

Memo

To: Members of Council
From: Rebekah Diec Stormes
Date: March 8, 2024
Subject: Digital Main Street program to end March 31, 2024

Comments

The Province of Ontario has elected to not renew/re-fund the Digital Main Street Ontario Grants Program, which includes the Digital Service Squad grant and the Digital Transformation Grant. The last day for Oakville's Digital Service Squad will be March 31, 2024.

In 2019, the Government of Ontario funded the expansion of Digital Main Street (DMS), a program to help main street businesses adopt and use digital technologies more effectively. Through the Digital Service Squad grant, Oakville was one of the earliest communities to create a Digital Service Squad (DSS), a team of specialists that worked directly with small businesses to digitally transform how they promote and run their business. The Oakville DSS was initially created as part of the mitigation strategy for the Lakeshore Road Streetscape Project.

Thanks to continued funding since 2019, Oakville has been able to maintain a DSS for over 5 years, expanding services across the town. Most recently, in 2022, Oakville received a \$195,000 grant, allowing the Digital Service Squad to continue supporting small businesses until March 31, 2024. The DMS program in Oakville was a partnership between the town, the Oakville Chamber of Commerce, and the three Business Improvement Associations.

Over the course of the last five years, the DMS program as had a significant impact on the Oakville small business community, which continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Oakville DSS has worked with over 650 businesses since 2019 and more the 200 Digital Transformation Grants (over \$500,000) have been provided to Oakville businesses.