



**City of Kingston
Report to Council
Report Number 21-150**

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Craig Desjardins, Director, Office of Strategy, Innovation & Partnerships

Resource Staff: None

Date of Meeting: June 1, 2021

Subject: Kingston Economic Recovery Team (KERT) Update and Mandate Renewal

Council Strategic Plan Alignment:

Theme: 4. Strengthen economic development opportunities

Goal: 4.1 Support new and existing businesses

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a second update on the progress of the Kingston Economic Recovery Team's (KERT) efforts to plan and deliver short and long-term strategies and tactics that seek to mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19 in the community. As a result of extended provincial lockdowns and ongoing impacts on local businesses, this report requests Council's support for the continuation of the KERT mandate and work in progress.

Building on the information detailed in [Report Number 20-207](#), four priority-themed working groups made up of community stakeholders have been meeting monthly to advise, conceptualize and support the implementation of a number of initiatives designed to address the economic impacts of the pandemic.

Organizations across the community have come forward to participate and/or lead projects including: Tourism Kingston, United Way of KFL&A, Kingston & District Labour Council, KFL&A Public Health, Queen's University, St. Lawrence College, Downtown Kingston!, Kingston

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Chamber of Commerce, Kingston Economic Development and numerous other private sector business owners.

Ideation, prototyping and implementation of solutions from the four (4) working groups (Rapid reskilling and redeployment of the workforce, Advocacy & sourcing additional financial resources, Community confidence & involvement and Providing access to economic opportunity for underrepresented groups) have been supported by City and Kingston Economic Development staff. Two additional ad hoc KERT working groups- Tourism and Property Tax have also worked to provide significant support to local businesses. Specifics of this work are provided in the body of this report and while considerable progress has been made, we are still in the early stage of business economic recovery efforts.

One of the early positive outcomes of the community's pandemic response has been the unprecedented organizational collaboration that has rapidly and effectively met many of the social and economic challenges brought on by the pandemic. It is hoped that this spirit of connection and alignment of organizational strategies and resources will be one of the lasting legacies of the pandemic.

As part of the creation of the KERT, a one-year term was set, with an option to renew for additional one-year terms with the agreement of KERT members, participating business support organizations and City Council. KERT members, working group participants and support organizations have unanimously supported the KERT mandate renewal for an additional year, with Council's approval recommended in this report.

City staff have been and will continue to work closely with the business community and its needs to support the economic recovery. Most recently, businesses raised concerns with extended lockdowns and continued restrictions on outdoor dining. As part of this report, and to address this issue in a timely manner, staff are recommending that fees and charges applicable to permanent patios be reduced by 50% for the remainder patio season.

Recommendation:

That Council support the renewal of the Kingston Economic Recovery Team mandate for a further 1-year term; and

That Council direct City staff to support the development and implementation of initiatives of the Kingston Economic Recovery Team working groups; and

That Council direct staff to continue to pursue grant opportunities where available to advance pandemic economic recovery initiatives.

That Council waive By-Law Number 2005-10, 'A By-Law To Establish Fees And Charges To Be Collected By The Corporation Of The City Of Kingston' and to reduce the permanent patio fees by 50% for remainder of the 2021 season.

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Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY DIRECTOR

**Craig Desjardins, Director, Office
of Strategy, Innovation &
Partnerships**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**Lanie Hurdle, Chief
Administrative Officer**

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Community Services	Not required
Peter Huigenbos, Commissioner, Business, Environment & Projects	Not required
Brad Joyce, Commissioner, Corporate Services	Not required
Jim Keech, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer	Not required
Sheila Kidd, Commissioner, Transportation & Public Works	

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Options/Discussion:

The Kingston Economic Recovery Team (KERT) is a cross sector committee designed to respond quickly to changing conditions in our community from both a public health and economic perspective. It is a collaborative effort that has brought together individuals representing different sectors of our local economy, organized labour force and corporate management to provide an interconnection between City leadership and local businesses and support organizations.

Over the past year, the KERT and the 4 priority-themed working groups have focused on both short-term rapid response initiatives and long-term planning to:

1. Help Kingston's existing businesses survive;
2. Support the local economy in the transition to a new normal, post-pandemic;
3. Support the development of a new vision for economic development based on the new realities and opportunities that may emerge.

The KERT has been involved in:

- Supporting the work being done by business support organizations including the Kingston Economic Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Kingston! (BIA), and Tourism Kingston to ensure alignment and avoid duplication of efforts;
- Research and analysis of current, local and relevant information and data to inform the development of evidence-based solutions that assist economic relief and recovery;
- Innovating when developing and implementing solutions with community partners;
- Advocating for specific funding and/or other support (policy changes) from senior levels of government;
- Coordination and alignment of economic relief and recovery strategy across the economy including efforts of provincial and federal governments and KFL&A Public Health.

