

**CITY OF  
HAMILTON**



# BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREAS



# TOOLKIT

**INVEST  
IN HAMILTON**



Hamilton

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# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

## PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit has been created as a comprehensive resource for the City of Hamilton’s Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), their boards, and staff. It has also been designed for interested parties who are making inquiries about the City’s BIAs, starting their own or understanding best practices. It has been crafted to serve three key purposes:

- 1. Supporting Existing BIAs:** Provide operational guidance and practical resources for the 11 active BIAs to strengthen their governance, financial management, and strategic planning efforts.
- 2. Guiding the Formation of New BIAs:** Offer clear and concise information for individuals or groups interested in establishing a new BIA in Hamilton, outlining the process, benefits, and requirements and best practices.
- 3. Clarifying the City’s Role and Resources:** Clearly articulate the City of Hamilton’s position on BIA-related issues, programs, and policies, particularly highlighting the suite of financial incentive programs available to support revitalization and growth.

By addressing these goals, this toolkit aims to empower Hamilton’s BIAs to drive economic vitality, improve public spaces, and foster a sense of community within their individual commercial districts that come together to reflect the City of Hamilton as a whole.

## WHY ARE BIAs IMPORTANT?

**BIAs are integral to Hamilton’s economic and social fabric. They:**

- Attract investment by enhancing the aesthetics and appeal of their areas.
- Support local businesses through marketing, events, beautification, advocacy for their members and collaborative initiatives.
- Create safe, accessible, vibrant and welcoming spaces for residents, visitors, and businesses.
- Contribute to the city’s overall growth and revitalization by fostering strong commercial hubs.

## THE CITY OF HAMILTON’S COMMITMENT TO BIAS

**Hamilton’s BIAs do not stand alone. They are viewed as important entities and are valued and supported by the City of Hamilton. This unique relationship ensures that BIAs have access to:**

- **Dedicated Support:** The City’s BIA Coordinator serves as a direct resource for operational and strategic guidance.
- **Financial Incentives:** Programs like Commercial District Revitalization Grant, the Revitalizing Hamilton Tax Increment Grant and others that help drive improvements and revitalization.
- **Contributions to;** Operating Budgets, shared Parking Revenue, and a Christmas Grant specific to Hamilton BIAs.
- **Eligibility:** to apply for City Enrichment Grants related to BIA events and activations.
- **Strategic Collaboration:** Access to City resources, including infrastructure planning, streetscape beautification, safety initiatives and advocacy for the broader commercial community.

This toolkit reflects the City’s ongoing commitment to fostering thriving business districts across the City of Hamilton.



## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

The toolkit is divided into clearly defined sections for ease of use:

- 1. BIA Introduction & Overview:** A foundational understanding of BIAs and their role in Hamilton.
- 2. Forming a BIA and BIA Boundaries:** Step-by-step guidance for establishing a new BIA within the City of Hamilton plus a detailed explanation of expanding the boundaries for an existing BIA.
- 3. Governance/ Operations/Financial Management:** Best practices and Municipal expectations for BIA boards and staff. Insights into budgeting, levy management, and financial reporting.
- 4. City of Hamilton Financial Incentives:** Details on the City’s unique programs for BIAs.
- 5. Best Practices & Additional Resources:** Guidance on placemaking, marketing, and community engagement.

By following this structure, users can navigate directly to the information most relevant to their needs.

This Document provides the foundation for understanding the value of BIAs, the City’s role, and how this toolkit can support both operational excellence and long-term success.

## SECTION 1B: BIA OVERVIEW

### WHAT IS A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA (BIA)?

A Business Improvement Area (BIA) is a designated geographic area where local businesses and commercial property owners join forces to enhance their commercial district’s economic, social, and physical environment. By pooling resources and working collaboratively, BIAs create dynamic, attractive Main Streets that draw in customers, foster community engagement, and support local economic growth.

Established under the **Ontario Municipal Act in 1970**, BIAs operate within a clear legislative framework, with governance provided by an elected Board of Management and oversight by the municipality. This structure allows BIAs to remain focused on addressing local needs while benefiting from municipal guidance and support.

In Hamilton, BIAs stand out for their unique alignment with the City’s Economic Development Department. This partnership enables BIAs to access specialized resources and strategic support, enhancing their ability to meet the needs of their members and communities.

# CORE CHARACTERISTICS OF A BIA

- **Locally Led and Managed:** BIAs are driven by the people who know their areas best—local business owners and property owners. This ensures initiatives are tailored to the community’s unique identity and needs.
- **Community-Focused:** Beyond benefiting businesses, BIAs enhance the overall quality of life for residents and visitors through beautification projects, events, and public safety initiatives.
- **Self-Funded:** BIAs are funded through a levy collected from commercial property owners within their boundaries. These funds are invested directly back into the area, creating tangible benefits for the entire commercial area. These funds are fully overseen and managed by the Board.
- **Self-Managed:** BIAs must adhere to the Ontario Municipal Act and their respective Procedural Bylaw, but apart from that, they have the autonomy to run their operations as they see fit; including sole responsibility of staffing choices (including funding tools required for their staff to do their job (laptop, cell phone additional staff) all human resource related activities of their staff such as performance evaluations, salary, corrective action when needed), deciding on their operation through the BIA levy, how their operational budget is allocated and spent and what projects and initiatives they feel will serve the best interests of their BIA members and neighbourhood.

# THE ROLE OF BIAS

BIAs serve as catalysts for positive change in their districts. They undertake a broad range of initiatives aimed at fostering a thriving business environment, including:

- **Beautification and Streetscaping:** BIAs invest in visual enhancements such as planters, public art, decorative lighting, banners, and murals, making their districts more inviting and memorable.
- **Marketing and Promotions:** Coordinating campaigns, seasonal promotions, social media and events that attract foot traffic, raise awareness of local businesses, and build Brand and a sense of identity for the BIA area and surrounding neighbourhood.
- **Safety and Accessibility:** Working closely with the City and City partners (such as Hamilton Police Services) to address safety concerns, such as installing better lighting and advocating for accessible infrastructure that meets the needs of all visitors. Collaboration with HPS (Hamilton Police Services) through the local BIA Crime Managers, improves communication and can also result in enhanced police patrols and data.
- **Business Advocacy and Support:** Acting as a unified voice for BIA businesses, they provide resources, advocate for policies that benefit their members, and build collaborative networks.
- **Community Building:** Hosting markets, festivals, and other events and activations that encourage residents and visitors to connect, fostering a sense of belonging and pride in the area.

# THE VALUE OF BIAS

BIAs are critical to Hamilton’s urban and economic landscape. They:

- **Boost Local Economies:** By driving visitors to businesses and improving the district’s overall appeal, BIAs stimulate economic activity and increase property values.
- **Enhance Urban Spaces:** Partnering with the City to beautify streetscapes, improve infrastructure, and create public spaces that are safe, functional, welcoming and fun.
- **Foster Innovation and Creativity:** BIAs often lead the charge in testing innovative ideas, from pop-up markets and public art installations to technology solutions and sustainability initiatives that set new standards.
- **Build Community Resilience:** By bringing people together and fostering collaboration, BIAs strengthen the social and economic fabric of their districts.
- **Proactive Ownership:** BIAs have the ability to take a more proactive approach to challenges impacting their areas. The BIA can prove the value of the BIA by taking ownership of solutions to problems that fall outside of the standard City of Hamilton service levels.



