

A black and white photograph of the Hamilton City Hall building, a grand stone structure with multiple domes and arched windows. A teal banner is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title text. The foreground shows a paved walkway leading towards the building, flanked by street lamps and some landscaping.

HAMILTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2022 PROVINCIAL ELECTION PRIORITIES

On behalf of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, I would like to present our Provincial Election 2022 Priorities for you and your campaign's consideration. We thank and commend you for your participation in the democratic process to seek to represent Hamilton and our community interests in the Ontario Legislature.

As Interim CEO of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, Hamilton's oldest institution at 177 years old, I have the privilege of speaking for our 1,000+ members that employ over 75,000 people in our community. The Chamber is presenting recommendations herein to further strengthen our local economy.

Looking to the future, it remains imperative that the provincial government continue to provide ongoing financial support and relief to Ontarian businesses as the effects of the pandemic continue to endure. Additionally, the government must plan for Ontario's economic recovery and take action now to prepare for a more sustainable economy of the future. There is also a crucial need to address several policy areas related to improving equity and affordability for all Ontarians. Combined, these measures will help to restore business confidence as we emerge out of the pandemic.

Our long-standing advocacy of the Hamilton B-Line LRT project, which received a provincial funding commitment last year, meets all of the above criteria, and remains our top priority for the federal government. We are pleased that each party has pledged to honour that commitment beyond this election. It is just one of many opportunities in Hamilton's near future that, with provincial support, will help sustain the exciting renewal of this great Canadian city.

We look forward to continuing our dialogue with you and wish you well on your campaign.

Sincerely,



Marie Nash
Interim CEO
Hamilton Chamber of Commerce



COVID-19 PANDEMIC RECOVERY SUPPORTS

Advocate to the federal government for relief by forgiving interest payments on COVID-related government backed loans for SMEs in the hardest-hit sectors. This measure should apply to the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA), the Business Credit Availability Program (BCAP) and the Highly Affected Sectors Credit Availability Program (HASCAP).

Provide clear direction to businesses on the legality of vaccination policies and protect employers from discriminatory lawsuits for implementing such policies. Government is urged to provide clarity and protections to businesses with vaccination policies as soon as possible and to provide guidelines to businesses on how it should be used. This will ensure consistency and simplicity of adoption across the province and moreover will prevent the need for any discriminatory lawsuits for simply following the best public health advice.

Promote mental health-friendly workplaces. Mental health policies and considerations on accommodations are essential and it is encouraged that all employers establish a mental health policy. Government should provide draft policies that account for best-practices and allow employer flexibility to adapt accordingly. Governments need to provide subsidized training opportunities for managers at all levels on inclusive human resources policies and procedures, which include essential considerations on mental health supports. We must sustain the conversation on mental health well beyond the pandemic to destigmatize and acknowledge the potential consequences of mental health challenges.

Improve business confidence and predictability. Predictability is fundamental to business confidence, economic recovery and prosperity. Businesses need a stable policy environment with clear timelines, contracts, consultations, and strategies to help them plan for the future and make long-term investments. Given the uncertainty brought on by COVID-19, Ontario must also bolster its pandemic preparedness in response to ongoing and future threats.

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

Support for Implementation of Hamilton BLAST Network. With the federal government's contribution to this project announced earlier this year, it is essential to begin construction on the 14-kilometre B-Line LRT as soon as possible and to begin planning the additional investments required to complete the full implementation of Hamilton's future rapid transit network. The provincial government should continue its collaboration with Metrolinx, the City of Hamilton, and other Hamilton anchor institutions, including the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, to facilitate the development of and unlock the economic stimulus benefits of the Hamilton B-Line LRT project.

Investment in modern transportation infrastructure. We must plan now for the transportation needs of the future, which include considerations on the electrification of existing networks, collection and utilization of data, and ensuring sufficient capacity for long-term economic prosperity. It is also imperative that increasingly stringent environmental standards are applied to assessments on increased transportation infrastructure due to its significant share of Hamilton's local emissions profile.

