

Nuit Blanche 2024 and beyond: Bright Night in the Boroughs

Date: November 14, 2023

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Nuit Blanche is the City's signature cultural event and one of the largest free events in Toronto, drawing upwards of one million attendees annually and shines a spotlight on the city's arts sector. Since 2018, Nuit Blanche has expanded its footprint and held exhibitions beyond the downtown core to include the inner suburbs such as Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke to deliver a unique experience of contemporary art in civic spaces for the broadest possible audience.

This report responds to direction from City Council to report on a plan to include the inner suburbs as exhibition areas for Nuit Blanche on an annual basis, starting in 2024. In efforts to offer Torontonians and visitors access to a curated experience of public arts in the different neighbourhoods across Toronto, and considering the City's current fiscal constraints, Nuit Blanche will continue to anchor its exhibitions in the downtown core while also showcasing public art projects from major institutions and independent projects in one or multiple inner suburbs on an alternating basis, beginning in 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture recommends that:

1. Economic and Community Development Committee receives this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no current year financial implications resulting from the recommendations contained in this report. The resources required to support the near-term planning

activities for Nuit Blanche will be accommodated within the 2023 Council Approved Operating Budget of Economic Development and Culture.

The proposed Nuit Blanche planning activities may have future year financial implications. Any incremental resource requirements including staffing impacts to advance the proposed Nuit Blanche plan, if required, will be submitted for consideration against other Citywide priorities as part of future budget processes.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

In its meeting on May 3, 2016, City Council adopted item ED11.7 and requested Guild Park and Gardens to be considered as a potential venue for Nuit Blanche 2017.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2016.ED11.7>

In its meeting on October 29, 2019, City Council adopted item EC8.6 Establishing Strategic Priorities for Cultural Investment (2020-2024), which listed the following strategic priorities to guide the City's investment in culture over the next five years (2020-2024): a. culture for all, to increase opportunities for all Torontonians, no matter where they live in the city, to participate in local, relevant cultural activities throughout the year that reflect Toronto's diversity and creativity; b. space for culture, to maintain and create new accessible, sustainable spaces for Toronto's creative sector in a growing city; and c. developing creative talent to strengthen Toronto's cultural workforce, and increase diversity and representation within the sector.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EC8.6>

In its meeting on December 17, 2019, City Council adopted the Toronto Public Art Strategy.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EX11.5>

In its meeting on June 14, 2023, City Council requested the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to provide a plan that includes the inner suburbs in Nuit blanche exhibition areas on an annual basis, beginning with Nuit Blanche 2024.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.MM7.12>

COMMENTS

Background

Nuit Blanche is the City of Toronto-produced free, all-night exploration of contemporary visual art event. Since its inception in 2006 and with exceptional success, Nuit Blanche has consistently offered an accessible experience of contemporary art in civic space for the broadest possible audience. Delivered by the City's Cultural Events team, it is the largest annual event produced by the City's Economic Development and Culture (EDC)

Division, reaching an audience of well over one million Torontonians and visitors. To date, Nuit Blanche has featured approximately 1,600 art installations by more than 5,800 artists and has generated over \$489 million in economic impact for Toronto.

As a completely free event, Nuit Blanche has balanced this public accessibility with a commitment to present the highest level of curatorial and artistic excellence while ensuring the most efficient use of public resources. The presentation of curated public exhibitions offers a unique level of social engagement with contemporary art. This accessible model lowers the barriers to engagement and minimizes the requirement for a pre-existing knowledge of contemporary art. This public experience is a direct contrast to the traditional ways of engaging in a museum or gallery. As a result, Nuit Blanche reaches an audience frequently unaccustomed to attending formal arts institutions but leaves them more likely to attend in the future.

Nuit Blanche also provides local, national and international artists and curators with the opportunity to create large-scale work designed for a mass audience supported by a resourced and experienced producing framework. In addition to installations in public spaces, local arts organizations and educational institutions also open their doors to this mass audience, many of which might not otherwise visit a gallery or a museum. Annually, the public is offered the extraordinary opportunity to see Toronto through a new lens as they view a diverse range of artworks exhibited throughout the night.