# HAMILTON’S BIAS AT A GLANCE



Hamilton is home to 11 active BIAs, ranging from historic commercial streets to more modern retail hubs, each contributing to the city’s diverse economic ecosystem. Two additional BIAs are currently in dormancy, but the City continues to explore opportunities to reinvigorate these and other areas. Collectively, Hamilton’s BIAs represent a cornerstone of the city’s commercial vitality and cultural identity.

While this toolkit does not provide detailed profiles of each BIA, it emphasizes the collective role these organizations play in fostering a vibrant and sustainable Hamilton.



# COLLABORATION WITH THE CITY OF HAMILTON

Hamilton’s BIAs are deeply integrated into the City’s broader economic strategy. The partnership between BIAs and the City ensures:

- **Operational Support:** The City’s BIA Coordinator provides direct guidance on strategic planning, governance, and operations, serving as a vital resource for BIA boards and staff and as a conduit of information both ingoing and outgoing to the BIAs from the City of Hamilton.
- **BIAs designated as Sub Committees of City Council:** As a sub committee of Council, each BIA has a direct conduit to City Council and also forms a part of the BIA Sub Committee which meets monthly. These meetings have assigned Councillor(s) and are administered by a Legislative Clerk from the City of Hamilton.
- **Access to Incentives:** Hamilton offers a range of financial programs, such as grants and loans, to support revitalization and growth within BIA boundaries.
- **As mandated by the Ontario Municipal Act, and in the interest of financial transparency with each of the BIA memberships, annual audits must be completed by the city auditor.** To facilitate the requirement, the City of Hamilton partially subsidizes the cost of each BIA audit and provides an additional staff support from the Corporate Services department.
- **Infrastructure and Safety Enhancements:** The City collaborates with BIAs whenever possible to maintain and improve public infrastructure, ensure accessibility, and implement safety measures that benefit businesses and the public.
- **Placemaking Initiatives:** The City takes on a variety of activations throughout the city and the BIAs (Open Streets, Summer Concert Series, Pride events).
- **BIA Awards of Excellence:** To recognize the successes and efforts put forth by the memberships of each BIA, an annual awards ceremony is hosted to celebrate two award winners from each BIA in categories that support BIA pillars.
- **All City of Hamilton BIAs:** Are required to provide an Annual Report to City Staff. This helps the City see their activities and programming for the year. Not only does this help with oversight but it also allows the City to better understand where there may be opportunities for partnerships and helps the City align strategies where possible.

This close relationship fosters alignment between local and municipal efforts, maximizing the impact of BIA initiatives.



## BIAS: A FORCE FOR THE FUTURE

As Hamilton grows and evolves, its BIAs will continue to play a central role in shaping the city’s character and driving its economic success. By fostering collaboration, creativity, and community, BIAs help Hamilton’s commercial districts adapt to new challenges and seize emerging opportunities.

This toolkit is designed to support BIAs at every stage of their journey, offering the resources, guidance, and insights needed to thrive in a dynamic urban environment.





## SECTION 2: FORMING A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA (BIA) AND EXPANDING BIA BOUNDARIES

### THE VALUE OF FORMING A BIA

A BIA provides a formal structure to address shared challenges and opportunities within a commercial district. By pooling financial resources, amongst property owners, BIAs:

- ✓ **Increase Foot Traffic:** Events and activations, promotions, and beautification projects attract more visitors, benefiting businesses and the wider community.
- ✓ **Improve Public Spaces:** Streetscapes, lighting, accessibility, public art, placemaking and cleanliness are enhanced through coordinated initiatives.
- ✓ **Strengthen Advocacy:** A unified voice allows businesses to influence decisions and policies affecting their district.
- ✓ **Foster Community Identity:** BIAs create a sense of place and pride, uniting businesses and residents around a shared vision.



# STEPS TO ESTABLISH A BIA

Forming a BIA is a significant undertaking requiring careful planning, broad business and community support, and close collaboration with the City of Hamilton. Below are the detailed steps:

*See Attached documents: Establishing a Business Improvement Area, BIA Survey, Module 6*

## 1. Initial Engagement and Feasibility

- **Identify the Need:** Assess the area's challenges and opportunities. Common indicators include declining foot traffic, underutilized spaces, or a need for collective marketing efforts.
- **Gauge Initial Interest:** Host informal discussions with local businesses and property owners to measure interest in forming a BIA.
- **Assess Feasibility:** Conduct a preliminary feasibility study to evaluate the area's economic profile, the potential levy revenue, and readiness for collective action from potential BIA members.
- **City Support:** Engage with the City's BIA Coordinator early in the process to gain insights into requirements, resources, and timelines.

## 2. Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging stakeholders is the cornerstone of forming a BIA. Success depends on securing buy-in from the Business and property owners that will become BIA members:

- **Person-to-Person Outreach:** Direct, one-on-one conversations build trust and allow you to address specific concerns or misconceptions.
- **Present Organized Materials:**
  - A proposed budget with transparent explanations of planned expenditures.
  - Individual levy estimates for each property, demonstrating fairness and value and early proposed programming.
- **Community Champion:** Identify a respected local leader to spearhead the initiative, rally support, and serve as the face of the effort.
- **Host a Town Hall:** A formal town hall meeting with City staff is required to present the proposal, answer questions, and showcase community support.



## 3. Boundary Definition and Budget Planning

- **Define Boundaries:** Collaborate with the City to determine the proposed area. Boundaries should include a cohesive commercial district with shared interests.

BIA boundaries must be continuous. What the BIA boundaries will look like are ultimately proposed by the group initiating the desire to create the BIA. The City will verify that the proposed boundaries are acceptable.

Once the boundaries are determined, all commercial and industrial zoned properties would be subject to the BIA levy with no ability to opt out.

If a property is mixed commercial and residentially zoned, the BIA contribution would be prorated for the portion of the property that is commercially zoned.

- **Draft Budget:** Develop a preliminary budget outlining key priorities and expenditures. Examples of necessary items might include:
  - Branding: Creating a logo, signage, website and other visual identity materials to unify and promote the district.
  - Capital Assets: Purchasing placemaking banners, art installations/murals, benches, litter containers, bike racks, and other infrastructure to enhance public spaces.
  - Operational Costs: Allocating funds for administration, staffing, and office expenses. It is important to note to allocate for a good salary for an Executive Director. This role is critical as the Board of Management are the visionaries and directors of BIA funds – but it is the Executive Director that executives on these initiatives and brings them to life. It is equally important to provide staff with the necessary tools to effectively do their job (for example a BIA owned laptop and cell phone).

• **Include Programming Ideas:**

- Marketing and Social Media: Launch promotional campaigns to raise the district’s profile. Use social media platforms to engage the community and attract visitors.
- Small Activations: Plan low-cost, high-impact events such as pop-up markets, sidewalk sales, or seasonal decorations to draw foot traffic and build excitement.
- Community Engagement: Host workshops or networking events to strengthen connections among businesses and residents particularly those people who may not know each other in a formerly non-BIA area.

• **Levy Calculation:** The BIA decides on what their operational budget will be. The budget is then equitably distributed amongst the commercial and industrial zoned properties within the BIA boundary. The City can assist with calculating contributions by individual businesses based on assessment values, ensuring fairness and transparency.



**4. Application Submission**

• **Prepare Required Documents:**

- Proposed boundaries and maps.
- Petition of support signed by a minimum of 2/3rds of property owners and businesses.
- Draft proposed budget.
- Governance framework outlining the proposed BIA’s Governance structure.

