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SUBJECT SPECIAL EVENTS IN NANAIMO

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report:

To provide an overview of outdoor events in City of Nanaimo parks and open spaces and outline how the City of Nanaimo facilitates the delivery of events with logistical support, funding opportunities and infrastructure.

BACKGROUND

At the 2021-FEB-08 Governance and Priorities Committee Meeting, discussion occurred regarding special events, and their potential to animate the downtown core. In response, this report presents information on how the City of Nanaimo currently facilitates the delivery of events with logistical support through staff, funding opportunities, and infrastructure.

The *Official Community Plan (OCP)*, and the *Parks, Recreation and Culture Masterplan* both outline policy and direction related to the provision and support of special events for the community. The OCP identifies that the City will “provide opportunities for all Nanaimo residents and visitors to express creativity and enjoy leisure time through a wide range of programs, courses, activities and special events.” A *Cultural Plan for a Creative Nanaimo* identifies actions related to events including: pursuing public and private partnerships; encouraging and supporting new and revitalized events and festivals; supporting events and festivals organizations to collaborate; and providing greater support to events and festivals.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Nanaimo hosted over 250 outdoor events, tournaments and festivals in City parks and open spaces each year, including business/trade, political, educational, arts and culture, sports and recreational, ceremonial and private events. Events attract local and international visitors, build vibrant communities, create economic revenues, and generate community spirit and a sense of civic identity.

Events and the organizations and people who deliver them in Nanaimo were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through 2020 and 2021 because of restrictions on gatherings and travel. While some groups were able to adapt to hold small in-person or virtual events, many were unable to adapt their event to meet Provincial Health Orders and cancelled. With restrictions now lifted, the focus is on supporting organizations and people to rebuild and re-establish well-loved special events, and re-engage our communities through fresh events of all kinds.

DISCUSSION

Staff Support – Special Events Coordinator on the Culture & Events team

As part of organizational restructuring in 2019, the Culture and Events section was created within the division of Recreation and Culture. New positions, including Manager of Culture & Events, and Special Events Coordinator were established. Guided by City plans, including *A Cultural Plan for a Creative Nanaimo*, the Culture & Events team serves as a convener, connector, facilitator, enabler and funder.

The Special Events Coordinator acts as key liaison, both internally and externally. They are responsible for connecting with and providing excellent customer service to individuals, community organizations, including non-profits, business and other agencies, and enabling them to deliver major community events, tournaments and festivals in City parks, picnic shelters, and other outdoor spaces. The Special Events Coordinator, in conjunction with other staff, helps to connect groups with a suitable venue for their event, and assists with booking parks, fields and other outdoor facilities. They provide guidance and one-on-one support to event organizers to ensure that appropriate licensing, insurance and other logistical considerations are addressed.

Within the past year, the Special Events Coordinator has spear-headed a Tourism and Events Networking Group, bringing together representatives from the Vancouver Island Conference Centre, Tourism Nanaimo, Vancouver Island Symphony, the Port Theatre, Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo Art Gallery, Nanaimo Museum, and sports tourism for conversations designed to share information, promote collaboration, and expand networks.

Within the City, the Special Events Coordinator facilitates connections between the various departments that support events in civic space, including Parks Operations, Engineering, Traffic, Bylaws, Fire Rescue, Communications and others as required. They also liaise with Community Development on filming permits. To strengthen these connections, regular inter-department meetings to specifically address events and festivals will be convened. A main purpose of the role is to ensure greater coordination, and provide a consistent point of contact knowledgeable about available City facilities and infrastructure, the logistics of major event operation, funding and opportunities, and the landscape of local events and festivals.

With leadership from the Special Events Coordinator, within the last month improvements have been implemented to make the City's online interface for booking requests simpler to access, in order to reduce barriers and better serve the individuals and organizations who wish to book City spaces.

