



## THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF AMHERSTBURG

### OFFICE OF COMMUNITY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES

*MISSION STATEMENT: Committed to delivering cost-effective and efficient services for the residents of the Town of Amherstburg with a view to improve and enhance their quality of life.*

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Author's Phone: 519 730-1309 ext. 2218	Date to Council: November 22, 2021
Author's E-mail: <a href="mailto:arota@amherstburg.ca">arota@amherstburg.ca</a>	Resolution #:

To: Mayor and Members of Town Council

Subject: Open Air Weekends 2021 Post Report

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#### 1. RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that:

1. The report from the Manager of Tourism and Culture dated October 29, 2021 titled Open Air Weekends 2021 Post Report be **RECEIVED**;
2. Council **APPROVE** the 2022 Open Air Weekends plan and logistics as listed below in principle:
  - The hours of operation and the operational footprint for Open Air Weekends 2022 attached under 'Appendix D';
  - An exemption for permits and road closures;
  - A Noise By-Law exemption as long as the noise generated from Open Air Weekends 2022 remain at a noise level below 60dba;
  - An exemption for Section 3 of the Kings Navy Yard Park By-law #2004-89 to allow for the Open Air Weekends 2022 in Kings Navy Yard Park; and
3. That consideration of funding for the 2022 Open Air Weekends initiative be **DEFERRED** to 2022 Operating Budget deliberations.

#### 2. BACKGROUND:

On March 22, 2020, the Town of Amherstburg declared a State of Emergency in alignment with the provincially declared State of Emergency due to the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. On June 8, 2020 Administration was directed by Council to facilitate the Respond, Restart, Recover COVID -19 - Amherstburg Revitalization Initiative.

The Open Air Weekends programming and operations of 2020 and 2021 were created as a direct result of the ever changing regulations in support of providing opportunities for the downtown businesses and to entice visitation to Amherstburg. The primary objective of Open Air Weekends is economic development. The ancillary objective is to engage our own residents in a safe, outdoor environment while following the directives of the Provincial government guidelines to stop the spread of COVID -19.

The Open Air Weekends program operated every weekend during the months of June to the end of September in both 2020 and 2021. The initiative provided many positive benefits to the community including the promotion of Amherstburg as a destination, rich in cultural and heritage features – an immersive destination to be experienced. Organized activities and programming such as scavenger hunts whose goal was to bring people into the businesses, live entertainment in the park and games in the streets were popular.

The community at large has been faced with many challenges as a result of COVID-19 but Open Air Weekends was a success story amongst these challenges. The venue, the programming and planned activities provided a reason for people to visit Amherstburg. The ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic can be felt across the nation and it has never been more apparent the vital role outdoor public spaces, venues and programming play in providing wellbeing to the community. Since the onset of the pandemic, places like parks, squares, plazas, pathways and trails have seen unparalleled use during all hours and all seasons. Many lessons have been learned over the course of the last two years and Administration is committed to using these lessons to improve Open Air Weekends programming and further enhance this unique, Town lead initiative that draws people to the Town.

Open Air Weekends were reviewed in both 2020 and 2021 by the Public Events Committee consisting of representatives who continue to provide comments inclusive of such elements as public safety, accessibility and emergency planning. Additionally, there were on-site reviews conducted by persons with disabilities. The Amherstburg Accessibility Advisory Committee conducted public education and outreach on the accessible features of the event to increase public awareness of how the event was rendered accessible to persons with disabilities such as through the inclusion of accessible routes of travel, washroom facilities and parking locations.

### **3. DISCUSSION:**

The unprecedented impacts of COVID-19 have and continue to influence a global shift for corporations and communities to pivot and plan for alternative, creative dynamics. Administration is of the belief that not only did Open Air Weekends serve as a conduit to a pivoted delivery service for our core downtown businesses during the height of the pandemic, it will also continue to evolve as a major economic driver and job creator as a major tourist attraction for all of Amherstburg.

The Town of Amherstburg's downtown core is ideal and geographically positioned as a tourist destination and is one of the Town's greatest assets. The Town is viewed upon respectfully as a tourist destination supported through Council adopted Community Strategic Plan; Pillar 1- Marketing & Promotion and Pillar 2- Economic Development. This view is confirmed through the Town's success in achieving favorable outcomes in grants and awards from Economic Development Canada, Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, Tourism Association Industry of Ontario, Festival and Events

Ontario (TIAO), Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC) and Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island (TWEPI).

