



Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce Proposal to The City of Merritt - November 2019

To Whom it may Concern:

The Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce was established in 1914 as the Merritt Board of Trade and has been a contributor to the business success of this community for over 105 years, making us one of the longest standing Chambers in Canada. In 2018 when a new Board and Executive Director took over the Chamber, the tenuous financial circumstances of the Chamber were concerning to the Board and Executive Director. Since that time, the Chamber has made great strides to improve the financial situation although the Chamber continues to find the economic situation challenging as a not-for-profit organization that relies solely on Memberships and Fundraising.

In 2018, the Board also made the decision to go back to mandate and focus on event planning and endeavors that supported business. The Merritt Chamber switched gears and committed ourselves only to those things that were directly growing or supporting businesses, and the City of Merritt. At that time, we also began to build a new relationship with the City of Merritt, which had faltered for some time.

As a result of our renewed partnership with the City and desire to return to mandate, the Chamber has increased its value to the community and assisted the City in raising their profile as well. In the Chamber's opinion, this has been achieved through the following programs and initiatives:

- The creation of the Merritt Summer Nights Market. While the City of Merritt was named a sole supporting partner on this endeavor, it was not involved in the organization of the program other than by way of a small amount of the City's contribution to advertising. Money raised goes to the Chamber with a percentage being injected back into Crime Stoppers who assists with security so they may put community funds back into their safety programs. In our opinion, this market has directly contributed to new company start-ups and to the relocation of business to Quilchena Avenue.
- The Exit 290 Sign Project. By contract, the Chamber was allotted a \$10,000 grant that the City received for the creation of the map, and building of the sign structure. We have provided our man hours to contract, and coordinate the entire project at no cost to the City and removed the



responsibility of the project from their staff. While the sign project has not yet been completed, it is well underway with no direct cost to the City.

- The Chamber Executive Director was an active member of the Business License Review for which the Chamber and Community Futures Nicola Valley provided information and collaborated with the City of Merritt to assist them in the decision-making process which shaped the changes to that program.
- We advocated for the City at Vision Merritt to include Will George as a City Representative as well as Council to involve them in that business working group to improve Merritt as we believed they should be involved and were an asset to the process.
- The Executive Director was involved as an active member of the PNP committee which includes reviewing business plans and related paperwork, meetings with PNP Participants and assisting them in navigating business in Merritt along with Community Futures Nicola Valley, and providing informed recommendations for appropriate business plans for the City of Merritt to send recommendation letters to the government for approval. With the recent lay off of the Chamber's Executive Director, this roll has been taken on by the current President.
- The City is listed as a sole partner on every Chamber event, including Community Day, Country Christmas, Business After Business, Lunch and Learn, All Candidates Meetings, Merritt Summer Nights Market, Art Walk, etc.
- This past July, our current President, Kim McLean, and Executive Director, Meagan Preston, attended the Thompson-Okanagan Regional Consultation in Kelowna and spoke directly to the Deputy Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Deputy Minister of Jobs, Trade, and Tech, the Ministry of Attorney General, and the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General about issues directly affecting the City of Merritt. This included the Forestry Crisis, Housing Crisis, and the Opioid Crisis we are currently facing in an attempt to raise the profile of Merritt with the officials in Ottawa.
- The Chamber is helping to attract new business to Merritt by assisting and attracting franchises with accurate statistics of the business area and demographic.
- The Chamber has agreed to a partnership with the City for dual use of our Kiosk at no charge to the City.
- We have increased our perceived value in the community and we now have over 100 members, which is higher than it has been in a number of years.



- We support the Youth Entrepreneur program by offering free placement at the Merritt Summer Nights Market and other relevant Chamber led events, and support our young businesspeople along with Community Futures Nicola Valley who facilitates this program for the City.
- Our Executive Director and President are in constant contact with City Councilors and Staff to feed forward information, ideas and research regarding development and quick wins for the City so they may prosper, draw more tourism, and attract more business. This includes providing research and information.

During recent Roundtable Meetings that we have had with Chamber members, as well as non-members, it is apparent that the key aspect we are lacking as a City is *clear communication and one strong voice*. Right now, we are all working towards the same goal, to make Merritt better, but from different starting points and we need one main source for people to go with their business concerns. Furthermore, businesses need to know those concerns will be brought to the City and advocated for, currently, this is not the case. The Chamber has the potential to be that source for Merritt - with the support of the City. Small business is and will be the backbone of our community and to make Merritt a better place, we strongly feel that more resources and advocacy for small business is a benefit to all.

At the end of the day, with all of the positive strides we have made to make Merritt a better place to visit and do business, we still struggle financially to make ends meet and clear the remainder of the debt accrued prior to 2018. Because of our increased focus on business support, supporting City initiatives, and the creation of new business opportunities mandate, we no longer have the time or the desire to fundraise through avenues that do not support business. As a not-for-profit, we struggle every year to make ends meet, and this is proving to continue to be difficult and puts the future of the Chamber in jeopardy.

We have recently canvassed the other Chambers in BC for information on how the city they represent supports them. The information we received was surprising and somewhat disheartening as it pertains to our current support level that we receive from the City of Merritt. Clearly, we are valuable to be called upon for support, but we feel perhaps it is unclear that we also require support as a not-for-profit. Some Chambers do run the tourist information centers and provide marketing, or economic development support, which can lead to City infusions in excess of \$380,000 per year, whereas others are receiving in excess of \$60,000+ per year just to support the business community in towns with as small of a population as 11,000.

We are asking for our City to see the value we bring to the table, to the community as a whole and ask that the City consider making a much more significant investment in us, as we continue to grow and improve



the business community here in Merritt. We are excited about the opportunities and the energy the Board brings to the Chamber but we are also cognizant that we need to find a better way to make the finances of the Chamber function to permit the focus of the Board to be on betterment of the community rather than fundraising.

In particular, we would like to ask the following be considered by the City as we continue to work together to improve and grow Merritt:

1. That we, the Chamber, receive \$25 - \$50 from each business license fee paid annually to be able to put back into the business community through support programs like Lunch and Learns, Seminars, Business After Business, Roundtables, business growth strategies, and other events. We do recognize that the Business License fees have been reduced recently, but feel that it would be positive in the eyes of the businesses and public for the City to reallocate some of those funds to inject back into business support strategies.
2. That we, the Chamber, may receive support funds from the City directly to assist with the man hours that we are currently investing in supporting City initiatives, staff, and programs. The Chamber has been providing the expertise and time of our Executive Director as well as partnership branding to the City on every event, website, social media, marketing, and programs for quite some time for a very minimal fee of \$3,000 (which was originally a rental subsidy for this not-for-profit business). We are looking to review this partnership structure, so we can be of more benefit to the community and to the City of Merritt.

In closing, we sincerely hope that you see the value that the Chamber provides to the City of Merritt and to the growth of the business community and ask that we be able to meet and discuss these items further.

We are looking forward to hearing from you, and continuing to grow our partnership.

Sincerely,

The Board of the Merritt & District Chamber of Commerce

Current President and Property Manager – Kim McLean

Past President and Bank Manager– Louise Grenier

Director and Lawyer – Una Gabie

Director and Business Owner – Chandelle Agar

Director and Business Owner – Clive Masih

Director and Realtor – Melonie Ivanic