OVERVIEW OF EVENTS AND CITY SUPPORT

In a typical year, the City of Nanaimo hosts, facilitates, supports and liaises to deliver events to the community year-round. Events are outlined in the following categories:

City-Hosted Events

The City of Nanaimo, through the Recreation Coordinator team, directly facilitates approximately 25 annual events, which are funded by the City. These include both free events and low-cost admission-based events. Examples include Healthamoungus, Family Fun Nights, Winter

Wonderland, the Culture & Heritage Awards, Concerts in the Park, and New Year's Eve Finale. Large scale events like Canada Day typically require significant investments of staff time. For example, Canada Day, which attracts over 10,000 people to Maffeo Sutton Park, takes three staff members approximately six months to plan, as staff take on all aspects of event design and management including: marketing and promotion, entertainers and technicians, food vendors, equipment rentals, custodial, first aid, volunteers, parking management, community booths, permits and licensing, site management, and additional elements as required.

Additionally, smaller scale events are routinely held throughout the year in aquatics, arenas and parks. Sponsorship of events by local groups or businesses including the Nanaimo Lions Club and Coast Capital Savings provides many free swimming and skating experiences to local residents. A listing of events hosted and directly facilitated by the City is included as item #1 in Attachment A.

In addition to the City's annual signature events listed above, staff also organize events and celebrations as occasions arise. Though in 2020 and 2021, while gathering in large numbers was not permitted, Staff were able to organize creative ways to mark the openings of important civic facilities, including the Rotary Centennial Garden, Harewood Youth Park, and Phase I of the Maffeo Sutton Park Inclusive Playground. Looking ahead, Recreation and Culture staff are collaborating on several upcoming celebrations related to the installation of the Welcome Pole at Maffeo Sutton Park and the re-opening of Beban Pool in October.

City-Supported Community Events

The City of Nanaimo supports events, festivals and tournaments by way of grant funding, physical space, liaising with provincial licensing officers, and providing assistance with logistical aspects of event implementation. Some well-known events, run by independent organizations with City support, have included the National Indigenous Peoples Day, Commercial Street Night Market, Symphony by the Sea, Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival, the Marine Festival, Nanaimo Fringe Festival, among many others. An example of a notable large-scale event that the City supported was the 2014 BC Summer Games which had an economic impact of approximately \$2 million dollars and brought 3,000 athletes to Nanaimo. Most recently, the City supported Crimson Coast Dance's 23rd Infringing Dance Festival which held in-person events at venues across the community and virtual events that attracted international participation. Another example of upcoming activity the City is supporting are the series of Corner Concerts the Nanaimo Chamber will present downtown each weekend over the summer.

Typically, the majority of events take place at Maffeo Sutton Park, which is considered Nanaimo's premiere event park. Other well-used event locations include Westwood Lake Park, Bowen Park and Diana Krall Plaza. A listing of events supported by the City is included as item #2 in Attachment A.

Staff also represent the City by attending many events hosted by other community organizations, and participate in their delivery by hosting tents and providing fun activities, while promoting Parks, Recreation and Culture programs and inviting community participation.

Sports Tournament Events

City-owned facilities host many organized matches and tournaments in lakes, parks, pools, arenas and fields. A few of these events include the U17 Hockey Tournament, Nanaimo Minor

Lacrosse Tournament, and Nanaimo Women’s Field Hockey Association. The City is well-positioned to host additional events with the planned improvements to amenities at the Serauxmen Stadium. Upgrades to spectator and participant experience include; enhanced lighting, playing surface, seating, washrooms, power and all complement the existing facilities in the Larry McNabb Sports Zone. Nanaimo continues to promote hosting opportunities and with this in mind staff submitted a bid package to host the 2026 BC Summer Games earlier this year.

Private Events: Wedding Ceremonies, Family Reunions and Small Gatherings

City venues are routinely booked by individuals for private celebrations. Over the past few years, the City has seen an increase in bookings for wedding ceremonies. Two of our most popular wedding locations are the scenic amphitheatre at Bowen Park, with an average of 27 weddings per year, and Neck Point Park which hosts 22 weddings annually, across four locations. Additionally, an average of 100 smaller events take place each year in City parks. These private gatherings include workshops, reunions, birthday parties and other festivities.

City Funding for Special Events

The City of Nanaimo provides annual funding to assist groups in the production and growth of special events. The City funds events through two different grant streams, Culture and Heritage Project Grants, and Downtown Events and Revitalization Fund program. Additionally, arts and culture organizations who receive City operating funding, and those who co-manage City-owned culture facilities also host a variety of events, as part of their ongoing community programming.

Grants for events are typically awarded in January and fund a variety of activities throughout the year, though the majority of activity is concentrated from March to August. Over 90% of the events that the City funds through Downtown Event Revitalization Funds, and Culture and Heritage Project Grants take place downtown.

