnership in the completion of the consultation sessions and in execution of the many recovery actions identified in this report, as well as future actions to come.

Barrie Together. The Power of Community.

APPENDICES

A. Consultation Summaries by Sector
B. Consultation Guide & Questions
C. Consultation Recommendations

ARTS & CULTURE

ARTS & CULTURE

Two consultations were held with stakeholders from diverse cross-sections of this industry, including theatrical performance, visual arts, live music, written mediums, professional consultants, media, and gallery, venue, and studio spaces.

SECTOR OVERVIEW

The Arts community has been dramatically impacted by COVID-19. The inability for gatherings has resulted in a practical shut down of the industry, with a lack of certainty as to when audiences can return. From individual and independent artists practicing various forms of art, to large performance organizations who have made fiscal commitments to venues, artists, programming and staff, all are facing the common issue of cash flow sustainability in both the immediate term and into the future. Deloitte's April 2020 economic forecasts for the Arts & Culture sector anticipate an 8.3% to 20% hit in GDP due to COVID-19 impacts. Feedback from over 100 local arts and culture professionals via the City's economic recovery survey revealed that 70% had been forced to stop operating due to the pandemic. Many arts & culture organizations are initiating or already practicing alternate revenue models to stay active. Nearly 30% of respondents identified as working full-time arts and culture professionals, while 70% were part-time – of the part-time professionals, nearly 50% have secondary income sources.

WHAT WE HEARD

Throughout the consultation process, fear and uncertainty was prevalent. Community feedback strongly communicated that revisiting the existing Arts & Culture Grant for 2021 would assist creative businesses and organizations in rebounding. The City also received significant praise for keeping their 2020 commitments to grant recipients.

HIGHLIGHTS OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the depth and complexity of impacts to the sector, more exploration must be completed to develop a comprehensive approach to this sector. Requests for support with pivoting business models, whether to develop digital content or mobile experiences in public spaces were recurring themes. Examples include permitting of cross-discipline buskers, support for 'drive-in' festivals and performances, and investment in pop-up platforms in public spaces. From a public art lens, the opportunity to support small-scale murals in creative places through public and private partnerships emerged as a quick-to-implement solution for downtown revitalization and promotion of the sector. As in other sectors, recommendations for the creation of spend local marketing campaigns, downtown business support, and usage of City facilities were also key themes heard.

CONSTRUCTION

CONSTRUCTION

The construction sector consultations were facilitated by our partners at the Barrie Construction Association and the Simcoe County Home Builders Association. There were two consultation sessions with a wide range of companies participating including developers, trades people, engineers, and general contractors.

SECTOR OVERVIEW

Construction continued to take place on many job sites in Barrie during COVID-19 emergency orders, despite an overall decline in new work starting. Statistics Canada's Investment in building construction numbers, which represents data for residential and non-residential building construction, shows a 3.6% month-over-month decline nationally for March 2020 with steeper declines expected for April. In Barrie's housing market the number of units sold in May 2020 dropped 14.2% year-over-year. In terms of local building permit activity, May 2020 experienced a 76.4% decline in values – dropping from $57.4 million in May 2019 to $13.5 million in May 2020.

WHAT WE HEARD

Locally, the construction industry has fared better than other sectors during the COVID-19 crisis, as many construction businesses were able to continue work with existing permits. The local construction sector found the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy very helpful in keeping business operational and assisting with cash flow. The construction industry is a major employer in Barrie and are confident that they could keep people working as long as construction jobs were getting approved and permits issued.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholders outlined that the City of Barrie plays an essential role in supporting recovery of the local construction sector. A recurring request was for the City to focus on issuing permits while preemptively avoiding bottlenecks in the development application process. Participants suggested several approaches to addressing future backlogs, including re-introducing conditional permits and outsourcing the processing of application approvals. Another request involved the quick and efficient preparation of site alteration agreements to avoid delays and confusion. Many positive comments were shared about City staff who go above and beyond to help projects advance, while ensuring regulatory requirements are being met. Building on this, stakeholders discussed the importance of promoting an internal culture of support and solutions-oriented problem solving among City staff. Finally, stakeholders asked that the City create a single, standardized reference document for building inspectors to ensure consistent interpretations and assessments of building standards across sites and inspections staff.

