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To: Chief Administrative Officer

From: Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

Subject: **Proposed Scope and Process - Festivals and Events Strategy**

For: **Strategic Priorities Standing Committee**

Recommendation:

That the Committee receive the report of the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer dated March 31, 2025 and entitled "Proposed Scope and Process - Festivals and Events Strategy" for information.

Report Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to seek the Committee's feedback and input on the proposed scope and process for the development of the City's Festivals and Events Strategy.

Strategic Priorities:

This report supports the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan Priorities of *Economic Vitality, Financial Excellence and Operational Efficiency, and Community Amenities, EDI Reconciliation and Social Cohesion*, as festivals and events provide valuable opportunities for residents, visitors and businesses to connect, engage and foster a shared sense of community, while enhancing the City's quality of life, economic vitality and visitor economy. The Festivals and Events Strategy is identified as a "B" Priority in the 2025 Business Plan.

Background:

Festivals and events are essential to fostering a vibrant and welcoming environment in Coquitlam. Beyond enhancing the City's cultural and social landscape, they serve as strategic tools to advance municipal priorities, attract visitors, support local businesses, strengthen community identity and shape residents' perceptions of their City.

City-led events, such as Canada Day in Coquitlam and the Summer Concert Series, play a vital role in fostering civic pride and strengthening community



connections. In 2024, Canada Day achieved record-breaking attendance, with an estimated 100,000 participants, demonstrating the ongoing value of this flagship event. Similarly, the Summer Concert Series provides free, family-friendly entertainment, attracting in the range of 1,500 to 2,000 attendees per concert and reinforcing Coquitlam's reputation as a fun and inclusive community.

Community-led festivals, organized by non-profit and community-based organizations, highlight the City's rich cultural diversity and heritage while supporting local businesses. These events not only enhance Coquitlam's reputation as a vibrant destination but also foster social connections and inclusion. The City's current portfolio includes long-standing events, such as Festival du Bois and the Highland Games delivered by ScotFestBC, alongside emerging festivals such as the BC Dumpling Festival, Chaharshanbe Suri (formerly Fire Festival), HollyDaze in the Heights, and the Caribbean Days Festival. An average of 35 small to mid-size community-led events are also hosted annually, primarily at Town Centre Park, with others taking place in parks across the City, including: Glen Park, Blue Mountain Park, Mackin Park, Como Lake, Mundy Park, Spirit Square, Coquitlam Crunch, Oakdale Park, and Buchanan Square.

The realignment of the Festivals and Events portfolio to reside within the Economic Development Division reflects the City's goal of leveraging festivals and events as economic and tourism drivers. Since the transition in January 2024, staff have reviewed the current event landscape, identifying key challenges such as declining attendance at certain events, growing reliance of non-profit event organizers on City funding, increasing logistical complexities, and broader geopolitical and macroeconomic factors affecting event planning and delivery. Furthermore, staff have increased the focus on identifying opportunities to enhance collaboration between the City and community event partners to strengthen partnerships with local businesses, tourism partners, and event organizers to drive attendance and maximize mutual economic benefits.

As festival and event organizers continue to navigate the post-pandemic landscape, increased demand for funding and resources has placed additional pressure on municipalities. Rising costs due to inflation, supply chain disruptions, heightened risk management requirements combined with

increased competition for sponsorship funds have made event planning more challenging. Additionally, access to Federal and Provincial grants has declined, while labour and volunteer shortages persist.

The varied delivery models of community-led events present challenges in tracking audience reach, attendance, and other key metrics. Some events are organized by volunteer-based groups, while others are managed by professional societies with paid staff. Event budgets also vary significantly, with some generating revenue through ticket sales and sponsorships, while others remain free with limited direct revenues.

City-led events operate within base budgets but face similar challenges in data collection due to a lack of mechanisms to identify and track key performance metrics. Without consistent criteria for evaluating the economic and cultural value of events, there are gaps in understanding the return on investment for both the City and the community.

As Coquitlam continues to see a mix of legacy, signature, and emerging festivals and events, a clear vision for festivals and events and a structured approach to funding and evaluation will be essential to ensuring sustainable growth, a thriving events scene and maximized benefits. The planned Festivals and Events Strategy is intended to meet these objectives as highlighted below.