The total funding envelope for Culture & Heritage Project Grants is \$44,407. 25% of eligible costs can be supported through this stream, which requires organizers to raise the remaining 75% of costs through other means. The total funding envelope for Downtown Event Revitalization Fund grants is \$150,000. Up to 35% of eligible event costs can be supported through this stream, requiring organizers to raise the remaining 65% of costs.

Events Funded By Downtown Event Grants & Culture and Heritage Project Grants

| Year | # of Events | City Funds Issued | COMMENTS |
|------|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 2017 | 33 | \$149,699 | |
| 2018 | 42 | \$186,254 | |
| 2019 | 35 | \$165,082 | |
| 2020 | 38 | \$200,000 | Pandemic Impact |
| 2021 | 42 | \$163,000 | Pandemic Impact |

Other Funding Sources for Local Events

Other funding provided to events and festivals in Nanaimo is the Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) The City, as the Designated Recipient of the MRDT, has assigned the Nanaimo Hospitality Association to administer MRDT funds, including the Nanaimo Hospitality Grant. The key priorities with this grant are to enhance new and existing festivals and drive overnight

visitation. At this time, awarding of Festivals and Events Grants through Nanaimo Hospitality Association are on hold.

Event Spaces, Facility and Amenity Development

The City's OCP speaks to the provision of public gathering places through a diversity of parks, plazas and open spaces, and recognizes downtown as the primary focus for community events and gatherings. Improving the performance space at Maffeo Sutton Park is outlined as a priority in *A Cultural Plan for a Creative Nanaimo*, and was feedback that was received via REIMAGINE NANAIMO Phase 1 engagement. An option that is currently being explored, in partnership with the Lions Club of Nanaimo, are upgrades to the Lions Pavilion to enhance acoustics, lighting and sightlines. At the same time, Diana Krall Plaza is currently the subject of study. Though discussions were on hold during the pandemic, a design charrette with an interdisciplinary team was recently convened to look at ways of improving the plaza. Recommendations for improvements to that space are expected to come forward to Council in the next few months.

Impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic

The majority of events were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to Public Health Orders. While some organizers were able to adapt their events, others could not. Through the pandemic, Staff liaised with Island Health and BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA), with local tourism and event hosts, cultural organizations, and with other municipalities and regional districts across the province. This collegial network has afforded the opportunity to share ideas and issues, and helped us to adapt during periods of PHO restrictions and phases of reopening to deliver high-quality parks, recreation and culture services in safe and meaningful ways.

During this period, support and care was extended by Staff to community groups, organizations and residents. Staff liaised regularly with event organizers on bookings, changing restrictions, grant funding, and other matters, and collaborated to re-position their programs. A number of smaller scale, but impactful events took place, such as drive-in live performances and film screenings in community centre parking lots, COVID-safe scavenger hunts, and virtual concerts and gatherings. One example of a successful event during this time is the drive-through food drop-off and drive-in fireworks event presented by Nanaimo NightOwls on 2021-JAN-01 at Serauxmen Stadium.

Following the announcement on 2021-MAY-25 of the BC's Restart Plan, our community is eager to organize and participate in programs and events, and Staff are managing increased booking requests and inquiry for space. Staff continue to support the community as we move through reopening phases.

CONCLUSION

As Nanaimo grows, we anticipate an even greater desire by the community to both participate in and organize unique, memorable events and festivals of different sizes and shapes, and facilitate new opportunities to promote and activate cultural and sport tourism. Maintaining and enhancing facilities, growing funding programs to support events and festivals, streamlining City systems and communications channels, and continuing to build collaborations with and between a range of community partners and business are essential ingredients for future success. Recognizing that events and festivals of all kinds contribute to our social, environmental, cultural

and economic sustainability, the City has a commitment to events and festivals and a strong foundation on which to build.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Recreation & Culture Staff provide over 25 well-received community events.
- The City supports over 250 annual events, by providing space, funding and other resources.
- The City is well-positioned to host unique experiences and is constantly evolving its approach to provide high levels of service.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A: Special Events in Nanaimo – Tables
ATTACHMENT B: PowerPoint Presentation – Special Events in Nanaimo

Submitted by:

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