

## CITY OF ORILLIA

**TO:** Council Committee – November 2, 2020  
**FROM:** Economic Recovery Task Force  
**DATE:** October 28, 2020  
**REPORT NO:** ERTF-20-04  
**SUBJECT:** See You on the Patio Program

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### **Recommended Motion**

**THAT Council approve a 2021 See You on the Patio Program as recommended in Report ERTF-20-04;**

**AND THAT Council authorize the use of up to \$55,000 from the Social Assistance and Economic Recovery COVID-19 Emergency Relief Reserve for program marketing, road closed signs and barriers and a City-wide animation program;**

**AND THAT Council support in principle a downtown road closure program for the 2021 patio season, pending support of the DOMB through the allocation of DOMB staff to implement the closure;**

**AND THAT Chapter 675 of the City of Orillia Municipal Code - Use of Sidewalks - Business Improvement Area, be temporarily amended to revoke the authority of the DOMB to approve “tables” and “chairs” on municipal sidewalks in the Business Improvement Area between April 15 and November 15, 2021.**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the success of the 2020 See You on the Patio Program, and to provide recommendations for a 2021 program.

While the initiation of the proposed 2021 program is many months away, an extensive program is proposed which will require budget assurances and several months of planning.

### **Background & Key Facts**

- The Economic Recovery Task Force (ERTF) was created 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”.
- In the spring of 2020, COVID-related restrictions severely impacted businesses around the globe.
- Locally, the City of Orillia ERTF sought to respond to impacts on businesses through a round of consultations with various sectors of the economy.

- Through these consultations, the ERTF became aware of severe impacts to the retail and food service industries.
- As of June 12, 2020, most retail businesses, including restaurant and bar patios were allowed to begin operations in a modified manner.
- The ERTF therefore developed new programming to promote local shopping and dining and developing new programs to promote the use of patios and use of the public realm to increase the capacity of local businesses.
- In June 2020, Council approved Phase 1 of a Patio and Public Realm Project to support a new patio approval program throughout the City of Orillia, the creation of a Patio Task Force, creation of a City wide marketing program, a street animation program and amendments to the Downtown Tomorrow Community Improvement Plan to support the construction of patios.
- In July 2020, Council approved Phase 2 of the Public Realm Project related to the See You on the Patio downtown street closure program.
- The See You on the Patio Program ran from July 10-September 25, 2020.
- In addition to the above noted program, the ERTF has also undertaken a number of other initiatives to support businesses throughout the City of Orillia (hosting numerous consultation and brainstorming sessions, advocating for the reduction of fees and red tape for businesses, undertaking a comprehensive 'shop local' marketing campaign, developing parking initiatives to support curbside pick-up, design and distribution of free business signage for social distancing and curbside pick-up, etc).

### **Options & Analysis**

The ERTF presents the following options for consideration:

#### **Option 1 – Recommended**

**THAT Council approve a 2021 See You on the Patio Program as recommended in Report ERTF-20-04;**

**AND THAT Council authorize the use of up to \$55,000 from the Social Assistance and Economic Recovery COVID-19 Emergency Relief Reserve for program marketing, road closed signs and barriers and a City-wide animation program;**

**AND THAT Council support in principle a downtown road closure program for the 2021 patio season, pending support of the DOMB through the allocation of DOMB staff to implement the closure;**

**AND THAT Chapter 675 of the City of Orillia Municipal Code - Use of Sidewalks - Business Improvement Area, be temporarily amended to revoke the authority of the DOMB to approve “tables” and “chairs” on municipal sidewalks in the Business Improvement Area between April 15 and November 15, 2021.**

Overall the 2020 See You on the Patio Program was considered to be a success by residents and visitors alike:

- 426 respondents took part in the See You on the Patio Visitor Feedback Survey.
  - 98% (418) post-event survey respondents said that they took part in at least one component of the See You On The Patio program.
  - 90% of visitors agreed that they enjoyed visiting patios in general.
  - 75% enjoyed shopping in the downtown core when the street was closed to traffic.
  - 44% of visitors that answered the survey visited a restaurant patio outside of the downtown area.
- In total, 44 respondents took part in the See You On The Patio Business Feedback Survey.
  - 59% of business respondents extended their hours during the program.
  - 59% agreed the program allowed them to increase their sales.
  - 64% agreed the program increased awareness of their business.
- Anecdotally, members of the ERTF who participated in the event heard from attendees that the program lifted their mood and allowed them to meet with friends and family in a safe environment.
- Many attendees noted that the program and extended hours of retail establishments allowed them to visit stores and restaurants that they otherwise hadn't had the chance to visit. This was supported by survey data which showed that 16% of visitor respondents advised that the program enabled them to visit a restaurant/store/service in Orillia for the first time.
- The animation program supported 33 unique opportunities for local artists and performers. Musical performances, live demonstrations and a digital gallery were highlights of the program. The program had a Council approved budget of \$12,500 and utilized \$9,500.
- One business owner noted "We think that without this project, we would have closed our doors permanently."