Amherstburg’s downtown core includes a number of diversified retailers, restaurants, coffee shops, a craft brewery and a historic waterfront park that makes the downtown area a walkable “\*place-making” destination. The downtown core offers visitors an opportunity to experience a clustered number of cultural and historical assets all within close proximity. Residents and visitors recognize that these amenities are exceptional and unmatched within the region as a tourist destination.

Throughout the Open Air Weekends programming, Administration has consistently met with stakeholders, monitored the program and surveyed businesses that participated within the 2021 footprint. Administration also considered the patterns of visitors that frequented Open Air Weekends in order to learn what is working and where changes may be required to improve and build upon the current status of the initiative.

The following highlights and results were realized;

**September 27, 2021 Business Survey Samples 21 Respondents**

(See full survey attached - **Appendix A** – Final Business Survey Open Air 2021 Results)

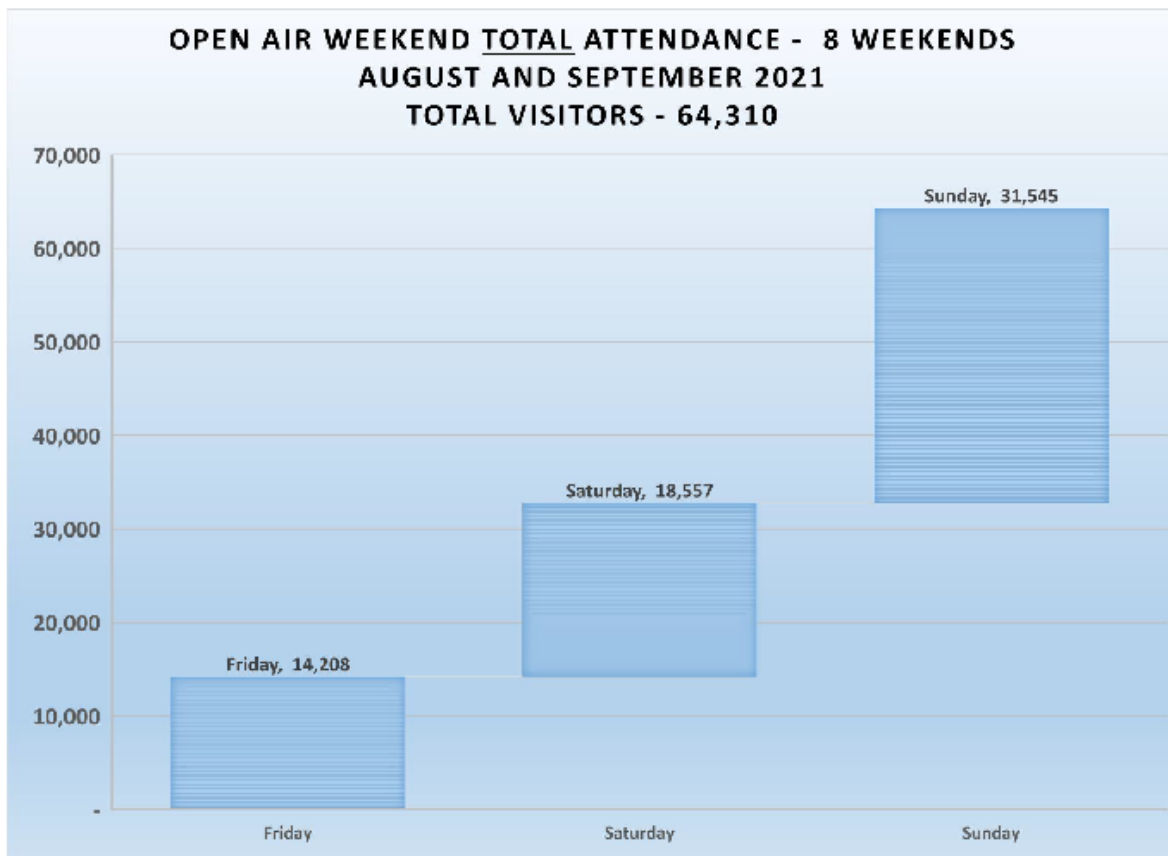
<b><u>Question</u></b>	<b><u>Yes</u></b>	<b><u>No</u></b>	
<b>#1</b> Has your business benefitted from Open Air Weekends in 2021?	52.38% Yes	47.62 No	
<b>#5</b> Would you like your business to see Open Air Weekends continue from Spring to Fall (Victoria Day weekend until end of September)?	<b>71.43%</b> <b>Yes</b>	<b>28.57</b> <b>No</b>	
<b>#6</b> Would you like Open Air Weekends to return in 2022?	61.90% Every weekend	23.81% One weekend a month	14.29% Not return
<b>#7</b> What type of feedback have you heard from your customers from your business during Open Air Weekends?	<b>60%</b> <b>Excellent</b>	<b>10%</b> <b>Good</b>	30% Negative

