Downtown Orillia
Business Improvement Area (DOBIA)

Member Handbook

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Hello and Welcome!

DOBIA exists to help make Downtown Orillia a stronger place to do business. This guide is for business owners, commercial property owners and tenants who are part of the BIA. It answers the practical questions members most often have and explains how you can get involved.

Our goal is to make it easy to understand what DOBIA does, what your membership means and where to go when you need more information.

1. What Is a Business Improvement Area?

A Business Improvement Area, or BIA, is a defined geographic area where local businesses and commercial property owners work together through a Board of Management to improve and promote the district.

For Downtown Orillia, DOBIA's mandate is to represent, promote, beautify and strengthen Downtown Orillia through collaborative leadership, strategic investment, advocacy and programs that support businesses, property owners, residents and visitors.

A BIA is different from a voluntary business association. Membership is established by legislation and is connected to the BIA levy. Property owners and business tenants within the designated area are therefore members of the BIA.

> **Why that matters** Because membership is shared across the district, DOBIA can undertake projects and programs that benefit the downtown as a whole instead of relying only on voluntary participation or individual businesses to fund them.

2. Why Does a BIA Matter to My Business or Property?

A healthy downtown is a shared business environment. Customers experience the streets, public spaces, events, storefronts, businesses and overall reputation of the downtown—not just one individual property. DOBIA's work is intended to strengthen that shared environment. Benefits are often collective rather than a direct service delivered to one member.

- A stronger downtown destination can support customer traffic and business activity.
- Coordinated marketing and promotions can give the downtown a larger presence than individual businesses could create on their own.
- Events and programming can give customers more reasons to visit and spend time downtown.
- Beautification, maintenance and streetscape initiatives can improve the appearance and experience of the area.
- A coordinated voice can help represent shared downtown business-community issues.
- Partnerships with the municipality and community organizations can bring additional ideas, resources, expertise and investment into downtown initiatives.

DOBIA doesn't guarantee increased sales, occupancy, property values or individual business results. Its role is to invest in the conditions, programs and partnerships that support a vibrant and economically resilient downtown.

3. What Does DOBIA Do for Members?

Promote Downtown Orillia
DOBIA works to promote Downtown Orillia as a destination for business, shopping, tourism, culture, dining, entertainment and community life.

Create and Support Events and Programming
DOBIA supports downtown events and programming that contribute to visitation, community activity and the overall downtown experience. Support depends on the event, available resources and Board-approved priorities.

Market the Downtown
DOBIA's marketing work may include campaigns, promotional tools, communications and partnerships designed to increase awareness of Downtown Orillia and its businesses.

Beautify and Improve Public Spaces
DOBIA supports projects that improve the appearance, functionality and activation of downtown public spaces and streetscapes.

Advocate for the Downtown
DOBIA can bring forward issues affecting the downtown business community, communicate shared member interests and work with the City and other partners on downtown priorities.

Build Partnerships
DOBIA works with businesses, property owners, community organizations, government and other partners where collaboration can strengthen downtown initiatives.

In practical terms DOBIA is here to help make the downtown a stronger place to do business. That includes the environment around your business as well as initiatives that help bring people downtown.

4. What Does the BIA Levy Support?

The BIA levy is the funding mechanism that allows DOBIA to carry out Board-approved priorities. The Board approves the annual budget and oversees how the organization's financial resources are used. Significant areas of investment can include:

- marketing and promotions;
- events and downtown programming;
- beautification and streetscape initiatives;

- maintenance beyond what the municipality can provide;
- advocacy, partnerships and other downtown initiatives; and
- administration and other approved operating costs.

The specific activities and spending approved for a given year are determined through the Board's budget process and may change from year to year.

> **Important** The levy is not an individual membership fee that buys a specific service. DOBIA uses its resources to support the downtown as a whole, in accordance with its mandate, budget and Board decisions.

5. Who Runs DOBIA?

DOBIA is governed by a Board of Management. The Board provides strategic direction, approves policies and the annual budget, oversees organizational performance and ensures accountability to members.

The Board includes Directors elected from the membership and a City Councillor appointed to the Board. Members elect Directors in accordance with the DOBIA Election Policy and applicable municipal requirements.

The Executive Director manages the day-to-day operations of DOBIA and implements Board-approved priorities and programs. Staff administer programs, communicate with members and coordinate the organization's work.

