

Subject: Strawberry Festival Partnership Plan

Staff Report No. CS-011-24

**Department/
Commission:** Community Services Commission

Date: December 11, 2024

Recommendation:

- 1) That Council receive Report No. CS-011-24 for information.

Report Highlights

- Staff are asking Council to receive Report No. CS-24-XXX for information
- Staff will be working in collaboration with the Strawberry Festival Board of Directors to establish a renewed operating and partnership model for the 2025 Strawberry Festival and future years.
- The Strawberry Festival Board will continue to plan and facilitate all Legacy Events, including: The Pancake Breakfast, The Citizen/Sports Person of the Year, The Sandra Stronach Red Berry Cafe, The Gladys Clarkson Stouffville Bakes competition, The Totally Toddler competition, and Picnic in the Park
- Under a new partnership and operating model, the Town will lead the planning and facilitation of the following portfolios: vendor management, event logistics, entertainment and technical production, beverage services, health and safety, and marketing

1. Purpose:

This report is to inform Council that staff are working in collaboration with the Strawberry Festival Board of Directors for a renewed operating and partnership model for the 2025 Strawberry Festival on June 27-29, 2025. A Memorandum of Understanding will be established between the Town and Strawberry Festival Board of Directors for the 2025 Festival and will be revisited following an event debriefing to refine for future years.

2. Background:

The Strawberry Festival has been a signature Stouffville event, having recently celebrated its 40th year in 2024. The festival's rich history in Stouffville includes being run by community volunteers and has been supported both financially and with services in-kind by the Town and the local business community. The Strawberry Festival also relies on grant funding to offset operational expenses. Previously, the Festival was supported through a Town operating grant for Canada Day festivities and in-kind support of park usage and operational staff. In December 2023, at the request of the Strawberry Festival Board of Directors, the 2024 Canada Day festivities were separated from a Board responsibility and were assumed by the Town. This allowed the Board of Directors to focus on the logistics for the festival weekend with a shared goal of maintaining a strong connection between the Strawberry Festival and Canada Day for the community.

In September 2024, the Board of Directors approached the Town to discuss options for a renewed operating and partnership model for the 2025 festival. The Board of Directors expressed that it has become challenging to recruit new committee members to take on the role of the larger portfolio leads and to sustain the festival in its past format as an event run exclusively by community volunteers.

At the October 16, 2024, Council meeting, a member motion was brought forward that the scale of the Festival has grown exponentially since its inception and Council directed staff to examine how the Town can increase support to the Festival and to bring a report to Council by the end of 2024 with a recommendation on how to proceed.

Town staff and the newly elected 2025 Board of Directors have met to discuss options for a new operating model that would still ensure success of the 2025 Strawberry Festival. The Board proposed a division of responsibilities where the Town would plan and facilitate the major portfolios within the festival including: vendor management, event logistics, entertainment and technical production, beverage services, health and safety, and marketing. It was important for the Board of Directors that they retain the iconic community "Legacy Events" as part of this new proposed model, including but not limited to: The Pancake Breakfast, The Citizen/Sports Person of the Year, The Sandra Stronach Red Berry Cafe, The Gladys Clarkson Stouffville Bakes competition, The Totally Toddler competition, and Picnic in the Park. The Town and Festival Board of Directors will work collaboratively on in-kind funding sources and the Town will lead all cash sponsorship initiatives to offset operational costs for the festival.

It is important to both the Town and Board of Directors to keep the same values of the festival and continue the tradition that has brought this community together for over 40 years. It was further agreed upon that ongoing dialogue will inform a future Memorandum of Understanding.

Official planning for the 2025 Festival will begin in early January 2025 between Town staff and members of the Strawberry Festival Board. An extensive debrief will be conducted post-event in July 2025 between both parties. The Town and Strawberry Festival Board will mutually assess and review the success of the 2025 operating and partnership model

and make any necessary changes or adjustments to the initiatives and events and/or parties' responsibilities.

3. Analysis:

Staff have reviewed the proposed operating model and believe this new extended partnership will provide a sustainable option for the Strawberry Festival and provide a renewed opportunity for the Board of Directors to continue and build on the Festival's Legacy Events.

As a result of the expanding partnership and growth of the Event team portfolio, the Art in the Park event will be transitioned in 2025 to Latcham Art Centre and the Stouffville Library.

With the event just over six months away, it is important to move forward with planning and contracting key service providers and vendors for the 2025 Festival.

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

- i. Strawberry Festival
Legacy event including: The Pancake Breakfast, The Citizen/Sports Person of the Year, The Sandra Stronach Red Berry Cafe, The Gladys Clarkson Stouffville Bakes competition, The Totally Toddler competition, the Stouffville Library Spelling Bee, Strawberry Express Trolley Bus Tour to local strawberry farms, and Picnic in the Park.
- ii. Town Portfolio
Stage entertainment, audio/visual, event logistics, park and AGCO permits, health and safety, marketing/promotion, vendors, beverage service, sponsorship portfolio.
- iii. Collaborative Efforts
Grant application, in-kind partnerships, opening ceremony, event schedule and workback plans.

4. Options:

4.1 Option A

That Council receive this report for information.

5. Financial Implications:

The Board of Directors has shared their 2023 and 2024 operating budgets and revenue sources with staff. The Board of Directors agrees to assume all operating costs outlined in the 3.1 i which will be offset by in-kind support, grant funding, and program revenue. The Town agrees to assume all expenses listed in 3.1 ii, Town Portfolio. All efforts will be made by Town staff to offset the unbudgeted estimated operating and staffing related costs of \$25,000 through sponsorship opportunities and vendor revenue.

6. Broader Intergovernmental Impacts and/or Considerations:

None.

7. Communication:

Town staff will work with the Festival Board of Directors on communicating this new partnership with our resident and sponsorship community.

8. Alignment with Strategic Plan:

An Engaging Town
Increase Community Engagement & Outreach

9. Attachments:

None

10. Related Reports:

None

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For further information on this report, please contact the Department Head: Rob Braid, Commissioner of Community Services at 905-640-1900 or 1-855-642-8697 ext. 2445 or via email at rob.braid@townofws.ca