



Paul and Natasha Tobias-Cooper credit the City of Saint John for help opening their two wedding venues.

Photo: Barbara Simpson/Telegraph-Journal

🕒 Published a day ago



Barbara Simpson | Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • After years of helping couples take the leap of faith into marriage, wedding planners Paul and Natasha Tobias-Cooper decided it was time for them to make a new commitment to their

business.

The couple sold their house in Hampton and purchased the Cornerstone Baptist Church. They dreamt of turning the Leinster Street building into a sleek modern wedding venue.

“I saw this picture [of the church] and I knew exactly what I wanted to do with it as soon as I saw that, so I took the step and said, ‘Let’s sell our house in Hampton. Let’s put the money and equity down for the Cornerstone Baptist Church,’” Natasha said.

Even before they had the keys, the Tobias-Coopers, who run Natasha’s Weddings & Events, had managed to secure 33 bookings within two days of the news going viral on social media.

Fast forward a year later and they’re well on their way to their own wedding venue empire in Saint John.

The couple recently hosted the first wedding at the Rockland, its new wedding venue in the former Holy Trinity Church on Rockland Road. Even with the second venue, Natasha said they’re booked for weddings into 2022.

While they put their own money on the line, the Tobias-Coopers credit Saint John’s planning department for helping them turn a dream into a reality.

“When I first came to the One-Stop Development Shop, I thought, ‘Oh boy here we go.’ I’d been through it in Ontario, I’d been through it in Nova Scotia when you walk in to get a permit you felt like you were going across the border,” said Paul, who is a former contractor from Ontario.

But instead the Tobias-Coopers said city planning staff were willing to sit down and explain the planning approvals they needed to open up shop in Saint John.

“Our stress was we still owned Natasha’s Wedding & Events and we still had to do 15 weddings a weekend,” Natasha said. “I was busy enough as it was let alone with owning a venue, so it was

fantastic that nobody turned their back on us and said, ‘Figure it out yourself.’”

City focused on cutting red tape

In 2016, the City of Saint John launched the One-Stop Development Shop, an initiative that allows developers to get their development-related approvals and permits through a single dedicated team of staff.

In the last few months, the city’s growth and community development services, who oversaw the one-stop shop, have been working on a new customer service enhancement plan.

“We bring dreams to life, so whether it’s a backyard deck or a dream garage or a growing business, we make projects happen and what we’re going to do to continue to make these happen is we’re going to continue to improve,” said Rachel Van Wart, customer service and operations manager for the One-Stop Development Shop.

Customer service enhancements include the hiring of a customer service manager, new customer service surveys for developers and celebratory site visits to thank developers.

“The one thing people do like is to be recognized and handheld through these developments, so anything our staff can do to move that along is better for everybody,” said Deputy Mayor Shirley McAlary at Tuesday’s growth committee meeting.

In order to reduce red tape, city staff have relaxed requirements for six-storey wood frame construction and streamlined the heritage approval process.

A pilot project is now underway to further help city staff problem solve with developers during the approval and permitting process, said Van Wart.

Based on his research, Coun. John MacKenzie said developers are experiencing a difference in Saint John.

“There are more projects than we’ve seen before on the waitlist now moving forward.”

 Published a day ago



Comments

My profile

Post a comment

2500 characters remaining

Post

All Comments 0

There are no comments yet. Why don't you write one?



COLLAPSE

NEWS

UPDATE: Skilled workers lining up for jobs: report