



Langford



August 5, 2020

The Honourable Melanie Joly
Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Request for amendments to eligibility criteria for the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF) for tourism businesses

Dear Minister Joly,

We want to begin by thanking you for your government's proactive and thoughtful response to taking care of Canadians during this extraordinary time.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on Greater Victoria's visitor economy, tourism workforce and on our communities. Prior to the pandemic, tourism in Greater Victoria employed more than 22,000 people, delivered \$2.3 billion in economic impacts, and brought in \$1.4 billion in new revenue from visitors annually. Discouragement of travel, closure of the border to US and international visitors, and loss of meetings, conferences and sporting events as necessary health and safety responses to the pandemic has resulted in revenue declines of up to 90 per cent for Greater Victoria's tourism businesses as well as escalating job losses for the industry's workers and the families in our communities that they support.

Over recent months, the federal government has acted quickly to support Canadian businesses. Programs such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) are helping many business operators in Greater Victoria and is a key support going forward. However, given the seasonal timing, impacts and necessary responses to COVID-19, tourism businesses need further help and there are opportunities to modify existing programs to support the struggling visitor economy and the revenues and jobs it generates.

As we understand it, the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF) was designed to help mitigate the unprecedented and unforeseeable financial pressures experienced by businesses and organizations due to COVID-19, as well as allowing businesses, organizations and communities to prepare for a successful recovery.

This program is delivered through the regional development agencies, and when it was announced it created optimism for many working in the tourism industry in our region.

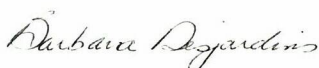
Unfortunately, it has become clear that the parameters of the program – which focus on rural areas and non-tourism economic sectors in Western Canada – exclude the vast majority of, if not all, businesses within the Greater Victoria visitor economy. Urban-based operators such as those in Greater Victoria are among the hardest hit because drivers of revenues such as vital conventions and ‘gateway’ services to cross-border travel have ceased. This urban infrastructure also underpins the broader economy and is essential for the larger industry to operate, provide jobs, contribute to taxes and succeed. If urban operators do not survive the very core of the visitor economy will be eroded and there will be no way for future travelers to access rural tourism opportunities.

As mayors in a region where the visitor economy is integral to job creation and community identity, we request that Western Economic Diversification Canada amend the eligibility criteria of the RRRF to include businesses located in urban areas as well as those operating in the Western Canadian visitor economy. Furthermore, most funding allotted to the RRRF envelop has been committed. Funding to the RRRF envelop should increase to ensure tourism business operators can receive funds through the program. Accessing RRRF will help Greater Victoria’s tourism businesses continue operations, remain solvent and create a foundation to capitalize on economic recovery in the months ahead. This will tremendously benefit our communities and the many jobs and the families who depend on this industry to thrive.

Sincerely,



Mayor Ryan Windsor
District of Central Saanich



Mayor Barb Desjardins
Township of Esquimalt



Mayor Ken Williams
District of Highlands



Mayor Stew Young
City of Langford



Mayor John Ranns
District of Metchosin



Mayor Geoff Orr
District of North Saanich



Mayor Kevin Murdoch
District of Oak Bay



Mayor Fred Haynes
District of Saanich



Mayor Cliff McNeil-Smith
Town of Sidney



Mayor Maja Tait
District of Sooke



Mayor Lisa Helps
City of Victoria



Mayor David Screech
Town of View Royal

cc: Randal Garrison, MP – Esquimalt-Sooke-Saanich
Laurel Collins, MP - Victoria
Alistair MacGregor, MP – Cowichan-Malahat-Langford
Elizabeth May, MP – Saanich-Gulf Islands
Hon. Lisa Beare, BC Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture
Walt Judas, CEO – Tourism Industry Association of BC
Charlotte Bell, CEO – Tourism Industry Association of Canada
Paul Nursey, CEO – Destination Greater Victoria