



The
CHAMBER.
Creating opportunities for business.

2021 Business Confidence Deputation to Timmins City Council
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About the Chamber

With 625 members, The Chamber is one of the largest accredited chambers of commerce with distinction in northeastern Ontario. As the "Voice of Business in Timmins" since 1949, our advocacy and policy initiatives focus on ensuring a favourable business climate in the City of Timmins.

Presentation:

Good evening. My name is Melanie Verreault, and I am the President of the Chamber. As the voice of business in Timmins for the last 71 years, The Chamber continues to remain proactive in conveying our supporters' most significant barriers to business while further creating opportunities to secure their continuity and resiliency.

First launched in 2019 to provide a new Timmins City Council and other interested parties with a snapshot of business satisfaction with city services in key areas crucial to their operation, I am pleased to provide our outlook today, which outlines the results of our 2021 Business Confidence Survey. We share this in our continued spirit of collaboration in the hopes that it provides benchmarking for you and other stakeholders who wish to improve the region's economic climate.

This preliminary report to Council highlights the trends identified from our 121 survey respondents across various business sectors and sizes based on the survey we ran from July 19th to 30th. I am pleased to share the findings of our pulse check on business, their confidence, and their continuity and recovery as we move cautiously to the other side of the pandemic. This report presents a candid look at private sector sentiment and opportunities for economic growth. The Timmins Chamber looks forward to our continued work at all levels of government throughout the coming year to ensure we are capitalizing on opportunities to drive economic growth for the North.

Tonight's presentation will focus on five pillars identified within the feedback generated through our 2021 survey and weigh it against the benchmarking based on similar questions we asked of independent business owners in 2019. These pillars are as follows: clear and transparent communication; investment incentives based on diversity, growth, and inclusion; an internal review of all municipal agencies and departments; a community growth strategy for industrial complexes and housing strategies; and programs and services that remain easily accessible to business. We hope that the constructive suggestions provided this evening are taken in the same spirit that they are being offered. Ultimately, our members share Council's goals to continue to make Timmins a better place to do business, and we look forward to working together to achieve them.

Communication and Initiatives

Narrative matters. When communication and information are shared broadly—even in the spirit of insight, it lends to the belief that we are all in this together, achieving common benefit from a common set of purposes, and gain strength from acting together. Now, more than ever, as we

propel through digital information sharing, the city can look to new platforms to adapt the way they share information.

In 2019, business respondents indicated a 58 percent satisfaction rate with the city's ability to convey clear information pertaining to their operations. This year, entrepreneurs cited a slight decrease in satisfaction. While we understand that it is difficult to target all audiences, The Chamber can be an effective conduit for sharing information with business owners and operators directly. The Chamber does all it can to address internal communication barriers by improving existing policies but seeks to find where a new generation is consuming information externally. Investing in sound communication strategies and technology to share your message to a broader audience will do well to dispel misinformation that can potentially tarnish a community's reputation. We also encourage the city to consider new forms of information sharing through social media or other means, as it keeps a population at the forefront of success stories and critical investments from the municipality.

Investment incentives based on diversity, growth, and inclusion

Ensuring that Timmins remains a great place to invest will strengthen the existing firms that have built our economy and help attract new businesses, especially as we look toward economic recovery. This leads to more significant opportunities for our workforce, bolsters our tax base, and ensures Timmins businesses continue to support the community in many other ways. Appropriate and responsible investment in a community is also the cornerstone of its growth. With this point of view, we continue to advocate for continued spending on economic diversification. There has been much discussion pertaining to the investment in a perimeter or bypass road. While there have been several efforts put forward by this Council to mitigate the speed of traffic on our main thoroughfare, the strain this places on large rigs comes at a significant cost to our natural resource industries. It would be prudent to highly consider the need for a bypass road—creating a safe and efficient corridor of commerce that skirts the city and removes potential or perceived danger from our main street. This will be one of the most important investments our community makes.

The Chamber is also pleased to participate in the Diversification Strategy currently undertaken by the Timmins Economic Development Corporation. Now, more than ever, we must acknowledge those who have chosen to make Timmins their home and offer opportunities for sound investment and growth within our community so that we can continue to remain a vibrant community that pushes the envelope on inclusivity. For that reason, we have and will continue to advocate for more significant funding solutions aggressively and successfully within our networks to provide support to businesses, organizations and agencies in adopting more diverse and inclusive workplace policies. As leaders, they will set the example of what we as a community wish to convey—that we are open for business and ready to welcome you.

