

CITY OF ORILLIA

TO: Special Council Meeting – June 30, 2020
FROM: Economic Recovery Task Force
DATE: June 30, 2020
REPORT NO: ERTF-20-03
SUBJECT: **Public Realm Project – Phase 2**

Recommended Motion

THAT the following temporary downtown road closures be approved on Friday and/or Saturday evenings from July 10 to September 5, 2020 on Mississaga Street East between Front Street and Andrew Street and on Peter Street South between Mississaga Street East and Colborne Street East;

AND THAT road closures must adhere to the following conditions:

- i) the cross streets will remain open, except Mississaga Street and Peter Street South as noted above, and
- ii) a six metre right-of-way fire route, down the centre of the closed streets, be maintained at all times to comply with fire and safety regulations, and
- iii) access to fire hydrants and fire department connections (sprinkler and/or standpipe) must be maintained, and
- iv) the barriers be removed on the Friday evening and replaced on the Saturday afternoon, and
- v) the whole intersections remain clear to allow for turning of emergency vehicles.

AND THAT up to \$30,000 be authorized and appropriated from the Social Assistance and Economic Recovery COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund for signage and marketing to promote the road closure, for animation of the street during road closures, for sanitizations stations and for the retention of Downtown Orillia Management Board (DOMB) staff to open and close the street during street closures.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's direction as it relates to a road closure in the downtown core, primarily to allow downtown businesses within the Business Improvement Area (BIA) to temporarily expand their capacity in the context of the new COVID-19 restrictions.

If approved, this road closure would be unlike past road closures in the downtown core which aimed to attract as many residents and visitors as possible. The City and the Economic Recovery Task Force (ERTF) would have to carefully weigh the needs of businesses who are anxious to expand into the public realm, with those who want the public realm to remain

available for parking and curbside pickup, while ensuring that residents and visitors have adequate space to practice safe physical distancing.

As the City explores collaborative ways to better use the public realm within the context of COVID-19 and reduces regulations this summer, the road closure initiative is also an evolving opportunity to learn how the municipality and business support partners could facilitate alternative uses of the public realm on a long-term basis.

Background & Key Facts

- The ERTF’s mandate is to “support the Orillia and Area COVID-19 economic recession by increasing business and non-profit organizations’ capacity to survive the short-term economic impact, recover as restrictions are phased out and return to prosperity”.
- The ERTF also prioritized taking actions to build public confidence to communicate that it is safe to return to consumer behavior at local businesses.
- As the Province introduced phases for lifting COVID-19 restrictions, the ERTF shifted focus to assist these organizations to return to operation while adhering to the Provincial guidelines for safe operation.
- As of June 12, 2020, most retail businesses were allowed to begin operations in a modified manner.
- Two focus groups were held with these operators to obtain their views and preferences moving forward. The results of these consultations are captured in Schedule “A”.
- The DOMB has undertaken a further survey of DOMB members. A summary of these survey results is captured in Schedule “B” of this report.
- On June 18, 2020, Council approved Phase 1 of this initiative which included grants to offset municipal fees and construction costs related to building patios in the downtown core, a streamlined patio approval process for all restaurants in the City of Orillia, the development of a Patio Task Force, and funds related to signage and the promotion of local restaurants across the City to residents and visitors.
- This report focuses on a proposed Phase 2, which contemplates street closures in the downtown to facilitate alternative uses of the public realm to allow residents and visitors to more easily physically separate while visiting, shopping, dining and otherwise enjoying a summer evening in downtown Orillia.

