



GOODERHAM & WORTS

NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION

February 23, 2026

**Economic and Community Development Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2
via email to: ecdc@toronto.ca**

Subject: 2026.EC26.2 Concerns with Failure to Address Festivals on Private Property

Dear Members of the Economic Development and Culture Committee:

I am writing you today on behalf of the Gooderham & Worts Neighborhood Association (GWNA) to express our serious concern with notable omissions from Toronto's Festival Strategy. We are disappointed that the Festival Strategy and accompanying Report for Action have failed to respond to Council's directive to develop a set of criteria for managing festivals and events on private property as part of their Festival Strategy reporting back in the fourth quarter of 2025, that includes appropriate durations of City-provided exemptions and permissions, based on size of event, hours of operation, alignment with holidays, locations and community impacts (TE22.19).

Staff now suggest that they will develop "Good Neighbour" guidelines to support events on private property and report on them in May 2026. These guidelines have been needed for years and will arrive two quarters later than expected – too late to help our community for 2026.

We strongly urge you to have Staff take the next logical step beyond outlining voluntary guidelines to also identify potential tools that the City could use to manage impacts of festivals held on private property. As the Report indicates that more festivals will be encouraged to use private venues rather than public realm, the corresponding erosion of capabilities to manage these festivals will be felt by more communities, quite possibly including your constituents.

For more than two decades, GWNA has worked to serve the interests and enhance the quality of life for residents in and around the Distillery District. GWNA volunteers have collaborated with the Distillery District's management for many years through an ongoing Distillery Roundtable. This work has included many years of iterative, incremental refinements attempting to mitigate negative impacts on residents from the Distillery Winter Village (DWV) as it expanded in scale and extended in duration to run continuously for close two months every November through January. While the private festival operator has shown goodwill in making various tweaks each year to attempt to address residents' concerns, the Distillery Winter Village clearly operates in ways that would not be allowed for a festival in the public realm. For example, DWV's nearly 2-month duration, residents' consistent top frustration, is double what would be allowed in the City's definition of a Festival which specifies "no longer than one month".



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While City Staff have commonly expressed the view that “there’s not much we can do about events on private property”, we noted that the Report and Festival Strategy both reference “impacts the City of Toronto by involving the use of **or having impact on the public realm**” (emphasis added). While DWV takes place primarily on the Distillery’s property, queues of patrons occupy significant portions of the sidewalks around the block, nearby public streets get reconfigured for the duration of the event, and traffic patterns are modified. These impacts on the public realm, and the consequences for thousands of residents, have been repeatedly raised and documented. We know from experience that even when the community engages strongly, and has excellent support from Councillors and their teams, the City’s lack of tools means that we remain at the mercy of event organizers who are under no obligation to take actions that don’t suit their commercial objectives.

GWNA believes that the City should have effective mechanisms to manage the overflow impacts from a festival on the public realm. We believe that empowering Councillors and City staff with clear rules and tools for festivals on private property would enable them to better balance festival promoters’ and communities’ interests, while providing clarity for all parties.

Sincerely,

Neil Betteridge
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cc:
Deputy Mayor Malik, Vienna O’Shea
Councillor Moise, Macy Parakh