

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

March 9, 2021--Google Meet on-line meeting 7-9:00 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

The meeting was called to Order at 7:00 pm.

2. Approval of Agenda

Yves G approved the the Agenda and there were no additions or deletions

3. Declaration of Pecuniary Interests

None indicated.

4. Approval of Minutes (February 9, 2021)

Robyn F approved the minutes and was seconded by Yves G

5. Business Arising/Action Items

a) Response to Park's Canada Draft Management Plan for Blockhouse Park

Yves discussed the Parks Canada call for input into the Management plan. The website had a survey and announced that Parks Canada are having three public meetings .Parks Canada will be accepting input until the end of this month. There were issues with registering for the public meetings and Yves is waiting for confirmation that he can participate in the meeting scheduled for March 18th. Yves' response to Parks Canada call for input will include a description of the close relationship between the municipality and Parks Canada and a request that the depot facilities should be open for the length of the canal season including the washrooms and the depot, which acts as a visitor centre.

Action Item: Yves will submit a summary document for the board to review before submission to Parks Canada.

b) Contact with Michael Woods, Small Business Advocate

Alesandro discussed that while attempting to contact Michael Wood he connected with the *Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses*.

Alesandro, participated in a discussion with the CFIB pertaining to ways to maintain an open discussion with the government around relaxing restrictions in smaller areas such as Merrickville instead of lumping smaller areas in with larger ones such as Ottawa and Toronto.

ACTION: Alesandro will attempt to make contact with Michael Wood this week and share the information with the Board at the next meeting.

c) In/Out Party

The discussion of a socially distanced gathering outdoors, which had been tabled in January due to the lockdown order was revisited. It was determined that the gathering would take place on Monday March 22, 2021 at the home of Jennifer Riskes. It will begin at 4:30 and everyone is responsible for their own food and chairs etc. It will be held outdoors. Robyn E will notify the past board members from last year.

d) Community Grant Submission to Municipality

A Community Grant Submission was made by the Chamber to the municipality in response to the available funds held over from 2020 community grants. The Grant application was submitted by the Chamber to request funds for a new sign/map display for the parkette to house the map, and to also to refresh the old sign and have it installed at Cenotaph Park. It was determined that the original sign belongs to the village and the content or map belongs to the Chamber. It was reported by Bob Foster that the village will erect and pay for the new sign/ map holder to be placed in the parkette and continue with its upkeep and maintenance going forward. The municipality will also look after the lighting at this time it appears to be solar panels with LED lighting to enable the sign to

be self contained and not have to have a dedicated power source. The old sign will have to be recovered to determine its condition and whether or not it is still viable to use. If not having a secondary sign made may be considered. The municipality will look at the cost for both the old sign and new. and although it will be second in precedence to the parkette, it is still on the table in terms of discussion at this time. The Chamber is hoping to “bookend” the business area of Merrickville with the two signs. Robyn F asked Bob if the sign would be erected by the Victoria Day Weekend. Bob reported that the costs are being considered by the municipality as well as the availability of materials during Covid-19, however getting it done is a priority for the village and he will keep the Chamber posted on the progress.

The Community Grant application submitted by the Chamber will not be reviewed. The surplus money from the budget (other than the money donated to the food bank) will go into the surplus deficit area in the municipal budget and then a new opportunity will open up in 2021 for Community Grant projects.

6. Council Liaison Bob: Foster

a) Chamber Map Holder-Parkette

See above discussion

b) Stacie Lloyd-Member on Marketing & Promotion Sub-Working Group

Robyn E inquired about having Stacie Llyod, EDO with the village, partner with the Chamber’s Marketing and Promotion sub-working group to help provide a collaborative approach to tourism in Merrickville-Wolford. Bob explained that as an employee of the village, Stacie is currently being utilized by the village in regards to Covid-19 and the current budget process which is underway for 2021. This partnership may have potential in future initiatives. A further discussion arose around whether or not there were any Grants that may be available for the Chamber and the Municipality to apply for to promote tourism. Yves reported that he felt there were some grants available including RTO-9 and that the process for applying closes at the end of this month. Nick reported that there is a Ontario Tourism Industry Development or Recovery Fund which may be an option for the Chamber to apply to, however the Chamber must meet the eligibility requirements and also must have a specific idea as to what the funding would be used for.

ACTION: Nick and Yves will review the RTO-9 grant application and prepare a point form document outlining it and any other available grants and criteria. An interim meeting will be arranged in the next few weeks to decide what the grant funding would be used for.