Options & Analysis

The ERTF presents the following options for consideration:

Option 1 – Recommended

THAT the following temporary downtown road closures be approved on Friday and/or Saturday evenings from July 10 to September 5, 2020 on Mississauga Street East between

Front Street and Andrew Street and on Peter Street South between Mississauga Street East and Colborne Street East;

AND THAT road closures must adhere to the following conditions:

- i) the cross streets will remain open, except Mississauga Street and Peter Street South as noted above, and**
- ii) a six metre right-of-way fire route, down the centre of the closed streets, be maintained at all times to comply with fire and safety regulations, and**
- iii) access to fire hydrants and fire department connections (sprinkler and/or standpipe) must be maintained, and**
- iv) the barriers be removed on the Friday evening and replaced on the Saturday afternoon, and**
- v) the whole intersections remain clear to allow for turning of emergency vehicles.**

AND THAT up to \$30,000 be authorized and appropriated from the Social Assistance and Economic Recovery COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund for signage and marketing to promote the road closure, for animation of the street during road closures, for sanitizations stations and for the retention of Downtown Orillia Management Board (DOMB) staff to open and close the street during street closures.

Road Closure

The ERTF, the Emergency Management Committee (EMC) and staff have received a significant number of inquiries from businesses about the potential of occupying public realm in the downtown core. These inquiries were accompanied by dozens of inquiries from community members requesting the municipality to explore closing the downtown to vehicular traffic to make way for on-street shopping and patios.

The trend of expanding the use of the public realm to facilitate more pedestrian and consumer space, especially in traditional “main street” areas, has taken off across the nation, and is reinforced by groups such as Bring Back Main Street (as noted in a recent memo titled [“Reallocating Main Street Space to Support Community Wellbeing”](#)).

Besides retailers wishing to expand their sales space into the public realm, it became evident that some retailers may require the use of the public realm to accommodate customer lines due to COVID-19 related reductions in store capacity. The stores in traditional downtown areas (and in Orillia’s downtown specifically) are typically narrow, with a back to front/perpendicular orientation, and cannot accommodate large numbers of people in queue inside without interference with the flow of clients in and out of the business. Due to the narrow sidewalks, it is also difficult to accommodate external store queues while ensuring physical distancing with pedestrians. Stores in new format retail areas, are typically oriented with a horizontal internal layout with the cashier locations optimally set up to accommodate long lines of customers without interfering with customer entry and exit.

The ERTF was tasked with exploring a street closure in the downtown core. While we recognize that there is pressure from the community to implement a road closure quickly, the ERTF determined that given the current context it was important that public safety and business

support across various sectors must take priority. The ERTF first worked to determine that there was sufficient business support for a road closure, as a closure would not be enjoyable to visitors if businesses did not have the capacity to participate.

According to a recent survey undertaken by the DOMB:

1. Approximately 74% of downtown business respondents support the temporary use of public realm space to support patios and 55% advised that they would support using the public realm for pedestrians and customer line-ups.
2. Approximately 49% of downtown business respondents support the temporary use of public realm space for expanded retail space.
3. Approximately 53% of downtown business respondents would be in favour of a temporary closure of the main street and some side streets, and an additional 19% said they would support the temporary closure of some streets but not all.
4. Approximately 21% of downtown business respondents are already open until 7 p.m. during the summer, while another 27% said they would stay open Friday evenings until 7 p.m. if a late night shopping opportunity was promoted for the downtown. Only 9% of respondents advised that they would stay open late on Saturday evenings.
5. Approximately 19 of 24 (80%) restaurants or food service businesses would take part in an evening road closure.

The DOMB also met to discuss this matter, and has since provided their support for a temporary road closure on Friday and Saturday evenings between 4 p.m. and 11 p.m. beginning July 3, 2020 to September 5, 2020 to accommodate the expansion of business establishments in select sections of Mississaga Street East and West Street and Peter Street South. The DOMB also requested that the City of Orillia allocate up to \$5,300 to cover the cost to hire two staff on Friday and Saturday evenings from July 3 to September 5, 2020 to set-up and tear-down barricades and monitor the closure to ensure fire lanes remain clear, deal with any emergencies and assist with the set-up and teardown of street.

