

Public Comments

- 1) David McLeish – December 7, 2024
- 2) Jaret Koop, Georgian Bay Folk Society - Referred from Community Services Committee - January 22, 2025
- 3) Lesley Etchegary-Nicholson - January 24, 2025

From: Editor at The Owen Sound Current

Sent: Saturday, December 7, 2024 3:51 PM

To: Mayor & Council <Council@owensound.ca>; Tim Simmonds <tsimmonds@owensound.ca>; Briana Bloomfield <bbloomfield@owensound.ca>

Cc: DAVID MCLEISH

Subject: TOM gallery data analysis

I'd like to submit the letter to the editor

here: <https://www.owensoundcurrent.com/p/letter-we-need-to-understand-tom> for inclusion in any presentation or reporting on the TOM's budget. Given that staff are including public input in the budget prese

Mayor, Council, City Manager, and Clerk,

I'd like to submit the letter to the editor here:

<https://www.owensoundcurrent.com/p/letter-we-need-to-understand-tom>

for inclusion in any presentation or reporting on the TOM's budget. Given that staff are including public input in the budget presentation this year, it seems appropriate that this well-researched and data-backed contribution be included.

Thank you,

Miranda Miller

Editor

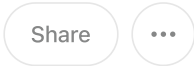
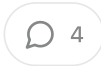
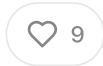
OwenSoundCurrent.com

Letter: We Need to Understand TOM Art Gallery Data & Curious Discrepancies

Resident David McLeish takes a deep dive into the data and assumptions being used to evaluate the business case for a multi-million dollar Tom Thomson Art Gallery expansion in Owen Sound.



THE OWEN SOUND CURRENT
DEC 06, 2024 • PAID



Editor’s Note: We are releasing this letter to the editor from David McLeish to all subscribers outside of our regular publishing schedule due to Owen Sound City Council’s budget deliberations on Monday, December 9th.

The City of Owen Sound released its 129-page 2025 Draft Budget document yesterday via a media release. As of 12:20 p.m. December 6, the [link given to access that budget presentation](#) directs visitors to a “404 Error: File or directory not found.”

Server Error

404 - File or directory not found.
The resource you are looking for might have been removed, had its name changed, or is temporarily unavailable.

The version released yesterday contained exactly one piece of public input on any issue: Slide 69 labelled “Art Gallery Questions from the Public” included questions from ONE (1) community member who would like to see the gallery fully funded by taxpayers.

Given the volume of concerns and questions we have received, published, and witnessed in City meetings since the last budget cycle, the inclusion of a single piece of input that supports staff’s request raises serious questions about the integrity of the budget process.

Residents who would like to see their input reflected in the information your elected representatives are given to consider on Monday should contact your Council at council@owensound.ca and City Manager Tim Simmonds at tsimmonds@owensound.ca at your earliest convenience.

You can [download the budget presentation the City published yesterday here](#), as we downloaded it from the City’s website in preparation for [this budget announcement article](#).

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Submitted by David McLeish

As W. Edwards Deming noted: “Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.”

Numbers, or more specifically, their analyses, can tell us a lot. Time series data and trend-through-time analyses are particularly interesting because they illustrate change over time and provide potential insights into the future. According to George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

In other words, it is better to use data to learn from the past and glimpse the future than to make mistakes that could have been prevented.

On March 11, 2024, following presentations by Staff and [Diamond Schmitt Architects](#), Owen Sound City Council voted to direct “staff to undertake a Fundraising Feasibility Study as outlined in the report using funds from the Art Gallery Collection reserve account” in support of a recommended \$16 million expansion of the Gallery.

The presentations to the Council were extensive, addressing a plethora of “critical needs” (e.g. Collection Storage, Flexible Programming Space, Professional workspaces/offices, Hazardous Loading Zone, etc.) and potential benefits, namely “revenue opportunities and community engagement opportunities.”

The presentations and reports made reference to data from a variety of sources, though it is the Gallery’s attendance data that will mostly be the subject of this letter.

In this letter, I’ll describe the data collected by The TOM and its relevance to the proposed expansion. We will explore several discrepancies between what has been reported to the public and the gallery’s data, as well as a number of assertions that reference the Gallery’s attendance data and other sources. In a follow-up letter, I will summarize the findings and pose several questions that will hopefully inform the decision-making process.

The findings presented in these articles were shared with several City officials beginning in June 2024. Given the potential for misinterpretations or erroneous analyses, the hope was that explanations for the observed discrepancies would be shared, and perhaps missing data would have been identified.

Unfortunately, that was not to be the case. Repeated efforts to engage City officials were unsuccessful. Several meetings were scheduled and then cancelled by City staff. A request for responses to questions in writing was left unanswered.

The Owen Sound Current is a reader-supported publication. Full subscribers get premium access to curated local news and events.

Part 1. Understanding The Data

Owen Sound City Council will soon make a decision on whether or not to proceed with a substantial expansion to the Tom Thomson Art Gallery. One would expect such a decision would be evidence-based, relying on a process that uses facts, data analysis, and a comparison of advantages and disadvantages to make the decision.

Has that been the case?

For most of us, the report and [presentation to City Council by Diamond Schmitt Architects on March 11, 2024](#) was our introduction to the process. Please note: this article is not intended to demean Diamond Schmitt Architects in any way: they were provided with information by City staff and, like most of us, trusted in its veracity. Rather, it is the City’s data used in their report that is the focus of this review.

In particular, one sentence in the Diamond Schmitt report stood out. It read: “Annual total attendance both within the building and through engagement ranged between 18,935 and 234,178” (Page 101). More specifically, the reference to “within the building and through engagement” begged elaboration.

No further information was provided however; on the relative contributions of these two components of attendance.

Through a Freedom of Information request, I obtained the Tom’s attendance data from 2010 to 2023 (Figure 1. Example of Gallery Attendance Spreadsheet). The data consists of records of the number of visitors to the building and to off-site events collected on a daily basis, summarized by month, and then summarized by year.

These data were concatenated into a format that permitted trend-through-time analyses, and numerous charts were generated.

| 2023 by Month | | | | | | | | | | | MY | | | | TOTAL | offsite | total | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|----------|------|-------|-------|------|-----|----------|------|-------|----------|--------|-------|----------|---------|------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------|-----|-----|-------|---|
| MONTH | visitors | >65 | 40-65 | 18-40 | <18 | exh | openings | #sch | tours | students | #hours | tours | lectures | classes | engagement | Total tracked user | NOT ATTRIBUTED & Staff | OPEN Card | counter/2 | attendance | films | ed | ex | eng | |
| JAN | 91 | 100 | 86 | 34 | 311 | | | | | | | | 23 | | 334 | 315 | | 649 | | | | | | 0 | |
| FEB | 84 | 100 | 84 | 41 | 309 | 75 | | | | | | 60 | | 40 | 484 | 303 | | 787 | 290 | | | | | 1077 | |
| MAR | 152 | 115 | 67 | 32 | 366 | | 2 | 33 | | | | | | 77 | 476 | 454 | | 930 | 573 | | | | | 1503 | |
| APR | 79 | 124 | 80 | 53 | 336 | | 4 | 70 | | | | | | 142 | 548 | 286 | | 834 | 571 | | | | | 1405 | |
| MAY | 144 | 128 | 73 | 16 | 361 | | 2 | 66 | | | | 40 | | 29 | 496 | 136 | | 632 | | | | | | 632 | |
| JUN | 136 | 225 | 79 | 24 | 464 | | 2 | 48 | 1 | 31 | 78 | | | 35 | 656 | 446 | | 1102 | | | | | | 1102 | |
| JUL | 192 | 341 | 116 | 144 | 793 | | | | 1 | 24 | | | | 152 | 969 | 222 | | 1191 | | | | | | 1191 | |
| AUG | 263 | 392 | 131 | 100 | 886 | | | | | | | | 27 | 25 | 938 | 434 | | 1372 | | | | | | 1372 | |
| SEP | 289 | 210 | 55 | 21 | 575 | 80 | | | | | | | | 145 | 800 | 471 | | 1271 | 347 | | | 198 | | 1816 | |
| OCT | 250 | 226 | 80 | 53 | 609 | | 1 | 13 | 1 | 20 | 15 | | | 99 | 756 | 479 | | 1235 | 563 | | | | | 1798 | |
| NOV | 166 | 105 | 68 | 54 | 393 | | 2 | 39 | 2 | 37 | | | | | 469 | 362 | | 831 | 313 | | | | | 1144 | |
| DEC | 139 | 135 | 73 | 42 | 389 | 75 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 484 | 437 | 48 | 921 | 286 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 46 | 1253 | |
| | | | | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | | | | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | | | | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | | | | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | | | | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | | | | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | 1985 | 2201 | 992 | 614 | 5792 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 5792 | 230 | 13 | 269 | 5 | 112 | 193 | 50 | 764 | | 7410 | 4345 | 48 | 11755 | 2943 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 272 | 14970 | |

I should note that the TOM uses 20 or so different categories, including counts of visitors by age category, groups (openings, students, tours, lectures, classes, engagement), as well as Open Card, Door Counter, films, education, exhibitions, and

engagement. Further, the number of categories varies from year to year, with some only appearing for a few years.

As a first step, the 18,935 and 234,178 referenced by Diamond Schmitt Architects were sought out in the data provided. The former was found in 2018, and the latter in 2016.

I'll also note that Diamond Schmitt cautioned that "it should be noted that prior to 2017, attendance data was collected using a different methodology and **may not be fully accurate.**"

Curiously, despite this caution, they still used the data.

The Gallery collects visitor data in two broad categories: on-site (i.e. visitors to The Gallery at 840 1st Ave W, Owen Sound) and off-site at locations ranging from local to national. On-site is clear, but how are visitors to off-site events included? The Gallery references off-site attendance in four categories:

- **"Films"** attendance at films shown as part of the Gallery Night At The Movies series at Galaxy Cinemas.
- **"Education"** "programming includes tours, lectures, talks, workshops and classes (at the gallery or offsite) that have a specific curriculum, objective, topic, project or instruction."
- **"Exhibitions"** (used from 2010 to 2016) are "curated and circulated by the TTAG to other institutions throughout Owen Sound, Grey-Bruce, Ontario and Beyond," and
- **"Engagement"** (used from 2014 – 2023) are "activities that connect visitors to us, our exhibitions, to community events or community partners, or to local, regional or national thematic activities." (definitions in quotes provided by the Tom Thomson Art Gallery) (Definitions in quotes provided by the Tom)

In the case of on-site data, an employee or volunteer records every time someone enters the gallery, and an electronic door counter registers each time someone enters or leaves the gallery. To account for the fact that everyone who enters also leaves the building, the number from the door counter is divided by two.

Inexplicably, however, little to no effort has been made to account for errors commonly associated with door counters e.g.:

- **Over-counting:** Staff arriving and departing and visiting the gift shop (with the exception of the period from 2017 to 2020), deliveries, people asking for direction;

- **Under-counting:** People walking side-by-side, or a group of people walking close together, will be counted as one person;
- **Blocking:** A person or object standing in front of the beam sensors will completely disable counting until they move; and
- **Interference:** A child, for example, stepping back and forth in a counter will provide an inflated count.

The attendance referenced by The Tom is calculated by adding the number from the door counter with attendance, divided by 2, with the numbers obtained from off-site venues. Referred to here as “**Gallery-Asserted Attendance**” (GAA), the equation can be expressed as:

$$GAA = \text{Electronic Door Counter Count} + 2$$

To put the numbers cited in the Diamond Schmitt Architects report into context, the 18,935 from 2018 consisted of:

14,418 from the door counter +
 3,177 from attendance at films +
 240 from educational events +
 1,100 from Engagement
 18,935

In contrast, the volunteer/employee count of people entering the gallery in 2018 was **11,207**.

The 234,178 figure from 2016 consisted of:

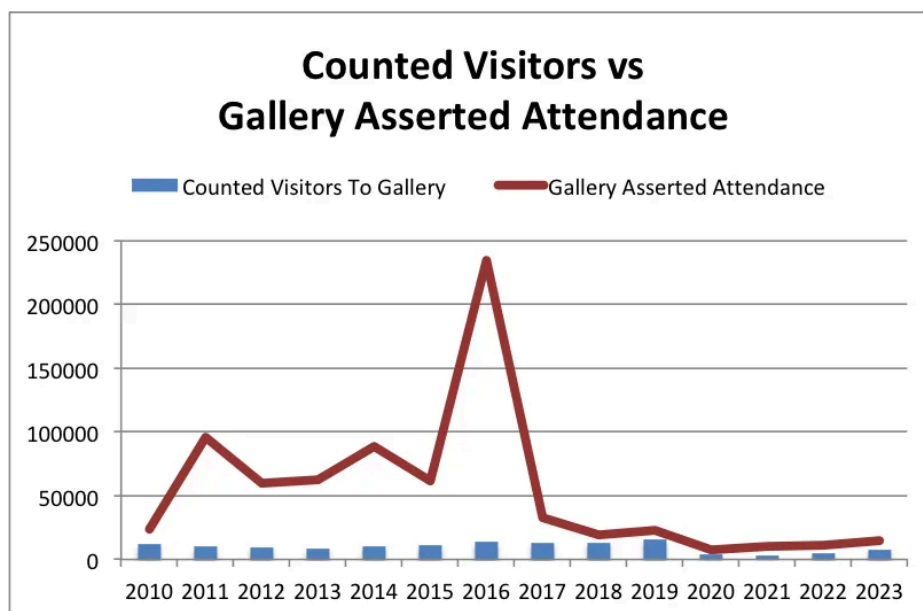
27,779 from the door counter +
 4,674 from attendance at films +
 168 from educational events +
 156,942 from Exhibitions +
 44,615 from Engagement
 234,178

