

Friday, February 26th, 2021

Re: 2021-2023 Seasonal Patio Program

To whom it concerns,

I first want to applaud Guelph City Staff for doing their best to bring a fair and equitable solution to this file. City Staff worked very hard under a very tight timeline and challenging circumstances with the pandemic to provide you and the community with different solutions, their financial impacts and other critical information. There are still many unanswered questions, concerns, and unknowns that will need to be worked out well beyond this year.

With that said, I am willing to support the approval of Recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 6 of the 2021-2023 Seasonal Patio Program Report.

The 2021-2023 Seasonal Patio Program as described in the 2021-2023 Seasonal Patio Program Report (i.e. Attachment-3 On-street Patio Permissions Map.pdf) will bring Guelph up to par with other cities, such as Toronto and Ottawa, for using parking spaces as patio spaces. This alone will bring economic activity into the Downtown area and make it a destination through Patio Season.

The one-time costs of \$112,500 for delivering the program are critical in making this program a success. We must make the look of the program uniformed, safe, and aesthetically pleasing. The annual seasonal patio parking stall fee of \$3.00 per square meter sounds reasonable, however, the report does not show what or if comparable cities are charging. This would be good to know to see if we line up with others. I fully support the waiving of application fees for 2021.

I fully support creation of the temporary use by-law and with connecting with the different ministries for keeping the basic 2021-2023 Seasonal Patio Program going.

As for the remaining Recommendations, I do have some concerns and suggestions that I wish for Council, City Staff, including Guelph Transit, and the Community to seriously consider. These are specifically for 2021 only as I feel circumstances will change in 2022 and 2023.

We must remember that we are still in a Pandemic. Regardless of what is scheduled to happen between now and the fall, there are still many unknowns, uncertainties, and unanswered questions.

The reason for last year's temporary dining district was to help some of our local downtown businesses and restaurants navigate around the Covid19 pandemic restrictions and closures imposed at the time. The number of cases hovered around about 500 a day for most of

the summer. Many restaurants did their best to adhere to the public health rules outlined, however, there were many reported instances of issues reported on social media and elsewhere. With new Covid19 variables, the health and safety of people should be front and centre, and it welcomed to hear there will be improved enforcement and inspections to address these concerns. It is very important that we remember that when making decisions on setting these patios up and closing any roadways.

As outlined in the report from staff, the Dining District was good for those businesses within the closed off area but not all businesses benefited from this closure. There were many other issues arising including access for delivery drivers, for those using transit missing connections, EMS access, and garbage collection. Adjustments were made on the fly by City Staff; however, many of these issues remain and are unresolved in this report based on the various options for Road Closures.

Each of the options presented by staff for specially closing the intersection of Macdonell and Wyndham Streets have many impacts, especially fiscally. In all the options and my own suggestions, it is critical that the lane down the middle of the road is accessible for EMS and Emergency vehicles and should be a top priority if any of these options pass.

The options presented by Staff each offer strengths and weaknesses. With all the options presented, adding programming, like live music, is highly unlikely for 2021 due to the ongoing pandemic.

City Staff are recommending to you **Option 1** - Restricting special event road closures to the Wyndham Street and Macdonell Street intersection, however, with the Covid19 Pandemic still raging, it would not be advisable to proceed with this option at this time.

Option 2, a repeat of a full closure of this intersection, would have the largest and most expensive cost and major impact on Public Transit. If the same detours were to be implemented as last year, there is an expectation from transit users of more missed connections and delays.

A suggestion was made by some on Council to extend the Guelph Transit transfer time from the current 1 hour to a 90-minute transfer. While this would be welcomed in general, it is well known that this will not solve the problem outright as many transit users are Monthly passholders which have unlimited transfers. There is also a budget and revenue impact that would need to be explained by Transit staff.

As a sidenote, I must make it know that since and before the switch to the new *On Your Way* fare card system, your Transit Advisory Committee (according to past minutes) has brought up the transfer time concern several times over the years. It was last informed by Transit staff that it would be looked at as part of the Transit Fare Strategy. The city is a lot larger now and transit travel times have increased. The 1-hour window is it should have been extended to a 90 minute or 2-hour window like other cities before any of this.

I also want to note the lack of consultation in this report with Transit users, including your Transit Advisory Committee on the Dining District and patio program matter.

Option 3, closing this intersection on weekends and holidays only **is a good compromise for 2021 only**. While it is not perfect, it does minimize costs, and keeps the transit impacts to a minimum. However, that is still not fair to other parts of downtown as noted in the Staff Report. Those within the area have a privilege and should cover their own costs for set up and tear down of the district.