On average, across its 17-year history (since inception), the City leverages a 35% cash contribution level while the remainder is raised through corporate sponsorships. The advanced commitment of sponsor contributions to the event is essential, especially when selecting geographical locations for key exhibition areas. This metric applies across the city and specifically when exploring expansion to the inner suburbs.

Nuit Blanche in the Inner Suburbs

In alignment with the City's strategic priority to invest in people and neighbourhoods and guided by its commitment of "Culture for all" to provide opportunities for all Torontonians, no matter where they live in the city, to participate in local, relevant, cultural activities, Nuit Blanche has expanded outside the downtown core to include exhibition sites in the inner suburbs.

In 2018, Nuit Blanche planned, commissioned and executed its first curator-led exhibition area in Scarborough centred in and around Scarborough Civic Centre and Scarborough Town Centre. The exhibition featured a Scarborough-based curator and programming focussing on Scarborough artists, spotlighting the vibrant arts and culture scene in Scarborough for the mass Nuit Blanche audience.

The 2018 event also featured curated exhibitions in the downtown core as well as projects that animated the transition from downtown to Scarborough. This included a significant investment in community outreach activities such as dedicated newsletters and social media posts geotargeted to Scarborough patrons, which began in the winter of 2017 and lasted throughout the year. On the night of the event, free access was offered to the Scarborough LRT which featured a series of commissioned murals in its stations. In addition, a selection of projects included elements that linked the two

exhibition areas, which encouraged audiences to explore both the downtown and the Scarborough exhibitions. A similar process was used for the 2019 Nuit Blanche, with a new curator also hailing from Scarborough whose programming showcased Scarborough artists alongside high-profile international artists.

In November of 2019, the Mayor announced the Year of Public Art, which included a proposal that would take Nuit Blanche city-wide. This expansion was supported by an increase in funding that allowed the Cultural Events team in EDC to work with Nuit Blanche's first Artistic Director to site fully curated exhibitions downtown, Scarborough, North York and south Etobicoke.

Since that time, Nuit Blanche has focused on a program planning model where the event features a mix of activities in downtown and the inner suburbs. Nuit Blanche's expansion has included both programming and sponsored partnerships that support the event in various geographies.

In addition to the curated exhibition areas, Nuit Blanche annually includes an Independent Project program that activates in neighbourhoods outside of the exhibition geographies. The Independent Project stream includes partnerships with major arts and cultural institutions who open their doors to the public for free for the 12-hours of the event. The Independent Projects are self-produced by Toronto-based artists, organizations and major institutions, and are presented in both the downtown and inner suburbs.

Nuit Blanche in 2024 and Beyond

As past success of presenting Nuit Blanche in a new geography in the inner suburbs have relied on time-intensive outreach and engagement activities, a two-year planning timeframe is necessary to ensure that there is meaningful interaction with local artists and that financial commitments can be secured with sponsors and collaborating partners.

Considering the fiscal constraints that the City currently faces and that may persist into the near future, as noted in the [Long-Term Financial Plan](#), it is not possible to expand Nuit Blanche activities city-wide in 2024 and 2025 at this time. To ensure equitable access, the existing approach of anchoring the event downtown while extending its activities in one or multiple inner suburbs will continue - new neighbourhoods outside the core will be considered in the planning cycles of the future iterations of the event while maintaining its presence in the downtown core. EDC will continue to work with local councillors and engage with sponsors and partners to identify opportunities and new resources to support the event in the future.

In 2024, Nuit Blanche will continue its curated public art exhibitions downtown, featuring approximately 25-30 commissioned artworks/installations while also showcasing art from major institutions and other Independent Projects in various areas outside the core including Scarborough, East York, Willowdale, Weston, and Etobicoke. In 2025, Nuit Blanche will look to include a curated exhibition in North York with supporting programming in the downtown core. Working closely with major institutions and

organizations, the Independent Projects stream will continue to bring the event to neighbourhoods throughout downtown and the inner suburbs.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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