SOUTHAMPTON BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA

2026

YEAR IN REVIEW

Annual General Meeting • November 3, 2026

A year of recovery, member advocacy, placemaking and building toward a four-season economy.

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Reopening High Street. Rebuilding momentum.

The year was about helping businesses recover from disruption while improving the tools, evidence and partnerships needed for the future.

MAY 16

High Street reopened

~10,000

Winter Love Local ballots

OBIAA Award

Streetscape Award for High Street Revitalization Partnership with the town.

A message from the Chair

2026 marked the transition from construction mitigation to downtown recovery. We continued to support local spending, improve public spaces, connect members with resources, and examine what will sustain our business community outside the summer peak.

What we delivered

- High Street reopening and promotional activities
- Local-spending campaigns and business visibility
- Streetscape, public art and seasonal decoration
- Member communication and representation

What we began building

- Beyond the Beach research with Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU)
- Better measures of event impact
- Stronger regional and provincial partnerships
- A more intentional 2027 shoulder-season
- Collaborations across businesses for experiences

REVITALIZATION & RECOVERY

High Street: reopening was a milestone, not the finish line.

The BIA continued communicating with importance of supporting our local businesses regardless of construction being completed. Businesses need to be considered when any event or activity impacts our core commercial area.

May 16: welcoming shoppers back

Mayor's ribbon cutting, presentation from MPP Thompson, sidewalk displays, games and a Southampton gift-pack draw. We had more than 1,300 ballots, and the winner was a seasonal resident.

Post Construction Advocacy

While we continue to work with the Town on a regular basis, including monthly meetings with our Community & Economic Development Officers, Sara also represented our personal experiences to 9 different provincial ministries with the simple ask, consider how your decisions impact our Main Street Businesses.

70%

May survey: saw an increase in traffic and/or sales from previous May.

70%

May survey: Reopening event was beneficial "loved the live music"

90%

Open to similar activations

2026 OBIAA Award of Merit: recognizing Southampton BIA and Town efforts supporting businesses through construction. We have also been highlighted provincially as a community worth learning from.

Turning attention into local spending

The BIA used incentives, paid media and business storytelling to encourage visits to Southampton during quieter periods.

Winter Love Local • February–March

Nearly 10,000 shop-to-win ballots were submitted, and eight $100 gift vouchers were awarded. The campaign rewarded local purchasing and encouraged residents and regional visitors to continue choosing Southampton.

RTO7 advertising support

A nearly $1,000 campaign - provided through RTO7 funding - targeted people within roughly 60 km. Reach and clicks demonstrate exposure, not verified sales.
Find out about this program in our regular newsletters.

74,849
Paid campaign reach

201,536
Ad impressions

5,641
Clicks reported

Promoting members

- Business spotlight reels and member social sharing
- Regional print advertising and editorial opportunities
- Accurate business listings, RTO7 listings and web visibility
- Support for business-generated events and offers

Business support & connections

- Shared training, grants and business-support links
- Business to Bruce and other County resources
- Online presence and Google Business Profile assistance
- Bruce Grey Simcoe/RTO7 tourism resources

2027 implication: connect marketing activity to business participation and actual commercial outcomes.

PROMOTION & EVENTS

A year of activity, collaboration and experimentation

BIA-led activities, support for community events, and cross-promotion all created opportunities for customers to explore Southampton.

Spring & summer

- Easter Egg Community Hunt Support
- April Wine & Cheese Fest: nine business pairings on Saturday, special Sunday tasting at Room 797
- Street reopening and sidewalk activation
- Summer music, arts and long-weekend promotion

Fall and Winter

- Ladies at the Lake and Mrs. Roper Romp (October)
- Business-focused municipal candidates meeting, co-hosted with Port Elgin BIA
- Pumpkinfest and other community-event tie-ins
- Southampton Sparkles
- Festive Fridays
- Frost & Fireside Festival
- Santa Summit

What the events data tells us

Activity downtown matters, but activity on its own is not enough. We need stronger calls to shop, business-linked offers, clear information about participation, and evaluation of customer spending.

Free family events have proven to detract from our businesses. Refocusing to ensure that family events happen without causing negative impact to businesses is vital.

2026 holiday programming scheduled after the AGM

Sparkles Night • Festive Fridays and wagon rides • Frost & Fireside • Santa Summit

Investing in a downtown worth visiting

Streetscape investments make Southampton more inviting and help distinguish our community as a place to explore.

