



Call to Order

An Executive Meeting of Strathroy's BIA was held on Wednesday, November 13th, 8am at the Seniors Centre in Strathroy. It was officially called to order at 8:05am, presided over by Cate O'Neill with Raegan Harding as secretary.

Attendees

Voting members in attendance included Brad Richards, Chris Traczuk, Dave Brock, Demetri Makrakos, Robin Tiller, Sue Looman, and Tina Hawkins. Guests included Doug and Marion Smith, Donna and John Pammer, Alisha Gleiser, Jill Zavitz, Darrin Berg, Diane McGuire, and Linda Wagner.

Approval of Minutes

Motion **1911-01** was made by Dave to approve the minutes of October 9th Executive meeting. Tina seconded. All in favour. Carried.

Actions/Main Motions

- Coupon book and "BIA Giveaways" online campaign

Raegan noted that the coupon books have finally gone to print, with 30 coupon entries submitted. We received funding from town to print 1000 books, which means each coupon book participant will get about thirty books to distribute to their customers, in the interest of reaching more people.

It was suggested that, instead of giving these to merchants to give out, these should be handed out by volunteers at the Victorian Christmas, with approximately 500 at each gate. This will be discussed further once the books are in, which Kelsie at PrintMore insists "they will be done before the 7th"

Raegan is launching an online campaign that would see these coupons posted to social media channels. So far, about a dozen merchants have agreed to take part in this social media campaign, which was intended to be "25 Days of BIA Giveaways" but has been changed to "Holly-days and BIA Giveaways" since not enough merchants provided approval to cover that many days.

We are hoping to be able to count on our merchants to track success metrics to see if this is a worthwhile venture for next year as a potential "shop local" holiday promotion, or fundraiser.

- Victorian Christmas and Holiday Market - updates, etc.

It was noted that the BIA supported road closures of Front and Frank Streets for this year's Victorian Christmas event, being held on December 7th, as fully discussed at the BIA's General Meeting on September 12th, 2019 at 7pm at the Seniors' Centre. This road closure came as a result of survey responses that were collected after last year's Victorian Christmas event, indicating that the Market area should be disbursed and expanded to include more of the BIA area, and not just outside of town hall. It was noted that the BIA and Downtown Strathroy Market's collective goal is to spread this event out, allowing for more expansive foot traffic. This closure has also allowed the Market to secure golf carts from Caradoc Sands which will be used as "Uber" carts, or people movers, intended to transport visitors who may have some mobility challenges.

Cate noted that Donna has requested to address the Board with her concerns for this road closure. Donna noted that, while she wasn't prepared to be a speaker, she will speak on behalf of many downtown business owners who are concerned about this Victorian Christmas road closure, suggesting that street closures have a negative impact on merchant sales since many people prefer not to visit stores without available parking.

Donna stated that the concerns with this most recent closure come on the heels of Hometown Hockey, which saw a four-day street closure of Frank & Front Streets, and hurt businesses in what's supposed to be their busiest quarter. Donna suggested that there has been a vast increase in the number of street closures over the past six to eight years, stating that they have likely tripled. She reminded the Board that eight years ago, the streets were closed only one day out of the year, for the Santa Claus Parade, emphasizing that closures hurt business.

Donna suggested that the Victorian Christmas event has seemingly become a Market event and no longer feels like a BIA event, suggesting that it is the responsibility of the BIA to promote and support their bricks and mortar stores that pay a tax levy, and not Market vendors. The Victorian Christmas event was created to provide an environment and opportunity for people to shop local. Donna noted that it was very successful in the first year and less successful, for merchants, once the Market was brought in the second year.

As far as the Market is concerned, Donna stated that it's been their experience at the Mens Shoppe and Her Boutique that if people come downtown for a special event, then that's what they're there to do and very few venture into stores. That said, she admitted that they did participate in the 2019 summer Market and that they saw modest gains there. But they should not be expected to pay almost \$300 to save the space in front of their storefront, in addition to paying extra staff, when they already pay rent, utilities, and taxes.

Donna urges the Market to exercise extreme caution when it comes to choice and placement of vendors, encouraging the Market executive to take into consideration vendors that offer something that isn't already for sale in the BIA. Cate, as representative of both the BIA and the Market, stated that she appreciates these merchant concerns and says the BIA does support them and will be very cautious when it comes to vendor placement.

At this point, Cate read an email that was sent by Jim Poag, who is in full support of the road closure for this year's Victorian Christmas, stating that he feels these events are what make Strathroy's downtown healthy, in comparison to most downtown areas. He went on to state that while the benefits of these events aren't always seen on the day of the event, it does come in the recognition of the downtown being an active place to shop and in people gaining exposure to businesses and then visiting at a later date. Jim was kind enough to share that Poag's had over 500 people through their door during 2017's Victorian Christmas event and over 550 in 2018. He also cautions that if we start to condemn these events taking place downtown then maybe they will choose outlying locations, drawing all attention away from our downtown. Cate then allowed for some open forum discussion but insisted that individuals speak one at a time.

Alisha insisted that we need to get away from Market vendor success being misinterpreted as BIA merchant success and emphasized that vendor placement is of utmost concern, encouraging that choices are made carefully and considerately. She stated that anything "free" should be on Front St W while any goods for sale should be kept on Frank Street as its merchants are more service-oriented. Alisha also pointed out that the Market does not pay a BIA fee, or levy.