The 156,942 from Exhibitions includes events such as:

- 14,779 from attendees at the Summerfolk Music and Crafts Festival that had the opportunity to see the “Summerfolk Morning Mural” and
- 15,000 who attended an ArtSpin event at Ontario Place billed as a “A transformative art experience” on September 15-25, 2016, where the TOM was credited as a Creative Partner for presenting the work of Artist Greg Staats.

In contrast, the volunteer/employee count of people entering the gallery in 2016 was 13,749.

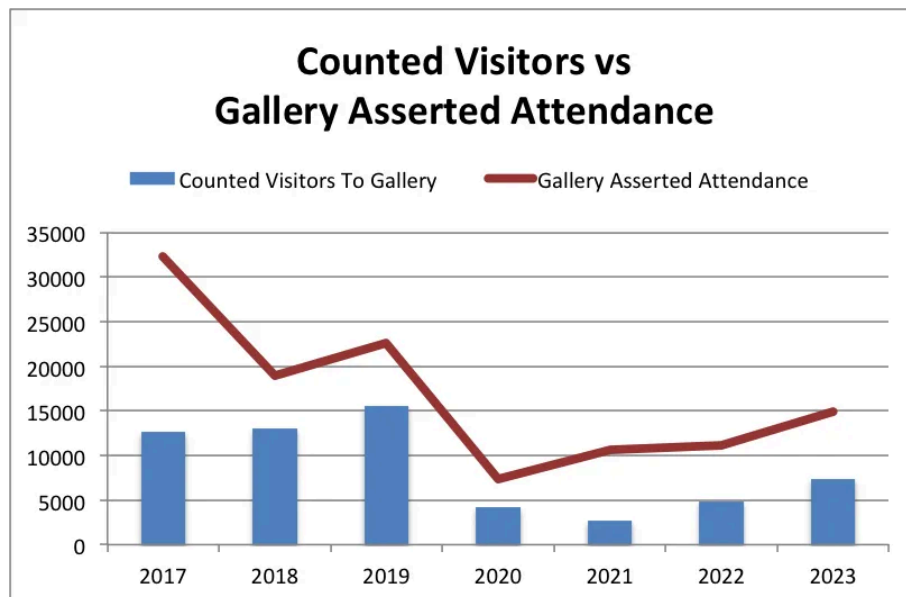
If we compare the volunteer/employee count with Gallery-Asserted Attendance from 2010 to 2023, it looks like this:



Clearly, prior to 2017, the inclusion of off-site attendance (e.g. “Exhibitions” and “Engagement”) grossly inflated the attendance figures. From 2010 to 2016, GAA averaged 8.2 (range: 2 to 17) times the number of Counted Visitors.

What changes were implemented in 2017 are unknown, though attendance at Exhibitions dropped to zero after 2016 and a new Curator started in 2018.

There appears to be a greater concurrence between Counted Visitors and Gallery Asserted Attendance (GAA) after 2016. However, if we focus on the period from 2017 to 2023, it becomes apparent that discrepancies, albeit smaller than the period from 2010 to 2016, remain. From 2017 to 2023 GAA averages 2.2 times (range: 1.5 to 3.9) the number of Counted Visitors.



Per the caution noted by Diamond Schmitt Architects, data prior to 2017 will now be set aside. From 2017 to 2023 the average number of visitors counted entering the gallery was 6,578 per annum.

Obviously, the COVID-19 Pandemic affected attendance everywhere, so if we restrict the reference years to 2017 to 2019, the average attendance is 10,102.

This suggests that Diamond Schmitt Architects should have used 6,578 to 10,102 per year as a range of attendance at the gallery instead of the “18,935 and 234,178” referenced in their report.

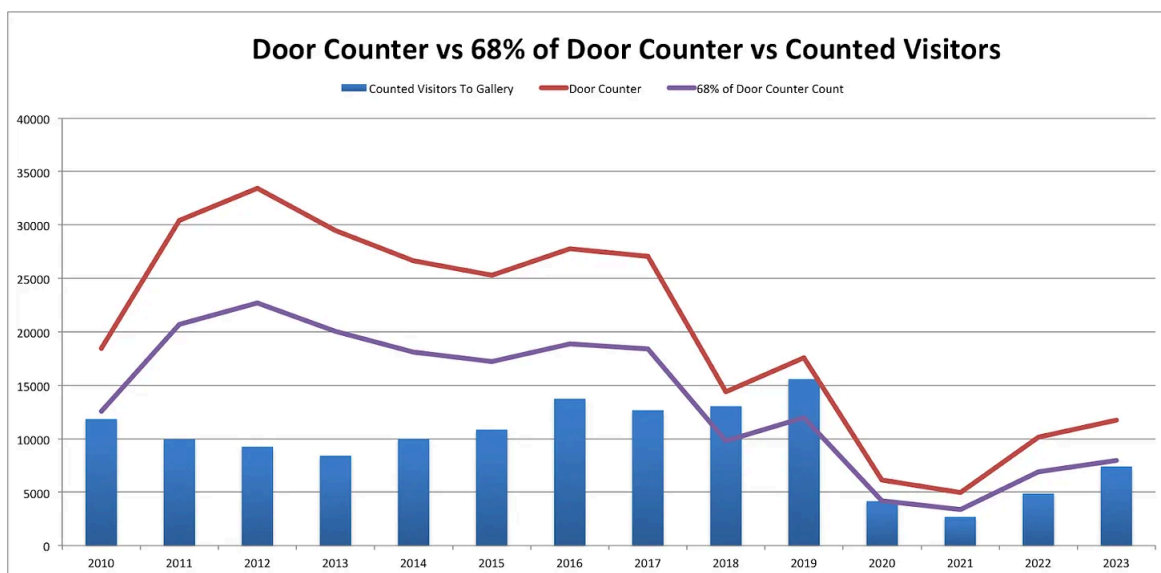
Comparing the data from the number of counted visitors with the Door Counter provides an interesting insight.