Summary of Activities and Outcomes

Activities of the 4 KERT working groups (as developed by KERT members), impacts and outcomes of the work and any next steps/new projects planned are summarized in Figure 1 below.

Additionally, two Ad Hoc working groups have also been working to support economic recovery and include:

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- 1. The Property Tax Working Group** has provided consultation and input regarding the need for municipal property tax relief programs.

Two different program opportunities were discussed: 1) options for deferring the City's 2020 final tax billing due dates and subsequently, as requested by Council, an extended relief program in 2021 that would address outstanding 2020 final billing installments and 2) a process and category of businesses that could be considered for property tax deferrals in 2021 (i.e., small businesses whose operations were significantly impacted by Provincial restrictions). The Group provided input in the following areas:

Business Impact

- Input on types of businesses that were significantly impacted by the pandemic based on limitations to operating hours, capacity requirements, reduced business demand and incremental costs of personal protective equipment and other protective measures.
- Type of support that might be needed and where targeted relief might be necessary.
- Input on the need for and scope of an extended deferral program for targeted businesses.

Other Provincial/Federal assistance

- Confirmed eligibility criteria of federal and provincial funding/loan programs.
- Identified existing gaps in support and eligibility, including businesses that did not qualify and where targeted relief might be necessary.

Other considerations

- Tenanted properties – identified need to ensure that business tenants were receiving benefits and how to incent landlords.
- Provided details of research on other community tax relief programs.
- Provided input on benefits of targeted relief and the use of an application program.

- 2. The Tourism Working Group** has planned and coordinated both short- and long-term strategies to respond to the economic impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector in Kingston.

The 16-member working group have discussed community product development as it relates to 2020/2021 and generating recommendations to respond quickly to changing conditions with both public health and economic perspectives in mind. Outcomes include:

- Lead the purchase of bike racks and repair stands to support outdoor recreation and cycle tourism that were lacking in the City.
- Lead the winter lighting project within the downtown core of the City.
- Partner for the Love Kingston Marketplace initiative - both marketing and product development.

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- Lead the Kingstonlicious campaign to support local culinary while locked down.
- Partner in the waterfront upgrades for confederation basin /Crawford Wharf.
- Leading the VISA gift card program for fall 2021 to initiative recovery for hotels.
- Promoting the Feast ON Ontario road to recovery program.
- Supported the changes to the public market by-law.
- Supporting the Sunday Jazz program to support Sunday activity and stays in 2020 summer/ fall.

Figure 1: KERT Working Group Initiative Outcomes

1) Community confidence & involvement

Key Initiative in first 100 days	Results/Outcomes	Next Steps/New projects
<p>1. Communications strategy and campaign - cross sector, including Public Health. Shared messaging; all sectors involved and aligned.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly pandemic messaging updates from City/Tourism Kingston/KFL&A Public Health • 2nd Queen’s PhD group Resilient Kingston project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued cross organization alignment of pandemic messaging to public and businesses • Research & development on possible messaging/ programs on mental health/ languishing
<p>2. Build processes and systems that provide decision-makers with access to timely and relevant data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquired and shared new geolocation dataset to help measure impact of pandemic • Provided monthly reports on local job postings/demand • Participation with regional partners in the development of economic modelling of pandemic impact • Queen’s PhD group conducted community confidence survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of new community data dashboard in partnership with Queen’s VP Research Office • Continued participation and leadership at the regional level in the development of solutions including a regional commuter strategy

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Key Initiative in first 100 days	Results/Outcomes	Next Steps/New projects
<p>3. Business buy-in to safety regulations to help build confidence in people; Kingston viewed as safe – protected staff and visitors. More communication to businesses about safety protocols.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation and engagement of Smith School of Business behavioral science researchers to advise on best practices in development of nudge campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of pilot behavioral “nudge” projects to encourage the return of people to downtown Kingston • Exploration of models/ communication campaigns to inform public of health safety practices of local businesses

2) Support the rapid re-deployment & re-skilling of the workforce

Key Initiative in first 100 days	Results/Outcomes	Next Steps/New projects
<p>1. Pull together employment supports from various employment agencies into one simple, global platform - one stop location for information and job opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created new job search and career pathway tools for displaced workers • Worked with healthcare facilities to assist with attraction of high need skills- surgical nurses, family physicians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with employment service providers to streamline process for businesses i.e., common intake forms when posting jobs
<p>2. Support program development for hard hit sectors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing skills training programs for arts sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with City Culture team and Queen’s & St. Lawrence College partners on the development/integration of entrepreneurial arts programming

