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Rotary asks council to support Fiddlefest 2016

The new Chair of the Canadian Open Old Time Fiddle Championship, Lynda Buffett, asked Council to consider financial support to the Rotary Club of Shelburne in the 2016 budget at the public meeting held in Council Chambers November 23rd. The organization is proposing revamping to a ?Heritage Music Festival? which would feature new bands as well as the fiddle competition and is looking for $25,000 in seed money from the Town.

The Canadian Open Old Time Fiddle Championship has seen 65 years of success as the ?premier event for the town,? putting Shelburne on the map as the fiddle capital of Canada. However, the event no longer draws the competitors or crowds of days gone by when it was a standing room only event. In an open letter to Council, Lynda Buffett said the organization recognizes ?the changing dynamics of our growing community? and realizes ?that now may be the best time to consider revamping this major town fundraising event.?

Reorganizing of Town Staff to become more efficient and ?more specialized? has meant the elimination of the Special Events Coordinator's position. This, in turn, means the running of festivals and events in Shelburne may now fall more on the shoulders of local service clubs, the Business Improvement Association and the Economic Development Committee.

?Given the change in Town policy,? Lynda Buffett asked that Council approve the ?one-time only start up fund of $25,000 to establish this new music festival and take over the full event venue.?

Buffett reminded Council that the Rotary Club was a non-profit organization whose mandate was to donate all monies raised back into ?the needs of Shelburne therefore creating a significant return on investment for the Town.? She said, ?In recent years, Rotary has contributed over $200,000 to Headwater's Hospital, $25,000 to the expansion of the CDRC, and $20,000 to the BMX Park, with significant annual contributions to the Shelburne Library, Shelburne Food Bank, Minor Hockey and a host of other local community needs each year.?

Further to this, Buffett added that the Fiddle Championship generated ?hundreds of thousands of dollars? toward the local economy. Mayor Bennington told organizers, ?No one is disputing the good work of the Rotary;? he did however, caution the Chair regarding the hiring of bands for the proposed Heritage Music Festival, noting that the Town had spent thousands of dollars introducing big bands into events in recent years and had lost thousands trying. Buffett responded, reminding Council that Rotary had been successful and profitable in the past and was perhaps better situated to handle the new venture. Council will deliberate on the funding for the Rotary Club along with additional requests for support from Youth for Christ and the proposed Jump Up and Wine Festival in the coming weeks.

By Marni Walsh