

Supplementary Report - Update on Creating Criteria for Special Events on Private Property

Date: March 18, 2026

To: City Council

From: General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: All

SUMMARY

In May 2025, Council directed staff in Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with Transportation Services, and Municipal Licensing and Standards, to develop a set of criteria to manage events held on private property. This direction was issued when City Council considered a staff report ([2025.TE22.19](#)) that provided a post-event review of the 2024 Distillery Winter Village. At that time, concerns were raised that the challenges associated with events on private property and their effects on surrounding communities may not be unique to this one event and could be addressed through a city-wide approach. Since then, staff have been exploring the tools available to mitigate the impacts of private property events on the public realm.

The Festival Strategy ([2026.EC26.2](#)), considered by the Economic and Community Development Committee on February 24, 2026, included a preliminary update on this work. At that time, the Economic and Community Development Committee directed Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with Transportation Services and Municipal Licensing and Standards, to report directly to the March 2026 Council meeting with an update of work done in response to the direction in TE22.19. This supplementary report provides an update on the progress since May 2025, outlines the next steps in responding to the directives, and provides a summary of related existing City regulations. The next steps of this work, including research findings to inform the development of criteria for assessing the community impact of events on private property, will be summarized and reported as part of the progress report on *Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)* to be considered at the May meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Economic Development and Culture recommends that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on February 24th, 2026, the Economic and Community Development Committee directed Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with Transportation Services, and Municipal Licensing and Standards, to report directly to the March 25, 2026 City Council meeting with an update on work done in response to direction in TE22.19 related to managing festivals and events on private property.
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.EC26.2>

At its meeting on May 21 and 22, 2025, City Council directed Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with Transportation Services and Municipal Licensing and Standards, to develop a set of criteria for managing festivals and events on private property and to consult with the Distillery District on a year-round activation strategy.
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.TE22.19>

At its meeting on November 13, 2024, City Council adopted Item TE17.32 - Temporary Adjustments to Parking Regulations and the Extension of Permit Parking Hours, and directed Transportation Services to review the Distillery Winter Village and report back on the impacts of the festival to the local community including traffic, parking, and noise.
<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.TE17.31>

COMMENTS

Background

Every year, Toronto hosts close to 300 festivals and hundreds of special events that play a critical role in strengthening the city's cultural vibrancy and social cohesion. These special events contribute to community-building, foster a sense of belonging and provide opportunities to celebrate and showcase Toronto's cultural diversity. Through a range of mechanisms, the City works with many types of events, including those held on private property, to support their success while seeking to mitigate potential impacts on surrounding neighbourhoods. Events occurring in the public realm are the focus of the City's Festival Strategy, as the City has more tools to directly manage event activities, whereas events held entirely on private property can occur without City permits.

The Distillery Winter Village is an example of a large-scale event that takes place entirely on private property within a mixed-use area that includes residential condominiums, retail businesses, transit services, and nearby construction activity. The

event is a seasonal market that has been held annually since 2010, with the exception of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each year this event attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors, contributing to the vibrancy of the Distillery Historic District and supporting nearby businesses, local artists, and the visitor economy during the winter season. At the same time, the scale and popularity of the event can result in impacts on the surrounding neighbourhood, including increased traffic congestion and parking pressures, sidewalk crowding, and higher levels of waste and noise that affect nearby residents and people visiting the area.

Under the current regulations and permitting processes, the organizers of the Distillery Winter Market do not need permission from the City of Toronto to host the event as the City does not administer an event permit for events on private property. City permits are issued for events taking place on City property by the relevant division such as Transportation Services for events in the public right-of-way and Parks and Recreation for events in City parkland. For events on private property, monitoring and enforcement of applicable bylaws and regulations may occur related to any impacts in the surrounding residential areas and public realm, or the organizer may apply for City permits or exemptions for specific event activities.