Linda said there's not enough money to go around, insisting that people will spend their money at the Market instead of with merchants. She went on to say that we, as downtown merchants, live and work in Strathroy and would hope that our residents would shop local and support their brick and mortars, adding that it saves them time and gas money.

Diane insisted that the BIA is more than just Frank & Front Streets, stating that she offered a lot of activities at her storefront during last year's Victorian Christmas and still experienced a drop in sales (66%) and foot traffic. The bricks and mortar businesses that run everyday face a lot of overhead costs, including rent, utilities and taxes, and they just cannot compete with these pop-up shops and vendors, nor should they need to.

Jill stated that she encourages events and sees the value in adding fun and vibrancy to the downtown. That said, she insists that there has to be a happy medium and vendors that "pop up" for events should not be in direct competition with any existing BIA shop. Jill went on to state that she would rather see Frank & Front Streets closed, rather than just Frank Street, as long as vendors are lining the full length of the road so that foot traffic gains more momentum.

Sue stated that we listen when our members speak, which was the intention of the survey that went out after last year's Victorian Christmas as well as the email that went out this week seeking feedback. Everyone has equal opportunities for their voices to be heard, they just need to use them. She suggested that we have to go with what the numbers say, as majority rules.

Raegan stated that the outcome of email responses received indicate that eleven (11) members say they would like the roads closed, as is, while six (6) stated that they would like the closure reversed. It was noted that this email was sent to about 200 members and, again, only a very small number actually participate, using their BIA voice.

Demetri took a moment to say a few things, emphasizing the fact that we have approximately 350,000

people about twenty (20) minutes away and if we can get even a small percentage of them to come, it's a successful event. He also mentioned the advantage downtown Strathroy has as our main streets are off the highway and cautions using the bollards too much as they do act as a barricade. He suggested that, in the interest of time, we table these discussions to a later date.

Motion **1911-02** was made by Demetri to table the discussions on road closures to another meeting, suggesting that the next General Meeting may be a good forum to revisit. Dave seconded. All in favour. Carried.

Motion **1911-03** was made by Demetri to keep the roads closed for this year's Victorian Christmas event, as it has already been approved by Council. Brad seconded. All in favour. Carried.

- Rogers Hometown Hockey debrief/wrap-up

Raegan noted that, while a lot of businesses are not pleased with the outcome of Rogers Hometown Hockey's visit, the community is brimming with pride. Our town, and specifically our downtown, received a lot of fantastic attention and recognition as a result of this very popular event.

It was noted that Raegan has been in touch with Lisa, the Senior Manager of Community & Events for Rogers Hometown Hockey, regarding complaints received specifically from one BIA merchant who feels that this event had a very negative impact on their business.

Lisa informed Raegan that any compensation offered by Rogers Hometown Hockey is simply spending dollars in that particular store while the Rogers crew is in the community. Unfortunately this particular store was not open on the day the complaints were received so there was no recourse.

Officers' Reports

Treasurer's Report

Dave noted that the BIA account balance sits at \$60,561.23, as of October 31st.

Motion **1911-04** was made by Dave to approve the BIA Budget review, as submitted. Robin seconded. All in favour, carried.

Promotions report

Our MyFM ads have now shifted to promote the Victorian Christmas event. We have also submitted an ad with the Middlesex Banner. The Facebook event page will be populated in the next week or so, as more participants' submissions are received. There was a suggestion that we should look into having an over-street banner for next year's Victorian Christmas event.

The Sip & Shop event that Donna has planned will roll out at the end of the month, with many BIA businesses participating.

Beautification report

Cate noted that the town looks fantastic right now, with many beautification upgrades in the downtown.

Raegan noted that the flower order will have to be made soon and is seeking feedback in regards to begonia colours, suggesting that the red we used in 2018 had much more of an impact than this year's yellows. It was agreed that red is the way to go. Raegan will place that order this week.

General Manager's report

As far as the Victorian Christmas goes, our event page has received about 102K hits, with middle-aged women being our target audience. It was noted that Raegan has ordered a 5-piece Victorian Set for \$150 from Joe Walsh at Wooden Garden Crafts. It was also noted that Raegan has found a film student at Fanshawe who is willing to be on-site from 11am - 1pm for \$250. The final product would be four (4) 30- to 60-second videos, edited with music for online promotional use. It was noted that myFM is on location from 11am - 3pm and Chris says he would like to do 12 live cut-ins. Raegan will send him the itinerary as soon as it's complete (likely around December 1st).

Communications

Last month, the committee discussed Hometown Hockey, the coupon book, and BIA distribution zones. Our next meeting will be held on November 20th, with key topics of discussion being Victorian Christmas and member engagement.

Business Advocacy

Demetri noted that there is a Business & Breakfast workshop tomorrow morning, November 14th, with 25-30 people registered so far. The topic is using Facebook to drive business. He also noted that a new commuter bus connection between London and Sarnia, with stops in Mount Brydges and Strathroy, will be announced tomorrow by Lambton-Kent-Middlesex MPP, Monte McNaughton. This new bus service is intended to run Monday to Friday with two round trips every week day and should be in place by the spring.

Other

It was noted that Victorian Christmas vendors will be lined up off-set from centreline of the road, as opposed to on the sidewalks as they usually are. This will allow for better flow and merchant visibility.

Next Meeting(s)

Executive Meeting: Wednesday, December 11th, 8am at the Seniors' Centre

Adjournment

Motion **1911- 05** was made by Demetri to adjourn at 9:49am. Tina seconded. All in favour. Carried.

Secretary: _____ Date of Approval: _____