

April 16, 2020

MAYOR & COUNCIL
CITY OF NANAIMO
Via: Email – Mayor.Council@nanaimo.ca

RE: Nanaimo Business Community Round Table Covid-19 Discussion Results

On April 14, 20+ leaders of the Nanaimo business community came together in a virtual Round Table meeting hosted by the Chamber of Commerce focused on a high-level scan of the current conditions, projections on the plight of business, options, and co-creating recommendations to be presented to local government for 'recovery'.

It was agreed that the dire conditions experienced at the ground level in our local economy cannot be overstated. As a community with a large tourism footprint, the devastation of our travel, transportation, accommodations and tourism operators has been tsunami-like. As a long-time hub for retail, wholesale and services, the widespread sudden shutdowns have put thousands out of work and is sadly illustrated by the shuttered businesses all around our city. Non-profits – charities, service providers and our important arts & culture economy -- have been crushed. For our most vulnerable population, suspension of services by charities and the potential for their long-term loss of service will have a significant negative effect on the fragile health of that population and our community in general.

We applaud Council's thoughtful consideration and actions regarding current social, health and economic preparations and remedies, especially in your last two Council meetings, and for enabling staff to implement immediate and critical measures. Transitioning city services 'online' seems like a positive experience all around. Measures to maintain services to residents and businesses while safeguarding workers has been admirable. Thank you.

Members of the Round Table support your leadership in 'staying the road' on capital project planning and execution. Since such public works projects stimulate the local economy with many projects already in the design, planning and engineering phases, let's not interrupt business any further and be more prepared than other communities when senior levels of government introduce stimulus projects as part of recovery.

The Round Table supports prudent reconsideration of the City's budget plans prior to confirming your previous forecasts and projections and committing to a financial plan for the coming year. We hope your goal would be to find savings re-examining the 'need-to-have versus have-to-have' columns. Our economy has already been seriously damaged and municipal revenues have been lost – income that cannot be replaced -- the same kind of pain our business world is experiencing! That consideration is obviously primary.

Significant challenges and difficult decision-making remain in front of all of us. The Nanaimo Chamber is hoping that the economic and social support lifeblood of Nanaimo – small business – remains prominent in your considerations. Local purchasing by the City and social procurement initiatives should be enhanced to inject life into the local economy.

Micro and small business, key to the downtown core and other areas of a city in which 38% of businesses are licensed as home-based, require triage during these times. Is there an appetite by the City to join business leaders in developing a strategy and programs to assist entrepreneurs/ owners/operators in determining the next steps required to survive the coming 30 days to 9 months; whatever ‘recovery’ looks like; or the ‘the next wave’?

Council must work with senior levels of government to avail Nanaimo of all benefits to support business -- relaxed taxation, sector-focused tax ‘holidays’, grants, subsidies, deferrals (fine for cash flow, but no long-term benefit), no-interest and forgivable loans. This week’s announcements on taxation and commercial rent supports, while announced but not unveiled, may help businesses stay afloat a little longer. We’ll have more comments on these as details are rolled out. For our small business community, every little bit counts but ‘little bits’ are likely not enough to sustain the future of many local Nanaimo businesses.

Lastly, the Chamber / Round Table encourages the Health & Housing Task Force and Homeless Coalition to fast-track food security, shelter, and enhanced hygiene for our homeless. The health of our entire community is at risk as our regional health care facilities could easily be overwhelmed by hundreds currently homeless and hundreds more at risk suddenly requiring intensive or critical care and isolation. It is also essential that social order is closely monitored and maintained so we still have a safe community to venture back into when the time comes.

The Chamber, with Round Table input, looks forward to continuing open communications on these issues with Mayor and Council. The Chamber is the appropriate community connector for continuing collaborative discussions. With our social network, direct membership platforms, provincial & national connections and senior government relationships, we bring a formidable communications force to the table.

In partnership,



KIM SMYTHE, President & CEO