• **City Review:** Submit the application package to the City for review. The City will evaluate the submission for compliance with legislative and procedural requirements. A report will be created by City staff and presented to Council for final approval.

**5. Public Consultation and City Council Approval**

- **Public Meeting:** A public consultation session is mandatory to gather feedback and address any concerns from the broader community. This step ensures transparency and builds confidence in the process.
- **Council Review and Decision:** If the application meets all requirements, City staff will present the proposal to City Council. Council may approve the application and pass a by-law establishing the BIA.

• **City Clerk Division:** Notice sent to all property owners.

Councill’s approval will direct the City Clerk’s Division be authorized and directed to circulate the proposed area with the notice of intent to approve the designating by-law in accordance with Sections 204, 210, 212 and 213 of The Municipal Act.

Before passing a By-law to establish a BIA a notice of intent, as set out in accordance with The Municipal Act, shall be sent to all property owners within the proposed boundary that have a commercial or industrial assessment. Within 30 days after the notice is mailed the property owner shall:

- (a) give a copy of the notice to each tenant of the property to which the notice relates who is required to pay all or part of the taxes on the property; and,
- (b) give the clerk of the municipality a list of every tenant described in clause (a) and the share of the taxes that each tenant is required to pay.

The notice will also outline the objection process identifying that a municipality shall not pass a by-law to establish a BIA if:

- (a) written objections are received by the staff Procurement of the municipality within 60 days after the last day of mailing of the notices;
- (b) the objections have been signed by at least one-third of the total number of persons entitled to notice and,
- (c) the objectors are responsible for at least one-third of the taxes levied for the purposes of the general local municipality levy on rateable





6. Post-Approval: Initial Operations

- **Board of Management Formation:** Elect a Board of Management, comprising local business and property owners, and up to 20% of your Board compliment can be community representatives to oversee the BIA’s operations.
- **Operational Start-Up:**
  - Implement governance policies as per the City of Hamilton BIA By Law.
  - Begin executing the approved budget and strategic initiatives.
  - Conduct outreach to keep members informed and engaged.

**Included template documents:** Ontario Municipal Act (section 204), MMAH-BIA Handbook, BIA Procedural Bylaw 14-253, Code of Conduct, Hiring policy, Procurement policy.

7. Challenges and Best Practices

Forming a BIA is rewarding but not without its challenges. Below are common obstacles and strategies to overcome them:

Challenges:

- **Generating Critical Mass:** Building sufficient support from stakeholders can be difficult, especially during economic downturns.
- **Financial Hesitancy:** Resistance to the mandatory levy can arise if the benefits are not clearly communicated and a strong plan for implementation.
- **Mandatory Participation:** Emphasizing the long-term advantages of mandatory participation is key to framing it positively.

Best Practices:

- **Effective Communication:** Provide clear, transparent information about the benefits and costs of forming a BIA.
- **Engaged Leadership:** Strong leadership from a trusted community champion can drive momentum.
- **City Partnership:** Utilize the resources and expertise offered by the City’s BIA Coordinator to streamline the process.
- **Strong Plan:** For managing the day-to-day Business and programming of the BIA.



BARTON  
BIA



ANCASTER  
BIA



8. City of Hamilton’s Support

The City of Hamilton is a dedicated partner throughout the BIA formation process, offering:

- **Guidance and Expertise:** The BIA Coordinator provides insights, advice, and support for stakeholder engagement, boundary mapping, budget and program development.
- **Governance Resources:** Assistance with establishing a Board of Management and navigating governance requirements.
- **Public Engagement Support:** Facilitation of public consultations and assistance in addressing community concerns.
- Commercial Market Assessments are updated every 5 years. This is a 50/50 shared cost between Economic Development and the BIAs.

Provided below is the list of hyperlinks to each active BIA’s downloadable CMA.

*Westdale Village*

*Waterdown BIA*

*Stoney Creek BIA*

*Ottawa Street BIA*

*Locke Street BIA*

*International Village BIA*

*Downtown Hamilton BIA*

*Dundas BIA*

*Concession Street BIA*

*Barton Village BIA*

*Ancaster BIA*

9. Considerations

- **Dormant BIAs:** The City of Hamilton can and does put BIAs into dormancy. Reactivation follows similar steps to forming a new BIA.If a BIA does not comply with compliance requirements, as per the Municipal Act, or if engagement falls that does not enable to BIA to perform and show value to its membership, a process can be initiated to put the BIA in dormancy status. This pauses all BIA activities, including any further BIA levies to property owners, for a period of up to 3 years. Funds are put into trust with the City until which time the future of the BIA is decided.

If at any time in the 3-year dormancy period there is a desire to reactivate the BIA, a report through EcDev to Council will make that recommendation (which will include changes to status quo that will satisfy Council that the BIA should be reactivated.



If after 3 years there is no desire to reactivate the BIA, a notice of Intent to Dissolve will be mailed to all property owners. If no response received within 30 days, a report though EcDev to Council will make the recommendation to permanently dissolve the BIA.

- **Annual Governance Training:** New BIAs are required to participate in governance training, ensuring effective management and compliance with City and provincial standards.

### Conclusion

Forming a BIA in Hamilton is a collaborative journey that brings significant benefits to commercial districts, businesses, and the community at large. While challenges exist, the resources and support available from the City of Hamilton ensure that applicants are well-equipped to navigate the process successfully.

This toolkit provides the framework, guidance, and templates needed to begin, with additional resources available through the City’s Economic Development Department.



## SECTION 2B: EXPANDING A BIA BOUNDARY

Expanding the boundaries of a Business Improvement Area (BIA) is a strategic decision that allows a BIA to extend its services, advocacy, and economic development efforts to a broader commercial district. A well-planned expansion can increase funding, improve streetscapes, and strengthen the collective voice of businesses. However, it also requires careful stakeholder engagement, financial planning, and approval by the City of Hamilton.

## WHY CONSIDER A BOUNDARY EXPANSION?

**Expanding a BIA boundary can offer several advantages, but it must be approached with a clear understanding of why an expansion is beneficial. Some valid reasons for expansion include:**

- ✓ **Increased Membership & Funding** – A larger membership base means a greater levy pool to fund marketing, streetscape improvements, and community events.
- ✓ **Stronger Economic Influence** – More businesses contribute to a stronger collective voice when advocating for municipal improvements and policy changes.
- ✓ **Extending Success to Adjacent Areas** – Expanding a well-managed BIA to underperforming commercial areas can stimulate investment, reduce vacancies, and improve overall business conditions.
- ✓ **Enhancing Streetscape & Infrastructure Improvements** – Areas within a BIA are often prioritized for municipal improvements, including lighting, signage, and beautification projects.
- ✓ **Coordinated Branding & Promotion** – Businesses outside the current BIA boundary may benefit from coordinated events, advertising, and tourism efforts.

**Proactive Ownership:** BIAs have the ability to take a more proactive approach to challenges impacting their areas. Show the membership the value of having a BIA by taking ownership of solutions to problems that fall outside of the standard City of Hamilton service levels.

(It is highly recommended that more than one of the above criteria be the driving force behind boundary changes.)

## CHALLENGES & CONSIDERATIONS OF EXPANSION

**While expansion can bring many benefits, there are also important considerations:**

- ⚠ **Increased Levy Costs for New Members** – Some businesses may be hesitant about additional taxes/levies to fund BIA activities.
- ⚠ **Resistance from Existing Businesses** – Current members may be concerned that expansion will dilute their benefits or shift focus from their needs.
- ⚠ **Need for Additional Services** – The BIA must ensure that expanded areas receive value through programming, events, and marketing.
- ⚠ **Longer Decision-Making Process** – An expansion requires extensive consultation, a formal petition, and City Council approval, which can take several months.



