Annual Conference Concludes in Penticton with Focus on Public Safety, Economic Pressures and Main Street Resilience

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PENTICTON, BC – The Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC) concluded its 2026 Annual Conference this weekend in Penticton, bringing together business leaders, economic development professionals, local and provincial government representatives, and community partners from across the province to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing BC's main streets and commercial districts.

Held May 24–27 at the Penticton Lakeside Resort & Conference Centre, the conference welcomed BIAs from throughout British Columbia, which collectively represent more than 55,000 businesses province-wide.

This year's conference focused on some of the most pressing issues facing businesses and communities, including public safety, retail crime, the rising cost of doing business, economic uncertainty, and the expanding role BIAs play in supporting vibrant and resilient commercial districts.

"This year's conference reinforced the important role Business Improvement Areas are playing in communities across British Columbia," said BIABC President Jeremy Heighton. "Across BC, BIAs are stepping up to help address increasingly complex challenges facing businesses and commercial districts - from public safety and street disorder to affordability pressures and economic uncertainty. The conversations over the past several days demonstrate both the seriousness of those challenges and the strong commitment from communities to work collaboratively toward solutions."

The conference featured remarks from Housing and Municipal Affairs Minister Ravi Kahlon, along with keynote presentations, panel discussions, and breakout sessions exploring emerging trends, economic conditions, and practical approaches to strengthening downtowns and commercial areas.

Sessions included discussions on the impact of crime and disorder on businesses, collaborative community safety approaches, the role of events and placemaking in community vibrancy, and broader economic pressures affecting businesses throughout British Columbia.

A significant focus throughout the conference was the provincial government's planned expansion of the Provincial Sales Tax to a range of services, including security services, accounting, and other professional services relied upon by businesses, BIAs, and non-profit organizations.

There was also meaningful discussion about the growing need for consistent, data-driven tools to measure the health, vibrancy, and economic impact of main streets and neighbourhoods - to help guide planning, investment, and decision-making. BIABC remains committed to working with members and partners to advance the use of these tools, while advocating for provincial and federal support to ensure BIAs across the province have access to meaningful and consistent data resources.

"For many businesses and commercial districts, security services have become an essential operating expense," said Heighton. "There was strong discussion throughout the conference about the cumulative pressures businesses are facing and the importance of ensuring policies do not further increase costs at a time when many businesses are already under strain."

Best in the West Awards

The conference also honoured BIABC Best in the West Award recipients, recognizing excellence in member engagement, placemaking, marketing, organizational leadership, and creative approaches to strengthening local business districts.

Hey, Downtown Van! Podcast
Recognized for creating a fresh and engaging platform that strengthened connections between the BIA, its members, stakeholders, and the broader community.

Mount Pleasant Block Party Series
Honoured for its decentralized event model that brought community activations directly into micro-neighbourhoods across the district.

Austin Heights Bars
Awarded for a simple but highly effective marketing campaign that encouraged local shopping through a community-based prize initiative.

The West End, Taylor's Version
Recognized for leveraging a major cultural event through creative placemaking, public art, and local partnerships to drive visitation, media attention, and community connection.

Mount Pleasant Day Festival
Honoured for its highly collaborative approach to festival development, engaging more than 150 businesses as co-creators of programming rather than traditional vendors.

Parksville Downtown – Imagine | Build | Thrive
Recognized for Organizational Excellence for developing an adaptable and collaborative framework to revitalize a downtown facing long-standing economic and seasonal challenges.

About BIABC

The Business Improvement Areas of British Columbia (BIABC) is the provincial champion of strong, vibrant, and successful downtowns, main streets, and commercial districts throughout the province. Its members represent more than 80 business districts, employing hundreds of thousands of retail, service, and office workers.

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