

Memorandum to Council

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Strategic Initiatives Division



To: Mayor and Members of Council
CC: Sarah Klein, Director Strategic Initiatives
From: Christy Chrus, Manager Creative Communities; Lara Toman, Program Manager Events, Culture and Tourism
Date: December 15, 2023
File #: N/A
Subject: Staff Response to Downtown Whitby BIA Letter regarding 2024 Street Event

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell,
Chief Administrative Officer**

The purpose of this memo is to advise Council that Town Staff recommend declining the Downtown Whitby BIA's request to consider the implementation and funding of a street event in 2024.

The Town of Whitby received the attached letter from the Downtown Whitby Business Improvement Area (BIA) requesting the Town's consideration in allocating funding for the inclusion of a new street event in the 2024 budget and planning.

In the letter, the BIA indicates that the Downtown Whitby BIA Board of Directors, comprised of Downtown Whitby business owners, have discussed, and emphasized the importance of reinstating a street event with a closure like Heritage Day, to garner more exposure for local businesses and infuse a renewed sense of vitality into the downtown area. While Town staff support this objective, staff do not recommend this approach due to budget constraints, staffing capacity constraints and a Council endorsed Plan to develop a new signature event in 2025.

Currently, the Downtown Whitby BIA organizes two major events annually including Beer Fest held at Celebration Square in September and the Christmas Market held at Celebration Square and The Promenade in November. In addition, other smaller scale events such as a ladies shopping night have been organized. The BIA develops an annual budget, like the Town of Whitby, and once approved by the BIA Board of Directors and Town of Whitby Council, a special property tax levy is collected from property owners within the BIA boundaries based on the BIA budget. The special property tax levy is in addition to the Town's property tax levy and is transferred to the BIA Board to fund the BIA's budgeted events and other expenditures. While the BIA

letter notes that their noteworthy events (Beer Fest and the Christmas Market), are funded by sponsorship and ticket sales, any shortfalls between event revenue and costs are offset by the special (BIA) tax levy revenues. The BIA may also proceed with their proposed street event by incorporating the costs of this event into their 2024 budget and special (BIA) tax levy. Costs related to road closures include staffing costs for the installation of signage and barricades, pay-duty police officers and Town staff for the duration of the event. In accordance with the Special Events policy, a request for a road closure requires a minimum of 120 days in order for appropriate consultation by the Special Events Review Team (which includes outside agencies) to ensure the closure is safe and does not conflict with construction and other events.

In 2022, Council approved the Special Events Strategy 2022-2025 which outlines several key actions the municipality shall undertake to support the planning, delivery, permitting and implementation of special events in the community.

One of the key actions of the Strategy is the development and launch of a new signature event in 2025. In addition, the development of a new signature event was identified in the Community Strategic Plan as a 2025 action.

In the Special Events Strategy, Strategic Priority 2 - Grow the Town's signature events, includes three action items as follows:

- 2.10 Develop a business plan to host a new signature event that showcases the diversity and uniqueness of Whitby with a timeline of 2023.
- 2.11 Planning of signature event (budget, sponsorship, grants, partners, operational plans) with a timeline of 2024.
- 2.12 Delivery and promotion of new signature event with a timeline of 2025.

With the labour disruption this fall, the timelines for the business plan have slightly shifted and staff are currently in the business planning stages and community engagement component of the new signature event plan. Staff will be launching a public survey in early 2024 to receive feedback from the community on the type of event they would like to see, possible locations and opportunities to ensure Whitby's diversity is showcased as part of the new event plan. Staff will report back to Council on the status of the business plan for the new signature event.

As part of the 2024 capital budget, staff have put forward a capital budget request of \$30,000 to support the planning for the new signature event, while the 2025 capital budget will include a proposed budget to support the implementation of the new signature event, subject to Council approval. The introduction of a new event takes time and proper planning to ensure the needs of the community are being addressed while responsibly allocating resources to achieve the desired outcome.

Creative Communities staff have advised the BIA Board of the plans for the 2025 signature event and the potential of this event being in downtown Whitby subject to community engagement results.

Town Staff will continue to seek opportunities to partner with the BIA to achieve their objective of increased exposure for local businesses and infusing vitality into the downtowns. This could include, but not be limited to supporting smaller event pop ups, third party partnerships in Downtown Whitby. Staff will continue to consult and engage with the BIA as part of the signature event planning process and look for opportunities to partner.

Given the information provided in this memo, Town Staff recommend declining the BIA's request for a 2024 street closure and event budget. Creative Communities staff will continue to work through the timelines as noted in the Council approved Special Event Strategy, the Community Strategic Plan and our current work plans to plan, build out and budget for a new signature event in 2025 to ensure its success within the community.



Clorraine Dennie
Executive Director
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December 6, 2023

Mayor Elizabeth Roy
575 Rossland Road East
Whitby, Ontario Canada L1N2M8

Subject: Formal Request for Inclusion of Funding for Street Event in 2024 Budget

Dear Mayor Roy,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Downtown Whitby Business Improvement Area (DWBIA), an organization that has been diligently working since its establishment in 2017 to enhance the appeal and prosperity of the downtown core.

The DWBIA operates within a designated zone in the downtown core, and businesses within this area contribute through a mandatory municipal tax. The funds collected are utilized to transform Downtown Whitby into a preferred destination through various initiatives, including events, beautification efforts, tourism endeavors, business support, and more. Our overarching mission is to create a vibrant and thriving community, achieved through place-making attractions and signature events.

Over the years, the DWBIA has made significant strides in putting Downtown Whitby on the map as a destination of choice. Noteworthy events such as Beer Fest and the Christmas Market, which attract a combined 2,000 visitors annually, have become integral traditions in our community. It is crucial to highlight that these events are not funded by the budget but are made possible through sponsorship dollars and ticket sales.

Currently operated by two dedicated full-time staff members, the DWBIA is not only responsible for executing event programming to drive traffic but also provides essential services to our members. These include public consultation and member relations, safety initiatives in collaboration with the town and DRPS, beautification and streetscaping programs, and engagement with government agencies and community partners to offer support for the downtown and the wider region.

As we embark on the planning of our 2024 initiatives and budget, the DWBIA voluntary Board of Directors, comprised of downtown Whitby business owners have extensively discussed and emphasized the importance of reinstating a street event with a closure similar to Heritage Days. Resilient business owners, who form the core of our thriving downtown, have also voiced their support for this endeavor. This event, they believe, will not only garner more exposure for our local businesses but also infuse a renewed sense of vitality into the downtown area.

In light of the above, the DWBIA is formally requesting the Town of Whitby's consideration and support in allocating funding for the inclusion of a street event in their 2024 budget and planning. We believe that this collaboration will not only bolster the economic landscape of our downtown but also contribute to the overall well-being and satisfaction of our residents.

We would be more than willing to provide additional details, engage in discussions, and address any inquiries you may have regarding this request. The DWBIA looks forward to the opportunity to work closely with the Town of Whitby in making this street event a reality and reinforcing the sense of pride and community spirit that defines our town.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We eagerly await a positive response and the prospect of collaborating for the betterment of our community.

Sincerely,

Clorraine Dennie

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