DOWNTOWN

Downtown Businesses

COVID-19
Business Recovery
Action Plan

DOWNTOWN

Consultation sessions included a broad range of Barrie's Downtown businesses, representing health and wellness, food and beverage, and service-based businesses. Many have been mainstays on Dunlop Street for several years, and have a strong understanding of the unique factors of operating in downtown.

SECTOR OVERVIEW

Downtown is the heart of Barrie. Many merchants are independent owner/operators and are heavily reliant on foot traffic and seasonal surges from both residents and tourists for survival. The combined effects of COVID-19 and the streetscape improvements to Dunlop Street have left many downtown Barrie businesses facing an uncertain future. When questioned, many respondents from other sectors identified a strong downtown as key to the city's recovery efforts.

WHAT WE HEARD

Of utmost importance to this sector is the need for a sustained marketing plan to highlight and promote the Downtown to rebuild consumer confidence and to promote local purchasing habits. The suggestion was also made to allow greater, more efficient access to City spaces for business owners and event hosts. For instance, allowing outdoor business activities in City parks and streamlining the process for booking space at Meridian Square.

HIGHLIGHTS OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation regarding having a plan and procedure for allowing the use of available outdoor space for business purposes and streamlining access to City facilities for the hosting of events was seen as a strong need. Respondents also showed general interest in pedestrianizing Dunlop Street, and using parking spots for patios to encourage social distancing, while encouraging visitors to come back into the downtown to patronize businesses. Respondents highlighted the importance of finding a different way to handle curbside pickup to allow for efficiency and speed of receiving goods.

MANUFACTURING

MANUFACTURING

There were two consultations held for the manufacturing sector in partnership with the Barrie Chamber of Commerce. There was a broad representation of manufacturers within the area that provided feedback on local market conditions, obstacles they face, lessons learned, and action items they suggested for the City of Barrie to undertake for COVID-19 recovery.

SECTOR OVERVIEW

The Canadian Manufacturers and Exports (CME) reported as of May 2020, 1 in 4 manufacturers were reporting a decline in sales of more than 50%. According to Statistics Canada, Canada's merchandise exports fell by 30% in April to $32.7 billion, while merchandise imports declined by 25% to $35.9 billion – the biggest monthly declines on record. Almost all reduction in trade activity in April was due to lower trade flows between Canada and the United States. In volume terms, national manufacturing sales fell by a record 26.0% in April 2020, the first full month of physical distancing measures. Locally, manufacturers confirmed similar slow-downs, and some have pivoted production creating new products to manage the rapidly changing economy.

WHAT WE HEARD

Respondents and stakeholders identified several challenges including employee retention, implementation of safety measures to allow for physical distancing amongst employees, supply chain issues, and a decline in business. There were broader concerns over the inefficiencies introduced by COVID-19 within a sector that bases its operations on efficiency to be globally competitive. Manufacturers pointed out that new internal procedures implemented to deal with COVID-19 would be costly in the long run and price adjustments may have to occur moving forward.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Several key items were raised to support the manufacturing sector. Extended transit service to help manufacturers facilitate physical distancing amongst employees, which would enable them to add a third shift to their operations, ensuring fewer people are in their facilities simultaneously. Similar to the construction sector, manufacturers mentioned the need for the City of Barrie to process permits quickly and efficiently. The Downtown, although not directly related to the manufacturing sector, came up in discussions on numerous occasions. Many manufacturers encouraged the City of Barrie to continue to invest in the downtown core, and to develop initiatives that build consumer confidence to encourage residents and visitors to return to the downtown to buy local.

SERVICE BASED BUSINESSES

Service Based Businesses

SERVICE BASED BUSINESSES

A cross-section of service businesses attended this consultation—from restaurants to play centres, graphic designers to physiotherapists. The service sector was significantly impacted by COVID-19; many businesses had to temporarily close, while some stayed open but were forced to drastically change their method of service delivery.

