

Wednesday June 13th, 2018

COW-10-18  
COW, July 9, 2018  
File no. 965-03

**Memorandum:**

**Board of Management & members of The Burlington Downtown  
Business Association**

Chair, Members of Committee of the Whole:

The BDBA is writing to Committee with a request of the Council-appointed liaison to the BDBA Board. Our request relates to the date of the proposed Santa 5K race, organized by VR Pro, which takes place in Downtown Burlington annually.

We respectfully request that Committee support the following motion:

“THAT the date for the Santa 5K Race be changed to Saturday November 24, 2018 and that the final Saturday in November be the fixed date for this event in subsequent years”

The BDBA is not recommending a change to the route nor the timing of the 2017 race. Our principal concern is the selection of a Saturday in December, a position which is supported by the City’s Manager of Community Development.

The event organizer has hosted foot races in Burlington, Ontario, Hamilton, Ontario and Burlington, Vermont for several years. They include: Frosty 5K (Sunday/March), Chilly Half Marathon (Sunday/March), Celebrate Canada Day Race (Sunday/June) and several Santa 5K Races in November.

In 2016 the event organizer changed the date for the Santa 5K to Saturday November 26.

In spring 2017 the BDBA Board was petitioned by the City’s Special Events Team to take a position on the event organizer’s request for a date and time change to the event: Saturday December 9, 2017. To inform the Board’s decision the Association issued to its business membership a survey, there were twenty-two responses (the full results and summary of conclusions are enclosed in *APPENDIX A*).

Ninety per cent of the survey respondents were not in favour of the requested time and date change. The survey responses were from twenty-two businesses, on the leg of Brant Street between Lakeshore Road and Caroline, the prime Santa 5K Race route. There are approximately 72 businesses in this section of Brant Street; the survey respondents represent approximately 30% of the commercial entities in this corridor.



The Association met with our business membership on several occasions to better understand the rationale for this opposition. We reached out to all twenty survey respondents and have devised a subcommittee composed of seven retailers with a specific vested interest in this issue. The survey and subsequent discussions with the retail and hospitality community affected by the Santa 5K Race have been revealing. The opposition is centered on three primary objections:

- 1) **The race puts a strain on customer parking in December.** Several members cited concerns about lack of customer/client parking that results when race participants and spectators consume the limited public parking supply. The December Free P! parking programme is in effect for the entire month of December. This programme was spearheaded by the BDBA on the direct recommendation of the downtown business community and is funded, in part, by the Defined Parking Area levy borne by business and property owners in the core. One member observed,

*“parking again was overtaken by race patrons. My staff and customers can't navigate to get down town to work or shop, December is a very busy month and we count on Saturday for all day traffic, we pay high rent and high taxes to have an opportunity to do business here”*

- 2) **EVERY Saturday in December is critical to retailers for Christmas sales.** Eighty-six per cent of the respondents to the BDBA's survey were open for business during the Santa 5K race in December 2016. Seventy-five per cent of these survey respondents indicated that their sales were “lower than average” during and after the race event.

This statistic caused the BDBA to dig deeper and undertake confidential interviews with five of the key merchants on Brant Street. Each of them recorded diminished sales figures, year over year, on days when the Santa 5K race was held downtown. One member observed,

*“December is our biggest month of the year and Saturday is our busiest day of the week. We have 4 Saturdays in 2017 and the first 2 are the best.*

Another business owner adding:

*“WAY TOO CLOSE TO CHRISTMAS!!! NO to Saturday! Get it off Brant St. This is very unfair to our customers. Saturday is our busiest day of the week. No one can pick up orders nor find parking.”*



- 3) **Race participants/spectators do not generally shop or translate into new sales for the downtown business community.** Unfortunately, sales figures during the race and feedback from “regular” downtown patrons confirm that the business community is not benefiting from sales through “new” customers. BDBA members cite the fact that spectators and race participants often patronize their places of businesses only for access to washrooms. This is true for retailers and members of the restaurant community as well. One member concludes,

*“Our customers avoid us because of this influx of cars/bodies/traffic and our business suffers as a result”*

Another BDBA member concludes:

*“There is no parking available and street closures make it difficult for customers to want to come downtown. We did not notice any additional sales from the people that attended the run.”*

The consensus amongst the Downtown business membership is that we collectively see value in the Santa 5K Race continuing in the Downtown core. It continues to be a popular event and is a traditional component of the post-summer animation campaign in Burlington.

In 2017 the Santa 5K route was changed. Previous race routes encircled the downtown business community and caused frustration with the businesses and their customers seeking access. The 2017 route change “opened up” the downtown significantly by re-routing the foot race down Lakeshore Road. This was a welcomed development. Unfortunately, the overuse of municipal parking assets and disruption to the routine of traditional Christmas shoppers remain significant challenges.

We have considered a number of variables that if changed could prove to be a “recipe for success” for the event organizer in the future. Variables considered include: adjusting the race date to a Sunday (the event organizer has executed several events in Burlington on Sundays), selecting a non-December weekend for the race, and, even encouraging the event organizer to consider hosting the race in another part of Burlington.

Of these options we believe that changing the race to the “final Saturday in November” is the preferred action.



In an effort to quantify the impact of the race continuing on a Saturday in December the Burlington Downtown Business Association met with five veteran retailers on Brant Street. All five were respondents to the original survey and maintain significant concerns about the race date.

Collectively these five businesses contribute in excess of \$140,000 property taxes to the City of Burlington annually. In addition, they collectively contribute in excess of \$5,000 annually to the Defined Parking Area Fund. This fund supports the pooled parking infrastructure downtown all year and the Free P! program providing free parking each December.

Our retail community depends on the healthy sales generated through goods and services purchased on the weekends leading up to Christmas each year. One single Saturday in December can generate over \$20K in business, per retailer.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this issue which has been unresolved, from the perspective of the BDBA, for several years. The BDBA has a stated responsibility to advocate and address any issues that directly affect the prosperity of our levy-paying membership. The present memorandum to Committee is a direct response to an issue identified by our membership. We feel that the motion tabled for consideration by Committee and City Council is reasonable and would be a fair outcome for all parties concerned.

Respectfully submitted,



Brian Dean  
Executive Director  
Burlington Downtown Business Association

