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April 15, 2020

Municipality of Chatham-Kent
315 King St W.
Chatham, ON Delivery by email

Attention: Mayor and Council

Dear Mayor Canniff and Council Members:

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are increasingly challenging for our community. We recognize that the current circumstance being presented is rarely encompassed in a Business Plan or Annual Budget. Yet, a crisis is upon us, and business is fighting the battle and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the Voice of Business and partner in prosperity, I am writing on behalf of our membership and, openly, Chatham-Kent business at large. These are unprecedented times. Like you, we are hearing on a constant basis, business is ailing. As noted in our recent Chamber member survey, 49% of respondents shared that weathering the COVID-19 disruptions could be problematic to their business and operations. They are concerned, worried with tough decisions to be made, dealing with the pressures of who to pay, can I pay, will I have revenue, what costs can I eliminate and, ultimately, will my business survive this crisis? These are hard questions that are keeping our Chatham-Kent business owners and managers up at night. If a business survives the current crisis, can they afford to continue? We recognize there are various government reliefs, yet, 'bankruptcy' is a familiar word at present.

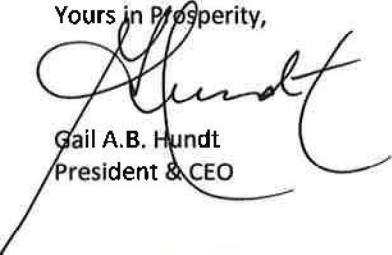
While our members and local proprietors are making the harshest decisions ever imagined, it is recognized that Council, too, has bold decisions to make, for conclusions that will impact the future of business in Chatham-Kent. It is necessary now, more than ever before, that our Municipal Leaders think to the future prosperity of Chatham-Kent. Let's be frank, if business does not survive, unemployment levels will increase, tax base will decrease, support to local initiatives and charities are eliminated, and new investments are a thing of the past, all the while any growth opportunity in Chatham-Kent looks bleak.

Clearly, this is not the Chatham-Kent our Chamber Board envisions for the future. While deferments are appreciated for some short-term relief, this does not eliminate overall costs. We trust property owners will further defer rent collection to business tenants, recognizing their building tax deferrals. On behalf of our members and local business, we suggest pencils need be sharpened. The municipality must make the same bold considerations as a business owner and find substantial cost savings for the long-term gain of our community. Consider, if business doesn't close from the current crisis, will future tax levels put them in disparaging circumstances and force closures or, yet, bankruptcy? These are not favourable thoughts, yet, can be our reality if deep savings are not taken.

As a partner in prosperity, I reference the attached email of March 23rd, proposing the creation of, partnership and support of a Business Sustainability and/or Community Recovery Task Force. We are pleased to see introduction to this initiative as, together, Chatham-Kent will end in greater successes.

Truly, the Chatham-Kent Board of Directors are positive minded and see brighter days ahead. We trust you, as Council and the directive leaders of our municipality, will make the tough decisions, for the right reasons and long-term benefit for our business community and future of Chatham-Kent.

Yours in Prosperity,



Gail A.B. Hundt
President & CEO