



SUBJECT: Future direction on events in Burlington

TO: Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.

FROM: Recreation, Community and Culture Department

Report Number: RCC-06-22

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 965-01

Date to Committee: April 7, 2022

Date to Council: April 19, 2022

Recommendation:

Receive and file recreation, community and culture department report RCC-06-22 regarding event delivery on city lands.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture

To provide background information on the work that was done in 2015 with the community, event organizers and elected officials on the development of an event strategy. Connect and integrate this previous work on events to the city's Framework for Community Recreation and as we emerge from the effects of COVID-19, seek Committee's feedback on the previous principles, processes, and direction to guide the future of events in Burlington.

Background and Discussion:

The city supports festival and events of all sizes which leads to connectedness and civic pride for residents in and throughout our vibrant neighbourhoods.

There are two operational models for events in Burlington:

1. Most events (80%) are organized by community organizations, professional event companies or residents (e.g., Sound of Music, Ribfest, Moon in June, Love My Neighbourhood).
2. The city directly plans and executes events in the community (e.g., Santa Clause Parade, Canada Day).

Before COVID, the city hosted four Top 100 Festival and Events in Ontario annually; two delivered through community organizations; Sound of Music and RibFest and two by the city's Festival and Events Unit; Canada Day and Children's Festival.

In 2015, staff started an extensive review of eventing in Burlington. Undertaking a thorough business process review, developed action plans to address concerns raised and retained graphic facilitator Pamela Hubbard to conduct several engagement sessions with the community, businesses, event organizers, and elected officials.

One of the greatest successes from that review was to delegate decision making authority to the Supervisor of Festival and Events to allow for a timely decision instead of needing to seek approval from Council on all events. Approvals could now happen throughout the year instead of through an annual report which had been very limiting.

Many other improvements were made as a result of this extensive consultation such as:

- Role clarity for various city staff, members of the Special Events Team (SET) and event organizers.
- Defined the approval process for new events which includes resident and ward Councillor consultation for events over 1,000 attendees.
- Investment in hydro transformers to enable eventing outside of the downtown.
- The establishment of a risk management process aligned to IMS providing clarity on who has command and control of an event during an emergency and is reviewed by emergency services through SET.

Since that time, several other areas have impacted event services in Burlington including:

- The launch of the Love My Neighbourhood program which started with 12 applications and the city investing \$300 per event which grew to over 150 applications with an increased city investment of \$500 per event.
- Decommissioning the former city owned stage that reached its end of useful life requiring various repairs, modifications, and certifications to meet safety standards and additional Roads, Parks and Forestry staff and equipment.

- The city discontinued renting equipment such as a sound system, tents, chairs, and other smaller items to event organizers. The ongoing cleaning, maintenance, replacement, delivery, and storage needs to manage the rental component was costly and retracting from staff time to manage the event approval process or executing events.

Much has been accomplished since 2015. Staff did not specifically come back to Committee with an event strategy to solidify the vision for events in Burlington as the focus instead pivoted to a larger department wide initiative to develop a Framework for Recreation which was approved in 2019. This Framework shapes the vision for events by outlining the types of recreational and cultural activities that would be given preference for space on public property thereby contributing to providing a vision for events. The approval of the Framework was quickly followed by the pandemic. The pandemic required events to adapt and change; many cancelling, postponing or going virtual.

As the community looks to emerge and celebrate again, staff felt it was prudent to consult with Committee to re-confirm the vision for events in Burlington including why we allow events to be hosted in the city and what the city wants to achieve through event hosting. In addition, having a conversation with Committee on taxpayer investment towards the city's direct delivered events. To adjust to reduction of sponsorship funds and increasing event expenses, staff brought a report to try to maximize operating dollars by moving funding from the Kite Festival and the Children's Festival towards a new event called Burlington Day (RCC-11-21). This approach was not supported at the time by Council. Council issued the following staff direction SD-23-21:

Direct the Director of Recreation, Community and Culture to report back in Q1 2022 on the concept of a "Celebrate Burlington" event as outlined in Report RCC-11-21.

Following an overview presentation, staff will be facilitating a discussion with Committee on the future of events including when and why the city hosts events and what the city's goals/outcomes are related to city delivered events.

Strategy/process

Over half of this term of Council has been during a pandemic and as event organizations look to return to service, including city event staff for direct delivered events, staff would like to provide some background on:

- the event approval process,
- the alignment with the Framework for Recreation, and

- cost escalation to host events

Provide any clarification on past practices and consult with Committee on their vision of city delivered events moving forward.

Options Considered

To continue the event approval process the same as it was pre-pandemic but integrate the Recreation Framework without consulting with Committee and continue to offer the same direct delivered events but on a smaller scale to meet net budget.

Consult with Committee on their vision of eventing in Burlington to see if there is still alignment with the vision set in 2015 or if it has evolved. As well as to explore options on whether the city will continue to handle event requests as they come in or be strategic on what events take place on city property or events the city invests in.

Financial Matters:

There are two operational models for events in Burlington, both with different financial impacts:

1. Community event organizers cover the direct cost of city services to execute the event from licensing and permitting, maintenance, parking, signage, etc. However, these events do not cover the cost of city staff time during the approval process which requires staff from many departments in the city and the Region, frequently known as the Special Events Team (SET). On occasion, event organizers have access to city support through the Arts and Culture Fund and the Community Investment Fund.
2. The city directly delivers events to the community. The Festival and Events office has an operating budget to host events. The funds currently support Canada Day, Santa Clause Parade, Movies Under the Stars, Children's Festival and veteran events and are partially offset by revenues from vendors, sponsors, and grants.

Total Financial Impact

The investment to run both operating models is just over \$661,000 with most of the staff time being allocated to the approval of the community lead events model and most part time staff, and operating expenses being allocated to city lead events operational model.

Community Lead events: operates with over \$417,000 investment in staff to process and administer event applications as well as run city events on city land. This investment only reflects staff in the Festival and Events office and does not include all other staff time from Roads, Parks and Forestry, Transportation, Building, Fire, Parking, Transit, By-law, and Operations staff. Although there is a cost recovery for some aspects of event hosting (e.g., need for additional garbage collection or parking staff) these additional costs are directly related to the operation of the actual event and not the planning time to get to the event. Full time staff spend about 80% of their time in this area.

City Lead events: is an expenditure of almost \$325,000. Expenses include such items as part time staff, equipment, marketing, entertainment, licenses, and permits. These expenditures are partially offset with revenues of just over \$80,000 for a total tax investment of \$245,000.

Source of Funding

Events are funded through the city's operating budget for events directly delivered by the city including veteran events. Community event organizers pay for all city services required to host their event on public property.

Other Resource Impacts

Staff representing the SET provide consultation and support to the Festival and Events office and community event organizers as part of their regular duties.

Climate Implications

Event organizers are encouraged to implement greening strategies. All events run by the city ensure that there is recycling, encourage active transportation and organic collection of waste. Events that are held outdoors are always at risk due to potential weather implications that could result in delays and even cancellations.

Engagement Matters:

Extensive engagements were conducted in the initial development of the events strategy. Subsequently, the city continues to engage with residents to inform of any road closures associated with events or other potential disruptions such as engaging with residents affected by a proposed new event.

Conclusion:

As outlined through this report there have been several changes to the way events are being supported and delivered in the city. As we emerge from the pandemic and the community starts to engage in events again, it is timely to clarify the vision for events in Burlington along with decision criteria required to guide the future types and quality of events being delivered across Burlington. Staff look forward to having a facilitated discussion with Committee on the future of events.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra Maxwell

Supervisor of Festivals and Events

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Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.