Discussion/Analysis:

The current Council-endorsed Event, Festival, and Tournament Policy (Attachment 1) has been in effect since 2018. This policy has effectively provided staff with a structured framework and practical guiding principles for managing events supported by the City. It establishes a transparent and efficient event management process that aligns with relevant policies, regulations, and City priorities, ensuring the delivery of high-quality events, festivals, and tournaments.

Given the evolving challenges and opportunities in the festivals and events sector noted above, a comprehensive strategy is needed to provide a long-term vision that will guide the application of the existing policy while proactively shaping the future landscape of festivals and events in Coquitlam. This strategy will aim to focus on maximizing the economic, social, and cultural benefits

associated with festivals and events by building on past successes, while also identifying opportunities for improvement and growth.

Key Objectives

A successful Festivals and Events Strategy for the City will inform, establish and support the long-term vision for festivals and events in Coquitlam. The strategy will be a roadmap for attracting, growing and supporting high-quality events, strengthening and fostering partnerships, maximizing return on investment, and elevating Coquitlam's profile and reputation as a premier destination for festivals and events in Metro Vancouver. Key objectives will include:

A. A Sustainable and Adaptive Event Ecosystem

The strategy will enhance and evolve the event ecosystem by ensuring there is room for the attraction of new event opportunities that align with the City's core strategic priorities, while supporting changes to existing events, allowing for a balance of tradition and innovation and encouraging fresh event experiences. This will be based on a flexible and nimble approach that adapts to new opportunities and priorities.

B. Strategic Event Scheduling

The strategy will build on best practices for scheduling events and allocating venues based on defined evaluation criteria, such as event size, type, and scope, to create a balanced and accessible events calendar that meets community needs and places events throughout the city.

C. Customer Service-Focused Event Support

Ensuring comprehensive customer-service focused support for community-led, grassroots, low-cost, and emerging festivals and events, safeguarding their growth and long-term success. This will include a supportive approach with non-profit event organizers that includes offering support with effective budgeting and resource allocation, enhanced marketing and promotional reach, identifying partnership opportunities, and management of logistical complexities.

D. Comprehensive Event Performance Metrics

The strategy will include development of a framework and tools for measuring event success, incorporating key performance indicators (KPIs)

such as attendance, revenue generation, marketing reach, and economic, environmental, and cultural impact.

E. Optimized Event Infrastructure Allocation

A comprehensive assessment of City facilities and event infrastructure to identify underutilized assets and expand event locations, ensuring a balanced distribution of activities and reducing pressure on high-demand venues.

F. Transparent and Equitable Funding Allocation

A clear and consistent framework for granting City funds to event organizers, ensuring fair and transparent support for both long-standing legacy events and newly emerging festivals.

Proposed Scope of Work

It is proposed that the scope of work for the Festivals and Events Strategy will focus specifically on city-led and community-led festivals and events. While Sport Tourism is an important part of Coquitlam's economy, staff believe that these types of sporting events would be best addressed through a separate strategy and is therefore not recommended as part of the scope of this work. The proposed scope of work will include:

A. Current State Assessment

- Conduct an inventory of festivals and events, evaluating strengths, gaps, economic and cultural impacts, seasonal distribution, event sustainability, existing resource impacts and opportunities for growth.
- Assess City infrastructure including: Town Centre Park, Blue Mountain Park, Glen Park, Mackin Park, Buchanan Square, Mundy Park, Como Lake, City streets, and other outdoor venues to determine suitability for supporting festivals and events, parameters for right-sized festivals and events in those venues, and possible improvements that could positively influence future events.
- Evaluate the City's current funding models, including, base budget for City-led events, City grants and identify possible sustainable alternatives.

B. Benchmarking and Research

- Compare Coquitlam’s festival and event offerings with those of comparable municipalities.
- Conduct an analysis of event planning and management practices across similar municipalities, reviewing delivery models, staff resources, policies and logistical support.
- Analyze industry trends, success factors, and emerging best practices, and define target audiences using demographic data, data from previous City-led event surveys, and event trends.
- Work with Communications and Civic Engagement on a focused approach to engagement with event organizers, and ensure the public has information on the project.

