

MEMO

TO: Mayor Kogon and Members of Council

FROM: Jeff Bacon, Business Development Officer

DATE: March 20, 2023

RE: Discussion Paper on the feasibility of hosting a gala event to recognize businesses in the town of Amherst.

At the February 20th 2023 Committee of the Whole Meeting, Council directed staff to provide a discussion paper for further consideration of the feasibility of hosting an event to recognize businesses in Amherst. The following provides some ideas for discussion.

It would need to be decided who are the targeted participants – all business sizes, small or micro. The Amherst business directory lists over 350 businesses in town with only ten of those having 100 employees or more. Statistics Canada considers a small business as one with fewer than 100 employees.

It would need to be determined if invitations would be sent to the business owners only, or would include, management, or perhaps all staff. Would the invitation be offered for more than one person per business. and if spouses or partners would be invited. Even with the potential for a large amount of participation, a lack of interest and low turn out should be considered as a risk.

The intent behind an appreciation event would be to recognize our business community at large. Offering awards or certificates are a consideration but that comes with the risk of honouring one business but neglecting another. For many years during Small Business week the Cumberland Chamber of Commerce hosts a banquet to honor businesses. It is an existing event that has not occurred since 2020 due to COVID. In 2023 the Chamber will be hosting this banquet. The Chamber does not have any concern if Amherst hosts an additional event but requested that no awards be presented as this would compete and possibly confuse the Chamber's efforts. There is the option to partner with the Chamber event but the Chamber being County wide would need to be considered. The Chamber mentioned they would like TOA to sponsor an award at their 2023 banquet.

To be Amherst centric, the event could be considered as an evening with Amherst Town Council and business persons could be invited to mingle with Council and perhaps staff.

The event could feature speeches from Mayor and Councillor and could include participation from other guest speakers such as a Minister or Deputy Minister, our MP, MLA, partner business support organizations or business leaders.

There is the option to allow businesses to have product demonstrations or offer marketing samples to other guests.

The cost of an event would be determined by services provided. Food and beverages could be offered as finger foods, a casual buffet, or full sit-down meal. Rough pricing for food could fall in the area of \$10 per person for finger foods, \$30 per person for buffet and \$40 per person for sit down meals. If a buffet was offered for a 50-person to a 200-person event, the cost would range from \$1500 to \$6000 respectively. As such, a budget of \$10,000 for the event should be considered.

Another consideration is determining the optimal time to hold the event. If the intention is to hold one in 2023, the Spring may be too soon, the summer months often deter participation and the Holiday Season is a busy time for businesses. If the Fall is to be considered there is the opportunity to hold the gala during Small Business week, which takes place October 15th to 21st this year.

Regarding venues, the Community Credit Union Business Innovation Centre conference room has a capacity of 140 persons. The Amherst Fire Hall hosting 441 persons (no food or beverage) and the Amherst Stadium are larger venues available if all businesses attend.

A registration system would be necessary to capture attendance and make this determination.

Meetings with Amherst Downtown Business Association Chair, the Cumberland Business Connector CEO and the Cumberland Chamber of Commerce Executive Director were held to discuss the idea. Each felt an event would be appreciated by the business community. Awards and individual business recognitions were brought up by each organization and each commented on the challenge to recognize one business and not another.

Considering the above, staff's suggestion would be to host a meet and greet event during small business week in October, and consider sponsoring an award or awards to Amherst businesses.