



**SUBJECT: Food Truck Festival 2024**

**TO: Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.**

**FROM: Recreation, Community and Culture**

Report Number: RCC-16-23

Wards Affected: 2

File Numbers: 965-01

Date to Committee: October 5, 2023

Date to Council: October 17, 2023

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**Recommendation:**

Receive and file recreation, community and culture department report RCC-16-23 regarding the Burlington Food Truck Festival at Spencer Smith Park (SSP).

**PURPOSE:**

**Vision to Focus Alignment:**

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture

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**Background and Discussion:**

Burlington's Food Truck Festival event has taken place yearly in July for the last 7 years. In the first few years of operation, the event was well received by both residents and downtown businesses. Since the pandemic, Burlington's Food Truck Festival event has been brought before Council several times due to concerns expressed by the Burlington Downtown Business Association (BDBA) and the Burlington Restaurant Association (BRA). They both expressed that the event negatively impacts their business.

Following re-occurring concerns from both parties previously stated, earlier this year, a Motion Memo was brought before Council regarding the event:

Direct the Director of Recreation, Community and Culture to work with the event organizer to explore alternative options for the location and configuration for the

food truck festival outside of the downtown and report back to council in Q3 2023  
CARRIED (CPRM-06-23) (SD-26-23)

It was decided that the event would carry on as planned for the 2023 year under the Delegated Authority of the Supervisor of Festivals & Events with the provision that the organizers continue to meet the Special Event Team (SET) guidelines. The organizer listened to recent feedback and the concerns expressed and subsequently offered to work with the BDBA and BRA to help market local area businesses through their extensive campaign. In addition to this, they changed the recipient of their fundraising to Joseph Brant Hospital Foundation in 2023 resulting in a total of \$9,370 being donated. It should be noted that this generous donation was made despite the event not having returned to pre-pandemic capacity.

### **Strategy/process/risk**

Park locations to host large festivals (outside of SSP) are limited in Burlington due to a lack of amenities and infrastructure to support them resulting in higher operating costs to operate. Amenities such as power sources and water, play a large part in determining the feasibility and suitability of an event site as do access to parking, public transit, accessibility, location which includes nearby amenities, etc. Both the organizer and the BDBA conducted attendee surveys in 2023 (see Appendix A & B.) 57.1% of event attendees report planning on visiting shops or restaurants outside of SSP during their visit with 25% of these attendees stating they will be spending 4+ hours downtown during their visit. The attraction of the event being located in downtown with surrounding businesses indicates an overall draw to the area.

However, given the staff direction, staff suggested a variety of alternative options which were explored by the organizer including Burlington GO Station parking lot, Burloak Park, Lowville Park, Hidden Valley Park, LaSalle Park and City View Park. Out of these, the organizer provided feedback as follows:

### **Burlington GO Station parking lot**

A parking lot location is less than ideal to host any event mid-summer due to the heat that bounces up off the pavement. This would be extremely unwelcoming for attendees to want to stay on-site and enjoy the planned activities. Park space is the ideal location as attendees are offered to “picnic” in the venue with the use of picnic tables or to sit on the grass to enjoy the offerings or listen to music. A possibility of a fall date, such as October was discussed, however, this poses other risks with the weather being cooler along with shorter days ensuing. It is also a time of year when people are busier with the return to school and activities after the summer holiday season and as the Friday

start to the event would not be feasible due to lack of attendance and likely result in an overall revenue loss (incl. a loss in funds raised for local charities).

### **Burloak Park**

This venue could be a potential, however, the number of trees at this park location is of concern and could pose a major issue for the overall set-up and layout as the current event is fenced off due to a Special Occasion Permit (SOP) to sell alcohol at the event. In keeping with the Municipal Alcohol Policy, an outdoor event with an SOP is required to have a delineation with visible infrastructure to cordon off the licensed area. Fencing off a park area poses its own set of challenges due to uneven surfaces and is easier configured when they can follow straight line patterns versus having to maneuver around trees. This could potentially increase costs if more fencing is required to block off the entire park to work around the trees. In this circumstance, a larger enclosed area would require additional Pay Duty Officers to monitor a larger licensed area and would require Fire to determine entrance/egress points of access along with capacities; again increasing costs for the event organizer. The alternative would be to either not have a SOP license at the event or to consider including a potential small, licensed area within the overall event footprint, both of which would impact fundraising revenues. There is also a lack of available parking infrastructure to support the current volume of attendees and therefore would require the use of shuttles.

### **Lowville Park**

This area is too secluded for a large festival with limited access to vehicular traffic and a lack of surrounding parking. In addition to this, it is surrounded by farmland and lacks residential density to encourage foot traffic. Organizing shuttles to service this area would be costly and the distance of travel to run a continuous loop would result in longer wait times and thus making shuttle service less desirable for attendees. There are no surrounding amenities/businesses to add a further draw to the area for tourism and an event of this scale would cause increased volumes of traffic that would need to be mitigated and likely result in the need for an added Traffic Control Plan which would significantly increase costs. In addition, events wanting to set-up in this location require approval through the Niagara Escarpment Commission resulting in limitations imposed in this area for event set-up.

### **Hidden Valley**

Once again, the area is hidden and is not easily accessible by car with limited roadways to/from the area. Accessing this location would turn into a traffic nightmare for a large festival and impact the overall event experience negatively despite the introduction of shuttle services. It would require the event footprint to also be spread out over two

sections of the park intersected by a single-lane roadway which is a safety hazard for pedestrians. The significant increase in traffic to this area would simply not be feasible to mitigate and would negatively impact access for residents in this area.

