



January 23, 2019

MEMO TO: Ward 1 Councillor Stephen Dasko

RE: Ribfest in Port Credit

Dear Stephen: Thank you for requesting TOPCA's feedback concerning Ribfest in Port Credit, first held in PC Memorial Park during July 12-15, 2018. The following consolidation is based on:

- personal observations (we visited and photographed the event last July)
- talking to residents and receiving emails sent to TOPCA
- reviewing comments on TOPCA's social media accounts

We have categorized the concerns below. We propose that this issues list could be referenced as part of a thorough collaboration with yourself, City staff, community group representatives, and the event organizers, while the July 2019 event is yet in the early planning stages.

1. Lack of Prior Consultation: The TOPCA Executive was approached for input by City staff via email on March 1, 2018, *after* the decision was already made to relocate Ribfest to Port Credit Memorial Park that same summer. The Corporate Staff Report to Council making the recommendation was also dated March 1, 2018. The Report mentioned TOPCA and implied we had already been consulted. The Ribfest press release confirming the relocation was issued on March 7, 2018, the same day Council voted to confirm the move.

On March 5, 2018, we began soliciting comments from the Port Credit community via our website and Twitter & Facebook accounts. Our question, simply: ***THOUGHTS ABOUT RIBFEST IN PC?***

We had a high level of direct engagement, not counting the ripple effect of our posts being further shared and engaged through other accounts. At a minimum we reached 8,842 people, of whom 1,939 engaged with our posts via comments, shares, reactions, or clicks for further information on our website, which received 1000's of hits, some not originating from postings but from searches.

Many residents responded that they were pleased about the new **proximity** of Ribfest to their Port Credit neighbourhood. But more than half of all respondents were concerned in various ways about community or personal impacts. Some residents stated they would not attend on principle for several reasons, and some residents felt there are "enough events already".

Residents felt the event should be carefully planned and organized given the known constraints of the PC location, but this was not seen to be done, just as the decision was seen to be hasty.

2. Duration: Six (6) days [*includes 2 days for set-up + take-down*] is a long time in a community that is already hosting festivals all season and experiences frequent disruption as a result. There

is "resident fatigue" for such a long mid-July addition. The festivals all benefit from breathing space in between, as do the many local volunteers who help make them happen. A three (3) day event Friday evening thru Sunday might be preferable, in keeping with other PC festivals, and to optimize attendance and reduce costs.

The Port Credit BIA has curated PC events for variety, uniqueness and timing, and City management who rent out PC Memorial Park should use that approach as well, and also ensure that staff on the ground in Port Credit (*whom we spoke to*) have the capacity to plan and handle logistics for yet another large and complex event within such a short space of time.

3. Garbage: Many were pleased that Rotary made an effort this year to better handle the amount of garbage produced on-site, maximizing recycling of both the food (organic) and packaging waste, with a goal of minimal actual "garbage" to end up in landfill (*per image below*).



Perhaps not anticipated, many Ribfest patrons purchased ribs on-site, then took their ribs off-site to eat and enjoy, given the natural draw of the Port Credit harbour and waterfront parks.

There were not enough garbage cans in place to accept the litter and the mainstreet really took the brunt. We were informed the PCBIA had to hire a private cleanup service for the weekend to maintain a tidier street. Of course people come to Port Credit every weekend, not just for Ribfest, and always want to enjoy a clean landscape and stroll & shop the mainstreet.



We understand not enough extra garbage cans were brought in for the event (less than half of the number ordered by the organizers?). This should have been corrected in what ever way necessary.

Could some litter sources be eliminated altogether, e.g. the red foam visors (*per image*)?

4. Access to the River: The Credit River is a special natural attraction and a public treasure. All access to the River was cut off by high chain link fencing (*per image below*), with no provision for using the pedestrian pathway to view the river, do shore fishing, get out of a canoe, etc. Park rental should not include the River path. Residents highly value their access to Memorial Park on foot or on bike, and summer weekends are precious.



5. Kitsch vs. Culture: Port Credit is designated as Cultural Node within Mississauga and every event should ideally reflect that, by connecting authentically with the attributes of the community which warranted that designation. The community is used to a high level of presentation from other events which have become part of the Port Credit festival fabric and celebrate location as well as theme.



More care should be taken as to signage and other “props” to better meet, and contribute to, the cultural goals of the area.

It must be noted that a few respondents stated they were disgusted by the killing of animals for this eating event and the smell of the meat being cooked, and the “stench” of smoke emanating from the BBQs.

It is very important to be aware of the sensibilities of *all* community members.

6. Traffic, Parking & Shuttle Bus: Residents of course had many concerns about traffic and parking in the Port Credit area during Ribfest. The shuttle bus was cited by Rotary organizers as a solution. Observation over a two-hour period mid-Saturday afternoon showed the shuttle bus was under-utilized (*per image below*).



Given that the shuttle bus ran only from Celebration Square, in case Ribfest patrons mistakenly attended there, and to transport downtown residents who would miss the central location, it was not understood locally how the shuttle would help significantly with Port Credit's far less central, and less accessible, location.

The GO Train provides convenient access from Toronto, but is not used for local transit. We do not have statistics for whether MiWay was busier during this period. Ironically, the parked cars shown beside the shuttle bus are in an area signed as NO PARKING.

Port Credit is highly pedestrianized, and many attended Ribfest without a car. But if the event is to grow in this new location as the organizers plan, the growth will need to come from residents all around the City. A further look at how attendees arrive in Port Credit should be taken, especially with the LRT construction starting at the Port Credit GO Station (for the underground terminus) and up Hurontario Street in late 2019 for several years (as mentioned in a Facebook comment).

