

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, April 10, 2024

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: VAUGHAN MUNICIPAL EVENTS STRATEGY

FROM:

Gus Michaels, Deputy City Manager, Community Services

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek Council approval to adopt the Vaughan Municipal Events Strategy for the future framework for hosting an event in the City of Vaughan including, City-led events and Community-led events.

Report Highlights

- This plan has 5 strategic goals that provide clear direction and targets for the City to execute its Strategy.
 - Clarify roles and responsibilities
 - Streamline the event approval process
 - Support new and existing event organizers in running great events
 - Allocate resources to effectively and efficiently maximize impact
 - Continue to actively communicate with and invite organizers to host in the City of Vaughan.

- The Strategy includes 21 action items that will help the City of Vaughan actualize the goals outlined in the Strategy. The action items are organized into 6 functional areas:
 - City procedures,
 - Information & Technology,
 - Resourcing,
 - Logistics & Coordination,
 - Engagement & Empowerment, and
 - Promotion.

Recommendation

1. THAT Council approve the Vaughan Municipal Events Strategy, as prepared and recommended by the external consultant urbanMetrics Inc.

Background

The City of Vaughan continues to grow as a destination of choice for residents, businesses and visitors alike. The Vaughan Municipal Events Strategy will support the commitment prescribed within the 2022-2026 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan under the strategic priority area of Active, Engaged and Inclusive Communities: continuing to support building Vaughan as an active, engaged, creative and culturally vibrant City.

City events are those owned and hosted by the City, involving City services and/or facilities. City events are organized and managed by a lead or host City department and the funding for the event is allocated to the budget of the lead department. These events are a means of showcasing service offerings, facilities, building community and growing networks. Vaughan supports and celebrates events that are diverse, safe, welcoming and accessible for all who live, visit, play and work in our community.

The City of Vaughan hosts a number of events annually, including but not limited to Winterfest, Concerts in the Park and Canada Day — signature celebrations under the Vaughan Celebrates umbrella. Other City-led events include Official Facility and Park openings and festive and cultural celebrations.

Community events are local events owned and hosted by a community, business and/or organization that may or may not involve direct City support, services and/or grants. However, all such events are accommodated through the City's Special Events By-law and related permit process, thereby providing the necessary framework and regulations that are intended to mitigate nuisance while supporting the safety and wellbeing of the community. These events typically bring together likeminded people seeking to strengthen the bonds of friendship, culture, faith, and community connection. Co-sponsored events, which are jointly hosted by the City and another organization/business, are included in the Community events category.

On June 6, 2017, the [Event Management Audit](#) was presented to Finance, Administration and Audit Committee (FA&A). The report contained nine recommendations. Aside from the value that events provide to our City, a key finding and conclusion of the audit identified that the establishment and implementation of a comprehensive Municipal Events Strategy will ensure that risks relating to planning, administering and managing events are efficiently and effectively mitigated.

Staff began the development of the Events Strategy through the hiring of an external consultant. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the City parted ways with the original consultant and priorities shifted. As of late 2020 in the heart of the pandemic, the development of an Events Strategy and Implementation Plan project was redefined to focus on the Intake Process for Events. Given the challenges attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, City of Vaughan staff had to adapt to new ways of delivering on City services, focusing on enhanced online service offerings and in-take processes while continuing to seek opportunities to identify gaps and look for ways to enhance the overall service delivery of community and City events.

Updates to the Intake Process included:

- Creating a webpage on www.vaughan.ca to direct organizers wishing to host an event in the City of Vaughan to the application process.
- Producing a webpage encompassing all event producer information, requirements, and links, while being user-friendly.
- Creating a webpage resource named [Hosting an Event in Vaughan](#).

Events Strategy and Implementation Plan

In 2022, urbanMetrics Inc. was retained, and the development of an Events Strategy and Implementation Plan were undertaken. The first step was to develop a current state assessment. This review is the culmination of research and engagement activities focused on understanding and improving the events system in Vaughan.

The review included:

- Summaries from engagement with internal and external stakeholders and industry experts
- An overview of Vaughan's existing events processes and offerings
- A review of applicable policies, procedures and protocols
- Lessons from municipalities across Canada
- An analysis of Vaughan's current strengths, areas for improvement, opportunities, and challenges.

This review informed the development of the comprehensive Municipal Events Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Event Management Audit, Finance, Administration and Audit Committee \(FA&A\), June 6, 2017](#)

Analysis and Options

Events in Vaughan generally fall under two broad categories: **City-led events** and **Community-led events**.