### **LaSalle**

This park location with sloping grounds in a large portion of it is simply not large enough to be able to accommodate this type of festival set-up and would require a reduced footprint and this would transpire to less generated revenue. The City currently does not have a long-term operating agreement for the Pavilion at this location however, historically, this venue is a popular wedding destination and thus poses a risk to be able to book the location over the span of a week to include set-up and tear-down should the City enter into another agreement.

### **City View**

Another secluded location with too many sports fields. Trucks cannot drive onto the sports fields and no event set-up is allowed on them. The open space area for event set-up is not large enough to accommodate this size of festival.

### **Summary**

The organizer has indicated that out of these options, they would not be able to make the event work in the suggested locations except for potentially Burloak Park. This location however poses quite a few challenges namely the density of the tree canopy. In addition, the event would be much less environmentally friendly as all vendors would need to run generators the entire duration and potable water would need to be trucked in.

Of note, moving an event after it has become established in a location comes with inherent risks to re-establish itself along with added expenses for new site plans, expanded marketing and infrastructure needs all of which would increase expenses and take at least three years to recover from resulting in a reduction of donations for the hospital and/or result in the organizer deciding to move the event out of Burlington to another municipality.

### **Options Considered**

The options for the future of the Food Truck Festival in Burlington are as follows:

1. To decline the application to be held in SSP and risk the event being cancelled.
2. To move it to a different location such as Burloak Park and consider helping the organizer offset start-up expenses due to the relocation.

3. To allow the event to continue to be held in Spencer Smith Park provided that the organizer continues to apply to host the event in Burlington at this location.

Staff are planning for the continuance of the Burlington Food Truck Festival at SSP provided that the event organizer continues to follow the guidance of the SET. It would be beneficial if the event organizer and BDBA and BRA find ways to better work together during the event; one suggestion could be to work towards a mutually beneficial marketing plan of action that may benefit both parties.

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### **Financial Matters:**

Not applicable.

### **Total Financial Impact**

The event organizer pays for any city resources utilized. There is no cost to the city to host this event. In 2023, the event organizer allocated proceeds from the event to benefit Joseph Brant Hospital which was previously donated to Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto.

### **Source of Funding**

Not applicable.

### **Other Resource Impacts**

Moving an event to an alternate location would result in many new approvals and requirements that would impact members of the Special Events Team (SET). Under Delegated Authority, any major event scheduled in a new area requires a community consultation to allow residents the opportunity to voice any concerns. This consultation cost for an existing event would be passed on to the event organizer.

Roads, Parks and Forestry (RPF) staff would have added requirements at another park location such as potential movement of existing infrastructure and accommodating various event needs as well as providing increased staffing in park locations that are typically not resourced as they are not as busy a site as SSP. Fire would need to assess a new site plan and determine capacity restrictions including load-in/out as the event is licensed and therefore gated. The event includes a stage and new Building Code requirements places added strain to Building permits and may impact the ability to set-up a stage entirely without proper grounding electrical requirements installed in the park. In addition, added time would be needed for the review of temporary structures in spaces with many trees, slopes and varying topography. There would be added strain

on parking in areas that do not have municipal lots resulting in the need for increased enforcement to the area. Halton Regional Police Services (HRPS) would need to develop a new Operational Plan and the increase of traffic to a new area would result in congestion and a likelihood for increased Paid Duty Officers to help manage traffic and/or a need to introduce traffic control measures through a third-party company which would impact Transportation staff workloads. Lastly, since this is a licensed event, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) would need to review new site plans and review capacities.

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## **Climate Implications**

Organizers for this event have event greening plans in place to address waste management including recycling and composting as well as incorporate a waste diversion program to educate attendees when disposing of their waste and designated volunteers to sort waste. All food trucks are mandated to not use styrofoam or plastics such as: straws, bags and beverage bottles. They also have an oil recycling company collect oil waste so that it can be repurposed. Marketing does not incorporate any printed promotional materials.

SSP has multiple hydro outlets to support large event needs along with potable water as required by Halton Regional Health when food is being served. Moving the event to any other location in Burlington would require the event to add the expense of supplying water and would solely rely on the use of generators for power which would result in significant noise and air pollution. In addition, re-locating to an area of Burlington that has limited road access would result in traffic congestion and cars idling.

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## **Engagement Matters:**

The organizer for Burlington's Food Truck Festival was consulted on potential re-location areas for consideration.

The BDBA was also consulted to provide further feedback related to the impact this event has on downtown businesses. Both the event organizer and the BDBA conducted surveys at this year's event to obtain customer feedback. The BDBA worked with Burlington's Tourism office to conduct intercept surveys which captured feedback from 135 patrons attending the event and the event organizer conducted an online survey requesting patrons to scan a QR code at the event to capture feedback which captured 83 responses. The results from both of these individual surveys are attached as Appendices for information purposes.

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## **Conclusion:**

Upon exploring the feasibility of other outdoor venues to re-locate Burlington's Food Truck Festival, the organizer has outlined various reasons for their unsuitability. Although there is some indication that Burloak Park could be an alternative, it is highly likely that the challenges presented at this location to support an event of this scale would not be feasible and may result in the event being moved out of Burlington. Given that the event has run successfully in SSP since 2017 and continues to thrive post-pandemic is a good indicator that the event continues to draw both residents and tourists to the area.

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Respectfully submitted,

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## **Appendices:**

- A. 2023 BFTF Survey Results
- B. BDBA INTERCEPT Food Truck Festival Summary v2

## **Notifications:**

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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.