

TO: MAYOR & COUNCILLORS
FROM: GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE
SUBJECT: **GROWTH OF EVENTS & FUNDING**
PURPOSE: To provide information on the expansion of events and other public space activations in Burnaby, following direction from Council in 2024 to explore Car Free Days and the expansion of the Blues & Roots Festival.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report titled “Growth of Events & Funding” dated February 11, 2025, be received for information.

Executive Summary

Burnaby’s Festivals and Events continue to be a source of civic pride and offer opportunities for social participation, cultural enrichment and diverse experiences. To ensure ongoing success at this level of service delivery requires new resources that will support coordinated, efficient service to external event producers, and greater investment in community collaborations that build capacity. Opportunities for new and expanded events have also been explored at Council’s direction and recommended options have been developed that prioritize community engagement and building local ownership of new events.

1.0 POLICY SECTION

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

2.0 BACKGROUND

At the February 26, 2024, Council meeting, staff presented the Culture Special Events Program Review report, which included several areas of focus for the program, including stabilizing costs, working towards stable, multi-year funding models, identifying capital improvements for efficient event production, and enhancing support for community event organizers. Council approved a recommendation to realign event budgets, and directed staff to explore opportunities to expand the Burnaby Blues & Roots Festival. Also in 2024, Council directed an exploration of opportunities to present Car Free Days and staff presented initial information to Council on April 29, 2024.

In 2024, City’s events program had another successful year. With programming relatively consistent year over year, staff were able to focus on efficiencies and improvements in an environment of rapidly escalating production and talent costs. Burnaby Blues & Roots Festival in particular was a success after Council reinforced the importance of continuing the well-established event. The lineup including Mavis Staples, Calexico, and Chrystal Shawanda drew an estimated 9,000 people to the site. Total costs of the event were reduced by over \$160,000 from 2023.

Driven by growth in both the number and scale of events, attendance was strong across all City signature events in 2024, at more than 150,000 people – an increase of over 500% since 2019. StreetFest on Central and Central Spark are estimated to have increased attendance by 10,000 people at each event. Other free cultural experiences offered by the Culture Division are also experiencing high demand; the Burnaby Village Museum (BVM) has seen a dramatic increase since 2019 when gate attendance was under 175,000. In 2023 this number rose to over 272,000 and was still high at 227,600 in 2024. In both years, 54% of the BVM’s total gate attendance occurred during the Heritage Christmas program.

Increased attendance puts pressure on both operational planning and budgets, particularly for public safety and maintaining customer service. Security, medical staff, traffic control personnel, and front-line auxiliary staff are required in larger numbers to respond to the popularity of these events.

Again in 2024, surveys were used at select events to learn more about attendance and to inform future planning. Attendees continue to express strong levels of satisfaction with events, with 68% of survey respondents stating that attendance at a City of Burnaby event gave them a sense of pride in the community. 37% of respondents were from Burnaby, with 33% coming from Metro Vancouver outside of Burnaby. Reasons for attendance varied with each event and included music, free admission and fireworks.

3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

These results demonstrate the demand for accessible cultural activities within the City. This demand has outgrown the City’s ability to respond under its current model. Council’s direction to continue to explore additional and expanded events, and to include more partners in funding and programming, responds to this demand. However, to fully leverage the input of other cultural communities who have the potential to add authentic, unique cultural activations throughout Burnaby requires new processes and resources, and time to build community capacity. By widening the scope of the City’s event delivery strategy to engage non-profit organizations, businesses, business associations and resident groups, a wider range of activations and events can be supported, continuing to build Burnaby as a vibrant, destination city.

3.1 Providing Better Support to Community Events

In 2024 staff completed a review of the City’s support to community organized events. These findings were presented to the Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee in June 2024. Subject to Council’s consideration and approval of

resources in the 2025 operating budget, this work will begin the creation of a new Events and Activation Branch within the Culture Division. The new branch would oversee delivery of the special events program, coordination and customer service support for the delivery of events by external producers, and opportunities for community engagement and collaboration in creative placemaking and other cultural programming. Two new positions have been requested in the 2025 budget to join existing Culture staff on the new team. Additional programming funding is also required, but is scalable. With the right staff team in place, and flexibility within the program expectations, smaller funding amounts can support new pilots and partnerships, building new relationships and capacity within communities and organizations for future projects. Options for programming funding are discussed in more detail below.

