

Aurora Chamber of Commerce Advocacy Paper



**AURORA'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY... CURRENT
STRUGGLES AND SURVIVAL FOR THE FUTURE**

OUR PURPOSE



The Aurora Chamber of Commerce is a non-partisan voice for the Aurora business. The mission of the Chamber is to support economic growth in Aurora by representing the interests of our members at all levels of government. We are committed to working with government to improve the business climate by providing support, information and advocacy leadership wherever possible. The Chamber endeavours to provide networking opportunities amongst its membership and leverage our membership needs with relevant public needs.

A SNAPSHOT OF WHERE WE ARE TODAY...(IN LOCKDOWN)



To say the past 9 months have been disruptive for the business community in Aurora is an understatement. While these conditions are prevalent across the Country, the Province and the GTA the impact on small communities like Aurora, and on smaller businesses and entrepreneurs which make up a large portion of our membership has been devastating. The Federal and Provincial governments have been pro-active with a variety of support mechanisms however not without challenges.

The Chamber fielded hundreds of calls weekly and has provided numerous information sessions during the initial period of the pandemic and has continued to assist membership by assisting with resources and strong communications in an effort to assist those companies who either did not have access to the programs or were unaware of how they might utilize them to their benefit.

Our membership is comprised of primarily small to medium sized businesses many of which are in the service and hospitality sectors. We held numerous virtual roundtable sessions with a variety of sectors as well as one on one discussions and on-site visits.

Our membership has declined by about 10%, numerous restaurants, retailers and service businesses have closed or are on the verge of closing.

WHAT WE HEARD...



- The initial rent subsidy program was not helpful as many landlords refused to subscribe
- The complexity of the CEWS, CEBA and the loan process was very taxing for many
- The time lapse between program announcements and the flow of funds created anxiety and hardship
- Fear of post pandemic unknown when subsidies are terminated
- Fear of unknown economic conditions and lack of consumer confidence
- Ability to regenerate business with or without government support
- Ability to change the operations and/or the type of business to the new marketplace needs
- The lack of local assistance other than the deferral of business/property taxes

MOVING FORWARD...



Both the Federal and Provincial governments have put forward extraordinary efforts to assist businesses through this pandemic and to ensure economic recovery. We applaud them for their efforts, knowing that more will be needed as we emerge from the pandemic and look at rebuilding the economy. Through the pandemic the Chamber and the Municipal government have advocated for needed supports for our local businesses.

WHAT OUR BUSINESSES NEED...



Federal Assistance:

- That the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS) be expanded to include previous months for tenants whose landlord did not subscribe to the previous rent subsidy programs and to include new businesses that have opened in 2020.
- That the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) continue at least until the vaccine is implemented and consumer confidence improves; alterations to the CEWS to include wages of new employees for companies poised to grow during the recovery.

Provincial Assistance:

- There is strong acknowledgement that the spread of the pandemic occurs through Community/Personal behaviour vs. Consumer/Business behaviour. The current framework to keep Ontario safe and open creates unfair and divisive conditions amongst businesses. The current policies push consumers to big box retailers where restrictions seem less restrictive and allow them to continue to sell essential and non-essential goods when small local retailers are closed. The definition of non-essential and essential is not only confusing to the public but punitive to smaller retailers. **The Chamber asks the Ontario Government to open all businesses using strict safety protocol, i.e. number of people per square metre/limiting capacity based on occupancy percentages* or ensure that the playing field is fair and equitable for all by closing non-essential sections of big box stores, to ensure the survival of our small business community. (*50% for restaurants, 25% for retail stores and gyms as per recent York Region Council recommendations.)**

WHAT OUR BUSINESSES NEED...(Continued)



Provincial Assistance (Continued):

- **Additional post COVID incentives (such as the electricity pricing changes)** that support growth and development of existing businesses and prevent further closures or production transfers to U.S./Mexico.
- A mechanism for increased involvement by medium sized businesses to create an environment where **business growth and expansion is supported by government ministries** and connections are made with other supportive businesses.

Regional/Municipal Assistance:

- That the Regional and Municipal governments collaborate closer on development **to ensure that zoning and necessary approvals not be delayed by inconsistent approval policies.**
- There is acknowledgement by the business community that the Business Concierge service offered by the Town of Aurora has been a step in the right direction. **Businesses have asked that the Business Concierge be quicker to respond and be better equipped with information.**
- As always, the Chamber is a willing and able support to the Town's Economic Development Department and looks forward to a close working relationship as the Town emerges from the pandemic.

IN SUMMARY...



Over the next 3-6 months many small and medium businesses will need to make significant changes in order to survive and continue operations, perhaps even further than that as the recovery period is dependent largely on the vaccine distribution, impact and results. The continued dissemination of information and strong, effective communications is imperative to mitigate the current frustration expressed by most businesses. There is a strong desire to have a centralized information resource and the Chamber is a willing and able body to play a role in providing that resource.

We will continue to support our members and would hope that the lines of communication would be available to facilitate a collaborative role in that regard.

In planning for 2021 and the future of our businesses, it is imperative that we participate in the discussions with all levels of Government in developing appropriate responses and actions that ensure the success of our local companies.