



Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

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REPORT #: CAO-24-041 **COMMITTEE DATE:** 2024-11-19
REPORT TO: COTW-General **DUE IN COUNCIL:** 2024-11-26
SUBJECT: Special Events Policy Review Work Plan and Engagement – Next Steps

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended that:

- 1.1 Council **APPROVE** the retention of consulting services to undertake a review of the Town's Special Events Policy as described in Appendix 1;
- 1.2 Council **DIRECT** Staff to report back in Q1 2025 with the timing for each phase of the project;
- 1.3 Council **DIRECT** Staff to report back in Q1 2025 with an interim revised Special Events Policy for Town-owned lands with provisions that include process improvements and cost recovery;
- 1.4 Council **APPROVE** a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) allocation of \$80,000 to fund the Special Events Policy Review; and,
- 1.5 Staff be authorized to take the necessary actions to give effect hereto.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The purpose of this report is to identify actions taken and next steps to review, update and streamline the current Special Events Policy and processes.
- The Town currently has a single policy (Special Events Policy CS-CL014) that provides the framework for special events requests across the municipality. The Policy has several weaknesses, such as limited provisions for cost recovery for the use of Town-owned land (lost revenue) and staff time.
- There are foundational plans/ policies that are currently being reviewed and updated by Town Staff, including the Official Plan, Winery policies, and the Town's Comprehensive Zoning By-law. These plans and policies inform the Special Events Policy in the context of on-farm diversified uses and zoning regulations for the agricultural area. The review of these policies represents a significant commitment of resources limiting corporate capacity to take on another review.
- Niagara-on-the-Lake is a tourist destination and a desired location for holding events, both big and small. With the tourism alignment with Special Events, it is proposed that funding in the amount of \$80,000 be allocated from MAT reserves to fund the review and to conduct community engagement in the development of an updated Policy.
- Retaining consulting services will allow this project to proceed without delay and allow staff to complete the outstanding work on the Official Plan and other foundational plans/policies.
- Staff have identified opportunities to achieve quick wins while the larger project is

underway. These include updated provisions related to cost recovery for special events held on Town-owned properties. The updated provisions will address improved permit processes, cost recovery, data collection, reporting and enforcement. A revised policy will be brought back to Council for consideration in Q1 2025.

3. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on actions recommended by Staff to advance the work plan for a Special Event Policy review.

4. BACKGROUND

At its meeting on July 30, 2024, Council considered Staff Information Report CAO-24-032 titled Special Event Permit Policy and Process Review. This report provided background information on the administration of the Special Event Permit Process and a proposed review to improve and modernize the process going forward. Appendix 1 is an excerpt from that report and provides a high-level scope of work for the modernization review.

At the September 24, 2024, meeting, Council adopted a motion directing Staff to bring forward a report describing the enforcement of commercial activities that are not in compliance with zoning, addressing current steps, volume of activity, resources applied, and barriers/needs to improve effectiveness. Within the body of the motion, concerns were identified about events in agricultural areas. This motion is addressed in report FES-24-014 on this meeting's agenda.

5. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

The following objectives are proposed for the Special Events Policy review:

- **Process Clarity** - The revised policy should focus on ensuring clarity and transparency for the Special Event Policy and processes and the expectations of the applicant when applying. This transparency and clarity will assist with community inquiries and provide a better customer experience for applicants.
- **Streamline Process:** A Lean Process Review will ensure that the special events process is efficient, transparent, and aligned with best practices. Outlining expectations of submission upfront will ensure that the applicant provides all the required information for decision-making and that there is sufficient time for staff review prior to the event. The review will consider the necessary level of documentation and ensure optimum coordination and responsibility across staff teams.
- **Cost Recovery:** Without appropriate administration fees, municipal taxes cover the cost of the permit review. Costs should be allocated to the applicant unless exemptions are approved by Council at their discretion.
- **Enforcement:** The review will result in better tools for data collection in support of regular monitoring and determination of service levels and necessary enforcement capacity. This will inform a future enforcement strategy.