**August 7, 8, 9 2021 Visitor Profile; sample highlights administered by TWEPI**

(See full survey attached- **Appendix B** –Amherstburg Open Air Weekends Visitor Survey TWEPI)

The charts and graphs below are reflective of a survey encompassing 236 responses from the general public within the 2021 Open Air footprint.





**Note:** This graph is based on data collected for the last 8 weekends of Open Air 2021. Open Air weekends was a 16 weekend event in 2021. This data was collected for 50% of the event timeframe. If we assume that some of the visitors were counted more than once we can safely and conservatively surmise that the total of 64,310 visitors is a low estimation. By using the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries; Regional Visitor Profiles figures indicated that; A one day spend of a tourist is \$79 p.p. and overnight spend of a tourist (40km+) is \$244 p.p. We can then conclude the following of Open Air Weekends 2021:

Total # of visitors	64,310
Day visitors (81%)	52,091 spends \$ 79 p.p. per day for a total of \$4,115,189
Overnight visitor (19%)	12,219 spends \$244 p.p. per day for a total of 2,981,436
Total visitor spending	<b>\$7,096,625</b>

**Recommended 2022 Open Air Footprint and Operational Times** (listed below)  
(See - **Appendix D** – Open Air 2022 Map)

The downtown businesses provided feedback and concerns which were considered by Administration and in particular from the Amherstburg Public Events Committee (PEC) which consists of professionals that managed the footprint area and operations of Open Air Weekends. These departments' areas of responsibility included but are not limited to Bylaw, Public Works, Parks, Fire, Police, Risk Management, Accessibility and Tourism and Culture.

## Administrative Assessment 2021/2022 (What did we learn?)

- The management of traffic patterns by both pedestrians and vehicles are paramount to ensure the best protection and provision of safety and accessibility to members of the general public and staff. At peak times, the influx of visitors (foot traffic) was intense and pedestrians were naturally gravitating to the vehicular section of the street. It became unclear at times to the pedestrians as to where the defined boundaries were by the sheer volume of people within that space.
- Closing the streets on Fridays and reopening them on Saturdays to accommodate vehicular traffic during the day was extremely labor intensive. It also required specialized equipment, trucks and skilled manpower to erect and tear down fencing. This method of operations often compromised other areas of day to day Parks departments operations.
- Planning well in advance with concise and timely communication to stakeholders and the general public is essential for a safe, equitable and successful initiative such as Open Air Weekends.

### Resolutions to mitigate the above:

- In the 2021 footprint, the portion of Dalhousie between Richmond and Rankin combined both pedestrians *and* vehicular traffic separated by fencing to accommodate entry to private driveways. In the proposed 2022 footprint, by keeping this portion of Dalhousie Street open to vehicular traffic only and eliminating the fencing combination of vehicles *and* pedestrians will create a clearly defined area for vehicular traffic only. This also will increase the number of parking spaces by 21 including 2 accessible parking spaces.

By moving the entrance of the Open Air footprint on Richmond Street from the Post Office driveway to the corner of Richmond and Ramsey, we will eliminate the combination of pedestrians and vehicles. To facilitate this, we will direct traffic through the public lot, adjacent to the Heritage Square building and route it to the Post Office and the parking lot between Precision Jewellers and Towne Shoppe property. **No access will be lost to these parking lots with this plan.** Private stakeholders of those properties will be consulted upon Council approval of this plan.

- After careful revue of staff resources and visitation patterns, the following **Hours of Operations are proposed**;
  - Every weekend from May 21, 2022 to September 25, 2022
  - Roads closure begins on Fridays at 3:00 p.m.
  - Roads remain closed until Sunday evening at the following times;
  - May to June – Sunday take down begins at 9:00 p.m.
  - July to August – Sunday take down at 10:00 p.m.
  - September – Sunday take down at 9:00 p.m.

- Should Council approve the proposed 2022 footprint, Administration can effectively begin communications, planning and facilitating the necessary processes and permits in a cooperative and timely manner with participating stakeholders. Access to government grant applications can also begin immediately as calls for applications for funding have already commenced.