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3) Ensure persons and groups with vulnerabilities have access to economic opportunity

Key Initiative in first 100 days	Results/Outcomes	Next Steps/New projects
<p>1. Design programs to provide access to employment for vulnerable groups. Finding additional sources of funding to create more programs to help those most impacted by COVID-19.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify barriers for vulnerable groups including access with respect to Wi-Fi, computers, and the respective skills to participate online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have City’s grant development team present to Working Group to provide advice on the development of funding application to support vulnerable groups City to continue its donation of equipment to not-for-profit organizations to support the vulnerable groups
<p>2. Promote diversity and inclusion in workplaces, including identifying resources to address and overcome biases and refine hiring criteria, systems and processes e.g. hiring committees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Held Competitive Advantage of Inclusion event Advancing the Kingston Workplace Inclusion Charter into both SME’s and larger broader public sector- City, KHSC, SLC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning for additional events on inclusion and diversity topics- identify appropriate speakers
<p>3. Identify who is 'underrepresented' and prioritize which groups and individuals are underrepresented and need access to economic opportunity i.e. sustainable employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Queen’s PhD- Kingston Outreach project in exploring work poverty 	

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4) Increase advocacy and sourcing of the necessary financial resources

Key Initiative in first 100 days	Results/Outcomes	Next Steps/New projects
1. Increase and Coordinate Advocacy: We need more engagement with our Provincial and Federal representatives to help gain access to financial resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance more collaborative community grant development model/strategy • Provide advocacy at both political and bureaucracy level for federal and provincial grants submitted. • Completed discovery phase of potential use of social finance models for community investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory the key community stakeholders operating in the economic recovery and social services space to understand capacity, current activity and mandate • Ongoing surveillance of the grant landscape (federal and provincial level, corporations, foundations)
2. Understand what businesses need i.e. extend wage subsidies into next year; what extra funds are out there that's not included in gov't programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed Business Navigator role and received 3 Canada Summer Job grants • Developing Supply chain project to facilitate a “buy local” industrial campaign • Developed & delivering Kingston Pandemic Business Support Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have Business Navigators reach out to businesses to help with accessing existing grant programs • Seeking business input on the redesign of the City's business support services including the creation of a Business concierge to rapidly solve programs, re-engineering of City processes and updating of City business web pages

With the third wave of the pandemic still requiring business lockdown/restrictions and vaccinations rates only gradually climbing across the province, economic recovery from the pandemic will be a slow and challenging process. Continuation of the KERT structure and operation will provide critical support to ensure Kingston becomes a resilient, sustainable and strong community.

Collaboration with Queen's Faculty of Graduate Studies

The KERT has had a significant partnership with the Queen's Faculty of Graduate Studies over the past year. The Queen's University's PhD Community Initiative program, comprised of

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multidisciplinary PhD student volunteers and academic mentors, partnered with the KERT working groups to provide solutions to identified economic recovery priorities.

The 2021 PhD-Community Initiative (PhD-CI) brought together 20 PhD students from a variety of research fields into interdisciplinary teams to support the Kingston community. Over the past 8 months, four teams worked with the City on projects related to the priorities of KERT. The City asked student to address: How do we increase the community resilience that is required to support economic and social recovery post-COVID-19?

Below is a summary of each of the projects:

In-work Poverty Exacerbated by COVID-19

Kingston Outreach Group (KOG) was tasked with the City's priority of ensuring the most vulnerable have access to economic opportunities. Ultimately, KOG chose to focus on a broadly defined group of individuals and families who despite employment, continue to face barriers and challenges to improving their lives and moving beyond the poverty line – people experiencing in-work poverty. KOG presents several parallel lines of research conducted in order to define in-work poverty, explore the barriers faced, and, ultimately, create a list of practical recommendations for community engagement and support program best practices aimed at serving the Kingston in-work poverty community.

Recommendations are intentionally flexible in design and serve as an overall guiding framework for engaging with and supporting people experiencing in-work poverty and can be further tailored to meet specific population needs.

1. Adoption and utilization of the in-work poverty definition created by the research team
2. Use of a framework for inclusive public engagement practices
3. Use of community advisory boards for people experiencing in-work poverty
4. Implementation of community benefits agreements
5. Support of local social enterprises
6. Creation of a centralized resource of community supports and services for people experiencing in-work poverty
7. Provision of accessible internet for people experiencing poverty

Empowering the Kingston arts community through entrepreneurial up-skilling in a post-COVID-19 world

This project catalogued the supports and tools available to Kingston area artists. After a consultation with a group of local arts community managers and business educators, there is a clear need for an entrepreneurial program for arts industry members. Artists are already highly

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qualified and skilled contributors to the local economy, and there should be a focus on up-skilling rather than re-skilling following the COVID-19 pandemic.

