

April 28 2021

## **Report on How to Attract White Rock Residents to Marine Drive Businesses**

At the April 26 2021 City of White Rock Council meeting, a request came for a report from the White Rock BIA about “how to attract White Rock residents to the waterfront” from now until Labour Day.

Sifting through the statements made at the Council meeting, it appears that at least some members of Council believe that White Rock’s waterfront should be shut down for the safety of White Rock residents and that we simply need to attract White Rock residents for Marine Drive businesses to have sufficient support. There also seems to be some who believe that White Rock business owners and employees aren’t invested in our community.

We fundamentally disagree with all of the above for several reasons, and would like to report again on the existential challenge currently being faced by White Rock eateries:

### **1. White Rock is a Tourism Economy**

We rely on people outside of the municipality to make businesses viable. The population of White Rock (~20 000) is simply not big enough to support our diverse, large business base- we rely on the immediate community around us (the peninsula) on a day-to-day basis to support our businesses.

We only need to look at a neighbouring area of our community- Ocean Park- to see what a community without a tourism economy would look like. Ocean Park has ~50% of White Rock’s population and ~15% of White Rock’s number of businesses.

Simply put, we need more than just White Rock residents to ensure White Rock businesses survive, let alone thrive.

### **2. White Rock Business Owners and Employees are Part of Our Community**

Many White Rock business owners are also White Rock residents. White Rock businesses on Marine Drive employ over 1000 people.

It is unfathomable to believe that they are not residents of our municipality and members of our community. It is equally unfathomable to believe that issues that negatively impact businesses do not negatively impact White Rock residents, our municipality, and our community.

### 3. Our Community Is Not Just the City of White Rock

White Rock residents require services in South Surrey; many White Rock residents work outside of White Rock. White Rock families send their children to elementary and secondary schools in South Surrey. Many residents of South Surrey work and play in White Rock.

We have a mutually beneficial relationship with our neighbouring municipality, and frankly no viable way of offering attractions to residents of White Rock that excludes residents of South Surrey. As councillors have noted, Dr. Henry says to stay in our neighbourhood- but our neighbourhood isn't Nichol Rd to Stayte Rd. It is distressing to us that White Rock Council doesn't recognize this crucial fact.

Moreover, shutting down our waterfront will simply push visitors to other waterfront attractions in our community- Crescent Beach and Mud Bay- that are already crowded. If crowding is a concern, it makes little sense to increase crowding in other areas of our community, since literally the same people use them.

The current Public Health Order discourages non-essential travel outside of our Health Authority and heavily restricts business activities. Should the Provincial Health Officer decide additional restrictions are required, we are certain that they will be implemented and, as White Rock businesses have shown countless times during this pandemic, followed.

### 4. White Rock Eateries Desperately Need Additional Seating Capacity

This is the most important point we want to convey: under the current health order, White Rock eateries do not have a marketing challenge- they have a seating capacity challenge.

It is not challenging to fill 3-10 tables. It is challenging to pay your rent, supplies, taxes, fees, and staff when you have only 3-10 tables and your business requires double that number to be viable.

***Extremely limited seating capacity is the number one challenge facing White Rock restaurants, cafes, and breweries at this time. It is an existential threat to our businesses throughout White Rock, but especially Marine Drive.***

Outside of the pandemic, we're competing with vacation attractions and other municipalities- events and marketing are crucial to capturing customers for White Rock businesses. During the 2020 pandemic summer, we were competing with other Metro Vancouver municipalities. Right now White Rock has a captive audience.

What businesses need is enough seating capacity to serve them.

## 5. The White Rock BIA Cannot Solve the Seating Capacity Issue

There are two authorities that can solve the seating capacity restrictions that White Rock eateries are facing: the Province of British Columbia, by removing indoor dining restrictions (not feasible at this time due to COVID numbers); and the City of White Rock, by expanding potential outdoor dining space (entirely allowable under the current Public Health Order).

There seems to be at times a widespread, completely unsubstantiated belief that the White Rock BIA has immense regulatory powers, unlimited resources, and no restrictions on our programs. This is completely false:

- We have no regulatory powers nor road management capabilities;
- Our budget is 0.6% of the City of White Rock's budget and we have only two staff members;
- Our mandate and activities are set out by White Rock City Bylaw 2311.

Our activities can be broadly defined into four categories: Beautification (which we're continuing but do not solve the seating capacity issues); Events (which are not allowed under the current Public Health Order but that we are preparing for post-pandemic); Marketing (we have tripled our marketing budget and seen great results- but marketing does not solve the seating capacity issues); and Reports.

It is this last activity that we want to highlight. We have brought forward two ideas for expanding seating capacity for Marine Drive businesses: liquor consumption in Memorial Park and one-way Marine Drive. We did not bring these ideas forward because we enjoy writing letters. We brought them forward because we consulted our members and researched possible solutions to the existential threat they are facing.

Ultimately, we are policy-agnostic and problem-focused. It is far more important that the problem is solved than how it is solved. We do know two things: what the problem is- a lack of seating capacity- and that we cannot solve it.

In this situation, all we can do is report this existential, time-sensitive threat to you.