

Patios returning to King this spring, summer

By Mark PavilonsEditorLocal Journalism Initiative

Patio dining will return to villages across King this season. Councillors voted to continue the private and public land patio programs through 2021, in keeping with provincial, York and municipal COVID guidelines. The program was established last year in response to provisions set out by the provincial Alcohol and Gaming Commission, to support restaurants and food establishments during COVID-19. The local move will help King restaurants and establishments offer safe, outdoor, physically distant dining options. King has two programs, one on private lands and the other on public lands. The private patio program allows restaurants to develop a new, or expand an existing patio. It's designed to allow them to set up on the road right of way in village cores. The municipality helps by coordinating the location of the patio and also pitches in with structures and safety barrier planter boxes. Seven restaurants applied last June and they included Rockford's Bar and Grill, The Scruffy Duck, Sunset Grill (King City), Spresso, Wild Wing and Raffaele's Catina. In the public land program, applicants have to provide sketches and proof of insurance to protect the municipality. In Schomberg, Leonardo's Pizzeria and Smoke House, and the Grackle Coffee set up shop. Staff reported that Pop-Up Street Patios Inc. offered a 50% discount to support costs through Central Counties Tourism. Other costs were covered through the Economic Development program budget. Township staff carried out a survey in the summer and fall of 2020 in Schomberg and the results were very positive. The majority (over 85%) felt the patios should be reinstated this year, and they were beneficial to local businesses. More than 93% enjoyed their Main Street dining experiences. Staff received strong support for the program, but did note there were some challenges. They included developing an application process that included government guidelines; developing the patio programs quickly, and trying to accommodate the needs of businesses, while balancing government regulations. The AGCO is authorizing the extension of "by the glass" licences, to extend licenced premises. King isn't asking for any fees associated with the program, but the Township is asking those on public land contribute 10% of the fees, which works out to roughly \$350 per patio. "These two patio programs will help support one of King's hardest hit sectors as a result fo the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2021," staff said. As the pandemic continues and regulations also continue to change, the patio programs "would offer safe and viable options for businesses and their patrons."