# COMMON CONCERNS & RESPONSES

Concern	Response
“Will my property taxes increase?”	The BIA levy is a small, dedicated charge that funds improvements. The benefits—such as increased foot traffic, marketing, and improved streetscapes—often outweigh the cost. All levy funds collected are fully redirected back to the BIA for their use, unlike property taxes that go into the city coffers.
“What if I don’t want to be part of a BIA?”	While participation is mandatory if the expansion is approved, businesses gain valuable support, advocacy, promotional opportunities and access to City incentives. The BIA provides measurable economic benefits.
“How long does the expansion process take?”	The process can take 6-12 months depending on stakeholder engagement, petition approval, and City Council review. Proper planning ensures a smooth transition.
“Will the BIA still focus on my needs?”	Expanding the BIA does not mean current members lose services. A well-managed BIA ensures that all areas receive equal attention and programming.

## STEPS FOR EXPANDING A BIA BOUNDARY

### 1. Initiation & Feasibility

- Identify the need for expansion and conduct a **preliminary study** on potential benefits.
- Present the concept to the **BIA Board of Management** for initial approval.
- Hold informal discussions with businesses in the proposed expansion area.

### 2. Stakeholder Engagement

- Consult directly with newly proposed businesses and property owners.
- Provide information on BIA benefits, costs, and expectations.
- Address concerns and modify the expansion plan as necessary.



### 3. Petition of Support

- Obtain signatures from at least **two-thirds (2/3rds)** of property owners and businesses in the proposed expansion area.
- Insure the petition includes clear details of the expansion proposal.

### 4. Formal Submission to the City

- ✓ Submit an application that includes:
- ✓ A proposed boundary map
- ✓ The signed petition
- ✓ An updated budget reflecting the expansion
- ✓ Any necessary governance adjustments



### 5. Public Consultation & City Review

- The City of Hamilton will hold a **formal public consultation** to gather feedback.
- City staff will prepare a report for **City Council consideration**.

Councill’s approval will direct the City Clerk’s Division be authorized and directed to circulate the proposed area with the notice of intent to approve the designating by-law in accordance with Sections 204, 210, 212 and 213 of The Municipal Act.

**Before passing a By-law to establish a BIA a notice of intent**, as set out in accordance with The Municipal Act, shall be sent to all property owners within the proposed boundary that have a commercial or industrial assessment. Within 30 days after the notice is mailed the property owner shall:

- (a) give a copy of the notice to each tenant of the property to which the notice relates who is required to pay all or part of the taxes on the property; and,
- (b) give the clerk of the municipality a list of every tenant described in clause (a) and the share of the taxes that each tenant is required to pay.

The notice will also outline the objection process identifying that a municipality shall not pass a by-law to establish a BIA if:



- (a) written objections are received by the clerk of the municipality within 60 days after the last day of mailing of the notices;
  - (b) the objections have been signed by at least one-third of the total number of persons entitled to notice and,
  - (c) the objectors are responsible for at least one-third of the taxes levied for the purposes of the general local municipality levy on rateable
- If approved, an amendment will be made to the **BIA by-law** to reflect the new boundaries.

### 6. Post-Approval Implementation

- **New Member Outreach** – Provide resources to newly added businesses to ensure they understand the benefits of being part of a BIA.
- **Financial Adjustments** – The BIA’s levy will be recalculated to reflect the expanded membership.
- **Strategic Planning Updates** – Engage new businesses in planning to align their needs with existing BIA goals.

### Checklist for BIA Boundary Expansion

- ✓ Identify the need for expansion and engage the BIA Board.
- ✓ Conduct initial outreach and gauge interest from businesses.
- ✓ Prepare a clear case for expansion (economic benefits, services, etc.)
- ✓ Develop a proposed boundary map.
- ✓ Collect at least two-thirds (2/3rds) support from affected businesses.
- ✓ Submit a formal expansion application to the City of Hamilton.
- ✓ Participate in the public consultation process.
- ✓ If approved, integrate new members and update financial plans.

*Insert a link to the boundary expansion document in Module 6 when it becomes available.*



### Conclusion

Expanding a BIA boundary is a **significant opportunity** for growth and economic revitalization. By following the structured process outlined above, BIAs can **extend their impact, improve commercial conditions, and strengthen local businesses**. While challenges exist, careful **stakeholder engagement, transparent communication, and strategic planning can help ensure a smooth and successful expansion**.

The City of Hamilton provides support throughout the process, ensuring that expansions align with municipal guidelines and contribute to the overall health of Hamilton’s business districts







## SECTION 3:

# GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS OF A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA (BIA)

**Good governance** is the foundation of a successful Business Improvement Area (BIA). It ensures transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in decision-making, enabling the BIA to operate effectively and sustainably. Good governance means having clear structures, roles, and responsibilities for the Board, staff, and stakeholders, supported by robust policies and procedures. It fosters trust among members, encourages active engagement, and aligns the organization's actions with its strategic goals.

In this section, we outline the essential components of good governance, including effective leadership, compliance with legislative requirements, sound financial management, and proactive communication. By embracing these principles, BIAs can strengthen their operations and deliver meaningful results for their members and the broader community.

**The City of Hamilton supports BIAs** by providing oversight, resources, and advocacy to help ensure compliance with governance standards. In return, BIAs are expected to maintain transparency on operational and finance matters, fulfill operational responsibilities, and ensure compliance with the Ontario Municipal Act requirements of BIAs.

# GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

## Definition of a BIA (Ontario Municipal Act)

Under the **Ontario Municipal Act, 2001, Section 204**, a Business Improvement Area is:

“A GEOGRAPHIC AREA DESIGNATED BY A MUNICIPALITY WHERE LOCAL BUSINESS AND COMMERCIAL PROPERTY OWNERS WORK TOGETHER TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY, AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE AREA.”

Each BIA is a **local board of the municipality** and functions as a corporate entity governed by a Board of Management. While BIAs often engage in strategic planning and economic development initiatives, their **core mandate is the collective enhancement and promotion of their commercial district** as outlined in provincial legislation.

## BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

The **Board of Management** is the governing body of a BIA, responsible for decision-making, financial oversight, and strategic leadership. Board members are elected by BIA members at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and approved by Hamilton City Council. The Board serves a four-year term aligned with the municipal election cycle.

### Key Responsibilities of the Board

- **Financial Oversight:** Approving budgets, managing expenditures, and ensuring the completion of an annual external audit.
- **Program Development:** Overseeing marketing, promotions, beautification projects, and economic development activities.
- **Compliance:** Adhering to the Ontario Municipal Act, City by-laws, and all relevant governance policies.
- **Transparency:** Ensuring that meeting agendas, minutes, and financial reports are publicly accessible, as required by the City of Hamilton.
- **Advocacy & Representation:** Representing BIA interests to the City, community partners, and external stakeholders.



- **Oversight and Management of any BIA staff:** Human resources and management of any staff including clear communication of role and expectations, performance evaluations, salary allocations, disciplinary issues of employees such as Executive Directors, bookkeepers, and any other BIA staff.

This also includes providing any staff with the tools required to effectively carry out their job. (laptop, cell phone, purchasing card, etc.,)

- **Proactive Ownership:** BIAs have the ability to take a more proactive approach to challenges impacting their areas. BIAs can prove the value of the BIA by taking ownership of solutions to problems that fall outside of the standard City of Hamilton service levels.

