



Policy in the Midst of a Pandemic

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On May 22nd-23rd, delegates from 67 chambers and boards of trade across the province stayed in their home communities and met virtually for the BC Chamber of Commerce 68th Annual General Meeting & Conference. The BC Chamber team had quite a task on their hands to make this happen. Keynote speeches were straightforward enough as most of us are now familiar with the use of Zoom. Policy discussion and debate was rather more complicated as this process includes presentation of the policy, challenges or query, introduction of amendments, and voting for both any amendments and the policy itself. By using Zoom for presentation and discussion, with a link to their MindReader platform for voting, the BC Chamber staff kept us all on task. By the end of the second day, 62 policies were passed.

Why this matters is because while COVID-19 has required a whole new set of supports and advocacy for business, the pre-COVID issues have of course not gone away. Policy development within the BC Chamber network takes place at a grass roots level, which means that policy is developed by chambers/boards of trade to respond to a business issue. This year policy was passed in a range of areas, including increasing employment opportunities, supporting future and traditional sectors, and creating a competitive taxation framework. In a post-COVID world, any increase or addition to taxes could have dire consequences to the economy.

Another area of focus was investment in transportation and infrastructure. “The specific policy recommendations ultimately aim to create jobs along the supply chain, and create trade-enabling infrastructure—including roads, rail, marine, ports, airports— that will serve BC for decades to come.” The specific projects included expediting the George Massey Crossing Project, accelerating research around hydrogen as an alternative fuel for the transportation sector, and increasing federal funding for regional airports. The proposed policy “Restoring Rail on Vancouver Island” was of particular interest to those of us on the Island and is a priority for the south island (as evidenced by the Feb 2019 letter to the province by all 13 capital region mayors.) Unfortunately, this policy needed more amendments before it could go ahead and has been referred to the BC Chamber Board for further work.

The 2020-21 Policy & Positions Manual will be available late June.