City divisions and agencies may also proactively adjust regulations for the public realm to mitigate impacts to the surrounding communities. The Distillery Winter Village event organizers, for example, have voluntarily collaborated with Transportation Services in prior years to develop and support continuous improvements to their Traffic Management Plan (TMP), which includes a street closure and adjustments to parking and traffic regulations on nearby streets to support community safety and manage congestion in the surrounding neighbourhood.

The City also proactively coordinates with event organizers through the Special Events Advisory Team (SEAT) and the Executive Steering Committee on Special Events. The SEAT reviews special event plans based on a set of accepted criteria (Support Matrix) including type of event, public realm impact, historical event information, requirements for City services, threat/risk assessment, and community impact and delivers oversight, planning, guidance, information and decision-making on large or complex City-produced and third-party special events. The Executive Steering Committee on Special Events is a senior-level body tasked with the overarching oversight, coordination, and strategic planning of large-scale events, festivals, and public gatherings on municipal property.

Additionally, EDC provides guidance and support to organizers in navigating City requirements and implementing event planning best practices through both the Event Support Unit and the Special Events Permit Navigator. This Event Support Unit provides support and guidance to identify and resolve issues in collaboration with other divisions, agencies and event organizers. The Special Events Permit Navigator is a tool to support event organizers on public and private property in determining the permits, approvals, and key contacts for planning a festival or event in Toronto.

Through the implementation of the Festival Strategy, the City is developing additional resource guides, templates, and trainings on specific topics, including community engagement, and the creation of a new Good Neighbour Guide for Festival organizers.

These resources will communicate clear expectations from the City for festivals and events, including both mandatory requirements and voluntary best practices.

As directed by Council, EDC will report to the May 2026 meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee with further updates on the work underway. Per Council directive, these criteria could inform when City recommendations are provided. To advance this work, EDC is continuing to collaborate with MLS, Transportation Services, Legal Services, Customer Experience (311), and other relevant City divisions and agencies that support or are impacted by large-scale events on private property.

Actions to Date

Since May 2025, EDC has worked with Transportation Services, MLS, Legal Services, and other City divisions, to advance Council direction related to the Distillery Winter Village and address the impacts of large-scale events on private-property events on surrounding neighbourhoods. Interdivisional meetings took place regularly throughout 2025 and early 2026 to assess the City's jurisdiction under existing City by-laws and permitting frameworks to manage events on private property. In early 2026, interdivisional meetings focused on reviewing existing criteria and discretionary authority that the City has related to permits and exemptions. This work will continue through subsequent months to further define the mechanisms available to the City to regulate events on private property.

Additional work undertaken by the Divisions includes:

- Transportation Services worked directly with the Distillery Winter Village event organizer, including holding meetings and conducting site visits in Fall 2025, to identify mitigation measures.
- EDC met with the Distillery Winter Village event organizer in Fall 2025 to review recommendations outlined in the report associated with item 2025.TE22.19.
- EDC supported ongoing communication between the event organizer and the local community, including attending a roundtable meeting in Fall 2025 where the event organizer presented the 2025 event plan to the residents' association.
- EDC met with representatives of the Gooderham & Worts Neighbourhood Association in early 2026 to understand impacts of the Distillery Winter Village from the community's perspective, including the impact of operational changes to the 2025 event.
- EDC, in consultation with Transportation Services and Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS), summarized the key existing regulations the City may use to mitigate public realm impacts of private-property events, found in Attachment 1.
- EDC conducted a preliminary policy analysis to identify potential pathways to regulate events on private property, with the preliminary analysis on regulating event duration to be included in this report, based on Council direction.
- EDC summarized the existing coordination process to detail how City Divisions currently support event organizers on private and public property to ensure compliance with City regulations, included in this report.
- EDC conducted a preliminary jurisdictional scan of special event permitting models at comparable Canadian municipalities, including regulations for events

on private property and any limitations on event duration which is summarized below.