Public art & local creativity

- New Bell utility-building mural by Saugeen First Nation artist Kennedy Cameron-Nashkewa
- G.C. Huston student-designed pole banners
- Alley gallery and public-art enhancements
- Spruce the Bruce funding support

Seasonal streetscape

- Flower baskets and planters
- Holiday lighting and décor
- 18 new illuminated pole-mounted wreaths to replace aging decorations
- Wayfinding and stronger links between events and High Street

The SOUTH sign

The sign generated photo opportunities and vigorous debate over design, placement, safety and local identity. Member feedback was 57% supportive in the current location, 22% supportive in any location, 21% opposed to location or sign
Overall 79% supportive

MEMBER VOICE & OUTCOMES

Listening to businesses, not just counting visitors

Three surveys during 2026 gave the Board evidence of both enthusiasm and practical concerns about downtown programming.

42.9%

August: noticed more event foot traffic

13%

Saw an increase from sales

87%

Said sales were down during events

A meaningful distinction

Respondents noticed increased foot traffic during community events, but only a small sales increase was seen – or more importantly and overwhelming decline in sales was seen. This is why programming must be designed with merchants and not merely around visitor counts.

What members asked for

- More BIA-led activations
- Better wayfinding to the business core
- Business spotlight reels
- More collaboration and experiences across multiple businesses.
- Events to be removed from the core commercial block
- A bylaw or incentive to put retail or food-based businesses into our core commercial area over service based,

2027 business surveys

Two tailored forms now ask High Street businesses about winter and shoulder-season program interest, and off-High Street members about opportunities, support, communications and visibility. Responses will shape decisions, rather than being presumed.

TMU studied the gap between summer success and winter resilience

The 2026 Toronto Metropolitan University capstone examined challenges, business feedback, comparative destinations and a practical framework for change.

85%

Believe more shoulder-season events could attract customers

64.3%

Would join a coordinated promotion

71.4%

Would offer promotions or giveaways

What the survey uncovered

Respondents identified declining customer traffic and winter weather as major barriers. Reported shoulder-season revenue represented roughly 10–40% of annual business revenue for respondents; most shoulder-season customers were local to Bruce County.

Strengths to build upon

- Strong independent-business identity
- Historic small-town atmosphere
- Waterfront and outdoor recreation
- Businesses able to collaborate across retail, food, arts and wellness
- A destination already known in summer

Constraints to tackle

- Harsh winter travel conditions
- Businesses shortening hours or closing
- Limited winter destination identity
- Few structured training/networking opportunities
- Finite BIA budget and volunteer capacity

What other destinations taught us, and what TMU recommended

The final report offers more than an event list: it calls for a coordinated shift in products, branding, partnerships and local capacity.

1. Signature experiences

Spring Awakening, fall colours, harvest and winter experiences: attract visitors because of the season, rather than apologizing for it.

2. Packaged getaways

Market multi-business visitor experiences—not isolated offers. Examples: romantic winter escape, girls' weekend and active adventure getaway.

3. Culinary tourism

Use food as a reason to visit: tasting trails, seasonal menus, restaurant weeks, soup-and-sip experiences and linked retail activities.

4. Audience & identity

Reach mature couples and families with older children interested in food, shopping, wellness, culture and active experiences. Build a distinct all-season brand.

Business readiness & long-term support

TMU also recommends business capacity-building, a cohesive destination story, better visitor information and consideration of longer-term tourism funding options, including municipal accommodation-tax advocacy.

Case-study lessons

Prince Edward County invested in culinary and winter experiences; Tofino embraced storm watching. Southampton needs its own authentic reason to visit outside summer.

What the new data reveals

An additional evidence base alongside TMU's Beyond the Beach research and direct member feedback.

2.9M

Estimated visits in the defined 2025 study area

69%

Of estimated visits were on weekdays

42.93%

Of visits occurred from noon to 6 p.m.