3.2 Options for Expanding Blues & Roots Festival

Council directed staff to explore expanded programming for Burnaby Blues & Roots Festival (BBRF), both adding additional days and spreading activations throughout Deer Lake Park and adjacent areas. In the 2025 budget, a placeholder of \$317,000 was used while additional analysis of options was completed. These options are outlined in the table below. The recommended option is the initiation of a second stage with guest curation by local artists, members of specific cultural communities or youth. This stage will increase the variety of programming on the site, broaden the draw to the festival, and support stronger relationships with local cultural communities and their participation in BBRF. Complemented by the community zone and a potential third daytime stage at the BVM, this concept is an incremental expansion appropriate to the Festival Lawn site and staffing while creating new opportunities for exciting partnerships, programming and audience experiences.

	Option 1 (Recommended)	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
	Second Stage (East Lawn) & BVM Daytime Activation	BVM Daytime Activation	Friday (7 pm start) & Saturday Mainstage only	Combines Option 3 with Option 1	Full Weekend Concert Series (Fri – Sun, 7 pm start)
Stage	\$10,500	\$2,500	--	\$10,500	--
Sound System & Lighting	\$8,500	\$1,000	--	\$8,500	\$20,000
Tent	\$4,500	\$2,000	--	\$4,500	--
Technicians Production Contractors	\$3,500	\$1,500	\$10,000	\$13,500	\$20,000
Curation	\$10,000	--	--	\$10,000	--
Talent	\$15,000	\$5,000	\$50,000	\$65,000	\$65,000
General Staffing	--	--	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$40,000

Traffic Control	--	--	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$30,000
Total	\$52,000	\$12,000	\$95,000	\$147,000	\$175,000

3.3 Car Free Days

Continued exploration of Car Free Days has included consultation with current and past producers of car free days and other street festivals in the metro area, support of the Engineering Transportation Division to understand options and costs of road closures in locations throughout the City, and surveys at similar events. In surveys, Car Free Days were described as street closures to facilitate the participation of business, community organizations, arts and other entertainment in activations that are reflective of the local community and concentrated in a geographic area that is easily navigated on foot or through other active transportation. In total, 1,000 responses were received to surveys at Hats Off Day, Edmonds City Fair and Central Spark. Survey respondents identified as being in a younger age range than responses received at other City events, with 44% under the age of 34. 80% of respondents expressed interest in attending additional Car Free Days. Live music and other performances, and food trucks were the preferred activities to draw people to these events, with farmer’s markets and games or sports activities following.

While earlier proposals to Council on implementation of Car Free Days had assumed a model similar to other City festivals, advice from organizers of similar events highlighted the importance of engagement with local community stakeholders to improve the authenticity, vibrancy, and local ownership of the event. Thoughtful communication and coordination with businesses, service organizations and institutions along the festival route is critical to ensure broad participation and has to be resourced with both time and dedicated staff. Financial or other incentives for small businesses and other neighbours can address concerns about the strength of walk-by traffic, or support patios or other adjustments to service on event day. In the absence of local business or other neighbourhood associations, building trust and partnership will take longer as key stakeholders need to be identified and brought into the planning process. Community members are likely to be more eager to participate if the event can be organized to address local challenges and opportunities, and potentially with a name and branding that the neighbourhood feels ownership over.

Three options have been identified in 2025 to work towards new street festivals. At the time of budget preparation, a \$675,000 budget amount was projected, assuming a complex road closure with large footprint and contracting of programming and production support similar to other major City-produced festivals. With the advice of other event organizers to prioritize external partnerships and community capacity, options were identified that would operate at a smaller scale but with increased focus on local relationships and organic programming. Beresford Street between Willingdon and Sussex provides a simpler closure with opportunities to pilot a new festival in 2025 at a cost of \$295,000. Pilot activities in the Edmonds community could begin to build towards a future fully programmed street festival with strong ownership by community partners, at a cost of \$120,000.

4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

If approved by Council in the proposed 2025-2029 Financial Plan, the Culture Division will work with Marketing and Communications to create engagement and marketing plans for new events and initiatives.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Funding discussed in this report is included in the proposed 2025-2029 Financial Plan under the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department.

Respectfully submitted,

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

ATTACHMENTS

Not applicable.

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

This report was prepared by Emmaline Hill, Director, Culture