On September 4, 2024, Gallery staff reported that “68% of all people entering the facility are venturing into the exhibition spaces.” This number is helpful for several reasons”

- It confirms that 32% of people entering the building do not view the exhibits.
- It also accounts for staff arrivals and departures, deliveries, and people seeking directions.

It is recognized that this number is from 2024, when the gallery was also used as a tourism information facility. With that in mind, the number enables a comparison with the visitor count.

As can be seen in the chart below, the raw Door Counter Data provides an inflated estimate of attendance at the gallery, whereas from 2017 onwards, 68% of the Door Counter Data is almost identical to the number of visitors counted by a human.



In conclusion, the question arises as to whether attendance at off-site events should be included in justifying a proposed \$16+ million capital project at 840 1st Ave W, Owen Sound?

Part 2. Curious Assertions and Discrepancies

In addition to the data discussed in Part 1, City staff have made several attendance-related reports to the Tom Thomson Art Gallery Advisory Committee and City Council that are inconsistent with the data discussed in Part 1.

Four of these discrepancies are discussed below. In addition, this article examines seven gallery-related assertions that have appeared in [City Budgets and the Diamond Schmitt Architects' report](#).

'Discrepancies' are cases where staff have presented an attendance number that is inconsistent with the number of visitors counted by a Gallery employee or that claim to represent on-site visitors when off-site visitors are also included.

'Questionable Assertions' are numbers from a variety of sources that relate to the Gallery. These include the projected cost of the Gallery Expansion, Citizen Satisfaction, Membership, and the potential Economic Benefits of a Gallery expansion.

Discrepancy 1: Attendance of 22,000 claimed versus 15,578 counted

On January 18, 2021, the City Manager's Report notes that "total visitors to the Tom Thomson Art Gallery in 2019 = 22,000."

Although this number is generally consistent with the 22,610 Gallery Asserted Attendance figure in the data provided by the Gallery, it does not actually refer to "total visitors to the Tom Thomson Art Gallery."

Rather, it is 45% greater than the 15,578 attendance counted by an employee, including an additional 5,040 visitors from off-site events and 1,992 more visitors from the door counter than were counted by an employee.

Discrepancy 2: Attendance of 3000 claimed versus 1,497 counted

(100% greater than counted)

On September 28, 2022, the Tom Thomson Art Gallery Advisory Committee was told that:

"Attendance to the Gallery throughout the summer was outstanding with upwards of 100 people often visiting exhibitions per afternoon, even on weekdays. Overall, the Gallery averaged 66 people per day through the months of July and August with a total of over 3000 visitors in those two months alone."

The employee counted data provided by the Gallery indicates totals of 663 and 834 for July and August, respectively, for a total of 1,497 visitors, some 100% less than suggested. The door counter data² was 1,192 and 1,438 for July and August, respectively, for a total of 2,630, still well under 3,000.

Discrepancy 3: Attendance of 18,831 claimed versus 4,870 counted

On February 1, 2023, the Director and Chief Curator reported to the Tom Thomson Art Gallery Advisory Committee (Report AG-23-003) that, "The Gallery's 2022 attendance was 18,831, **excluding Off-site projects/public art**" (bold added for emphasis). This report was subsequently shared with City Council on February 13, 2023.

Of particular note is the reference to “excluding Off-site projects/public art.” In contrast, the Gallery Data reported an on-site visitor count of 4,870, a discrepancy of 287%.

The 18,831 figure presented is 69% greater than the 11,134 Gallery Asserted Attendance number for 2022, raising the question as to the origin of this number.

Discrepancy 4a: Attendance of 25,000 claimed versus 7,410 counted

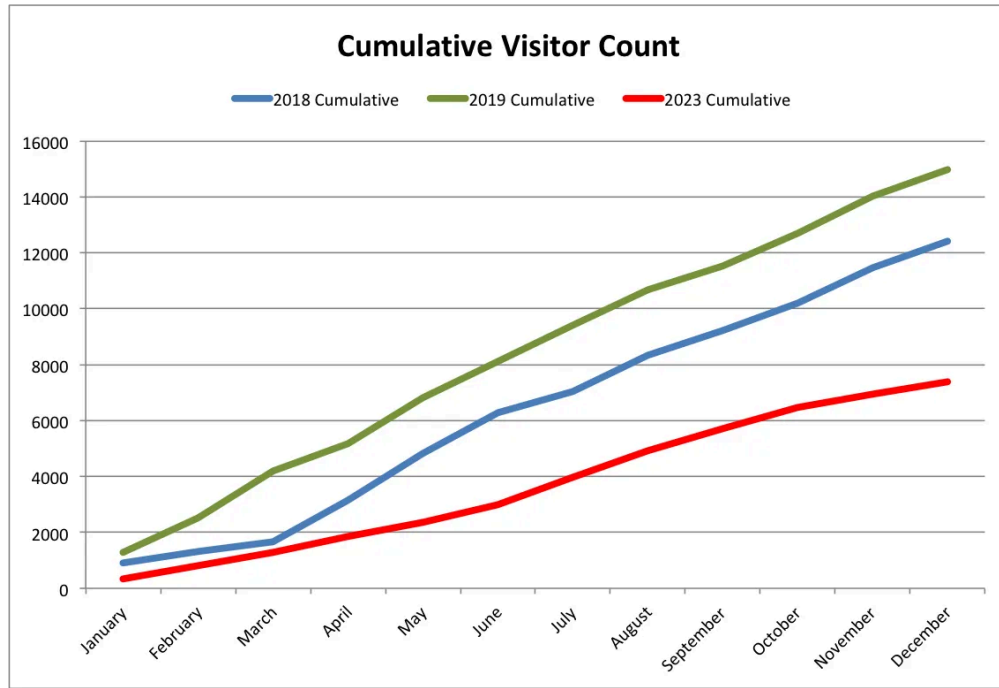
On December 4, 2023, in response to two questions from an Owen Sound resident (“*To date in 2023, how many people did the Art Gallery record visiting the Gallery? What is the City provided subsidy on a per person visit basis?*”), the Director of Community Services, reported to City Council that:

*“As of August 2023, the in-person attendance is trending higher than the pre-pandemic years of 2018 and 2019. The estimate to year end based on the planned exhibits for the remainder of the year is **25,000 in-person visitors**. There are an additional **3,000** visitors under the category of Arts, Education and Learning, and **10,000** visitors under the category of Community Project Outreach, with a digital engagement reach of **300,000** people. The City subsidy on a per person basis is \$9.” (bold added for emphasis)*

To summarize, the Director of Community Services asserted that the Total Projected Attendance for 2023 = 25,000+3,000+10,000 = 38,000+300,000 via digital engagement for a total of 338,000.

