

2024 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission

Brandon Chamber of Commerce
January 31, 2024



INTRODUCTION

The Brandon Chamber of Commerce is an independent, membership funded, not-for-profit organization that represents Brandon businesses at the grassroots level. The Chamber is dedicated to encouraging growth in the Brandon community by fostering a progressive business environment, favorable to enhancing existing businesses and attracting new ones.

2023 has proven to be another challenging year for our business community, as we continue to deal with uncertainty following the pandemic, including interrupted supply chains, labour issues, persistent inflationary pressures, and continued interest rate increases throughout 2023. On top of these varied, and significant pressures, the Government of Canada's CEBA loan re-payments were due this month. Our business community has been dealing with significant and unforeseen issues since the outset of the pandemic in March 2020, with no end in sight.

Our community, in its entirety, faces its own unique challenges, with the last quarter of 2023 highlighting some significant and ongoing challenges to the management of our municipal government finances and how our community will fund growth in the years ahead. The Chamber loudly calls upon the Province to be an active partner in the solution to this difficult situation.

There are two overarching issues that require relentless focus on behalf of the Province of Manitoba. The Manitoba Hydro grid expansion that was announced last year must continue, bringing vital hydroelectric power to our communities so that we can attract large business and industries that will contribute to the growth of our region. Additionally, the Brandon Chamber of Commerce encourages the Province to continue working on the pervasive social issues that are impacting our businesses, and every citizen of the province. While typically focused on business related issues, the burgeoning social problems are impacting many of our members, particularly those who operate downtown. Our business owners are sympathetic to the situation of those who are unsheltered but urge our provincial government to continue to make changes that speak to the on-the-ground issues with regards to mental health, housing and social supports. These issues require continued attention and will impact each of the priority areas outlined below, if not addressed and resolved by our provincial government.

The Brandon Chamber of Commerce is committed to continuing to promote Brandon as the province's second largest City and we will work with our provincial government to ensure that our business sector has access to the tools to succeed within a community that is poised to grow sustainably into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the Province of Manitoba considers the 2024 Budget, we encourage our elected officials to:

- 1. Support regional development initiatives, such as RMED and the GROW Brandon plan** to ensure that southwestern Manitoba continues to thrive and collaborate towards economic growth and prosperity. As GROW Brandon gets legs, it will be imperative to have partners like the Province of Manitoba at the table, to assist us in identifying the opportunities and securing adequate funding to build a robust, and achievable plan. The Keystone Centre is a major economic generator in our province, standing as a primary venue for hosting a diverse range of events that have a profound impact on our local economy. These gatherings result in substantial economic ripple effects, benefiting not only the Keystone Centre itself but also various industries throughout our community. Given its pivotal role as an economic catalyst, we urge a careful review of funding allocations in the 2024 provincial budget to ensure the continued success and growth of this vital institution. We also express gratitude for the province's initial commitment to multi-year funding, recognizing its positive impact on our local economy.
- 2. Develop a plan for equitable and consistent funding transfers to municipalities,** ensuring funding fairness and predictability. We echo the sentiments of the City of Brandon and Association of Manitoba Municipalities that calls for a simplified and predictable funding model with an annual escalator in place, enabling our communities to budget and plan for provincial government funding receipts. In addition, a review of the taxing structure and tools in would ensure a level playing field with regards to taxation, providing greater tax flexibility and autonomy to municipalities.

- 3. Invest in our province's post-secondary institutions in a fair and equitable manner,** ensuring that the establishments who literally produce the workforce of the future have consistent funding, regardless of where they are located in the province. Brandon's enviable position of being home to three post-secondary institutions means that we have a considerable vested interest in their ability to grow and educate those will build our businesses and community into the future. The Chamber of Commerce is particularly encouraged by the potential partnership of Brandon University and the University of Manitoba which would result in Max Rady School of Medicine seats right here in Brandon. The Chamber will support this unique, collaborative approach to producing physicians who are vested in the care of our region's residents.
- 4. Immigration** is a key cog in the wheel that will enable our businesses to thrive and our province to grow. The Brandon Chamber of Commerce encourages the province to leverage every aspect of immigration, bringing newcomers to our province who can join the workforce and contribute to our success. Seeing a Provincial Nominee Program that wasn't fully subscribed in 2023 (with only approximately 2/3 of our annual allotment being used) is very disheartening, and the Brandon Chamber of Commerce wants to work with government officials to ensure that every immigration avenue is operating at full capacity, ensuring that our workforce can grow into the future.
- 5. International trade** is a critical to a diverse economy. In recent years, Manitoba's international presence has all but evaporated, leaving businesses with export potential to navigate the choppy waters of international trade on their own. With the province not organizing trade missions, it leaves Manitoba behind the curve when provinces such as BC, AB, SK, ON, QC and NB have a much larger global footprint. The Brandon Chamber of Commerce has welcomed provincial leaders to tour some of the businesses located right in Brandon who are exporting their products all over the world; let's leverage their knowledge and provide a coordinated approach to helping others gain access to the global marketplace.

CONCLUSION

We encourage the Province of Manitoba to continue asking questions and seeking collaboration with citizens, stakeholders and businesses. The Brandon Chamber of Commerce, our community and our region will continue to raise our voices, sharing how we can best work together for the growth and economic prosperity of our region.

We thank you for being curious, and listening to the responses that have been shared so far. It is critical that this government look at ways that we can generate revenue and grow, so that the economic horse is well fed and capable of pulling the overburdened social cart. Each level of government is facing its own post-pandemic challenges, coupled with staggering infrastructure needs. The Brandon Chamber of Commerce is working to collaborate with other agencies to address as many of the issues that we can, however we need the Province of Manitoba to do its fair share of the heavy lifting in building our economy, and our communities into the future.

Thank you.



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