

Opposition to **gay-village** fundraiser a timing issue: BIA; Business group says 'bureaucratic foul-up' delayed notice of request to close Bank St.

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The Bank Street Promenade Business Improvement Area opposed closing a stretch of the downtown road for a fundraiser because of the short notice the group received, its executive director says, not because of the cause.

The Bank Street Village Initiative had hoped to hold a screening of *The Wizard of Oz* on Bank Street last night to raise money to buy rainbow gay-pride flags to adorn the streetscape. The group hopes to convince the city to designate Bank between Nepean and James streets as Ottawa's "**gay village**."

But the city declined to close off a block of Bank in the evening, partly because the Bank Street BIA opposed the proposed event, so the organizers moved it to nearby Gilmour Street.

Relations between the Village Initiative and the BIA have been strained since the BIA's board of directors decided against supporting the **gay village** designation. Instead, the BIA says individual businesses can decide how they might want to appeal to gay customers.

The business group's executive director, Gerry LePage, said neither he nor the BIA opposed the fundraiser, and the association's opposition was driven by concern from its members over the lack of notice given to area businesses.

"This has absolutely nothing to do with the nature of the event whatsoever," he said. "It's inappropriate to close a major street and have absolutely no notification to the BIA or its members."

A Village Initiative spokes-man said the group asked the city for permission to close Bank for the evening back in early August, but the request seems to have gotten lost in a paperwork shuffle.

Mr. LePage said he found out about the event late last week when one of the BIA's members phoned him after seeing a poster. But Mr. LePage said he did not fault the Bank Street Village Initiative for the lack of notification.

"It was just a bureaucratic foul-up," he said, adding that what the Village Initiative is trying to do -- raise its own money and drum up community support -- is to be commended and is what the BIA's board had in mind in terms of "bottom up" branding for the neighbourhood.

"Why would we be averse to this? It's simply not consistent with our historical position," he said, citing the association's support of events during Gay Pride Week. "This was simply a question of a lack of communication between the city, the BIA and its membership."