In contrast, the Gallery Data reported a visitor count of 7,410, a discrepancy of 237%.

The chart below shows the cumulative attendance for 2018, 2019, and 2023 (i.e. January, January + February, January + February + March, etc.). As can be seen from the chart, at no time did the in-person attendance in 2023 trend higher than in 2018 and 2019. In fact, the 2023 cumulative attendance, especially after March, remained substantially below the other two years.



If one divides the “City Contribution” from the 2023 Budget (\$475,000) for the Gallery in 2023 by 7,410, the quotient (i.e. The City subsidy on a per person basis) equals \$64.10, not \$9.

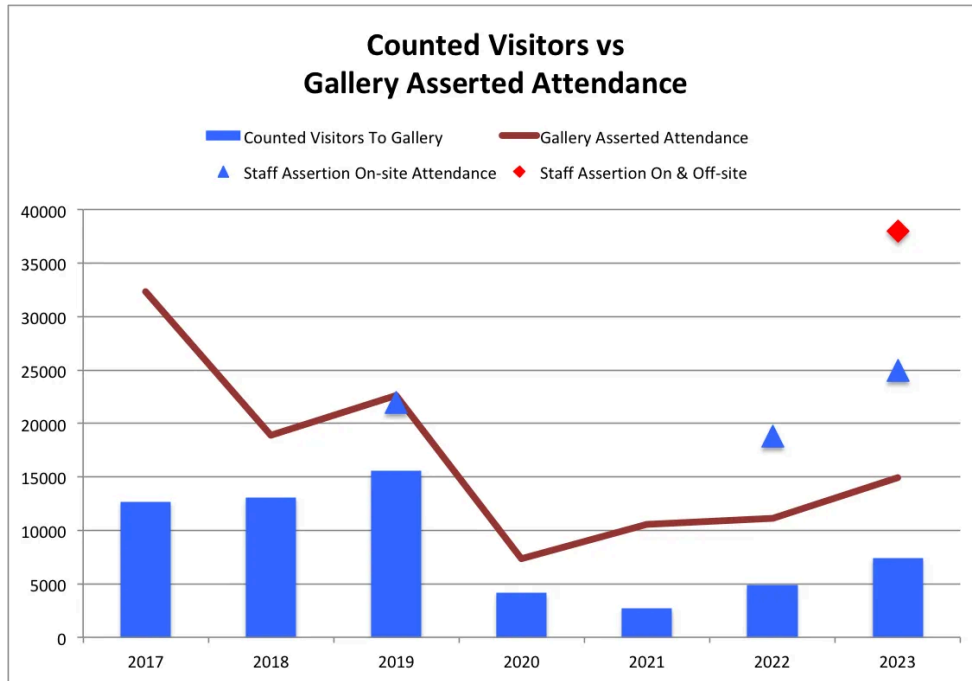
NB: The categories referred to as “Arts, Education and Learning” and “Community Project Outreach” do not appear anywhere in the Gallery data, nor in any of the documents searched. It is, therefore, impossible to cross-reference these numbers with the data provided.

Discrepancy 4b: Attendance of 38,000 claimed versus 10,625 counted

Given the uncertainty of the source of the 38,000 figure, it is compared to the Gallery Asserted Attendance (defined in Part 1). Gallery Asserted Attendance for 2023 was 14,970, again much lower than the 38,000 (154% greater than counted) provided in the report.

Finally, no reference to the 300,000 figure can be found in the data provided by the Gallery.

The following figure is the same as presented in Part 1, with the addition of triangles and diamonds representing the Discrepancies noted above.



Questionable Assertion 1: Estimated Cost of Expansion

On March 11, 2024, the Director and Chief Curator – Art Gallery, Culture, Tourism presented a report (*Report Code: AG-24-003*) to Council that noted:

*“In 2023, an RFP was awarded to Diamond Schmitt Architects to undertake a Tom Thomson Art Gallery Expansion Feasibility Study. The feasibility study included a Market Analysis that highlights the Gallery’s current context, statistics, sector challenges, and opportunities for growth, a building assessment and proposed design alternatives as well as a **Class ‘C’ construction estimate** (bold added for emphasis) to allow for an estimate of costs as well as potential opportunities for revenue.”*

Later in the same report, it is noted that:

*“As part of the study, a **Class D costing analysis**, inclusive of a net-zero carbon build, was provided for both Option 1 and 2 and included in their report.”*

The reasons for the change from a Class ‘C’ to a Class ‘D’ estimate are not addressed in the report. Class ‘D’ estimates are less accurate than Class ‘C’ and reflect “the initial functional program and broad concept approach, expected variance of 20 to 30%.”

For reference purposes, a Class ‘A’ estimate is “produced after the construction documents are 100% complete” and carry “an expected degree of accuracy of 5% to 10%”.

The Altus Group Limited, who prepared the Class 'D' estimate, noted that HST was not included in the estimate (@ 13% HST = \$2,090,660 would bring the total Class 'D' estimate to \$18,172,660).

Assuming a variance of 20 to 30%, the projected cost of the Gallery Expansion jumps to \$21.8 million - \$23.6 million. This does not take into account inflation between 2024 and the start of construction and unforeseen site issues.

Further, to put the proposed \$16.0 - \$23.6 million Tom Thomson Art Gallery Expansion proposal into context the following recent capital projects are provided for comparison purposes:

- Owen Sound City Hall Renovation = \$8.5 million
- New St. Marys High School = \$16.3 million
- Renovation of Grey County Administration Building = \$12.1 million

Questionable Assertion 2: 2022 and 2023 Budget Decks

On page 20 of the 2022 Budget and page 14 of the 2023 Budget, found on the City's website, reference is made to the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey, noting that "70% of residents are satisfied with the services of the Tom Thomson Art Gallery."

A review of page 39 of the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey reveals that the 70% figure actually pertains to "Satisfaction with the Services City Building" / "City Building services." Building services are defined as "the systems installed in buildings to make them comfortable, functional, efficient and safe." While some might consider this pedantic, satisfaction with building services (e.g. heating, air conditioning) is not the same as satisfaction with the programs delivered in the building.

In addition, the 2021 Citizen Satisfaction Survey reports on the results of another question pertaining to "Frequency of the Usage of Services," on page 35. It is noted that "More than half reported to have never used the Tom Thomson Gallery ..."

More specifically:

- 49% (Online) to 51% (Phone) of respondents "Never" use the Tom;
- 24% (Phone) to 29% (Online) "Rarely" use the Tom.

