



REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: September 29, 2025

FROM: Community Services Commission
Recreation and Culture

DATE: September 16, 2025

SUBJECT: **Oakville Special Events Plan**

LOCATION: Multiple

WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the Oakville Special Events Plan (Appendix A) dated August 22, 2025 and Community Events Grant Program Terms of Reference (Appendix B) be approved; and
2. That the implementation of the Special Events Plan be referred to the 2026 budget process for consideration.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The Oakville Special Events Plan builds community from the ground up, fostering a culture of celebration by supporting diverse groups, empowering community-led events, and introducing a framework that is transparent, equitable, and outcome-driven.
- The plan sets two overarching goals – **Organizational Development** (strengthening systems, staff capacity, and planning tools) and **Event and Program Development** (expanding and balancing the event calendar) – supported by 12 initiatives and 60 actions.
- More than 1,450 contributions from residents, organizers, BIAs, and staff shaped the plan, including 185 responses to the 2025 public validation survey, which showed strong support (87–97%) for the top 10 priority actions.
- Key priority actions include launching a **Community Events Grant Program** in 2026, streamlining, permitting and evaluation tools, improving promotion, supporting signature events such as Canada Day and the Santa Claus

Parade, and investing in event infrastructure such as upgraded parks and a potential new outdoor venue.

- The plan consolidates multiple funding streams into one transparent program, while embedding stability and accountability through five-year agreements for legacy events (Remembrance Day, Terry Fox Run) and BIA-led events, with allocations already included in the Town's base budget.
- The plan directly supports Council's strategic priorities by advancing Community Belonging through inclusive and accessible events, ensuring Accountable Government with transparent, criteria-based funding, and supporting Growth Management by planning for the tools and spaces needed to sustain a balanced, sustainable event calendar.

BACKGROUND:

Special events are central to Oakville's cultural life. They bring residents together, animate neighbourhoods, and showcase the town's identity. Historically, decisions related to events were guided largely by precedent and legacy arrangements. The Oakville Special Events Plan introduces a clear framework to ensure that decisions are transparent, equitable, and focused on outcomes.

The plan provides direction for the next five years, setting out a proactive and coordinated approach to funding, permitting, and service delivery. By linking funding to outcomes, encouraging innovation, and embedding equity and accessibility, the plan highlights Oakville's commitment to events that celebrate community identity while maximizing benefits for residents, businesses, and visitors.

The plan was developed over 18 months, guided by best-practice benchmarking, staff and stakeholder expertise, and external research and consultation led by Expedition Management Consulting. It provides the Town with a roadmap to streamline processes, strengthen partnerships, and deliver a balanced, sustainable calendar of events that aligns with community expectations while generating both cultural and economic benefits.

CONSULTATION:

The plan was developed through an extensive consultation process with residents, community organizations, event producers, BIAs, staff, and Council. Engagement occurred in two main phases between 2024 and 2025 to ensure the plan reflects both operational realities and community aspirations.

Phase One (March – July 2024)

The first phase assessed Oakville's current event delivery system and identified key challenges, opportunities, and community priorities. Engagement activities included

surveys, workshops, in-person tours, staff and Special Event Advisory Team (SEAT) sessions, and interviews with stakeholders. In total, 1,274 points of input were collected:

- Community Survey – 1,151 responses
- Event Vendor and Organizer Survey – 24 responses
- Community Input Workshops – 9 participants
- Event Vendor and Organizer Workshops – 3 participants
- In-Person Tours and Meetings – 10 participants
- Town Council Input Workshops – 12 participants
- SEAT Member Workshop – 19 participants
- Staff Input Sessions – 32 participants
- Stakeholder Interviews – 14 completed

Key findings included strong satisfaction with the quality, safety, and inclusivity of current events, alongside demand for greater diversity in offerings, particularly arts/music, multicultural, and food-based programming. Respondents emphasized the need for more effective promotion, streamlined permitting, clearer decision-making frameworks, and more equitable distribution of events across wards. Rising event costs, limited infrastructure, and growing community diversity were also identified as critical pressures. These insights directly shaped the draft plan that was validated in Phase Two.

Phase Two (May – August 2025)

The second phase tested and validated the draft plan through a Council workshop (May 6) and subsequent discussions, supported by meetings with individual Councillors (July 21–25, 2025). To further engage the community, the draft plan was published online, and a public survey was conducted from July 9 to August 1, 2025.

The survey received 185 responses from residents, community groups, and event producers, demonstrating strong alignment with the plan's direction:

- **Vision:** 73% agreed with the proposed vision for events in Oakville; including neutral responses, overall support was 95%.
- **Outcomes:** 75% agreed with the proposed outcomes; including neutral responses, overall support was 94%.
- **Priority Actions:** Across the ten actions, the majority of respondents agreed, with overall levels of support (agree + neutral) ranging from 87% to 96%.

Feedback from this phase suggested refinements, such as reordering priority actions, ensuring signature events such as Canada Day and the Santa Claus Parade are well-supported alongside legacy events, better distribution and use of parks and facilities, more adult-oriented programming, showcasing local talent,

multiple grant application deadlines, and stronger event promotion. A summary of Phase Two feedback is provided in Appendix C.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS:

Based on consultation findings, the plan identifies two overarching goals supported by 12 initiatives and 60 actions (detailed in Appendix A).

- **Organizational Development** focuses on the systems, resources, and planning tools required to strengthen the Town's ability to support events. This ensures that decisions are transparent, outcomes can be measured, and staff capacity is aligned with community demand.
- **Event and Program Development** focuses on the experiences that residents and visitors see and enjoy. These objectives ensure that Oakville's event calendar is inclusive, geographically balanced, and capable of responding to future growth.

Of these, 10 priority actions were highlighted and validated through consultation with Council and the community. These represent the actions most important to prioritize through the plan's implementation based on community sentiment.

One of the most significant priority actions, and a direct response to Council's 2023 referral, is the creation of a Community Events Grant Program.

Community Events Grant Program – Transition Year (2026)

The Community Events Grant Program responds directly to Council's 2023 referral and addresses feedback about the complexity and equity of fee waivers. It replaces the Special Event Permit Fee Assistance Procedure and consolidates multiple funding streams into a single program. This shift provides a consistent, outcome-based model for event support that is aligned with Council priorities.

Launching in 2026 with an overall allocation of \$174,600 – comprised of **\$70,000 in requested new funding** and the **balance supported through the Town's existing base budget** – the program consolidates fee assistance, right-of-way management, legacy event funding, and BIA event funding into one process. It will apply consistent, criteria-based evaluations with annual reporting to Council, support a broader range of eligible expenses, and align funding decisions with Council's priorities and demonstrated community benefits.

Funding for legacy events such as the Remembrance Day (\$10,000), the Terry Fox Run (\$10,000) and BIA-led events (\$20,000 to each) is already included in the Town's base budget and will continue to be supported through the new program.

Funding Consolidation Table

Allocation	2025 Budget	2026 Budget
Special Event Fee Assistance (46252)	\$ 86,700	\$ 24,600
Right of Way Management (53220)	\$ 20,000	\$ -
Terry Fox Run Fee Assistance (base budget)	\$ -	\$ 10,000
Remembrance Day Fee Assistance (base budget)	\$ -	\$ 10,000
BIA Fee Assistance (3 x \$20,000) (base budget)	\$ -	\$ 60,000
Community Events Grant Program (requested new)	\$ -	\$ 70,000
Total	\$ 106,700	\$ 174,600

Transition and Review

To give organizers time to adjust to the new process, 2026 will serve as a transition year. Organizers may choose to continue using the current fee reduction approach or apply under the new Community Events Grant Program. Under the Terms of Reference (Appendix B), they must select either the Community Events Grant Program or the Special Event Permit Fee Assistance for a given event, not both, to avoid duplication.

Following the transition year, staff will evaluate the model’s effectiveness, gather feedback from organizers, and report back to Council with any adjustments.

To provide some stability for the legacy events (Remembrance Day and the Terry Fox Run) and the BIA events, staff will implement five-year agreements identifying how the funding will support the events.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

Endorsement of the Special Events Plan will:

- Establish a clear and coordinated framework for event planning and decision-making, reducing reliance on precedent and legacy arrangements.
- Improve efficiency through streamlined permitting, a single point of contact for organizers, and standardized evaluation tools.

- Consolidate multiple funding streams into the new Community Events Grant Program, ensuring fairness, transparency, and alignment with Council's priorities.
- Provide stability for legacy and BIA events through multi-year agreements while embedding accountability through reporting requirements.
- Strengthen the Town's ability to support community-led events by reducing administrative burden and improving coordination across departments.
- Position Oakville to respond to growth by investing in the tools, resources, and spaces needed to sustain a balanced, inclusive event calendar.
- Enhance programming and partnerships to ensure events are geographically distributed, accessible, and reflective of community needs.
- Support Oakville's cultural vibrancy, economic development, and sense of community belonging by providing a sustainable and equitable approach to special events.

Next Steps

Implementation of the Oakville Special Events Plan will be considered as part of the 2026 budget process.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

As detailed in the report, the plan was informed by more than 1,450 contributions through surveys, workshops, and interviews, including 185 responses to the public validation survey in summer 2025. Feedback emphasized the need for a transparent funding model, streamlined permitting, stronger support for community-led events, and programming that reflects Oakville's diversity and growth. These priorities are embedded throughout the plan to ensure its actions are responsive to community needs.

(B) FINANCIAL

Implementation of the Special Events Plan will require new operating and capital resources beginning in 2026. Endorsement of the Plan at this stage does not commit funding; related requests will be brought forward through the 2026 operating budget and subsequent capital budgets.

Where appropriate, some costs may be offset through the Town's share of the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT). Separate information on MAT reserves will be presented to Council by year-end.

As part of the 2026 budget process, staff plan to bring forward \$181,300 in proposed operating requests, including one FTE and \$70,000 for the Community Events Grant Program.

As part of the 2027 budget process, staff plan to bring forward \$151,100 in proposed capital funding through the budget process to advance priority actions, including:

- Action 6 – Explore and prioritize opportunities town-wide to enhance the functionality of existing park spaces to host events (e.g., servicing upgrades, staging areas, utilities).
- Action 9 – Explore the feasibility of a purpose-built outdoor venue to host large-scale community events (as recommended in the Parks, Recreation and Library Master Plan).

All other implementation costs can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Five-Year Financial Impact (2026-2030)

Budget Request	2026	2027
Capital Costs		
Action Implementation	\$ -	\$ 151,100
Operating Costs		
1.0 FTE Event Supervisor	\$ 111,300	\$ 36,500
Community Events Grant Program	\$ 70,000	\$ -
Total Impact	\$ 181,300	\$ 187,600

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

There is no direct impact on other departments; however, they will continue to be involved through SEAT and in supporting event delivery via permitting and related services.

(D) COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The report addresses Council’s strategic priorities: Community Belonging, Accountable Government, and Growth Management.

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

N/A

APPENDICES:

- Appendix A – Oakville Special Events Plan
- Appendix B – Community Events Grant Program Terms of Reference
- Appendix C – Phase Two Consultation Summary

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