An internal review of all municipal agencies and departments

As businesses continue to face growing financial challenges from all levels of government and the COVID pandemic, it is crucial that the municipality focus on limiting future tax increases through diligent efforts to control the city's overall costs. Targeted, transparent budgeting allows for greater public understanding when considering significant investments. Moreover, every budget presents opportunities to delay or defer projects whose timing may be less optimal for the current financial climate. Identifying such projects within these municipal budget discussions -- alongside inter-departmental synergies and attrition -- could assist Council in achieving these specific goals.

Thus, The Chamber recommends that the city utilize this COVID-provided silver lining to conduct an internal review of all municipally funded departments and agencies to identify where improvements are needed and with a business lens in mind. It was noted that between 2019 and 2021, business owners cited a 5 percent decrease in satisfaction and accessibility with respect to business-focused city services.

Striving for greater accuracy in job costing may also provide an opportunity for some greater fiscal efficiencies for municipal projects and alleviate some of the pressures seen on specific infrastructure initiatives throughout the year. As Timmins enters a time of increased financial instability, we hope this will serve as the foundation for pursuing even greater savings. The Chamber recognizes that our community can only be made stronger when we all work together on constructive, positive solutions.

A community growth strategy for industrial complexes and housing strategies

Our local economy is strong thanks to a robust natural resource supply network, and our regional mines and forestry industries have proven strong leaders in responsible natural resource extraction. As we see the new, large-scale projects come online and the potential for new industry, zoning for agri-specific sectors must be undertaken to further incentivize and diversify our economy. As we look to encourage growth, consider identifying viable industrial complexes and districts within our community that align with planning and growth strategies in key areas of Timmins. When we operate under this lens, we make attraction and retention easier. Furthermore, this must also be considered when looking at new, affordable housing developments. Timmins boasts a healthy number of vacant houses and properties based on market data but lacks desirable housing, leaving us vulnerable. Partnerships exist with CDSSAB and other community stakeholders who can be consulted when deciding on new developments in areas within our municipality.

Establishing and maintaining programs and services that remain easily accessible to business

We recognize that the city has little capacity to offer grants to businesses but acknowledge and applaud the recent changes to the Downtown Community Improvement Plan. Another example of a silver lining is that changes to the Downtown CIP must be streamlined for ease of application

and continue expanding the program to include security measures must remain and expand the program to other mainstreets or downtown cores within the City of Timmins.

Timmins businesses are confident in their ability to maintain continuity, but they need a greater champion led by the municipality. Galvanizing existing partnerships and forging new ones will only result in successful outcomes. It is essential to understand that the city that secures a successful solution is the city that wins, and we need to be that city. On behalf of our members, our Board and our staff, The Chamber thanks you for the opportunity to address you this evening, and we look forward to working with you throughout the rest of 2021 and beyond.

Thank you.

The 2015 KPMG City of Timmins Service Delivery and Operational Review¹ presented a moment of opportunity to review the alignment of city and arms-length agency services such as a consideration, based on research and engagement with similar Ontario communities with similar natural-resource-driven economies, a blending of services between planning and economic development.

Harness the opportunities presented during Council's term to identify areas of harmonization of city and agency work pillars

The 2015 KPMG City of Timmins Service Delivery and Operational Review^[1] presented a moment of opportunity to review the alignment of city and arms-length agency services such as a consideration in a blending of services between planning and economic development. This would also be supported based on research and engagement with similar Ontario communities with similar natural-resource-driven economies.

The City can be a catalyst for change, lobbying government to provide more significant support to an under-supported region of the province that will give our business community the leg-up it needs to look to metamorphosis as a natural progression to growth. Items of immediate wins could be encouraging economic development through enacting Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas through the establishment of local agricultural zoning and transitioning the airport's oversight to the stewardship of an Airport Authority so that more significant funding can be accessed under the structure of a non-profit entity.

Among the lowest sectors represented are education-based organizations, personal care services, and food and beverage businesses who may not be top financial contributors but provide high-level in-kind contributions or social support mechanisms to those within our community. Low participation rates within

these sectors may have resulted from low capacity at the time of the survey, given that the provincial reopenings coincided with the launch of the survey.