

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Sent via email to: Minister.fin@ontario.ca and Peter.Bethlenfalvy@Ontario.ca

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board
Province of Ontario
Frost Bldg S 7th Flr, 7 Queen's Park Cres
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

RE: February 11th Pre-Budget Consultation Session in Guelph

The Guelph Chamber of Commerce and the City of Guelph thank you for participating in the virtual pre-budget consultation session with key Guelph stakeholders hosted by the Chamber last week on February 11th. Now more than ever it is vital that provincial decision-makers such as yourself listen to and engage with perspectives from local businesses and communities on the ground. We hope the session was informative as you prepare the upcoming provincial budget.

Important priorities raised by roundtable participants for your consideration include:

- ✓ Leveraging partnerships with the private sector and the broader public sector to combat the virus
- ✓ Supporting hard hit sectors to ensure their survival and sustainability
- ✓ Strategically preparing for the recovery period
- ✓ Addressing the secondary effects of the pandemic

Leveraging partnerships with the private sector and the broader public sector to combat the virus

The private sector, universities and local governments have risen to the challenge when it comes to working collaboratively to address the pandemic in local communities. We encourage you to continue to lean on these partnerships to advance rapid testing, contract tracing and to ensure a quick and effective vaccination program. The faster we can vaccinate our community, the quicker our economy can fully reopen. Strengthening local rapid testing and contract tracing capacity in the short-term can help us remain safe until these game-changing vaccines are more broadly available.

Supporting hard hit sectors to ensure their survival and sustainability

The Ontario Small Business Support grant has been a quick, easy and effective support program since it launched earlier this year. We encourage the province to continue offering supports like these to small businesses and hard-hit sectors struggling to make ends meet, including the hospitality, retail, arts and non-profit sectors. The City of Guelph also urges the province to prioritize emergency relief funding for municipal transit systems and operating shortfalls in 2021. The provincial government can also support local businesses by working collaboratively with the federal government to address gaps in federal supports for businesses so that all business owners can access federal benefits, including new businesses and those that own their own building.

An important policy recommendation raised by the group was to reduce alcohol taxes paid by local restaurants to support them during these challenging times.

Strategically prepare for the recovery period

Our province has the potential to emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever. To get there, we need to focus on making Ontario the best place to start a business, and for innovative and green manufacturing companies and businesses to invest. We encourage the province to focus in on entrepreneurship as a strategic pillar of its recovery strategy so that we can replenish our main streets. Ontario also needs a dedicated workforce development strategy to address existing and anticipated labour shortages. Economic stimulus will also be imperative to get our economy going. Investing in critical municipal and local infrastructure will be an important tool in the province's toolkit to create well-paying jobs while building the communities of tomorrow. In Guelph, continued investments in interregional infrastructure, namely all-day-two-way GO service and investments in highways 6&7, can further unlock our region's economic potential.

Addressing the secondary effects of the pandemic

Through this pandemic we have learnt that certain communities have been disproportionately impacted when compared to others. Guelph stakeholders therefore encouraged the province to take a wholistic approach to the recovery period, earmarking investments for things like social services, childcare broadband and supportive housing. The need to acknowledge the impact the pandemic has had on mental health was another theme raised during the session. We encourage the province to invest in mental health supports to increase the health of our local businesses and broader community.

Thank you again for participating in the session. We look forward to welcoming you to our community both virtually and in-person in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shakiba Shayani'.

Shakiba Shayani, President & CEO
Guelph Chamber of Commerce

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cam Guthrie'.

Cam Guthrie, Mayor
City of Guelph

C Mike Schreiner, MPP for Guelph