

Notes from December 12, 2016

Candace Shaw board chair opened the meeting by acknowledging that a Monday night at 7pm was not the best time for some folks to try to meet, but it was most important to have the meeting in a timely fashion.

Candace introduced board members present Noah Sullivan, Beth Sheffield, and Deborah Hackett, and Margaret Sullivan. Elizabeth Henkel Thomas and Jamila Sheffield were unable to attend.

Candace explained how we got to where we are today. 2015 saw a lot of changes and came with a lot of challenges, money needed to be spent out of the Rainy Day Fund to bring infrastructure up to code.

In 2016 we had hoped to have a good year and replenish some of the rainy day fund, but many donors have stepped away so Donations are down again this year. More money was needed for infrastructure (stages, public food area, hospitality cook shed, etc.) repairs. And ticket sales were down 13%. (Ticket sales for many Ontario folk festivals were down this year some to the turn of 30%, this is due at least in part to the large for-profit mega festivals)

We do still have some money in reserve, \$10,000 GIC, which will be necessary to pay our bills in the next few months, ie paying the accountants for our reviewed financial statements, (\$4000.00+).

Candace asked that we act with kindness in our discussions; she made clear that the board alone takes responsibility for decisions made about the festival and that no one should be attacking staff with accusations or insults. It was pointed out that no one should be treated badly.

Candace told those in attendance that Kim Orchard office manager did have some copies of the Year to Date statements if anyone was interested in having a look. The Operating Committee did a great job keeping their costs down and in a lot of cases bringing their revenue up.

But even with this fiscal responsibility we are facing some big challenges:

- Our infrastructure at the farm needs money to keep it in good repair so that it is safe.
- The site is a challenge for accessibility, many of our ticket buyers are getting to an age that negotiating our physical site is a challenge.
- We have always had a problem burning through our human resources, we ask a lot of many of our volunteers and as a result they step away from the festival

Sustainability is more than just financial, we need to be responsible with our human resources too, and we cannot continue what we are doing presently and have done historically.

Candace wrap-up her opening with some context:

- We have very good grant support – grants do not cover salaries or short falls – they do cover the things we are already doing, if we go after new grants we will have to do more things, we do not have the human resources to add more things to the list of things we are already doing. They will not cover making improvements to private property, so when we build permanent infrastructure on privately owned property we cannot get a grant for that
- Community Concerts do not typically make much if any money, sometimes they lose money, they are not a reliable fundraiser
- The main stage needs extensive repair again this coming year
- approximately \$20,000 more annually would be what we need in unfettered income – income that is not allocated for something in particular

- 2017 will be a challenge given that it is Canada's 150 and there will be a ton of free festivals to enjoy

It became apparent at the Board and OC retreat in November that big changes would need to come in order to continue on with the festival. After a long discussion of the board and many tears it seemed that the only way forward would be to not continue at the Farm long term. The board feels it is not financially viable to stay at the farm after 2017.

The Board met with the Henkels to tell them that they are committed to a 2017 festival at the Farm but that they do not feel that the festival can continue at the farm after that.

The Board does not know if this means a move or an ending of the festival, as soon as the Henkels were told of the conclusions they had come to the board started making preparations to tell the membership in a special meeting (tonight) ahead of the AGM

Membership input - *(any answers given in italics)*

- are plans in place for a new festival site – *answer No*
- if membership is given a list of jobs that need doing, and a list of materials needed that would show up. if a challenge was put out even to those in the room to put in \$350 each we could solve our cash flow issues – *the board did ask its volunteers to give \$100 each this year, many were offend, about a dozen people gave charitable donations, (some gave more than the suggested amount).*
- why the infrastructure is in such bad shape that it is taking so much money year after year and also questions the effectiveness of the fundraising committee - *our much infrastructure is wooden and sits in the elements 365 days a year, we only use them for 3 days. The things we store in the trailer on site regularly gets damaged by mice (and in the past raccoons)*
- the majority of our capital expenses are behind us and that surely it would be cheaper to stay on a site where the infrastructure is already in place. - *the infrastructure is 10+years old it needs replacing and repair*
- how much it would cost to move to another site and questions as to the boards plan for moving, frustrations around not enough information around how much each option would cost
- we are putting the board in a damned if you do /damned if you don't position by asking why they haven't costed out a possible move but wanting the members to be consulted as soon as these possibilities are discussed. The board was trying its best to be open with the membership that these are the possible options given the money and problems we have, the membership should understand that it will take time to investigate what a move in 2018 would look like and how much it would cost.
- what specific things our infrastructure is composed of –*Roy answered (OC - Guest Services, Site, prefest): Stages, fencing, public food station floors and counters, hospitality cooking shed, the plumbing and gas lines for hospitality and our storage trailer. We can get creative and figure out these problems.*

Candace explained that there is funding available (if a successful grant is written) from Celebrate Ontario for chattels this is how we were able to purchase some tables, chairs, and tarps last year. We cannot however get grants to improve permanent structures on private property.

- no vision for moving and that will just add to more problems not less.
- Someone else said we need to see the list of things needed to be done at the current site.
- a walk-around of the site should be undertaken to get the real picture of what is needed then we can engage the larger community on getting the things and money we need –should call Mike (the previous site coordinator).

