

## **Addressing challenges & issues associated with COVID-19 and the tourism season in Merrickville-Wolford: Supporting businesses and residents during Village re-opening to tourists and visitors**

Date: Thursday, June 4, 2020 Time: 10:00 AM - 12:00 Noon

### **1. Participants**

Yves Grandmaitre, President, Merrickville & District Chamber of Commerce  
Robyn Eagle, Director, Merrickville & District Chamber of Commerce  
Nick Previsich, Secretary, Merrickville & District Chamber of Commerce;  
Director - MOCA; President - Merrickville Artists' Guild (MAG)  
Ann Martin, Historical Society  
Jane Graham, Historical Society  
Karen Oxorn, Jazzfest  
Susan Piercey, Jazzfest  
Doug Struthers, Mayor, Merrickville-Wolford  
Bob Foster, Councillor Merrickville-Wolford  
Mike Cameron, Councillor, Merrickville-Wolford  
Michele Andrews, Sustainable Merrickville-Wolford  
Helen Steinburg, Theatre Night in Merrickville (TNIM)  
Michele Bellows, Health Centre  
Chuck Willemsen, Merrickville Artists' Guild (MAG)  
Hilary Thompson, NG Times

### **2. Objective**

Yves welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that the objective was to hear from community groups about their involvement regarding planned events in and around Merrickville-Wolford and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected those plans. In addition, the meeting was to identify challenges as well as opportunities for collaboration and assistance for some event which may go forward and other planned activities given that the tourist season is rapidly approaching. He invited the Mayor - Doug Struthers to provide some initial comments who noted that this situation is very different than any other emergencies the community has had to face. Of special importance is the timing of new regulations and recommendations regarding social distancing, mass gatherings and sound public health practices for

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individuals, groups and businesses. The impact for Merrickville-Wolford will be better understood when greater clarity is provided by the Province on these important factors.

### **3. Updates on Facilities (Blockhouse/Depot/Canal Locks)**

The Blockhouse will remain closed for this summer. Ann Martin noted that given the public health guidelines and the lack of toilet or wash facilities at the Blockhouse, it would not be safe for staff, volunteers or visitors to operate the facility and displays as in years past. She also indicated that Parks Canada has no intention of operating the Blockhouse facility itself this summer. The Mayor noted that Parks Canada has introduced a policy of no group activities nor public events in the park and areas it controls until further notice.

The Depot being run by The Friends of the Rideau is undergoing renovation which will take 4 - 6 weeks and it is not clear when these will resume. This will have an impact on the availability of toilet facilities for public use.

The Locks will be operational and the Mayor indicated that Parks Canada has stated that the unisex toilet located at the Lockmaster's House is now available to the public.

### **4. Washroom availability**

There was general agreement that the lack of publicly accessible toilets will present a major challenge to businesses and community groups. With the exception of the toilet at the Lockmaster's House, the Mayor indicated that the toilets at the rink (near the Community Centre) and the portable toilet near the Veterinary Clinic will not be functional due to lack of staff capacity to clean them fully and frequently. Yves noted that businesses are permitted to place portable toilets on private land but will be conditional on not contravening any Municipal Bylaws. He also mentioned that local businesses - especially restaurants/patios - are waiting to hear what the new health regulations will be when these types of businesses are allowed to open fully. Chuck suggested that there should be some research done on the availability and use of UV (light) radiation equipment to sterilize washroom facilities.

***Action Item: Robyn suggested that the Municipal Office and/or Parks Canada should develop signage clearly indicating where the Lockmaster's House toilet is located.***

## **5. Roundtable on Challenges Experienced by Community Groups for 2020**

### Ann Martin - Historical Society

Ann noted that the Historical Society has no plans to run the Blockhouse nor does it intend to have any public presentations on historical topics at this point. In response to a question, she indicated that they will likely not undertake any “virtual” historical projects due to lack of resources.

### Nick Previsich - Merrickville Artists’ Guild (MAG)

Nick reported that the Annual Studio Tour (end of September) is cancelled and MAG is exploring holding a virtual studio tour. MAG has secured the use of a large window at the Food Market to display several pieces of art work for sale on a rotational basis. Plans to hold a MAG Art Fair at a location on St. Lawrence Street on August 9th are still going forward pending public health advice and the participation of sufficient numbers of MAG artists. The popular “Conversations” that MAG held at the Legion are cancelled for the summer and may continue in the fall.

