

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

February 9, 2021—Google Meet on-line meeting 7-8:30 pm

PRESENT: Robyn Eagle, Robyn Fredrickson, Alesandro Giuliani, Jennifer Ritskes, Mary Kate Laphen, Nick Previsich, Yves Grandmaitre, Bob Foster, Leia Atkinson, Janet Gaskell

1. Welcome and Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 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 (January 12, 2021)

Robyn E approved the minutes and was seconded by both Robyn F and Jennifer.

Brief discussion about action items discussed at AGM including finding a way to expand the business footprint to the side streets, developing more electronic media advertising and developing a marketing strategy.

5. Business Arising/Action Item

a) Council Liaison

Bob Foster was welcomed as the new Council Liaison from the Municipality who discussed his role. Bob shared he is looking forward to meeting with the Chamber and assisting with helping from the council's point of view. Bob shared he will bring the Chambers concerns back to council to facilitate working together.

Bob clarified that there is no formal Marketing and Promotions Program, as per information posted to the Village Website. The Economic Development Officer, Stacy Llyod, is currently focused with COVID relief and programs for businesses, including Digital Mainstreet.

There is a Tourism Adaptation Fund and as well a Small Business Advisory Centre. Further information can be forwarded to Robyn E who will ensure it gets to Robyn F and Mary Kate for posting on the two Facebook pages and Chamber Web page.

Yves asked if the Municipality was applying for any funding or grants, to which Bob will investigate and report back to the Chamber. Nick and Yves are looking into funding opportunities for the Chamber to apply to.

Bob advised there are still funds in the 2020 Community Grant that could be applied for. To date, Council has allocated \$4,500.00 of the Community Grant to the Merrickville Food Cupboard to support those in need in the community. The Chamber could submit a proposal to Council to support businesses.

MOTION: was made by Robyn E and seconded by Janet and Alesandro that the Marketing and Promotion Sub-Working Group draft a submission to Council for a Community Grant.

Robyn brought forth her request to have Stacey Lloyd, EDO join the Marketing and Promotion sub-group. Bob reported that Stacey Llyod was not available to liaison with the Chamber at this point but may be able to work on specific tasks and information sharing.

ACTION: Bob will inquire as to Stacey's availability to participate on the Marketing & Promotions Sub-Working Group and request that Stacey forward information of interest to Robyn E.

b) Digital Mainstreet

Yves reported that Rebecca is still working with some businesses through the end of February, although the initial grant application window is now closed. Some of the businesses who applied initially also received second grants. As well, Rebecca is continuing to borrow the Chambers equipment. Cindy Bolton, the United Counties contact at Digital Mainstreet, sent an email to inform Nick that the program has been extended. It was confirmed by Bob that the extension goes until March 31, 2021 and will be limited to DMS zoning parameters focusing on Main Street Businesses. There is a list of parameters and Bob will ask Stacey Llyod EDO to define who would qualify for the grant.

ACTON: Nick to share this with the local MAG artists as well as with Robyn F, so this information can be posted to the Chamber Business Facebook page.

c) **Merrickville Square**

It was confirmed that the Chamber is the owner of the original map holder sign, which is currently stored at one of the Municipalities public works yards. Although no official decision has been made, the Legion is amenable to having the old map holder installed in Cenotaph Park.

A new map holder is to be placed at the Parkette, which was part of the Revitalization Grant design. Chamber sent a letter to the Municipality in early January regarding specifications for the new map holder and clarified it met all requirements of the Accessibility Standards. No response has been received to date.

ACTION: Bob will follow up regarding the status of the new map holder.

6. **Correspondence**

a) **Rideau Canal National Historic Site of Canada and UNESCO World Heritage Site and Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan**

A document has been received from Parks Canada regarding their draft Management Plan, which outlines the parameters of how the parks along the Canal should be managed by Parks Canada. Parks Canada is requesting feedback from stakeholders.

A review of the Draft Plan indicates that Parks has committed to upkeep and maintenance of the Blockhouse and provide internet service. Blockhouse Park has between 9,000 and 10,000 visitors, on average per year and is a prominent location within the Village. The Historical Society has submitted feedback on the Draft Plan already.

MOTION: proposed by Robyn E. seconded by Janet and Alessandro that Yves strike a sub working group to formulate a response to the Draft Management Plan, as it relates to Blockhouse Park and the Public Washrooms at the Depot.

7. Treasurer's Report

a) CRA Submission

Jennifer reported a bank balance of \$10,787.00 There is approximately \$2675.00 owing for HST and approximately \$5000.00 due to the CRA, which is still being worked on. The Accountant has submitted documents to the CRA for information but has not had a response yet. The bank has not yet responded to the request for past statements.

b) Status of Accounting

Jennifer reported that two of the overdue account's receivables have been paid and there are three left to be received.