Both visitors and business owners provided a range of feedback and recommendations for improvement. These comments are summarized in Schedules "A" and "B". Overall, visitors were very happy with the program but sought longer hours, more opportunities for the street closure, and increased participation by businesses. Feedback from businesses were more varied, with some businesses seeking an expansion to the program, and others being opposed to the program and noting that vehicular traffic is a critical component of their specific business models. Business feedback regarding hours and length of the program was also split, as many businesses acknowledged that the program was beneficial but that due to the increased effort and hours this program entails, it also required more resources for businesses at a time when additional staffing is not financially feasible.

The ERTF recommends that following components for a 2021 See You on the Patio Program:

- The ERTF recommends retaining the name of the program, "See You on the Patio", for the 2021 season. Other options were contemplated, however, the ERTF found that the name had earned recognition by the end of the season, and several businesses recommended retaining the name because of this. Despite reference to

patios within the name, the See You on the Patio program also achieved the ERTF goal of driving traffic to restaurants in this city which in turn increased the amount of patronage to downtown retail businesses (as demonstrated by the visitor survey which noted that 75% of respondents engaged in downtown shopping during the street closure).

- The ERTF recommends a See You on the Patio marketing campaign to promote patios across the City between May 22 and September 3, 2021. This campaign would seek to promote restaurants, shops and services within Orillia which feature patio space. A marketing campaign would be developed to ensure a comprehensive marketing approach across various print, digital, and/or radio formats. Participating businesses would be promoted by the ERTF and its member business support organizations.
- The ERTF recommends that Council support in principle a downtown street closure program during the See You on the Patio campaign. This street closure would primarily take place on Mississauga Street from Front Street to Albert Street, and could include Peter Street from Colborne to Mississauga Street East if sufficient engagement from businesses can be achieved. This component would be contingent upon DOMB support, and the allocation of DOMB staff to implement the road closure. Based on survey responses and discussions with local businesses, a closure on Friday evenings during the patio season would likely achieve the highest amount of business support. Based on survey responses and discussions with business owners, concerns were expressed about the strain on owner operators who extended their evening hours to accommodate the program on both Friday and Saturday evenings this summer. The ERTF anticipates that greater engagement from retail businesses may be achieved if the street closure is focused on one day of the week, and animation and programming could also be more focused. A subsequent report would need to come forward from the DOMB which sets out dates, times and geographical identification of the closures.
- Building upon the success of the 2020 street animation program, staff recommend that the City offer a City-wide animation program to provide entertainment offerings throughout the community on Friday evenings. Restaurants, retailers and/or service providers who have indoor or outdoor (covered) gathering space meeting the City's criteria would be eligible to apply to become a host facility for local entertainers and performers. Entertainment would be coordinated and paid for by the City, procured in accordance with the City's purchasing policy and would meet any applicable Provincial/Health Unit guidelines related to the COVID safety measures. This program would support patronage to local shops and restaurants while simultaneously supporting the local arts and culture sector.
- Patio Lease Applications will continue for business which require use of the public realm (City streets and sidewalks), however, Patio Lease Applications will be extended from the current season of approximately May to October, to an eligible season of April 15 to November 15, to align with the City's snow clearing operation by-law. Consideration will be also be given to applicants who submit special requests to extend beyond these dates provided that municipal concerns related to snow clearing and other weather-related implications can be adequately addressed.
- Many lessons were learned over the course of 2020 with respect to issuing approvals for temporary patios on private property throughout the City. Generally, applicants

found the process burdensome and overly bureaucratic. From a municipal staff perspective, the review process was time-consuming and involved many staff from different divisions/departments. As the initial roll out of a City-wide program was crafted within considerable time constraints to the evolving COVID-related restrictions, there were many questions from applicants that had not previously been contemplated resulting at times in miscommunication, confusion and delays. With the opportunity to review this past season and adjust for lessons learned, municipal staff have been exploring opportunities to further streamline the approval process for temporary seasonal patios in 2021. Municipal staff intend to spend the Fall of 2020 and Winter of 2020/21 revising the requirements for temporary seasonal patios with the lens to make the process more streamlined for both applicants and staff. However, they have noted that it is premature at this time to propose changes to the temporary seasonal patio approvals process as much input is still required from various staff.

