

BACKGROUNDER

VR Pro (a 3rd party event organizer) has executed the Santa 5K Race in downtown Burlington on the second Saturday in December for many years. In December 2016 the organizers changed the race date to the last Saturday in November. When they requested to change the date back to December for 2017 the City's Special Events Department reached out to the Burlington Downtown Business Association for a position. We canvassed our membership for their opinion.

What did our business community tell us?

The downtown business community told us that they overwhelmingly support the event taking place on the last Saturday of November. There are over seventy-two businesses on Brant Street and Lakeshore Road that are directly affected by the race/road closures. Nearly one half of our business membership is affected within a two block radius of the race as well.

Our merchants have recorded their sales during and after race time, year over year for the past three years. ***The conclusion?*** Sales go down on race during the most critical weekend of the holiday shopping season.

Facts & figures

- When questioned about a preferred race date we had a **30%** response rate from businesses surveyed. This is statistically significant.
- A commanding **90%** of these survey respondents were not in favour of the event being held on a Saturday in December.
- During race day the merchants' regular customers simply do not come downtown. These are the customers who habitually choose Downtown businesses for their Christmas shopping, they expect ease of access, they know what they want to purchase, and, they collectively can constitute over **65%** of weekend sales on a given Saturday in December.

- In some cases over **15% of yearly sales** are made in the 24 days of December leading up to Christmas. One single Saturday in December can generate over \$20,000 in business per retailer. **The stakes are this high.**
- Tracking Saturday December sales year over year from 2015 to 2017 some businesses have reported being off sales projections as much as **12 points**, *specifically* on race day and *specifically* during the mornings.

Making our case

In June 2018 the BDBA and members of the Downtown business community went to City Council to state our case. We had been unsuccessful at trying to negotiate a preferred date with the event organizer away from Council chamber. During our delegation we clearly stated a preference to see the Race continue in the downtown in the future, but could no longer support the event on a weekend in December.

We reasoned that a December event was causing a strain on our public parking resources, funded by the downtown membership and free to customers for the entire month of December. We acknowledged that the local faith community would prefer that the event not disrupt church services on a Sunday. We reminded City Council of the event organizer's success at executing events on Saturdays and in the month of November. Finally, we impressed upon City Council that the loss of revenue resulting from a Saturday December race date was predictable, but could be remedied by a change of date.

We support the Santa 5K race downtown on a Saturday in November.

Next steps

The City agreed that the Santa 5K Race for 2018 will continue on the second Saturday in December. City Event staff were directed to return to Council in November 2018 with a recommendation for a fixed date, time and location for the Santa 5K Race commencing in 2019.

Event staff has decided to reach out to the public for feedback through a short survey.

The survey will close mid-September 2018 and we expect that the results will strongly influence the final decision.