

**MINUTES OF THE MERRICKVILLE & DISTRICT  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

January 12, 2021-Google Meet on-line meeting 7 – 8:30pm

**Present:** Robyn Eagle, Robyn Fredrickson, Alesandro Giuliani, Jennifer Ritskes, Mary Kate Laphen, Nick Previsich, Janet Gaskell, Yves Grandmaitre

**1. Welcome and Call to Order**

Meeting was called to Order at 7:01 PM.

**2. Approval of Agenda**

Robyn E approved the Agenda and there were no additions or deletions

**3. Declaration of Pecuniary Interests**

None indicated.

**4. Approval of Minutes (November 10, 2020)**

Robyn E approved the minutes as circulated. Nick indicated he would like to see the December AGM minutes reviewed before a year has elapsed.

**ACTION:** review/approve Minutes of the December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020 AGM at the February 9 meeting.

**5. Business Arising/Action Items**

**a) Practicum Student**

Tim Lucas, a student of the Willis Business School, was interviewed for a practicum placement by Yves, Robyn E and Jennifer Ritskes at the end of December, 2020. It was determined that his skill set did not match up to what the Chamber was looking for, which was to assist with marketing and research. Yves sent a letter to the College to advise as much.

Yves suggested the Chamber consider applying for funding to hire a summer student. The student could be engaged as a village ambassador or in a research position.

**ACTION:** Agenda item for February meeting – Student Placement

**b) Team Builder—In/Out Party**

Discussion at the December Strategic Planning session suggested having an informal ‘mixer’ to welcome new Board members and thank outgoing ones in early January. Due to COVID restrictions, the mixer was cancelled. It was decided to defer it to spring

**Bring Forward:** March, 2021

### **c) Digital Mainstreet**

Rebecca Braden is the Digital Mainstreet Squad (DMS) representative for the United Counties of Leeds Grenville, who has enrolled 78 Merrickville businesses with DMS. Yves added that of the 78 businesses who have signed up, most did so in the first round. All the data collected has been used to update business data bases.

Robyn E asked Cheri and Kemp Long to share their experience with the DMS program. The program has helped with getting their inventory on-line found the program to be a valuable resource. Businesses who wanted to access funds for website assistance or marketing assistance or to put their inventory on- line received help. Even people who had applied before were encouraged to apply for the next phase for what they needed. The second round allowed for additional funds.

Yves noted the Chamber has loaned the 360 camera (which was purchased with the 1<sup>st</sup> round DMS grant) to Rebecca for use with the applicants DMS promotion.

Jennifer suggested information regarding the Digital Mainstreet Program be posted to the Facebook and web page.

**ACTION:** Robyn E to ensure DMS information be posted to Facebook and Webpage.

### **d) Merrickville Square**

Yves reported that there has been no feedback yet from Council regarding the letter sent in December, 2020 regarding suggestions for the map holder design. The CAO requested we ensure the design met AODA requirements, to which Terry Gillen, a professional Accessibility/Barrier Free Design Consultant, confirmed there were no issues with the map holder design.

There is also a phase two for the square, which entails construction of a promenade along Mill Street.

Yves has received confirmation from the Legion to have the old map sign placed at Cenotaph Park, however, ownership of this sign needs to be confirmed.

**Action:** Robyn E to reach out to Karl Fage to confirm ownership of the old sign

### **e) Lions Logo on Chamber Entrance signs**

This was a discussion item at the November 20 Chamber meeting, where discussion concluded with agreement, that if Municipality did not approve of erecting signage for Service Group logos, the Chamber was favorable of having the Lions Logo placed on the 4 Chamber entrance signs to the Village.

Yves reported that Council did approve at their January 11<sup>th</sup> meeting to erect signage, pending discussion with the CAO and operations manager regarding line of sight etc.

## **6. Correspondence**

Chamber sent a letter to Council in November, 2020 requesting a Council Liaison to sit on our Chamber meetings. Mayor Struthers noted this issue will be discussed at their January 25<sup>th</sup> Council meeting.

Additionally, Robyn E. contacted Stacie Llyod (Economic Development Officer) to request she sit on the Marketing and Promotion sub-working group. Stacie is awaiting confirmation from the CAO.

## **7. Treasurer's Report**

Jennifer reported the currently balance is \$10,728.67 in the Chamber's bank account. She is currently waiting for authorization signatures to be processed at the bank and for permission to be able to talk to the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA).

Discussion regarding the operating budget:

- Costs for Accountant and bank fees to process CRA submissions for 2011-present approximately \$4,000+
- Insurance costs: \$1,500
- HST remittance: \$2,600

Robyn E noted the 2020 Chamber Board of Director's decision that, due to the impact of the Corona Virus, any member who paid fees in 2020 would be automatically paid up until December 2021. Hence, membership fee income for 2021 will be an area of concern.

Therefore, we are left with a minimal operating budget this year. All agreed a fund-raising strategy will be necessary to pursue.

Jennifer noted there some receivables, which need to be followed up on.

### **Action Items:**

- Strategize ways of increasing revenue for Chamber by means of fundraising ideas.
- Membership Committee to follow up on aged receivables relating to outstanding membership fees

## **8. New Business**

### **a) Feedback from Strategic Planning Meeting December 29, 2020**

Robyn E thanked the Board for their input in generating the Game Plan Document. This Document will aid the Chamber to focus on strategies to help businesses to grow and is intended to be a living document that everyone can contribute to. The Game Plan Document is filed in the 2021 Strategy Planning shared drive of the google suite.