The ERTF did explore a street closure from Friday afternoon through to Saturday evening; however, the ERTF does not recommend a street closure which does not align with the DOMB recommendation, because the DOMB represents and speaks for businesses in the downtown core and the ERTF does not wish to implement a closure which is not supported by downtown businesses.

After carefully assessing and balancing the feedback of both community members and businesses in the downtown core, the ERTF recommends that Council approve a street closure of Mississaga Street East from Front Street to Peter Street South and from West Street to Andrew Street and on Peter Street South from Mississaga Street East to Colborne Street East on Friday and/or Saturday evenings from July 10 to September 5, 2020.

The geographical extent of the road closure was determined by reviewing the locations of businesses who require use of the public realm in order to expand, while also ensuring that adequate on-street parking remains for retailers who continue to rely heavily on curbside pickup. The ERTF anticipates that the block along Mississauga Street East between Peter Street South and West Street South would remain closed initially until it's demonstrated that a sufficient number of businesses along this block will participate in a street closure. Existing parking regulations for on-street parking mean that even during the road closure, parking spaces along this block would remain available for 30 minute curbside pickup and shopping.

The ERTF recommends that the street closures be phased in beginning on July 10, 2020, on Friday evenings only. This will allow approximately a week and a half for business owners to hire staff, purchase/rent equipment, market the closure and prepare to occupy the street during the road closure. By easing into the closure starting one day a week, this will allow the DOMB and City staff to assess the participation of businesses, the engagement of the community, and the ability of visitors to the downtown core to effectively physical distance from each other (crowd control). If Council approves the recommended motion, the ERTF in consultation with the EMC would be afforded the discretion to determine if and when an expansion to include Saturday evenings is appropriate.

The ERTF will continue to monitor the impact of any road closure in the context of Provincial decisions to move towards a Stage III reopening of the economy.

Facilitation of the road closure would be done collaboratively with the DOMB as follows:

- The City would design and purchase road closure signs.
- The City would deliver barricades on Friday afternoon and pick up Monday morning.
- The DOMB would set-up and take-down the barricades as required.
- The DOMB would manage layouts for businesses and develop a traffic control plan
- The City and DOMB would collaboratively promote the road closure through the ERTF Shop Local marketing plan.
- The DOMB has an existing Certificate of Insurance for these types of road closure activities.

Street Animation

The ERTF recommends taking a phased approach to the introduction of street animation. While it can benefit residents and visitors by enhancing their overall downtown experience, it needs to be executed in a safe and responsible manner to ensure the health and safety

of both the artists and audience. Currently, provincial guidelines do not permit live music or dancing in outdoor dining areas.

This is based on research that suggests this type of programming causes diners to lean towards each other and raise their voices or shout, which can increase the risk of transmission. With that in mind, and the current limits on gatherings, staff recommend activation move forward cautiously to limit crowds and ensure the artist's and public safety.

The ERTF recommends that Council approve the use of up to \$12,500 in funds to animate the downtown streetscape in a phased approach using local professionals from the arts and culture community. This phased approach could contemplate animation such as vintage car displays, muralists, woodworkers and buskers, and evolve into performances if provincial guidelines allow this type of entertainment. If Council approves these funds, staff would work to develop a street animation plan which could be implemented once it has been demonstrated that the street closures have the capacity for additional visitors and once the plan has been determined to meet provincial and health unit guidelines. The street animation plan would come forward to the ERTF and EMC for approval within one month of the road closure implementation (pending lifting of restrictions related to street animation/entertainment).

Marketing and Promotion

If Council approves the recommended motion, up to \$5,000 would be utilized to inform the public of and promote the downtown road closure. These funds would complement an existing \$5,000 which was allocated to promote restaurants throughout the City's core, however this marketing would primarily focus on communicating detail related specifically to the road closure (dates, times, detour information, etc). Marketing would be carried out through the ERTF Stay Safe, Shop Local Team, and would also include communications to assist shoppers as they navigate the Front Street road closure to drive to, and through, Downtown Orillia.

