

# »TORONTO STAR«

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## CANADA

# Peterborough's downtown street closure dubbed 'a debacle' on Stage 2's first night

By **Joelle Kovach** Staff Reporter

Sat., June 13, 2020 |  2 min. read

Closing George Street to vehicular traffic to allow people to walk around at a safe physical distance from one another was "a debacle" that deterred business rather than stimulated it, said DBIA executive director Terry Guiel.

"Today I was on damage control with angry shop owners," said Guiel in an interview early Friday evening.

The idea was to allow restaurants with no existing patios a "fast-track" to creating them, city spokesperson Brendan Wedley wrote in a statement to The Examiner.

On Thursday night, city councillors voted to authorize the city chief administrative officer to close lanes of vehicular traffic and of sidewalks in Peterborough to allow pop-up patios and outdoor shopping.

And then on Friday the city closed George Street for the weekend between Brock and King streets downtown.

But Guiel said the DBIA didn't want full closures of streets: it had asked for some lanes of traffic open and some parking spots available for curbside pickup of takeout food.

"This (full closure) does nothing but hurt our businesses," Guiel said.

Wedley wrote that the city kept side-streets open to help with curbside pickups, "but we know it isn't as convenient as parking right in front of a store."

Some restaurants along George Street had new pop-up patios on Friday night: Bar Vita and Real Thai Cuisine, for instance.

But Cork & Bean owner Steve Francis said "he didn't see the purpose" of closing the street for just a weekend.

At The Favourite Greek restaurant on George Street, owner George Vassiliadis, the brother of Coun. Don Vassiliadis, said business was slow on Friday evening.

He blamed the street closure and said few people were out walking on Friday.

"We're just getting back on our feet, and now we're hit with this," he said.

Peterborough Square manager Cheryl McQueen said she didn't want to be "too negative" about the closure. She said the city is just trying to assist its tenants.

At the Black Horse Pub on George Street, owner Desmond Vandenberg has been offering takeout since March but business has nonetheless declined by 80 per cent.

He said he saw the reopening of the patio as "a glimmer of hope" that he might boost business by offering both takeout and a patio.

"But we've seen a big drop-off in takeout today," Vandenberg said.

At Frame It For You, a frame shop on George Street, the owner was obviously unhappy: There was a sign in the window stating "The Mayor and Council are Hurting Downtown Businesses."

The store was closed by the time The Examiner got there at 6 p.m.

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