

February 7, 2022

The Hon. Tim Houston
Premier of Nova Scotia
Office of the Premier
7th Floor, One Government Place
1700 Granville Street
Halifax, NS B3J 1X5

Dear Premier Houston:

We are writing to you today representing over 4,000 downtown and main street businesses from across Nova Scotia. Many of these businesses, the lifeblood of their communities, have paid a heavy, heavy cost to not only follow, but promote, public health guidelines, in order to protect people as well as our over-extended health care system. But these businesses have existed in a seemingly endless cycle for two years now: rising cases lead to new restrictions, which leads to lost revenues, and then a need to advocate for renewed government support. The current wave has been the hardest thus far for most, as they have already seen two holiday seasons lost and are up to their eyeballs in debt, and are unsure of making payroll and rent, to say nothing of keeping their doors open for another several weeks.

There are positive signs that the omicron variant will give way to an even lesser virulent strain of COVID-19, and we will truly enter an endemic phase wherein restrictions will disappear, and consumer confidence will return. This is happening in other jurisdictions. There are projections that the spring and summer of 2022 will see a return to pre-pandemic levels of tourism, and business can once again thrive. But an increasing number of our businesses no longer believe they will survive to see it.

Friday, January 28, the Business Improvement Districts wrote to the Minister of Economic Development, Susan Corkum-Greek. The Halifax Chamber of Commerce, with input from the NS Business Labour Economic Coalition (NSBLEC), also wrote a letter. We were pleased to meet with Minister Corkum-Greek on February 2. However, following that meeting, we feel it is critical to reiterate the urgent needs of businesses in this province and ask that you, and your government, act swiftly.

Our small businesses are calling for the Government of Nova Scotia to:

1. Extend the Sector Impact Support Program, and commit to extending it automatically if restrictions are extended and whenever they put in place again.
2. Accept that government messaging around staying home drives consumer behaviour beyond restrictions, and expand the eligibility requirements for the Sector Impact Support Program to additional business types, such as retail, and personal services (hair, nail, spa, salon, etc).

3. Share a timeline of loosening restrictions that are tied to clear relevant health benchmarks (such as hospitalizations from COVID-19).
4. Create marketing programs, and positive government messaging, to be launched as soon as restrictions lift, focused on rebuilding consumer confidence, and encouraging visitation to our downtowns and main streets.
5. Work with industry partners to help ensure adequate labour availability for tourism-related sectors, as they ramp up.

Without these measures, our downtowns and main streets will look very different when we reach the end of the pandemic. Even as this day seems tantalizingly close, more businesses will close, and our communities will feel this loss. People who work in these businesses will lose their jobs. Through these past two years, small businesses have been on the front lines in Nova Scotia, demonstrating steadfast commitment to public safety and their communities. Let us now show small business that their government has their back – that we are all in this together, and that we will all get out of this together.

Sincerely,

Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission

Downtown Halifax Business Commission

Downtown Truro Partnership

Kentville Business Community

North End Business Association

Porters Lake Business Association

Quinpool Road Mainstreet District Association

Sackville Business Association

Spring Garden Area Business Association

Spryfield Business Commission

Sydney Downtown Development Association

The Village On Main – Community Improvement District

cc:

The Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek, Minister of Economic Development

The Hon. Pat Dunn, Minister of Communities Culture, Heritage and Tourism

Scott Farmer, Deputy Minister of the Department of Economic Development