

Open Discussion
Dawson City Hotel Owners
and the Impact of COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Meeting held on April 2nd at 4:00pm, via ZOOM videoconference

In attendance:

Brad Whitelaw -Triple J Hotel
Pat Brooks – Goldrush Campground
Adam Gerle – Downtown Hotel
Lee Manning – Yukon Spaces
Tracy Abbott – Westmark Inn
Jackie Olson - KVA
Steve Nordick – Aurora Inn
Stephen Lancaster – Downtown Hotel
Will Fellers - KPMA
Brooke Rudolph - KPMA

Kat Derusha: Hello everyone and welcome. Jackie Olson reached out to me and we thought it would be a good idea to get Dawson hotel owners together and talk about how your businesses will be impacted. As well, how to handle guests coming from outside the community needing to self isolate. It would be good if we are all on the same page and have the same health guidelines on how to operate. Does anyone have any comments about the impact on your business? Who would like to start?

Pat Brooks: We are not a hotel, but I can tell you we will not have a May, and probably wont have a June. And beyond that, I don't know. We are looking at a possibility of not opening for 2020 season. Our line in the sand is that if we can't open before August, we will not open at all. It doesn't make much sense for us to de-winterize our property for only a short period. Where we are, there is no travel and no tourism travel allowed in BC, only essential travel is, and the Yukon will probably follow suit. And I suppose most people are on the same boat.

Lee Manning: We are very new, and we are not expecting to have any income this year. We are wondering how we can survive. We are looking at all the Government funding programs, but it doesn't look like we qualify for any of them, because we are new and have no history. So, we are quite concerned at the moment.

Adam Gerle: Same at the Downtown. The annex is completely closed. The Saloon is shut down, the restaurant is open for takeout until early evening. We are only at 10% occupancy and had lots of cancellations this year. We are also going ahead with the Midnight Sun, but we are pushing our opening date further into May.

Steve Nordick: We are the same situation as anyone else, no reservations coming in anytime soon so we are effectively closed until everything blows over.

Brad: It all sounds very bleak. At the Triple J we general open in April for Raw TV, but that was cancelled. We are continuing to thaw the building and prepare, but we have no intention of opening the restaurant so far. We need to see what unfolds in the season and go from there, we will be prepared for opening if we need to, but it doesn't look good. I don't think the Spirit will go on the river at all as it doesn't seem feasible.

Steve Nordick: Also it makes no sense to create competition against hotels that are already open and fully staffed, so it is a delicate situation.

Kat Derusha: Will and Brooke are here from the KPMA and they have been working with miners and sending information to ensure everyone returning is self isolating. I'm going to hand it over to Brooke.

Brooke Rudolph: A few of the things we are trying to do include a job offer letter distributed to miners that has very strongly worded rules for hiring new staff. We also have a tracking form for employers to provide information about where their employees came from and where they stopped along the way. We are also putting together a list of local businesses that are still offering services and we encourage miners to shop locally and support businesses. We have safe work policies regarding COVID-19 distributed, the KPMA does not condone on anyone breaking the quarantine rules, so please report anyone who does.

Lee Manning: Currently it takes about an hour and a half to clean each room, we are trying to keep everything as sanitized as possible. We get take out and offer grocery deliveries to guests, try to do as much as we can to help reduce the risks and make it as easy as possible for people to isolate.

Will Fellers: We really appreciate all the extra effort that hotels are putting in, it definitely doesn't go unnoticed.

Jackie Olson: Are you encouraging all the mines are supporting the local economy as much as possible?

Will Fellers: Yes, absolutely. One of the things we did is put together a list of who is offering services like no-contact boxed deliveries, including all the contact information as well. We have also told people to come prepared with at least two weeks worth of supplies to self isolate.

Jackie Olson: Any negative feedback or pushback against isolation?

Will Fellers: Actually no, there has been nothing but overwhelming compliance, and even before we issued these recommendations, people were already proactively taking measures. Also, like we said, please report to us if anyone is not complying. Also please note that there are people with BC or Alberta plates that have been up in camp for two months and they are only coming into town now, but that doesn't mean that they haven't isolated.

Jackie Olson: Maybe there is a way that people can have a green sticker in their car that is issued after they have quarantined, to mark that they are safe?

Kat Derusha: There was an announcement from the Government that they will put checkpoints along the highways to track where people are coming from and whether they have self isolated. Maybe this is a way to track that?

Lee Manning: Also, communicating is important, just letting those things be known can be just as effective.

Will Fellers: Once the enforcement comes into place, that is going to make people feel a lot more secure too.

Kat Derusha: Are there any talks about a courier service coming into camps?

Will Fellers: I think Smalls Expediting is offering that service, but I don't have any more information beyond that.

Jackie Olson: Regarding funding: Any of you planning on accessing that funding? And if you are, how is it going for you?

Brad Whitelaw: I am not ready for that struggle yet, I don't have the patience for it. I hope that it comes out in a good fashion, but I really don't foresee that. I am just holding out for the other shoe to drop. To have any long-term plans is just not feasible for me right now. If there is financing available, I will have Dennis look into that.

Jackie Olson: I just want to sure you that the message that is going forward is that these funding opportunities need to be accessed in a timely manner.

Pat Brooks: I spoke with the MP after our meeting at noon. It appears that as a seasonal businesses, we don't fall into the parameters of funding. But he said he wants to bring this forward to Ottawa since there are many cases like us.

Jackie Olson: Yes, just like the new businesses that are falling through the cracks.

Brad Whitelaw: I didn't mean to downplay the funding efforts, but these numbers that they are dealing with and how fast everything is happening would stagger any system.

Jackie Olson: Because the federal Government is guaranteeing business loans, there wont be the same pushback or waiting as would happen before. The challenge is to work with the system so our needs are heard.

Lee Manning: We have been very lucky with our bank, they have forgiven our interest rates for this month. I have been wondering about deferments, and how they don't really work, and how they end up making the bank money with all the accumulated interest. There are campaigns on social media about this, to exert pressure on these unfair practices.

Jackie Olson: I agree, any social media pressure we can put and have a presence would be good. Also there are many people who need those funds the most, and they will not be accessing them. It is only making things worse to accumulate interest and debts, when there will still be no revenue.

Kat Derusha: Another funding opportunity is that for cancelled events. Any events that were cancelled in town might be covered, I believe hotels can access these funds as well to cover the costs of cancellations.

Jackie Olson: I definitely encourage you all to access those funds if possible.

Kat Derusha: Also if anyone has any trouble accessing these funds, give us a call. We are trying to gather as much information about this as we can.

Anyone have thoughts on housekeeping?

Lee Manning: The Corona Virus is very easy to kill when it is outside of the body: the outer layer of the virus is fat, so soap and water kills it very effectively. People have been bleaching their hands and this is not necessary at all.

Adam Gerle: I know everyone at the Downtown has been putting in a lot of effort into this. Heavy duty cleaners and disinfecting everything, but Steve would be the expert on that.

Stephen Lancaster: We happened to buy an ozone machine and it comes in very handy. If you put this machine in the room it kills any pathogen, and after, the ozone breaks down into oxygen. We use it in the rooms before the housekeeping staff comes in. We sanitize every surface, doorknobs, keys, everything. We are also installing a sneeze guard on the front desk. As well, we are offering discounted rates on rooms for people that need to self isolate.

Lee Manning: Also important to note that putting gloves on is not enough, because the virus can still spread through them. It is important to still disinfect.

Kat Derusha: Is there anything else that the Chamber of the KVA can help you with that you can think of?

Jackie Olson: Also, from the KVA I can tell you that Paul and his crew are working to keep people reminded of Dawson and still keep in the loop marketing-wise, even though of course travelling is not possible right now. We are planning our strategy for the future and we are concentrating mostly on a regional “explore your backyard” kind of message. There was also a mention of a tax break for travelling within Canada, I believe.

Kat Derusha: From the Chamber we are working to develop Shop Dawson initiatives, to try and encourage people to spend their money here, as well as to discover the tourism opportunities in our own town. If anyone has any comments or questions please contact me, any time.

Thank you everyone!

Meeting adjourned 16.49