Jurisdictional Scan

A jurisdictional scan is underway and full results will be presented in the May 2026 update on *Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)*. This section outlines preliminary findings from a scan of seven comparable Canadian municipalities, including Ottawa, Vancouver, Calgary, Brampton, Mississauga, Montreal, and Hamilton. The scan indicates a range of approaches to special event permitting, particularly with respect to authority over events on private property:

- Some municipalities, such as Ottawa and Vancouver, have adopted permitting frameworks that extend to private property events where there is a public impact.
- Ottawa introduced a new Special Events By-law in spring 2025 that applies to both public and private property and requires applicants to submit a traffic management plan, as well as an emergency plan and a site plan.
- Since 2020, Vancouver similarly requires a special event permit for events on private property that have public impacts. The special event permit uses a set of criteria to determine the complexity of events, with higher complexity events being subject to additional requirements and longer review timelines.
- In contrast, several municipalities, including Brampton, Mississauga, Calgary, Montreal, and Hamilton, do not issue permits for events on private property and instead regulate events primarily on City-owned property or through other location (i.e. park and street permits) or activity-specific permits.

Across the municipalities reviewed, maximum event duration limits for special events are generally not prescribed in policy or by-law:

- Ottawa and Vancouver do not appear to impose fixed maximums on the number of days an event may operate, instead assessing applications on a case-by-case basis based on anticipated impacts.
- Brampton, Mississauga, Montreal, and Hamilton do not establish set maximum durations for permitted events on public property nor are there maximum durations on permits that support private property events such as a noise exemption permits or street closure permits.
- Calgary is the only municipality that imposes a maximum duration on their noise exemption permits having a maximum of 14 days per application.

Overall, the review of other relevant jurisdictions suggests that some municipalities have expanded their authority to regulate private property events with public impacts and very few have set explicit maximum duration limits on permits.

Summary of Regulations and Current Authorities

The following section summarizes the relevant bylaws and permits that private property event organizers may use to support their event and mitigate the impacts on the surrounding neighbourhood. Further details are provided in Attachment 1.

Table 1: Summary of key City regulations and their consideration of duration limits

Permit Type	Issuer	Bylaw	Existing Limit on Duration	Existing Community Impact Consideration	Council Approval Required
Street Event Permit	Transportation Services	Municipal Code Chapter 743	Council approval if the street closure is over 4 days	Applicants must submit proof of notification to the residents and businesses affected by the closure in the public right-of-way informing them of the details of the event	Yes, Council approval required if the street closure is over 4 days in duration
Noise Exemption Permit (NEP)	Municipal Licensing & Standards	Municipal Code Chapter 591	Per the Noise Bylaw, staff have the ability to determine the duration of the NEP, which is dependent on the type of event/activity and potential noise impacts	Staff triage NEPs based on impact, and current screening criteria considers expected attendance, equipment and amplification, and type of event. Noise exemption permit must be posted in a visible location where the noise will occur, seven days before the event takes place.	No. City staff issue the permits, and Ward councillor(s) receive notice and can object to an application, triggering application refusal by MLS.

While event organizers may choose to collaborate with Transportation Services to develop a Traffic Management Plan that addresses traffic flow, parking, and congestion, without a street event permit, the City does not currently have the authority to require such coordination for events held on private property. If an organizer does voluntarily engage Transportation Services or takes out an event permit, the Division will be in a position to provide feedback on Traffic Management Plans and consider any other mitigating measures such as parking and traffic regulation changes to support the event or reduce community impacts.

Regulating Duration of City-Provided Exemptions & Permissions

Under current regulatory framework, Council has the authority to approve or deny street event permits, in the public right-of-way, that require street closures exceeding four days in duration, as these permits are subject to City Council approval. Within this framework, City Council, as a whole, may consider a range of factors, including impacts on surrounding neighbourhoods, local business, transit operations, and other community considerations deemed relevant for permit decision. This existing authority provides councillors with the ability to consider event durations when issuing a street event permit for events longer than four days. For events less than four days in duration, the General Manager of Transportation Services issues permits if the event complies with the by-law.

