

Report to Council



Date: February 8, 2021
To: Council
From: City Manager
Subject: Event Strategy
Department: Sport & Event Services

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the report from Sport & Event Services dated February 8, 2021 regarding the activities related to the development of an Event Strategy;

AND THAT Council approves in principle the draft strategic goals and objectives as outlined in the report;

AND FURTHER THAT Council directs staff to provide a progress update following the review and consultation process.

Purpose:

To update Council on the development of an Event Strategy and seek Council's input on the draft strategic goals and objectives.

Background:

Events play several important roles in the function of a city. Not only do they serve as a mechanism to animate and bring vibrancy to a community but also they act as a tool to advance a city's priorities and vision and affect the way its citizens think and feel about their community. More cities, nationally and globally, are adopting event strategies to help drive their respective goals and objectives while reaping the benefits events provide, including: improved quality of life, increased economic and social stimulus, enhanced collaboration and partnerships and raised national profile.

Over the past decade, Kelowna has made significant advancements within the event industry through a number of local initiatives and activities such as the establishment of the Outdoor Events Committee (OEC) and key partnerships, the creation of the Major Event Hosting Program, and the streamlining of the events application process. As a result, Kelowna boasts a dynamic annual event portfolio and has established itself as a strong contender to host all levels of major events.

The City's Event Services Team, comprised of one supervisor, two full-time event coordinators and one part-time recreation technician, leads the City's efforts related to the various facets of special events. Responsibilities include: event/program development, event/film permitting, grants management, organizational development, and major event procurement. The team plays a key role in providing direction to the local event industry as we strive to become an 'eventful city'; a city that utilizes events for the creation and advancement, rather than the preservation, of community development.

Events & COVID-19

Traditionally, Kelowna is host to 160+ events annually, ranging in size and type. Typical events include: weddings, fundraisers, community-wide festivals, concerts, film productions and major events, providing a broad array of opportunities for residents and businesses alike.

Locally, and around the globe, the event industry has taken an unprecedented hit in 2020 due to COVID-19 and the associated restrictions on gatherings. Compared to previous years, including years of excessive smoke and flooding, the local event industry has never been so negatively impacted as it was in 2020. The absence of events affected much of the Kelowna community including service providers, organizers, artists, facility operators and accommodation and transportation industries. In addition, social connection was at an all-time low triggering increased tensions, fear of visiting physical spaces and an overall negative affect on the community's emotional well-being.

Out of a scheduled 173 events in 2020, only 37 were permitted with the remainder being cancelled due to the pandemic and associated safety measures. Despite the challenges, the Event Services Team worked closely with several event organizers to find solutions for the delivery of some noteworthy events:

Kelowna Farmers' & Crafters' Market

In late March, the Farmers' Market was advised their regular outdoor location at Springfield & Dilworth was not available due to the uncertainty of COVID. With the impetus to support local farmers, staff worked with organizers and health officials to offer a modified version in the Parkinson Recreation Centre parking lot with required protocols such as, designated entry & exit points, pre-ordering products, capping participants, and sanitizing stations.

Hungry Hungry Half Marathon

In September, the Hungry Hungry Half Marathon, which raises funds for the Central Okanagan Foodbank, was modified to allow 167 participants to partake in the run. The race was reduced to 5km and runners were required to pre-register for timeslots that were capped at 10 people. The run, beginning in the Apple Bowl and progressing along the Rail Trail, had markers to ensure social distancing, onsite health officials, volunteers along the route, sanitizing stations, and constant communication to educate participants on safety protocols.

Kelowna Pride Festival

Traditionally, the Kelowna Pride Festival sees upwards of 4000 people march in celebration of equal rights and diverse sexual and gender identities before enjoying an eventful day of music, activities, and food. This year the march was adapted into separate cycle and automobile parades to continue the tradition. Both parades, which occurred on separate days, required pre-registration and followed Provincial COVID safety protocols including, social distancing, capping participant and vehicle numbers, and contact tracing.