- As one of the key challenges facing businesses who were implementing a new patio was understanding the various municipal, provincial and building code requirements associated with such a structure, the ERTF recommends launching an educational component to the See You on the Patio Program. This would include development of a new “how to” video for setting up a safe and engaging patio, as well as a brochure which would include best practices and local information to help businesses resource patio components locally (including items such as curb stops, barriers, gates and reflective tape).
- The City and DOMB received several complaints regarding the use of bistro tables on municipal sidewalks over this past summer, due to the limited capacity of municipal sidewalks and the need for increased social distancing due to COVID-19. The ERTF recommends that Council approve an amendment to Chapter 675 to remove the authority of the DOMB to approve tables and chairs on municipal sidewalks in the Business Improvement Area. This will allow the City to ensure that all requests for patio space are directed through one approval process so that we can ensure all patios meet the social distancing provisions and that adequate pedestrian space is maintained.
- The ERTF recommends that the construction of patios in the Downtown Tomorrow Community Improvement Plan (DTCIP) area continue to be interpreted as eligible for grant purposes, but will be recommending that all non-development related fees (patio application fees, etc) not be considered eligible under the DTCIP Program in 2021. These recommendations will be brought to Council by municipal staff through the annual DTCIP report in the coming months.

## Option 2

### **THAT Report ERTF-20-04 be received as information.**

This option is not recommended because a See You on the Patio Program this would have the impact of receiving the update on the 2020 program and would also have the effect of not approving a program for 2021. The 2020 program was considered a success by residents, visitors and businesses, and allowed several businesses to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. While we are hopeful that fewer restrictions will be in place by summer 2021,

the impacts of COVID will likely continue to be felt and programming which encourages open-air patronage to Orillia restaurants, stores and services will continue to be of great value.

### **Financial Impact**

Option 1 would have the following budgetary implications:

<b>Project Component</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
City-wide animation program	\$20,000
Signage (up to 10) and barriers (up to 25) for road closure	\$10,000
Marketing campaign	\$20,000
Contingency (due to COVID related uncertainties)	\$5,000
<b>Total Estimated Costs</b>	<b>\$55,000</b>

As this program is a direct result of the ERTF COVID related consultations, and this program has been developed in response to the ongoing impacts which COVID has had on local businesses, the ERTF recommends that the program be funded through the Social Assistance and Economic Recovery COVID-19 Emergency Relief Reserve. At the Council meeting of May 11, 2020 \$1 million of the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve was set aside for the Relief Fund. Council has allocated approximately \$97,000 in total from the Emergency Relief Fund, of which approximately \$49,000 has been spent to date.

The ERTF is recommending that the street closure program be contingent upon DOMB support through the provision of staff. Based on a preliminary review of staff costing by municipal staff, it's anticipated that the retention of three staff for the duration of each road closure would cost approximately \$400 per day. If the DOMB were to contemplate an 8-week program on Friday evenings, this would incur a staff resourcing cost of approximately \$3,200, and if they preferred a 12-week program this would cost approximately \$4,800 for staffing. The ERTF recommends that the DOMB consider the value of this program in addition to the cost and staffing implications, as the ERTF heard from several business respondents who claimed that the program "saved" their business, and that "there was an increase over expected revenue had the event not happened".

The DOMB has advised that they require further time to analyze the costs/benefits of this program.

### **Consultation**

The ERTF undertook significant consultations to assess the impacts of the 2020 See You on the Patio Program. This consultation is captured in Schedules "A" and "B".

The Emergency Management Committee (EMC) was consulted on the draft report and supports the recommendations. The EMC did note that their support for the proposed street closure is contingent upon the DOMB providing the staff to implement the street closure.

The DOMB has reviewed the program framework and advised that street closures do have staffing and cost implications. Therefore the DOMB requires additional time to consult with members prior to committing to the proposed street closure.

### **Economic Development Impact**

Business owners across the City of Orillia have experienced a significant impact to their business due to the Provincial restrictions which were enacted to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Several businesses have expressed concern about the ability to survive the next 6-12 months. This program has the ability to directly support the arts and culture sector through the delivery of a city-wide animation program, and has the ability to support shops, services and restaurants by providing an opportunity which they can leverage to attract customers and patrons. This is an excellent opportunity for the City to set the stage for a catalytic program, and by approving this program now, it allows for other groups and business leaders to build upon this municipal program and leverage it even further. It also allows much needed time for the City and businesses to plan for next season to make the program even more successful.