### Nick Previsich - Merrickville Organization for Culture & the Arts (MOCA)

MOCA has been the local community based organization that has partnered with Ottawa Bluesfest to host the popular Small Halls Concert. It typically attracts an audience of 200-250 people - most of whom are visitors to the Village. Bluesfest has not cancelled the event for October 1, 2020 at this time and discussions are needed with the United Church to determine their willingness to go forward with the event.

### Jane Graham - Merrickville Walking Tour

Jane noted that nothing is planned for this summer and that they are considering how to do business differently and possibly virtually.

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Susan Piercey & Karen Oxorn - Merrickville Jazzfest

Susan and Karen indicated that at this point they are still going forward with plans for the October 15-18th event. They have consulted the musicians lined up for the 2020 festival and they are still enthusiastic. They acknowledged that they need to meet with the owners of the planned venues (churches, pubs, etc) to determine their willingness to participate and also the willingness of businesses to continue to provide sponsorships. They also indicated that the “at risk” demographic represents a large portion of their audience as well as volunteers. They are planning to undertake a survey (through their mail lists, Facebook page and website) of past attendees and volunteers to solicit feedback on their comfort level with small or large venues and the timeframe for the event. The results of the survey could be of value to the other community groups as well as customizing it to their own social media platforms.

Michelle Andrews - Sustainable Merrickville-Wolford

Michelle has been very active in supporting the the local Food Cupboard. They recently launched their website that provides information on how people can be more sustainable. They are promoting a “Grow a Row” initiative encouraging local gardeners to add an extra row to provide fresh produce for local vulnerable families and individuals. They have offered to share the Grow a Row poster with the other community groups to post on their sites and they are willing to accept the logos of the other groups to post on the Sustainable Merrickville-Wolford site. They are also encouraging residents and nearby communities to purchase locally produced vegetables and foods.

Bob Foster (Councillor) encouraged the use of the Community Gardens (organized by the Lions Club) to help facilitate the production of fresh produce for the the Grow a Row initiative.

Mike Cameron (Councillor) emphasized the great collaboration demonstrated by today’s virtual meeting and looked forward to future interactions between the Chamber of Commerce, Council and community stakeholders.

Michelle Bellows - Health Centre

Michelle indicated that the Health Centre is planning on being “virtual” until at least September (which might be overly optimistic) and the timing and distribution

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of a COVID-19 vaccine will be a critical factor in their operations. The September AGM will be held virtually.

### Helen Steinberg - Theatre Night in Merrickville (TNIM)

Helen reported that the spring play was postponed until November and that the June event at MUAC has been cancelled. The “at risk” population presents a significant portion of their audience members. They are examining the possibility of holding virtual performances.

## 5. Other Issues

### Status of Community Grants

- None of the 2020 grants applied for have been allocated. Based on criteria of the grant program, Council would have to discuss amending the way these funds are granted.
- Municipality still open to review requests of event/activity coordinators.
- Nick suggested that Council quickly contact those who have already applied in early 2020 to advise the status of their application and to determine if there are additional funds available due to various events being cancelled.

### Resources

- 360 Camera:
- Yves offered the Chamber’s 360 camera to organizations wishing to promote their business/event, etc virtually. Contact Yves to book
- Suggestion to engage a local youth to make videos and promote the Village, etc

### Chamber Web/Facebook Pages

- Mary Kate Laphen has been posting on the Chamber’s Facebook page weekly updates and information.
- All are encouraged to share their posts on the Chamber’s FB page, as there is a large following.
- The Chamber is promoting the need to share and communicate. There is a great opportunity to open a whole new door

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The United County of Leeds & Grenville has an Economic Development Manager - Anne Weir: Website provides an extensive listing of local resources (<https://invest.leedsgrenville.com/en/contacts-news-events/economic-development-office.aspx>)

**7. Next steps/follow ups**

Participants to this Zoom meeting supported the planning of another meeting in early July to review progress.