

Orangeville Blues & Jazz Festival wins reprieve from Town's new park fees



By Mike Pickford

The Orangeville Blues & Jazz Festival will receive a second shot to the arm from the Town of Orangeville after Council this week agreed to cover all costs the local event will incur under the municipality's new rates and fees schedule.

Two of the driving forces behind the summer musical spectacle, Josh Leitch and Larry Kurtz, expressed their concern to Council on Monday regarding an "approximate" bill of \$3,000 the group had been asked to pay ahead of the June 1 kickoff. That money, Parks and Recreation Director Ray Osmond says, would pay for the use of Alexandra Park throughout the three-day event, as well as compensating Town Staff for their time helping with set-up and tear-down.

"We were surprised this year when we started planning with Parks and Rec to learn that we now have to come up with additional funds for use of the park, staff and a couple of other detail changes," Mr. Leitch said. "We wanted to remind you that Orangeville Blues and Jazz is not-for-profit. It's costing us \$303,000 this year to put on a free concert. Many businesses and community members benefit from this event."

He added, "If we continue to realize these fees that we didn't plan for, we can't possibly go on. We are here to ask for Council to waive those fees and give us a chance to plan for them next year."

Councillor Scott Wilson made a motion to waive the fees, which it was said were between \$2,300 and \$2,800, and that was seconded by Coun. Nick Garisto.

Coun. Don Kidd expressed his concern about such a motion, asking Mr. Osmond what ramifications this could have on the Town moving forward.

"Would this open the door for other service clubs in town to ask for a similar waiver?" he inquired.

While Mr. Osmond didn't directly answer the question, he went on to explain the Town's new rates and fees schedule and the situation surrounding the Blues & Jazz Festival. The new system, approved by Council, kicked in last May. The department deferred implementing the new rates on Blues & Jazz for 12 months, with Mr. Osmond stating the hope had been that would give the event's organizers time to adapt to the new charges.

Coun. Gail Campbell suggested that Council consider offering a grant to cover the amount racked up by the new fees system, believing that to be safer than simple waiving the fee. Coun. Wilson agreed to amend his motion.

Although indicating she was "very, very supportive" of the Festival, Coun. Sylvia Bradley said she couldn't vote in favour of handing over more money less than six months after Council approved a one-time grant of \$15,000 to back the event.

"We all know the benefits Blues & Jazz brings to the town, and how wonderful it is for our community. However, we have other festivals, other events? I think this would set a dangerous precedent," Coun. Bradley said. "We already gave Blues & Jazz a grant, a quite large one that they hadn't gotten before. I think there could be an opportunity for them to pull the \$2,500 out of that so that they're being treated as fairly as everyone else."

The majority of Council sided with Mr. Leitch and Mr. Kurtz, with a 4-2 vote securing the money the group was looking for. Deputy Mayor Warren Maycock voted alongside Councillors Garisto, Wilson and Campbell in approving the grant, with Councillors Bradley and Kidd voting against it.

In a release to media the following day, Coun. Kidd reiterated why he could not support the request.

"Once Council gives relief of rates and fees through not charging or (giving out) grants, that is the start of ending fees to user

groups. Sometimes members of Council have to make unpopular choices and last night I had to make one. Even in an election year, I have to vote for what I think is the right choice for now and the future.?