

November 17, 2021

Attention: Lambton Shores Municipal Council and Staff

From: Optimist Club of Forest

Re: Kimball Hall

Dear Council,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Board for the Optimist Club of Forest.

By way of background, the Optimist Club of Forest was founded in 1979. It was the first Optimist Club in Canada, and perhaps North America, to accept female members and has a long and strong reputation for providing progressive, community-based programs to benefit the youth of our region.

The Club motto is "Friend of Youth" and as such, it has directly run or funded a wide array of youth programming, benefiting hundreds of youth each and every year of its existence.

For example, in 2019, just before the pandemic, the Club either directly ran, or donated to, the following activities:

Optimist Youth Basketball, Conductive Education, Youth Film Festival, Kiwanis Kineto Theatre renovations, Optimist Youth Volleyball, Lambton Rebound, Junior Achievement, Forest Ringette, Thedford Storm baseball team, Relay for Life Cancer Campaign, Camp Foodie, Optimist Youth Ball Hockey, Taxandria Soccer, Canada Day celebrations, Pickleball courts, Christmas for Everyone, Minor Hockey, St. John Fisher iPad, Bravery Beads for children with cancer, Optimist Junior Golf, H.O.B.Y. Foundation, NLSS Art Award, NLSS Auction, Fall Fair Junior Division, Operation Christmas Tree, and the Legion Poppy Fund.

Other activities include Halloween trick or treating at the Hall, Youth dances, Parade floats, donations and gifts as needed to the local Food bank, stag and does, vaccination services with Public Health, space rentals to third parties, the annual Christmas Party, and so on. The list is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather it is provided to show the broad level of activities and support for the services provided by the Club and made possible by the use of the Hall.

The Club raises its funds from a variety of sources, most of which are tied to the use of the Hall. Overall, in 2019, the last year prior to the pandemic, the Club raised nearly 110,000.00\$, and returned to the community nearly 96,000.00\$ in grants, or as gifts. The balance of the funds, 14,000.00\$ was spent on purchasing local services such as snow removal and utilities.

We would like to note, as well, that prior to the pandemic, the Club had initiated renewal efforts to expand its reach and grow its memberships in the community. The club undertook the development of an interactive website in order to communicate with the public and service activities such as the Youth

Film Competition. Moreover, discussions had begun on ways to attract and retain new members. Although the film competition continued to grow, providing training to nearly 100 students in the region last year, the membership efforts were put on hold due to the pandemic. That being said, we were pleased to welcome a new member to the Club at our most recent meeting.

The success of the club is due to its partnerships in the community. Several years ago, the Club acted as the lead to raise funding for the splash pad in Town. Many of the fundraising activities to pay for the splash pad were centred on fundraising at the Hall.

Fundraising, through the use of the Hall, combined with the bingo revenue raised by members who volunteer to work bingos in Sarnia, also enabled the Club to be a significant donor for the Kineto Theatre project.

The Club works with local ratepayers, and groups such as the Kiwanis, to host social events and fundraisers which cannot be held elsewhere in Town.

Finally, it should be noted that there are important synergies between the Hall and the local food bank. Club members often assist with food drives, and provide additional services such as storage, physical labour in terms of moving items around, etc.

In closing, we note that we have always enjoyed a positive and supportive relationship with the Town, for which we are most grateful. Both the Town and the Club have worked together well in a manner that greatly benefits the community.

To that end the Club has greatly appreciated the fact that the Town waived payment of utilities at the Hall for 2020. Unfortunately, the Club is in the same predicament as last year due to the ongoing pandemic and our inability to use the Hall. Although the Club continues to pay for water and reduced levels of snow removal, the Club must again ask for relief from the costs for the balance of the utilities at the Hall.

Club members recently discussed the Hall and what its future relationship with it would be. Members at the meeting voted unanimously to support the restoration of the Hall and strongly confirmed its commitment to work with the Town to see the Hall renovated and maintained for the benefit of the community. To that end, the Club is prepared to undertake fundraising to oversee the update and renovation of the kitchen. The kitchen was last upgraded nearly 30 years ago and is due to be upgraded. The project would be a significant one for the Club to undertake, and doing so is a reflection of our long-term commitment to the facility.

We apologize for the length of the letter but thought that it was important for Council to have the Club's perspective as it deliberates the future of the Hall.

Yours truly,

The Optimist Club of Forest.