



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: October 22, 2025

Report Number: SRCS.25.11

Department: Community Services

Division: Recreation and Culture Services

Subject: **SRCS.25.11 - Member of Council Events**

Purpose:

To repeal the existing Member of Council Events Policy and obtain approval for a new Event and Fundraising Policy that will enable increased focus on City and community-led events.

Recommendations:

- a) That staff report SRCS.25.11 be received.
- b) That the Member of Council Event Policy approved May 5, 2021 be repealed.
- c) That the Council Member Fundraising and Event Policy attached to SRCS.25.11 as Attachment 1 be approved.
- d) That the new Festivals and Events Strategy include a recommendation for the phase-in of a minimum of four new City Events using existing staff resources.

Contact Person(s):

- Donald Hearn, Director of Recreation and Culture, extension 2503
- Stephen Huycke, Director of Legislative Services and City Clerk, extension 2529
- Tracey Steele, Commissioner of Community Services, extension 2476
- Sherry Adams, Commissioner of Corporate and Financial Services, extension 2521

Report Approval:

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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Key Messages:

- While Member of Council Events have been held in the City for more than a decade, discussion and analysis conducted through the Festivals and Events Strategy process suggests that Council members would prefer to direct resources to the provision of City Events and support for community events.
- Repeal and replacement of the existing Member of Council Event Policy as outlined in SRCS.25.11 will provide for the elimination of Member of Council Events, associated fundraising, and use of Event Accounts.

Background:

In May of 2021 Council approved the in-force Member of Council Events Policy which defines “Council-Led Events” as:

Events planned and delivered by a [Member of Council] (or by a Member and Staff acting on behalf of a Member) and do not have a broad community focus or relate to the business, services or decisions of Council or Richmond Hill. Funding for the events comes from community sponsorship.

This definition points out the following specific elements of “Council-Led” Events:

- They are hosted by one individual Member of Council.
- They do not have a “broad community focus” (this element of the definition was intended to distinguish Council-Led Events from City-Led Events)
- They are different from activities that “relate to the business, services or decisions of Council or the City” (such as a resident meeting to discuss a planning application or a Ward meeting to discuss community safety), and
- They must be funded by Council Member fundraising (i.e., “community sponsorship”).

The current Member of Council Events Policy sets out the existing framework for “Council-Led Events”, including the following elements:

- In a calendar year, each Member of Council may hold two one-day events or one two-day event. One, one day event per member is permitted in the year of a regular municipal election.
- No Richmond Hill financial resources (including any Council-approved budget) shall be used to fund an event. The only exception to this rule is an allowance for use of regular time of staff (specifically Council office staff and staff in the Cultural Services Section as set out in the applicable Service Level Agreement/Guidelines for Use of Staff Resources).
- Use of City services and equipment are to be billed at rates paid by the public as identified in the Tariff of Fees By-law.
- Donation of surplus funds to local charities is permitted, but events specifically intended to raise funds for local charities are not to be organized as Council-Led Events (they are to be managed by the local charity).

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- Overall responsibility for event planning, policy compliance and determining appropriateness of sponsorship and expenses rests with individual Members of Council.

On July 12, 2023 Council approved the following Member Motion:

Now Therefore Be It Resolved, that Staff be directed to conduct a high-level analysis on the areas in which Events accounts are spent since the adoption of the Member of Council Events Policy, and report back in Q3 2023 with recommendations on how to improve the policy to best align with Council's intention that ensures fairness, accountability and transparency.

In early 2024, work was initiated on a new Festivals and Events Strategy for the City. One of the objectives of this work was to review the current framework for Member of Council Events and how it fits within the larger framework of festivals and events in the City.

Discussion:

Pros and Cons

Council-Led Events can have the following benefits for the community:

- They expand the number and type of events taking place in the City bringing the community together and contributing to community vibrancy.
- They can be a venue for community organizations to showcase their services.
- They can facilitate donations to charitable community organizations.
- They are an opportunity for Council Members to interact with residents and hear different perspectives on municipal issues and services.

Council-Led Events also create a number of challenges:

- They place significant demands on staff time and in doing so draw resources from other services and initiatives.
- Sponsorship fundraising creates the potential for conflict of interest and competes with sponsorship fundraising for City initiatives.
- They pose a potential financial risk to the City as it is not possible to fully enforce financial rules.
- The perceived use of City resources to facilitate these events is a reputational risk for the City, and the actual use of staff resources may not be supported as a priority by the community.

Options and Considerations

Since the Council direction in 2023 a great deal of research and discussion has taken place regarding Member of Council events. Between late 2024 and present, multiple interviews with Council members were conducted, the existing policy and use of Event Accounts was reviewed, and benchmarking information was collected and analyzed.