To enhance governance effectiveness, it is recommended that Boards:

- **Establish a Clear Mandate:** Define the BIA’s mission, vision, objectives, and strategic priorities.
- **Conduct Annual Governance Orientations:** Provide training sessions for Board members to understand their roles and responsibilities.
- **Apply Transparent Decision-Making Processes:** Ensure decisions are made through comprehensive and open procedures.
- **Employ Ongoing Fiduciary Monitoring:** Regularly review financial activities to uphold fiscal responsibility.
- **BIA Policies:** Establish and maintain good governance through the creation of BIA policies that align with corresponding municipal policies.

### Committees and their role in BIAs

The Ontario Municipal Act allows BIAs to establish committees to support their operations and strategic initiatives. Committees can be a valuable tool for engaging members, distributing workload, and driving key projects forward. However, committees should be structured thoughtfully, ensuring they serve a clear purpose rather than becoming an administrative burden.

#### BARTON BIA



#### ANCASTER BIA

## Best Practices for BIA Committees

### 1. Committees Should Have a Clear Purpose

- Committees should be created to address a specific need within the BIA (e.g., Marketing, Beautification, Events, Economic Development).
- Each committee should have defined goals and deliverables that align with the BIA's strategic priorities.

### 2. Develop a Terms of Reference

- Every committee should operate under a Terms of Reference (TOR) document outlining:
  - The committee's mandate and objectives.
  - Membership criteria and roles (e.g., board members, business owners, stakeholders).
  - Reporting structure (how the committee reports to the BIA board).
  - Expected timeline (standing vs. temporary committees).

### 3. Avoid “Make-Work” Committees

- Not all BIAs require committees for every function. Some committees may become ineffective or redundant over time.
- If a committee is not achieving results, the board should evaluate whether to adjust its structure, redefine its role, or dissolve it.

### 4. Committees Should Have a Defined Lifespan

- Some committees, like Events Planning or Strategic Planning, may serve a short-term purpose and should disband once their objectives are met.
- Standing committees, like Governance or Finance, may be needed on an ongoing basis.

### 5. Committees Support—Not Replace—Board Decisions

- Committees advise and recommend, but ultimate decision-making authority remains with the BIA Board of Management.
- Committee members should understand their role is to support board initiatives, not create independent policies.

## Common BIA Committees



LOCKE  
STREET  
BIA



- **Marketing & Promotions Committee** – Oversees branding, social media, and advertising strategies.
- **Events & Programming Committee** – Plans festivals, activations, and community events.
- **Beautification & Streetscape Committee** – Focuses on public realm improvements like lighting, planters, banners, and seasonal décor.
- **Economic Development & Advocacy Committee** – Engages with businesses, property owners, and local government to drive investment.
- **Governance & Finance Committee** – Ensures financial oversight, policy compliance, and board development.

### >>Checklist for Effective Committees

## Committees Conclusion

Committees can be a powerful tool for engaging members, sharing leadership responsibilities, and driving strategic initiatives. However, they must be purposeful, well-structured, and results driven. By ensuring committees have clear mandates and defined terms, BIAs can maximize efficiency while avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy. The goal is to enhance BIA operations, not create additional administrative burdens.

## Operational Procedures

The City of Hamilton requires BIAs to follow standardized procedural guidelines, as outlined in the BIA By-law. These procedures include governance protocols, meeting requirements, and financial management expectations.

### >>Insert Procedural Section from City of Hamilton BIA By-law

# FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT & REPORTING

## Annual Budgeting & Levy Collection

The **Business Improvement Area (BIA) levy** is the primary funding mechanism that allows BIAs to operate and implement initiatives that benefit their commercial districts. The levy is collected from commercial and industrial properties within the designated BIA boundary by the Municipality and is **mandatory for all property owners** in the area. This ensures equitable participation and investment in local economic development.

The Board is responsible for preparing an annual budget that aligns with strategic priorities. This budget is:

- Reviewed and discussed with the membership at the AGM.
- Approved at the Board level before submission to Hamilton City Council for final approval.

This process ensures that the budget reflects the needs and priorities of the BIA while maintaining accountability to both members and the municipality.

## How the BIA Levy is Calculated

### 1. Establishing the Annual Budget

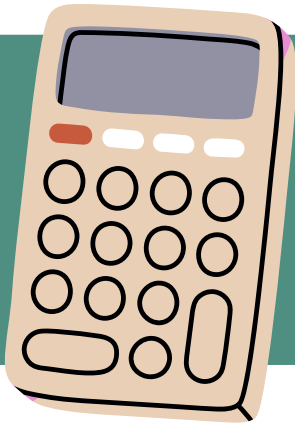
- Each BIA determines its annual **operating budget** based on planned activities, programs, and operational costs.
- The budget is reviewed by the **BIA Board of Management** and presented to members for discussion at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- The budget is then **submitted to the City of Hamilton for approval**, as required under the Ontario Municipal Act.

### 2. Apportioning the Levy

- Once the budget is approved, the total required amount is distributed **among all commercial and industrial properties** within the BIA boundary.
- The City of Hamilton calculates each property’s share of the levy based on its **current assessed value**, as determined by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC).

## BIA LEVY CALCULATION FORMULA:

$$\begin{aligned} & (\text{Total BIA Budget}) \div (\text{Total Assessed Value of all BIA Properties}) \\ & \times (\text{Individual Property's Assessed Value}) \\ & = \text{Property's BIA Levy Contribution} \end{aligned}$$



### 3. Applying the Levy to Mixed-Use Properties

- If a property has both **commercial and residential** components, only the commercial portion is subject to the BIA levy.
- The levy is **pro-rated** based on the percentage of the property’s assessed value that is classified as commercial.
- Levy payouts may be subject to readjustment due to property reassessment claims.

### 4. Collection & Payment

- The City of Hamilton **adds the BIA levy to the property tax bill** of each commercial and industrial property within the BIA.
- Property owners pay the levy as part of their regular municipal property taxes, and the City distributes the collected funds to the BIA. One half of the BIA levy is paid out in Jan/Feb with the second half disbursed in June.

## Key Considerations for BIAs

- **Fairness & Transparency** – The levy is based on assessment values, ensuring that businesses contribute proportionally to the overall budget.
- **No Opt-Out Option** – All commercial and industrial properties within the BIA boundary must contribute to the levy to support shared improvements and services.
- **Annual Review & Adjustments** – The levy amount may change each year based on budget needs, assessment value fluctuations, or changes in BIA boundaries.
- **City Oversight** – The City ensures compliance with municipal regulations and annual audits and assists BIAs in calculating levy amounts.



### Annual External Audit

All BIAs must undergo an external audit annually.

The audited financial statements must be:

- Completed by the City Auditor (as per the Ontario Municipal Act)
- Submitted to the City of Hamilton for review.
- Shared with BIA members to ensure transparency.
- Presented at the AGM for discussion, though approval occurs at the Board level.
- Paid for by the BIA – in part or in whole – as dictated by the City Finance Department.



### Financial Best Practices

- **Maintain Detailed Financial Records:** Accurate tracking of income and expenses. This includes reconciliation of all expenditures and incomes on a monthly basis with the BIA bookkeeper and or Board Treasurer.
- **Optional Reserve Funds:** While not required or discouraged, reserve funds may be considered a best practice. However, some members prefer that levy funds be fully utilized annually to demonstrate value.
- **Quarterly Financial Reporting:** Regular updates to the Board and membership.

