



THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF AMHERSTBURG
OFFICE OF PARKS, FACILITIES, RECREATION & CULTURE

MISSION STATEMENT: Committed to delivering cost-effective and efficient services for the residents of the Town of Amherstburg with a view to improve and enhance their quality of life.

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| Author's Name: Phil Roberts | Report Date: October 5, 2020 |
| Author's Phone: | Date to Council: October 13, 2020 |
| Author's E-mail: proberts@amherstburg.ca | Resolution #: |

To: Mayor and Members of Town Council

Subject: Respond Restart Recover COVID 19 – 2020 Season Finale

1. RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that:

1. The Open Air Program **BE DISCONTINUED** after Sunday November 1st, 2020;
2. The continuation of River Lights **BE APPROVED** which will allow residents and visitors to view the River Lights displays in a large geographical area, with no set schedule for viewing during a two-month period as a self-guided, driving or walking tour, during the declared COVID-19 emergency;
3. The continuation of Light up the Town **BE APPROVED** as it is unscheduled, outdoor, continuous and accessibly inclusive to all ages, abilities and manners of viewing, during the declared COVID-19 emergency;
4. The implementation of the Holiday Stroll **BE APPROVED** as it is unscheduled, outdoors, continuous and accessibly inclusive to all ages, abilities and manners of viewing, during the declared COVID-19 emergency;
5. A Santa Claus Parade and a Reverse Santa Claus Parade **BE DENIED** for the 2020 season, which is consistent with Provincial guidelines that discourage gatherings of more than 50 people outside.

2. BACKGROUND:

On June 8, 2020 Administration was directed by Council to facilitate the Respond, Restart, Recover COVID -19 - Amherstburg Revitalization Initiative.

Administration created an internal working committee (Amherstburg Business Recovery Committee) that included staff from the Bylaw, Parks, Public Works, Fire, Police, and Tourism and Culture areas and the Office of the CAO. The committee was tasked with the development of revitalization initiatives which largely became the Amherstburg Open Air Weekend program.

The Tourism and Culture Division was responsible for development of the program in collaboration with the downtown and Amherstburg municipally registered businesses and to monitor the restart and local recovery progress.

The committee, largely supported by the Manager of Licensing and Enforcement, monitored closely the regulations and recommendations from the Government of Canada, Ontario Government and the Windsor Essex County Health Unit as they relate to pandemic mitigation and the program of the Amherstburg Open Air Weekends.

The duration of this initiative was identified in Council Resolution # 20200608-165 2020 06 08 (1 of 5), that the Amherstburg Revitalization Initiative and associated events **BE EXEMPT AND PERMITTED** for road closures to begin prior to 5pm for the remainder of 2020;

This supported by the same resolution (2 of 5), that authority **BE DELEGATED** to Administration to advise the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) that Council has no objection to the proposed temporary extension of the licensed area for businesses participating in the Amherstburg Revitalization Initiative.

The ability to encroach on Municipal property or right of way was extended to all businesses and for those that served alcohol, the AGCO had provided notice that these exemptions would remain valid until December 31, 2020.

The only businesses to take advantage of the opportunity to expand their footprint by way of encroachment agreement were those in the downtown core, specifically Dalhousie, Richmond, Rankin and Murray Street businesses.

3. DISCUSSION:

The Tourism and Culture Division has been fundamental in communicating with the downtown businesses throughout the program by email, social media, in person and conducting surveys. While the survey data indicates a high approval ranking from businesses for the Open Air program (71%), not all businesses felt they benefitted and a few claimed the program had caused them some losses.

In a recent survey, specifically asking about continuing the program beyond November 1, 2020 the majority (70%) of the respondents indicated they would not be continuing to participate. Without the participation of downtown businesses, it would be unnecessary for the Town to continue with the program.

Administration has continued to follow action directed from the Provincial government to stop the spread of Covid-19.

On September 19th, the Premier announced that Ontario was limiting the size of unmonitored and private social gatherings across the province. On September 28th, the Premier confirmed that Ontario is now experiencing a second wave of Covid-19. On October 9th, the Premier strongly urging people across the province to stay home except for essential purposes and has announced the three COVID-19 hotspots will revert to a modified Stage 2.