SECTOR OVERVIEW

According to Statistics Canada, in 2019, the services sector accounted for approximately 54.4% of the Barrie Census Metropolitan Area's employment base. This number rises to 77.4% when the sector definition is expanded to include Retail & Wholesale Trade, as well as Accommodation and Food Services. With such a wide range of businesses in this sector, different effects were felt during the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic. Establishments that were required to provide in-person service with customers such as hairdressers felt the brunt of restrictions, as they were forced to temporarily shut down. On another hand, certain retailers could open providing curbside pickup although consumer confidence was weak. Then there were service businesses such as graphic designers that were able to adopt work from home practices for their employees, which meant business could carry on as long as contracts were in place.

WHAT WE HEARD

Businesses in this sector require clear guidelines and safety protocols for welcoming staff back to work and reopening to the public. Of particular importance is access to Personal Protective Equipment. Suggestions were made around supporting further financial relief efforts, such as continued advocacy towards the Federal and Provincial governments with the aim of closing gaps and strengthening the available programs, continuing commercial tax deferrals as a way to encourage landlords to apply for the Federal rent relief program, and assistance and knowledge around navigating the various application processes for the programs as they exist. Additionally, there is a call for a concerted effort around promoting local buying habits and restoring consumer confidence.

HIGHLIGHTS OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the re-opening of this vital sector and to restore consumer confidence as quickly as possible, recommendations to provide accurate training to business owners around proper health and safety procedures related to COVID-19, including the sponsorship of a Food Safety Certification program, will be crucial. Support in accessing relief programs was also highlighted, while the City along with stakeholder partners continuing to advocate on behalf of business at both the Provincial and Federal level, as well as keeping open the option of further commercial tax deferrals. Above all, a strong focus on buying local has been brought forward, with the roll-out of a local Virtual Marketplace via the Hey Local platform as well as renewed efforts towards educating the local business community on conducting business with the Municipality, guidelines around pilot programs and information on procurement procedures.

TOURISM

TOURISM

Consultations were held with stakeholders from diverse roles within the Tourism sector, including sports and recreation, outdoor activities, indoor attractions, event venues, accommodations, festivals and events, and corporate tourism.

SECTOR OVERVIEW

Travel & Tourism accounts for 6.3% of Canada's GDP and 8.8% of employment. With 80% of spending from domestic visitors, and 64% for leisure purposes, Barrie is ideally positioned to attract regional and provincial tourist spending if businesses are prepared for re-opening. Supporting a strong rebound for these businesses is expected to bring fast financial injections to Barrie's economy for Summer 2020. In 2019, Barrie's touring visitors contributed over $141M in spending to the economy, and directly accounted for over $2.7M in total municipal tax revenue (Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture). Tourism has been one of the hardest hit industries in the COVID-19 pandemic. As of April 2020, early benchmarks in tourism show a decrease of 60-80% in consumer spending compared to 2019.