There is also concern that Councillor budgets were applied to the cost of the shuttle bus; some felt it was inappropriate for taxpayer dollars to be used to subsidize a private enterprise, whether charitable or not. Council made the decision to move Ribfest very suddenly, but thought to only compensate Rotary for the move, not the community which had to suddenly accommodate the impact of that decision. It has been suggested that a community benefit be discussed: more than just the directed charity, but perhaps new infrastructure to enhance everyone's experience.

7. Live Music and Noise: Ribfest was the third (loud) live music event in a month, following the Waterfront Festival in June, and PC Canada Day. Many residents **do** enjoy the vibe and activity and sound of these events, and have even said they move here for this reason.

But for others, it's hard to sleep on festival nights in Port Credit. The River carries sound much further than organizers may realize. People returning to their cars parked in the neighbourhoods also create some disruption late at night. Considerable new development is coming to the immediate area, and noise may become more of an issue in future years for *all* festivals.

Could there be better positioning of the sound stages? Could there be a shorter festival (*per #2*) and a reduced live music schedule? Could Ribfest be moved to a new date in August to replace Port Credit Buskerfest, now that it has been discontinued? This would provide breathing space.

8. Affordability & Compass Food Bank: There was concern by residents about having to pay an entrance fee, and about the price of the ribs as well -- affordability for families is an issue in Port Credit, although the event is recognized as a fundraiser. Perhaps the entrance fees (one reason why the event was removed from Celebration Square) could all be donated to The Compass Food Bank, and *be seen to be* at the entrance (*per image below*).

Banners posted along the fencing were largely the routine Rotary International fundraising promos. There was one small banner for the Compass which we saw. Generally, there was not a local vibe (*per images below*). While a cheque and food was given to The Compass, could there also be locally-oriented signage, and reassurance to the community that those who could not afford to attend were being given discreet options to do so?



We note The Compass responded on our Twitter and Facebook pages with this statement:

"The Rotary Clubs of Mississauga and Mississauga West are both long term supporters of @CompassFoodBank (individually and with proceeds from @RotaryRibfest). We hope they will move [to Port Credit] to make it easier for us to attend!"

Some Compass clients might wish to attend at the park and be part of the event; a method for providing free tickets for a family experience (if desired) should be explored.



9. Children's Rides: These were considered expensive, they blocked off the Arena parking lot, and they appeared to be under-subscribed. Perhaps in City Centre, these amusements were welcomed by local families, but in Port Credit with so many other local events offering such attractions, there is a limit to how much families can spend and the novelty may not be there.



With GO Train commuters regularly using the Arena lot for spill-over parking, there was surprise that such critical space was used in this way. Events continued to happen at the Arena as well.

Perhaps this aspect of the event needs to be reconsidered, and alternative children's activities provided.

This image (*above*) was taken on Saturday, July 14 at 1:56 pm.

10. Adaptation to Natural Setting: Memorial Park has a wonderfully natural setting, which was virtually obscured with the exclusionary fencing and the generic Ribfest set-up – it could have been held anywhere (*per image*). Members of the TOPCA Executive, like many PC residents, have visited Ribfest at Celebration Square in past years. Many feel that Celebration Square is the perfect central venue for this type of event and indeed built for it, with a paved surface and pre-designed layout to suit vendors and large installations.



TOPCA had expressed concern about damage to the grass from such a long event with hard use by large trailers, but a tour of the site a couple of days after take-down showed the grass was rebounding! This is no longer a concern.

If in fact the natural location is NOT paramount as demonstrated in the set-up, then a more central, accessible and permanent location could be sought.

Celebration Square is not the only option in the City!

Conclusions...

CONCLUSIONS:

A. None of this is to say that Ribfest *can't* work in Port Credit, and indeed many local residents enjoyed it, but consensus is that it has to be more than a cookie-cutter Rotary fundraiser plunked down in the Park without some reference and adaptation to its surroundings.

B. Port Credit is considered a prime event site because of the expected success in a waterfront location with village character, a highly pedestrianized community, an army of faithful volunteers, and nearby mainstreet amenities. But too many festivals can dilute this advantage.

C. We understand Ribfest revenues were down in 2018 due to the lack of daytime density, meaning that evening was the main revenue generator. While the organizer stated that Memorial Park is 40% larger than the Square and desirable for that reason, it may not support sustainable growth year after year, because of many of the issues listed above. Duration (#2 above) also impacts the issue of net revenues and might be looked at again considering this location.

D. We provide this Facebook comment which the City might want to seriously consider:

"I love PC and we visit in the summer often but we live on the other side of the city and having Ribfest in city centre is central for everyone. Moving it so far south really disadvantages the north side of the city. PC gets a lot of the cool events in the city already; it's always been nice that Ribfest balances that out."

On behalf of the TOPCA Executive,

Dorothy Tomiuk
Vice-President

www.topca.net

Addendum:

TOPCA reps met with the Port Credit Ribfest Organizers on March 8, 2019 to review this Report, and changes are planned in response to the community's concerns.

The photographs of the 2018 Ribfest in Port Credit will be posted on the TOPCA Facebook page in full resolution (*images are smaller in the Report, in the interests of space*).

The 2019 Ribfest in Port Credit takes place the weekend of July 12-14 at Memorial Park per:
www.mississaugaribfest.com