Enable local climate resiliency. Support municipalities with the tools they need to protect and climate-proof their existing infrastructure and to assist with transition to carbon neutrality specific to local needs.

Eliminate barriers to interprovincial labour mobility and trade. Economic activity in Canada is hampered by inconsistent provincial rules around transportation, the environment, securities, professional certification, agri-food marketing, food safety, and more. To ensure businesses can make the most of internal markets, Canada should work with provinces to accelerate harmonization efforts.

Establish a Marine Economy Strategy that will level the playing field for Ontario with other jurisdictions with similar strategies in place. Ontario is home to some of the most significant waterways critical to the sustenance of the Canadian economy, thanks particularly our immediate access to the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway. Ontarians depend upon the efficient flow of goods and services through our provincial waterways and it is imperative to implement an effective Marine Economy Strategy. With such a strategy in place, Ontario can effectively unlock further opportunities to bolster our provincial and national supply chain resiliency, while simultaneously expanding our competitive infrastructure.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Develop a Small Business Net-Zero Strategy. This strategy will provide Main Street SMEs with incentives and opportunities to participate in Canada's plan to achieve net-zero emissions. Helping businesses with improving their own footprint through retrofit incentives, technology adoption pilot projects, and diversifying their options for energy utilization.

Build Canada's and Hamilton's Clean Industrial Advantage. It will be essential for government to support the decarbonization of energy- and emissions-intensive industries through targeted investments into the research, incentivization and implementation of emissions reductions technologies. Governments must work de-risk energy sharing opportunities and to collaborate with industry partners to explore the feasibility of large-scale emission reducing installations, including incentivizing waste heat recovery technology adoption. Moreover, there exists a unique opportunity in Hamilton's industrial bayfront to explore hydrogen applications in existing industrial processes.

Support and invest in industry under the Made-In-Ontario Environment Plan. Ensure that the Made-In-Ontario Environment Plan includes specific investments to decarbonize Ontario's industrial manufacturing sectors, incentivizing them to explore options to achieve greenhouse gas reductions and improve efficiency.

SUPPORTS FOR WOMEN & DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Create new opportunities for diversity-owned business and those with diverse workforces to access provincial contracts. Provide enhanced opportunities for diversity-owned businesses to secure public procurement contracts, including metrics and resources targeted at supporting access for women-owned and other diversity-owned businesses and those diversifying their workforces.

Support women-specific support services/programming. By ensuring that all levels of government apply intersectional, anti-racism, gender-based and diversity lenses to information policy decisions and that government invests in organizations with experience in advancing gender equity.

Support small businesses owned by women, Indigenous, and racialized entrepreneurs with financing, legal advice, mentorship, training, and supplier diversity programs.

AFFORDABILITY & HOUSING

Create a Basic Income pilot project and thoroughly examine its results upon completion.

Given the experiences and learning of the pandemic, particularly with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the Canada Response Benefit (CRB), we must assess the potential costs, benefits and outcomes of a nationwide or province-wide basic income social assistance program.

Commit to long-term investments in and incentives towards affordable housing development. All levels of government need to urgently recognize the need for expanded, long-term, dedicated supports for affordable housing development – these include financial resources, subsidies and incentives.

Review provincial minimum wage policies to reflect a modern, living wage policy. Doing so would improve the lives of thousands of Canadians by lifting them out of poverty and help to spur further economic spending at a critical time of recovery.

Take drastic action on improving housing approval and permitting processes to facilitate increased province-wide housing supply of all types. Ontario must help facilitate the development of new housing across the province to retain its current workforce and attract the workforce of its future. Without significant improvements to existing approval processes, Ontario will experience ongoing housing price increases and supply shortages. Implement the measures announced through the Provincial-Municipal Housing Summit such as the Streamline Development Approval Fund and other implementations as detailed in the Toronto Region Board of Trade's report, "Meeting in the Middle: A Plan to End Exclusionary Zoning and Tackle Ontario's Housing Crisis," to streamline development process approvals and increase supply.