60.8%

Of visits originated in the N0H postal area

Implications for 2027

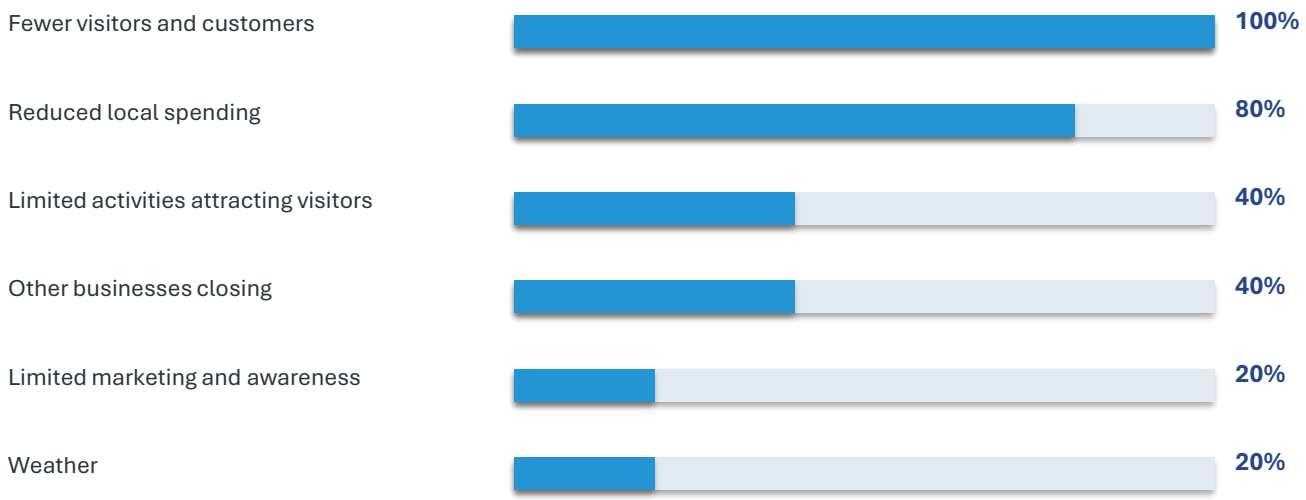
- Q1 was the lowest-visitation quarter: a clear case for winter indoor experiences and promotions.
- Food, wellness and family activities can build on strong weekday and afternoon demand.
- Loyalty programs and business collaborations can encourage repeat visits among local and regional customers.
- CUI's prospectus also identifies opportunities for future business attraction in retail, services and hospitality.

Source: CUI / Environics Analytics, 2025 data. Visitation estimates are not confirmed transactions or BIA-driven visits. The source PDFs misspell Southampton; corrected here.

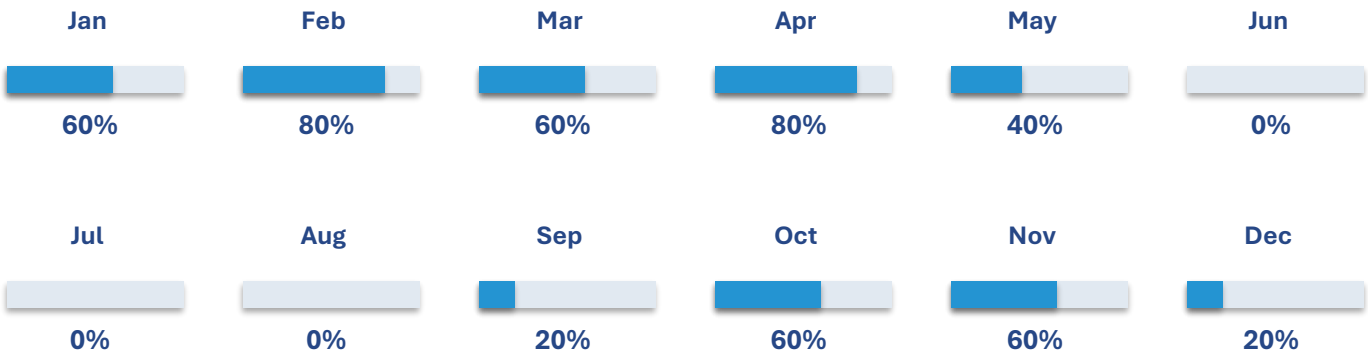
Why shoulder-season growth matters

Current High Street survey findings reinforce the TMU conclusion: the quieter months need stronger reasons to visit, and more reasons to spend locally.