(Sample size: Phone n = 401 / Online n = 908)

In summary, 73% to 80% of respondents rarely or never use the TOM, a stark contrast to the assertion that 70% of residents are satisfied with the TOM. The Frequency of the Usage of Services figures are conspicuous by their absence from the 2022 and 2023 Budgets.

Questionable Assertion 3. 2023 Budget Deck

On page 9 of the 2023 Budget Deck, a textbox states that there has been a “3000% increase in Art Gallery memberships since the adoption of the OPEN Card. 2022 membership total 8,830.”

Given that the key point is the reference to a “3000% increase in Art Gallery memberships” one is led to conclude that people have been signing membership cards to the Gallery in droves.

In reality, the number referenced is the number of OPEN Cards issued by the Owen Sound & North Grey Union Public Library.

The OPEN Card replaced the previous library card on May 18, 2022, and provides membership to the Owen Sound & North Grey Union Public Library, the Billy Bishop Museum, The Community Waterfront and Heritage Museum, and the Tom Thomson Art Gallery.

Questionable Assertion 4: Economic Benefits of a Gallery Expansion

On March 11, 2024, Diamond Schmitt Architects and the Director and Chief Curator – Art Gallery, Culture, Tourism provided a report and presentation to City Council. Two references were made regarding the economic benefits that would accrue to Owen Sound from an expanded art gallery.

On page 7 of the March 11, 2024, Staff Report (AG-24-003), it is noted that:

“In 2016, Gail Lord of Lord Cultural Resources conducted a visioning workshop with the Art Gallery and the resulting report enforces the case for expansion,...” (NB: This workshop was in relation to the relocation of The TOM to the Old Courthouse Building.)

“The report emphasizes the Gallery’s capacity to be a change agent for the City and estimated that a new facility would inject \$8-9 million into the local economy and provide a year-round destination/attraction.”

The reference to \$8 to \$9 million also appears verbatim in the Executive Summary of the Diamond Schmitt Architects Tom Thomson Art Gallery Expansion Feasibility Study Report:

“It is estimated that a new facility would inject \$8-9M into the local economy and provide a year round destination and attraction.”

The December 8, 2016, report “Visioning Workshop Results Lord Cultural Resources” was obtained through a Freedom of Information request. The report contains three references to economic benefits.

Page 6:

“THE NEW TOM WILL HAVE AN IMPACT AS A CITY BUILDING INSTITUTION AND WILL BENEFIT THE CITY”

- *“It will inject \$8-9million per year into the local economy and offer a year-round attraction that will help bring more money to the area in the winter months.”*

Page 9:

“From a fundraising perspective, the economic benefit of \$8-10M will be attractive to potential donors.”

Page B1:

“APPENDIX B: VISIONING WORKSHOP NOTES, FLIP CHARTS TRANSCRIBED.”

“A new TOM”

- *“\$8-9 million dollar benefit for Owen Sound”*

From the above it appears that a workshop attendee suggested the \$8-9 million figure, it was captured on a flip chart, referenced in the workshop report, and then reiterated in Staff Report AG-24-003 and again by Diamond Schmitt Architects.

There is no reference to an economic impact analysis of any sort in Lord (2016) or elsewhere that might provide some quantitative veracity to this assertion, raising the question as to its merits.

Yet the Staff Report, which relied upon this number, recommended that “City Council directs staff to undertake a Fundraising Feasibility Study as outlined in the report using funds from the Art Gallery Collection reserve account.”

Questionable Assertion 5: Subliminal Influence?

In the Diamond Schmitt Architects Tom Thomson Art Gallery Expansion Feasibility Study Report, numerous pictures of other galleries are included for reference purposes (e.g. pages 35, 37, 39 & 41), presumably to illustrate what Owen Sound can anticipate.

A review of the locations of the pictures reveals that they are mostly from much larger cities (e.g. Cincinnati, Toronto, North Vancouver, London in the U.K., New York, Ottawa, Margate in the U.K., and Vaughan). The average population size of the locations featured is 4,663,108, with a range of 58,120 to 19,571,216.

The extent to which these images might influence the reader is uncertain; however, comparing a small city of 22,000 with cities that have, on average, 216 times more people could certainly be construed as leading.

Questionable Assertion 6: Gallery Status

In the March 11, 2024, Staff Report (Report Code: AG-24-003) the Director and Chief Curator – Art Gallery, Culture, Tourism referred to the Tom Thomson Art Gallery as: “one of the most important art galleries in Ontario and Canada” and its “iconic status.”

Recognizing that the internet is not a definitive source of information on the relative importance of art galleries, a survey of several popular sites was undertaken to assess the above-noted claims.

- DestinationOntario.com listed The TOM at 11th out of its 20 Top art galleries in Ontario
- Trip Advisor placed The TOM at 33 of 706
- travel.destinationcanada.com did not include The TOM
- theculturetrip.com did not include The TOM
- clevercanadian.ca did not include The TOM
- whichmuseum.com - did not include The TOM in its list of “70 art museums that are located in Canada”

Is there a definitive source that assesses the relative merits of art galleries in Ontario and Canada?

Questionable Assertion 7: Lack of Local Meeting Space

The Diamond Schmitt Architects Tom Thomson Art Gallery Expansion Feasibility Study Report noted that:

“There is a clear need for additional space within TTAG to enable a wider range of activities to be delivered”

and

“The competitor review demonstrated a lack of local meeting space for capacities in the region of 20-50 people.”

to

“provide a greater programme of events and activities alongside hireable space would create more opportunity for revenue generation and support ongoing sustainability.”

These are curious assertions given that the report itself lists numerous venues with ample meeting space and program offerings.

In particular, The Georgian Bay Centre for the Arts (GBarts) offers countless programs in a diversity of media for adults and children in a hireable space. Harmony Centre has an abundance of meeting spaces ranging in size from small meeting rooms to large event spaces.

Add to this spaces in other city-owned facilities (e.g. The Library, Harry Lumley Bayshore Community Centre), Grey County’s Grey Roots Museum & Archives and numerous hotels offering meeting rooms and catering.

To be continued...

Letters to the Editor do not necessarily reflect the opinions or beliefs of The Owen Sound Current and its editor or publisher.



Likes

← Previous

Next →

Discussion about this post



GEORGIAN BAY FOLK SOCIETY

The GBFS is a cultural organization, led by volunteers, that presents, promotes and encourages folk music and other folk arts in the community at large.

Dear City of Owen Sound Council,

I am writing on behalf of the Georgian Bay Folk Society to formally request an agreement regarding financial support for the Summerfolk Music and Crafts Festival.