C. Strategic Goals and Evaluation Framework

- Establish goals for economic impact, tourism enhancement, community engagement and cultural enrichment.
- Develop an evaluation framework with measurable outcomes for tracking event success, based on quantitative and qualitative key performance indicators to inform budget, granting policy and facility use.

D. Partnership and Funding Model

- Engage with City departments, businesses, cultural groups and residents to ensure the strategy aligns with the overarching goals of Coquitlam’s Strategic Plan, Economic Development Strategy, Tourism Strategy, and the Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategic Plan.
- Identify potential partners, including businesses and sponsors, and propose collaboration models designed to engage and offer value to partners.
- Propose funding mechanisms including sponsorships, grants, and budget allocations.

Process and Timeline

The Festivals and Events Strategy is proposed to be completed by T2 2026 and will be organized into the following phases:

- Research and Assessment (T1 and T2, 2025)
- Framing the Strategy (T2, 2025)
- Council Committee Check-In (T2, 2025)
- Strategy Development (T2 and T3, 2025)
- Draft Vision and Implementation Framework, Council Committee Review (T1, 2026)
- Draft Strategy Review (T2, 2026)
- Council Approval (T2, 2026)

Financial Implications:

The City currently allocates a total of approximately \$580k towards City-led festivals and events. This includes \$450k in the operating budget and an additional \$130k allocated from the sponsorship reserve. These funds support a variety of events, such as Canada Day celebrations, the Summer Concert Series, the Lights at Lafarge Kick-Off Event, and Neighborhood Block Parties. In addition, in 2025, Council approved a grant funding allocation of \$402k from Casino revenues to support Signature Events, including Festival du Bois, Charshanbe Suri, ScotFestBC - The BC Highland Games, BC Dumpling Festival, Caribbean Days Festival, and HollyDaze in the Heights.

As noted earlier in this report, the increasing pressures of rising costs due to inflation, labour shortages, supply chain disruptions, greater risk management requirements, further intense competition for sponsorships, and the reduced availability of Federal and Provincial grants all significantly impact both event budgets and the City's funding capacity which lends to the relevance of the Festivals and Events Strategy at this time.

With respect to the development of the Festivals and Events Strategy, the Committee's feedback on the proposed Scope and Process will be incorporated into a Request for Proposal document for procuring consulting expertise to assist with this work. Once costs associated with a Festivals and Events Strategy are determined, staff will report back to Council with a funding request from the Tourism Reserve. The uncommitted balance in the Tourism Reserve is \$283,000.

Conclusion:

Festivals and events provide valuable opportunities for residents, visitors, and local businesses to connect, engage, and foster a shared sense of community. Emerging pressures including rising costs, competition and lack of funding are currently impacting the festivals and events landscape, but, despite these challenges, Coquitlam remains a very popular location for event producers due to high quality facilities, a centralized location, and access to municipal funding.

The City invests significantly into both City-led and Community-led events making it essential to have a clear strategy that ensures funds are allocated responsibly, events are economically viable, self-sustaining, and impactful, and the City's support drives meaningful cultural, social, and economic benefits.

Developing a Festivals and Events Strategy will bring clarity and focus to the City's role in investing, supporting and delivering events, ensuring they are well-resourced, strategically aligned, and leveraged to maximize their economic, cultural, and social benefits and long-term impacts.

Michelle Hunt, CPA, CMA

Attachments:

1. Event, Festival and Tournament Policy (#5659580)
2. Presentation - Festivals and Events Strategy Scope and Process (#5558158)

This report was prepared by Heidi Hughes, Manager Tourism and Visitor Economy and reviewed by Jennifer Keefe, Director Community Recreation, Culture and Facilities; Michelle Frilund, Senior Manager, Communications and Civic Engagement; Aaron Hilgerdenaar, Senior Manager Bylaw Services; Eric Kalnins, Senior Manager Economic Development; Kathleen Reinheimer, Senior Manager Parks; Lindsey Grist, Manager Business and Innovation; Jamie Mahal, Manager Financial Planning Budgeting; Matthew Dindo, Strategic Analyst Policy and Plans.