

# SAULT THIS WEEK

## DTA should maintain control of Queen Street events

*Merchants oppose Shoemaker's plan to close the area to traffic on summer weekends and the idea has gleaned little support in the community*

Author of the article:

[DOUG MILLROY](#)

Jan 25, 2022 • 3 days ago • 4 minute read • [Join the conversation](#)



Doug Millroy

Silly me. Here all along I have been thinking that the \$8.4-million plaza that is to go on Queen Street was to solve all the downtown's woes.

But no, there was another shoe to drop.

Coun. Matthew Shoemaker, who is exploring a run for the mayor's seat in the civic election this fall, wants to see the downtown, aka Queen Street, closed to traffic on summer weekends.

My first thought? Has he forgotten the number of road closures we have each summer because of reconstruction as well as the looney changes to traffic patterns, such as at East and Albert and McNabb and Elmwood, the city's traffic jocks have foisted on us?

But it actually turns out the idea is not new.

Council about five years ago passed a resolution asking staff to study such a proposal. That report just got to council and it came with a recommendation that was good but didn't go far enough:

"Don't close the streets at this time," it said.

The bit about "at this time" should have been left out.

I can't see it ever being a good idea to close our main downtown street every weekend throughout the summer.

It seems the Downtown Association, which represents merchants, has some concerns too.

Association Executive Director Salvatore Marchese was quoted as saying that while there is support for some street closures, the association does not have the budget nor the manpower for the work required to regularly close Queen Street. But Shoemaker, who wants city staff to come up with a plan, seems to simply override the association's concerns, claiming the city owns the streets, not the association.

In recommending against the move, staff also pointed to the pandemic and the effect it has had on programming with the gathering limits that have been imposed, as well as the costs and the volunteers who would be required to pull off such a stunt.

Yet it is a role that Shoemaker would have the city assume, claiming that it rather than the Downtown Association should be in control of events that take place on Queen Street.

I have trouble accepting that premise. Surely the association should be in control of the space its members occupy, even if it does operate under a council bylaw.

There has been no time frame suggested for the proposed closures but I am assuming they would take place in July and August. We also have not been told how many blocks of the street would be involved.

In any event, it seems to me the proposed venture would take so much planning and work that it would almost require the creation of a department to pull it all together, to plan events covering two days a week for two months. I would say good luck to getting volunteers to put in that much time.

Council has pressed on with the Downtown Plaza even though it doesn't appear to have caught on with the general public.

I wrote in August of last year that I was not a fan of the plaza when the price tag was \$8.4 million, believing our downtown was too spread out for it to work, and that I was even less of a fan as the price tag had essentially worked its way up to \$11.3 million.

The new price tag was a result of the \$2.9 million addition of the Mill Market, the farmers market

which is to relocate from Canal Drive to the former Greyhound Canada Union Cab building at 73 Brock Street, property that is adjacent to the plaza proper.

Saultonline on May 8 had presented the results of a poll question, “Are you in favour of the city spending over \$8 million to build the Downtown Plaza?”

Of the 5,072 responses, 3,846 voted no, 908 voted yes and 308 were undecided.

SooToday also took a poll in May but it skirted the question that counted, are you in favour or not. It simply asked, “What element of the downtown civic plaza are you most interested in?”

However, the results of one category did stand out for its lack of support for the project.

Of the 2,716 votes registered, the “None of the above” category was far in the lead with 1,197, which to me spoke volumes as to what these respondents thought of the plan.

The farmers market, which was still outdoors within the plaza when the polls were taken, was second with 609 votes.

SaultOnline is in the process of taking another poll, this time asking, “Do you support the city’s efforts to move the Mill Market to the new Downtown Plaza location at a cost of millions?”

The results as of this writing last Saturday:

No, leave it where it is, 1,936.

Yes, the Downtown Plaza is a better location, 248.

Undecided, 137.

Either location is good, 60.

I believe council should have held off on the plaza so it could have been an election issue and this should hold true for the proposed street closing. This way voters could let Shoemaker, and any others who support the idea, know what they think of it one way or the other.

Shoemaker wasn’t happy that it took so long for the report to come back to council and he shouldn’t have been. Taking five years to come back with a report is ridiculous.

However, I find it strange that Shoemaker or some other councillor somewhere along the line didn’t ask why it was taking so long.

Shoemaker sees benefits in bringing the role of the association in-house, meaning city hall, especially in planning and hosting events while maintaining a board that would have a voice in operating the downtown.

This to me smacks too much of the city taking control of something that should be left to the people who could be most affected.

Queenstown is a business area, not an event centre.