

September 23rd, 2019

Open Letter to Honourable John Horgan
Premier
Province of British Columbia
West Annex, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

By email to: Premier@gov.bc.ca

Dear Premier Horgan,

Today marks the first day of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Convention with the theme of resiliency and change. To start the dialogue, several of BC's largest business and arts and culture stakeholder groups are calling for your government to take bold action to help small businesses struggling to survive massive property tax increases. Local businesses and community arts and culture organizations are being pushed out of our communities. The province has the opportunity to take action to make our communities more resilient by protecting our local businesses and arts organizations and to help them flourish.

The policy on the table that has been endorsed by the municipalities, the business community, and the arts community is the creation of a new commercial property 'subclass.' This will allow municipalities to tax the unbuilt development potential above businesses at a rate lower than the current commercial rate. We urge the Government of BC to take the immediate steps needed to provide municipalities this tool which can provide real, targeted tax relief to those small businesses which are the most impacted, in time for the upcoming tax year.

When this proposal is discussed during UBCM, we expect there to be significant municipal support. By giving this optional tool to municipalities, the Government of BC will demonstrate to local governments, the business community, the arts and culture community, and to the public that it recognizes the problem facing our local business owners and it has taken action by allowing an option that will help them thrive.

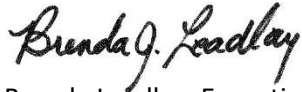
As Vancouver Mayor Kennedy Stewart recently wrote to you, "the viability of independent small businesses, and the art, culture and non-profit sectors in Metro Vancouver is under threat, particularly for those in neighbourhoods that are experiencing a fast pace of change and dramatic increase in market valuation." We agree with this statement and encourage the Province to publicly declare during UBCM that they will provide this much needed tool for municipalities in time for the 2020 tax year.

We believe that this option will deliver the flexibility that will help many small businesses, arts and culture groups and our communities. We would be pleased to work with staff to provide more details.

Sincerely,



Patricia Barnes
The Vancouver Business Improvement Association



Brenda Leadlay, Executive Director
BC Alliance for Arts + Culture



David Crawford, Interim CEO
Greater Vancouver Board of Trade



Val Litwin, President and CEO
BC Chamber of Commerce



Elia Kirby, President
Great Northern Way Scene Shop and Arts Factory Society



Aaron Aerts, Western Canada Economist
Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses



Anne McMullin, President & CEO
Urban Development Institute Pacific Region



Beth Berry, President
National Association for Industrial and Office Parks Vancouver



Damian Stathonikos, President
Building Owners and Managers Association of British Columbia

cc: Hon. Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing – Province of BC
Hon. Carole James, Minister of Finance – Province of BC
UBCM Executive and Finance Committees
Metro Vancouver Mayors