**Chamber Opposes Tone Deaf User Group Fee Hike Sept. 11, 2023**

The Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce believes the City of Vernon has abandoned community-based organizations wanting to host events.

On Sept. 11, city council supported a five per cent fee hike for facilities starting January 2024, even though there have been months of growing frustration from user groups about the high fees and challenging booking process.

“This is going to hurt non-profits and the ability to hold local events for the community. If the public is wondering why it’s difficult to attract events or why events are modified or disappear, this will be a significant factor,” said Robin Cardew, Greater Vernon Chamber president.

“It’s interesting to note that the fee hike will likely be used to pay for the discretionary grants that user groups will be awarded by council moving forward and that user groups will be paying for their own grant which feels backwards. It’s like robbing your piggy bank to cut yourself a cheque.”

The Chamber is also frustrated that city council completely overlooked the Chamber’s recommendations on facility fees and booking processed based on input from user groups reviewing the report from the city’s consultant looking into fees.

“The feedback requested a freeze on fee hikes until a proper full review on fees was completed. It also provided unanimous opposition to discretionary grants, citing the potential for favouritism, cumbersome administrative work and grant dependence. Instead, the Chamber task force was in favour of reducing fees in an equitable and balanced manner,” said Cardew.

“City staff delayed a presentation to council for a month so they could respond to the Chamber recommendations. But instead of doing that, city staff simply mirrored the consultant’s findings with no further input of how to support user groups or inclusion of solutions from user groups.”

The Chamber is pleased to see the city is proceeding with the hiring of an event coordinator.

“Hopefully this helps to enhance communication efforts and responsiveness with user groups. However, time will tell if efficiencies are created or the city’s booking process continues to provide stumbling blocks for non-profits,” said Cardew.

For more information, contact

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