

**Matthew and Jordyn Howse**

**Owners, Better Vibe Cafe**

204 Conrad Road, Lawrencetown, NS

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11 March 2024

Dear Halifax Regional Municipality and Council,

We are writing to you on behalf of Better Vibe Ice Cream and Coffee, a café and bakery seeking to establish within the heart of Lawrencetown, located at 204 Conrad Road, PID 00490862. Our vision for Better Vibe Cafe is to transform the RR-1/industrially zoned-use space, formerly a carpentry shop, into a small, community-centric take-out cafe with dine-in seating for 15 customers. This letter serves as a rationale for the requested development agreement, highlighting alignment with the municipal planning strategy and the numerous benefits our cafe will bring and has brought to the local community.

### **Previous business use**

The existing site previously functioned as an industrial carpentry shop. It employed 13 carpenters, and both previous owners. They produced cabinetry and custom kitchens, stairwells, tables, and served as a warehouse for wood and materials for homebuilding. The basement was used for spraying chemicals, solvents, and paints. All sprays were ducted out the East wall with fans. There remains an area of construction debris in the field behind the shop. There was regular truck traffic for materials and finished product delivery, customer pickups, and employee traffic. The carpentry shop produced regular noise from woodworking and the use of electric and air tools, including an industrial air compressor.

### **Business use since purchase**

We have been running Better Vibe as a takeout café for the past two years, thinking that we had already achieved all of the correct permitting to run a takeout. We are new to both business and homeownership and have mistakenly missed this step of obtaining a development agreement/permit. We have aimed to and will continue to be transparent and above-board at every juncture. We are registered with the Province as a food establishment and public water drinking source, and registered federally with the CRA. We have even been featured in several HRM publications.

### **Proposed Use**

The transformation into Better Vibe Cafe represents a change which sees the business use produce much less nuisance and produce many benefits for the neighbourhood, the wider community, and tourists visiting the area and Conrad Beach. The proposed use would focus on serving food and beverage to the community and providing a meeting place which, compared to the previous use, significantly lessens noise, eliminates the spray of chemicals and sawdust, and ends the dumping and stockpiling of materials.

We envision a place that is a hub for community reconnection in the post-COVID-19 era. Our cafe will offer a warm, welcoming space, facilitate the rekindling of community bonds, serve as a gathering spot for neighbours and local interest groups of all ages, and provide support to the neighbourhood during extreme weather events and power outages.

## **Enhanced Community Connectivity and Tourism Appeal**

Our neighbours often remark how happy they are to have a place to happen by each other. People in the neighbourhood who have moved here from other provinces and countries frequently voice their support that Better Vibe has helped them make new friendships upon moving here. Similarly, many old friends and long-time residents have remarked that the shop has helped bring them back together after the pandemic, and gives them a place to run into each other. Most importantly, our space and atmosphere has helped connect and intermingle these two groups.

Since we opened in 2022, Better Vibe Cafe has enjoyed robust backing from the community and has become a favored destination for tourists. Lawrencetown is a tourist destination with a patchwork of options for people to stay for extended periods. Tourists stay with local friends and family, stay at AirBnBs or Bed and Breakfast's, camp at Porter's Lake campground, or sleep in vans in many of the scenic parking lots. Guests and hosts from all accommodations have been very appreciative that we provide an option for people nearby to come for meals and to meet people from the community.

## **Accessibility and Inclusivity**

Many of the businesses on the Eastern Shore are in heritage properties, which often pose accessibility challenges, Better Vibe Cafe is committed to providing an accessible and barrier-free environment for all patrons. Our design and renovations will ensure that everyone can enjoy the space comfortably and safely. This commitment underscores our belief in inclusivity and the importance of creating a space that welcomes everyone. Given our proximity to the Atlantic View Trail and Conrad Beach, many of our patrons arrive on foot with dogs or strollers, or on bicycles. Our proposed outdoor seating area will allow cyclists and dog owners to be served without coming inside, if they so choose.

## **Commitment to Fair Wages, Charitable Contributions and Community Support**

Our staff's well-being is central to our business ethos, evidenced by our policy of paying a minimum wage of \$20 per hour and paying culinary and NSCC grads \$25 minimum. We have employed six to ten local residents depending on the season, along with the two owners. Our staff to-date has consisted of local high-school students, university students, and NSCC graduates.

Our commitment to the community extends beyond the walls of our cafe. We have been actively engaged in charitable donations and support local initiatives that benefit Lawrencetown residents. Better Vibe Cafe is dedicated to giving back and strengthening the fabric of our community, to date we have made donations to the Adsum House, the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, local kids surf competitions, the Lawrencetown community centre, Open-View Preschool, and have provided free food, beverages, generator-based power, and clean drinking water to the neighbourhood during Hurricane Fiona.

## **Parking and EVs**

We acknowledge parking can be a challenge, especially during peak tourist seasons at Conrad Beach, at the south end of Conrad Road. We have had two people in the neighbourhood express that they do not want people parked on the side of the road in front of their house. Firstly, we are committed to expanding our parking area from its current eight spaces to 12 spaces depending on which design is approved with the permit application. This expansion aims to alleviate congestion and improve

accessibility, supporting both local residents and visitors. Secondly, on-street parking is a reality of Conrad Road, because there are approximately 8 parking spaces at Conrad Beach, which regularly sees up to 250 cars visit at one time throughout the summer, resulting in on-street parking for the entire length of the road with overflow parking at the Lawrencetown community centre.

We plan to install two electric car chargers at Better Vibe Café as part of this development. Currently, there are no publicly accessible electric car charging stations in the area, making this initiative a pioneering step towards supporting green transportation within Lawrencetown. This addition not only emphasizes our commitment to sustainability but also enhances the area's infrastructure, encouraging eco-friendly travel options. The nearest chargers in either direction that we are aware of at this time are The Opus Cafe in Dartmouth (13km West) and Uprooted Market in Musquodoboit Harbour (34km Northeast).

We strongly believe that Better Vibe Cafe represents a forward-thinking, environmentally responsible, and community-focused use of the space that aligns with the goals and policies of the Halifax Regional Municipality's planning strategy. That our cafe enhances the local area's appeal and also serves as a model for sustainable and community-oriented business practices.

We kindly request your consideration and support for a development agreement and/or zoning changes to make Better Vibe Cafe a reality. We are more than willing to engage in further discussions, provide more information, and to adjust our business model and designs to best serve the community.

Thank you for considering our proposal. We look forward to the opportunity to contribute positively to our beloved community.

Warm regards,

A solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Matt and Jo  
Owners, Better Vibe Cafe