### **Parking Considerations during Open Air Weekends**

- There are 312 public parking spaces within a three-minute walking radius of centre of Richmond and Dalhousie.
- There are an additional 237 parking spaces within a six- minute walking radius of the centre of Richmond and Dalhousie.
- There are a total of 549 parking spaces within a six -minute walk of the centre of Richmond and Dalhousie.
- The new footprint would provide 21 additional parking spots, included in those new spaces are 2 that are accessible.

In 2020 and 2021, Administration also designated staff parking for businesses in the bus bays at General Amherst High School for Open Air Weekends. Fifty (50) parking spots were provided and reserved by permit only for downtown business employees. It was noted that the permits were not used to full capacity at times however, the same amenity would be offered in 2022.

### **Accessible Parking**

In 2020 and 2021, the Kings Navy Yard Park (KNYP) lot was signed for designated accessible parking only during Open Air. Administration noted that these spots were under utilized. Administration would recommend 2 spots in the KNYP lot as designated accessible parking spaces and the addition of 3 accessible parking spaces at the other 3 entrances to the Open Air footprint. (See Map indicated above) Public consultation will be completed with the Amherstburg Accessibility Advisory Committee on these locations before the addition of the accessible on-street parking spaces are created to ensure the location and suitability.

## **4. RISK ANALYSIS:**

Open Air Weekends are designed for the promotion of Amherstburg as an experiential destination. The over arching goal is to provide these opportunities and build upon the success of this initiative that came about as a result of the pandemic using it as an economic development driver to promote the distinctive amenities that Amherstburg has to offer.

In the short term, the domestic market and “staycation” travel within one’s own community, local or regional travel will drive the tourism economy post pandemic. Short haul travel as recorded in our visitor surveys will be the prominent driver of the COVID-19 rebound. The consumer will be selective in spending patterns, priorities and locations (attractions, restaurants, shops, services) that they choose to visit.

In 2022, Administration recommends continuing Open Air weekends and providing additional programming, adjusted hours and modified operations that will continue to attract residents and visitors to the downtown streets with a lens to future planning.

Additional programming will benefit artists, community groups and private enterprise. *By not supporting the proposed 2022 Open Air Weekends program, there is a medium to high risk of missed opportunity for this economic development driver with the potential to hinder Amherstburg's market share as a destination of choice that sets the Town apart from neighboring, highly competitive communities. This risk is considered possible and likely should this event not continue especially because there is currently no BIA in place within the downtown core.*

Long term initiatives on the Horizon for the Town include a hotel in the downtown core. Open Air Weekends provides a venue for the natural influx of a large number of visitors. The new hotel is scheduled to open by the time 40+km travel is on the rebound post pandemic. \*One day spend of a tourist is \$79 p.p. Overnight spend of a tourist is \$244 p.p. \* Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries; Regional Visitor Profiles. *By not supporting the proposed 2022 Open Air Weekends program there is a medium to high risk of missed opportunity to develop this initiative into a venue that will promote Amherstburg as a tourist destination and provide for a larger number of returning visitors, overnight guests, performing artists and musicians who will want to explore, stay overnight and spend more money both within the footprint and outside the footprint. This includes other attractions and businesses such as historical sites, retail, gas, grocery and big box stores.*

A successful initiative like Open Air Weekends takes months of planning coordinating and research. Planning needs to begin immediately as some government grants are currently calling for 2022 applications. Timing for infrastructure (such as the installation of flex bollards vs. delineators) necessary permits, business agreements, sponsorships and application to government funding opportunities is of the essence. *If Council chooses not to support the recommended 2022 Open Air Weekends footprint and operations plan, there is an inherent timing risk that this may result in missed grant opportunities and not enough time and resources to operate a safe, equitable and successful Open Air Weekends program. In order to mitigate this risk, timing is of the essence and it is recommended that the approval, in principal, be provided.*

The proposed footprint and hours of operation of Open Air Weekends supports staff and Administration who are “boots on the ground” to manage the initiative in a realistic, safe and efficient manner. *Not supporting the 2022 Open Air Weekends footprint and hours of operations as outlined in this report poses a resource and potential safety concerns thereby creating a stressful operating environment in relations to inefficient use of funds, human resources and time management for the Town of Amherstburg. In order to mitigate these risks, adoption, in principle, is sought ahead of consideration of funding allocations, which allows for prudent planning for the appropriate budget, operational plan and resources, as necessary.*

## **5. FINANCIAL MATTERS:**

The chart on the following page provides the actual costs from the 2021 Open Air Weekends and the financial implications for the proposed 2022 plan.