To increase community resilience, effort needs to be directed at a program that offers mentorship, continuous engagement and experiential learning, considering the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and indigeneity. Economic and social recovery in the creative industries can not be measured as directly as other industries. However, the impact that a successful and supported local creative industry can have on the city of Kingston should not be overlooked.

C5: Community COVID Concerns Communicated Consciously

Consumer confidence is often considered a predictor of economic growth. As such, consumer confidence is an important metric for assessment, particularly when a community is undergoing economic strain or change.

This project used a community survey to assess consumer behaviours and confidence of individuals in Kingston. Frequency of engagement, where self-reported, was assessed in a variety of economic behaviours, such as shopping and dining.

These analyses suggested that during lockdown there was more shopping online and more shopping at businesses outside of the city. Further, analyses suggested that while dining-in in the city had decreased with the lockdown restrictions, take-out did not increase to compensate for these losses. Age moderated all of these findings as well, indicating that older individuals were less likely to shop online or eat at local restaurants. Taken together, these findings illustrate losses of revenue for many businesses in Kingston.

Additionally, participants' self-reported the explanation for low frequency of endorsement overwhelmingly identified perceived risk from other patrons. This suggests that the primary factor affecting loss of revenue at local businesses during the lockdown was concern for health and safety due to carelessness of other citizens.

While concern for safety was identified as the primary reason for participants' low economic engagement, financial worry did not predict any differences among behaviour metrics. This suggests that generally, participants' financial situation was not a major contributor, on average, to lower economic engagement. However, participants did report that they expected their finances would continue to be affected by the pandemic for at least another year, on average.

It is also worth noting that perceptions of financial security were divided, with some individuals citing heightened financial insecurity (which could have bearing on their long-term spending and saving habits), while others reported unchanged or increased financial security.

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Resilient Kingston

This project explored how Kingston residents perceived and experienced resilience, social connectivity, and community confidence during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study involved completion of a basic demographic questionnaire and participation in a virtual focus group.

Participants felt strongly about the myriad of ways in which the pandemic had specifically affected their lives as Kingston residents. One participant stated that they viewed the pandemic as "a catalyst for change"; this sentiment seemed to be shared by a number of participants and is reflected throughout the following two subsections. The discussion and recommendations that follow are necessarily limited in scope due to the limitations of the project, but they are nevertheless representative of the stories shared.

Three major successes and challenges pertaining to the City's management of the pandemic emerged through the interviews. Some participants also offered ideas for the City to ensure further success, or to mitigate the challenges they had perceived. Successes include:

- The transparency and effective leadership of KFL&A Public Health and Dr. Kieran Moore's response to the pandemic.
- Local businesses' ability to "make it work" while adhering to Public Health guidelines.
- The availability of public outdoor spaces and programming within the City.

Challenges included:

- Big businesses' ability to remain fully operative while small businesses were required to close.
- A lack of transparency and communication between Queen's University's administrators and the staff/students directly impacted by changing public health regulations.
- The exacerbation of already prevalent issues faced by under-represented communities due to the constraints on access to social services as a result of COVID-19.

Permanent Patio Fees for 2021

In order to provide continued support to downtown businesses, City staff presented [Report Number 21-056](#) Love Kingston Marketplace which summarized the 2020 program and highlighted things to come in 2021. The report indicated that fees and charges would not be applicable to the expanded temporary patios, however fees would be applicable to the permanent patios. Since this report patios have only been permitted to operate for a handful of days. The normal operating season for permanent patios is April 1 to October 31 (7 months) with the option to extend into November for another 30 days. As a result of the continued restrictions on outdoor dining and the impact on local restaurants, staff are recommending that fees and charges applicable to permanent patios be reduced by 50% for the remainder patio season. The associated revenue lost through this reduction will be approximately \$30K in patios fees and \$55K in parking fees.

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Existing Policy/By-Law:

Kingston Integrated Economic Development Strategy

By-Law Number 2005-10 "A By-Law To Establish Fees And Charges To Be Collected By The Corporation Of The City Of Kingston"

Notice Provisions:

None

Accessibility Considerations:

None

Financial Considerations:

The revenue loss from the reduction in patio fees will be absorbed by the respective departments. Staff will endeavor to offset this loss through efficiencies and/or other revenue sources.

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Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:

Luke Follwell, Director, Engineering

Exhibits Attached:

None