If **Option 2 or 3** were to be approved for this specific intersection, I would suggest the following be considered by all parties to keep transit moving for 2021 and beyond:

- **Restricted Traffic Lane on Macdonell:** Creating a slow one-way lane for restricted traffic (buses, taxis, delivery vehicles, EMS) travelling outbound from Guelph Central Station toward the Basilica only (3 bus routes - Outbound Route 99 Mainline North and South, and Route 11, possible other routes pending review)
- **Restricted Traffic Lane on Carden St:** The parking spaces along Carden Street are recommended to be all patio space, utilize the remaining lane as a slow one-way lane (toward Wilson) for select Guelph Transit Routes, Taxis, Delivery Vehicles, and those wanting to access the Wilson Street Parking Garage. For safety, install a barrier between Wilson and the Courthouse in front of City Hall to prevent people from jaywalking. Note this would only be for outgoing Route 99 Mainline North and South and possibility other routes pending review. The number of stops closed would be a minimum of 4.
- **Rerouting:** Move Route 20 away from Paisley and have it travel inbound down London Road and then down Woolwich Street into Guelph Central. This cuts out several traffic lights and turns and will keep the route on time. Route 10 and/or 11 already cover this stretch of Paisley.
- **Rerouting:** Have Route 10 go down Suffolk Street to Woolwich inbound. This requires the route to turn off Paisley at Yorkshire Street or at Edinburgh. It also cuts out several traffic lights and turns that cause delays.
- **Other routes:** Some of the other transit detours were reasonable but should be reviewed for additional improvements.

These suggestions would save time, money, and minimize transit stop closures, maintain access to critical locations, and help transit continue to play an important role in the rebuilding our local economy during and after this pandemic.

Alternative Road Closures should also be considered. The Mayor has also stated on Social Media that he does not care where in downtown the road closures happen. So, I have a few alternative scenarios to suggest:

- **From Macdonell to St. Georges Square** should be closed to traffic. One lane or two from Quebec Street (same side as If Shoes) to Cork Street should remain open to traffic.
 - **Alternative:** close Cork from about where Bell is and closing Wyndham at the Square/Quebec Street.
- On the same side of **Scotiabank from the Square (or Douglas Street) along Wyndham to Woolwich** you could close 2 lanes of traffic while leaving the two other lanes open (same side as Old Post Office) for two-way traffic to get to Quebec Street and/or Cork Street (if not closed)
- Closing the small stretch of **Wyndham between Carden Street and Macdonell Street.**
- **Leaving Macdonell Street open**, except for the patios approved in the Program as outlined in Attachment-3 On-street Patio Permissions Map.pdf
 - **Alternative:** Extending patios out further while leaving a Restricted Lane (in or out bound) for transit, EMS, Taxis, and Delivery Drivers.

These alternatives allow for transit to operate with minimal impacts while keeping access to other important vehicles such as delivery vehicles, EMS and others while, extending active transportation zones across more of downtown.

The closure of roads and/or intersections for a Dining District should only happen for 2021 and then come back to Council in 2022. We do not know what 2022 or 2023 will look like. We do not even know how this year will play out. With questions like will the University of Guelph be back full time, or will it be hybrid (half on site, half online) and what will the impacts on transit be with students back in class? Will the vaccines cover the Covid19 Variables? Will there be another outbreak into 2022? How many jobs will come back online and what will the impacts be when restoring transit service to pre-March 2020 levels? Will the Accessibility issues be taken care of?

We defiantly will have a better idea by this summer of what 2022 could possibly look like. With that, I would suggest Council to not delegate authority on this specifically and recommend that this topic come back in late 2021 or early 2022 for discussion.

At the end of the day, the patio program as outlined in the report (without road closures) **is excellent.** It brings Guelph on par with larger cities and makes Downtown a destination for dining, shopping, and tourism. Once the pandemic has passed, we defiantly should look at making parts of Downtown into Dining Districts and more Pedestrian Friendly with entertainment and other activities, but until then, Option 3 in the report offers a compromise for 2021 as do some of my own suggestions.

In conclusion, the major hurdle to any road closures is for those who use Guelph Transit. They have longed been asked to make sacrifices and wait patiently for improvements, which in many cases have never come or taken years to show up.

Remember, these are real people who need to get to work and real businesses who need transit for employees to access those jobs to help rebuild and grow the economy. These are people who need to access stores to buy food and goods that help keep our local businesses alive. They are people who need to access education to help keep our local, provincial, and national economy competitive in the world, and these are people who need to access medical and health services to stay healthy.

If you have not noticed a theme here, let me make it clear: **Transit plays a huge roll in our local economy and in its recovery from Covid19.** For every \$1.00 spent on Transit, it has an economic spinoff of between \$3.00 and \$6.00 dollars. For every cancellation, delayed bus, or detoured bus, and missed connection – the economy is impacted, we lose money and become less competitive in the region and the world. Therefore, Council needs to show **more respect to the importance of transit in the recovery of our local economy** during and after Covid19. We all need to understand how some road closures impact Transit's role in getting our City back on its feet.

I would hope that these suggestions, some of which I have ran across transit planning professionals, be seriously considered. It is in your and the City of Guelph's best interest to Keep Transit Moving, especially if there are any road closures at Macdonell and Wyndham Streets.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss any parts of this letter.

Thank you for your time.

Steven Petric
Guelph