

Oakville Commercial Recovery Initiative

In May of 2020, Oakville's Economic Task Force launched a Commercial Recovery Initiative (CRI) to support the town-wide reopening of small businesses and restaurants in a practical and safe manner. The initiative consisted of a new patio program, a community-wide *Welcome Back, Oakville!* marketing campaign, and dedicated resources to help businesses move services online. The Commercial Recovery Initiative was incredibly effective and addressed very specific issues identified by the business community as requiring town support.

Throughout the summer, a total of 93 patio permits were processed, a significant increase from previous years. The new program allowed for patios on public lands and parking spaces, and Town staff worked to expedite permits, provide temporary parking exemptions to accommodate outdoor patios and displays on private property, and waive fees to help restaurants expand their footprint to keep customers safe. At the request of local restaurants and the BIAs, the patio program has recently been extended until December 31, 2020.

On June 28, the Task Force launched a community-wide *Welcome Back, Oakville!* marketing campaign which included downloadable marketing templates for businesses, safety decals, an interactive business map, and a social media video series showcasing the familiar faces and safe spaces of Oakville's small businesses. In addition to print and digital ads, a *CHCH Remote on Location* was coordinated, shining a spotlight on businesses in Oakville's 3 BIAs.

The campaign targeted two distinct audiences; the Oakville small business community, and local residents or visitors from neighbouring municipalities. Communication to the business community flowed through the town's Economic Development office with resources housed on the Invest Oakville website and distributed through partner networks including the Oakville Chamber of Commerce and Business Improvement Associations (BIAs). Communication to residents and visitors was housed on the Visit Oakville website with marketing tactics geared towards inspiring residents to support local, safely. The campaign was executed under tight timelines to ensure the program provided timely support for business. Campaign communications were adapted through the summer to reflect the gradual reopening of the economy as Oakville entered Stage 3 in July, and new safety requirements as masks became mandatory in Halton.

The campaign was well-received and as of early September, the #WelcomeBackOakville hashtag had been used more than 1,000 times on Instagram alone with businesses and residents working together to support local. The reach of the campaign was significant. The business spotlight video series received almost 9,000 views, marketing templates were downloaded by 250 visitors, and 250 Welcome Back packages were hand-delivered to local businesses. A geo-targeted digital ad campaign reached more than 160,000 residents in Oakville and Halton and the *CHCH Remote on Location* was viewed by an audience of 40,000 in the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area.

The Task Force also identified the need to help businesses move online. Programs like Ritual ONE and shopHERE were promoted to connect businesses with e-commerce solutions. Additional funding was also secured allowing for the expansion of the Digital Main Street program. The program has assisted more than 200 small businesses move services online since launching in 2019 and aims to assist 200 more in the coming months.

Feedback received from the business community on Oakville's CRI was positive and the program was recently extended by Council to the end of 2021. The initiative has also served as a best practice example for other municipalities, requesting to use the framework as a model for recovery initiatives.

The success of the Commercial Recovery Initiative is most evident in the way the Oakville community rallied together to support small business this summer. Residents and businesses joined the community-wide campaign to shine a spotlight on the incredible small businesses and their work to welcome customers back safely.

Oakville's Economic Task Force is a partnership between Oakville Mayor Rob Burton, Town of Oakville Economic Development, Oakville Chamber of Commerce, Visit Oakville, and the Oakville Business Improvement Associations.