Candace said we need to look at 2017 with fresh eyes.

- our numbers for ticket sales are really quite good except for Advance tickets; this speaks to a need for marketing and money being needed for marketing the festival. In the past both Jan and Aengus did way more marketing but with the change in staff structure we have lost this piece.
- ticket sales were hurt by our very public challenges at the beginning of 2015,
- ticket sales will probably be hurt by the Friends of Shelter Valley Facebook page that has become an angry place in the last week or so.
- what actually happened in 2015 – Candace said the old administration wanted to go in a direction the membership did not and so there was a change of administration.
- actual problems are bring in more money or reduce expenses
- Carol-Anne would like to hear what our Mission and Vision are because if we are not following those that is the real problem – *Candace read the Mission Statement (the verb in our mission statement is **celebrate** that is the action we should be focusing on).*
- the board was commended for doing a good job with limited resources but maybe we haven't exhausted all of the possibilities yet. Some people get frustrated by not seeing the results of sharing their input, and she for one would like to see a five year plan. *Candace stated that even if we had a 5 year plan we would still be faced with declining ticket buyers and fewer donations.*
- the membership just needed to be asked to give and they would give – *the membership was asked and very few gave and many were offended.*
- offended by request for donation when he gives 200+ hours of labour and his gas to get to the site to work.
- re: mainstage - a large crack in one of the main beams supporting the canopy on the main stage, there would be a lot of time and money that would need to go into fixing it. *Deborah explained that our structures need to be Ministry of Labour compliant, regulations have changed and the board is now seen as an employer and volunteers and musicians are seen as staff, every structure on site must be safe according to the ministry of labour (a complaint was filed with the M of L in 2015 about SVFF and inspectors were on site before the festival, it cost us approximately \$10,000 to become compliant with building codes for outdoor structures used by the public).*
- are the Henkels even wanting to continue having a festival on their land? – Arnie said he would be happy to give the board a three year contract, for stability sake. Arnie does not believe there is a problem with the main stage.
- if the festival is happening in 2017, younger, new volunteers would very much like to help engage a younger demographic.
- Noah echoed this statement by saying it will be important to reach a different Demographic through targeted marketing because the festival site is not easily accessible to our older patrons.
- Amelia said this site is not only hard on bodies it is hard on Site Coordinators (we are looking to fill this role again in 2017), who work an excess of 1000 volunteer hours per year.
- more meetings like this
- some of our problems are caused because we are on Labour Day weekend – *Labour Day weekend has always been a hard date but it was picked because we are not in direct competition with any other folk festivals.*
- what is happening in 2018? – *Candace said that the board is committed to 2017 but they believe 2018 may not happen at all but for sure they cannot see it happening at the Henkel farm.*
- if there were no money, infrastructure or accessibility factors would we be staying at the farm? – *Candace-yes, if these things were not a problem it would be great to stay at the farm.*

Candace we are responsible to everyone, it is our job to keep everyone safe and we can't be part of decision making that continues to hurt people, we have to be responsible to all of our volunteers, not continuing to burn them out.

- discussion about what the festival has cost in human resources alone. Candace spoke of the number of hours that Liz spends to organize our volunteers - happily for the sake of Shelter Valley she volunteers more than 900 hours per year.
- would be possible to imagine a radically different kind of festival, one that would be sustainable both financially but also in people, perhaps a one day festival.

Candace paraphrased something posted by someone of the FOSV FaceBook group – could it be that the festival has come to its natural conclusion, it is okay to let go of something that has come to an end

- we are in a time of transition, that that is hard, we may have to let go of parts of the past to keep the future. He said, we have to ask ourselves if some of the things we are holding onto are Sacred Cows, do we need to let somethings go? Can we work through this transition together, and if we are coming to an end then we need to end well.

Notes collected:

- If the hill is a huge part of the problem, could another part of the farm be used or has this already been explored?
- Much as I love the Henkel Farm it has become an accessibility issue for me. If SVFF remains there, I will inevitably have to stop attending. Look to the membership for their skills and talents. Don't spend money on anything a volunteer would be happy to do.
- Next meeting ideas, set out clear structure and times at the star, no hands up instead ask 5 people to speak name 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Those people know there number and speak in that order then name 5 more people. Have a moderator who is not speaking for the most part. Small groups are good but speaking for the whole group is important.
- Thank you for holding this important and challenging meeting I would love to see the festival stay at the Henkel farm so I would be happy to see all efforts exhausted to make that a strong possibility for 2018 and beyond. I still feel uninformed as to just how big some of the hurdles may be but I appreciate your willingness to open this up for everyone to voice their opinion.
- As a somewhat younger member I would love to see the festival try to appeal to a younger demographic –this would also mean you would have to worry less about accessibility issues.
- I'm happy to be a part of such a passionate group and discussion.
- Thank you for all your hard work!

And from Emails received by those who couldn't attend the meeting:

- Do we need to provide 3 meals a day for all volunteers?
- Would like to build workshop around the documentary about Max (who played with Annie Lou)
- Would like to help do what he can in Toronto with publicity and sponsorship
- Would pay twice as much, should we increase the ticket prices?
- Would like to participate more can we have more meetings on weekends?

Next Meeting: Sunday January 15th from 2-5pm at the Cobourg Public Library.

