Block Clubs, Festivals, Parades & Races Events Research

Background

The City is experiencing an increase in special events. Frustration among event organizers and residents came to light during the last budget process relating to fees assessed and collected for events permitting, specifically, at what level of event funding (if any) or City in-kind services were set aside for organizers, and the number, type, frequency of events and location of events that take place within the City of St. Paul. Additionally, in response to citizen concerns regarding street closure and noise impacts of events, staff was asked to look into our permitting requirements, examine ways to mitigate the negative impacts of hosting events continuously at preferred sites, explore better ways of addressing traffic management and business and neighborhood notification. These mitigation measures are the source of some of the frustrations expressed by event organizers and residents. The City Council requested a session on the state of events management and strategy in St. Paul and recommendations from affected departments for improvements.

Council staff invited key staff across St. Paul's permitting offices to examine event challenges. The discussions mainly focused on whether existing policies and practices need to be changed to better align with current needs and challenges.

Current Challenges in St. Paul's Process

The research revealed that our City's event permitting process is similar to surrounding cities in Minnesota and superior to some because we have a committee made up of various departments that review large-size events together to facilitate the application process. (NOTE: Because of the similarities in processes, no Minnesota cities were included in this matrix. The most notable distinction between St. Paul and Minneapolis is that the City of Minneapolis requires that notification for the date of the event are usually set one year out and posted online in January of each year. If any new events come up during that year, a new letter will be sent to the neighborhoods.) St. Paul's committee charged with evaluating and approving events are comprised of members of Parks & Recreations, Police, Public Works, Department of Safety and Inspections, and Fire to support the coordination and permitting of events that take place in the public realm (e.g., parks, streets, etc.). This committee functions as the central coordination of City services to provide a more consistent and efficient process. Depending on the size and scope of the event, organizers who wish to make use of our parks or streets for hosting an event such as a festival or race may likely start their inquiry through the Police Department. In addition, the process is sometimes further frustrated by inconsistencies in the communication process with event organizers working with the various departments, the inconsistent fees assessed for a privately-funded event compared against a community-based event, and the lack of consistent notification to neighboring residents of the event. St. Paul's fees for city services are charged differently across the various departments and depending on the size and scale of the event, fees for the overall cost of putting on an event may be higher when the event is completed.

Policy guidance about the number, location, frequencies, types of events and cost associated with events are necessary to help the City Council understand the nature of events impact on residents in St. Paul. Currently, the City of St. Paul does not have formal criteria to limit the number of events that take place. Based on various accounts, event permit requests may be denied or revoked for the following reasons:

1. A scheduling conflict where more than one group desires to reserve and use the same park or street at the same or nearly the same time and the adequate and safe coordination of the two events is not reasonably possible. Under some circumstances, rather than denying an application,

the City would suggest other locations to make the initially requested site possible at the desired location.

2. The location is not appropriate for the event due to the heavy general public used of that particular location on the date/time of the year requested.
3. There is insufficient time to properly prepare the event.
4. The applicant fails to comply with event requirements, submit required permits, or fails to pay required fees and/or deposits by the imposed deadlines.

Another challenge for events is that it is unclear whether any of our departments set aside funding in our budget for services as it relates to events as the number of new events being held in St. Paul has increased in recent years.

Overview of Research Findings
See Matrix (Attachment A) which provides a snapshot of other U.S. cities' event processes.

The following is a list of policy issues that cities considered when adopting a one-stop approach to manage special events.

- **Process Transparency:** Make special events permitting more accessible through one online portal. Rather than having organizers search through multiple sources and contacting various City staff, a one-stop approach enabled organizers to submit permits applications to multiple divisions through a single user interface, which reduced multiple and duplicative submissions and reviewing components of the permit process. Each application will be assigned a tracking number, allowing the organizer to check on the status and timeline of the approval process. The consolidation enabled event organizers to obtain relevant and required information from a single source which ensured that all parties involved in the process had the same information, allowing for the timely processing of relevant permits. Furthermore, the process allowed for a more consistent interpretation of policies, consistent fee reduction and fee waiver practices, and consistent practice in handling customer inquiries. Transparency in the process not only reduced duplicate review efforts from multiple department sources but it also provided organizers with automated and interactive individualized information while at the same time conserving City resources.
- **Community Benefit**: Cities recognized the substantial community benefits that result from special events. These events provide cultural enrichment, promote economic vitality and diversity, enhance community identity and pride, create tourism and economic opportunities to attract visitors, and provide fundraising opportunities for the community's nonprofit agencies.
- **First Amendment Protection**: Cities are mindful of rights of citizens to assemble and participate in free speech and support standards that bring greater uniformity to the procedural requirements by ensuring that any regulation as it relates to the use of public space is narrowly tailored to serve a legitimate public interest to balance that against the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens, and the conservation of City resources.
- **Managing Multiple Demands Against Scarce Resource**: Partnerships between cities, event sponsors and the community are valuable in ensuring successful events that minimizes neighborhood impact at preferred sites. Multiple-events occurring during the same time frame can cause significant resource constraints on departments that support special events (e.g. Police Officers, Emergency Medical Services, Enforcement Officers, etc.) and can cause citywide congestion and delays. On a broad scale, some events absorb a large amount of resources and thus make it difficult to support normal operations and other events at the same time. Creation of policies that control the number of events that can happen during times when the City is host to a significant or legacy event or events that consume large amounts of City resources would alleviate

pressures on City resources and allow for the City to ensure normal service delivery with minimal disruption.

