



Heights Merchants Association 2024-2029 5-Year Strategic Plan

Presented to the HMA Board of Directors Aug. 2, 2023, as ratified on Oct. 4, 2023.

Background:

In Summer 2022, the HMA conducted a comprehensive survey of our membership (Merchants and Property Owners alike). Their responses were collected, summarized, and shared with the HMA Board and a strategic planning facilitator, Stephen Mikicich. (These survey data reports are available from the HMA office at any time.)

Later, in January 2023, the HMA Board and staff gathered on two separate occasions to review the survey results, discuss the current and upcoming needs of the district, and provide input to Stephen Mikicich. Stephen Mikicich took notes of the discussion, categorized them for us, and summarized his learnings from our group into a report entitled, “Heights Merchants Association: Toward a new BIA Mandate. Summary Report March 2023.”

This summary document was presented to the Board in the Spring 2023 and serves as the basis of this Strategic Plan.

Purpose of this document

This document will serve as the foundation of what we are approaching our membership to approve in the upcoming 10-Year Renewal of our Mandate.

While the Heights Merchants Association is appealing to our membership to approve a 10-year mandate, for the purposes of more controllable planning, this Strategic Plan will focus on the first five years. It will be reviewed mid-way (in 2026-2027) to help us glance ahead to the subsequent 5 years. In any 5-year time period, many factors and circumstances may change, as has been our experience as a BIA since 1994. Any significant changes will prompt a review of the Strategic Plan and how this Plan will influence and be translated into annual operational Business Plans.

Mission of the HMA*

To foster the economic development of the Burnaby Heights commercial district in cooperation with the community.

**The mission statement of the HMA remains unchanged.*

Vision Statements for Burnaby Heights*

Burnaby Heights aspires to be a vibrant gathering place, and a thriving shopping destination.

Burnaby Heights aspires to have a safe, pedestrian-friendly, community-centric ambience.

**A vision statement is the “dream” – a broad, aspirational goal for an organization. Usually it is just one statement, but we are including two inter-connected statements.*

5-Year Strategic Priorities for the Heights Merchants Association (2024 to 2025)

These priorities, broadly presented, will serve as over-arching priorities under which we will develop our more specific goals within annual operational Business Plans.

Executive Summary

The Burnaby Heights business district has changed dramatically and noticeably since its last renewal in 2014. Ten years ago, Burnaby Heights offered at least 40% more retailers and daily trade businesses than it does today. Medical and dental affiliated businesses were a much smaller business category than they are today. Since 2014, Medical and Dental enterprises have grown by more than 40% and today constitute the single biggest business category, outstripping Restaurants and Cafes (previously the biggest business category). Retail and small businesses are being pushed out.

In 2014, the district's businesses had only recently finally recovered from the 2008 Recession, of which economists say the effects lingered until 2011. This recovery was not perfect, however, as commercial property taxes were rising each year due to the lack of split assessments and the practice of assigning property values based on "highest and best use", not "current and actual" use. Because of tremendous tax fatigue, the HMA opted to keep our BIA Levy relatively the same from 2014-2024 (it was frozen for the first two years, and only grew between 1 to 2% in the years thereafter). This was not a wise move as the Association was not able to keep up with rising inflation, compete for quality employees, nor effectively meet the needs of its members. So in 2024 we will be asking our membership for a BIA Levy boost, spread out over two years (20.5% then 8.5%), then more moderate increases for inflation in the 8 years that follow.

In 2023, as we face our next Renewal, our merchants are still recovering from the effects of the 2020-2022 pandemic period. Inflation is slowly settling down (as of June 2023 figures) after fluctuating from 6 to 3% over the past 12 months. The high inflation has meant that the cost of goods and supplies has been difficult to keep up with, and even more difficult to pass down to customers to pay. Interest rates and borrowing costs remain high. The labour market is still tight. Partly due to the net decrease in the number of commercial units being built in the region (including in the Heights), commercial rents have been rising spectacularly. Combining high rents with high property values has resulted in untenably high overhead for small and independent businesses. We invite our readers to consider numerous competitive factors from big box stores, major shopping centres (including nearby Brentwood and SOLO) and online giants such as Amazon, and one can see that the road ahead for small main-street style merchants is not a smooth one.