The Board created four Sub-Working Groups: Marketing & Promotion, Communications, Partnership & Networking, and Membership. These four Sub-Working Groups will become the backbone of the Chamber's work for 2021.

Sub-Working Group Strategy: Each Group is led by a Board Member(s). Leads are encouraged to ask for assistance from other Chamber Members to participate in the work/specific tasks of their Group to solicit various skill sets, etc. The Sub-Working Groups would work between Board meetings on initiatives and report back at monthly Board meetings their progress and/or seek a motion on recommendations.

All concurred with this strategy for the functioning of the Sub-working Groups.

**Action item:** Sub-Working Groups to work outside Board meetings to address initiatives/focus/goals of their respective Group and report back to the Board monthly their progress and bring forward recommendations for motions, as required.

#### **b) Membership**

Discussion regarding current protocol for members with two businesses resulted in agreement there needs to be a firm guideline to address this issue.

Discussion regarding pro-rated membership fees resulted in Yves confirming that there is a protocol, where for new members, one time only, their fee would be pro-rated based on the number of months left in the year if they join mid year.

**Action Item(s):** Membership Committee draft a policy to address dues to be paid by owners of multiple businesses.

#### **c) Winter Chamber Entrance Signs**

The four Chamber entrance signs are changed up seasonally (currently by Yves). Suggestion that we have a winter scene separate from Christmas shopping. All concurred, however due to current finances, decision made to defer this issue until Autumn 2021. Robyn E thanked Yves for continuing to maintain and change up the signs seasonally.

**Bring forward:** Fall 2021

### **9. Sub-working Group Reports**

#### **a) Membership**

Robyn E reported that she had been in contact with Stephanie Briscoe, our Web designer, to streamline membership renewal/new memberships on the website with a button to either "Join" or "Renew". Ideally, this would also update our membership email listing. This is a work in progress.

Robyn E reported that she and Jennifer have drafted a Welcome package for new members, which still needs to be finalized.

**Action item(s):**

**Robyn E** will continue to work on streamlining the Chamber website to make it “one click” for renewal and joining.

**Robyn E and Jennifer** will continue to work on the Welcome package idea for new businesses to the village.

**b) Marketing and Promotion**

Robyn F reported she and Janet have brainstorming sessions to strategize:

- add value to the membership
- ways to bring the village together
- use the website as the go-to place for residents and visitors
- Increase website subscribers
- Cost effective seasonal promotions
- Strategies to increase traffic to by-street businesses

Discussion about a Valentine’s Day Promotion generated ideas, despite the current stay at home order. A “Merrickville is for Lovers” campaign was discussed.

Agreement to promote “Merrickville is for Lovers” via social media postings as well as provide information about which businesses have curbside pickup.

Yves reported that Valley Eats will be offering delivery service to Merrickville restaurants shortly.

Preparing a one-page flyer that could be left with restaurants to be sent with take out orders to be further flushed out after the meeting with the M&P Leads.

**Action Item:** Flyer advertising Merrickville is for Lovers along with social media posts for February promotions.

**c) Communications**

Robyn E Robyn F have discussed how to use our website and face-book pages as a one stop shop for residents and visitors. This will require a reformat the current landing page, ideas for which will be brought forward at the next meeting.

A draft of the Chamber Chat for the February Phoenix has been shared, and Robyn E asked the Board for their feedback by this Friday.

**Action Items:**

**Board** to provide feedback on the February Chamber Chat

**Robyn F and E** to provide recommendations for Reformat of Website landing Page

#### **d) Partnership and Networking**

Review and discussion of the ideas and initiatives that Nick and Yves have added to the Game Plan Document, in particular, building new partnerships and strengthening existing networks between the Chamber and outside organizations, which all seem very achievable. One partnership of importance will be that with Council, which will be facilitated by the Council Liaison position.

The two new sub-divisions, that are to begin construction this summer, will result in a significant increase to the Village's population. This is an opportunity for Chamber to provide relevant information about the services providers, not only our members but for residents and tourists alike.

Nick noted some initiatives are relatively straight forward and easy to do, but others will be based on our resource levels. The annual event initiative will be an opportunity for the Chamber to demonstrate their active role in the community – case in point, the collaboration with the Merrickville Artists Guild and Chamber raising money for the Syrian family in 2020. Events like this are examples of how the Chamber adds value, not only for businesses, but for community as well.

The Community Calendar of Events is another much needed 'tool' for our community, as there is nothing in place right now that brings all events together. This is another initiative which will promote the Chamber as the 'go to' place for information and demonstrate leadership.

The next step is to prioritize these initiatives and use tools like the calendar, to drive traffic to the Chamber's website and/or Facebook page.

**Action item(s):** Nick and Yves to prioritize initiatives for next meeting.

Robyn E closed the meeting by stating that the pandemic does not have to be an obstacle but an opportunity. She was recently interviewed by the North Grenville Times where she shared some of our work plan items and our Board's commitment to making it all work.

#### **Adjournment/Next Meeting**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

The next meeting Tuesday February 9, at 7:00 p.m.