### **Communications Plan**

Details regarding this initiative will be widely shared through a comprehensive marketing plan led by the Business Development and Communications Department, and will be supported by all members and member organizations of the ERTF.

### **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
  - 1.4 Support and enhance culture, arts and an active lifestyle.
  - 4.2 Develop the City to be a year-round destination for tourism, cultural activities, sports, active living, accommodation and trails.
  - 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 response to the COVID-19 restrictions placed on businesses in the spring of 2020, the ERTF quickly developed a new See You on the Patio Program to allow businesses to expand into the streets and take advantage of open-air activities. Overall this program is considered to be very successful based on the consultation held to date.

Building upon this program, and the constructive feedback and ideas collected since launching this program, the ERTF is proposing an expanded and improved 2021 See You

on the Patio Program. This program will have enhanced city-wide components and will support businesses across the arts and culture, retail, restaurant and service industries. The ERTF is also hopeful that this program will solidify Orillia as a safe destination during the 2021 summer season.

### **Schedules**

- Schedule “A” – See You on the Patio Visitor Survey Results Summary
- Schedule “B” - See You on the Patio Business Survey Results Summary

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On behalf of the Economic Recovery Task Force

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Approved by:            Ralph Cipolla, Acting Chair, Economic Recovery Task Force

**Schedule "A"**  
**See You on the Patio Visitor Survey Results Summary**

**Who responded and how did they participate in the Patio Program?**

- In total, 426 respondents took part in the See You on the Patio Visitor Feedback Survey.
- 74% of respondents were from the City of Orillia, 21% were from Orillia & Lake Country Region, and 5% were from out of the region.
- 418 respondents (98%) took part in at least one component of the See You On The Patio program.
  - 81% took part in visiting a restaurant patio in the downtown area on Friday/Saturday evenings while the street was closed to traffic.
  - 59% visited a local store/service in the downtown core during the Friday/Saturday evening street closure.
  - 44% visited a restaurant patio outside of the downtown area and 42% visited a restaurant patio in the downtown area while the street was open to traffic.
- 90% of respondents visited a patio in Orillia between at least once during the Patio Program, 29% attended restaurant patios more than five times during the program.

**How did respondents rate the program?**

- 90% agreed that they enjoyed visiting patios in general.
- 85% agreed that they enjoyed visiting patios in the downtown core when the street was closed to traffic.
- 75% enjoyed shopping in the downtown core when the street was closed to traffic.
- 85% agreed they were satisfied with the quantity of restaurants with patios throughout the City of Orillia.
- 89% agreed that they felt safe during street closures downtown.
- 80% enjoyed the entertainment and would recommend/invite a friend/family member to attend a similar event in the future.

**How did people hear about the program?**

- Social media attracted the most people, with 57% of respondents hearing about it there, 50% heard about it through word of mouth, 29% saw it in the newspaper, 27% heard about it from Downtown Orillia.

**Do respondents want to see the program continue in 2021?**

- 92% of respondents said they want to see at least one aspect of the program continue in 2021.
- 92% want to see the allowance of outdoor patios for all restaurants; 91% want to see downtown weekend street closures; and 85% want to see entertainment downtown on the weekend evenings.

- 87% are most likely to visit patios, shops and services on Friday evenings, 80% would visit on Saturday evenings.

## Suggested improvements

Overall, we received 258 suggestions for improvements. These largely followed several main themes, including:

- Keeping downtown streets closed longer (ranging from starting earlier on Saturdays to being closed all weekend long, to making it permanently pedestrian).
- Extending the program into fall by using heaters and starting earlier in the spring.
- Having more downtown restaurants and retailers participate in the street closures.
- More signage and promotion for out-of-town visitors to promote tourism (COVID-dependent).
- Adding more entertainment on the street and promoting it (COVID-dependent).
- Add more lights and general ambience – restaurant signage, patio decorations, etc.
- Adding more umbrellas/shaded locations to restaurant patios.
- Increase security and police service, as well as sidewalk cleaning.
- Provide more assistance to restaurants and retailers outside of the downtown area.
- Have more tables available. Make sure gating is set back from the tables, pedestrians passing too closely to tables.
- Remove parking restrictions (waterfront parking program).

