

## **Requesting Permission for Open Flame on Nathan Phillips Square for "The Burn" on March 11-12, 2023**

**Date:** January 10, 2023

**To:** Toronto and East York Community Council

**From:** General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

**Wards:** Ward 10 - Spadina-Fort York

### **SUMMARY**

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The purpose of this report is to request an exemption from the Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 636 "Public Squares" and former City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 237 "Nathan Phillips Square" for the use of open flame during "The Burn", a City-produced event that will be held on Nathan Phillips Square on the weekend of March 11-12, 2023.

The issuing of an exemption for "The Burn" will be conditional on adherence to Toronto Fire policy and procedures. The City of Toronto will produce the event. Economic Development and Culture and the City Clerk's Office will be responsible for submitting operational plans to the permit-issuing body and monitoring on-site operations in a manner that maintains compliance with all Toronto Fire guidelines and best practices. Although it is being produced by the City of Toronto, it is being conceptualized and developed through a collaboration among creatives from Indigenous and equity-deserving communities. The Economic Development and Culture Division is working in consultation with Toronto Fire to monitor and assess risks associated with "The Burn."

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture recommends that:

1. City Council grant permission to "The Burn" to use open flame as part of the City-produced event on Nathan Phillips Square to be held on the weekend of March 11-12, 2023, contingent upon satisfying any conditions placed by the Fire Marshal.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no current or known future year financial impacts arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

## **RECONCILIATION AND EQUITY IMPACT**

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"The Burn" is a City initiative to engage Torontonians in contending with the impacts of the pandemic to occur on Nathan Phillips Square on the weekend of March 11-12, 2023, involving the use of open flame. Beginning on March 11, 2023, the third anniversary of the declaration of the pandemic, a commemorative ceremony on Nathan Phillips Square will take place over a 24-hour period as part of the Stronger TOgether program in memory of lives lost. It is an initiative designed to provide Torontonians, with a focus on Indigenous and equity-deserving group members, a platform for healing and transformation across all communities.

Many Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving people call Toronto home, but frequently do not see themselves represented in City spaces. Nathan Phillips Square is Toronto's most recognizable public square, and - as it fronts City Hall, Toronto's seat of government - the Square has great symbolic significance. While produced by the City, the event itself is being planned and implemented through a collaboration between Indigenous and equity-deserving creatives.

Activations in the months leading up to the weekend will be taking place across the city, including neighbourhoods outside the downtown core where a large number of Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving residents live. The event will have a positive impact on Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving groups as it will strengthen a sense of belonging and placemaking. It will also help to bridge differences between people through highlighting the common experiences of trauma, grief, and healing brought about by the pandemic. These efforts at placemaking and healing can help foster more trustful relationships between Toronto residents and local institutions.

Community members will be able to mark cedar chips, recognizing the impacts of the pandemic, which will be burned in large vessels on the Square. The remaining ashes will then be harvested and mixed into soil to nurture community gardens in in the city.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its meeting on July 19, 2022, City Council adopted a report on "Advancing Reconciliation, Equity and Inclusion - Re-imagining a New Future for Toronto History Museums" which approved the *Toronto History Museums Strategic Plan: Laying a New Foundation* as a framework for continuing to advance reconciliation, equity and inclusion.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EC31.23>

At its meeting on June 15, 2022, City Council adopted a report for exemptions from the Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 636 "Public Squares" and former City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 237 "Nathan Phillips Square" for events that are proposed to

be held on Nathan Phillips Square from August 1, 2022 to April 30, 2023, including a number of events that use open flame as part of their event productions.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.TE33.51>

At its meeting on May 11, 2022, City Council approved the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism – Year Three Update, including priorities for Economic Development and Culture to "Recognize, reimagine and re-invest in neighbourhoods and public spaces to create safe and accessible public and virtual spaces for diverse Black communities. Celebrate and preserve Black culture, assets and heritage to strengthen Black representation and leadership in local decision making, and to foster deeper connections between Black families, children, residents and the places where they live."

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EC29.5>

At its meeting on April 6, 2022, City Council approved the 2022-2032 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), including the actions that the Economic Development and Culture Division will "support First Nations, Inuit and Métis artists, youth, and arts and culture organizations by providing funding and space needed to enhance the visibility of Indigenous Peoples in Toronto through the proliferation of arts and culture" and "support Indigenous festivals and events in the city throughout the year." The RAP also includes the City's commitment to "address barriers that Indigenous people experience when holding sacred fires."

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EX31.1>

## COMMENTS

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The Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 636 "Public Squares" and former City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 237 "Nathan Phillips Square" prohibit the use of open flame without the approval of Council.

Part of Toronto History Museum's ongoing Awakenings initiative, "The Burn" is a City-produced interactive installation that provides a place for transformation, healing and letting go through the universally sacred elements of fire and water. The installation will provide a venue for reflection and connection between individuals through a 24-hour burn on Nathan Phillips Square with rituals of intention setting and letting go. "The Burn" will provide a place for Toronto residents and visitors from diverse backgrounds to release and let go of emotions and grief by embarking on a journey of collective healing as individuals and as part of a broader community recovering from the pandemic.

As a city-wide initiative, several weeks prior to the event on Nathan Phillips Square, customized vessels will be on tour in all parts of the city in locations convenient to the general public. The people of Toronto will be encouraged to write their healing intentions on cedar chips that will be placed inside the vessels. On March 11 and 12, 2023, these healing intentions will be supplemented by fresh cedar chips provided for the public to engage with on-site at Nathan Phillips Square. All the chips will be burned over a 24-hour period on Nathan Phillips Square.

Economic Development and Culture staff will work with Toronto Fire to ensure that "The Burn" is undertaken in a manner that maximizes public safety throughout the duration of the installation. Safeguards include: hiring a professional, insured fire crew to manage the fires; ensuring that appropriate fire extinguishers and first aid kits are on hand for each fire pool; erecting barricades between the fires and the public; and having staff present to manage the flow of public participants and observers. Finally, the installation itself has been designed so that the public will not have direct contact with any flames. The fire pits will be sited within a 30-foot pool of water and the public will interact with the flames via a mechanical arm.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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