> **Board vs. staff** The Board governs and makes decisions collectively. Staff carry out the day-to-day work. Individual members and individual Directors do not direct staff or commit DOBIA resources unless specifically authorized.

6. How Members Can Participate

You do not have to wait for an election or AGM to be involved. Members can participate throughout the year in ways that fit their business or property.

- Share ideas, concerns and opportunities with the DOBIA office at office@downtownorillia.ca.
- Participate in downtown events and promotional initiatives.
- Request to serve on one of DOBIA's Board committees.
- Register in advance to attend a committee meeting as an observer.
- Stay informed by reading the weekly newsletter.
- Provide feedback when DOBIA asks for member input.
- Consider putting your name forward for the Board when an election is held.

Committee participation Members who want to serve on a committee must request to join and be approved through the committee appointment process. Members who simply want to observe a committee meeting should register with DOBIA staff in advance so seating and meeting materials can be planned. Observer status does not provide voting or decision-making rights.

7. Annual General Meeting and Member Input

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is an important opportunity for members to hear about DOBIA's work, ask questions, provide feedback and participate in the business of the membership meeting.

The proposed annual budget is presented to members for consultation and discussion. The Board then considers member feedback and approves the annual budget.

Members can also provide input throughout the year by contacting the DOBIA office, attending engagement opportunities and participating in committees.

More information Formal membership-meeting procedures, including notice and meeting requirements, are set out in the Procedural By-law and are available in the Member section of www.downtownorillia.ca.

8. Board Elections

Directors who serve on the Board are elected through the DOBIA election process established by the Election Policy and applicable municipal requirements. Each BIA member is entitled to one vote.

DOBIA elections follow the applicable municipal election cycle and occur once every four years. Election information, nomination requirements and key dates are communicated to members through DOBIA's regular communication channels.

Board service is a meaningful way to help shape the future of Downtown Orillia. Directors are expected to prepare for meetings, participate in Board and committee work, act in the interests of the BIA as a whole and follow the Board's governance and conduct requirements.

More information See the Election Policy and Governance Manual for formal eligibility, nomination, voting and Director-responsibility requirements. Current documents are available in the Member section of www.downtownorillia.ca.

9. Committees and Getting Involved

Committees help the Board research issues, develop ideas and make recommendations. A committee recommendation does not become a Board decision unless the Board approves it, unless the Board has specifically delegated decision-making authority.

Beautification, Maintenance & Streetscape Committee
This committee focuses on projects that beautify and activate public spaces, maintenance improvements, DOBIA on-street assets, vehicle-related recommendations and other downtown beautification and activation matters.

Marketing, Programming & Sponsorship Committee
This committee focuses on marketing Downtown Orillia, external marketing opportunities, events and programming, the DOBIA programming calendar and sponsorship opportunities.

Members who own a business or commercial property within the DOBIA boundary may serve on committees, subject to the committee appointment process.

10. Events, Marketing and Programming

DOBIA may organize, support or partner on events and programming that advance Downtown objectives. Support may include coordination, promotion, resources or funding, depending on the event and Board-approved priorities.

Members may also benefit from coordinated marketing and promotional opportunities designed to increase awareness of Downtown Orillia and its programming.
Event organizers are responsible for obtaining any required permits, licences, insurance and approvals. DOBIA support does not replace municipal or regulatory approvals.

> **Event funding** Requests for DOBIA financial sponsorship are considered through the applicable application process. Final funding decisions rest with the Board. The Event Planning Guide provides practical information for event organizers.

11. Downtown Beautification and Streetscape

One of DOBIA's roles is to support an attractive, welcoming and well-maintained downtown environment. This can include public-space beautification, seasonal decorations, banners, streetscape assets and other Board-approved improvements.

These initiatives are intended to benefit the downtown collectively. Projects are evaluated against organizational priorities, available resources and applicable municipal requirements.

12. Sidewalk Displays and Signs

Businesses may use municipally owned sidewalks for business-related displays subject to the Sidewalk Use Policy and applicable City requirements. Accessibility and safe pedestrian movement come first. Keep a clear and reasonably unobstructed route for pedestrians, including people using mobility devices. Displays should be neat, secure, well-maintained and compatible with the downtown streetscape.

