

After careful consideration, a decision has been made to cancel the 2020 Taste of Hamburg-er Festival scheduled to be held on September 5th in downtown Hamburg. This was not an easy decision for the festival committee to make, but at this point there is no other choice than to cancel. Currently Berks County is still in the “red” phase under Governor Wolf’s plan on reopening the state and it could take weeks until the county gets to the “green” phase, and even at that time gatherings are limited to a maximum capacity of 100. With the event drawing approximately 50,000 people to the town, there is no way the current social distancing guidelines could be implemented.

“We must be concerned not only for the safety of the general public, but also our volunteers” says Jeff Pettit, President of the Our Town Foundation, the organization which hosts the event. In 2019 there were approximately 225 people who volunteered their time during the event.

Our Town Foundation held off as long as they could in making their final decision; however, an event of this magnitude takes months of planning, and according to Deena Kershner, Director of the Foundation, they are already behind schedule. “We have been holding off on booking the entertainment, seeking sponsors, and contracting with our advertisers, but we can’t wait any longer. Vendors are starting to contact me asking if a decision has been made” says Kershner. “Vendor applications started to pour in already in February and over 150 have already been processed. Once the Governor started mandating business closures in March, we put everything on hold and stopped processing the applications that came in later. All vendors will be notified of our decision and will be asked to save the date for next year’s event which is scheduled for Saturday, September 4, 2021.”

Unfortunately, with the annual festival being canceled, the Foundation will be taking a big hit financially. “By far, the Taste of Hamburg-er Festival is our biggest fund raiser for the organization. We have already lost thousands of dollars since March with all of our other fundraisers and events having to be canceled” says Kershner. “In April we were forced to cancel our annual Art of the Brew Fest which is our 2nd largest fund raiser. In addition, going into 2020 we had already lost approximately \$15,000 in grant funding from the Berks County Community Foundation for our arts programming due to the fact they shuttered that particular grant program. I have already received notice that our state funding for the arts is also in jeopardy. We are really taking a hit.” Our Town Foundation also owns and operates the Hamburg Strand Theater which was forced to close on March 14, so there is no income being generated at the Theater with the exception of curbside popcorn and concession sales. The staff at both the Hamburg Strand Theater and the offices of the Our Town Foundation have been laid off since the end of March. Because of the financial concerns of the organization, a Go Fund Me account has been set up in hopes of raising enough money to sustain the organization through this crisis. The account can be accessed through this link <https://bit.ly/2LLoknA>.

Our Town Foundation’s mission is “to promote and preserve downtown historic Hamburg for our families and future generations to enjoy”. Formed in 2002 they have been instrumental in receiving over \$3,500,000.00 in grant funding for the Borough. In addition to offering business assistance and hosting the annual Taste of Hamburg-er Festival, they administer the Hamburg Area Arts Alliance and own and operate the Hamburg Strand Theater which they purchased in 2013 to save it from its demise. The Foundation has implemented major projects within the Hamburg Borough including a downtown streetscape project, assisting with the creation of local hiking and biking trails, and establishing native community gardens. A complete list of their accomplishments can be found on their Go Fund Me page.

