

# Wingham BIA clarifies position on Town Hall Theatre

*Dave Tiffin: 'Let's not look for reasons why things can't be done, let's look for ways to make things happen'*

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WINGHAM—The operation parameters of the Wingham Town Hall Theatre were openly discussed at the April 2 regular North Huron council meeting, but a decision on how to proceed was deferred to a later date after BIA Chair Dave Tiffin requested more time for a constructive conversation between township staff and the BIA.

The BIA is hopeful that this conversation will lead to a positive resolution.

According to a report to council from Director of Public Works Gregg Furtney, several operational challenges have emerged in the past few months. These include noise complaints from township staff, primarily about the sound checks and equipment setup for the performances, a lack of green room space, and privacy concerns due to access to municipal assets and records, which were mainly related to the use of the former Council Chambers as a Green Room. These challenges highlight the need for a constructive conversation to find practical solutions.

Additionally, Furtney cited concerns that bands setting up for a live show may not be using the correct entranceways. However, Tiffin said the BIA was unaware of the noise complaints or the doors being accessed incorrectly until now.

"Previously signed rental agreements allow event organizers to enter the building after 8:30 a.m. and conduct sound checks after 2 p.m. Performance Staff tend to use multiple building entrances to coordinate

getting their equipment into the building and up into the theatre. This often causes a lot of noise and makes it challenging for staff to conduct municipal business," Furtney's report said. "Staff are seeking council's direction regarding the scheduling of the Wingham Town Hall Theatre operations and recommend the Wingham Town Hall Theatre Rental Contract be updated accordingly. Staff are also seeking direction regarding use of the former Council Chambers as a Green Room."

Tiffin said a meeting Furtney requested with BIA treasurer Doug Kuyvenhoven and North Huron Recreation Department's Rachele Gerrie, who was handling bookings then, was held in Oct. 2023 to begin discussions on the operation parameters.

"So they had a meeting because Gregg was concerned about the use of staff. He didn't really want staff involved in opening up for acts and things like that. And that's fine. He's concerned about some overtime issues. And he was just wondering what could be done about it," said Tiffin. "So, as a result, there was a suggestion put forth to the BIA that maybe the BIA should do oversight of the theater, exclusive of bookings."

In December 2023, the BIA passed a motion to advise Furtney that they were in full support of taking on oversight of the Town Hall Theatre, with the exclusion of bookings.

After delivering the motion to Furtney in January, Furtney, Kuyvenhoven, Tiffin, and Community Engagement Coordinator Denise Lockie scheduled a meeting to discuss how things would be handled. Tiffin said, "And everything looked pretty

good."

"The BIA was going to set up a subcommittee to handle the operation of the theater. And we were going to have somebody designated as like a house manager. And that person will be responsible for letting the groups in, helping them get organized, basically what a staff person had had to do previously, and what they wanted to get away from," said Tiffin.

The BIA was waiting for a required Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) from the township. This document is crucial as it outlines the terms and conditions of the BIA's oversight of the theatre, including its responsibilities and limitations. Tiffin said, "And that hadn't been coming. And so we were getting kind of concerned about it."

Tiffin added that when the BIA inquired about what was happening, they were taken aback by the complaints, "about noise and lack of accessibility to the kitchenette, and using various entrances and things like that, which totally blew us away," said Tiffin. Up until the late fall, everything seemed to be okay; we'd never heard any complaints. So it came as a bit of a surprise to us.

Tiffin is still waiting to hear about the MOU, saying until that is established, they can't move forward with their plans.

On the morning of the April 2 council meeting, Tiffin learned that there was an agenda item regarding this matter, which provided North Huron council with four options to choose from. However, the BIA had yet to be asked to provide input, so he went before the council to ask for a deferral until discussions could be held between all parties.

An email from a concerned Wingham resident indicating that North Huron council was to blame for the current situation prompted Tiffin to ask residents to have patience as they work through the details, adding that council can only make decisions based on the information they are provided. They can only make an informed decision if they have all the information.

A meeting was scheduled for April 19 between the township and the BIA to discuss this matter further, but it was cancelled, Tiffin said because he was unavailable that day. He questions why the meeting was cancelled because Doug Kuyvenhoven or Council. Mitch Wright could easily have sat in.

Tiffin said one of the BIA's primary concerns is that one of the suggested changes, which would limit shows to weekends only, would reduce the likelihood of well-known acts booking the theatre. Many of them like to book smaller shows during the week so they can perform at the bigger venues on weekends. This limitation could potentially affect the quality and variety of shows that can be brought to Wingham, a concern that the BIA is keen to address in the ongoing discussions.

Moving forward, Tiffin is optimistic that the cancelled meeting will be rescheduled soon. The BIA remains steadfast in its commitment to the theatre's success, and Tiffin is eager for the township and the BIA to sit down and work out a mutually beneficial compromise. This will ensure that the work the BIA has been doing to make Wingham an attraction for well-known musical acts can continue.

Tiffin said, "Let's not look for reasons why things can't be done, let's look for ways to make things happen."