Appendix 1 provides a high-level scope of work for the modernization review and the proposed consulting assignment.

Based on an initial review of process, policy and a brief jurisdictional scan, Staff have identified two quick wins that could be implemented in the short term:

Create Special Events Policy for Town-Owned Properties: Staff will draft a separate policy and process related to special events held on Town-owned properties. This policy would include provisions such as cost recovery for lost revenue and staff time, along with other financial considerations. A draft of the policy will be brought to Council for review and approval in Q1 2025.

Updated Forms and Information on the Town's website: Based on staff and applicant feedback, there are straightforward amendments (for clarity only) that can be implemented to the current special events application form and instructions on the Town's website. These can be implemented quickly and will improve the customer experience for applicants.

There are foundational plans currently being reviewed and updated by Town staff, including the Official Plan and the Town's Comprehensive Zoning By-law. These are key Council priorities for this term of Council and require a significant commitment of limited planning staff resources. For this reason, and to provide a quick start to this work, it is recommended that consulting services be engaged to support the special events review.

6. STRATEGIC PLAN

The proposed next steps for the Special Event Policy align closely with Council's Strategic Plan by supporting key priorities such as fostering a vibrant and complete community, enhancing transparency, and improving customer service. Tracking events at Estate Wineries and implementing enhanced reporting mechanisms contribute to the Town's goal of promoting responsible growth. Additionally, improving the special event database and engaging stakeholders reflects the Town's commitment to continuous improvement and modernization. These efforts ensure that special events are managed efficiently, maintaining the balance between economic development and community well-being.

The content of this report supports the following Strategic Plan initiatives:

Pillar

1. Vibrant & Complete Community

Priority

1.2 Economic Development & Community Partnerships

Action

1.2 a) Economic Development

Pillar

4. Optimize Organizational Excellence

Priority

4.1 Streamline & Modernize

Action

4.1 b) Modernization Initiatives

7. OPTIONS

- 7.1 Option 1: That Council approve the retention of consulting services to undertake a public consultation and process review of special events funded from MAT allocation. **(Recommended)**
- 7.2 Option 2: That Council direct staff to reprioritize current work and resources to undertake the public consultation and policy review in-house. *(Not Recommended)*
- 7.3 Option 3: That Council direct Staff to remain status quo on special event permitting and process. This action is not recommended as there are an increasing number of complaints arising from special events. *(Not Recommended)*

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Given the tourism alignment with special events, it is proposed that funding in the amount of \$80,000 be allocated from MAT reserves to fund consulting support. Alternatively, this matter could be referred for consideration as part of the 2025 operating budget deliberations.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications are anticipated as a direct result of this report.

10. COMMUNICATIONS

If Council approves the proposed next steps, staff will ensure comprehensive communication of all efforts. This will include updating the Town's website with the latest information on the special event permit process and providing clear and accessible guidelines for applicants. Staff will also engage directly with event operators, as required, to keep them informed of any changes or new expectations. Additionally, efforts will be made to communicate progress and updates to both internal and external stakeholders, fostering transparency and promoting a smoother process for all involved parties.

11. CONCLUSION

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is widely recognized as a beautiful location for special events and gatherings. Our current practice for special events has not kept pace with the demand for events across the municipality. Staff have identified measures that can be implemented in the short term to improve efficiency and customer experience, as well as a proposed consulting assignment for a quick initiation of a comprehensive review.

12. PREVIOUS REPORTS

- CAO-24-032- Special Event Permit Policy and Process Review (July 30, 2024)
- FES-24-014 - Enforcement of Non-Compliant Commercial Activities (October 29, 2024)

13. APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 - Road Map for Modernization Review

Respectfully submitted:

Submitted and Recommended by:



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This report was prepared in consultation with:

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