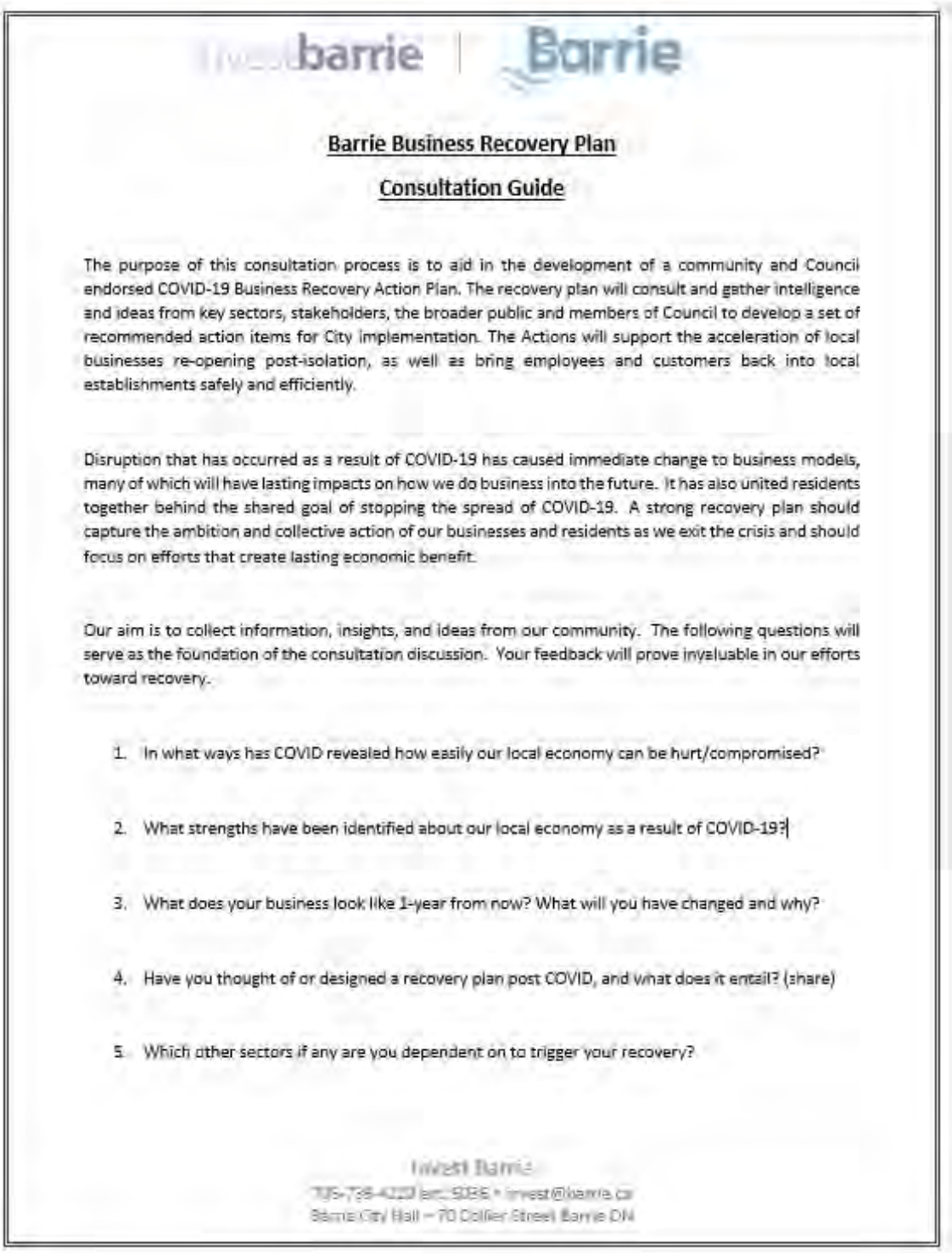
WHAT WE HEARD

Respondents and stakeholders identified specific challenges and requests in the consultation period. To implement new safety protocols, the majority of firms will require updated operational models, equipment and supplies, additional staff training, and new digital tools. Notably, one business outlined that the most optimistic projections they face include a 50% increase in expenses while operating at 25% capacity.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the re-launch of this critical industry and fast-track its financial contributions to Barrie's economy, respondents requested temporary support with essential operational expenses including staff training, permitting, taxation relief, and rent (advocating to landlords or pricing revisions where the City acts as a landlord). Support with the transition to new, more agile business models was also highlighted. This included licenses to operate more flexibly (e.g. mobile units in parking lots or public property), and investment in public infrastructure like Wi-Fi networks and washing facilities that can be utilized by numerous businesses. A strong marketing campaign to attract regional tourists was also a top request and is discussed earlier in this report.

APPENDIX B
CONSULTATION QUESTIONS



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Barrie Business Recovery Plan

Consultation Guide

The purpose of this consultation process is to aid in the development of a community and Council endorsed COVID-19 Business Recovery Action Plan. The recovery plan will consult and gather intelligence and ideas from key sectors, stakeholders, the broader public and members of Council to develop a set of recommended action items for City 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.