Festivals Kelowna - Parks Alive 'On Tour'

The Parks Alive program, which typically consists of musical acts performing at popular Kelowna destinations such as Waterfront Park, was also modified this year. Instead of inviting people to the concert, Festivals Kelowna brought the concert to the people in the form of 'Parks Alive On-Tour'. Local talent was trucked to various neighborhoods during the summer months to play 20-minute sets before moving on to a different location. This was a popular alternative during a difficult time and was met with positive feedback by residents who were able to enjoy the entertainment safely. In addition, Festivals Kelowna provided modified 'Pianos in the Park' and 'Buskers' programs and were also able to offer entertainment to the 400 block of Bernard Avenue during the last few weeks of the patio extension program.

Film Productions

Film productions were essentially halted across the globe in the early days of the pandemic. However, due to a combination of a proactive approach from the Okanagan Film Commission, collaboration from stakeholders such as WorkSafe BC, staff readiness, and the size of films being produced, the film industry was able to thrive in our community during a time when most others could not. Kelowna usually sees an average of 8 films per year, but in 2020, there were a total of 13 films permitted by the City with even more being planned for 2021.

As we look ahead to 2021, there is still much uncertainty on how COVID-19 will impact the local event calendar and staff will continue to explore safe and meaningful ways to support and advance the event industry.

Major Events

In recent years, the Event Services Team has worked in collaboration with its community partners to successfully procure an impressive schedule of major events including: 2018 Break Out West, 2019 Skate Canada International, 2020 Memorial Cup, and the 2021 Tim Hortons Brier. As a result of the pandemic, the 2020 Memorial Cup and the 2021 Tim Hortons Brier were cancelled, and alternate hosting dates are being pursued.

Staff continue to seek out event opportunities and are working to establish an event hosting forecast for major events in Kelowna. This process has many contributing factors including, event availability, available funding, facility capacities, and community support. As noted by event-industry networks, public comfort levels will be a key indicator for the success of events moving forward. With that in mind, staff are looking to secure events that have more of a participant-based format in 2021-2022 and larger fan-based events for 2023-2026.

Discussion:

An eventful city is more than merely hosting several single events. It requires the development of an integrated approach that aligns with associated Community plans (i.e. Community Sport Plan, Cultural Plan, and Council Priorities) and maximizes how events can achieve community priorities. By recognizing the strategic coherence of events, an eventful city is one that focuses on a proactive, holistic, and coordinated method to trigger the advancement of community priorities. Key elements of an eventful city include:

- Having a clear purpose and vision
- Having a dynamic event portfolio
- Having a collaborative event industry
- Having opportunities for the creation of events
- Having a reputation for being a first-class event destination
- Having a collective and progressive approach from the community
- Having a strategy that drives City priorities

With the evolution of the event industry moving from a supporter of civic objectives to a key driver for achieving community priorities, the Event Services Team is becoming more proactive in their approach and making a philosophical shift from being a City full of events to an eventful City. This includes having a cooperative and coordinated methodology to specific elements that address the broad focus areas of event development, event support, event management, and event spaces.

On February 11, 2019 Council endorsed a Strategic Events Framework (Appendix A) which includes a draft vision, guiding principles, and focus areas. Since then, staff have actively engaged a variety of event industry stakeholders to advance the development process and build out the framework. Activities accomplished to date include:

- System review
- Event organizer town-halls
- SWOT analysis (conducted by event organizers)
- Outdoor Event Committee interviews
- Post-event debriefs & surveys
- Municipal (and global) comparisons

Based on the strategic events framework, and the analysis and feedback to date, four draft “Strategic Goals” have been developed for each focus area along with a series of “Objectives” that outline the appropriate activities needing to take place in order to achieve the goals. They are:

1) Foster a progressive and proactive approach to the development of events and film to elevate resident pride and quality of life while supporting the process in achieving community priorities.