Due to the fairly immediate launch of this initiative, and concerns about crowd control, initial marketing of this program will include opportunities which can be launched quickly and effectively (social media boosted posts) and will be enhanced over the coming weeks provided it is safe to attract further visitors.

Lending of Municipal Assets

The ERTF explored the purchase of assets such as patio barriers and ramps which could be used for these, and future, road closures.

The ERTF ultimately did not support purchasing these assets for use by businesses, as ramps must be custom built for their location to ensure a smooth transition from curb to street surface. Although one business noted that the provision of barriers from the municipality would be helpful, the ERTF did not hear a sufficient need from other businesses to justify the pursuit of this.

The ERTF therefore recommend that City staff prepare a handout, which lists the requirements of ramps and patios barriers along with a listing of suppliers which could be shared with businesses to assist in their acquisition of this equipment.

Washrooms and Sanitization Stations

If Council approves the recommended motion, it is recommended that additional funds be allocated to source sanitizer for public entering and exiting the public realm road closure area. Five sanitization stations would be set-up for public use. The five stations would be located:

- Mississaga Street East and Front Street
- Mississaga Street West and Albert Street
- Peter Street South and Colborne Street East
- Peter Street South and Mississaga Street East
- Municipal Parking Lot 5

Each station would consist of a table, signage regarding public health guidelines and COVID-19 preventative measure guidelines, a self-screening check, and a 3.79L alcohol based hand sanitizer with pump.

Washrooms for restaurant customers will be provided to the public by the businesses in accordance with public health guidelines.

The City of Orillia public-use washrooms located in the downtown area are within facilities that remain closed (Orillia Opera House and Orillia Public Library). As these facilities begin to re-open, staff will assess the opportunity to potentially utilize these public spaces.

Inclement Weather

The ERTF recommends that the DOMB be given discretion to determine at 2 p.m. on Friday/Saturday (as applicable) whether or not the road closure will move forward or should be delayed based on radar imagery. In each case, if inclement weather becomes an issue, the road shall be closed no later than 5:30 p.m. if the radar indicates a potential for clear weather by 6 p.m.

Option 2

THAT Report ERTF-20-03 is received as information.

This option is not recommended as the mandate of the ERTF is to assist businesses and the recommendations within this report help achieve this mandate.

Financial Impact

If Council approves the recommended motion, this would result in the following financial impacts to the COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund, which has a current balance of \$939,000. The Treasury Department will be reporting back to Council on the financial impacts of COVID-19 across the corporation at an upcoming budget meeting.

Purpose	Amount (approximate)	Comments
Signage and marketing	\$7,000	To promote the downtown street closure and guide consumers through the Front Street road closure (approx. \$2,000 for road closure sign rentals and approx. \$5,000 for marketing).
Animation of the street	\$12,500	For potential activation of the street during road closures through the retention of buskers and entertainers.
DOMB staff	\$5,300	To fund the retention of DOMB staff to open, close and monitor the street during street closures.
Sanitization Stations	\$3,500	To fund sanitization stations (approx. \$3,000 for sanitization hand pumps and sanitizer and approx. \$500 for sanitization station signage).
Contingency	\$1,700	Figures above are approximate, a small contingency is recommended.
Total	\$30,000	

Since the drafting of this report, the DOMB has not yet met to discuss the potential of allocating funds to this initiative. While some of the DOMB funds that were originally anticipated for events have been reallocated to marketing for the downtown, DOMB staff anticipate that the DOMB may be able to contribute to the costs of road closure signage rental, marketing, street animation, and sanitization stations by reallocating existing funds. If approved, City staff would

reduce the municipal contribution to this initiative proportionate to the funds provided by the DOMB.