Disruption that has occurred as a result of COVID-19 has caused immediate change to business models, many of which will have lasting impacts on how we do business into the future. It has also united residents together behind the shared goal of stopping the spread of COVID-19. A strong recovery plan should capture the ambition and collective action of our businesses and residents as we exit the crisis and should focus on efforts that create lasting economic benefit.

Our aim is to collect information, insights, and ideas from our community. The following questions will serve as the foundation of the consultation discussion. Your feedback will prove invaluable in our efforts toward recovery.

1. In what ways has COVID revealed how easily our local economy can be hurt/compromised?
2. What strengths have been identified about our local economy as a result of COVID-19?
3. What does your business look like 1-year from now? What will you have changed and why?
4. Have you thought of or designed a recovery plan post COVID, and what does it entail? (share)
5. Which other sectors if any are you dependent on to trigger your recovery?

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6. What do you see as your biggest obstacle moving forward – both internal and external?

7. What is your biggest opportunity moving forward – both internal and external?

8. What is your greatest takeaway from the COVID pandemic related both to your business and to the community?

9. Are you taking any steps to prepare your business for future emergency/unplanned disruptions, i.e. a second wave of COVID-19 and what does that look like?

10. Building on the community networks (Simcoe Entrepreneurs Connect, Barrie's Live Music Show Facebook Group, etc.) that have established an unprecedented level of connection in the City during the pandemic, what do you think the City could do going forward to ensure we are creating a stronger community?

11. How do you see the City best supporting you/your business moving forward post COVID?
    a. Are there any City Regulations that could be temporarily changed that would help get your business open?
    b. Are there any licenses that you need from the City of Barrie that could have their renewal extended?
    c. What items that the City has influence over would most help the construction industry get up and running?
    d. What would be the most effective way to drive people to your business?

12. Of the items discussed, what immediate actions would you like the City to undertake that would have the greatest economic impact on recovery? What other ideas exist?

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Expedite/streamline permitting (building, lottery licenses, driving instructor licenses)	2. Building inspection standards & prompt inspections
3. Buy local campaign	4. City procurement
5. Downtown investment	6. Downtown consumer confidence
7. Downtown advocacy	8. Transit scheduling – 24-hours, reduced fees
9. Digital community events and networks (ie. Culture Days)	10. Incentivize rent relief take-up
11. Maximize participation in federal/provincial programs	12. Extend property tax deferrals/relief program
13. Business/employee safety guidelines, regulations, and supports	14. Downtown free parking
15. Use of City spaces (outdoor, indoor, rental fees, pop-up licenses)	16. Extend City office hours
17. Do more partner/event sponsorship	18. Digital technology equipment and support
19. Revisit cultural grant funding model (eligibility, requirements, budget)	20. Arts & Culture marketing campaign
21. Internal City rapid response team	22. Pop-up spaces (retail, downtown, parks, musicians, artists, food vendors)
23. Transparency of public funding and support	24. Marketing campaign, open for business/tourism (unified message from all stakeholders, including online ads, weekly business features, content for specific industries ex. Real estate)
25. Subsidized safety training and courses	26. Digital infrastructure – make sure City is connected (downtown/waterfront Wi-Fi, 5G)
27. Downtown, tourism infrastructure (lockers, showers, washing facilities)	28. MAT to Tourism Barrie
29. Incentivize entrepreneurship	30. Subsidize musician/artist performances
31. Reduce development charges	32. Business support network partnerships
33. Buy local platform	34. Subsidize high employment sectors
35. Provide access/mentorship from expert	36. Review by-laws that hinder business

business analysts	start-ups
37. Downtown pedestrian only areas	38. Local Business Guide- database of all Barrie businesses
39. Reduce commercial property taxes	40. Acceptable alternatives to traffic counts (during COVID-19 not accurate)
41. Allow business signage on sidewalks (suspend by-law for a time period)	42. Eliminate building permit fees
43. Open seasonal campgrounds	44. City fund local art programming
45. Downtown busking program	46. Public mural project