

## City of Orillia - See You on the Patio and Shop Local Program

### Purpose of the Project and anticipated outcomes:

In the spring of 2020, COVID related restrictions had severely impacted local businesses, and in particular, retail, food service, and arts and culture 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 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. The first phase of the project supported 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. The second phase implemented a new downtown street closure program to encourage businesses to expand into the public realm (streets and sidewalks). The See You on the Patio Program ran from July 10-September 25, 2020, and two comprehensive surveys (one for businesses and one for visitors) were undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the program. This program was complemented by a concurrent "Shop Local" marketing campaign which further extolled the values (socially and economically) of supporting local entrepreneurs. Careful evaluation of this program has taken place to evaluate the success of the program (from the perspective of visitors and businesses), and areas for improvement and the ERTF is recommending an updated See You on the Patio Program for 2021.

### Effectiveness in meeting objectives:

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.
- 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.
- The Shop Local marketing campaign reached a wide audience and achieved the following:
  - 173,884 consumer impressions through the digital display campaign (including

- 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 budget of \$12,500 and used \$9,500.
- One business owner noted “We think that without this project, we would have closed our doors permanently.”
- Anecdotally, the ERTF also heard feedback from the community that this program was very uplifting and allowed residents to gather with friends and family in a safe setting.

### **Challenges and Changes made:**

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 noting that vehicular traffic is an important component of their specific business models.

### **Target Audience (demographics):**

The target audience of this program was two-fold. The program was developed primarily to support local businesses and entrepreneurs, and in particular those in the retail, food service, and arts and culture sectors. The marketing campaigns were directed at local residents of the City of Orillia and surrounding communities.

### **Sustainability (influencing change for the better of our communities):**

Building upon this program, and the constructive feedback and ideas collected since launching this program, the ERTF is developing 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 program is currently proposed to evolve into 2021 as follows:

- See You on the Patio marketing campaign to promote patios across the City between May 22 and September 3, 2021.
- The ERTF is exploring a downtown BIA street closure during the See You on the Patio campaign on Friday evenings from the May long weekend to Labour Day weekend.
- 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 city-funded local entertainers and performers.

- 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.
- 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.
- The ERTF anticipates launching an educational component to the See You on the Patio Program, including a new "how to" video for setting up a safe and engaging patio, as well as a brochure with best practices and sourcing information for patio infrastructure.
- The ERTF is recommending that the construction of patios in the Downtown Tomorrow Community Improvement Plan (DTCIP) area continue to be considered eligible for grant purposes.

The ERTF is 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

**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.
  
- *“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!”*