In the October 9th Media Release¹ from the Province, it was noted:

“In addition to the measures being implemented in the Ottawa, Peel, and Toronto public health unit regions, the Chief Medical Officer of Health is also urging all Ontarians to:

Limit trips outside of home, except for essential purposes only such as work where it is not possible to work from home, school, grocery shopping, medical appointments, and outdoor healthy physical activity;

In addition, travel to other regions in the province, especially from higher transmission to lower transmission areas, should only be for essential purposes;

Practise physical distancing of at least two metres with those outside your household;

Wear a face covering when physical distancing is a challenge or where it is mandatory to do so;

Following gathering limits and rules;

and wash your hands frequently and thoroughly.

Dr. Amhed of the Windsor Essex County Health Unit has postured to senior county officials that he may stipulate the cancellation of all opportunities for public gathering.

One of the Tourism and Culture Division’s responsibilities is to program events and attractions to entice visitation to Amherstburg as well as engage our own residents.

In light of the previous, the remaining seasonal programs traditionally supported by the Town, have had consideration to modify, reduce or cancel to discourage any possibility of crowd gathering and transmission of the Covid-9 virus.

Administration has reviewed the event schedule for the remainder of the year. There is consensus that the programs and measures outlined below pose minimal risk to the Town’s resident and visitors and we outline the following:

1. River Light Displays – November 14, 2020 to January 11, 2021

- Traditionally, the light displays have been erected in both Toddy Jones and KNYP by the Parks Department. The size of these two parks combined is approximately 406,659 square feet.
- In accordance with the Ontario regulations regarding COVID-19, independent, outdoor healthy physical activity such as walking through the parks is permitted.

¹ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/58767/ontario-implementing-additional-public-health-measures-in-toronto-ottawa-and-peel-region>.

- The lights are static displays in two designated parks which are not fenced enclosed areas.
- The parks are open 7 days a week. The Amherstburg Open Air program, with Councils approval, will have ended by the time of viewing.
- The light displays would be erected in the parks for approximately 2 months for independent, self-viewing
- Displays will be specifically place to provide distancing and are generally more than 2 meters apart.
- A large number of displays are sponsored by the greater Amherstburg business community, as an opportunity for businesses outside of the downtown core to advertise. The light displays are maintained by that sponsorship with an agreement for businesses to advertise via signage on the displays.
- The traditional live programming events and programs usually associated with the River Lights Winter Festival will not be realized due to current COVID-19 guidelines.
- Signs will also be installed at the entrances to the parks, reminding patrons to keep physically distanced while viewing the displays.
- Bylaw Enforcement when scheduled will ensure residents and visitors are adhering to the provincial guidelines and health official's recommendations.

Administration recommends the continuation of this attraction which will allow residents and visitors to view the River Lights displays in a large geographical area, with no set schedule for viewing during a two-month period as a self-guided, driving or walking tour, to alleviate large crowds gathering in one area. This program is accessibly inclusive to all ages, abilities and manners of viewing.

2. Light Up the Town; (Phase One Program) - November 14, 2020 to January 2021

- The Light Up the Town program began in 2019, and was funded through an economic development FED DEV grant for the River Lights Winter Festival. With this funding, downtown businesses participated in a new outdoor, streetscape lighting program.
- Through the grant, the lights used for the Light Up the Town program are part of the Town's current inventory.
- In 2019, businesses reported an increase in commerce resulting from Light Up the Town program.

Administration recommends the continuation of this attraction as it unscheduled, outdoor, continuous and accessibly inclusive to all ages, abilities and manners of viewing.

3. Holiday Stroll (New) - November 14, 2020 to January 2021

- As an alternative to the long standing Holiday House Tours, a new program that encourages an outdoor physically distanced activity has been developed. The Holiday Stroll is a self-guided, walking or driving tour of private residences that feature holiday decorated porches and front yards on Rankin Avenue.
- The Holiday Stroll will be used as a place-holder for the popular, revenue generating Holiday House Tour as an alternative to an indoor event.

Administration recommends the implementation of this attraction as it is unscheduled, outdoors, continuous and accessibly inclusive to all ages, abilities and manners of viewing.

The following program, which is a modified version of the traditional program, due to COVID-19 distancing measures, is not recommended for implementation.

The Santa Clause Reverse Parade - November 28, 2020 (see attached proposal)

- Traditionally, the Santa Claus parade has attracted approximately 10,000 people to the downtown core of Amherstburg.
- A Reverse Parade is a scheduled event whereby the parade is stationary for a period of three hours and Christmas revelers walk through the designated area in a measure to prevent crowds gathering.
- The reverse parade proposal replaces the traditional parade with a reduced number of entries (35 in total) without a significant reduction in cost.
- Issues with hosting the reverse parade are; matters of unintentional congestion, crowd gathering and worsening pandemic conditions.