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Throughout the process, various approaches to Council-Led Events were investigated such as:

- i. Reducing the number and/or scope of events (for example, limiting to one event per member per year, reducing the upset limit for annual sponsorship fundraising, and/or limiting the location of events to smaller sites)
- ii. Providing staff event planning assistance through the Special Events Advisory Team (similar to community events)
- iii. Using a template theme and format for all member events in a given year (for example, all events in one year might have a pet theme)
- iv. Enabling one event per Councillor per year with staff assistance, and additional events organized without staff assistance
- v. Transitioning to “hybrid” events that are a combination of member and city events
- vi. Eliminating member events and directing staff resources to City and community-led events.

The following factors were considered in assessing options:

Benchmarking

Approaches to Council-Led Events vary significantly across municipalities but can be loosely grouped into three categories:

1. Municipalities that facilitate member events using a policy that limits event scope through an upset limit on sponsorship fundraising typically ranging from \$15,000 to \$30,000 annually. Within this category there are generally two types of event planning:
 - a. Council member events are processed similar to community events with limited involvement from staff outside Council offices
 - b. Council member events are afforded some limited level of assistance from staff specializing in event planning
2. Municipalities that do not have council member events
3. Municipalities that have unique approaches to member events. For example, incorporating member elements into City events or using a template approach to events.

Provision of City Events

Work is currently underway on a new Festivals and Events Strategy and the following ideas are being discussed as potential recommendations arising from the Strategy:

- Creation of an annual “Signature Event” for the City
- Diversification of City event venues and geographical locations
- Addition of new City events with specific themes that build on some of the themes traditionally used for Council-Led Events.

Feedback from Council members, and emerging direction from the Festivals and Events Strategy, suggest that there is opportunity to repurpose resources currently used for member events to provide additional City events with an enhanced event experience for the Community. On the other hand, if Council-Led Events continue status quo, it will not

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be possible to undertake additional City event initiatives without additional staff resources in the Cultural Services Team.

Recommendation – Eliminate Member of Council Events

Most of the approaches to Council-Led Events investigated (listed above, i. through iv.) either create new challenges or fail to substantially mitigate issues. The only approach that effectively resolves all existing challenges is to eliminate member events entirely.

Discussions with Council Members suggest that the preferred approach moving forward would be to eliminate member events and direct realized staff resources to the enhancement and expansion of City Events. Making the elimination of Council-Led Events effective January 1, 2027 following the next municipal election will ensure that all Members of Council are treated equally (given that some have already begun to plan for their 2026 event).

To affect the transition, it is recommended that the Member of Council Events Policy be repealed and replaced with the proposed new Council Member Event and Fundraising Policy attached to SRCS.25.11 as Attachment 1. The new policy specifies that Council Members will not:

- Host/hold Council Member Events,
- Request or direct staff to assist in the planning or organization of an Event to be hosted or held by a Council Member, or
- Solicit or collect funds for the purpose of holding or hosting Events.

The new policy also directs that any fundraising opportunities that come to the attention of Council Members shall be directed to the Commissioner of Community Services for follow-up by appropriate staff. Additionally, it clarifies that Council Members may co-host, MC or otherwise attend and support Events hosted by community organizations provided that the community organization is responsible for all aspects of fundraising and budget allocation.

In accordance with the existing Member of Council Events Policy (which will remain in effect for the 2026 election year) Council Members are required to identify the community organizations to which they will allocate any surplus funds by May 1, 2026. Consistent with the proposed Use of Corporate Resources for Election Campaign Purposes Policy, all 2026 Council-Led Events must be held before July 31, 2026. Finance will disburse any funds remaining in Event Accounts starting September 1, 2026 and all Event Accounts will be closed by January 1, 2027.

Financial Implications:

Given that the transition from Council-Led Events to additional City Events is proposed to be effective January 1, 2027 there will be no financial implications for 2026.

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The need for additional operating budget for City Event materials, supplies and contracts in 2027 will be assessed through the 2027 Operating Budget process. While it is recognized that there may be some need for funds, new City Events will be good candidates for City sponsorship opportunities.

Relationship to Strategic Plan 2024-2027:

This report relates to Pillar 2, Focusing on People, specifically, Priority 2, supporting Richmond Hill's unique character and sense of community through programs, services and events and fostering connections between the City and residents, as well as among community members themselves.

Attachments:

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. All attachments have been reviewed and made accessible. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

- Attachment 1 - Council Member Fundraising and Event Policy

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCS.25.11 Member of Council Events.docx
Attachments:	- Member Event and Fundraising Policy.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Nov 5, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Tracey Steele - Nov 5, 2025 - 11:06 AM

Darlene Joslin - Nov 5, 2025 - 4:10 PM