

October 22, 2022

TO: Village of Long Grove Board of Trustees, Village of Long Grove Staff

FROM: Jeff and Terri Taylor, Owners of Ma and Pa's Candy, 424 Robert Parker Coffin Rd.
and residents of the Village of Long Grove

RE: Consideration of Funding for Bridge Lighting

We would like the Village Board and Staff to be aware of details from the 2021 Bridge Lighting Ceremony and share our views about the request that the Village of Long Grove provide financial sponsorship for the Bridge Lighting Ceremony to be held Friday, November 18, 2022, 5-6:30pm.

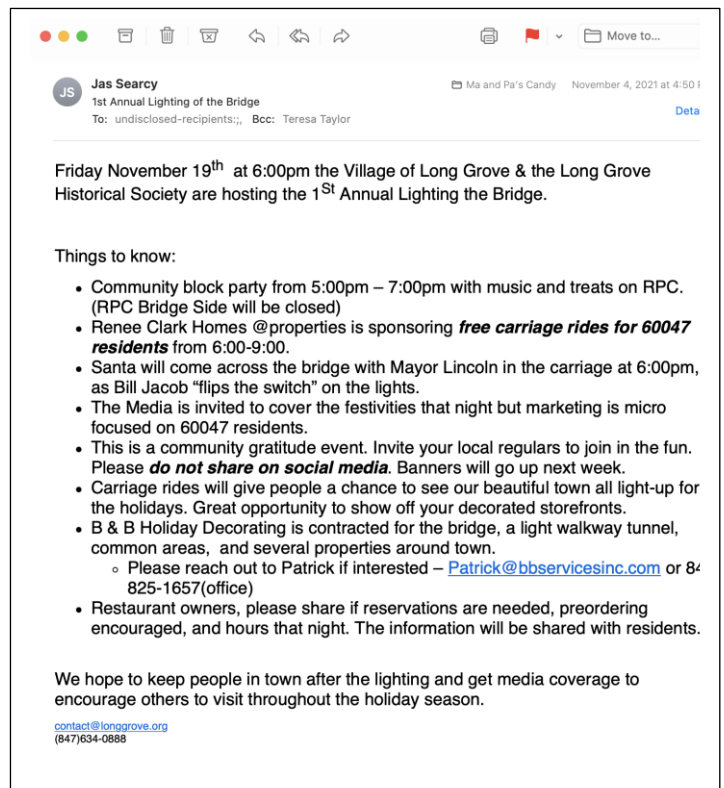
A Bit of History

In years prior to 2021, the HDLGBA sponsored and promoted a Holiday Kick-Off Event on a Thursday evening in mid-November. All businesses were encouraged to stay open late and have holiday decorations in place so the full historic downtown could “kick-off” the holiday season with an evening of shopping, dining and celebration. Locals and beyond were welcome to attend.

In 2021, the HDLGBA dropped this event. We do not know why or who decided to do so, but our business was indeed disappointed. Members of the HDLGBA were sent an email on November 4, 2021 informing us about a Holiday Bridge Lighting that would be taking place on November 19. Language in the email made it appear to be a collaboration between the Village and the Historical Society, but in fact was planned by an individual business and was also not a collaboration with the HDLGBA. We understand the contents of the email were submitted by the event planner Ms. Mary Prekop, Long Grove Confectionery. The HDLGBA was not involved in the planning or execution of the event. To the right is a copy of the email.

Bridge Lighting 2021

It seemed that this new event would take the place of the past Holiday Kick-Off. The new event was being communicated for “locals only” with no encouragement for businesses to be involved unless you were a restaurant. It was being referred to as a “block party” with not one business on the block being invited to participate in any way. And it was taking place after typical business hours for most retail establishments in downtown Long Grove, providing no immediate benefit to the neighboring businesses.



The strict rules set for who was welcome to attend and how businesses could or could not share information about it was difficult to comprehend. How would people know the event was happening? Wouldn't we want the street filled with people, residents and others? As a business owner being encouraged to "invite our local regulars" we were provided only two weeks notice to get the word out. Best practices for event planning suggest a much longer window of time to properly promote a successful event. And why would we not want locals who live in neighboring communities to visit our town for this special event?

We have many regulars who live close by, but outside the 60047 zip code (Buffalo Grove, Arlington Heights, Palatine, Mundelein and more) who we consider to be part of our local community. Not to mention, the zip code 60047 is not exclusive to Long Grove, but includes residents of Lake Zurich, Hawthorn Woods and Kildeer.

Our business does not keep track of where everyone lives (we don't poll every customer or currently keep a database with addresses), so how would we know who we could tell about this exclusive event? We believe the only direct communication to Long Grove residents came in the form of an email from the Village of Long Grove approximately 48-72 hours prior to the event. Which we can assume is probably a limited list of recipients (only those who've signed up) and provided residents (or whoever is on the email list) very little notice to make plans to attend.

The whole experience seemed poorly planned and completely discriminatory based upon where someone resides. It appeared to be less about community and more about self-promotion for the event planner and sponsor (note the invitation to the media to attend). Isn't the very block where the event is taking place part of the community?

Our Own Holiday Kick-Off

We felt it made perfect sense to get our own business ready for the holidays and decided to host a Holiday Kick-Off during the hours of the Bridge Lighting event. If people were going to possibly be in town, we should put forth an effort to be open for business. And why shouldn't we be able to invite our social media followers and promote our own event?

We invited some other businesses in town to stay open during the event hours or participate in some way in hopes that eventgoers would be looking for additional things to do during their visit. We quickly made posters and shared our event on Facebook. We welcomed everyone to get a free cone of fresh spun cotton candy inside our business, wear an ugly holiday sweater (and be entered to win a gift basket) and to get a head start on their holiday shopping.

The Bridge Lighting Event planner was not pleased by the decision that we and other businesses had chosen to host or participate in an event during the same time as the Bridge Lighting. She expressed this during a heated exchange with an HDLGBA board member during business hours and in front of customers. She later apologized.

We received a lot of positive feedback from visitors that night who thanked us for being open. Some were surprised that more businesses were not open.

Conclusion

We (as residents and business owners in Long Grove) do support the idea of a Bridge Lighting Ceremony that is truly about community. But past acts show this event, in its' current format, is anything but that. Community is more than a zip code.

A flyer about the upcoming event was presented at the October 2022 HDLGBA Board Meeting on October 15 which lists the planned activities and partners supporting the event. The HDLGBA is not one of these partners. No other formal communication has been provided to members of the HDLGBA about this event, which is now four weeks from yesterday. See right.

We do not support a decision by the Village to provide any funds now, or in the future, to an event in the Historic Downtown Business District that strictly limits attendance and excludes the business community from participation or benefit. An event like this should be about collaboration and inclusion, a real celebration of downtown Long Grove. Events like this are typically managed by the HDLGBA and are one of the reasons why the organization exists. We believe this is a missed opportunity for a larger celebration that could benefit Long Grove residents, other local community attendees, the entire historic business district and any other area partners invited to collaborate.



We appreciate that the Village is revising the Community Grant Program. We hope that stricter rules will apply in the future that prevent misuse of the funds supplied. We also hope the Village will not provide financial support for privately managed events.

We thank you for your time and efforts to make a decision that reflects the best interests of the entire Long Grove community.