## STAFFING VS. VOLUNTEER–RUN BIAS

### The Importance of Hiring Staff

While some BIAs rely solely on volunteers, hiring part-time or full-time staff is recommended for sustainability and growth.

#### Benefits of Hiring Staff:

- **Continuity:** Staff provide stability as Board members change over time.
- **Operational Capacity:** Staff manage day-to-day activities, freeing the Board to focus on strategic decisions.
- **Stakeholder Relationships:** Staff who remain in their roles long-term can build strong, lasting relationships—the cornerstone of BIA success.

Recommended roles include Executive Director, Marketing Coordinator, and Administrative Support based on the BIA’s size and budget.

## COLLABORATION/ADVOCACY

### City of Hamilton’s Role

The City of Hamilton supports BIAs through:

- **BIA Coordinator:** A dedicated resource for governance support, training, and operational guidance.
- **Advocacy:** Representing BIA interests in policy discussions, zoning changes, and municipal planning processes.
- **Communication Channels:** Connecting BIAs to the right municipal departments or individuals to help achieve goals related to planning, policy, and programming.
- **BIA Sub Committee of Council that meet on a monthly basis.**

## BIA’S ROLE IN ADVOCACY

### BIAs are expected to advocate for their members by:

- **Engaging with Municipal Leaders:** Participating in consultations and providing feedback on City projects.
- **Collaborating with Community Partners:** Building partnerships to amplify their voice.
- **Developing Advocacy Strategies:** Aligning with the City’s economic goals while championing local business interests.

## EVALUATE & INVEST IN TRAINING FOR BOARD MEMBERS & STAFF

Continuous development is critical for effective governance. BIAs should evaluate training needs and invest in professional development for both Board members and staff.

### Key Areas for Development:

- **Conferences & Workshops:** Stay current on BIA trends and best practices and help BIA staff fill knowledge gaps.
- **Digital Tools:** Improve operational efficiency and data management.
- **Annual Staff Reviews:** Focus on professional growth, goal setting, and performance support.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Foster mentorship within the Board to strengthen leadership skills.

# SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR BIAS

## The Importance of Succession Planning

Strong succession planning ensures the long-term stability and effectiveness of a BIA. Proactive planning for leadership transitions—both for **Board members and staff**—helps maintain institutional knowledge, avoid operational disruptions, and sustain momentum for key initiatives. A well-structured succession strategy also fosters strong governance, improves decision-making, and enhances community confidence in the BIA’s leadership.

## Best Practices for Board Succession Planning

### 1. Establish Term Limits & Rotation Policies

- Consider the implementation of **staggered terms** to ensure continuity and prevent full board turnover at once.
- Encourage a mix of **experienced members** and **new leadership** to bring fresh perspectives.

### 2. Maintain a Leadership Pipeline

- Identify potential board leaders early and offer **mentorship opportunities**.
- Provide **training** on governance, financial oversight, and municipal policies.

### 3. Encourage Diversity & Representation

- Ensure board composition reflects the diversity of the **business community** and **district demographics**. It is also important to consider strong and varied representation of all different voices within the BIA.
- Actively recruit members with **varied expertise** (e.g., finance, marketing, legal, operations).

### 4. Document Roles & Responsibilities

- Maintain up-to-date **job descriptions** for board positions.
- Ensure new board members receive a **comprehensive orientation**.



## 5. Conduct an Annual Governance Review

- Assess board effectiveness and identify skill gaps.
- Implement an **evaluation process** for board members and leadership roles.

## Best Practices for Staff Succession Planning

### 1. Develop Key Staff Leadership Skills

- Offer **professional development** opportunities.
- Create a **mentorship system** between senior staff and junior employees.

### 2. Maintain Clear Job Descriptions & Transition Guides

- Outline key responsibilities for each staff role.
- Keep a **transition manual** to ensure knowledge transfer during leadership changes.

### 3. Cross-Training & Knowledge Sharing

- Train multiple staff members in key operational areas.
- Use **shared documentation storage systems** for essential BIA information including documentation, passwords, insurance, banking etc.,

### 4. Engage in Regular Performance & Talent Assessments

- Evaluate current staff capabilities and identify knowledge gaps.
- Identify potential internal candidates for leadership roles.

### 5. Create an Emergency Transition Plan

- Develop a **temporary leadership plan** in case of sudden staff departures.
- Assign interim leadership roles and delegate key responsibilities in advance.

## Checklist for BIA Succession Planning

>> *Insert a checklist here.*

Succession Planning Conclusion

A strong succession plan ensures that a BIA remains stable, strategic, and forward-thinking. By proactively identifying future leaders, cross-training staff, and establishing clear governance structures, BIAs can transition smoothly between leadership changes without disrupting operations. Investing in **succession planning** supports long-term organizational health, enabling BIAs to continue serving their members and communities effectively.

Conclusion

Effective governance and operations ensure BIAs remain transparent, accountable, and aligned with both their members’ interests. The City of Hamilton provides support through advocacy, resources, and policy guidance, while BIAs are expected to maintain strong leadership, sound financial practices, and active member communication and engagement.

By prioritizing good governance, stakeholder relationships, and continuous learning, BIAs can create vibrant commercial districts that contribute to Hamilton’s long-term growth and prosperity.



SECTION 4:  
CITY OF HAMILTON FINANCIAL  
INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

For over two decades, the City of Hamilton has been a pioneer in implementing financial incentive programs aimed at revitalizing its Business Improvement Areas (BIAs). These initiatives are regularly reviewed and updated to meet the evolving needs of the community, ensuring their continued effectiveness in fostering economic growth and urban renewal. Hamilton’s proactive approach has positioned it as a leader, with other municipalities frequently seeking insights into its successful programs. The City’s commitment to continuous improvement has solidified its reputation as a leader in the urban revitalization.

## Overview of Hamilton’s Financial Incentive Programs

Hamilton’s suite of financial incentives is designed to stimulate private investment, enhance property values, and invigorate commercial districts. Key programs include:

- **Barton/Kenilworth Tax Increment Grant (BKTIG) Program:** Provides grants based on the increase in municipal property taxes resulting from significant property redevelopment, distributed over a maximum of nine annual payments.
- **Commercial District Revitalization Grant (CDRG) Program:** Offers matching grants for exterior and select interior property improvements in strategic commercial districts, including BIAs.
- **Revitalizing Hamilton Tax Increment Grant (RHTIG) Program:** Supports property development through grants based on increased municipal property taxes from improvements, with additional incentives for projects incorporating affordable housing or environmental sustainability measures.

>>*For more detailed information and descriptions of all of the City’s financial incentives, go to the link found here: [City of Hamilton BIA Financial Incentives Found Here](#)*

## How These Incentives Benefit BIAs

These financial incentive programs contribute directly to the success of BIAs by encouraging private investment, improving commercial properties, and fostering a vibrant business environment. By leveraging these programs, BIAs can support member businesses, enhance streetscapes, and attract new enterprises to their districts.

## Secondary Benefits of Financial Incentive Programs

Beyond the immediate economic uplift, these programs contribute to a range of secondary benefits:

- **Enhanced Community Confidence:** Visible improvements in BIAs foster a sense of pride and confidence among residents, encouraging further community engagement and investment.
- **Job Creation:** Revitalization projects often lead to increased employment opportunities, both during the construction phase and through the attraction of new businesses.
- **Improved Public Safety:** Well-maintained and active commercial areas tend to experience reduced crime rates, contributing to overall public safety.
- **Increased Property Values:** Enhanced aesthetics and functionality of properties can lead to higher property values, benefiting both owners and the municipality through increased tax revenues.

