BIABC PROVIDES INPUT TO PRE-BUDGET PROCESS

Association recommends actions that will allow businesses to be part of the solution in a very difficult economic environment

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Vancouver, BC – In a pre-budget submission to The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, the Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC) today made three recommendations that address concerns of small and medium-sized businesses across the province.

BIABC President Jeremy Heighton prefaced the pre-budget submission by suggesting there are a host of challenges facing business owners.

"The recent actions of our American neighbours have exacerbated what was already a very difficult time for business owners and operators. The recommendations we are presenting on behalf of members very much reflect their desire to be part of the solution – by contributing to healthy, vital business districts and neighbourhoods, supporting employment and a strong local and provincial economy."

BIABC's three key recommendations include:

1. **A review of the five-day mandatory sick leave policy to reduce the financial impact on small and medium-sized business owners and operators.** While there is a positive economic and social benefit to this policy, it is one of several employer-related costs that have increased in recent years - and puts the onus on a business owner to pay the employee taking sick leave along with the employee backfilling that position.

   ⇒ **BIABC recommends** a review, in consultation with the business community - on options such as a rebate, subsidy or other mechanism that reduces the financial liability for businesses without placing an administrative burden on them.

2. **Expand the scope of the Development Potential Relief legislation and mandate its application.** In 2022, the provincial government introduced Development Potential Relief legislation to support small businesses and non-profits burdened by disproportionately high property taxes resulting from the 'highest and best

use' approach to property valuation. To date, we are not aware of any municipalities outside of Vancouver that have implemented a program. Moreover, the effectiveness of the relief has been significantly constrained by its narrow application specifically, its exclusion of non-municipal taxing authorities such as regional districts and the provincial school tax. As a result, the intended benefits of the legislation have not been fully realized.

⇒ **BIABC recommends** that the province mandate adoption of the Development Potential Relief legislation by all municipalities, ensuring a consistent, province-wide approach; and expand the scope of the legislation to include all taxing authorities, thereby maximizing the financial relief available to impacted small businesses and non-profit organizations.

3. The issue of crime and public safety are well documented, and BIABC continues to advocate for stronger bail and sentencing conditions. However, those who may believe where there's no violence, there's no harm, couldn't be further from the truth.

⇒ **BIABC recommends** investment in a comprehensive Non-Violent Repeat Offender Program, with elements that include the funding of restorative justice and diversion programs that place a focus on repairing harm and restoring relationships as alternative measures in specific cases to incarceration.

Heighton also referenced other key challenges requiring government action, including:

⇒ Additional investments in the Community Safety and Targeted Enforcement (C-STEP) program**.** Budget 2025 established the Community Safety and Targeted Enforcement Program — which is intended to address robbery, shoplifting, and property crimes. BIABC recommends further investments , such as those that may support the installation and appropriate placement of security cameras to support prosecution of offenders.
⇒ Investments in policy and actions to create safer streets in our business districts and neighbourhoods.
⇒ Policies and targeted investments to address the significant challenges associated with mental health, addictions and housing.
⇒ Creating a stronger domestic marketplace by establishing local sourcing opportunities and expand the Buy BC Program to support local businesses, producers, and suppliers.
⇒ Creating avenues for business to access capital so they can potentially expand and/or tap into market opportunities, within Canada and internationally.
⇒ Establishing a dedicated/stand-alone ministry of Small Business to provide a specific voice to the largest private sector employer in the province.

About BIABC:

The Business Improvement Areas of BC (BIABC) is the provincial champion of strong, vibrant, and successful downtowns, main streets, and commercial districts throughout our province. Members represent more than 80 business districts that employ hundreds of thousands of retail, service, and office employees within defined business districts.

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