Challenges identified by businesses



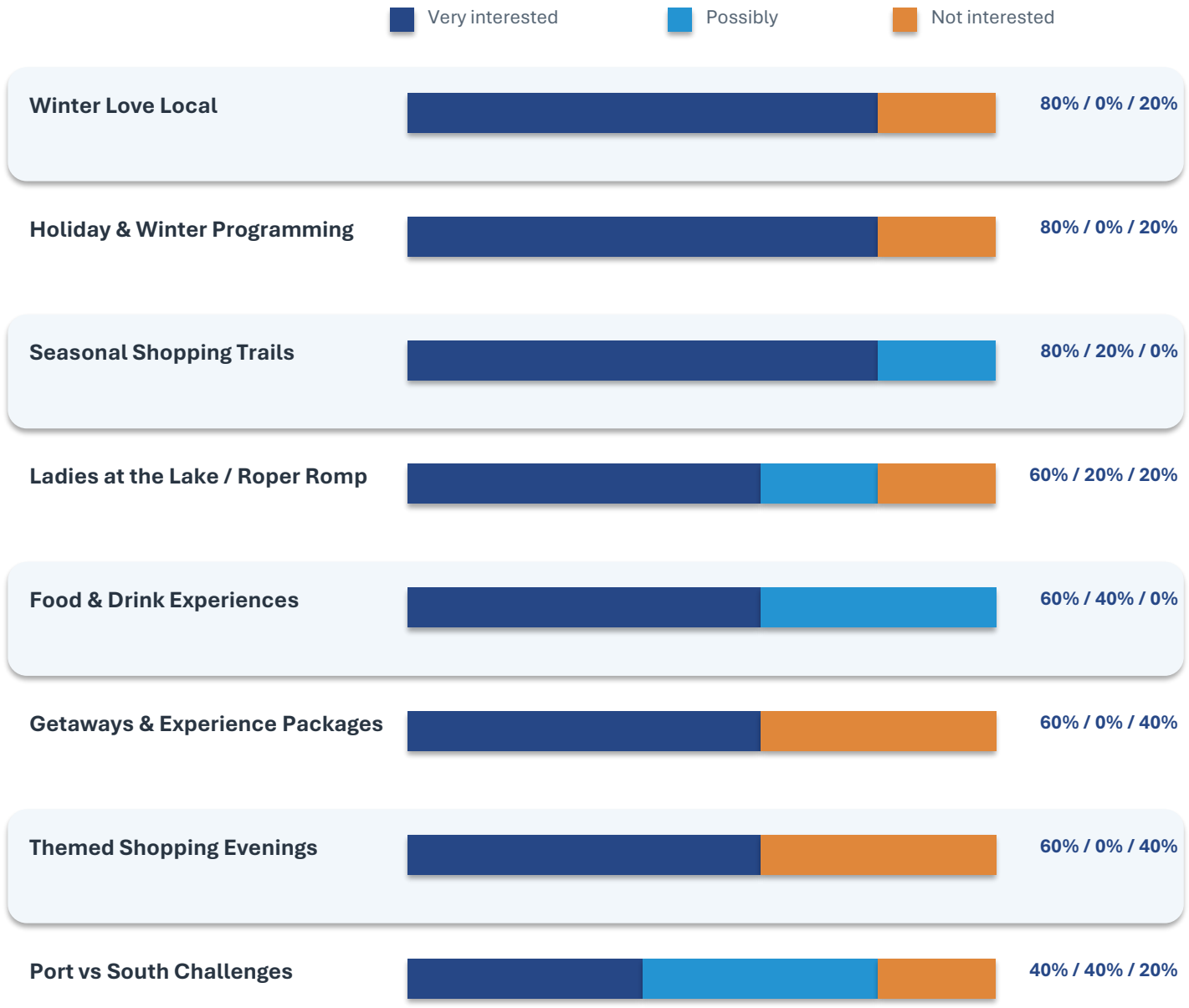
Months identified for additional programming



Takeaway: February and April were the strongest priority months; January, March, October and November also ranked highly.

Which experiences are gaining traction?

Businesses were asked about interest - not commitments - in proposed 2027 activities. The percentages below help inform priorities and future conversations.