City-led events are those organized, funded, and produced by the City of Vaughan (Vaughan staff) for the express benefit of its residents and visitors. The costs to administer, develop, produce, deliver and/or support these events cross-departmentally amounts to **\$2,032,999.92** annually. Refer to the chart below for a breakdown of department specific costs.

Portfolio / Department	Estimated Annual Costs
Recreation Services – Events Division	\$1,329,950
Recreation Services – Client Services Division	\$197,757
Recreation Services – Marketing Services	\$135,616
Office of the Chief Information Officer – Audio and Video Internal/External resources	\$49,714
Office of the Chief Information Officer – Audio and Video Equipment	\$10,000
Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations - Average Labour & Other Operating Expenses	\$282,111.73
Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations - Annual Fleet M&R	\$14,209.06
Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations - Annual Fuel Costs	\$13,642.13

Note: Additional resourcing and support from other departments not captured above may be required.

The City of Vaughan plans and executes many events, the majority of which are primarily organized by an in-house Events Team within the Recreation Services Department. In 2023, the Events Team executed 38 City-led events and supported an additional 15 events. Some of the signature events earned prestigious recognition, including three Pinnacle Awards from the International Festivals and Events Association for Canada Day and Culture Days. Festivals & Events Ontario also awarded the City of Vaughan with best promotional campaign for Concerts in the Park and Canada Day and Top 100 Festivals and Events in Ontario for Concerts in the Park and Canada Day. The above 38 events do not include the 27 flag raisings that took place.

The Culture Days festival programming also received recognition, including the Warren Garrett Inclusive Programming Award and Best In-person Program.

It is anticipated that in 2024 and beyond, there will be an increase in the total number of events delivered each year.

Community-led events are those initiated and carried out by individuals, community organizations or non-profit/private businesses. They typically involve a formal permit approval process requiring various departments of the City of Vaughan and external support agencies to ensure public safety and conformity with local, regional and provincial rules and regulations.

In 2023, within the City of Vaughan's By-law & Compliance, Licensing and Permit Services (BCLPS) Department, a total of 123 special event permits were granted. In addition, any applicable building/facility permits that may also be required were issued to private organizations/people who hosted their events within our City.

This Municipal Events Strategy was developed following months of consultation and research integrating the insights of staff, elected officials, local event producers, and most importantly, residents of Vaughan. It builds on the current state assessment and outlines 5 strategic goals and 21 action items. Engagement tactics included virtual meetings, online public surveys, virtual roundtable group discussions, one-on-one phone calls and online workshops. Participation was promoted via all City communication and social media channels.

The insights gathered through the consultation process have been instrumental in shaping the Strategy, providing a robust roadmap for enhancing Vaughan's event landscape. By capitalizing on our existing strengths, enhancing efficiency through streamlined processes, and maximizing opportunities, we aim to foster a more cohesive and impactful event environment. This approach ensures operational effectiveness and lays the groundwork for sustainable growth and innovation, elevating Vaughan's events to new heights and reinforcing our commitment to service excellence and community engagement.

The Strategy is built upon a series of key themes that were identified through the consultation process, acknowledging various aspects:

- Vaughan has the right attitude and energy to become a leader in municipal events.

- The current process for facilitating (and municipal permitting of) community-led events continues to demonstrate opportunities for improvement.
- Creative and strategic promotion of all events is important to community-led event organizers
- Events are typically attended by “family” audiences.
- As the community continues to grow and change there is a need to further incorporate a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) lens in event planning and programming.
- City staff resources are currently stretched and reaching capacity, especially during peak event season and with the return to more in-person events.
- All events carry risk. The City of Vaughan is steadfastly committed to ensuring risks, including public health, safety and compliance, are managed responsibly.
- New and future “flagship” facilities and venues such as North Maple Regional Park, Vaughan Studios and Event Space, The Sports Village and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre provide an opportunity for the City of Vaughan to showcase its capacity to lead, support, host and foster exceptional event experiences.

Strategic Goals

Strategic Goals are the high-level ambitions that are key to supporting a streamlined and cohesive events process and a robust offering of diverse events.

