

Second Meeting of the Community Stakeholder Groups Organized by the Merrickville & District Chamber of Commerce

Date: July 7, 2020

1. Participants

Yves Grandmaitre, Chamber of Commerce
Robyn Eagle, Chamber of Commerce
Nick Previsich, Chamber of Commerce, MAG, MOCA
Ann Martin, Historical Society
Jane Graham, Historical Society
Susan Piercey, Jazz Fest
Doug Struthers, Mayor - MW
Mike Cameron, Councillor - MW
Michele Andrews, Sustainable MW
Helen Steenburgh, TNIM
Michele Bellows, Health Centre
Chuck Willemssen, MAG
Hilary Thompson, NG Times
Mary Kate Laphen, Library and Chamber Facebook

2. Review of Minutes from June 4, 2020 Meeting

A quick review and updates was provided by Yves of the June 4th minutes

3. Updates on Business Opening Activities

Yves noted that the Village is seeing a significant influx of tourists and businesses are reporting crisp sales. Yves also indicated that new guidelines requiring the wearing of masks in enclosed spaces is in effect.

The locks are now open and boats have been moored at the Parks Canada docks. Yves mentioned that Le Boat has reported that despite losing 80% of bookings from USA and European clients due to COVID-19, bookings from clients in Quebec and Ontario have increased significantly for the months of July, August and September. The Depot run by the Friends of the Rideau will not be open this year due to impact of COVID-19 on the completion of the renovations.

Mayor Struthers indicated that municipal facilities continue to remain closed to the public. He noted that the issue of access to toilet facilities in MW is still a major concern and is a challenge for other municipalities as well. Lack of staff is preventing the opening and maintenance of toilets. The Mayor indicated that they are actively looking

for students to help in the frequent cleaning and maintenance of the toilets. A call-out to summer student job applicants was not successful. Mary Kate indicated that she know of student who would be willing to do the job.

Robyn offered to clean the toilets herself if students cannot be found to undertake this task. She also suggested that unused funds from the Community Grant program could be used to help pay for the rental of portable toilets and cleaning. The Mayor recommended that if anyone knows of students who are willing to do this work this summer to forward the names to the CAO.

4. Updates from Community Groups

Ann Martin from the Historical Society noted that there is no change in their decision to not operate the Block House. She indicated that they are exploring the possibility of using some form of virtual historical information.

Nick Previsich reported that MAG is going forward with plans to hold an outdoor Art Fair on a St. Lawrence street location on August 9th - pending sufficient numbers of participating artists. The window display of the work of MAG artists at the Food Market is working well and is rotated with new works every two weeks. Nick also noted that MAG plans on developing a year-round booklet on MAG artists for release in 2021 and is working on a virtual Studio Tour for October 2020. MAG is also growing vegetables in one of the community garden plots as part of the Sustainable Merrickville Grow a Row initiative. With respect to MOCA its unclear at this point if the Blues Fest organization will hold its annual Small Halls concerts in the Fall. However, they are asking participating communities to submit unique “stories” which will be recorded and available on-line. MOCA has written and submitted a story on Harry McLean and is collaborating with TNIM to have one of their actors as the story teller (Omar Simonyi).

Jane Graham commented that she and Anney de Gobeo are offering walking tours of the Village with smaller groups. This might also appeal to new residents in the Village.

Susan Piercey (Jazz Fest) reported that they have had varied responses to their survey sent to volunteers and festival patrons. They are still analyzing the data and will make a decision soon about how or if the annual Jazz Fest will take place this year.

Michele Andrews emphasized the need to have fresh produce available to the Food Cupboard and that protocols are being put in place for harvesting and cleaning produce. An important focus for Sustainable Merrickville is the impact that climate change is having on sustainability.

Michele Bellows from the Health Centre indicated that mask wearing in enclosed spaces is now in effect. Given the increased number of people in public spaces, their risk assessment process is in place. Yves mentioned that fitness instructors have

indicated that there is still great interest on the part of seniors to resume the fitness classes at the Community Centre when it reopens.

Helen Steenburgh (TNIM) indicated that the play (Death Trap) planned for this year has been postponed to the Spring of 2021. They are exploring using Zoom for the production of a radio play. They are holding their AGM in July via Zoom.

5. Other Issues

In response to questions about the process for accessing unused funds from the Community Grant program, Mayor Struthers suggested that applicants send a letter to the CAO and Council and to keep it simple. He noted that it's important to read thoroughly the criteria posted for qualifying for Grant funding. The reason that Christmas in Merrickville did not receive funding was that flow-through funding activities (where the fund recipient in turn provides those funds to a third party) made it ineligible.

Mike Cameron - Councilor, had difficulties with his Zoom connection during the meeting and provided comments in writing. He noted that people are staying closer to home and that Merrickville-Wolford is attracting greater interest from residents in nearby municipalities. He acknowledged the efforts that local groups are making to capture and maintain this interest. He emphasized that our success in responding to the new reality presented by COVID-19 is about partnerships and the Municipality is a key partner. He felt that given that the Municipality presents itself as a tourist destination it should do its part in ensuring that washroom facilities are available. He proposed that a short term solution would be to use existing staff to clean and operate the washrooms until a more permanent solution is found. He stressed that first impressions are very important in encouraging repeat visitors to Merrickville-Wolford.

Mayor Struthers thanked the community groups for their participation at the meeting and their efforts. He noted that "adaptation" is a key element in moving forward.

Yves reminded participants at the meeting that the Chamber has a 360 degree digital camera available for use to help promote their various initiatives. He also urged groups to send information about their activities to Mary Kate for posting on the Chamber's Facebook page.

6. Next Steps / Follow-up

Participants to the meeting felt that the discussion and information provided was valuable. They indicated an interest in participating in another Zoom meeting in the future and the Chamber agreed to call a meeting mid to late August, 2020.