Jennifer noted that membership fees/renewals that are sent by e-transfer have no information regarding who the payment is from. This information will be added to the updated on-line membership form.

The meeting was opened to questions regarding the Treasurer's Report.

Robyn F requested information regarding the Chamber's monthly expenses.

Yves noted \$11.30 is a contract with Bell Canada for a Wi Fi hotspot attached to the DMS equipment purchased. It is a three-year contract which began October 2019.

ACTION:

- Jennifer to provide information regarding monthly Chamber expenses.
- Updated Membership Form to include information as to who is submitting the e-transfer payment.

Robyn E proposed a motion to accept the verbal Treasurer's report. The motion was seconded by Yves and Robyn F.

8. New Business

a) Summer Student

Due to the tight timelines for hiring summer students and the Chamber's current financial position, it was decided to defer pursuing a summer student until spring 2022.

b) Challenge to the provincial and federal government to rethink lockdown strategies.

Discussion regarding strategies to challenge the federal or provincial governments regarding their lockdown orders, based on information we have now. Alesandro suggested contacting other Chamber of Commerces to see if there is a shared idea of how to approach the various levels of government to ensure businesses stay open this summer.

Yves reported that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has voiced their opinions regarding the inequalities and how closures are done. They are also pushing the provincial government to allow openings faster in areas with low Covid-19 numbers.

Robyn F suggested contacting Michael Wood who has been successful in advocating to the government on behalf of small business in Ottawa.

ACTION: Robyn F will share his contact info with Alesandro who will contact him to start a dialogue.

9. Committee Reports

Discussion: Process for Approval of Initiatives (how to get things done in-between meetings)

Yves noted that no decisions can be made by email. Following Robert's Rules of Order, the Chamber cannot vote on motions or anything else without engaging in conversation as a group. If the Board is committing the Chamber to a position, expense, or change of policy, it would require a motion.

It was decided the sub working groups will continue to post a report in the Google Suite prior to the monthly meetings for all to read and become familiar with prior to discussion.

a) Membership Committee (Yves and Alessandro)

Discussion regarding fees for owners of more than one business resulted in the following:

- those with more than one business would receive time and effort to market them, and
- each business receives a vote at the AGM

MOTION:

put forth by Yves that all business owners who wish have membership in the Chamber of Commerce must pay separate fees for each business represented. The motion was seconded by Alesandro and Robyn F with everyone in favour.

Yves reported that he and Alessandro have drafted a Welcome Package for new members, including a check list to ensure new member information is shared/announced, etc.

a) Marketing and Promotion (Janet and Robyn F)

Robyn F reported that being mindful of our low budget and the uncertainty around this coming year with Covid-19, means that we are prepared to be as cautious as possible about spending funds.

Robyn F. met with Erin Kurgan, owner of Pickle and Myrrh and who has an extensive background in marketing and social media. One idea was hiring a professional photographer (or membership in trade) to take photographs of all members' businesses both inside and out. This would generate a file of stock photos for our website and social media as well as provide a consistent feel and messaging in posts.

For the first quarter of this year, we are focusing on social media, including preparing a social media guide (social media cheat sheet) for businesses to utilize, which will generate a bigger online presence. Robyn F changed the tag line on our Instagram page from “Jewel of the Rideau” to “Merrickville, Explore and Shop”, which will result in more ‘hits’.

During the February posts, we saw a lot more and cross promotion of businesses on social media.

It was agreed by all that only Chamber members will be featured on the social media .

February Promotion/Curb-side Pickup

Discussion of the February social media promotion “Merrickville is for Lovers”. Mary Kate noted there were not as many businesses involved as hoped. More

material is required to promote businesses on social media. More pictures, especially professional ones, would be helpful. Mary Kate also suggested putting a call out on the website requesting posts and photos from Chamber member businesses as well as information about the re-opening such as hours of operation.

b) Communications (Robyn E and Robyn F)

Working to reformat the Chamber website to be more relevant for tourists and easier to navigate. A recommendation was submitted in the meeting package.

MOTION: by Robyn E that the Communications Sub-Working group continue with the website reformat. The motion was seconded by Alesandro and Jennifer.

Robyn E added the monthly Chamber newsletter was sent out at the end of January, as well as an article in the January 25th edition of the North Grenville Times.

c) Partnership/Networking (Yves and Nick)

Proposal for four stakeholder discussion groupings was circulated prior to this meeting, including participants, discussion items and timeframes.

ACTION: Board members to provide feedback on the Stakeholder Discussion Groups as soon as possible.

Nick shared that the Merrickville Artists Guild (MAG) will be launching a first ever annual publication, focusing on art and arts and crafts. Advertising opportunities are available to local businesses. This publication is viewed by MAG as being a way to work within the community to bring together organizations, businesses, events and artists and advertise their wares in a coordinated fashion. Robyn F. reported that the information has been shared on the Chamber business Facebook page.

Adjournment/Next Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

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