

HALIFAX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



2021-2022 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission

**Presented to:
Hon. Karen Casey,
Nova Scotia Minister of Finance**

December 22nd, 2020

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Halifax Chamber of Commerce Update

2020 has been a challenging time for our business community. The pandemic has forced many businesses to pivot their business model, temporarily close, and sadly, for some has meant the end of their operations. The Halifax Chamber has been working diligently to supply our membership with up-to-date and relevant information, provide virtual networking opportunities, and convene with stakeholders to ensure our membership has access to the key decision-makers. Our 2021-2022 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission will expand on our 2020 Issue Note and look to focus on what can be done to mitigate the outcome of both the virus and the restrictions with a view to rebuilding our economy in 2021. The Halifax Chamber agrees with the provincial government that Good Health Policy is Good Economic Policy, but we also know that the good health policy which has sustained our province and at one time, the Atlantic Bubble, has also had unintended consequences that affected the sustainability of many of our small and medium-sized businesses, our drivers of economic growth. We hope that the provincial government will not only work towards the changes that can have a positive impact on the business community today but also on the policy redevelopment that will improve the sustainability of our business community for years to come.

Once again, we would like to thank the provincial government for their support in the Nova Scotia Business and Labour Economic Coalition calls and for the quick policy changes that allowed many of our businesses to safely continue to serve our community. We hope that this relationship will last well after the pandemic is only a memory.

About the Chamber

As mentioned in our Issue Note, the overall goal of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce is to create value and prosperity for our over 1,750 members and

their over 65,000 employees. Through our 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, we are providing the services businesses need, hosting events that will help them learn, and are advocating for the conditions in the economy that enhance their prosperity. Our task forces, Fostering Private Sector Growth and Accessing A Skilled Workforce, are currently working towards goals that aid in our member's prosperity and economic growth of the Municipality. In a non-Covid-19 year, we host numerous in-person events that focus on the betterment and sustainability of our business community. Our signature and annual events often feature local entrepreneurs and immigrants, post-secondary institutions, and prestigious business organizations. Each year we provide our members the opportunity to hear the state of the Municipality and Province during luncheons and celebrate their successes at our Business Awards. The Halifax Chamber has since moved many of our events online, including multiple webinar series, virtual networking, and now within the current health protocols, have begun in-person and hybrid events.

Executive Summary

There is no way around it. 2020 has been a difficult year for many, especially those working in, or owning a business in the hardest-hit sectors like tourism, hospitality, and the arts. Our 2021-2022 Pre-Budget Submission focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on our business community and what government can do to mitigate the impacts. The submission focuses on optimizing the size of government through publicizing spending amounts and ensuring grants and supports are delivered with a purpose and to those that need them. It looks at ensuring our business environment sees less friction and more openness to communication and transparency. An Economic Plan that can guide our employees and employers through the darkest of times into the light and rapid testing that can reduce quarantine times and increase tourism.

Ensuring we retain our skilled workforce remains an important, if not essential, to our survival through this and we want the provincial government to ensure statistics are relevant and meaningful and that our schools have a consistent plan for closing. It is also pivotal that we reflect on the disproportional challenges faced by women and underrepresented groups during the pandemic and what changes can ensure not just their recovery but growth and prosperity.

Promoting Halifax as a major city through increased tourism marketing and advertising and funding our transit systems for Nova Scotians and travelers are just some of the ways we work towards a prosperous time after the vaccine. The road to recovery isn't straight and we don't expect the provincial government to know the answers, but we truly hope to see the principles to develop a plan for economic growth, for our schools and for a way business can remain or become sustainable through this pandemic and beyond.

Recommendations

- ❖ Provide the public with a line-by-line explanation for the expenditure of COVID-19 funding, including health care, business support, and the procurement of PPE.
- ❖ Provide additional funds to tourism and hospitality operators, aside from the two programs now, given his money is likely coming back.
- ❖ Provide Nova Scotians with a concrete set of actions for the economic recovery that includes support for businesses, reimagining policy, community-based support, and a plan for economic growth.
- ❖ Ensure exports of Nova Scotian goods and services to current and new markets is a priority for 2021.
- ❖ While providing financial support for those businesses that must close to reduce the spread of COVID-19 is necessary, we ask that government also look at what the unintended consequences could be for our small and medium businesses, like retailers and for those businesses that supply products and services to closed or restricted businesses.
- ❖ Promote and provide mental health supports for the business community.
- ❖ Youth and underrepresented groups employment numbers were misrepresented in the November jobs update. We would like the provincial government to determine the true level of unemployment for these groups to show the full picture of Nova Scotia's workforce and the impact on sectors like tourism, hospitality, and services providers. Specific programming will be needed to spur youth, underrepresented group, and immigrant employment as we come out of this pandemic.
- ❖ Provide parents, teachers, and students with a concrete and consistent plan for school closures, testing, and childcare, rather than on a case-by-case business.
- ❖ Utilize rapid-testing for high school-aged kids when cases are located to fast-track positive tests and allow for faster entry back into the workforce for parents and guardians.
- ❖ Provide students with materials in the form of a "School in a box" package that contains grade-specific learning tools and materials.
- ❖ Provide specific supports for youth, underrepresented groups, and immigrants to ensure new workers and displaced workers have employment opportunities coming out of the pandemic.
- ❖ Ensure that the "All Together" Plan updates are made public to increase awareness and subsequently, accountability and transparency.
- ❖ Increase Tourism Nova Scotia's budget by \$10 million for media and advertising campaigns to promote travel to Nova Scotia prior to the travel restrictions being

lessened or removed completely. Allocate an additional \$15 million to directly support tourism operators for liquidity and infrastructure.

- ❖ Implement testing at the Halifax Stanfield Airport to reduce quarantine time, if negative, to increase travel into and out of Nova Scotia.
- ❖ Provide the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) with support for Halifax Transit through the funding that was given by the Federal Government.
- ❖ Through the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Committee, Municipal Affairs policy and programming achieve meaningful change over the next year to 2 years.
- ❖ Grant greater powers to the municipality to increase the development and spur the creation of new apartments and condos.
- ❖ Ensure a safe return plan for all government employees to their offices throughout the HRM.
- ❖ Promote the safety and need to shop and dine locally with an investment in a confidence building plan.

Reviewing our 2020-2021 Recommendations

When we submitted our [2020-2021 pre-budget submission](#), like everyone else, we were not privy to the impact a pandemic would have on our business community, our government's spending, and our daily life. Knowing now what we didn't know then, we are reviewing our 2020-2021 recommendations with a grain of salt. Many recommendations will carry over unto 2022-2023 when the world resumes life "as normal", but we would like to reflect on the recommendations that were indeed acted upon. One such recommendation is the reduction of the provincial corporate tax rate to 14%. We were happy with this change to bring Nova Scotia from the highest corporate tax rate in Canada to the second

highest at 14%. For perspective, seven Canadian provinces and territories have provincial corporate tax rates that are 12% or under. The business community is especially thankful given the increasing financial constraints of COVID-19. While we didn't see our city enter the 5G market, we were happy that Nova Scotia's broadband capacity has expanded, allowing more businesses to "do business" anywhere in the province.

Optimize the size of government

- If departmental expenses are rising without actual need, we recommend, on behalf of our members, to utilize these funds for debt repayment.
- Explain the increase in departmental expenses over inflation.
- Remove the Capped Assessment Program but continue to have tools in place to protect those who would become vulnerable when the CAP is dissolved.
- Ensure there are enough grants and programs in place to support new business growth in our province.
- Invest in countries outside China and Europe for export development.
- Increase the number of entrepreneurial classes for high school students to ensure they are aware of the potential of business creation and leadership.
- Reduce the provincial corporate tax rate to 14%.
- Grant "Ability-to-Pay" legislation to the Municipality to aid in labour negotiations.
- Acknowledge publicly the role of Federal transfers in achieving a balanced budget
- Set as one of its strategic objectives the balancing of its annual budget without reliance on equalization payments and the setting of a target date for achievement

Creating a Frictionless Business Environment

- What are the savings plans for each government department? E.g., Cost savings

from the Business Navigator Program or increased technology across departments.

- Research the feasibility of a digital service squad to be utilized like the business navigator program in the department of regulatory affairs & service Effectiveness.
- Grant the municipality Natural Persons Powers for greater autonomy.
- If not already done, research opening new export markets for Nova Scotia goods, like Africa or South America.

Enhancing our Skilled Workforce

- Review the potential impact of our high provincial corporate tax rate to ensure this is not an impediment to the immigration of business owners and entrepreneurs. Reduce it to 14% in 2020 leading 12% in the future, therefore in line with other Canadian Provinces.
- Ensure the business community is aware of the grants and programs aimed at helping businesses become accessible by the required year, 2030.

Promoting the Growth of Halifax as a Major City

- Ensure Halifax does not lag behind other cities by providing our businesses with access to 5G.

Optimizing the Size of Government

Budgets and Spending

The Chamber has been very supportive of the funding provided by the provincial government for Covid19 support and vocal about the gaps that we hear about from our members. When it comes to spending there have been areas that our members have brought to us in concern. One unexplained phenomenon in the data is that there was a 3800-

net loss in health care jobs, yet, more than half of the province's \$580 million covid-19 spending this year was on health care, millions of which went to new hiring at hospitals, according to last week's report by the Auditor General¹. We would like to know where the discrepancy lies and if the provincial government will be making these new hires, or the spending for the new hires, public. In our 2020 Issue Note, we asked if the provincial government is aware of the total cost of the pandemic and if there will be more supports to follow. We were pleased to see the creation of the Small Business Impact Grant Part 2 – Restaurant, Bar, and Fitness and Leisure Business Stream², but, as will be mentioned in greater detail in the next section, we are looking for greater support of those businesses that feel the unintended consequences on even partial restrictions.

Recommendation: Provide the public with a line-by-line explanation for the expenditure of COVID-19 funding, including health care, business support, and the procurement of PPE.

Grants, Loans, and Capital

The Chamber is happy with the quick turnaround of the provincial government to acknowledge and work toward filling the gaps of the federal program. Programs like the Small Business Impact Grant helped our business community and their employees' weather through the worst of the storm, but many businesses are still being severely impacted by COVID-19 and will for years to follow. Tourism operators, businesses like hotels and travel organizations, will continue to feel the effects of COVID, probably until there is a vaccine. Recently, the Tourism Sector Financing Assistance Program has been released and while we are encouraged to see support for a few large tourism operators, we wonder, if the guarantee is not needed, if businesses do not default on their loans, then will the \$50M be

¹ Nova Scotia government has spent \$580M so far responding to the pandemic | CBC News

² Coronavirus (COVID-19): financial help and social supports - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada

returned to treasury or be provided as further support to tourism operators?

Recommendation: Provide additional funds to tourism and hospitality operators, aside from the two programs now, given his money is likely coming back.

Creating a Frictionless Business Environment

A Plan of Action: Economic Recovery

The business community needs specifics to understand how government will set priorities and goals to aid the private sector as we begin to see recovery in Nova Scotia. We want and need a plan that outlines how we will revitalize tourism, encourage safe dining, staying locally at safe and clean hotels, and funding/programs that can keep a business afloat until the pandemic is behind us. In our 2020 Issue Note we mentioned plans like that of New Zealand's Alert Levels Summary, which explained what will happen and to whom if case numbers increase. While it might be too late for a plan similar to this, we are now hoping that government will provide Nova Scotians with an economic recovery plan, akin to British Columbia's "Stronger BC for Everyone"³ plan or "Alberta's Recovery Plan"⁴. These plans provide Albertans and British Columbians with certainty, transparency, and accountability. As an example, the Alberta plan speaks directly to ways in which the government will create jobs. They plan on "supporting a competitive business environment' through the introduction of an Innovation Employment Grant to companies that invest in research and development to incentivize job creation in high growth new industries"⁵.

Alberta's plan also ensures that new technologies will be exported all over the globe⁶. Nova Scotia

exporters felt the impact the pandemic had on its exports; therefore, we hope that government will also ensure that the exportation of Nova Scotia goods and services to current and new markets is a top priority.

Recommendation: Provide Nova Scotians with a concrete set of actions for the economic recovery that includes support for businesses, reimagining policy, community-based support, and a plan for economic growth.

Recommendation: Ensure exports of Nova Scotian goods and services to current and new markets is a priority for 2021.

Support for Businesses and Employees

We are thankful that the government has provided support for local bars, restaurants, and fitness facilities through this second 'shut down'⁷, but there are other businesses like small retail shops who are also facing declining revenues due to public concern over the increase in cases in the Central zone. We have heard from numerous businesses that because of the new restrictions, customers are just not heading downtown to shop. Some of these are new but we have heard similar comments for six months as some in the private sector and the majority of government continue to work from home. We worry, especially as the holiday season can be so important for our SMEs, that the longer the second "restrictions" remain the more our small business community within the HRM will be impacted. In Alberta, it was acknowledged that small businesses contributed to very little spread of COVID-19 infections when compared to social gatherings⁸. We would like to continue to see our small and medium businesses prioritized and the impacts of closures analyzed when new restrictions are implemented.

It is also important that the provincial government focus on what mental health support can be made

³ [StrongerBC | Government of British Columbia](#)

⁴ [alberta-recovery-plan.pdf](#)

⁵ [IBID, page 13](#)

⁶ [IBID, page 13](#)

⁷ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): financial help and social supports - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada](#)

⁸ [Corbella: Retailers relieved government has not locked them down | Calgary Herald](#)

available for Nova Scotians, both as employers and employees and as citizens. Entrepreneurs faced extreme challenges when making decisions to keep their business open or close, retain or lay off employees and find and apply for government funding. Many of our webinars were devoted to the mental health of our members and practices and programs that are available through different providers.

Recommendation: While providing financial support for those businesses that must close to reduce the spread of COVID-19 is necessary, we ask that government also look at what the unintended consequences could be for our small and medium businesses, like retailers and for those businesses that supply products and services to closed or restricted businesses.

Recommendation: Promote and provide mental health supports for the business community.

Our Skilled Workforce

Unemployment Levels

We are very lucky, at the Halifax Chamber, to have bright, engaged, and aware members of our task force(s). Recently, one of our Task Force Members looked into the November jobs report and found some concerning issues which could potentially affect not only the public opinion of the state of employment in Halifax but also the need for new funding programs in our province. The November jobs report showed that our employment numbers were not only back to pre-COVID levels but exceeding them. This is difficult to imagine given what we are hearing from our members in many sectors like tourism, art and service, and hospitality. Releasing these numbers without providing context will not show the full picture of the impact of COVID-19. As an example, there is a large cohort of people under the age of 25 who lost their jobs in the hard-

hit sectors (restaurants, retail, accommodations, arts, etc.) and who have stopped looking for work. If you are unemployed and not looking for work, you don't count as an unemployed person for the survey and for calculating the unemployment rate. You must be actively looking for work to be considered unemployed. So, when this category of workers was unsuccessfully looking for work back in June, they showed up in the stats and caused a larger unemployment number. Now that many have given up and are not looking for work in these sectors anymore, the unemployment rate has artificially improved by not counting them in the equation anymore - though they are still unemployed⁹. We would like to remind the government that alongside the statistics that are used in conversations with the public and organizations, context should be given to ensure that Nova Scotians understand the total picture of employment and employment levels.

Recommendation: Youth and underrepresented groups employment numbers were misrepresented in the November jobs update. We would like the provincial government to determine the true level of unemployment for these groups to show the full picture of Nova Scotia's workforce and the impact on sectors like tourism, hospitality, and services providers. Specific programming will be needed to spur youth, underrepresented group, and immigrant employment as we come out of this pandemic.

Recommendation: Provide specific supports for youth, underrepresented groups, and immigrants to ensure new workers and displaced workers have employment opportunities coming out of the pandemic.

Schools

While we have had a handful of cases in our schools since we submitted our 2020 Issue Note, the majority have remained open and safe. This has been welcome news for many parents who are not able to work from home or rely on school as a safe

⁹ [Employment by industry, three-month moving average, unadjusted for seasonality, provinces and economic regions \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-662-x/2020001/article/00001-eng.htm)

space for their children. We are though, concerned that there is no definite plan of action for a “case” at a school. While some schools with cases have remained closed for weeks, others are for only days. Certainty and continuity are both big factors for both assurances that there is a concrete plan of action and for the trust that schools are safe. That is why we were surprised to see the early dismissal and late start for students, a longer break, as it will impact the many parents who work in sectors like hospitality and services. This announcement came as a surprise and will leave many in a rush to find childcare. We asked for supports for parents/businesses for hybrid models in our Issue Note, and now we add supports for parents when schools close for cleaning and ‘out of an abundance of caution’. In the province’s Back to School Plan, there was no mention of schools closing for varying number of days, but rather a framework for parents, teachers, and students¹⁰. It is now mid-December, and this plan has not been publicized. We were glad to see that the province will be infusing another \$14.3 million into education for the purchase of PPE, food programs, etc.¹¹. In the future we would like to see every child be given a “school in a box” that would reflect the materials needed for learning. This would benefit those who need to learn from home, due to COVID or not, and would ensure that parents had the materials needed to supervise learning while working from home.

Recommendation: Provide parents, teachers, and students with a concrete and consistent plan for school closures, testing, and childcare, rather than on a case-by-case business.

Recommendation: Utilize rapid-testing for high school-aged kids when cases are located to fast-track positive tests and allow for faster entry back into the workforce for parents and guardians.

Recommendation: Provide students with materials in the form of a “School in a box” package that contains grade-specific learning tools and materials.

Diversity & Inclusion

In our 2020 Issue Note we asked the government if they will be providing public updates for the “All Together” diversity and inclusion plan. We would like to reiterate that we believe this would increase transparency and accountability of the plan and ensure that the public is aware of the goals and outcome of the plan. We would also like to take this opportunity to inform the provincial government that the Chamber has begun the process of creating our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy to ensure diversity and inclusion in our hiring practices, on our boards, and ingrained in our event speaker selection. We want to ensure the Halifax Chamber not only asks the government to be diverse and inclusive but reflects that in our operations as well.

Recommendation: Ensure that the “All Together” Plan updates are made public to increase awareness and subsequently, accountability and transparency.

Promoting the Growth of Halifax as a Major City

Tourism Nova Scotia

While the Chamber agrees that the 14-day quarantine for travelers outside Nova Scotia and the Atlantic Bubble did play a significant role in our low case numbers, it also created a significant decline in our tourism sector. The numbers paint the picture, with revenues for tourism operators down 65%, from \$2.6 billion to just \$900 million¹². With so much riding on tourism, we can't let this market dwindle. Members of the tourism sector often told us of the challenges they faced promoting travel around our province, even to Nova Scotians even with all health precautions taken seriously. We continue to push for testing at the airport to lessen quarantine time, but

¹⁰ [back-to-school-plan.pdf \(novascotia.ca\)](#)

¹¹ [N.S. to spend another \\$14.3 million on school programs, drinking water - Halifax | Globalnews.ca](#)

¹² [COVID-19 crushes Nova Scotia's tourism season | CBC News](#)

we also would like to suggest increasing Tourism Nova Scotia's budget and programming to support tourism operators to reflect the need for greater awareness of Nova Scotia to non-Nova Scotians once it is safe to travel freely. We need to reinvigorate our tourism operators, not only with cash flow but with enhanced marketing and media awareness. On December 15th, Scotland announced 60 Million Pounds in Tourism support funding to support the sector in 2021. Equivalent funding in Nova Scotia would be approx. \$25 Million. Nova Scotia has a unique location with low cases, and it makes sense that we would be one of the first destinations chosen by travelers as the pandemic eases. Paying approximately half of what the province of Nova Scotia pays for the ferry to the US to attract 17,500 visitors or \$10M to increase the over 2 Million visitors that come to Nova Scotia annually is a wise investment.

Recommendation: Increase Tourism Nova Scotia's budget by \$10 million for media and advertising campaigns to promote travel to Nova Scotia prior to the travel restrictions being lessened or removed completely. Allocate an additional \$15 million to directly support tourism operators for liquidity and infrastructure.

Arrivals Testing

Arrivals testing. We now know it can be done and can reduce asymptomatic spread. It is time to utilize this service at our airports and reduce the quarantine period, thus allowing travelers, family members, and essential workers to know they are entering our province safely and to increase travel and tourism to our province. The Province of Alberta has recently launched a testing program at the Calgary International Airport that allows international passengers to quarantine for less time if they test negative¹³. With dwindling airlines flying into and out of the Atlantic Provinces, testing at

arrival might be the key to sustaining our airports and retaining employees. The Montreal Airport is participating in a pilot project wherein passengers pay a fee for a test when flying to France (where restrictions are severe)¹⁴. It is possible then to provide rapid testing as an alternative to the full 14-day quarantine. The Halifax Chamber, like many other organizations, has been adamant that rapid testing should be part of our plan for living with COVID-19.

Recommendation: Implement testing at the Halifax Stanfield Airport to reduce quarantine time, if negative, to increase travel into and out of Nova Scotia.

Transit Funding

While we were pleased to hear that many Haligonians, whether resident or business, were able to pay their property tax bill. We are still aware of the revenue loss faced by Halifax Municipality due to the reduction in transit users, at about 75%¹⁵, and the decision to eliminate rider fares as the onset. Transit accounted for just over \$29 million of the \$44 million in losses¹⁶. In other major municipalities, Transit is supported by their respective provincial government, yet this is not the case for Halifax. Quebec injected nearly \$400 million into their public transit agencies¹⁷, through the use of funding that was made available from Ottawa¹⁸, yet Halifax Transit saw none of the same. The Halifax Regional Municipality is Canada's largest municipality (geographically speaking) and carries numerous riders over dozens of routes to jobs, schools, and businesses. If Halifax is a creature of the province, and therefore so is transit, we ask why the provincial government did not support HRM through funding to mitigate the loss of transit revenue?

Recommendation: Provide the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) with support for Halifax Transit

¹³ [COVID-19 Testing at YYC](#)

¹⁴ [Montreal's Trudeau airport to offer rapid COVID-19 tests as part of pilot project | Globalnews.ca](#)

¹⁵ [Halifax Transit will join other public transit providers in seeking federal funding | Local | News | The Chronicle Herald](#)

¹⁶ [HRM to vote on \\$85M in budget cuts in response to COVID-19 | CBC News](#)

¹⁷ [Quebec injects \\$400M in emergency funding to help public transit agencies amid coronavirus crisis | Globalnews.ca](#)

¹⁸ IBID

through the funding that was given by the Federal Government.

Affordable Housing

The Halifax Chamber is aware that there is a lack of affordable housing in Halifax. Our members, especially our development organizations tell us that part of the issue lies with slow municipal development approval times, which often limit the number of units available to rent/own. As mentioned in our 2020 Issue Note, we are asking the provincial government to grant the municipality greater powers to ensure quicker development approvals which should hopefully increase the vacancy rate and drive down prices. The Chamber is wary that the introduction of rent control will harm the development of new rentals and condos. While Rent Control can help those that are currently living in rentals and during the pandemic, landlords will “struggle to maintain and upgrade their buildings, leading to a decrease in the housing available for low-income tenants”¹⁹. We hope the government is looking at long-term solutions and working with the municipality to ensure a long-term solution is created for those in need of affordable housing.

We are also acutely aware that the province itself has significant responsibility in this area. The Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Committee should be empowered with the real ability to affect policy change. We have heard from our members over the past few months that putting the right people in the room and empowering them with the ability to effect change can help solve the problem. Municipal Affairs need to develop proactive, not reactive innovative programming that deals with the supply issue. Significant funding, education and legislation needs to be developed to ensure affordable housing is integrated into new development, not segregated from new development.

Recommendation: Through the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Committee, Municipal Affairs

policy and programming achieve meaningful change over the next year to 2 years.

Recommendation: Grant greater powers to the municipality to increase the development and spur the creation of new apartments and condos.

Safe Return to Work and Consumer Confidence

So many of our businesses, especially in the downtown core of Halifax, rely on the magnitude of government employees that frequent their locations for lunch, meetings, and shopping. When COVID hit and government employees began working from home, many businesses saw a dramatic decline in their sales, forcing them to make the difficult decision to close or lay off employees. While some government employees have since returned to the office, consumer confidence that it is safe to resume dining out and shopping local has waxed and waned. While we understand and were in support of the short closures to stem Wave 2, we would hope the government would continue to support businesses through media awareness of the safety and need of shopping and dining local and through the safe return of government employees to offices in our downtown cores.

Recommendation: Ensure a safe return plan for all government employees to their offices throughout the HRM.

Recommendation: Promote the safety and need to shop and dine locally with an investment in a confidence building plan.

Conclusion

We commend the province on the work they have done during COVID-19 and the communication and relationship developed through the Nova Scotia Business and Labour Economic Coalition. There is, though, still much to be done though, to ensure our business community can indeed grow and flourish

¹⁹ [Newly imposed rent control won't solve N.S. affordable housing shortfall: landlords | The Star](#)

and increase our province's economic capacity. We ask that you carefully review our recommendations and provide feedback so that we can continue our conversation at task force meetings, in-person and virtual events and during one-on-one discussions with our members.

Recommendations

- ❖ Provide the public with a line-by-line explanation for the expenditure of COVID-19 funding, including health care, business support, and the procurement of PPE.
- ❖ Provide additional funds to tourism and hospitality operators, aside from the two programs now, given his money is likely coming back.
- ❖ Provide Nova Scotians with a concrete set of actions for the economic recovery that includes support for businesses, reimagining policy, community-based support, and a plan for economic growth.
- ❖ Ensure exports of Nova Scotian goods and services to current and new markets is a priority for 2021.
- ❖ While providing financial support for those businesses that must close to reduce the spread of COVID-19 is necessary, we ask that government also look at what the unintended consequences could be for our small and medium businesses, like retailers and for those businesses that supply products and services to closed or restricted businesses.
- ❖ Promote and provide mental health supports for the business community.
- ❖ Youth and underrepresented groups employment numbers were misrepresented in the November jobs update. We would like the provincial government to determine the true level of unemployment for these groups to show the full picture of Nova Scotia's workforce and the impact on sectors like tourism, hospitality, and services providers. Specific programming will be needed to spur youth, underrepresented group, and immigrant employment as we come out of this pandemic.
- ❖ Provide parents, teachers, and students with a concrete and consistent plan for school closures, testing, and childcare, rather than on a case-by-case business.
- ❖ Utilize rapid-testing for high school-aged kids when cases are located to fast-track positive tests and allow for faster entry back into the workforce for parents and guardians.
- ❖ Provide students with materials in the form of a "School in a box" package that contains grade-specific learning tools and materials.
- ❖ Provide specific supports for youth, underrepresented groups, and immigrants to ensure new workers and displaced workers have employment opportunities coming out of the pandemic.
- ❖ Ensure that the "All Together" Plan updates are made public to increase awareness and subsequently, accountability and transparency.
- ❖ Increase Tourism Nova Scotia's budget by \$10 million for media and advertising campaigns to promote travel to Nova Scotia prior to the travel restrictions being lessened or removed completely. Allocate an additional \$15 million to directly support tourism operators for liquidity and infrastructure.
- ❖ Implement testing at the Halifax Stanfield Airport to reduce quarantine time, if negative, to increase travel into and out of Nova Scotia.
- ❖ Provide the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) with support for Halifax Transit through the funding that was given by the Federal Government.
- ❖ Through the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Committee, Municipal Affairs policy and programming achieve meaningful change over the next year to 2 years.

- ❖ Grant greater powers to the municipality to increase the development and spur the creation of new apartments and condos.
- ❖ Ensure a safe return plan for all government employees to their offices throughout the HRM.
- ❖ Promote the safety and need to shop and dine locally with an investment in a confidence building plan.

Sincerely,



Patrick Sullivan
President & CEO
Halifax Chamber of Commerce

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