Develop a policy framework to expand the 'missing middle' housing supply. This includes enabling as-of-right permissions for at least four units per building in all residentially zoned areas, with a potentially higher baseline near transit stations. Moreover, consider formalizing areas where municipalities are required to utilize inclusionary and exclusionary zoning policies to facilitate further housing supply offerings to Ontarians of all income levels.

CHILDCARE & EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Increase investments in childcare at all levels. Ensure that considerations on affordable and accessible childcare informs future economic recovery initiatives and is considered an integral component of all economic development activities. The provincial government should widely report on the National Child Care and Early Childhood Education Strategy to monitor, coordinate and evaluate existing child care measures across Ontario to ensure intergovernmental collaboration to achieve the best possible program outcomes for Ontarian women, children and families.

Seek to explore how expanded childcare offerings can help facilitate further employment opportunities within the sector and increase childcare capacity. Further it should understand the vital role that affordable and accessible childcare and early childhood education plays in workforce participation.

Consultations on childcare reforms must include input from parents, providers, employers and other stakeholders to prioritize equitable and informed policy outcomes. It will be essential to gather the perspectives and input from those with lived experience to foster the best possible long-term solutions to equitable access to high quality and affordable childcare and early childhood education.

Support sector growth & retention. Government should promote further professionalization of the sector by subsidizing a living wage, enabling better working conditions and increased employee retention. In order to ensure long-term viability and employment attraction to the sector, all levels of government must commit to implementing a living wage across all sectors of the economy, but even more so for those essential services that have been historically under-appreciated.

WORKFORCE RESKILLING

Create flexible, accessible, navigable upskilling and reskilling options. Developing a culture of lifelong learning can create talent pipelines through targeted matchmaking programs. This approach will help build resilient employees and businesses alike, reduce risks for all groups and create a more diverse workforce.

Maximize microcredential opportunities. All levels of government need to ensure that microcredentialing strategies and programs are designed and informed by inputs from employers, job-seekers and service providers. In order to ensure long-term benefits are derived, government, employers and service providers need to engage in an iterative dialogue through multiple program cohorts to understand how best to design and improve outcomes for job-seekers, and particularly those experiencing further community marginalization.

SUPPORTING AN INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

Continue facilitating the secure digitalization of SMEs. The government can enhance growth by making cybersecurity part of the recently launched Canada Digital Adoption Program and by championing the development of cybersecurity standards across the country. Moreover, the province ought to launch the next iteration of the Digital Main Street Program as soon as possible to facilitate further economic recovery of small-to-medium sized businesses.

Build closer collaboration among governments, employers and educational institutions. To succeed in the 21st century economy, Ontario needs a 21st century workforce, which it can only achieve through better communication and collaboration among the key players. Formalizing relationships between employers and service providers is a critical link to ensuring viable training for in-demand skills of the future.

Support Ontario's and Hamilton's innovation ecosystem. Provide incentives and invest in made-in-Ontario/Hamilton innovations to fight climate change across transportation, infrastructure and industrial emissions and utilize the net zero accelerator to explore wide array of emissions-combating technologies. The provincial government must ensure that it is dedicating critical investments where necessary to support our traditional industrial, infrastructure and transportation sectors through energy transition.

Implement a provincial life sciences strategy. The strategy must execute specific measures that will attract investments from life sciences companies into Ontario for domestic production, develop life sciences R&D infrastructure, improve the system of patient access, invest in life sciences talent and ensure Canada is part of global supply chains.

Expand investments in broadband through the Up-to-Speed Broadband and Cellular Action Plan. Enabling more access to 5G Internet in rural and remote communities will support job creation outside urban centres.