

Mayor’s Task Force on Economic Recovery

Appendix A: Summary Report on the COVID-19 Pandemic’s Impact on Guelph’s Business Community May 6, 2020

Overview

The Task Force is made up of 28 business owners and operators, government representatives and support agencies who represent organizations of all sizes and across various sectors, including manufacturing, social enterprise, education, energy, hospitality and tourism, and arts and culture.

Mandate

To sustain, develop and maintain Guelph’s robust local economy through intergovernmental advocacy efforts and by sharing insights across sectors to help businesses navigate operational and financial challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

What We Heard from Guelph’s Business Community

During the first meeting of the Mayor’s Task Force on April 22, 2020, the membership reported unprecedented operational and financial repercussions stemming from a rapidly-evolving business landscape that has been significantly impacted by COVID-19, and expressed uncertainty about how and when the local economy will recover. The group identified eight (8) common challenges and immediate needs impacting local businesses, as well as a range of opportunities for federal, provincial and community-based solutions to promote economic recovery. While the Task Force recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to this crisis, the group is creative, hopeful, and committed to helping Guelph’s local economy recover as quickly as possible. There is a collective focus on identifying immediate crisis management resources, as well as short-term recovery measures to help the community get back to business, and longer-term capacity-building opportunities to ensure a more adaptive and resilient economy for the future.

Challenges and Proposed Solutions

Challenges		Description	Proposed Solutions	Timing
Operational	1	Labour interruptions, layoffs, and staff safety concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote community protocols for safe working practices. Identify and/or advocate for financial relief programs for affected individuals and provide guidance for businesses to assist employees in accessing them. 	Short- and medium-term

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Challenges		Description	Proposed Solutions	Timing	
	2	Need for increased mental health resources	Local business owners/operators/staff and support agencies are experiencing significant mental health challenges as they try to navigate this unprecedented public health crisis. Social and physical isolation, financial pressure, work-related stress, health concerns, and lack of support for parents and families have taken a toll, both for individuals and the community as a whole. Mental health concerns related to the pandemic are expected to increase over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of the pandemic's impact on mental health and promote community-based mental health support. • Advocate for mental health programs designed specifically for business owners and operators. 	Short- and medium-term
	3	Reduced financial liquidity	Loss of business, decreased revenues, and in some cases, increased costs related to the pandemic have made it difficult for businesses to maintain financial liquidity. Some owners/operators are hesitant to take advantage of support programs that require loans to be repaid over time, given economic and operational uncertainty about the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for accessible and flexible relief measures for businesses with a preference for grants rather than loans. • Identify and promote new micro-granting opportunities, such as the emerging Our Food Future model. 	Short- and medium-term
Financial	4	Support managing fixed costs	Many local businesses report that fixed costs associated with rent, utilities, benefits and insurance, even in circumstances where operations have been suspended and staff have been laid off, pose an immediate challenge and contribute to ongoing financial stress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for rent relief and support programs for commercial tenants. • Advocate for reduced or interest-free utility costs. • Advocate for tax deferral programs for businesses. • Advocate for the establishment of a new tax class for not-for-profit organizations. 	Short-, medium- and long-term

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Challenges		Description	Proposed Solutions	Timing	
Other	5	Strained local support ecosystem	The local business support ecosystem is running beyond capacity as they meet demands from their clients. They are managing by being creative, offering new COVID-specific programming, utilizing digital channels and stretching every resource they have.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote a "shop-local" campaign to encourage Guelphites to continue to support small businesses wherever possible. • Establish a mentoring program to allow businesses to share insights and solutions to common challenges • Advocate for support programs for NFP and NGO business support organizations 	Short- and medium-term
	6	Lack of clarity about government support programs, policy decisions and relief measures	Business owners/operators/staff and support agencies expressed confusion and uncertainty about the support, policy decisions and relief measures available to them due to a lack of timely and accurate information about the programs and clearly-defined instructions for how to access them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for alignment in decision making and communication from all levels of government to support economic recovery. • Identify and promote resources that will provide clarity for businesses around the support available to them, and assist them in accessing various funding streams. 	Short-, medium- and long-term
	7	Impact to arts and culture sector	The arts and culture sector is experiencing significant disruption due to mandatory closures and cancellations, and are entirely reliant on the return of a robust local economy to resume operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for further clarity for the government about timelines for re-establishing events and festivals. 	Undefined
	8	Impact to youth and students	While many local youth and students are facing uncertainty related to residential leases, unemployment, and interruptions to education, which in turn affect their ability to contribute to and participate in Guelph's local economy.		Undefined

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Opportunities Identified by Task Force

Opportunities		Description
1	Support, develop and leverage Guelph's creative, agile, resilient local business support network to create "obsessively local" made-in-Guelph solutions to support economic recovery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist support agencies in defining a road map forward that will pair locally-minded, right-sized solutions with the businesses that need them most. • Identify and amplify community protocols to support businesses, arts and culture festivals as they resume operations in a staggered approach. • Identify and amplify recently-established local solutions (i.e. GuelphBox, 10C's local food page) to encourage community engagement with Guelph-based businesses. • Explore opportunities to pair local service providers with small- and medium-sized businesses looking to amplify their profile or invigorate sales.
2	Build resilience into Guelph's economic future by evaluating what kind of community we want to be moving forward, building stronger relationships between local businesses and support agencies, and accelerating new business models to adapt operations, services and products to the post-COVID economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in data collection and analysis to identify emerging trends and gaps in capacity in real time. • Leverage and promote existing resources (such as the Digital Main Street program) to assist local businesses in pivoting and/or streamlining operations using technology, COVID-specific programming, and peer-to-peer networking and collaboration. • Identify and share best practices from businesses and organizations that have successfully adapted to the rapidly-changing business landscape.