Since its founding in 1976, Summerfolk has been a cornerstone of Owen Sound's cultural and economic landscape. Held annually at Kelso Beach at Nawash Park, this festival has drawn thousands of attendees each year, showcasing world-class musical talent, supporting local artisans, and providing family-friendly entertainment. The festival has also contributed significantly to the development of Kelso Beach at Nawash Park, including the creation of the Amphitheatre in memory of Stan Rogers.

We are seeking the City's support to address rising operational costs and reduced funding from upper-level governments.

Specifically, we are requesting:

1. Removal of rental fees for Kelso Beach at Nawash Park as our venue in the amount **\$2454.19**
2. Financial support through a partnership as a title Sponsor in the amount of **\$10,000**.

This support would ensure that Summerfolk remains a vital contributor to Owen Sound's identity and economy. The festival not only attracts thousands of visitors but also generates significant economic activity through tourism, local spending, and job creation. Additionally, it fosters community engagement through programs like Youth Discoveries, which provides young performers with opportunities to showcase their talent on a professional stage.

We believe that this sponsorship aligns with the City's commitment to supporting cultural initiatives that enrich our community and drive economic growth.

We look forward to presenting further details during our deputation and discussing how we can continue this longstanding partnership with the City of Owen Sound.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

Jaret Koop
GBFS Operations Manager

890 4th Avenue East
Owen Sound, ON
N4K 2H7

Phone: 519-371-2995

E-mail: info@summerfolk.org

www.summerfolk.org

Summerfolk's Request to Owen Sound City Council



- **Removal of rental fees for Kelso Beach at Nawash Park**
- **Partnership with the GBFS as a Title Sponsor: \$10,000**

Longstanding Partnership

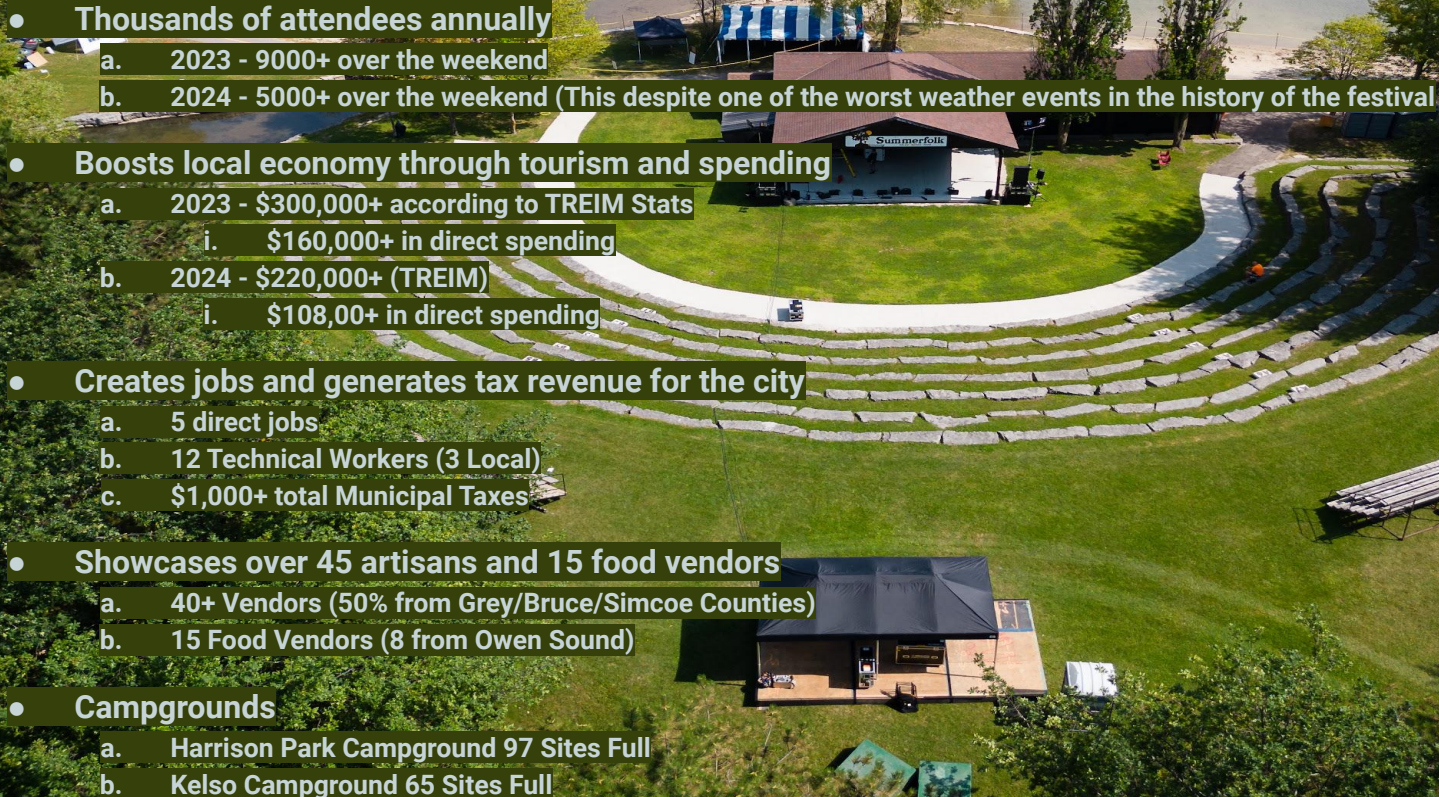
A man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a red and black striped shirt and a green and black kilt, is playing a bagpipe. He is standing in the foreground of a large outdoor festival. In the background, a large crowd of people is seated on folding chairs, many of which are blue and red. The setting is a grassy area with trees in the distance. The overall atmosphere is festive and community-oriented.