Administration is recommending that neither a Santa Claus Parade nor a reverse parade be held for the 2020 season. Administration is of the opinion that due to previous years' success with the parade and the number of spectators, it would be extremely difficult to adhere to and enforce the provincial regulations during such an event. As there is indication that a second wave of COVID-19 infection is occurring, Administration feels obligated to first consider the health and safety of the Town's residents and visitors as well as provincial regulation compliance over providing an event that could potentially compromise public health.

On an events related note, a program called Streets and Creeps taking place in Amherstburg, October 29-31, to the benefit of the Windsor Essex County Humane Society is being programmed independently of the Town. There are currently no requests for encroachment on Town property for that event.

4. RISK ANALYSIS

1. River Lights Displays

- Not installing the light displays in Toddy Jones Park and KNYP would potentially result in loss of commerce in the downtown business core.
- Not installing the displays, businesses would lose an important opportunity to highlight their business and the Town would lose the sponsorship revenue resulting in a potential loss of confidence in supporting programs going further and negative budget impact.
- Not installing the displays will result in the loss of a safe, passive recreational opportunity for residents, in particular during the winter months, which may have an adverse affect on community social wellness.

2. Light Up the Town – Phase One program

- By not facilitating the streetscape lighting to the storefronts, may result in a loss of customers, client fidelity and therefore reduced revenue for the businesses.

3. Holiday Stroll

- Not allowing this alternative program, our visitors may lose interest to return and the path to recovery for this event will be prolonged.
- Not allowing this program will result in the loss of a safe, passive recreational opportunity for residents, in particular during the winter months, which may have an adverse affect on community social wellness.

4. Santa Claus Reverse Parade

- Allowing such an event may result in crowd gathering and congestion which could potentially leading to the spread of the COVID-19 virus.
- Allowing this event may be in violation of Ontario Regulations as they relate to public gatherings and health measures and a contradiction of current Provincial urgings for people to stay at home.
- Allowing this event may result in public expectation not being met and there may be a loss of public confidence with an expenditure of money for less value during pandemic condition times.

5. FINANCIAL MATTERS:

1. River Lights Displays

The cost of installation of the Light Displays is within the approved 2020 Budget under the Parks budget center. Sponsorship revenue is anticipated in the 2020 Budget under the Tourism & Culture budget centre at approximately \$7,000, to offset the annual maintenance expense depending on the level of maintenance that year. As a norm, any new displays requested are fully funded by a sponsor.

2. Light Up the Town – Phase One program

The cost of contracted service for installation for the outdoor streetscape lighting to the businesses is approximately \$5,000. This expense is anticipated in the 2020 under the Tourism & Culture budget centre, Community Events cost centre. This cost will be offset by sponsorship funds from Enbridge.

3. Holiday Stroll

There is no cost associated with this program. The porches and front yards, are decorated by the homeowners.

4. Santa Clause Parade

The cost of the Santa Claus Parade to the Windsor Parade Corporation is within the approved 2020 Budget. The \$13,000 is an expenditure required supported from the community events cost centre. Should Council choose not to host a parade this result in a budget surplus.

6. CONSULTATIONS:

- Businesses in the Amherstburg Open Air Weekend footprint.
- Rankin Street homeowners.
- Windsor Essex County Health Unit, Dr Amhed.
- Manager of Licensing and Enforcement.

7. CONCLUSION:

The Tourism and Culture Department has fundamentally acted in the role of Business Improvement Association (BIA) for Amherstburg's downtown businesses, and while this function supported the economic recovery in a critical economic area it has superseded work required to plan, develop and promote all tourism elements for the entire municipality.

Administration will continue to spearhead new initiatives and grant opportunities as well as maintain those programs proven to be successful in generating interest, livability and economic sustainability in the community as a whole.

When it comes to inviting tourists and residents to socially, economically or recreationally embrace Amherstburg, Administration will do so while taking every precaution reasonable to ensure safety in these unprecedented times.

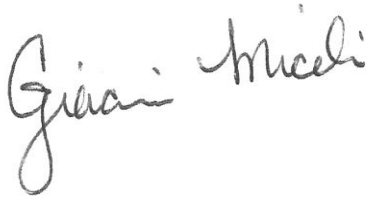


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Report Approval Details

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| Document Title: | Respond Restart Recover COVID 19 - 2020 Season Finale.docx |
| Attachments: | N/A |
| Final Approval Date: | Oct 13, 2020 |

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:



John Miceli



Paula Parker