

Committee of the Whole (1) Report

DATE: Tuesday, April 4, 2023

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS 2023-2024

FROM:

Gus Michaels, Deputy City Manager, Community Services

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek Council direction on a proposed plan with options for developing and hosting an annual Festival of Lights event to be launched during the 2023-2024 holiday season.

Report Highlights

- In response to a Member's Resolution from Council, staff have developed three (3) options for Council's consideration and are recommending approval of Option #2 for an annual Festival of Lights event beginning in the 2023-2024 holiday season.
- Staff believe Option #2 provides an optimal event to achieve desired outcomes.
- Festive lights are a hallmark of the holiday season that brings the community together to celebrate the joyous time of year and attracts visitors.
- The proposed Festival of Lights event will run annually from November 12th of one calendar year to February 1st the following year.
- The proposed plan will involve support from Office of Communications and Economic Development, and other departments, as required.

Recommendations

1. THAT Council approve Option #2 and that staff from Recreation Services, Events Division in Community Services be directed to implement Option #2 of this report for the annual City of Vaughan Festival of Lights Event; and

2. THAT the Office of Communications and Economic Development utilizes corporate communications resources and channels to promote the annual Festival of Lights Event.

Background

At the November 22, 2022 Committee of the Whole (1) meeting, through a Member's Resolution, Council directed staff to develop a plan with options to host an annual Festival of Lights to be launched during the 2023-2024 holiday season; and as part of the City's planning efforts for the Festival of Lights, staff consider funding options, including but not limited to, the Municipal Accommodation Tax, grants, sponsorship, and future budget requests.

The City of Vaughan offers and supports popular and much anticipated events throughout the year, and throughout the holiday and winter season, such as the annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony, Christmas Tree Lighting, Toy Drive in support of the CP24 CHUM Christmas Wish, and the award-winning Vaughan Celebrates Winterfest.

Events remain a key offering for residents and visitors alike and support the City's interest to continue to develop opportunities for cultural diversity, community pride and inclusion across the City of Vaughan.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Member's Resolution, Item No. 24 of Report No. 38](#) of November 22, 2022.

Analysis and Options

In consultation with Office of Communications and Economic Development, Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations, the following provides three (3) options for a Festival of Lights Event with a varying degree of event highlights, budget and required staff resources, for Council's consideration.

Option #1 – 'VAUGHAN' Illuminated – City Hall

Purchase and display large letters (approximately 3 feet tall in size) spelling "VAUGHAN" lit and placed along the back windows in the Council Chamber, facing the Courtyard.

Recreation Service, Events Division will host a launch event at City Hall, along with communications support led by the Corporate and Strategic Communications Department, encouraging residents to light-up their homes and businesses.

Option #2 – Nomination Program & Event

Purchase and display large letters (approximately 3 feet tall in size) spelling “VAUGHAN” lit and placed along the back windows in the Council Chamber, facing the Courtyard.

To encourage public engagement and civic pride, create a *Festive Lights Nomination Program* that recognizes residents and businesses that exhibit exceptional pride and effort in their light displays. Vaughan residents would celebrate diversity and inclusion in the communities, an opportunity for Vaughan residents to celebrate each other’s cultures.

Recreation Services, Events Division will host a launch event at City Hall, along with communications support led by the Corporate and Strategic Communications Department, encouraging residents to light-up their homes and businesses. Residents may nominate themselves and/or each other.

Residents, business owners and visitors would be encouraged to send an email to Recreation Services nominating a residence or business based on the following criteria:

- Overall aesthetic of the property is visually appealing
- Property uses lights and decorations
- Design incorporates the use of energy efficient lights
- Property shows creativity in design
- Property is well maintained
- Property’s visibility and proximity to major roads

Neighbourhood or commercial area groups featuring a coordinated destination will be encouraged to apply.

All successful nominations will be awarded with a reflective *Festive Lights* branded sign, that will be provided to each participant.

Each participant will be encouraged to display their sign at the front of their property or front window.

Option #3 – Light Tunnel

Purchase and display large letters (approximately 3 feet in size) spelling “VAUGHAN” lit and placed along the back windows in the Council Chamber, facing the Courtyard.

Rent and install a Light Tunnel along the west-side walking pathway/entrance to City Hall (from the staircase to the main front doors).

Tunnel to be lit throughout the duration of the program and residents/visitors would be encouraged to visit the tunnel for “selfies”.

Recreation Services, Events Division will host a launch event at City Hall, along with communications support led by the Corporate and Strategic Communications Department, encouraging residents to light-up their homes and businesses.

Financial Impact

Proposed Festival of Lights Event Options	Estimated Direct Costs
Option #1 'VAUGHAN' Illuminated – City Hall	Estimated Cost of \$10,000 <i>Cost includes purchase of letters and hosting of launch event at City Hall.</i>
Option #2 Nomination Program & Event	Estimated Cost of \$20,000 <i>Cost includes purchase of letters, developing the nomination program, signage for nominated participants and hosting of launch event at City Hall</i>
Option #3 Light Tunnel	Estimated Cost of \$55,000+ <i>Cost includes purchase of letters, rental, and installation of Light Tunnel for program duration and hosting of launch event at City Hall.</i>

Direct vs Indirect Costs

The above options provide a reasonable estimate of direct costs associated with developing and launching a new annual City of Vaughan Festival of Lights. This event was not planned for the 2023 Event Calendar. The reflected costs do not incorporate the indirect costs associated with staff time, resources and incidental preparations required with all three (3) options.

Funding Source

Option #1 and Option #2 (recommended) can, for 2023, be supported by Recreation's existing operating budget. Staff will explore alternate funding sources to permanently support these costs in future years. Alternate funding sources may include the Municipal Accommodation Tax (City of Vaughan and Tourism Vaughan Corporation portions), sponsorships, grants, and possible partnerships with local businesses.

Option #3 cannot currently be supported by Recreation's existing 2023 operating budget. If this option is selected by Council, staff will undertake further work to refine the estimated cost and secure funding.

Economic and Tourism Opportunities

The holiday and winter season presents further economic and overnight tourism development opportunities with key tourism market segments – as outlined in the [Vaughan Destination Master Plan](#) - including residents across Southern Ontario.

Operational Impact

Staff from primary affected departments have reviewed and provided input for this report.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

N/A

Conclusion

The holiday season brings communities, families, neighbours and visitors together to enjoy many amenities and festivities throughout Vaughan.

The City is well positioned to build off the success of our current holiday and winter season events by organizing and launching an annual Festival of Lights Event, to further bring families and visitors to the Vaughan community for the 2023-2024 holiday and winter season.

Staff researched a variety of similar events across a number of municipal jurisdictions, along with relying on the expertise of internal subject matter experts in the development of the three (3) options reflected within. The three options provide a variation in offerings and related costs, accordingly.

Given the above and the intended purpose of the event, staff believe that approval of Option #2 will achieve the desired outcome and as with most annual events, should the event and its anticipated popularity grow, future expansion of the program and its offerings can be considered and incorporated year over year; through the appropriate budget allocation and/or identified alternative funding sources noted above.

As such and in consultation with the necessary internal stakeholders, the recommendation within this report will support ongoing efforts to foster a greater culture of inclusion and achieve a successful annual Festival of Lights Event.

For more information, please contact: Anna Dara, Director, Recreation Services, ext. 8028, Anna.Dara@vaughan.ca.

Attachment

1. Event Option Images.

Prepared by

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Approved by



Gus Michaels, Deputy City Manager,
Community Services

Reviewed by



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