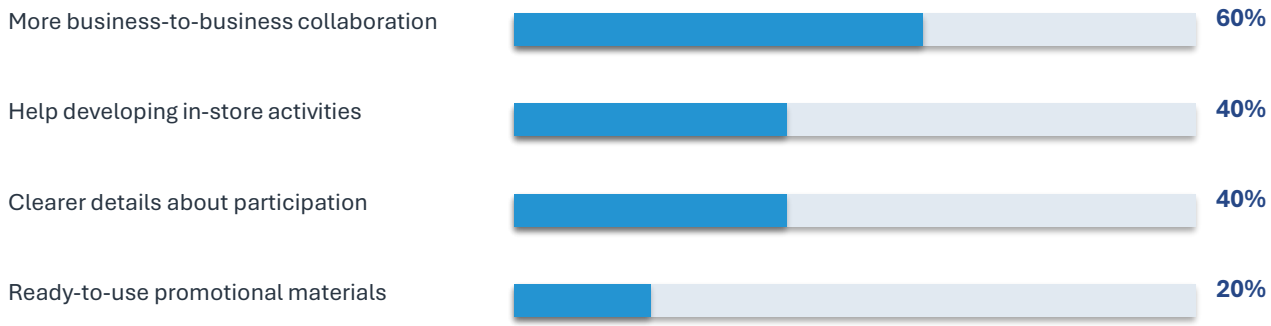


Strongest “very interested” results: Winter Love Local, winter programming and shopping trails (80% each).

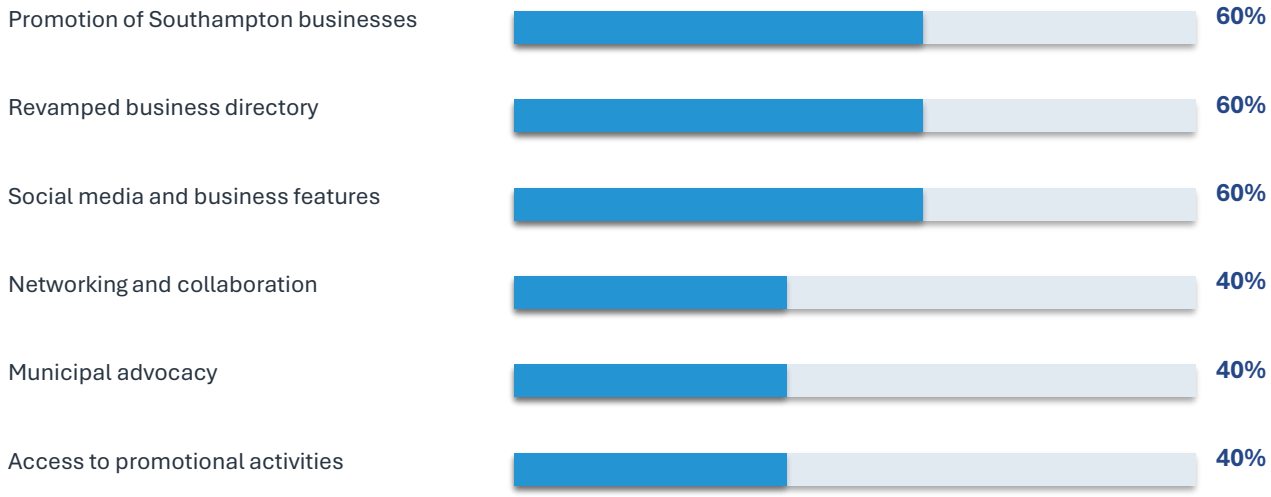
What businesses need from the BIA

The survey helps identify how to make programs achievable—not just which ideas sound appealing.

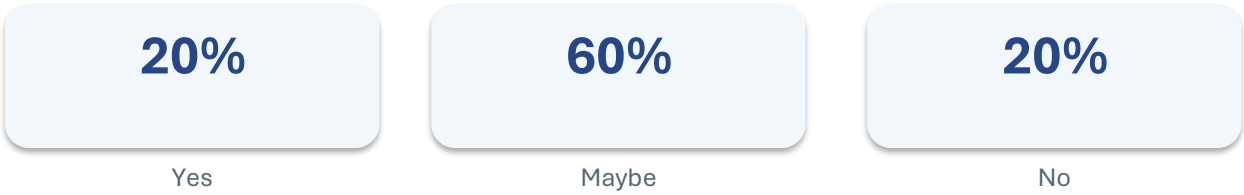
Support needed to participate



BIA services members value



Interest in BIA networking or information sessions



Beyond the Beach becomes a workable shoulder-season program

Proposed, not yet delivered: initiatives will be prioritized using the member surveys, available partners, capacity and approved budget.