7. Treasurer's Report

a) CRA Submission

A document was provided by Jennifer with a chart form outlining the 2019, 2020 and 2021 budget numbers. The 2019 numbers were included to illustrate a typical year since 2020 was so different due to Covid-19. Jennifer explained the numbers included in the 2021 budget may change. There will be a predicted shortfall between income and expenses and liabilities partly due to the fact that there are no membership fees expected this year. To date the Chamber has collected \$525.00 in new memberships this year. There will be a Treasurer's shared drive created in the suite so that this report and future documents can be stored there for directors to access. After a brief discussion around the current document provided by Jennifer it was agreed that the Chamber currently will be operating with a negative balance. Although there are still currently funds in the account there are upcoming expenses which will consume most of the current balance. This will make it difficult to provide any programming going forward. Robyn F shared that although the chamber board last year decided not to charge membership fees in fact some of the businesses in the village did very well or had their best year financially to date. The discussion was capped at this time due to time restraints to potentially be revisited in the membership report.

8) New Business

a) Map

Yves provided an overview of the printed map process from the past year. The map incorporates a wide scope of Merrickville-Wolford and identifies destinations such as cemeteries, beaches, to fishing spots as well as shopping and dining options. The map is very detailed and there is space on the map for local advertising. Not all of the advertising spaces were filled last year. There are new stores in town this year so the advertising will provide a bit of revenue. In order to reach consumers outside the municipality a rack card was

also printed for distribution along the 401 highway corridor and other pick up points. The Chamber has several thousand of the rack cards left from last year and since it is not dated and so it will likely prove to be enough for this year without a reprint. Another avenue to provide some revenue, which was discussed, was to have a spot on the map holder that businesses could “rent” for a nominal fee to promote a sale or special event. The advertising on the map as well as the “special area for rent” on the map holder can be reserved for members of the Chamber only. However, the business directory has to be inclusive of all businesses in the municipality. **Bob let the Chamber know that according to the by-law the Chamber can collect a fee from non members for advertising.** It is expected that the advertising generated for the map will cover the expense of reprinting. When the printing of the map was pursued last year the Chamber attempted to have a local printer produce the map but was unable to do so and so an external printer was utilized. Robyn E will assist Yves when all information is gathered in selling the advertising spaces for the map reprint.

ACTION: Yves will secure the 2021 map pricing and will circulate to the Board in the next week with further discussion around advertising prices to be discussed.

b) May 1st Garage Sale

The question was posed “how should the Chamber promote the Merrickville Yard Sale?” The discussion focused primarily on community safety and the timeline for vaccinations. It was discussed that the yard sale has a positive impact for the community as well as the businesses as it develops an interest in visiting Merrickville like the Maker’s Market did in the past year. Yves shared he does have yard sale signs to attach to the welcome signs and he can put them out if the yard sale is going forward. Depending on guidance from the Public Health department the yard sale may even be a fundraising opportunity for the Chamber. Bob Foster shared that the garage sale has not been discussed at the council table as of yet and the council is waiting to hear what will be allowed by the Lanark Leeds and Grenville Health Unit. It was determined that last year the Yard Sale was cancelled by decree of the province.

Another suggestion was to perhaps change the date of the garage sale to the fall when more vaccinations will have occurred. The discussion was tabled until the April meeting when more information will be available.

Action: This item will be brought forward and added to the agenda for April's meeting.

9. Partnership and Networking--stakeholder discussion groups

Yves shared that the sub-working group took the comments and suggestions from the directors and reformatted the document. This can be found in the shared folder on the drive. They will report back next month after the first virtual meeting with the various chambers of commerce. Robyn E was invited to convene the first meeting with her contemporaries including but not limited to, other chambers from North Augusta, Montague, Kinsley and perhaps Centreville and Portland. These chambers will receive invitations to have the first session hosted by Merrickville-Wolford and then each year another community would take the responsibility of hosting. Yve and Nick and Robyn E will meet to discuss the agenda and structure of the meeting.

Communications--reformat of Chamber website, quarterly newsletter and Chamber Chat

Robyn E reported that the reformat of the Chamber website will include more of a focus on tourism and the public rather than being focused, as in the past on Chamber membership. The notes from these meetings discuss several examples of tourist based webpages and Stephanie Briscoe (web designer) will be working with the sub group on the new design. Once Stephanie has been able to see the scope of the project she will provide the Chamber with an estimate of the cost. During the discussion with Stephanie Robyn E and Robyn F requested that if Stephanie could set up the templates and back bone of the new site then the remainder of the work could be completed by the Communications committee in order to offset some of the cost. A feature that will be included in the new website will be an individual page for each Chamber member to showcase their business and highlight their services or products. Once the

estimate is in, the amounts and timelines will be brought back to the board for approval. An article was put into the March/April Phoenix and a newsletter was sent out the last week of February. These items are housed in the shared Communications drive and Robyn E encouraged all to reach out if they have anything they would like included in these communications in future.

