

REPORT

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING

MEETING DATE: OCTOBER 26, 2020

FROM: Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives

DATE: October 21, 2020

SUBJECT: Economic Recovery Initiatives

LOCATION:

WARD: Town wide

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Commercial Recovery Initiative, as approved by Council on May 25, 2020, be extended to December 31, 2021; and
2. That the Commissioner of Community Development and the Director of Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives be authorized to determine the dates for the 2021 Patio Program prior to the expiry of the program in 2020.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- An Economic Task Force was formed to provide information and support to the business community in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Commercial Recovery Initiative (CRI) was approved by Council on May 25, 2020 and is applicable until the end of 2020. The Patio Program is a subset of the CRI.
- Staff, in cooperation with members of the Economic Task Force, were authorized to implement the Commercial Recovery Initiative in order to re-invigorate economic activity within the Town while simultaneously protecting public health and safety.
- Successful initiatives stemming from the Commercial Recovery Initiative include the patio program and the Welcome Back, Oakville! marketing campaign.
- This report recommends the extension of the Commercial Recovery Initiative in 2021 to provide support to businesses through the pandemic.

BACKGROUND:

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed considerable stress on Oakville's small business community, including the restaurant industry. According to Halton Region's recent COVID-19 Business Impact Survey, 78% of the businesses reported decreased revenue and 74% reported a reduction in sales or customers.

The Commercial Recovery Initiative (CRI) was developed to support the reopening of commercial businesses in a manner that supports the safety of the community, employees and members of the public. It includes the following:

- Making town lands in and adjacent to commercial areas available at nominal cost to enable temporary commercial services outdoors, such as patios or pop-up facilities
- Developing and implementing a coordinated marketing campaign to encourage residents and visitors to support local businesses
- Expedited processing of patio permits to assist existing businesses in adjusting their service delivery
- Temporary exemptions from providing required parking under section 40 of the *Planning Act* to accommodate outdoor patios or display areas on private property
- Waiving application fees for requisite approvals associated with the Commercial Recovery Initiative

Council provided the authority to implement the CRI to the Commissioner of Community Development and the Director of Economic Development, for the period ending December 31, 2020. A copy of the full resolution for the Commercial Recovery Initiative can be found in Appendix A.

Implementation

Patio Program

Restaurants in Halton Region are currently permitted to allow in-person dining, however public health recommendations have required restaurants to make adjustments to their service delivery including maintenance of two-metre physical distancing known to be a critical tool in slowing the spread of COVID-19. The Commercial Recovery Initiative provided an opportunity for restaurants to pivot to their new circumstances and allow for outdoor dining - providing additional space for restaurants to accommodate diners while maintaining appropriate distances.

After the implementation of the Commercial Recovery Initiative, town staff approved 93 permits for patios - a substantial increase from previous years. Patios were permitted in a mix of locations including private lands and parking spaces, as well as town lands including sidewalks, on-street parking spaces, parking lots, Towne Square, and on a section of Marine Drive.

The Patio Program was initially scheduled to end on November 3, 2020 with permits expiring on this date. However, consultation with the BIAs and a survey of patio permit holders showed a desire to keep patios open through the winter. Staff have developed a set of winter patio guidelines that allow the patio program to be extended to December 31, 2020 to provide additional support to the local restaurant community, while maintaining safety in their use. A summary of the winter patio program is outlined below. Full guidelines and requirements can be found in Appendix B.

Winter Patio Program Overview

Restaurant operators must contact the town if they interested in extending the use of their patios.

1. **Extension Agreement:** Existing patio permit holders will require an extension agreement if they would like to use their patios beyond November 3, 2020. New requests for patios will require a new patio permit agreement.
2. **Heaters:** Heaters will be allowed as long as they meet the guidelines provided in Appendix B to this report. If a patio operator wants to provide heating in a covered area, a review by the Fire Department is required.
3. **Snow Clearing:** Patios and bistros can remain on sidewalks if they can provide a 2m width and 2.4m height clearance to allow for snow removal equipment. Patio operators will be responsible for keeping their patios accessible and clear of snow and ice.
4. **Public Health Requirements:** Restaurant operators will be required to abide by all Halton Public Health requirements.
5. **Tents:** In some instances, tents may be permitted, including on-street parking spaces, however, patio permit holders will be required to demonstrate that their tents can safely accommodate snow and wind loads. Additionally, some tents may require a building permit. The Fire department will provide an inspection for the use of all tents in conjunction with Building staff.

NOTE: It should be noted that many tents are not constructed to withstand snow and wind loads. Various municipalities have allowed for the extension of patios only until the snow arrives while others are still exploring how to extend patios throughout the winter. In Oakville, the onus lies with the patio permit holder to demonstrate how their tent can be safely operated. Building staff will continue to address this situation to determine whether standard criteria for tents can be established to make it easier for restaurants to assess the feasibility of erecting a tent. Guidelines will be updated as more information becomes available. In the interim, restaurant operators are advised to discuss their plans with staff prior to setting up a tent on their patio.

Marketing Campaign

On June 28, 2020 town staff, in partnership with the Economic Task Force, launched the Welcome Back Oakville marketing campaign to encourage residents and visitors to support local, safely.