Consultation

- The following ERTF members provided feedback on behalf of their organization members:
 - Lisa Thomson-Roop, DOMB
 - Allan Lafontaine, Orillia District Chamber of Commerce
 - Kris Puhvel, Orillia & Lake Country Tourism
 - Wendy Timpano, Orillia Area Community Development Corporation
- The ERTF undertook two consultation groups, one focused on the DOMB and a second for restaurateurs outside of the downtown core.
 - These consultations are summarized in Schedule “A”.
- The DOMB executive provided feedback on behalf of DOMB members.
- The DOMB undertook a survey of DOMB members and a summary of the survey results are attached as Schedule “B”.
- Emails, phone calls and Facebook messages received by ERTF members and the Emergency Management Committee were also taken into consideration.

The DOMB adopted the following motion at its June 16, 2020, Board meeting:

“THAT the Downtown Orillia Management Board support Option 1 as outlined in the Patio and Public Realm Project Report from the Economic Recovery Task Force dated June 15, 2020;

AND THAT the DMB delegate authority to the DMB’s Sidewalk Use Committee to approve patio expansions on to the public realm;

AND THAT for efficiency, the DMB prefers to continue to have authority under Chapter 675 to approve minor encroachments on sidewalks within the BIA;

AND THAT the DMB provide the following recommendation in regard to implementing street closures as outlined in Phase 2 should it be deemed necessary:

- *Friday and Saturday evenings between 4:00pm – 11pm beginning July 3, 2020 to September 5, 2020 to accommodate the expansion of patios and retail establishments in select sections of Mississauga Street East and West and Peter Street South based on participation;*

AND THAT the DMB request up to \$5,300 to cover the cost to hire two staff on Friday and Saturday evenings for ten weeks beginning July 3 to September 5, 2020 to set-up and tear-down barricades and monitor the closure to ensure fire lanes remain clear, deal with any emergencies and assist with the set-up and teardown of street;

AND THAT the DMB and ERTF monitor the street closures and pedestrian traffic to determine if the street closure should be expanded or decreased based on success of the closure.”

Should the board feel the street should be re-opened in case of an emergency or inclement weather, the hired staff will contact the delegated DMB staff member for direction to move forward with re-opening the street.

Economic Development Impact

Almost all business owners in the Orillia area have experienced a significant impact to their business due to the Provincial restrictions which were enacted to address the COVID-19 pandemic. These businesses are now eager to open their businesses in whatever capacity they are able to do so. Restaurants in particular are eager to proceed with the implementation of patios since they are not currently permitted to offer indoor dining. These restaurants have noted that there are several barriers to this including barriers related to cost, red tape and logistical issues such as proximity to intersections and lack of adequate space for a patio.

The approval of the recommended motion would allow businesses in the BIA to expand into the public realm one to two evenings per week.

This is an excellent opportunity for the City of Orillia to explore collaborative ways to better use the public realm within the context of COVID-19. By asking DOMB staff and participating businesses to provide qualitative and quantitative feedback, this is also an evolving opportunity to learn how the municipality and business support partners could facilitate use of the public realm on a long-term basis.

Communications Plan

Business Development staff will work with the Manager of Tourism and Manager of Marketing to refine messaging to promote the road closure through the Stay Safe, Shop Local campaign. Details regarding this initiative will be promoted on the business support webpage at orillia.ca/businesssupport and the Shop Local Orillia webpage at shoplocalorillia.ca and widely shared using the City’s social media channels.

Relation to Formal Plans, City of Orillia Policy Manual and/or Guiding Legislation

The recommendation included in this report is related to the following formal plans, the City of Orillia Policy Manual and/or guiding legislation:

- City of Orillia Strategic Plan (Section 5.1 and 6.2)
 - 5.1. Promote a revitalized and vibrant downtown core which encourages citizens to contribute to businesses in this area.
 - 6.2. Deliver leading edge, efficient and effective services that are client-centric and business friendly.

Conclusion

In light of the recent Provincial announcement regarding the Stage 2 re-openings, businesses throughout Orillia are eager to open to the fullest extent, and as soon as possible. Retailers have had to restrict capacity to their stores which has resulted in customer line ups on municipal streets and sidewalks.