- Promote sectoral collaboration on event-related initiatives that will strengthen relationships with key stakeholders and support partnership opportunities.
- Develop policies, procedures, and resources for the enhancement and advancement of events and film in the community.
- Actively seek out and procure large-scale, major events that have a significant impact on the broader community.
- Foster a dynamic and balanced portfolio of quality events throughout the community and calendar year.

- Administer accurate reporting methods to measure both qualitative and quantitative data.

2) Provide quality resources and programs that enhance the community's capacity for successful event delivery and organizational development.

- Create and facilitate funding programs that aid in the attainment, retainment, and development of events.
- Support industry development through an annual series of training programs, workshops & seminars, for staff, event organizers and other key stakeholders.
- Build a robust and sustainable volunteer program that assists with the recruitment, training and utilization of volunteers.
- Enhance the communications and marketing efforts of event organizers to actively promote local events and expand awareness of event opportunities.
- Develop a menu of innovative and tangible services & resources for event organizers that foster the delivery of events and bolster public experiences.

3) Nurture a solution-oriented culture that utilizes progressive systems to manage the coordination, communication, and overall delivery of a safe and flourishing event industry.

- Expand and enhance online application systems to streamline the varying types and nuances of events and film.
- Develop a set of film guidelines & fees that will govern the uniqueness of filmmaking in the community while balancing industry standards and community impact.
- Ensure event and film-related bylaws, fees, and guidelines are up-to-date and based on industry standards through regular reviews and comparative analysis.
- Develop a communications and marketing strategy to effectively convey and educate stakeholders on the impact, readiness, and benefits of events in the community
- Foster the current advisory committee structure and review process to provide solution-oriented expertise effectively and proactively for all facets of local event and film delivery.

4) Adopt a collaborative and integrated approach to the development, utilization and maintenance of event facilities, infrastructure and spaces for successful event hosting and community enjoyment.

- Conduct a comprehensive review of all City-owned event facilities, infrastructure, and spaces on a 5-year cycle and inform development/revitalization plans.

- Adopt a strategic, collaborative approach and/or explore joint funding opportunities for capital investment and resource allocation for existing facility renewal.
- Identify and animate non-traditional event spaces across the city to create safe and vibrant gathering sites while encouraging creative expression.
- Explore new and unique methods to deliver events that are accessible and available to all residents in the community.
- Ensure purposeful involvement from the events sector and consideration of event hosting priorities in urban and parks planning exercises.

Additionally, draft “Action Items” are under development that will clearly detail the steps for each objective. Together, the strategic goals, objectives and subsequent action items will provide clear direction and manageable progressions for plan implementation.

In the final phases of development, staff will work with key stakeholders to review and finalize the draft Events Strategy document and develop an implementation plan based on the established goals, objectives, and action items. Once complete, the final document will be presented to Council for consideration of endorsement. Project completion is anticipated for fall 2021.

Conclusion:

Events play an important role in the overall development of the community. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the significance of events through their absence and has highlighted the importance and timing of creating a meaningful Events Strategy. Becoming an eventful city will require a clear strategic direction and collaborative approach by all stakeholders. In a future where collaboration is encouraged, an integrated approach to the development of events will be influential in achieving resident pride, vibrant neighborhoods, community safety, and other community priorities.

Internal Circulation:

Active Living & Culture
Communications

Considerations applicable to this report:

Existing Policy: Council’s 2019-2022 priorities identified measures supporting staff’s recommendations in this report. Specifically, relevant to this report:

- Common understanding of future direction;
- Residents feel safe; and,
- Animated parks & public spaces

Additionally, the Events Strategy aligns with key objectives of the Kelowna Community Sport Plan and Cultural Plan; and contributes to our efforts to be an eventful “City of the Future”.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

Existing Policy:

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

External Agency/Public Comments:

Communications Comments:

Submitted by:

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Approved by:

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Attachments: Appendix A – Event and Festivals Framework 2019

Powerpoint Presentation – Events Presentation - 2020

cc: