



**FREDERICTON
CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE**
— The Voice of Business —

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17 April 2020

Premier Blaine Higgs
Chancery Place
P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB
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Via email: blaine.higgs@gnb.ca

Dear Premier Higgs

Re: Looking Towards a Plan to Re-Open NB's Economy

The Province's leadership team deserves much praise in its handling of the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis. Early intervention with decisive action seems to have made a big difference to flattening the curve in New Brunswick – particularly when you look on the other side of our borders and see the issues happening in Quebec, Nova Scotia and the United States. The daily news conferences with you and Dr Russell have been a calming force and we appreciate getting information from our officials in such a straight-forward and regular manner.

We also appreciate the continued availability of our local government caucus members. The lines of communication have been open since your election in 2018 and during this crisis that level of openness has actually increased and we have met and communicated regularly with ministers Wilson, Cardy and Carr along with members of their staff in addition to other individuals from all sectors of government and all parties. We thank them as well – we realize their time is even more precious than during normal times.

For our organization's part, we have focused on:

- Getting regular, timely and clear information to the region's business community.
- Providing educational opportunities focused on navigating the current crisis.
- Advocating for support to local business from all levels of government. Including financial support, policy changes and regulatory tweaks. Due to the need for governments to act quickly and get programs up and running, we have extensively advocated for alterations to recently announced programs, that have not had the usual time periods to identify gaps.
- Communicating to the public what businesses remain open and how their operations have been altered to comply with orders and best practices. We launched our "Open, Operational, Offering Help" listing as a community resource to let people know what businesses remain open, how

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their operations have been modified and if they are offering any services to other local businesses to help one another get through the crisis.

- Encouraging the business community to fully comply with the recommendations and orders of the province. The current health and economic crisis are inseparable. The best thing we can collectively do for both the economy and public health in this moment is follow the recommendations of our health officials in order to flatten the curve and expedite the recovery process. The better we all do with this, the more we can mitigate the damage done to our health and our economy.

We are already seeing the resiliency and innovative spirit in our community and in our businesses. People are learning to adapt, businesses are pivoting to delivery and curbside pickup options that allow them to continue to operate – or in some cases, retooling their operations entirely to join the fight against COVID-19. These actions are mitigating losses in the short-term, but in order to survive in the medium- and long-term, businesses will have to get back to something resembling normal operations.

We understand that the Province’s leadership team has been discussing a post-COVID-19 recovery plans and options – this makes good sense. We agree that a pre-condition to “re-opening the economy” is ensuring that the COVID-19 threat is under control to the satisfaction of Public Health. Indeed we hope that they are actively involved in ongoing discussions about the timing, process and nature of what a reopen would look like.

Of course, all New Brunswickers – including the business community – are keen to start getting back some normalcy, but we want to do so safely and not backtrack on our progress or excellent health outcomes to date. Further – as we are sure you are aware, getting businesses back up and running isn’t as simple as turning on a switch – businesses will need information and time before ramping back up.

It will be a complex undertaking to develop a plan for business in the province to reopen and business owners should be involved in the planning and there must be open, honest communication between the government and the business community. To this end, we think the time is right to bring the province’s business community into these discussions regarding the recovery process to ensure public officials have the best ‘on-the-ground’ information possible. At a minimum, with our consistently low number of COVID-19 cases, pressure is growing on the Province to start providing some guidance on questions such as:

- What metrics / criteria will be used to determine when businesses will be allowed to reopen?
- Will reopening be done on a community-by-community basis, or on an industry-by-industry basis, or some other basis?



- Will reopening be done in phases? How many?
- Which businesses will be included in which phases?
- Can we re-open more broadly internally before opening up our borders?
- How does reopening schools and daycares fit into the plan?
- What criteria will be used to determine when additional phases of reopening will occur?
- What restrictions on social distancing and crowd sizes within businesses will remain in place?
- Will businesses still restricted have some type of ongoing support?
- What circumstances will allow for social distancing and crowd size restrictions to be eased or eliminated?
- What measures will business owners be expected to implement prior to reopening to ensure the health and safety of customers and staff?

Of course, we understand that the situation is dynamic, and it is not possible for government, business or anyone else to have all the answers today, but public and private discourse is turning more and more towards recovery. These are the types of questions that our organization is being asked already and having a plan in place that will energize the private sector to roll out when certain goals /metrics / targets are met is imperative.

We agree with the statement made by Marcel LeBrun and David Alston in their commentary yesterday: “A week-by-week approach will only cause uncertainty and economic loss. We need a plan. We also need to remain flexible to changing conditions.” Their overall thesis is that New Brunswick has done great with phase 1 – flattening the curve; now we have to do a great job at getting our recovery right.

They’re right - NB was on rocky economic footing before the crisis, which is now getting worse by the day - this recovery has to be (a) planned and (b) executed perfectly – business should be part of both phases.

Sincerely,

Karen Grant
Owner, Kiers Marketing
President, Fredericton Chamber of Commerce

Krista Ross
CEO, Fredericton Chamber of Commerce



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cc: Hon. Mary Wilson, Minister of Economic Development and Small Business
cc: Hon. Jeff Carr, Minister of Environment and Local Government
cc: Hon. Dominic Cardy, Minister of Education
cc: Dr. Jennifer Russell, Chief Medical Officer
cc: Mayor Mike O'Brien, City of Fredericton
cc: Kevin Vickers, Leader, Liberal Party of New Brunswick
cc: David Coon, Leader, Green Party of New Brunswick
cc: Kris Austin, Leader, People's Alliance of New Brunswick
cc: Cheryl Hansen, Clerk of the Executive Council