

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF BIAs

In 1967, challenges were facing retailers as a proliferation of shopping malls were springing up on the outskirts of the city. As a result, some merchants were forced to close their shops or even in some instances, follow the crowds to the malls. Vacancies resulted and many local shopping areas began to look run down and seemed doomed to oblivion.

Out of sheer frustration, a group of businessmen including Alex Ling a true visionary in the west end of Toronto, along Bloor Street West, went to City Hall and the Province seeking legislation that would compel all businesses within a designated area to pay a levy for the purpose of revitalizing their business strip through physical improvements and promotional activities. The levy would be collected by the City and turned over to the elected Board of Management to be used as needed. After some persuasion, the idea was finally adopted, and the Business Improvement Area (BIA) legislation was enacted and became Section 204-217 of the Municipal Act. Bloor West Village became the pioneer of the BIA concept and was designated as the first BIA in 1970!

Currently there are more than 300 BIAs in the province of Ontario. The model is used across Canada and throughout the United States and abroad. Businesses, governments, and community members believe in the concept and have seen the successes in the model of “Main Street” communities everywhere.¹

What is a BIA?

A Business Improvement Area (BIA) is an association of commercial property owners and tenants within a defined area who work in partnership with the City to create thriving and safe business areas that attract shoppers, diners, tourists, and new businesses. By working collectively as a BIA, local businesses have the resource capacity (funds and people) to actively enhance the quality of life in their local neighbourhood and the City as a whole.

A Business Improvement Area (BIA) permits local businesses and property owners within a defined district to join together and, with the support of the municipality, organize, finance, improve and promote the area as a commercial district.

Benefits of a BIA

BIAs help form a strong and distinct image for a City’s neighbourhood as its destination to eat, shop, work, and play. This effectively markets the area as a local destination, competing against e-commerce giants and malls, and tourism destinations.

¹ Ontario Business Improvement Area Association *50th ANNIVERSARY & BIA WEEK TOOLKIT*
<https://www.canva.com/design/DAD0wTucZx4/3QtQspl6a0d0ZcrPK9a5CA/view?website#2:celebrating-50-years-of-connecting-people-place>

BIAs can be catalysts for civic improvement and significant contributors to the City's economy and the quality of life of our neighbourhoods. In order to help local commercial areas create thriving, competitive and safe business areas, the City offers a number of programs to BIAs.

BIAs improve their local economies through activities such as:

- Street and sidewalk maintenance and capital improvements
- Promotion of the BIA as a business, employment, tourist or shopping area (business directories, festivals, advertising)
- Hosting neighbourhood festivals and events
- Safety, security and crime prevention initiatives
- Graffiti and poster removal services respecting building facades visible from the street
- Strategic plans for business recruitment, market studies and capital improvements
- Advocate on behalf of their membership as a unified voice²

² Ottawa Coalition of BIAs *What is a BIA?* <https://ocobia.org/what-is-a-bia/>