The ERTF is recommending that Council further support downtown businesses within a portion of the BIA in their use of the public realm by approving temporary road closures and a complementary marketing program to encourage residents to shop and dine local.

Schedules

- Schedule “A” - Sector Consultation Summary
- Schedule “B” – DOMB Survey results
- Schedule “C” – Orillia in the Context of the “Bring Back Main Street” Initiative

Prepared by & Key Contact: Laura Thompson, CEC.D., Ec.D.
Senior Manager of Business Development

On behalf of the Economic Recovery Task Force
Councillor Ted Emond, Chair
Councillor David Campbell
Councillor Ralph Cipolla
Ron Shulman, Mayor's appointee
Ted Markle, Mayor's appointee
Laura Thompson, City of Orillia Business Development and Communications
Dan Landry, City of Orillia Business Development and Communications
Michael Ladouceur, City of Orillia Business Development and Communications
Wendy Timpano, Orillia Area CDC
Allan Lafontaine, Orillia District Chamber of Commerce
Lisa Thomson-Roop, Downtown Orillia Management Board
Kris Puhvel, Orillia & Lake Country Tourism

Approved by: Ted Emond, Chair, Economic Recovery Task Force

Schedule “A” Sector Consultation Summary

Public Realm in the Downtown Core

Date: Monday, June 8, 2020

Top 5 Key Concerns raised:

1. Space and managing people is a challenge.
2. Narrative by government and media is that it is unsafe to shop. Moving forward, that narrative needs to change.
3. Free parking is an issue because currently some cars are not moving all day, which is counterproductive to the intent
4. Full-time street closure would be devastating to retail business.
5. Front street construction will impact street closures and traffic, it's important to understand the plan for the summer.

Key actions recommended:

1. Use on-street parking spaces for patios as long as it's balanced with the needs of retailers for curb-side pick-up
2. Reduce Red Tape if and where possible
3. Allow and encourage pedestrian bumpouts around patios
4. Consider Waiving Fees for patios and parking space rentals for this season
5. Explore using the CIP to offset the costs of building patios
6. Continue pushing shop-local messaging, and target boaters to bring them up the street to shop and dine
7. Phasing in programming to activate downtown
8. If there is a preference to close the street to traffic, this should only be done on Saturday
9. If street closure takes place, nearby curb-side pickup locations should be identified
10. Provide consistent signage and floor decals for businesses

Restaurant Reopening

Date: Tuesday, June 9, 2020

Top 5 Key Concerns raised:

6. Patio furniture is becoming scarce to source and locate. Can a restaurant simply put picnic tables instead of a patio?
7. Cleaning washrooms after each customer is extremely time intensive
8. Rush to open patios now, with very little notice. Need solutions now.
9. No clear rules on how they can open a patio, are masks required etc
10. How are restaurants supposed to handle thunderstorms and weather interruptions? Where do customers go?

Key actions recommended:

11. Speak with health unit about guidance on measures that restaurants must implement such as masks, and space and washroom cleaning as well as guidance on how to manage weather related incidents.
12. Provide clarity on City rules re patios both inside and outside of the downtown core.
13. Create a “see you on the patio” campaign. Highlight restaurants with patios. They take photos and tag us, we share on City account.
14. Rental companies are out of fencing and barriers, exploring lending municipal fences and barriers.
15. Provide consistent signage and floor decals for restaurants.
16. Explore shared eating and picnic spaces in municipal parks and squares, ensure availability of washrooms and tables.

Schedule “B” DOMB Survey Results

Summary of DOMB Survey Results*

*Only quantitative information has been summarized below, however, extensive qualitative data was also collected and analyzed by the DOMB and ERTF.