The campaign included downloadable marketing templates for businesses, an interactive business map, safety decals and a video series providing insight into changes that local businesses had made to keep their customers safe. The community-wide campaign also included business outreach by members of Council, CHCH remote on-location filming with a geo-targeted digital campaign, tourism itineraries, bus shelter ads, mobile signs in high traffic areas, print ads in the Oakville Beaver and Look Local, and a painted chalk art mural on a patio barricade in Bronte Village.

The campaign was well-received and as of early September, had the following results:

- The hashtag #WelcomeBackOakville was used more than 1,000 times
- Instagram stories featuring the Welcome Back Oakville businesses were viewed almost 9,000 times.
- 3,337 page views on the Visit Oakville resident-focused webpage
- 824 visitors to the Welcome Back Oakville webpage on the Invest Oakville website
- 350 visitors to the downloadable marketing template page on the Invest Oakville website
- The extensive geo-targeted digital campaign reached an audience of over 160,000

Digital Marketing

The COVID-19 pandemic has also exemplified the importance of having an online presence for small businesses. Town staff applied for and successfully received

additional funding through the Digital Main Street program, allowing for the expansion of Oakville's Digital Service Squad. This funding allows for the hiring of an additional part-time Squad member and will extend the program through February 2021. The Digital Service Squad provides one-on-one and webinar support to businesses located in the BIAs as they build their online presence through e-commerce, social media and other online tools.

The town has also formed a partnership with Ritual One, a commission-free tool for online ordering for restaurants, grocers, and retailers. If an Oakville business signs up for Ritual One before October 31, 2020, all fees will be waived for 2020.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

Council has provided staff with the ability to implement the Commercial Recovery Initiative (CRI) until the end of 2020. Given the success of the CRI this year, staff recommend that Council extend the program to the end of 2021 to provide additional support to the business community. With an undetermined end to the pandemic, and the possibility that the Province may again impose restrictions on indoor dining, an extension of the program will help businesses continue to pivot their operations through 2021.

Town staff are currently exploring additional ways to support the local small business community throughout the winter months when weather may become an additional challenge. This may include additional marketing to encourage residents to support local businesses and the extension of the Patio Program beyond December 31, 2020.

There are numerous operational issues to be addressed in order to operate patios in the winter including the use of heaters and tents as well as snow clearing. Some municipalities are allowing the extension of patios to the end of 2020 and others are requiring their removal before the arrival of snow. In Oakville, staff are testing the operational aspects of winter patios through the extension of permits to December 31, 2020. This will allow staff to evaluate the success and potentially the challenges of the winter patio program and determine the period for the patios to operate in 2021. The recommendations contained in this report provide for the ability to use town lands for patios and associated fee waivers in 2021 through the extension of the Commercial Recovery Initiative, but provides staff with the authority to set the period in which patios can operate in 2021.

Fee Waivers

There is no budget request associated with the extension of the Commercial Recovery Initiative into 2021. The initiative does, however, waive the application fees for requisite approvals associated with the CRI. This may include administrative fees for patio permits, building permit fees (when required for tents), as well as rental fees for the use of town lands such as parking spaces. Of note, parking spaces were previously waived as part of the Patio Pilot program prior to the implementation of the Commercial Recovery Initiative.

The waived fees for the 2020 program have been estimated below. This estimation assumes a start date of June 1, 2020 and an end date of November 3, 2020, for a total of 156 days. Without knowing the number of patios that will stay open to the end of the year, it is difficult to estimate the additional waived fees for the parking spaces past November 3.

Estimated 2020 Waived Fees

	2020	Cost per	Estimated waived fees
Patio Permit Applications	93	\$250 -\$750 per permit	\$63,000
Quick Stop Parking Spaces	2	\$20/space/day	6,240
Parking lot	6	\$20/space/day	18,720
Street Parking spaces	18	\$20/space/day	56,160
TOTAL			\$144,120

It is assumed that there would be a similar uptake in the patio program for 2021. The waived fees for parking in 2021 would depend on whether the patio program runs throughout the year or if it is launched again in the spring after a break in the winter.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

The Commercial Recovery Initiative will directly impact restaurant and other small business owners. An extension of the Initiative will allow commercial businesses opportunities to continue to pivot their operations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There may be some members of the public or other businesses that object to the use of parking spaces that could otherwise be used for customer parking. It is noted however that the pandemic has created a most unusual environment with businesses fighting

for survival and that this warrants the recommended support. The BIAs have all expressed their support for the extension of the CRI.

(B) FINANCIAL

There is no budget request for the Commercial Recovery Initiative. However, fees are waived for requisite approvals associated with the CRI, resulting in lost revenue. If the patio program runs for a five month period in 2021, the estimated lost revenue is approximately \$144,000. If the program runs for the whole of 2021 from January to December, the estimated lost revenue would be approximately \$250,000.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

The Planning, Building, Fire, Engineering & Construction and Roads & Works Departments were consulted on the development of the winter patio guidelines. Economic Development, Legal, Planning, Building and Fire departments will be involved in discussions with small businesses, permit extensions and related inspections as part of their normal duties.

(D) CORPORATE AND/OR DEPARTMENT STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal to:

- enhance our economic environment
- provide outstanding service to our residents and businesses
- be innovative in everything we do
- be the most livable town in Canada

(E) COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

This report has an impact on the economic sustainability of Oakville. The small business community has been hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Commercial Recovery Initiative provides an important support to commercial businesses while protecting the safety of the community, employees and members of the public.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Resolution on the Commercial Recovery Initiative

Appendix B – Winter Patio Guidelines

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