These outcomes collectively contribute to the long-term sustainability and vibrancy of Hamilton’s neighborhoods.

## Challenges and the Role of BIAs

Despite the availability of these incentives, some property owners and businesses may hesitate to apply due to concerns about potential obligations, fears of increased taxes, or perceptions of a cumbersome application process. To address these challenges, BIAs play a crucial role in:

- **Educating Members:** Providing clear information about the benefits and requirements of the programs to dispel myths and build trust.
- **Assisting with Applications:** Offering support throughout the application process to simplify and expedite submissions.
- **Advocating for Members:** Liaising with municipal authorities to address concerns and streamline procedures, ensuring the programs are accessible and user-friendly.

By actively engaging in these areas, BIAs can enhance participation rates and maximize the positive impact of the incentive programs.

## Additional Support for Small Businesses

In addition to financial incentives, the City of Hamilton offers resources through the Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC). The SBEC provides assistance to emerging small businesses, including workshops, training sessions, and advisory services, further bolstering the entrepreneurial ecosystem within the city. (Is this still true?)

## Application and Eligibility

Property owners and business operators interested in applying for these programs should review The Hamilton’s Economic Development Division. Each program has distinct criteria, funding limits, and timelines, ensuring that businesses and property owners can access the support best suited to their needs.



“OUR TEAM WAS HAPPY TO WORK WITH THE CDSB TO BRING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REVITALIZATION IN DOWNTOWN HAMILTON. THE TEAM HELPED WALK US THROUGH THE PROCESS TO APPLY FOR AND RECEIVE OUR GRANT WITH EASE. I WOULD RECOMMEND THE PROGRAM TO OTHER PROPERTY OWNERS WHO WANT TO IMPROVE THE CITY LANDSCAPE.”

Conclusion

The City of Hamilton’s financial incentive programs have played a pivotal role in shaping the success and vibrancy of its BIAs for over two decades. By continually refining these programs to meet evolving economic needs, Hamilton has positioned itself as a leader in municipal support for commercial district revitalization. These initiatives not only stimulate private investment but also contribute to long-term economic sustainability, enhanced public spaces, and stronger business communities.

BIAs play a crucial role in promoting these programs, assisting members in navigating the application process, and ensuring businesses understand the full range of benefits available. By actively engaging with these financial incentives, Hamilton’s BIAs can continue to foster thriving, resilient, and prosperous commercial districts that serve as pillars of the city’s economic and social fabric.



SECTION 5:  
BEST PRACTICES & ADDITIONAL  
RESOURCES

Strong governance, strategic planning, and proactive engagement are essential for the success of a Business Improvement Area (BIA). This section highlights best practices that can help BIAs maximize their impact, foster economic growth, and maintain operational efficiency. Additionally, it provides resources to support BIAs in implementing these best practices.

## 1. Governance & Leadership

Effective governance ensures that a BIA operates transparently, efficiently, and in alignment with its mandate. Key governance best practices include:

- **Clear Roles & Responsibilities:** Board members, staff, and volunteers should have clearly defined roles, as outlined in the BIA's constitution, bylaws, and procedural policies.
- **Strong Financial Oversight:** Regular financial reporting, adherence to municipal requirements, and external audits help maintain credibility and accountability.
- **Board & Staff Training:** Ongoing education on municipal policies, financial management, and governance strengthens board effectiveness.
- **Ethical Standards & Conduct:** Adherence to a code of conduct and conflict of interest policies ensures professional and ethical decision-making.

## 2. Strategic & Business Planning

A well-defined strategic plan provides direction for a BIA's activities and ensures that initiatives align with long-term economic development goals. Best practices include:

- **Vision & Mission Alignment:** Establish a clear mission statement and vision that reflect the needs of businesses and the community.
- **Goal Setting & Performance Metrics:** Define measurable objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess progress.
- **Annual Work Plan Development:** Outline specific initiatives, timelines, and responsibilities in an annual work plan to ensure structured execution.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Regular consultation with business owners, property owners, and community stakeholders strengthens support for BIA initiatives.
- **Taking personal ownership of challenges impacting the BIA** – and not always deferring to city service levels. Thinking and implementing creative solutions to problems to show value to the BIA membership. ie: If security is an issue, consider hiring private security patrols. If cleanliness is an issue, consider a seasonal community clean up initiative or renting a dumpster for waste collection. If graffiti is an issue, consider hiring a BIA contractor to regularly clear off tags.



## 3. Financial Sustainability & Revenue Generation

Sustainable funding is crucial for the long-term success of a BIA. Key financial strategies include:

- **Leveraging City Incentives:** Take full advantage of municipal grants, staff supports and contributions to BIA budgets.
- **Diversified Revenue Streams:** Explore sponsorships, partnerships, event revenue, and membership fees to supplement levy-based funding.
- **Reserve Fund Management:** Maintain a contingency reserve for unexpected expenses or future investment opportunities.



## 4. Marketing, Promotion & Placemaking

Attracting visitors, customers, and investment requires strong branding and placemaking efforts. Best practices include:

- **Consistent Branding & Identity:** Develop a cohesive marketing strategy that includes a strong visual identity, social media presence, and promotional materials.
- **Community & Cultural Events:** Hosting events, markets, and festivals can enhance visibility, attract foot traffic, and support local businesses.
- **Public Realm Improvements:** Streetscaping, façade enhancements, and public art projects improve the overall appeal of the commercial district.

## 5. Data-Driven Decision Making

Collecting and analyzing data helps BIAs make informed decisions and demonstrate their impact. Effective data strategies include:

- **Business & Property Inventories:** Maintain an up-to-date directory of businesses and property owners for communication and planning.
- **Foot Traffic & Sales Data:** Partner with businesses and stakeholders to track sales trends and pedestrian counts to measure economic activity.
- **Surveys & Community Feedback:** Regularly engage with stakeholders to assess needs and satisfaction levels.

## 6. Advocacy & Partnerships

BIAs play a key role in advocating for policies that support small businesses and commercial districts. Strong advocacy and partnerships include:

- **Collaboration with the City:** Work closely with municipal departments on infrastructure projects, policy changes, and funding opportunities.
- **Business & Community Alliances:** Partner with chambers of commerce, tourism boards, neighbourhood associations, service clubs and other local organizations to amplify initiatives.
- **Government Relations:** Engage with local, provincial, and federal representatives to secure funding and policy support.

## 7. Activating Spaces through Events & Programming

One of the most impactful ways a BIA can foster vibrancy in its district is through creative placemaking and event programming. Successful BIAs invest in:

- **Seasonal and Cultural Festivals:** Hosting regular events that bring the community together and attract visitors to local businesses.
- **Pop-up Markets & Interactive Installations:** Creating temporary activations that increase engagement and foot traffic.
- **Collaborations with Artists & Performers:** Using arts and culture to define the character of a district and make it a destination.
- **Outdoor Public Programming:** Activating parks, sidewalks, and public spaces with live music, performances, and community events.

## 8. City of Hamilton BIA Support & Action Plans

Each of Hamilton’s BIAs has had an Action Plan developed by an external consultant, providing a clear roadmap for success. These plans include tailored strategies for business support, marketing, and capital improvements. Additionally, the City has conducted Revitalization Studies and provided data and insights to help BIAs make informed decisions.

