



December 1, 2020

Mayor Watson, City of Ottawa
City of Ottawa Council Members
City Hall, City of Ottawa, 110 Laurier Ave West, Ottawa, ON K1P 1J1

Dear Mayor Watson and City of Ottawa Councillors,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the City of Ottawa Budget. The Ottawa Board of Trade is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan organization with a mandate to advocate for businesses in the Ottawa region. Our businesses include all sectors, all sizes and represent a broad range of employers. Our mission is to create prosperity by cultivating business and community growth. We collaborate with economic stakeholders across our region, our province and our country, with the goal of making Ottawa the best place to live, work and play . . . as well as to visit, study and invest.

The Ottawa Board of Trade supports a city budget that represents a forward-thinking vision for the city including fiscal prudence, innovation, planning for growth, and optimizing opportunities.

I would like to take this opportunity to express gratitude to the city staff team for their exceptional work under challenging circumstances as it relates to managing COVID-19. Your team remain dedicated to supporting business, maintaining services and being innovative. I would like to extend congratulations and thanks to Dr. Etches and her team at the Ottawa Public Health. Dr. Etches, her level of communication and collaboration and most importantly her position on the integration of our economy and our health certainly gives Ottawa a competitive edge and provides a strong foundation for our future prosperity.

We applaud the city commitment to less than 3% increase city wide for taxes, particularly in the face of the ongoing implications from the pandemic and the counter measures. The combination of fiscal responsibility in spending combined with innovative investment in economic development will garner us the best long-term results. Thank you for focusing on priorities such as affordable housing, environment and sustainability, transportation and infrastructure and the support of our local small and medium enterprises.

We wish to restate our position for the city to conduct and share economic impact reports for major spending projects. We believe this exercise will serve to set spending priorities and funding requests, garner public support, and encourage businesses and the community to identify opportunities to plan and be involved.

Additionally, we are pleased to see the Municipal Property Tax Relief announcement, as proposed in the 2020 Ontario Budget. This will be a powerful tool for our city to extend real and significant relief to our small and medium-sized enterprises. Indeed, property taxes are one of the most unavoidable costs businesses face and we ask that the City do all it can to administer these measures promptly.

The key tenets of our presentation are intended to establish a basis that we build on in the future – caution, clarity, and creativity.

Our businesses and our municipal corporation have enjoyed more than fifteen years of unprecedented spending from other levels of government. The pandemic recovery response provides an opportunity for smart growth – investments in the environment and infrastructure will be key components of the government recovery plan. We must proceed with optimistic **caution**. A 3% increase is very much the upper limits of what businesses and families can afford. Many of our businesses and their employees have not had wage increases - in fact, many have seen cuts. While we understand the pressures that municipal budgets are under the tax levy outpaces CPI. There are many unknowns facing businesses, owners, and their families. We must remain diligent in managing future tax pressures and **clearly** set our community priorities to make the most of our investments. It will be challenging to balance community expectations, high return initiatives, life cycle planning and fiscal responsibility. That is why we wish to move toward a budget that **clearly** delineates how much is invested in economic development and infrastructure, and the expected deliverables and outcomes. This would have the dual purpose of serving both as an engagement and marketing tool. Finally, city building in a creative economy requires a commitment to collaboration and communication. We have witnessed a radical level of consultation from all levels of government, politicians, bureaucrats, business and community leaders and we work together to fight COVID. Thank you for establishing the Mayor’s Economic Partners Task Force early in the pandemic to ensure a cohesive approach to policy and program priority setting. This level of collaboration and communication spurs the creativity we will need for a successful and timely recovery.

There is much opportunity for our businesses today however they are also facing many challenges including but not limited to the impact of digitization and disruption in the global economy. Our city has demonstrated great support of our business community, more is needed, and we are here to assist.

We know Ottawa has the potential to be the greatest city in the world if we aspire to do so. A clearly communicated and aspirational vision combined with a community of the whole economic, environment and innovation plan that leverages our strengths and partnerships would give us a competitive edge over other markets. The global economic landscape is changing quickly, and the coming years promise to transform our businesses and our lives more profoundly than we ever imagined. There is much that is unknown and whole industries have the potential to emerge or disappear. Ottawa will either flourish with opportunity or risk being left out. True leadership from by our business, community and political leaders are vital. The key will be how we work together; communicate and achieve our common goals.

We wish to express appreciation to you, the Mayor and City Council, along with city staff for your commitment to economic growth, innovation and our business community. We look forward to working with you to create a diverse and robust economic platform that will ensure a prosperous Ottawa region. Stronger together.

Sincerely,



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