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November 26, 2020

Mayor Fred Eisenberger
Hamilton City Hall
2nd Floor – 71 Main Street West
Hamilton, ON
L8P 4Y5

Dear Mayor Eisenberger,

These are increasingly difficult times for everyone. We empathize that the pandemic has presented you and your government with unprecedented challenges and we thank you for the steps you have taken to ensure public safety and the integrity of our health care system.

As we collectively continue to do what's prudent to fight this virus, we want to remind you that our small, independent businesses – the backbone of our economies – are struggling to survive.

On behalf of the 250+ local businesses that comprise the Waterdown Business Improvement Area (BIA) membership, we ask that you continue to advocate on their behalf when working with your provincial and public health counterparts in implementing the COVID-19 Response Framework. We urge you to consider their fate and ask that you demand a fair and level playing field for all businesses so that our Main Street entrepreneurs have the same opportunity to make it through the pandemic... bruised and scathed but still viable.

Our business operators have followed the guidelines, enforced the rules and invested hundreds to thousands of dollars to protect the safety of their employees and clients and to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. They have willingly done so while suffering significant revenue losses due to capacity restrictions and a rapidly evolving economic environment.

They have lost sleep worrying about the livelihood and well-being of their staff members. They have pivoted again and again as the situation continues to unfold. Some have been eligible for emergency relief packages, many have not. Businesses that were the last to re-open in the initial Provincial Framework were unfortunately the first to be closed and/or severely impacted again under the Control stage of the new COVID-19 Response Framework. Our new businesses are particularly at risk.

We lost a handful of businesses at the start of the pandemic. Many others barely made it through the first round of restrictions, struggling just to cover their operating costs. Yet they remained optimistic that the measures they put in place would help them regain some ground with peak holiday sales just around the corner – sales they count on to get them through the slower winter months. Now that Hamilton has moved into the Control phase, any optimism they had is fading fast. Three Waterdown BIA businesses announced their closures this week and we have heard of several more at risk of shutting permanently.

These are businesses that did the right things – that followed protocols, went above and beyond to install shields, enforce distancing, outfit employees with all required PPE and limit capacity in their locations. These are businesses that are ideally set-up to avoid crowds and long line-ups – that cater to more personalized, one-on-one service and are, therefore, well-equipped for contact tracing. These are businesses that know their customers, often by name, and are committed to operating in a way that puts their safety first. Which begs the question – why are these the businesses first and most impacted in the Framework while other, larger businesses with conditions far less ideal for curtailing the spread of COVID-19 are able to operate with far fewer restrictions?

The scales seem unfairly tipped to benefit the large and already thriving corporations while penalizing the independents who contribute and define the very character of our communities. Our fear is that our Main Streets will be unrecognizable on the other side of this pandemic if our BIA businesses are unable to fairly and safely compete; and if they do not have champions, such as yourself, fighting for their survival.

Let us be clear – our businesses are committed to following guidelines and doing their part to stop the spread. They are, however, looking for fair and equitable treatment.

We know tough decisions lay ahead. We urge you to keep the health of our local businesses and economies in the forefront just as they continue to always keep the health and safety of their patrons as top priority.

Sincerely,
Waterdown BIA Directors, on behalf of the Waterdown BIA membership

cc Councillor Judi Partridge, Ward 15