



Submission to the public consultation on Budget 2020

Submitted by: Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas (OCOBIA)

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Introduction

Every year, the City of Ottawa produces a municipal budget. One of the City's most important documents, the budget is the blueprint that defines how resources are collected and allocated.

As part of the budget process, the City is gathering feedback from residents, local businesses and community groups, which helps inform the City's budget priorities and contributes to decisions about investments in services.

About OCOBIA

The Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas (OCOBIA) is a newly-established organization created to enable the city's 19 Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) to speak with a unified voice on urban, suburban and rural issues impacting local communities. OCOBIA aims to support members by shaping policy, sharing best practices and strengthening relationships with the City of Ottawa and other key stakeholders.

BIAs are place-management organizations embedded in the areas they serve. They are community builders, neighbourhood champions and economic drivers. Ottawa BIAs represent more than 6,400 businesses who employ 120,000 people and are funded by nearly \$7.4 million in private sector funding. These resources are re-invested through initiatives that include on-street beautification, programming, promotional campaigns, public safety, and other activities. Globally, there are more than 4,000 like-minded organizations with 2,500 in North America alone.

Budget 2020 Recommendation

The Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas recommends that the Business Improvement Area (BIA) Grant Program be updated to provide more flexibility in what can be funded and an increased amount available for funding.

Business Improvement Area (BIA) Grant Programs

The Business Improvement Area Grant Program provides funding on an annual basis for the following programs:

Mural and Architectural Design Feature Grant Program

This program challenges BIAs, in collaboration with local artists, to develop "wow" moments that will enhance the public realm, create a more vibrant streetscape and enrich the customer experience.

Research Grant Program

This program provides funding contributions to BIAs to assist with research projects that are designed to enhance the economic viability and competitiveness of the BIA.

Anti-Graffiti Grant Program

The BIA Anti-Graffiti Program Funding contribution is available to all eligible BIAs as an annual renewable contribution. The purpose of the fund is to support BIAs and member businesses in adhering to the Graffiti Management By-law 2008-1 requiring the expedient removal of graffiti from all property within the City of Ottawa.

Formation/Expansion Grant Program

The BIA Formation/Expansion Grant Program provides funding grants of up to \$5,000 to business groups that have expressed formal interest to create a Business Improvement Area for their commercial district, or to existing BIAs wishing to expand their boundaries.

The BIA Grant Funding program is, for the most part, intended to match funds with BIAs, which means the City benefits from \$1.00 for every \$0.50 it allocates towards city building initiatives through BIAs.

Current Situation

Data provided by City officials indicates that a significant amount of funding is left unused at the end of the fiscal. City officials do receive proposals to access the funding but unspent funding is generally a result of BIAs not following through on their proposals.

BIAs, on the other hand, have indicated that the Grant program limits the amount of funding that they can apply for, and that the funding does not address some of the more pressing areas such as on-street enhancements. Therefore, the OCOBIA recommendation focusses on the need for increased flexibility, as well as an increase to the total amount of funding available.

More Flexibility

The 2019 Terms and Conditions for the BIA Research Funding Program outlined the following: “The City contribution will not exceed seven thousand five-hundred dollars (\$7,500) per project. A separate application is required for each funding request and a single BIA will not be eligible for more than two (2) financial contributions from the program per year, each limited by a maximum of seven thousand five-hundred dollars (\$7,500) per project in 2019.”

Conducting research is an expensive endeavour depending on the complexity and tools required to gather data. BIAs have indicated that a limit of \$7,500 per research project significantly limits the type and amount of research that can be conducted. Feedback from BIAs is that they would be willing to allocate more matching funds if higher limits were provided, and more funding was available. The same argument was raised for the Mural and Anti-Graffiti funding programs.

BIAs have also indicated that if they were aware that the BIA Grant Program had additional (unused) funding available they may be in a position to apply for additional funding depending on the timelines.

Additional Funding

The activities of a BIA play a vital role in revitalizing and sustaining vibrant environments that go beyond what the services of a city administration can provide alone. The investments made by private-sector funding from property and business owners within the boundaries of a district, together with the professionals they employ, help create tools and strategies that impact how citizens interact, engage

and proliferate within an area. BIAs recognize that strong communities are critical to the success of a city and region and their work is based on the principles of economy, inclusion, vibrancy, identity, and resilience.

All BIAs across Ottawa could benefit from funding available to make repairs to the streetscape. In many cases these costs are far too great for the average budget, and yet BIAs are best positioned to monitor and apply this funding based on the district needs. Access to a funding program to enhance BIA street infrastructure would be beneficial.

Additionally, BIAs could take advantage of additional funding for street maintenance, cleaning and snow removal, and marketing/communication for special community focussed projects.

Finally, given what we're seeing in neighborhoods with respect to social impacts stemming from homelessness, addiction, and mental health, funding that allows BIAs to help finance programs in partnership with organizations working in this field could go a long way. A great example is the Safe & Inclusive work that Downtown Young Street in Toronto is doing: <https://downtownyonge.com/safe-inclusive/>

Conclusion

BIAs in Ottawa are keen to work with the City of Ottawa to improve and promote their districts as shopping and business districts. The role of BIAs is very much aligned to the Policy Directions outlined in the Official Plan: 5 Big Moves for Growth Management, Urban and Community Design, and Economy.

Through increased flexibility in the BIA Grant program, as well as additional funding, BIAs can leverage their community relationships and leaders to assist the City in achieving its objective of affordable, accessible, and economically viable neighbourhoods.