This plan has **5 strategic goals**:

Goal #1	<p>Clarify roles & responsibilities</p> <p>The events process is a system of moving parts that involves input from various departments. This strategy provides a framework for timely decision-making and more effective information sharing.</p>
Goal #2	<p>Streamline the event approval process</p> <p>Simplifying and clarifying this process will make the events process more manageable for community-led event organizers as well as more efficient for event reviewers and approvers.</p>
Goal #3	<p>Support new and existing event organizers in running great events</p> <p>Investment in equipping new and existing event organizers with tools and resources that provide training and guidance.</p>
Goal #4	<p>Allocate resources to effectively and efficiently maximize impact</p> <p>Develop a well-defined process for event permit applications that will ensure that existing resources can stay on-task rather than addressing or rectifying issues which need last minute support.</p>

Goal #5	<p>Continue to actively communicate with and invite organizers to host in the City of Vaughan</p> <p>Ensure Vaughan residents and the broader community are aware of upcoming events in the City as well as the opportunities and benefits of hosting future events in Vaughan, as outlined in the Vaughan Destination Master Plan. There are many channels used to promote City-led events, but more opportunities should be explored to promote all events hosted in the City of Vaughan.</p>
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Action Items are identified in this plan as the specific tasks that will help the City of Vaughan with actualizing the Goals as outlined in the strategy.

As a result, **21 actions items** were identified in this plan and vary in their complexity, cost, timelines, and internal roles/responsibilities. They are organized into 6 functional areas:

1. City Procedures
2. Information & Technology
3. Staff Resourcing
4. Logistics & Coordination
5. Engagement & Empowerment
6. Promotion

City Procedures

1. Develop and implement an event classification framework
2. Review and update the Corporate Policies for Events and Corporate Protocols for Events
3. Formalize and implement a SEAT framework
4. Adopt a fast-tracked protocol for last-minute event requests
5. Ensure that a diversity of causes, events, and commemorations are recognized and communicated appropriately
6. Define the City's responsibilities when hosting and supporting events.

Information & Technology

7. Explore a modernized permit application portal that guides users through their specific event requirements and facilitates approvals
8. Build a database of venue options with tags and characteristics to quickly determine which venues are appropriate for a given event

9. Explore developing an accessible calendar of availability for various City-owned venues, resources, and assets
10. Develop a detailed database containing all historical event information to inform an annual Year in Review document

Staff Resourcing

11. Monitor and increase new staff position(s) to support successful Community-led events, as required
12. Monitor and increase resources as needed for key City departments that provide event support (i.e. Recreation Services, Public Works, By-law & Compliance, Licensing and Permit Services (BCLPS), Communications, Marketing and Engagement (CME), Facility Management, Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO))

Logistics & Coordination

13. Allow for automatic date holds for recurring successful events
14. Increase minimum application deadline to 30 or 45 days, depending on the type of event
15. Establish a formalized post-event debriefing process

Engagement & Empowerment

16. Offer pre-event consultations for first-time event organizers
17. Create a comprehensive toolkit to guide event organizers through the event approval and planning process
18. Run an annual event workshop to educate event organizers on the rules, processes and protocols for hosting events in Vaughan

Promotion

19. Create increased opportunities to showcase and promote Community-led events through the City's communications channels
20. Promote Vaughan as an "events city" to attract more Signature and Grand Events
21. Maintain an improved, up-to-date, and public calendar of all upcoming events in Vaughan

The implementation of the above 21 actions items involves key departments, timelines required to execute, and high-level cost estimates. The implementation of many aspects of this strategy can be completed using existing resources and no major additional costs.

Financial Impact

Future additional resource requests will be considered through the appropriate annual budget process.

Operational Impact

Internal departments were consulted in the development of this Strategy through either focus groups or one on one interviews.

As the demand and roster of events grows, the operational impacts across the corporation continues to increase.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

N/A.

Conclusion

The Municipal Events Strategy represents a pivotal step forward for the City of Vaughan in its commitment to fostering an engaged and culturally vibrant community through exceptional event experiences. By aligning with the insights gathered from extensive consultation and research, this strategy not only acknowledges existing strengths and challenges, but also sets a clear direction for capitalizing on opportunities and addressing areas for improvement.

Through streamlined processes, enhanced resource allocation and proactive communication, the strategy empowers both City-led and Community-led event organizers to navigate the complexities of event planning with confidence and efficiency. It ensures events in Vaughan continue to be inclusive and diverse, but also orchestrated through a transparent and supportive framework.

As we embark on this journey towards an even more dynamic event landscape, the Municipal Events Strategy serves as a blueprint for modernization and innovation. It positions Vaughan as a leader in municipal events, showcasing our capacity to host memorable experiences that enrich the lives of our residents and attract visitors from near and far.

This strategy is a strengthened commitment to service excellence, inclusivity and community-building. By embracing its principles and implementing its recommendations, we can create a near-future where events in Vaughan continue to be successful, while serving as catalysts for growth, connection and celebration.

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

Attachment

1. Executive Summary - Vaughan Municipal Events Strategy & Implementation Plan (2024-2028), urbanMetrics Inc., March 14, 2024.

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