Based on preliminary analysis, for City Council to regulate event durations through a standardized approach, amendments to the Municipal Code would be required. Further analysis of the jurisdictional scan is required to determine whether other options can be considered as an alternative response. This will be included in the May report.

Additional analysis, staff resources and community consultation would be required to assess the implications of adopting any of the identified approaches, including identifying where Council approval would be needed. Any associated costs will be considered as part of the 2027 Budget process.

Criteria for Assessing Event Impact

Without the need to amend by-laws, the City could explore creating a tool or set of criteria to assess the community impact of special events that may inform City recommendations or conditions to event organizers when permits are issued. These assessment criteria may contain the following categories, informed by preliminary findings through the jurisdictional scan.

Additionally, through by-law amendments, based on the level of impact identified through this assessment, the City could impose standardized conditions, which may include limiting the duration of any permission or exemption granted by the City. Any potential by-law amendments require additional analysis and staff resources to assess the operational and financial impact to the current permitting mechanisms.

- Location of the event or activity in relation to a residential zone
- Hours of operation of event or activity
- Alignment with holidays or existing festivals
- Anticipated attendance, (i.e. greater than 5,000 attendees per day)
- Types of activity, (i.e. fireworks, use of drones, amplified or instrumental noise)
- Event history
- Applicant's historical compliance with City By-laws
- Street closures required and
- Sale of alcohol or food
- Economic impact
- Community and social value
- Cultural vitality

Exact thresholds for these categories would need to be further developed with support from relevant Divisions and based on consultation as appropriate to ensure that criteria are aligned with existing tools used to assess impact.

Best Practices for Engaging the Local Community

In addition to requirements for community notification outlined in relevant permitting processes, EDC encourages event organizers to engage residents, businesses and the local councillor's office in the planning process for their events to ensure a proactive understanding of community impacts. While this is not required by the City, best

practices for engaging the local community in event organizing are outlined in the [City's Good Neighbour Guide for Late-Night Businesses](#). Event organizers are often directed to this resource, particularly when their events operate beyond 6:00 PM, and provided with some of the following best practices to mitigate negative impacts to the surrounding community:

- Engagement leading up to an event should include outreach to local residents' associations, community groups, or Business Improvement Areas.
- For events that are recurring, fostering these relationships can ensure that event organizers maintain engagement with the community on a year-round basis, offering multiple opportunities for consultation outside of high-pressure or high-impact moments.
- Community impacts should be managed in consultation with residents and businesses and with clear and open channels for communication to support timely issue resolution throughout the duration of an event, especially where there is spillover from private property into the public realm.
- Consultation and issues management for public realm spillover impacts should be managed collaboratively between the event organizer, the City (including both City staff and the local Councillor as appropriate), and community interest-holders.

Next Steps

EDC is continuing to analyze data to identify the primary public-realm impacts of events across the city, specifically identifying common challenges across private property sites. This work will also assess which mitigation tools are most effective in reducing spillover impacts, including the potential role of permit duration limits. In parallel, EDC, MLS, Transportation Services, and Legal Services will refine the proposed criteria for assessing the public realm impacts of events private property, including evaluating the operational and financial impacts to replicate by-laws in other jurisdictions that focus on events on large-scale private property.

In addition, as a year one action of the Festival Strategy, EDC will continue developing a Good Neighbour Guide for festival and event organizers, building on the community engagement best practices identified in this report. The Guide will be developed in consultation with festival and event organizers, resident associations, Councillors, and other relevant stakeholders.

Findings from this work will be reported in the progress report on *Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)* in May 2026. Advancing this work supports the City's objective of fostering a vibrant and resilient culture sector while protecting community health, safety, and quality of life, and balancing cultural activity on public and private lands with the cumulative impacts of large-scale events.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Summary of relevant bylaws and permits for special events