6. 79% of downtown business respondents support using on-street parking spaces to allow restaurants/café patios to expand on the street in front of their restaurants.
7. 74% of downtown business respondents support the temporary use of public realm space to support patios and 55% advised that they'd support using the public realm for pedestrians and customer line-ups.
8. 49% of downtown business respondents support the temporary use of public realm space for expanded retail space.
9. 34% of survey respondents felt that all municipal property (including streets, sidewalks, parking lots, parks and squares could be used to support their business. 52% of respondents feel that municipal sidewalks could be used to support their downtown business, while 38% of respondents feel that municipal streets could be used to support their business.
10. 53% of downtown business respondents would be in favour of a temporary closure of the main street and some side streets, and an additional 19% said they'd support the temporary closure of some streets but not all.
11. 26% of downtown survey respondents advised that they'd prefer the streets open [to vehicular traffic] at all times.
12. 21% of downtown business respondents are already open until 7 p.m. during the summer, while another 27% said they would stay open Friday evenings until 7 p.m. if a late night shopping opportunity was promoted for the downtown. Only 9% of respondents advised that they would stay open late on Saturday evenings.
13. 35% of downtown business respondents advised that if the City reduced/waived fees they could consider a patio/expanded retail space this year.**
 - a. **It should be noted that there are approximately 4 patio lease approvals downtown on an annual basis. It is not likely, but if all respondents who noted interest proceed through the approval process, this would constitute an increase of 600% or 24 patio/retail expansions.

Schedule “C”

Orillia in the Context of the “Bring Back Main Street” Initiative

By Councillor Ted Emond, Chair

(ERTF acknowledges the contribution of the Canadian Urban Institute Bring Back Main Street Initiative)

Mississauga Street and The Peter Street Arts District

They are concentrations of commercial activity along a street and in a district that includes a variety of small and independently owned businesses.

They are social gathering places with community amenities, cultural institutions and public spaces, such as libraries, theatres, faith institutions, galleries, community centres, museums, post-secondary institutions, squares and laneways.

They are Orillia’s Main Streets with residences located adjacent to or above the streets’ retail shops and in bordering neighbourhoods.

Small town main streets, like Mississauga and Peter Streets, act as shopping districts and gathering places for the entire community. They often have unique heritage qualities and play an important role in defining the identity of Orillia. They link our waterfront Port and parks with our heritage downtown and also are tourist destinations.

The COVID-19 Challenge

COVID-19 has radically altered the way humans gather and interact in response to physical distancing measures, people are finding creative ways to use the main streets around them. More and more are using streets that typically prioritize cars to access essential jobs and services by foot and bike, meet friends and neighbours, and to share messages of hope and gratitude. Importantly, some are taking up main street space along with our park space to grieve and protest the racist treatment those in the GBLTQ2+ community and Black and Indigenous peoples.

Reallocating main street space – from parking or traffic to people and local businesses – is an essential part of holistic pandemic recovery. And in order to support businesses on the brink of closure and help people make the most of warm summer months, we need to act quickly. Now is the time for the City of Orillia, the Downtown Orillia Management Board, the Orillia District Chamber of Commerce and other city builders to support public health, economic recovery and people’s desires to take up space on our Main Streets.

The need to rapidly respond to the COVID-19 crisis means testing solutions and coming up with best practices fast. Here are a few emerging, and broadly applicable, good

practices to help make sure our main street reallocation project is well-designed and equitable:

