

Proposal to Council
Re: St. Marys Station Gallery
September 11, 2017

Background:

The St. Marys Station Gallery is a non-profit community-based art gallery, operating in the foyer of the historic Via station in St. Marys. The gallery is operated and funded by two community members, Cameron Porteous and Reed Needles, who rent studio space from the town in the station building. We initiated the idea of a free art gallery showcasing local art and artists, as a means of supporting the local arts community and bringing more attention to one of St Marys most iconic features. Since September 2016, the Gallery has hosted 10 separate exhibits, highlighting a variety of different artists and genres. Working closely with town officials and staff, we have created a series of exhibitions which have attracted more than 1300 visitors to the station. Planning for the 2017 – 2018 season is underway.

Mandate:

The St Marys Station Gallery operates under the following mandate:

“The St Marys Station Gallery operates under the understanding that it will:

1. showcase those artists working in various media whose creative insights, technical excellence and breadth of expression demonstrate a mastery of professional standards in artistic vision and technique,
2. assemble and exhibit a variety of works in 2 and 3D media, thereby giving exposure to artists who reflect the cultural diversity, history, talent and character of the community of St Marys, and
3. engender an appreciation for the historical significance of the Via station, and actively promote its preservation and heritage.”

Funding:

The Gallery operates as a non-profit organization, although it has yet to be granted that status officially. Admission to the gallery is free. Artists hang their work for free. Costs for display, advertising and promotion are covered by us at our own personal expense. The average cost of mounting an exhibition is about \$350.00. Donations have been solicited from visitors and local business to help defray expenses. Neither of us personally receive any profit from the exhibitions in any way, as we see this project as our contribution to the community as a whole.

Response/Effect:

Each of the exhibitions to date has received favourable reviews. A number of articles have appeared in local newspapers (St Marys Journal Argus, The St Marys Independent, The Stratford Beacon Herald) and on-line via Facebook and the Gallery's website. Those artists whose works have been presented receive both significant media attention, and an appreciably larger market for their work. This in turn has encouraged the creation of more local work.

Each new exhibit has hosted an opening night, where visitors meet the artists and preview their work. A number of local businesses have assisted at these openings, notably Jennie's Restaurant, Roancroft Framing, Barista's, MacDonald's Independent Grocery, Four Happy Restaurant, Macpherson's Arts and Crafts, The Flower Shop, and St Marys Office Solutions.

The Gallery therefore **directly** supports and receives support from local businesses and individuals, while at the same time **indirectly** supporting local businesses, as the visitors to the gallery also patronize local services such as restaurants, shops, bed and breakfast establishments, etc.

Finally, visitors to the Gallery are also introduced to the station itself, its history and cultural significance, as a major contributor to the growth of early St. Marys.

Future Plans:

We hope to continue this positive trend via a series of new exhibitions in the 2017-2018 season. Currently, we are pursuing displays of local photography, a Canadian premiere, a new exhibition combining the work of acclaimed bird photographer Herman Venendaal and local bird-carvers, a presentation of theatrical costume design by an respected local designer, more work from local artists, both individual and as part of the Stonetown Arts organization, new work from St Marys glass artist Peter Allan Ryce, as well as works created by local youth on a variety of themes.

Purpose of this Proposal:

We believe that the events, activity and response to our work over the past year has demonstrated the need for, and positive effect of having a designated Art Gallery in St. Marys. We have worked in close conjunction with Town officials over the year to ensure that we are in compliance with regulations and policies regarding liability, access, signage, security and insurance. We have enjoyed the support of the Town via the linking of our website to the Town's website, the inclusion of the Gallery on the Tourism Map of St Marys, and innumerable acts of kindness and assistance from Town staff. We are also very interested in helping bring attention to the station, and enlisting public support for Via services.

We are anxious to be able to continue offering art and support to the community, but since this is a non-profit venture, and we have been using our own personal funds to cover costs, we need additional support from Council. To that end, we would ask that members of Council consider the following three questions:

1. Does Council wish the Gallery to continue in the station?
2. Would Council consider "adopting" the St Marys Station Gallery as an officially sanctioned St Marys endeavour/attraction?
3. Would Council support the Gallery financially?

We sincerely appreciate your past and continued support. Thank you for your time and consideration of our requests.

Yours sincerely

C. Porteous

R. Needles