

TO: MAYOR & COUNCILLORS
FROM: GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE
SUBJECT: **CAR FREE DAY FEASIBILITY AND NEXT STEPS**
PURPOSE: To provide an update on initial analysis and next steps in response to Council's resolution that staff explore the feasibility and advisability of implementing a car free Sunday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. from mid-May to mid-September at least once a month on a rotating basis.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report titled "Car Free Day Feasibility and Next Steps" dated April 29, 2024, be received for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An initial assessment of the feasibility of Car Free Days determined that the funding and resource requirements needed may exceed Council's expectations. This arises from the scale of the events, the complexity of street closures along the specified roadways, and the current lack of resources and capacity within the relevant departments responsible for implementation.

Staff is committed to exploring various options to fulfill Council's vision of enhancing the activation of public spaces, along with the commitment to fostering an inclusive, vibrant and engaged community. Creative strategies for the use of public spaces, identifying opportunities for expansion, and repurposing infrastructure for programming can have transformative impacts on the community when carefully planned and implemented. Recommendations for Council's consideration will be presented for review in the fall of 2024.

1.0 POLICY SECTION

The analysis within this report aligns with the *Corporate Strategic Plan*, supporting diverse, accessible cultural experiences that enhance vibrancy within Burnaby.

2.0 BACKGROUND

On January 29, 2024, Council approved Resolution No. 2024-040 directing exploration of the feasibility of up to five one-day events that would close specific streets to cars and engage business, community organizations, and arts and entertainment in programming vibrant street fairs.

Discussion at the Council meeting acknowledged that several major street closures already occur in Burnaby, specifically *Hats Off Day* along Hastings Street and the *Canada Day StreetFest* on Central Boulevard. The *Edmonds City Fair* has also included a significant street closure in the past, but in recent years has had a smaller footprint.

3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

3.1 Car Free Day

Car Free Day is a worldwide movement that promotes travel by means other than cars. In the Metro Vancouver region, regular events have been organized since 2005. Car Free Days of Summer is sponsored by TransLink and events run in partnership with Business Improvement Areas in Vancouver, Surrey, North Vancouver, New Westminster and Port Coquitlam. The City of Port Moody also holds an annual Car Free Day.

While specifics can vary, Car Free Days typically involve closing a street to car traffic and inviting the participation of business, community organizations and arts and entertainment for a festive atmosphere. Successful Car Free Days include diverse activations that are reflective of the local neighbourhood and concentrated in a geographic area that is easily navigated on foot or through other active transportation.

3.2 Resourcing Major Street Closures in Burnaby

Staff worked with available information to prepare estimates of the resources required for the events specified in the resolution. In total, costs as high as \$750,000 per event can be anticipated, based on the time frame outlined in the Council resolution. This estimate is based on actual costs of existing events and includes projections for significant investments in programming and equipment to reflect the large footprint for the events outlined in the resolution.

Hats Off Day was used to assess the City’s cost of a significant street closure. While the City does not lead this event, the cost of the street closure is borne by the City as an in-kind contribution. In 2023 the total was \$237,000 in staffing, consulting and signage costs from Engineering and RCMP. The Burnaby Heights Merchants’ Association approaches *Hats Off Day* as an act of appreciation for residents and customers, and member businesses assume a considerable portion of the programming and activation responsibilities. When assessing the cost of the events outlined in the resolution, it is presumed that the City would bear the majority of these programming costs particularly along thoroughfares without the concentration of small-scale retail boutiques, restaurants and cafes as found on Hastings Street. For this assessment, costs of the *Canada Day StreetFest* were used as a benchmark. Accounting for the length of the events identified in the resolution, up to \$500,000 in additional funding per event may be necessary. This includes staff for planning and front-line service, advertising, permits, equipment rental, contracts for artists and other entertainment, as well as contingency.

Finally, the Parks, Recreation and Culture (PRC) Department has found that its capacity for event delivery within the existing resources and organizational structure has reached its limits, particularly with the growth in events since the pandemic. Additional events at

this scale either require a large influx of new resources or necessitate the scaling down of other activities.

Similarly, other departments face similar circumstances. The Engineering Transportation Department acknowledges the difficulty in supporting street closures for major special events with existing staffing levels. Consequently, both internal and external event organizers are often referred to contracted traffic management services to plan and implement these events. In addition, technical considerations such as ensuring multi-modal access to local businesses and residences, impacts on transit services, on street parking changes, and emergency services response, require thorough evaluation and tailored response on a case-by-case basis.

3.3 Future State

The current organizational structure and processes employed by the City for festivals and events are not sufficient to meet Council’s vision for growth. To address this gap, the PRC department is proposing the establishment of a new branch dedicated to activating and invigorating public spaces and will be bringing a budget forward for consideration as part of the 2025 budget planning process. This new branch will amalgamate the current special events team and create a “One-Stop Shop” for events. This will create a hub for knowledge and coordination of community and externally-produced events, alongside complementary functions.

The introduction of this new structure will bring about increased capacity for process enhancement and improved customer service, ultimately streamlining the process for hosting events or festivals in Burnaby. By consolidating resources and expertise, the aim is to facilitate smoother event planning and execution.

The enhancement of public space vibrancy extends beyond formal programming. Initiatives such as placemaking through public art and heritage preservation, as well as exploring opportunities for street modifications or traffic pattern alterations, and the development of new parkettes or plaza spaces, contribute to the creation of inviting environments that foster informal gatherings and promote community cohesion.

These opportunities for enhancing public spaces will be further investigated in collaboration with colleagues in the Planning and Development department, emphasizing a holistic approach to urban development and community engagement.

3.4 Plan for 2024

Council has consistently championed the vision for increased activation of public spaces, a commitment reflected in various initiatives undertaken in recent years. New and expanded events introduced in 2022 and 2023 drew capacity crowds and positive feedback. Additionally, recent changes approved to the Festivals Burnaby Grant Program in 2023 support the sustained delivery of community organized events.

In February 2024 Council proactively directed staff to explore additional programming at Deer Lake Park, specifically an expanded Burnaby Blues and Roots Festival

(Resolution No.2024-063), starting in 2025. This action underscores Council’s ongoing dedication to enhancing public spaces and fostering community engagement.

To continue to deliver on Council’s expectations, a new scalable delivery model for festivals and events is required. This model will require adjustments to organizational structure, allocation of additional resources and the implementation of streamlined processes and efficiencies across the City. Recommendations are being developed for consideration in the 2025 Budget.

In 2024, the Culture Division will continue to explore the feasibility of Car Free Days through several key actions:

- Continued collaboration with Burnaby Board of Trade to gather feedback from members regarding potential involvement in Car Free Days;
- Active participation in *Hats Off Day* and *Edmonds City Fair* to explore partnership opportunities and gauge community expectations regarding additional or expanded events; and
- Identification of various options for enhancing programmable public spaces, including but not limited to street closures, to further promote community engagement and vibrancy.

The results of this work and follow-up recommendations will be brought to Council in late 2024.

4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PRC staff will attend *Hats Off Day* and *Edmonds City Fair* this summer to engage with the community to gain a better understanding of the community’s thoughts regarding Car Free Days and other potential events in Burnaby, including location suggestions, activities and timing. A survey of businesses will be conducted in partnership with the Board of Trade.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no financial considerations associated with this report.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Morrison-Clark, General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

This report was prepared by Emmaline Hill, Director Culture, and Lois Dawson, Coordinator Festivals & Special Events. Reviewed by Marie Ishikawa, Director Marketing and Corporate Communications and Amy Choh, Director Engineering Transportation.