- ***Expand patio space for all businesses:*** The City of Toronto recently announced a new program called CaféTO. It aims to make it easier for restaurants to open and expand patio space, by identifying available spaces to expand and speeding up the parklet and sidewalk café permitting process. Rotterdam has rolled out an even wider initiative. Between June and November, the City is encouraging entrepreneurs to bring their offerings to parking spaces adjacent to their buildings. By waiving permit requirements and offering free delivery and installation of pre-made decks, the municipality has made it easy for all kinds of businesses to pop up outside. Outdoor haircut, anyone?
- ***Pedestrianize main streets:*** Opening streets to people, while relegating non-essential vehicles to nearby parking lots enables more space for people to stay physically distanced while walking, enjoying patios, and more. In doing so, traffic noise drops, air quality improves and the human senses are allowed to come alive. Every summer, many people make the “trip of a lifetime” to enjoy the car-calmed streets of Amsterdam, Barcelona and elsewhere. This summer, let’s bring those feelings home to our main streets.
- ***Provide small grants for community activations:*** Businesses shouldn’t be the only organizations taking up space when main streets are opened up. Cities can promote equitable street access by funding cashless activations by community organizations or resident groups. Activations might include parklets, art installations, free food, or outdoor religious or cultural gathering spaces.
- ***Seek out partnerships with social impact organizations:*** Relying on large companies to handle things like programming and waste management can be convenient, but partnering with social impact organizations to manage recycling programs or repurpose street banners can ensure that key investments benefit main street businesses and the people who live on or around them.
- ***Engage underrepresented communities:*** Ensuring that streets welcome and reflect everyone who uses them - or would like to use them - requires nuanced engagement and openness to distinct approaches. Take a look at Oakland, the city that pioneered “Slow Streets” in April. When the initiative first rolled out, it seemed like Oakland’s communities of colour were skeptical. But the City’s engagement team conducted another round of dialogue with groups that had been underrepresented the first time. The team realized that these residents wanted to ensure the mobility strategy prioritized safe access to essential services, rather than just prioritizing leisure. Oakland responded by rolling out the Essential Places program, which slows down streets that improve access to grocery stores, food distribution sites and COVID-19 testing sites.

It is in this context that the Orillia Economic Recovery Task Force has prepared this report as Phase 2 of our recommended assistance to use the downtown public realm to help our small businesses recover, enable our residents to safely return downtown to

dine, brose and shop and experiment with new and innovative ways to use our Main Streets' public realm now and in the future.

But before introducing our recommendations an important starting point is to establish a common understanding why main streets matter.

- **Main streets are drivers of the economy.** The economic stability of our country and our communities is top of mind for almost everyone and a high priority for all levels of government. Main streets are major employment hubs that offer diverse job opportunities. They often contain significant amount of office space and are important retail destinations. Main streets also tend to serve as incubators for new businesses, most of which are independently owned. In other words, we need our main streets to thrive in order to rebuild our local economy.
- **Main streets are hubs of social and cultural activity.** Heritage buildings, public art, civic institutions, unique public spaces, entertainment facilities, restaurants, cafes and bars are often concentrated along main streets. They are where people go to have fun and enjoy leisurely activities, social interaction, stimulation and relaxation. When social distancing rules are lifted, citizens will be longing for social experiences, and places to safely participate cultural activity and civic life.
- **Main streets support community health and safety.** When shops, services and amenities are located on a main street, they support healthy lifestyle choices such as walking and cycling. They enable greater density, adaptive re-use and lower carbon emissions.
- **Main streets make communities more resilient.** Main streets and the many small businesses and civic assets located on them are gathering places that support a strong sense of community. As shops and services begin to re-open, the sense of trust that people have with local retailers will help people to feel safe as they begin to re-enter retail environments. Self-sufficiency is another characteristic of a resilient community. When main streets and local businesses thrive, we can be less reliant on larger, multi-national retailers for our day-to-day needs. Money is also more likely to stay in a community when purchases are made at locally owned businesses. This is especially valuable in a time when we are vulnerable to instabilities in our global economy.
- **Main streets provide value for investment.** When it comes to economic, social and cultural vitality, main streets 'punch above their weight'. They may be small in terms of land area, but they provide significant portions of the city's tax base (usually around 10 to 15 per cent), a concentration of jobs, cultural institutions, and entertainment offerings. Big public investments, in community facilities, public realm upgrades, parks, public art in our downtowns have historically had great success in growing public confidence and stimulating local economies. As we're thinking about recovery, considering value for investment will help to ensure public and private funds are used strategically to support economic growth and the vibrancy and liveability of our communities.