

Pop-ups prominent in Business Improvement Area's 2022 plans

Get ready for a series of pop-up events in Machell's Alley this year.

Last week, the Aurora Downtown Business Improvement Area, which was founded to revitalize and bring people into Aurora's historic Downtown Core, presented its future plans and budget to Council.

While the engagement of local businesses within its catchment area of the Yonge and Wellington area is of primary importance with a potential new hire to do just that, engaging the wider community is also the name of the game.

BIA Chair Joanne Russo said that Aurorans this year can expect a Music in the Alley program at Machell's Alley, the gathering space on the east side of Yonge Street just south of Wellington, from June through September, Bingo Tuesdays and more.

Beyond the Alley, the BIA hopes to partner with the Town and the Chamber on street parties, the Canada Day parade, and the Santa Under the Stars event in November while encouraging member businesses to step up and be a part of it as well.

"Pop Up Alleys include artisans, new businesses, mini-festivals, activation programs, decoration options for the street light bases? with more to be confirmed," she said.

But BIA member engagement will be key.

Last week's meeting was an opportunity for the BIA to present their budget, which typically stands at \$40,000 per year, taken as tax from property owners who live within the BIA boundaries. During COVID-19, however, there have been budgetary surpluses which have carried over from the previous year.

If their budget is approved this week by Council, the BIA hopes to allocate \$10,000 from their budget for a part-time contract position dedicated to member support and to serve as an ambassador for the group.

"We're hoping to engage someone so we can connect and engage with each member, be a primary contact for the BIA member list updates, send out communications and information, assist members with the BIA and Explore Aurora websites, update our website with information for members, assist the Board with meetings, minutes, etc., and also assist the Board with social media and marketing."

The BIA hoped to fund this position through a grant from the My Main Street funding program but this application was unsuccessful.

"We have members that are reviewing the applications that are being brought forward and then ultimately the BIA Board members would review the candidates that we feel are best-suited for the position and as Board members as a whole we would ultimately make the decision?as to who is best-suited for the position," said Ms. Russo.

Lisa Hauz, Economic Development Manager for the Town of Aurora, noted that the hiring process will be contingent on Council's final budget approval.

"The grant was not successful but the Board has asked whether [they] could still contribute the partnership amount that we were trying to get through the grant," said Ms. Hausz. "After [Council's approval] the process is then to go out with the job application. We have two Board members who have stepped up to the interview panel [who will then] present candidates to the Board."

Added Mayor Mrakas: "Ultimately, Council's authority and direction is to approve a budget for [the BIA] and ultimately it is the Board who, under their discretion, decides what to do with those funds. I trust what you guys are doing. [You] put on some great

events that are going to enhance our downtown core and enhance the businesses in that area, and help with the economic growth as we continue to move out of the pandemic.

?I think it is going to be an extraordinary feat and I think you guys are up to the task. Seeing what you've put forward, it looks like it will be heading there very soon. Thank you for all the work?you guys have done through the pandemic. It hasn't been easy, it hasn't been easy for anyone, but you guys have done a tremendous job.?

These sentiments were echoed by Councillor Sandra Humfries who said she was ?really looking forward to the future.?

?There are a lot of great things you're going to be doing to draw attention to the Downtown, to businesses in the area. I am just thrilled you guys are plowing through with all the different changes in the environment to continue to help our businesses thrive as much as possible downtown with some of the things you're working on.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter