

Battle of Stoney Creek Re-enactment Report of Findings

Background

Hamilton City Council directed staff on June 8, 2022 to consult with the public and key stakeholders regarding the scope, approach and programming of the Battle of Stoney Creek event.

As part of the consultation process, RO Jones Consulting was engaged by the City of Hamilton, Tourism and Culture Division, to provide facilitation services and a Report of Findings based on the input provided from the facilitated sessions.

Methodology

Invitations were sent out to the public by Civic Museums staff for a total of three facilitated sessions. Two of the sessions were held in-person at the Stoney Creek Battlefield House, and one session was held virtually using the City of Hamilton WebEx platform. The sessions took place on November 16, 21 and 25, 2022.

All sessions were facilitated by RO Jones Consulting with administrative assistance provided by Civic Museums staff at each session. The sessions were facilitated in a manner intended to establish a level of comfort amongst the participants and encourage full and equal participation from all involved. The goal was to promote authentic and constructive dialogue using the question areas and topics as prompts to guide the discussion.

Areas of Interview Focus

RO Jones worked collaboratively with Civic Museums staff to develop the topics and questions for the facilitated sessions. The consultation was intended to explore options and opportunities for the Battle of Stoney Creek to be commemorated while increasing the economic, educational and community benefits flowing from the event. From the outset, it was agreed the tone and purpose of the facilitated questioning was to be positive and prospective, i.e. to consider how we might build on the strengths of the event and identify what changes should be made to sustain and improve its positive impact.

Topics/Question areas for the facilitated sessions:

- 1) Identify the top three strengths of the event from everyone’s perspective and explain why they feel that way.
- 2) How might we expand the economic benefit of the event for local businesses?
- 3) How might we mitigate some of the negative impacts and challenges of the event, e.g. parking concerns; garbage collection/environmental impact; traffic problems, etc. Participants were encouraged to identify their own issues of concern beyond those suggested in the question to prompt discussion.

- 4) How might we expand and enhance the educational opportunities of the re-enactment event? Can we build on the existing History in Action Day? Could we connect with schools and students differently and effectively using technology? Can we connect with more and different schools and student populations than in the past?
- 5) What aspects or items would you like to see changed with the event? What in your opinion do we need to do more of, less of, do differently, start doing and/or stop doing at the event?
- 6) How would you like to be involved in this event? How could you or your group continue to see its expansion and success?

Report of Findings

A total of eleven individuals participated in the facilitated sessions. All participants had a longstanding connection to, and involvement with, the event. Their roles and connections to the event were varied and included re-enactors, event planners, vendors, service club representatives, the recently elected City of Hamilton Councillor for Ward 5, a representative of the Friends of Battlefield House, and a representative of the Stoney Creek Chamber of Commerce and Historical Society.

All sessions were consistent in terms of the topics and questions discussed to ensure consistency and relevance when aggregated for this report.

Top Strengths of the Event

The following areas were identified in response to this question. The responses are not ranked or weighted other than they are all considered by the participants to be one of the top two or three strengths of the event:

- a) Economic benefit for Stoney Creek and Hamilton. A significant tourist attraction.
- b) Community event with something for everyone. Both education and entertainment value. Its important to bring the community together and many new Canadians attend and learn more about local history. An effective positive connection with and for new Canadians in the area.
- c) Commemoration of the battle and keeping the history alive for each generation. Presenting an important historical event in a way that is entertaining. It is a form of active learning that is effective. It's important to refresh history in a way that is palatable to younger generations.
- d) The event brings talented passionate people to the area from across North America. This includes re-enactors, merchants, vendors and specialized crafts persons such as spinners and weavers.

Suggestions to build on these strengths

In terms of enhancing the educational aspects and impact of the event suggestions and comments included:

- a) Make new and additional connections with educational institutions including colleges and universities. Perhaps connect the event to college curricula such as the Mohawk College or Niagara College media training programs. Students could record the event, interview event participants and attendees, etc. as part of their program and create a reusable, transferable, record of the event and demonstrations that could be used in other schools to raise awareness and educate students.
- b) Use technology and some social media to better connect the event with younger students in a way that is familiar and comfortable for them.
- c) Establish an outreach program and hold talks throughout the year in schools about the event and the battle itself. Add more information in the story to include the role and perspective of Indigenous persons, women beyond their roles as cooks and vendors and the “Coloured Corps”. Currently it is a very male-dominated event. People want to see themselves represented.
- d) Kiwanis Clubs currently sponsor four Stoney Creek area schools. Perhaps more students from these schools could be invited to provide volunteer assistance at the event.
- e) Break the event into several demonstrations and have new additional people involved in telling the story and answering questions from those attending. Involve people in addition to the re-enactors to help tell a more fulsome story. Vendors are a big part of the event and are closely connected. Vendors interact with the public a great deal and get many questions about the battle and the related history. They are very knowledgeable and can be involved more effectively in telling the stories.
- f) Examine the possibility of a better connection with Fort George and Fort Erie as the Battle of Stoney Creek is part of a much larger battle.
- g) Develop and provide more accuracy and information as to the actual location of the battle and include more information on the important naval involvement in the overall battle.
- h) Utilize students to access Stoney Creek archives. Student research projects could create stories about the background of actual soldiers and their families from the battle. It would be an opportunity to amplify individual stories and tell the story of these people over time as opposed to just at the battle itself.
- i) Provide more pre and post event materials online for teachers to access year-round and possibly incorporate into their study programs.

- j) Connect with fourth year McMaster University students studying history, journalism, or business and marketing. This might become a co-op or internship opportunity for them and enhance the educational impact as well as level and type of student connections to the event.
- k) Consider how we might better connect the event and the overall history to newer Canadians. Possibly use common interests such as food and medicine as a platform to establish better connections, discussions and levels of involvement with the event. Food, medicine, and raising children are all common points of intersection with new Canadians unfamiliar with the battle history. We need to think about the scope of “community” more broadly when we create resources.
- l) Broaden the knowledge and information base to include stories about local families of the time such as the Gage family.
- m) Have actors in period costume go to the schools to inform and connect with the younger students directly and promote the event in April and May.
- n) There needs to be more People of Colour, Black, and Indigenous input to make it a better and more fulsome educational piece. We need more guest speakers and talks about aspects such as the role of the Black Militia.
- o) We need to better include the Indigenous perspective. This must be done authentically by and with Indigenous persons.
- p) Improve the experience for kids on History in Action Day. Make it more than a field trip. Use technology to make it more interactive and interesting for younger students at the site. Be more hands-on and experiential on Heritage in Action Day. Go beyond just local schools to include the Halton area schools and perhaps others.
- q) Increase and improve the demonstrations during the event and promote them as much as the battle re-enactment. Make better use of the vendor community to educate visitors and students. Many are well-versed in the history and are a regular point of contact for visitors with a variety of questions.
- r) Consider student volunteers to assist with the concession stands. Find ways for more direct student and school involvement overall.

The following is a list of suggestions made by participants to improve the economic impact of the event. They are not listed in any ranked or weighted order:

- a) More and better marketing and improved communication overall concerning the event. More outreach to local businesses.
- b) Connect with bus tour companies. Get assistance from Tourism Hamilton with this. Bring tourists from further distances who might well stay overnight or longer with potentially

positive impact on local restaurants and hotels as well as the event site itself. Possibly create more of an “all in one” event to get people involved beyond the self-contained battle site and have more involvement with downtown restaurants shops and hotels. Discounts from local merchants for attendees would be helpful.

- c) The local business community does not really realize the impact of the event. The Stoney Creek BIA has never been asked to contribute but is open to having more activity and partnership. The BIA might hold a complimentary festival to coincide with the battle event.
- d) Consider having food trucks on site and local restaurants offering incentives to dine there.
- e) Consider temporary changes to the local downtown Stoney Creek two-hour parking limit during the event to encourage people to stay longer and frequent local businesses before or after visiting the event site.
- f) The Town of Stoney Creek needs to be more involved. Participation from local businesses and the town has declined in recent years when compared with the past.
- g) The event needs better promotion. People find out about the event too late. It is hard to find information about the event on the City of Hamilton website and that site is often behind schedule. People in Niagara and Burlington need to know about the event with better communications and marketing.
- h) Consider types of business sponsorship for the event that would improve awareness, attendance and connection between event participants/attendees and those business sponsors. Discount coupons for downtown businesses could be a possibility. Sponsorship of shuttle buses between the downtown and the event site to connect attendees to the downtown business section might provide improved economic benefits.
- i) Meet with the business community to discuss possibilities and define their interests. Understand their needs and answer the “What’s in it for me” question from the business community.
- j) Re-evaluate having a licensed beer tent on site during the vent. This was a very popular and profitable aspect of the event when it existed in the past.

Identify and mitigate the event challenges and negative impacts

Participants were asked to identify challenges and negative impacts of the event and consider how these might be mitigated or overcome. Discussion included, but was not limited to, issues of parking, physical access, facilities, garbage and possible negative environmental impacts of the event.

The following list of comments and suggestions for improvement are not ranked or weighted:

- a) Parking was uniformly identified by participants as an issue of concern. The issue of

limited parking overall was mentioned in addition to the specific lack of accessible parking onsite. Limited parking impacts vendors and participants as well as visitors. It was noted that continued building and development on previously available local parking sites has made the situation much worse in the last few years.

- b) Consider a more effective shuttle bus or similar transportation option to mitigate the parking concerns. This could be a sponsorship opportunity and means of connecting visitors with the downtown business community during the event days.
- c) Access for seniors. Consider improved walking trail access for nearby seniors that would include benches along the pathway to rest as appropriate. These benches could be sponsored by local businesses.
- d) Insufficient and access to bathroom facilities on the site. Vendors and re-enactors need access to dedicated bathroom facilities during the event. They don't have time to wait in line-ups with the public to use the facilities and stay on schedule. The bathrooms become very dirty and need to be maintained more often and properly during the event. Some participants felt the City of Hamilton has not responded positively in the past to requests for more and improved bathroom facilities.
- e) There is a need to establish a more formal and effective weather/safety plan to put into effect in the event of inclement weather.
- f) Make the necessary repairs to re-establish a working kitchen hearth in the museum. This would significantly enhance the demonstrations and related learning experiences.

No issues with garbage collection or management were cited. Many of the participants were very complimentary of the good work done in this regard by City of Hamilton staff during the event.

No issues of negative environmental impact as a result of the re-enactment were raised by any of the participants.

Identify needed changes to improve the event

This was an open-ended opportunity for all participants to identify areas where they felt change was needed to sustain and improve future events. It was intended to identify concerns and solutions in addition to those cited by them earlier in the facilitated sessions, and in this report. In some instances, however, there may be some overlap between the following and previously documented suggestions for change in this report.

Participant comments and suggestions below are not in any ranked or weighted order:

- a) Develop a more realistic portrayal of the battle. There needs to be improvement in the scripting of the battle at the event and more mention made of the role of groups like the militia as well as the regular armies.

- b) Broaden the interpretation to include the perspectives of women, Indigenous and Black people.
- c) Find a way to involve other museum sites more involved, e.g. Dundurn and Military sites could create programming and get involved directly with the event. Make this the “flagship” event for the entire City. Make it the “best of the best”. Doing this could be an opportunity to involve and connect to a bigger and potentially broader audience.
- d) Use the Stoney Creek BIA to communicate and coordinate with local business.
- e) The event needs more support from the City of Hamilton. This support includes: marketing advertising and communications, appointing a person or persons in addition to the Battlefield Site Curator to coordinate with various City of Hamilton departments as necessary and support the Curator and volunteers, assist directly with the setting up and tearing down of the site, providing more and improved washroom/change facilities, and adopting more of a positive cooperative/partnership approach when interacting with the event planners, supporters, and participants.
- f) Maintain the free admission policy. Most participants cited this as a very positive change that had an on-going positive impact on attendance and improving levels of access within the community. Vendors benefit as well. Obtain sponsors if and as necessary to maintain free admission.
- g) The event does a good job at what it is intended to do. It is a re-enactment and teaches people about the battle. It is well organized and high quality. It needs a broader outreach with more voices being represented and heard.
- h) Consultations and outreach are necessary to get authentic input as to the perspectives and roles played by “Indigenous persons, Black, People of Colour and women” in the battle event and history.
- i) Make changes grounded in research. Don’t create a revisionist history.
- j) Consult with the organizing committee and others deeply involved before changes are made.
- k) Consider the possible re-allocation of the funds used to purchase fireworks to spend on improving other aspects of the event as identified.
- l) Train the professional staff so they can tell more fulsome nuanced stories during the event.
- m) Get clarity as to who are the City of Hamilton staffers that will take on the long-term event and help steer it. Establish a multi-disciplinary working group from the City of Hamilton to drive the event. City of Hamilton Tourism and Finance need to be more involved and

supportive. There have been recent staff and other changes so it's unclear currently who we are partnering with at the City of Hamilton.

- n) Pay attention specifically to seniors both in terms of access to the site as well as educational opportunities.
- o) Need to do more at the Battlefield site beyond the re-enactment. Consider creating mini demonstrations and events to hold year-round at the site to make the whole thing more relevant and improve awareness.

The following is a list of participants and their affiliation in the community consultations held on November 16, 21, and 25, 2022.

Cathy Wakeman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stoney Creek Historical Society and Chamber of Commerce
Heidi Madden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-enactor • Former Secretary of Friends of Battlefield House
Craig Williams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longstanding participant in the battle reenactment • Currently “Commander Crown Forces North America”
Matt Francis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Hamilton Councillor, Ward 5
Lisa Barty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-enactor and volunteer • Created the “History in Action” Day • Museum Degree
Stan Eastman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stoney Creek Lions Club • Longstanding involvement • Provides re-enactors breakfast
Christine Eastman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stoney Creek Lions Club • Similar involvement as Stan Eastman
Ron Burshaw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kiwanis Club President • Been involved with the event for 25 years • Provides water and bbq sales
Marilyn Pasher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kiwanis Club Secretary • Longstanding involvement with the event
Seika Groves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vendor • Archeology background • Well versed in the War of 1812 • Has a naval perspective of the battle • Does other unrelated historical re-enacting
Edd Scorpio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vendor involved with the event for 7 years • Indigenous • Does unrelated historical re-enacting