The HMA **needs to continue to advocate for the needs of these businesses** so that neighbourhood shopping nodes like Burnaby Heights stand a chance at being viable – and successful. We need to keep in mind what competitive advantages the big box stores have that small street-front businesses do not. For example, our competitors never have 50% of their prime convenience parking supply taken from them during peak business hours each day, as we have and do.

While advocating for the district, the **HMA must also promote and market the district so that our Brand can stand out** and receive the attention the district needs. We must continue to **develop and evolve our Brand** as well to keep it **relevant and authentic** to our ever-changing business district and the community it serves.

At the same time, by **organizing local events and community celebrations**, in tandem with **creating cultural experiences** and **improving the physical experience** of the Heights, we will help keep those **links between merchants and residents** strong, and retain and **build on that sense of community** that has helped our area weather storms in the past.

Underscoring all of this is the community of merchants itself. **Relationships between business owners** is the heartbeat of our district, and the HMA will do all it can to serve its members, and keep them well connected with our Association, and with one another.

This document serves to outline what we will focus on to achieve all of this.

Priority 1 – Marketing and Promotion

Objectives:

- a) Vigorously promote Burnaby Heights for its unique local qualities and authenticity – which are our competitive advantages. Identify how the area is changing and how to position our district in a changing economic climate.
- b) Appeal to emerging generations of shoppers, through our programming and communication style.
- c) Ensure the new residents of Brentwood and SOLO have a high awareness of, and attraction to, our district.
- d) Ensure that the HMA uses newer media and technologies as suited to our current and desired customer base’s preferences.
- e) Ensure that adequate funds in the budget are made available for Marketing and that the employee hired to do marketing has sufficient bandwidth to do so. (This will require hiring additional staff to support Events.)

Priority 2 – Place Making, Events, and Community Experiences

Objectives:

- a) Host events that create strong linkages and unity between merchants and residents/shoppers, fostering community, loyalty, and a true understanding of what a neighbourhood shopping district delivers to its community. Do so while understanding that such events have the power, through common experiences, to build up social cohesion and community and have numerous other social and economic benefits for our district and the City as a whole.
- b) Through programming, physical enhancements, and/or public art, create common experiences and foster a local culture for our community. This is so that younger generations grow up with a firm identity of what this district means to them, and they have a positive association and relationship with the merchants that serve this area.
- c) Through the hiring of an additional staff member, ensure that the HMA’s capacity will expand enough to create more and/or higher quality place-making and community experiences.

Priority 3 – Advocacy for what we need to thrive

(NOTE: Priority 3 is equal in importance to Priority 2)

Objectives:

- a) On a rolling and at least annual basis, identify the leading existential threats and opportunities to the district as it pertains to transportation policies, infrastructure, as well as goals and intentions by City and regional authorities.
- b) Advocate for such policies in transportation and pedestrian movement that Burnaby Heights shopping district needs to compete effectively and succeed today and in the long-term, in light of the current economic landscape.
- b) Develop ideas and ask for new methods of bringing customers to our area, particularly from Brentwood-SOLO.
- c) Maintain excellent relations with local residents, support their needs, and foster their support in turn. Be a united and well-integrated community.
- d) Maintain excellent relations with partners, stakeholders and government leaders so that Burnaby Heights as a district is well understood as a major Burnaby employer and shopping centre, and supported as such.

Priority 4 – Member Relations

Objectives:

- a) Ensure our membership is well aware of our successes and efforts on their behalf.
- b) Ensure that no member is “left behind” in their connection with us, and that our communication reach is sufficiently frequent and thorough.
- c) Engage more merchants in our committees, events, initiatives, etc.
- d) Make a strong connection with our merchant newcomers and support them as they become established.