Consider how displays affect neighbouring businesses, storefront access, sightlines and pedestrian circulation. Sidewalk signs are permitted and do not require a separate DOBIA application or permit, but they must still comply with City requirements and sidewalk-use standards.

The regular display period is April 15 to November 15 to avoid creating barriers to sidewalk snow removal. Event or sale related displays may be permitted outside the regular period where appropriate arrangements or municipal requirements apply. Accessibility and safety requirements continue to apply.

13. Accessibility and a Welcoming Downtown

DOBIA is committed to a safe, welcoming and accessible downtown. Accessibility is considered in programs, events, public-space initiatives, communications and service delivery.

Where a space or service is controlled by another organization, DOBIA works with the responsible organization where reasonably practicable. DOBIA's Accessibility Policy does not require DOBIA to make structural changes to property it does not own or control.

14. Raising a Concern or Making a Complaint

Members are encouraged to raise questions or concerns respectfully and through the appropriate channel. The right process depends on the issue.

Concern	Start Here	More Information
General member or conduct concern	Executive Director or appropriate DOBIA staff	Member Conduct, Respectful Communication & Complaints Policy
Conflict of interest	Disclose the conflict to the appropriate decision-maker	Conflict of Interest Policy, Sections 3–9
Sidewalk-use concern	City of Orillia for municipal/by-law matters	Sidewalk Use Policy, Sections 3–12

DOBIA's role is not the same as the City's regulatory role. Where a matter is governed by a City by-law, permit, licence or other municipal authority, the City remains responsible for that regulatory decision.

15. Working With DOBIA

The best member relationship is two-way. DOBIA can communicate programs and opportunities, while members can help the organization understand what is happening in the downtown. We welcome input about:

- customer and visitor trends;
- downtown opportunities or challenges;
- ideas for events or programming;

- beautification or maintenance concerns;
- business issues that may have a broader downtown impact; and
- potential partnerships, sponsorships or community connections.

Keep your contact information current so DOBIA can communicate important notices, programs, event opportunities, business-development opportunities and election or membership information through the weekly newsletter and other member communications.

16. Frequently Asked Questions

Is joining DOBIA optional?
No. Membership is established by legislation for owners or tenants within the BIA area who are subject to the BIA levy.

Do I get a direct service in exchange for my levy?
The levy supports the work of the BIA as a whole. DOBIA's programs and investments are intended to benefit the downtown collectively rather than provide an individual service package to each member.

Can I attend a committee meeting?
Yes. Members who want to attend as observers are always welcome and should register with DOBIA staff in advance to make sure there is seating available. Observers don’t vote on recommendations and aren’t able to comment during the meeting.

Can I serve on a committee?
Yes, subject to the Board's committee appointment process. Members who want to serve should send a request to join.

Can I run for the Board?
Yes, subject to the eligibility and nomination requirements in the Election Policy and applicable municipal requirements.

Do members approve the annual budget?
The proposed budget is presented to members at the AGM for consultation and discussion. The Board considers that feedback, makes any decided upon amendments and then approves the annual budget.

Who do I contact about a City by-law issue?
City by-laws and municipal approvals are the City's responsibility. DOBIA can help point you toward the appropriate City contact. Bylaw items could include signage, property maintenance, parking and noise or nuisance issues.

Where can I find current policies?

The current Board-approved policy framework is maintained by DOBIA. Current documents are available in the Member section of www.downtownorillia.ca, or you can contact the DOBIA office for assistance.

17. Where to Find More Information

This Handbook is designed to be the easy starting point. For formal requirements, use the current governing documents below.

Document	What it covers
Governance Manual	Board authority, governance structure, Director responsibilities, committees and governance principles.
Procedural By-law	Board and membership meeting procedures, notice, quorum, motions, voting and meeting conduct.
Standalone Policies Manual	Specific policies affecting members and downtown operations, including events, sidewalk use, accessibility and conduct.
Financial Policies & Procedures Manual	Financial controls, purchasing, spending authority, reimbursement and financial oversight.
Election Policy	Board election schedule, nominations, voting eligibility and voting process.
Committee Terms of Reference	How committees operate and the mandates of the Beautification, Maintenance & Streetscape Committee and Marketing, Programming & Sponsorship Committee.

Questions?
Start with the DOBIA office at office@downtownorillia.ca or www.downtownorillia.ca.