## Comments submitted

- 227 comments were submitted by respondents, the majority of which spoke positively about the program and/or included the above noted suggestions.
- 90 respondents provided testimonials. A few sample responses include:
- *“As an Orillia area resident, I love seeing the downtown core come alive at night. We have visited every weekend since the patios have been opened and enjoy a walk downtown after dinner to visit other local retailers and friends.”*
- *“This program is so great for the city and small businesses! What a stand out program, so proud of Orillia!”*
- *“The See You On The Patio Program promotes a sense of community and pride. It's great to see everyone coming together to support local businesses and the community at large.”*
- *“In the past weeks I have spent more time downtown than in the past year. The closed street gave a festive feeling to the downtown, as did the restaurant patios. We ate at Era 67, The Common Stove, Brewery Bay, 125 Breakfast Club and Rustica. Service and food was great at every place. We also wandered through the shops. Thank you for this wonderful initiative!”*

**Schedule “B”**  
**See You on the Patio Business Survey Results Summary**

**Who responded and how did they participate in the Patio Program?**

- In total, 44 respondents took part in the See You On The Patio Business Feedback Survey.
- 48% of respondents were restaurant owners.
  - 55% were retailers/service providers.
  - 91% of responses came from those in the DOMB coverage area.
  - 11% of respondents were from outside of the DOMB coverage area.

**How did businesses rate the See You On The Patio program?**

- 57% agreed the program allowed them to increase the capacity of their business.
- 59% agreed the program allowed them to increase their sales.
- 64% agreed the program increased awareness of their business.
- 59% agreed they saw any increase in visitors during the closure of streets to downtown traffic.
- 57% agreed the program benefitted both restaurants and retailers.
- 55% agreed the street animation in the downtown core enhanced their business atmosphere.
- 25% found the patio approval easy to understand and apply for, but 66% were neutral or didn't participate.
- 59% agreed they would consider the See You On The Patio program a success.

**Consideration of a 2021 program?**

- The majority of respondents want to see at least one aspect of the program continue in 2021.
- 73% want to see the allowance of outdoor patios for all restaurants continue.
- 70% want to see the downtown weekend street closure continue.
- 68% want to see marketing of the program continue.
- 64% want to see the entertainment downtown on the weekend continue.
- 61% want to see promotion opportunities for retailers continue.
- 11% (5 respondents) said they did not want to see the program continue in 2021.
- Approximately half (50%) of respondents said they would participate on both Fridays and Saturdays.
- 41% said they would participate on Fridays.
- 23% said they would participate on Saturdays.
- 61% were supportive of a Downtown Orillia street closure from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. each evening the program is in effect.

Responses related to street closure times and days were split as some said the street closure helped them and they want to see longer hours, while others said not to close the street at all as they lost business.

## What time would retailers/service providers participating in a 2021 program stay open until?

Of 23 responses, answers were split.

- The majority (61%) said they would stay open until 8 p.m., 9 p.m., or 10 p.m.
- 13% said they would stay open until 6 p.m. or 7 p.m.
- 0% said they would stay open until 11 p.m.
- 26% said “other” or that they would not participate.

## What improvements would business respondents suggest?

34 respondents left suggestions for improvements. Responses included:

- Requested that the closure included lands east of Front Street.
- Better communication is needed around parking.
- Retailers should be encouraged to keep their stores open past 5 p.m.
- Add activities for children.
- Increased monitoring/policing.
- More marketing of animation and notifying businesses of planned entertainment.
- Consider impact on non-downtown businesses.
- Limit the street closure to Mississauga Street only.
- Keep Peter Street and between Peter and West Street open.
- Inform taxi companies of the street closures.
- Free parking in the municipal lots during street closures.

## What else did business have to say?

- Multiple respondents wrote about the potential for daytime closures.
- More retailers need to participate.
- It provides an unfair advantage to some restaurant owners and dilutes the customer base for those who already had patios.
- Quick service restaurants were impacted by disruptions to pick-up and delivery. People thought the street was closed all the time.
- Make it inclusive for restaurants outside of downtown.
- Leave Peter Street open for parking, not enough businesses participated here.
- Do not support allowing businesses from outside the downtown to set up tables downtown during the program.
- *“It made zero improvement in our sales. We are supportive of it for the restaurants, but it cut into our end of day business.”*
- *“The See You On The Patio program helped recoup lost revenues from COVID closure and introduced us to a wider audience.”*
- *“We think that without this project, we would have closed our doors permanently.”*
- *“It's wonderful to see the streets alive in the evening and the pedestrianization has certainly helped our business immensely. We are wholly supportive of the See You On The Patio program!”*