<b>Open Air Weekends</b>		
	<b>2021 Actuals</b>	<b>2022 Anticipated</b>
<b># of weekends</b>	<b>16</b> (June 11-Sept 26)	<b>19</b> (May 21-Sept 25)
<b>REVENUE</b>		
Corporate Sponsorships	\$5,500	\$5,500
Government Grants	<u>\$20,000</u>	<u>\$20,000</u>
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$25,500</b>	<b>\$25,500</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Wages	\$59,122	\$70,000
Programming	\$16,626	\$30,000
Capital Costs	\$32,520	\$15,000
Advertising	<u>\$1,600</u>	<u>\$2,000</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$109,868</b>	<b>\$117,000</b>
<b>Net Town Costs</b>	<b>\$84,368</b>	<b>\$91,500</b>
<b>FUNDING SOURCES</b>		
Base Budget: Council Approved Open Air - Parks Staff	<b>\$49,854</b>	<b>\$70,000</b>
Base Budget: Community Events	<u><b>\$34,514</b></u>	<u><b>\$21,500</b></u>
<b>Total Funding for Town Costs</b>	<b>\$84,368</b>	<b>\$91,500</b>

**Notes:**

- In 2022, an anticipated wage increase expense is estimated due to additional (3) weekends of operations and rate of inflation
- \*In 2021, the Tourism and Culture department was operating with three (3) less staff members who were redeployed to MVC and Communications at the time of Open Air Weekends. This staff compliment worked MVC and additionally Open Air weekends. In 2022, resuming a full compliment of four (4) staff, the hours to operate Open Air Weekends will remain within the normal work week
- A healthy head start in developing sponsorship packages and submitting additional grant applications in 2022 is anticipated. Sponsorship and grant revenue is estimated to be equal or greater than in 2021
- The anticipated increase in budget dollars required for 2022 will be brought forward to Council as part of the 2022 budget process

## 6. **CONSULTATIONS:**

- The downtown commercial and residential businesses within the 2021 Open Air Weekends footprint were consulted via surveys, emails and ongoing site consultations during the operating weekends.
- The Director of Community and Protective Services was consulted.
- The Public Events Committee was consulted.
- Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island (TWEPI); survey facilitators and program partners.
- South West Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC); funders for KNYP parkette's new accessible picnic tables and flex delineators.
- Visitors to Open Air 2021 were consulted.
- The Amherstburg Accessibility Advisory Committee. (Please note that the Amherstburg Accessibility Advisory Committee would be consulted further on the approved perimeter as presented in this report to review parking, accessibility provisions, and routes of travel, and accessible access prior to start of Open Air Weekends 2022.)

## 7. **CONCLUSION:**

\*The concept of Placemaking is not a new idea (<https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>). Communities that are advancing to a multi-faceted approach in the planning, design and management of public spaces are attractive and sought after as a positive life style choice for both the resident and visitor. These become the destinations of choice in a highly competitive market share.

The active use of unique spaces and the evolution of Open Air Weekends for pedestrian commonality was evident in 2020/2021 as demonstrated in the Town of Amherstburg led surveys. The Open Air initiative has the potential to evolve as an even greater economic development driver with a lens to future growth and investment for the Town of Amherstburg. With thoughtful planning and the cooperation from stakeholders and partners, Administration is of the belief that the new 2022 Open Air Weekends footprint will facilitate a safe, creative, culturally inviting reason for residents and tourists alike to spend money, visit other Amherstburg business and return again and again to play, work and invest in one of the most charming, walkable, waterfront communities in Ontario.



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Anne Rota  
**Manager of Tourism and Culture**

## Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Open Air Weekends 2021 Post Report .docx
Attachments:	- Appendix A Final Business Survey Open Air 2021 Results.pdf - Appendix B Amherstburg Open Air Weekends Visitor Survey TWEPI.pdf - Appendix C Visitors Stats Aug 6 to Sept 26 2021.xlsx - Appendix D Open Air 2022 Map and Operational Hours.docx
Final Approval Date:	Nov 17, 2021

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:



Heidi Baillargeon

Mark Spizzirri

**No Signature - Task assigned to Tony Haddad was completed by workflow administrator Kevin Fox**

Tony Haddad



Valerie Critchley