Winter • January–March

Winter Love Local, “For the Love of Southampton” couples’ escapes, and a Port vs South trivia / euchre event, “Going South” marketing

Spring • April–June

Spring Awakening workshops, wellness and café collaborations; expanded Southampton Food & Drink Festival; business-linked scavenger hunt and possible charity bed race.

Late summer & fall

Food passports, cycling and other regional activations; Roper Romp shopping weekend; restaurant-led Battle of the Bites; holiday shopping experiences and window displays.

How we would deliver

Partner with accommodation, food, retail, wellness and recreation operators; package experiences together; provide promotional tools; test a manageable number of signature experiences.

What success looks like

Track participating businesses, packages booked, referrals, event attendance, campaign reach, member-reported traffic and - where possible - sales impact, not just crowd size.

2027 programming is an evidence-informed proposal, not a commitment to deliver every concept.

Sharper communication, clearer priorities

The 2027 budget and new website tracking offer a baseline for choosing work that is achievable and measurable.

235
Website active users

203
New users

1m 19s
Average engagement time

Google Analytics snapshot: September 19–October 16, 2026. This is a 28-day window, not a full-year website total.

Pages and discovery

Top pages included Events & Promotions (117 views), Explore Southampton Businesses & Community (116), Municipal Candidates Meeting (105), and Ladies at the Lake 2026 (63). Google organic and direct were leading session sources.

$20,000
2027 events & promotions

$17,333
2027 streetscape

$23,128
2027 administration

2027 draft working budget • $60,461 total

Proposed levy is $60,461 (3% above $58,700). The draft includes $1,000 expected event revenue and an estimated $30,000 in reserves; these are planning figures, not 2026 actual spending.

Practical financial caution

Not every experience listed for 2027 has a separate funded budget line. Partnerships, sponsorships, reprioritization or program phasing may be required.

Representing Southampton locally, regionally and provincially

The BIA's role extends beyond activities: we bring small-business issues to municipal decision-makers, economic development partners and provincial BIA conversations.

2026 engagement and collaboration

- Business-focused municipal candidates discussion co-hosted with Port Elgin BIA
- Information-sharing with Saugeen Shores, Bruce County, RTO7 and other regional partners
- Experience HWY 21 collaboration connecting our BIAs for cross-promotion
- Worked closely with Amanda Monaghan and Paul McGrath on supporting our local economy

OBIAA leadership and provincial representation

- Sara acts as OBIAA Secretary, Executive Committee; Chair, Advocacy Committee; member of Communications, Membership, Education and Conference committees.
- Represented rural BIAs through six ROMA and 9 AMO ministry delegations and invited to attend EDCO on behalf of OBIAA.
- Shared Southampton's construction-mitigation lessons through an invited Stouffville BIA presentation.

Why this matters to Southampton

Provincial influence on Main Street recovery and construction policy; early intelligence on grants; ministry relationships; a province-wide peer network; and increased visibility for Southampton, including an opportunity to host the 2028 OBIAA Conference.

A provincial voice with local returns

Advocacy & ministry access

Participation in provincial policy discussions on the Municipal Act, construction mitigation, Main Street recovery funding and rural BIA priorities.

Funding intelligence

Earlier awareness of provincial grants and programs through OBIAA networks and communications.

Peer learning

Practical examples from across Ontario on marketing, beautification, governance, public art, parking and event coordination.

Southampton's profile

Provincial recognition of the High Street revitalization approach, speaking invitations, and the opportunity to host OBIAA's 2028 conference.

Financial context

Sara must be nominated/endorsed by the SBIA board to sit on the OBIAA board every 2 years, the next endorsement will be in 2027. It comes with a recommendation by OBIAA that $2500 be allocated in the SBIA budget to cover expenses incurred for travel to in person board meetings and conference. Additional expenses are covered by Sara personally.

From recovery to a stronger four-season Main Street

The Board's 2027 choices should respond to the experiences of our members—and the limits of our capacity.

The next chapter

Use the High Street and off-High-Street member surveys to confirm interest; select a manageable number of signature experiences; connect business participation to promotion; strengthen wayfinding and digital discovery; keep advocating for the needs of local businesses.

Thank you

To our members, volunteers, Board, coordinator, municipal partners, artists, sponsors and everyone who continues to choose Southampton.

Sources: Spring and early-summer BIA bulletins; August/September member correspondence; May, August and October surveys; TMU final capstone report and presentation; GA4 snapshot; 2027 draft working budget.