- **Cost Recovery:** Frequently, event organizers make requests to City staff for in-kind support, but because many cities do not have clear policy directives, administers (depending on where the application originated from) may apply inconsistent decisions to waive fees, reduce fees or accept in-kind support which can create problems. First, department administrators may not be authorized to issue blanket fee reductions and waivers, as a result, decision-making may appear to be ad hoc or inconsistent both to Council and to the public, including organizers of special events. Second, waiving fees may increase spending in departments that may not have budgeted for services that support special events and prevents department's ability to keep expenditures within approved budgets. Finally, fee waivers generally do not involve accounting mechanisms, and consequently do not leave an appropriate accountability or audit trail.

Questions to consider in developing short-term or long-term strategies to mitigate current and evolving event permitting

1. Whether Council needs to change existing ordinances to better align with current policies and practices? What actions need to take place in order to coordinate a vision for events and how to align the City's resource to meet the needs of St. Paul's residents?
2. What are some of the current challenges faced by the various departments that may require additional resource or support to properly administer events permits?
3. How can we better track how many events occurred in previous years compared to this year (or the following year)?
4. Should the Council consider policies to set aside event funding assistance, limit the number of fee waiver of city services, etc.? What level of funding should the City allocate to event support, i.e., subsidized city services?
5. What options are available for cost recovery for providing City services that extends beyond Police, Public Works, DSI and Parks like Fire/EMT services, etc.?
6. What considerations or strategies are being made to limit events on popular/preferred locations? Are there types of events, partnerships or locations to encourage or discourage?
7. Who determines the event strategy for the City and what parties have been or should be involved in the process? What are the restrictions or limitations on type and number of events? Who applies these restrictions? Consider whether the City department responsible for providing event oversight has the appropriate resources and whether additional capacity is needed based on projected number of events to take place.
8. Is the City's permitting process reflective of the City of St. Paul's vision?
9. What steps can we take to provide better notification to residents and businesses? Who determines whether neighborhood support is needed to effectively address negative impact for residents and businesses? How would staff assess methods for streamlining neighbor, business and participant feedback when approving an event?
10. What role do events play in the City's tourism and economic development strategy?

Proposed Process

In sync with larger cities experienced with events permitting, City-wide staff would provide assistance to vendors via one starting point by providing navigational assistance throughout the event process including acquisition of needed permits, requirement explanation, City service coordination, and site option recommendations, etc. The process would follow a facilitative and streamlined process between City staff and event vendors. The facilitative approach allows for most events to occur whether the event is a community celebration, parade or race. A one-stop approach would enable better review of the true size,

scope of the event, and the amount of equipment/services required in the public space to appropriately maintain the health and safety of our citizens.

Additional information
City of Raleigh (NC) is currently in the process to move from a decentralize process of reviewing and approving special events permits (e.g., road races, festivals, etc.) to a centralize process.
In November 2013, the City Manager recommended that the City Council consider centralizing special events to improve street closures and noise complaints from residents and streamline confusion in the process from event organizers. In recent years, the city experienced an increase in events taking place in their downtown areas and highly traveled roadways. Some of those challenges included the number of hosted events, variety of events, inconsistency in coordination of events, unclear policies and fee structure, noise, and increases in road closures (e.g., on popular routes, multiple events occurring each weekend, neighborhoods, businesses and transit users affected by street closures). At the time, the city did not have a single department or agency that was dedicated to managing events. Event applications were mostly handled by the Raleigh Police Department (with approval from the City Council) and events that occurred downtown were handled by the Downtown Raleigh Alliance. At the beginning of 2014, the city moved forward to permanently establish the Special Events Office which would provide a single point of contact for event management.

The Office will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of special events and be the liaison between city staff, event producers, and citizens. Policy changes included the following:

- Creation of a first-come, first-served date reservation policy – with ability to reserve same date in subsequent years with good performance score
- City Council-approved economic development events have priority
- $100 application fee
- 100 events per year limit with an additional limitation on use of popular routes on subsequent days or weekends during the year
- 12-event limit on greenways
- Notification plan required
- Dedicated race courses not on city streets are exempt from 100-event limit
- Implement graduated fee structure to support the creation of the Special Events Office
- Establish city-wide calendar of events
- Development of a web-based application system to manage events
- Development of special events policies for notification / communication

Sometime in late Spring 2014, staff are expected to report back to the City Council the status of the creation and rollout implementation of a one-stop office.