- Summerfolk has been held at Kelso Beach at Nawash Park since 1976
- Collaboration led to creation of the Amphitheatre in memory of Stan Rogers
- 49 years of cultural enrichment for Owen Sound community

Economic Impact

Jason Hemstock – Owen Sound Chamber of Commerce Chair / General Manager The Best Western Inn on the Bay

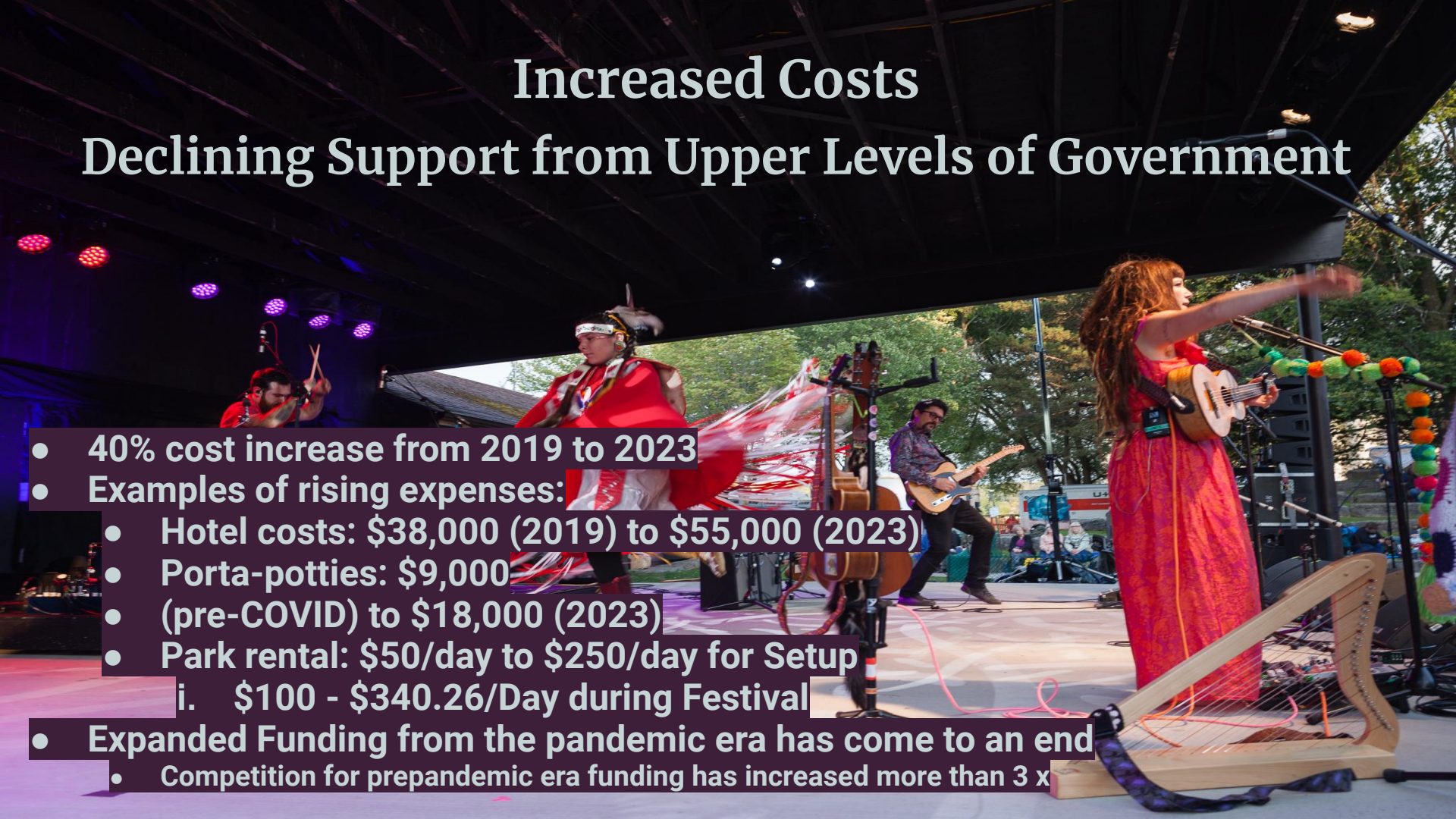
“Summerfolk is the number one event in this city to put heads in beds.”

- **Thousands of attendees annually**
 - a. 2023 - 9000+ over the weekend
 - b. 2024 - 5000+ over the weekend (This despite one of the worst weather events in the history of the festival)
 - **Boosts local economy through tourism and spending**
 - a. 2023 - \$300,000+ according to TREIM Stats
 - i. \$160,000+ in direct spending
 - b. 2024 - \$220,000+ (TREIM)
 - i. \$108,00+ in direct spending
 - **Creates jobs and generates tax revenue for the city**
 - a. 5 direct jobs
 - b. 12 Technical Workers (3 Local)
 - c. \$1,000+ total Municipal Taxes
 - **Showcases over 45 artisans and 15 food vendors**
 - a. 40+ Vendors (50% from Grey/Bruce/Simcoe Counties)
 - b. 15 Food Vendors (8 from Owen Sound)
 - **Campgrounds**
 - a. Harrison Park Campground 97 Sites Full
 - b. Kelso Campground 65 Sites Full
- 

Increased Costs

Declining Support from Upper Levels of Government

- 40% cost increase from 2019 to 2023
- Examples of rising expenses:
 - Hotel costs: \$38,000 (2019) to \$55,000 (2023)
 - Porta-potties: \$9,000 (pre-COVID) to \$18,000 (2023)
 - Park rental: \$50/day to \$250/day for Setup
 - i. \$100 - \$340.26/Day during Festival
- Expanded Funding from the pandemic era has come to an end
 - Competition for pre-pandemic era funding has increased more than 3 x



Community Value

- **Promotes local and international musical talent**
 - a. 30+ acts with 60+ musicians
- **Promotes and Supports other Community Not for Profit Organizations**
 - a. Community Village offers local organizations to promote to thousands of people per day
- **Offers family-friendly entertainment and activities**
 - a. Crafts, Stage, Puppets, Dance
- **Supports youth through Youth Discoveries program**
 - a. Youth Discoveries is recognized nationally and internationally in the folk music scene as an incredibly successful youth program
- **Contributes to Owen Sound's cultural identity**

From: Lesley Etchegary-Nicholson

Sent: Friday, January 24, 2025 4:41 PM

To: Briana Bloomfield <bbloomfield@owensound.ca>; Mayor & Council <Council@owensound.ca>

Subject: 2025 Owen Sound Budget Vote - comments to be circulated

Hello Mayor and Council Members,

I have reviewed the 2025 proposed budget, viewed the meeting on Dec 5th (where many questions were left unanswered).

As you have elected to limit public comment on Monday January 27th to a total of 15 minutes, with 3 minutes allocated to each question, something needs to be said in writing.

You have a stagnant population, with an average HOUSEHOLD income of \$57,500. And year after year, you expand FTE's and the taxes Owen Sounders have to pay.

I am just in my first year here, but I will tell you the people of Owen Sound are angry at City Hall, their property taxes, the abandonment of our downtown core. There will be a day of reckoning. I and others will be watching how councilors vote, whether they even have anything to say to support our residents and will be very vocal in the coming year.

I encourage all councilors to place a "stay" on the budget until reductions are included. If council may not be aware, we are staring down the barrel of incredible inflation. Conduct yourselves accordingly.

Lesley Etchegary-Nicholson