

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA FOR LOWER LONSDALE

By Kerry Morris

Tuesday January 20th, 5:00 PM, and the Lower Lonsdale Business Association ("LLBA") has convened a meeting at City Hall to discuss the Roger Brooks report and the need to establish a Business Improvement Area ("BIA") tax. City Staff member Larry Orr and the anchor speaker Mayor Darrell Mussatto are on hand to make and monitor presentations.

Two weeks earlier Wendy Easton, owner of Colette's Frocks received a personal invitation from City funded contractor Stephanie Clarke to attend the LLBA event and listen to the Mayor's speech on the BIA initiative. When Ms. Easton began to question the impact the BIA would have on her business she was visited by Menchie's owner Terry Shein and told she was no longer welcome at the meeting. Shein, who identified himself as 'Lead on the BIA' told Easton '*...we can't be on the same page, that I [Easton] have issues, different motives, other interests aside from visioning and he [Shein] is not prepared to manage me.*'

Easton, who's business has already suffered a \$40,000 year over year decline in income as a result of the Staburn project being constructed between 1st and 2nd streets, on the west side of Lonsdale, feels shunned questioning how the LLBA, operating with \$120,000 of City grant monies, can conduct meetings at City Hall on a taxation matter which will directly affect Colette's Frocks yet has the authority to refuse attendance by a long time City business and taxpayer.



Easton was not the only small business person shunned by Shein. Pete of Big Pete's Comics and his lovely wife, long-time Lower Lonsdale business people of more than 15 years, who learned earlier in the day of the meeting, attended City Hall and were also denied access to the meeting by Shein and Clarke. When questioned why he could not attend, Shein told Pete that it was an LLBA meeting solely to do with LLBA finances and the BIA would not be discussed. This comment turned out to be in stark contrast to the information given Easton, who was told that financial issues and budgeting would not be subjects of the meeting, and her interest in those topics was why her invitation had been withdrawn.

LLBA members attending the event included Doug Assman, Terry Shein, Stephanie Powers, and the City's representative responsible for the BIA, Larry Orr. When question on the veracity of the allegation that the BIA would not be discuss in the meeting, Larry Orr laughed admitting '*...the process needs to be open and honest...*' and that misleading Lower Lonsdale business people in yet another attempt to sneak up and ensnare them in a new BIA taxation regime was an obvious error in judgement by LLBA organizers.

When asked to comment on what costs currently borne by the City could potentially be downloaded on Lower Lonsdale businesses, Orr would not say. He did admit the City will be looking around the province at the actions of other municipal governments to help determine the costs which may be transferred to the new BIA structure when approved. Pushed on this point, Orr admitted cost transfers could include LoLo Christmas Street lighting and light pole flags, event based garbage collection, park benches, flower gardens, and much much more. Its estimated the biggest cost burden may be associated with making ice at the new Roger Brooks outdoor sea-level ice rink, a potentially staggering burden. Orr also admitted none of these cost transfers had yet been determined. Orr admitted the intention to transfer these costs to the BIA should be disclosed to LoLo businesses in advance of this initiative going before council.

In addition to budgetary issues, it will be necessary for council to determine if the LLBA is legally able to operate a BIA as a partisan organization that used some of the grant monies provided by the City to lobby for the Mussatto 'Slate' in the 2014 local election.