The City of Hamilton also employs a dedicated BIA Coordinator, who serves as a direct point of contact for governance support, funding guidance, and operational assistance. This role ensures BIAs have access to municipal expertise and resources to help implement their strategic goals effectively.

# ASSET MAPPING FOR BIAS



## What is Asset Mapping?

Asset mapping is a strategic approach to identifying and documenting the resources available within a BIA’s boundaries. It includes two key categories:

- 1. Physical (Hard) Assets** – Infrastructure, public spaces, key commercial properties, transit connections, and amenities.
- 2. Soft Assets** – Business owners, community leaders, local organizations, and skilled individuals who can contribute to BIA initiatives.

By conducting asset mapping, a BIA creates a comprehensive inventory of its strengths, allowing it to better plan for marketing, programming, advocacy, and economic development.

## Why Should BIAs Conduct Asset Mapping?

- ✓ **Improves Decision-Making** – A well-documented asset map helps BIAs prioritize projects, allocate resources, and identify underutilized spaces.
- ✓ **Enhances Collaboration** – Understanding who in the community has relevant skills or expertise helps BIAs form partnerships and build stronger programming.
- ✓ **Strengthens Public Realm Investments** – Mapping infrastructure, green spaces, transit, and accessibility features ensures BIAs can advocate for improvements.
- ✓ **Aids in Maintenance & Infrastructure Tracking** – A detailed inventory of benches, litter containers, poles, planters, bike racks, and signage helps BIAs track when items are damaged, relocated, stolen, or require repairs (e.g., due to snow plow damage).
- ✓ **Encourages Business Support & Networking** – By recognizing key business sectors and skilled individuals, BIAs can connect members with opportunities that align with their strengths.
- ✓ **Aids in Advocacy Efforts** – A strong inventory of assets provides data to support funding applications, grant proposals, and municipal requests for improvements.



WATERDOWN  
BIA

STONE  
CREEK BIA



## Best Practices for Asset Mapping

### 1. Identify Key Public Realm Assets

- Streetscape elements (**benches, bike racks, waste bins, lighting, planters, wayfinding signage**).
- Public spaces (**parks, gathering spaces, sidewalks, event spaces**).
- Transit connections (**bus stops, bike lanes, parking infrastructure**).
- Document locations of **BIA-owned or municipally installed infrastructure** to track maintenance needs.

### 2. Create a Business & Property Inventory

- Track **commercial properties, key business sectors, and vacancy rates**.
- Identify properties with potential for redevelopment, leasing, or pop-up activations.

### 3. Map Soft Assets (People & Organizations)

- Business owners, community leaders, and volunteers with **relevant skills**.
- Partner organizations, including **nonprofits, cultural groups, service clubs, neighbourhood associations and schools**.
- Individuals with expertise in **event planning, marketing, design, or advocacy**.

### 4. Use Digital Tools

- Utilize **mapping tools/google, digital surveys, and stakeholder interviews** to create a dynamic, regularly updated asset inventory.

### 5. Review & Update the Asset Map Annually

- As businesses evolve and infrastructure projects are completed, the asset inventory should be **regularly reviewed and revised** to reflect changes in the district.

## Checklist for Asset Mapping



### Identify Key Public Realm Assets

- Document locations of benches, litter bins, bike racks, planters, streetlights, and wayfinding signage.
- Ensure infrastructure is mapped for accessibility and improvement tracking.



### Maintain a Business & Property Inventory

- Track occupied and vacant commercial spaces.
- Identify properties suitable for redevelopment, pop-ups, or business recruitment.



### Map People & Organizations with Skills That Can Support BIA Programming

- Identify business owners, community leaders, artists, and volunteers.
- Engage with nonprofits, cultural groups, and educational institutions as potential partners.



### Engage Stakeholders to Contribute to the Asset Mapping Process

- Conduct surveys or focus groups with businesses and residents.
- Host community meetings to validate findings and refine the inventory.



### Use Digital Mapping Tools to Make Information Accessible & Easy to Update

- Utilize GIS software or the City's Open Data Portal to create a visual representation of assets.
- Ensure BIA staff and board members have access to the mapping database.



### Implement a Tracking System for Damaged or Missing Infrastructure

- Establish a reporting process for businesses and community members to flag issues.
- Work with the City to coordinate repairs and replacements.



### Review & Refine the Asset Inventory Annually

- Conduct a yearly audit of public realm assets and business changes.
- Update mapping tools to reflect infrastructure upgrades and business turnover.



## Checklist for Asset Mapping

- Identify key public realm assets (benches, litter bins, signage, transit stops).
- Maintain a business & property inventory, tracking vacancies and opportunities.
- Map people and organizations with skills that can support BIA programming.
- Engage stakeholders to contribute to the asset mapping process.
- Use digital mapping tools to make information accessible and easy to update.
- Implement a tracking system for damaged or missing infrastructure.
- Review and refine the asset inventory annually.

## Conclusion

Asset mapping is a **valuable strategic tool** that enables BIAs to **maximize resources, build partnerships, and plan more effectively**. By cataloging both **physical and soft assets**, BIAs can ensure they are making informed decisions that support **economic growth, placemaking, and community engagement**. Additionally, a well-maintained inventory of **public realm assets helps BIAs advocate for repairs, replacements, and funding for infrastructure improvements**. Investing in a regularly updated asset map ensures a BIA is **proactive rather than reactive**, strengthening its role as a leader in local economic development.

## Leveraging Open Data for BIA Success

The City of Hamilton provides an Open Data Map that enables BIAs to access valuable information that supports planning, advocacy, and decision-making. This digital tool allows BIAs to visualize their district’s data and leverage municipal resources effectively.

## What Can BIAs Do with Open Data?

- Analyze Business & Property Data – Identify trends, track vacancies, and plan future improvements.
- Understand Demographic & Traffic Patterns – Use data to shape marketing campaigns and business recruitment strategies.
- Access Infrastructure & Public Realm Information – Locate assets like streetlights, bike racks, garbage bins, and benches.
- Support Grant Applications & Advocacy Efforts – Use real-time data to strengthen funding proposals and infrastructure requests.

## How to Access the City’s Open Data

BIAs can explore the Open Data Portal through the City’s website. The portal is continuously updated with GIS mapping layers, property assessments, transportation routes, and commercial zoning insights.

>> [Visit the Open Data Portal here:](#)

## Next Steps for BIA

- Train staff and board members on how to use Open Data for strategic decision-making.
- Incorporate Open Data insights into business retention and recruitment strategies.
- Use mapping tools to enhance wayfinding, accessibility, and beautification projects.

## Conclusion

BIAs play a critical role in fostering economic growth, enhancing public spaces, and strengthening business districts. Their efforts go beyond governance and financial management—they serve as catalysts for community engagement, cultural identity, and commercial success. By implementing best practices in leadership, strategic planning, placemaking, and advocacy, BIAs can create dynamic spaces that support thriving businesses and vibrant communities.

The City of Hamilton provides a strong foundation of resources and support, including Action Plans, Revitalization Studies, data insights, and a dedicated BIA Coordinator. The most successful BIAs are those that actively engage with their members, adapt to evolving economic conditions, and prioritize activation through events, programming, and creative placemaking. By embracing these approaches, BIAs can continue to be key drivers of prosperity and livability in Hamilton’s neighborhoods.



# CITY OF HAMILTON BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREAS TOOLKIT



Hamilton