



October 25, 2023

City of London,
300 Dufferin Ave, 6th Floor
London Ontario
N6A 4L9

To City of London Mayor and Strategic Priorities and Planning Committee,

RE: Health and Homelessness Update and Business Support

On behalf of Downtown London and our membership, we very much support and appreciate City staff's recommendation to provide one-time funding of \$1.66 million for the two core area BIAs (Downtown London - \$1.16million and Old East Village - \$500,000) to support core area businesses through the Whole of Community Response and the impacts that health and homelessness are having on them.

We also appreciate City Council's endorsement for the establishment of 3 London Health and Homeless Hubs to be set up by the spring of 2024 as a start of more investment and work to come for noticeable impact to be seen.

Our downtown businesses continue to face ongoing challenges with increased costs, decreased clientele and sales as a result of health and homeless impacts. This has resulted in many of our businesses taking on significant debt, with some not being able to maintain their financial obligations or have the ability to make any future business decisions and investments, or worse, are forced to close their business in our downtown, due to these impacts while still recovering from the effects of COVID.

Downtown London represents more than 1,400 business members across 84 blocks in the BIA's boundaries. These funds will go towards helping businesses recover increased costs related to the effects of health and homelessness and will help businesses enhance property security and safety, vandalism and property damage repairs, extra cleaning, façade and storefront improvements and increased cleaning of sidewalks and public spaces. Secondly, these funds will go towards activating our streets to help attract more feet downtown, along with security and support for these events (lighting, security, activation costs, etc).

Core area businesses and their patrons have historically, and continue to be the most significantly affected by health and homeless impacts due to a high concentration of critical care services for London's most vulnerable populations in the core area. We also recognize that until these three

Hubs and the future nine plus Hubs are created, it will take some time to see noticeable change for our businesses as these issues continue to play out on our core area streets.

As a Businesses Improvement Association, we are mandated under the Ontario Municipal Act to oversee, beyond what the municipality is responsible for, the improvements, beautification and maintenance of municipally-owned properties and structures in the business improvement area (eg. adding flowers, investing in public art, attracting feet to the street through street activations and events, picking up sidewalk litter, etc.). Secondly, we are tasked with marketing and promoting the business improvement area as a business, tourist and shopping area.

That said, over the last three years our LDBA budgets have been continually redirected to support our businesses to assist them with COVID recovery as well as the ever growing costs related to health and homelessness impacts. Today much of our work now includes:

- Removing needles and biowaste from public areas, sidewalks and vestibules,
- Replacing damaged or stolen flower boxes and plant materials
- Graffiti removal from public and private properties and on public art installations that our BIA, the City and community partners have invested in
- Funding and administering new property damage and storefront enhancement grants for our members to help businesses with the escalating costs of repairing property damages due to vandalism and maintaining appealing and welcoming storefronts for their customers.
- Additional marketing, events, communications along with additional staffing to help overcome negative public perception of downtown
- Establishing a new power washing program to wash public spaces and members' properties of human waste and excrement
- Assisting our members to navigate and help deploy supports to remove encampments or those resting or sleeping rough in their vestibules and on their properties, that often prevents owners from opening their businesses or allowing their employees or clients to gain access
- Helping our members find the right support to help those who are at risk or those who are in crisis or threatening to harm themselves or others in their business

These were never intended to be part of a BIA's mandate and the work we do, but they now take up a significant portion of our budgets and resources in an effort to support our members with health and homeless impacts.

Over the last three years, Downtown London has provided and administered to our members approximately \$1,695,000 in grant funding with 88% of that funding coming directly from the BIA levy to assist businesses with COVID recovery and address property repairs due to vandalism, improve their property security, and enhance their storefronts. All of these grants needed to be capped to ensure as many of our members as possible could be supported, resulting in only a small portion of their costs being covered and leaving members to pay the difference. Over and above the grants, the BIA has provided additional cleaning services, power washing, graffiti removal, plant maintenance and replacement. Together these totaled more than \$1,411,000 of BIA levy costs and

it still has not kept pace with the extent of work needed to keep our streets and sidewalks fully maintained because of increasing health and homeless impacts.

Additionally, many commercial and multi-unit residential property owners downtown have reported to us that their security costs now range anywhere from \$100,000 to over \$1,000,000 per year, with some saying they have had to at least double their cost over the last two-to-three years. In addition, some members have indicated that due to excessive clean-up of litter, garbage, needles, and biowaste on their private property they are incurring cleaning and maintenance costs as much as \$930,000 per year.

Our members and our BIA can no longer afford to cover these ever increasing costs which has had a significant impact on our economy and our ability to fill vacancies in the core area. These ongoing impacts further erode trust, civic pride and our ability to attract residents, visitors, and future investment downtown. With the City funds being requested, we believe this will provide some of the much-needed support that our members have been asking for.

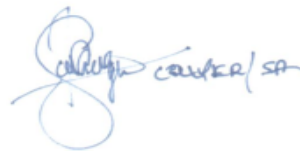
Downtown London staff and many of our members have been active participants in the Whole of Community Response to Health and Homelessness from its inception when we brought a group of downtown business leaders together with the City's senior leadership team in the summer of 2022 to discuss how we can all work together to be part of the solution to health and homelessness. Additionally, we have been at the table since the first Health and Homeless Summit last November, 2022.

We are acutely aware of the severity of the issue and the tremendous amount of great work that the City and many organizations in our community are doing to support London's most vulnerable population. Downtown London and our members have immense compassion for our at-risk community. Many of our members lead and participate in a variety of charitable causes and as good corporate citizens are committed to being a part of the solution as we work alongside the City and community partners through our Whole of Community Response to Health and Homelessness.

Sincerely,



Barbara Maly
Executive Director
Downtown London



Scott Andrew Collyer
Board Chair
London Downtown Business Association