Marketing and Promotion--strategies for 2021 Tourism Season

Robyn F reported that there have been meetings between her and Mary Kate regarding building a strong social media strategy and acknowledged that Mary Kate has been doing an amazing job promoting Chamber businesses on-line and also that Robyn E has been also promoting businesses with videos on-line as well. Moving forward, and if the money is available it would be beneficial for the Chamber to invest in a cell phone stabilizer to help with video quality. A rough estimate of this cost would be around \$150.00. In addition, standard colours and fonts were chosen to help to add to a sense of continuity to our story and brand on-line. This was put together in an example photo which can be shared for feedback. This continuity helps to make all the Chamber's posts more visually appealing. The 360 degree camera which is owned by the Chamber and currently out on loan should be back hopefully within the month and can be used by the Chamber for videos as well. Robyn F reached out to John Chambers, who is a professional photographer in the village. John has agreed to volunteer his time and expertise to coordinate with the Chamber members and take professional photos of each business to be featured on the Chamber website. John also has many stock photos of Merrickville he has taken in the past which he is willing to let the Chamber use. Each Chamber business will have its own feature page on the website. This request will be sent out to members to encourage them to sign up for a time so John can have the photos done in a timely fashion. There was a suggestion that a free membership in the Chamber be offered to John as a way to say "Thank-you". Yves cautioned that we need to be aware of having permission to post people's photos on the website.

A local resident has also reached out to the Chamber with an offer of drone footage he has accrued of the village. He has offered the video to the Chamber for use for \$100.00. Robyn F will send the link so directors can view the video before making a decision.

The Marketing and Promotion committee also discussed having a “photo booth” opportunity in the village where visitors could have two or three people pose in a stationary frame with some Merrickville branding in the picture to promote on social media. This could in turn lead to creating a social media contest where if people took a selfie in Merrickville and posted it with a certain hashtag they could be entered to win a gift certificate to use in the village. The Chamber could reimburse whichever business the certificate was redeemed at.

Marketing and Promotion are still working on a social media “cheat sheet” Robyn F has looked into resources offered by the Smith Fall’s Small Business Centre and will continue working on this for review when completed. As well it was proposed that the Chamber could offer a virtual scavenger hunt on a google form using a QR code on a link on-line. This could be a way to help drive people down the side streets and again, perhaps a prize could be offered. As well, the sub- group is looking at pricing for reusable shopping bags which could be printed with a branded Merrickville slogan and made available to local businesses to sell as an option in their shop or business. In addition, purchasing paid facebook advertising was discussed to perhaps boost an ad or post that the Chamber wants to reach a certain target audience. This will be considered ongoing as it is a very economical way to promote an event such as the yard sale for very little cost.

Membership Committee

Yves and Alessandro have put together a master list of Chamber members. Previous lists have been combined and the information checked to ensure accuracy. Once the sub- committee is able to meet again with Jennifer they will be able to put the document out to the board to update their own information such as phone numbers etc. This will be a user friendly, comprehensive document and

board members will have an opportunity to comment upon it and make suggestions when it is placed in the shared membership drive. Yves discussed the new process for a member of the community to join the Chamber. After filing out the membership form online the form is directed to the membership committee and is logged into the spreadsheet. This will in turn, forward a copy to our treasurer to prompt her to send an invoice to the new member and once the fee is collected Jennifer will be able to update the spreadsheet to show that the membership is paid. Once the account is paid it will allow Robyn to post the new member on the website and Facebook Page. It will be easier to track where the members are in terms of their membership going forward. There will be a section in the notes section of the spreadsheet to remind members when they have outstanding balances which need to be paid.

Alessandro proposed that many of the local businesses in the village had a good financial year despite Covid-19 restrictions. Alessandro observed that many people came into the village to shop and eat. It was discussed that perhaps the Chamber could approach the member businesses in the village to ascertain if they felt they would be able to pay year where they in fact would be able to pay their Chamber membership. Robyn E proposed that this inquiry could be proposed in a newsletter and Robyn F asked if businesses could pay whatever they feel they can afford, if they can't pay the full fee due to financial hardship.

This prompted a quick discussion about HST, and Jennifer shared that the tax could be calculated backwards based on the amount paid.

There was a brief discussion regarding the term "not for profit" and Yves explained that currently the Chamber is classed in a "registered letter patent" and that once all of the CRA info is organized the Chamber will be applying to have a designation of 'Not for Profit'. It was agreed that Robyn F and Robyn E and Janet would draft a notice for members regarding membership fees to be discussed after completion.

ACTION: Janet and Robyn F and Robyn E will draft a notice to members regarding membership fees.

Adjournment/Next Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

The next meeting is Tuesday April 13, at 7:00 p.m.