



November 15, 2023

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: The Great Outdoors Comedy Festival – Special Event Report Back

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board receive for information the report back on the 2023 Great Outdoors Comedy Festival as outlined in this report; and
- B. FURTHER THAT the Board approve the addition of The Great Outdoors Comedy Festival to the annual Calendar of Major Special Events starting in 2024.

REPORT SUMMARY

The inaugural Great Outdoors Comedy Festival (“Comedy Festival” or “Festival”) was successfully hosted at Brockton Fields in Stanley Park on September 15 & 16, 2023. The Festival was enjoyed by approximately 15,000 attendees and received a predominantly positive response from attendees, artists, suppliers, and other stakeholders. Like most first year events, a number of areas were also identified for improvement. The purpose of this report is to provide a report back on the Comedy Festival, and given the successful delivery and response to the event, seek Park Board approval to add this event to the annual Calendar of Major Special Events.

BOARD AUTHORITY, POLICY, PREVIOUS DECISIONS/UPDATES

Per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction and control over all areas designated as permanent and temporary parks in the City of Vancouver, including any structures, programs and activities, fees, and improvements that occur within those parks.

As informed by the [Guidelines for Special Events](#), the [Special Events Policy \(2003\)](#), as well as current practices, the Park Board reviews and approves new major special events, as well as significant changes or revisions to existing major special events.

On May 13, 2019, the Board [directed staff to update the aforementioned policy and guidelines](#). Concurrent with this direction, the Board also instructed staff to maintain and support the Park Board's current portfolio of commercial events and activities, but issued a moratorium on the introduction of any new commercial initiatives until after the Special Event Policy & Guidelines have been updated and approved by the Board.

On October 19, 2020, the Park Board approved the [VanPlay Framework](#), for Vancouver's [Parks and Recreation Services Master Plan](#). VanPlay sets out priorities and provides tools and policies to support the pursuit of equity, connectivity and access to parks and recreation for all. The Framework provides a succinct method for referencing and implementing VanPlay directions. The Great Outdoors Comedy Festival event supports and aligns with VanPlay's directions to

“Welcome Everyone” (parks and recreation experiences that improve quality of life) and “Weave the City Together” (parks, nature, recreation and culture integrated into everyday life).

On December 5, 2022, the Board [directed staff to lift the moratorium on new commercial event initiatives in Vancouver parks](#), and communicate this decision to the public and the festival and events community.

On March 27, 2023, the Park Board approved an application from Trixstar LIVE (“Trixstar” or “Event Producer”) to host a comedy festival, at Brockton Fields in Stanley Park, on September 15, 16 & 17, 2023, with a maximum daily attendance of 10,000 guests. The Board also approved an application from Trixstar for a Special Event Permit from the BC Liquor & Cannabis Regulation Branch to serve alcohol at the Festival.

BACKGROUND

Event Overview

The Great Outdoors Comedy Festival was delivered on September 15 & 16, 2023, at Brockton Point in Stanley Park (the event was reduced from the Board-approved 3 days to 2 days due to artist unavailability). Framed by the forest backdrop of Vancouver’s iconic park, the Festival featured a curated lineup of comedians that blended well known artists with emerging performers from across North America.

Event Location

Since 2011, Stanley Park’s Brockton Fields have hosted a variety of large scale events, including the SeaWheeze Sunset Festival, Vancouver 125, Parks Canada’s 100-Year Celebration, Sarah McLachlan’s Voices in the Park, and most recently the SKOOKUM Music Festival. These initiatives were well received and established Stanley Park as a desirable large scale event venue, similar to Central Park in New York City, Grant Park in Chicago, and Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Along with the Comedy Festival, these events have provided many benefits for the public, the Park Board, and other partners/stakeholders.

Event Producer Overview

Trixstar LIVE is an event management and marketing firm that activates in both urban and rural markets across North America with festivals, concerts, celebrity experiences, brand activations and keynote speaker engagements. The company produces unique experiences and impactful events that generate excitement and everlasting memories while raising funds and awareness for local charities and not-for-profits. Based in Edmonton since 2005, Trixstar has produced several major events including GRIT Speaker Series, Together Again Concert Series, Grey Cup Festival, Big Valley Jamboree, Soundtrack Music Festival, and The Great Outdoors Comedy Festival series.

Event Highlights

The 2023 Great Outdoors Comedy Festival was successfully delivered and enjoyed by approximately 15,000 attendees. Like most first year events, a number of areas were also identified for improvement and are referenced later in this report.

Key observations/highlights include:

Safety & Security

No major medical or safety issues directly related to Festival performers or guests occurred requiring Vancouver Police Department or Vancouver Fire & Rescue Services intervention. The only notable incident involved a non-Festival attendee who breached the event fencing and began moving towards the stage. He was promptly intercepted by Festival security and taken into custody. No one was harmed and the show went on without disruption.

There was no damage or significant breaches to Park Board assets located in and around the Festival location.

Despite the concentration of activity at Brockton Point, there was little operational impact on other areas of the park (west of Pipeline Road).

Park Protection

Notwithstanding the significant number of attendees, steps taken by the Event Producer to protect and prevent impacts to the Festival's ecologically and culturally sensitive event area proved effective.

As anticipated, and especially considering the favorable weather leading up to and after the event, Brockton Fields held up well throughout the event. Trixstar took the initiative to provide protective covering over the cricket pitches and locating food trucks on the track at Brockton Oval, thereby reducing wear and tear on these spaces.

Indigenous Representation

The Comedy Festival set out to engage and recognize the *xʷməθkʷəyəm* (Musqueam), *sk̓wxwú7mesh* (Squamish) and *səlilwətał* (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples ("MST" or "Host Nations"), as rights holders in Stanley Park. Key initiatives included:

- Engaging with the Host Nations leading up to the event;
- Working on protocol and relationships with the Host Nations;
- Welcoming approximately 200 members from the Host Nations to the Festival;
- Delivering a Festival opening announcement both evenings with members of each Host Nation, including Chief Wayne Sparrow from *xʷməθkʷəyəm* (Musqueam);
- Hosting a special backstage presentation with key artists for MST representatives; and
- Featuring artist performances by members of *sk̓wxwú7mesh* (Squamish) Nation.

It is anticipated that Indigenous representation at the Festival will continue to increase in future years, enabled by a longer event planning horizon and enhanced relationships with the three Host Nations.

Noise Impacts

Not surprisingly, due to the event location's distance from surrounding residential neighborhoods (e.g. Coal Harbour, the West End, and the North Shore), no noise complaints were received related to the delivery of the Festival.

Transportation

A best practice informed transportation plan was implemented to move guests to/from the

event, and reduce impacts on the event location and other parts of Stanley Park. Key elements of the plan included promotion of alternative forms of transportation such as walking, biking, public transit, taxis, and ride-hailing services.

Sustainability

The Festival incorporated a proactive sustainability program; key highlights included:

- Working with Ostrom Climate Solutions, Canada's leading carbon management solutions provider, to determine GHG emissions related to the Festival and fully offset them;
- As a result of these efforts, the Festival was awarded a Climate Friendly Event Designation;
- Only certified compostable containers and cutlery used onsite;
- Promotion of active and eco-friendly transportation for attendees;
- Creation of a Comedy Festival Sustainability Field Guide to act as the north star for any green event practices;
- Addition of sustainability webpage on Festival site;
- Partnership with Coca-Cola to provide reusable water bottles for all staff, volunteers and artists to reduce single use plastic waste;
- Water refill stations provided for all staff, volunteers, and artists to encourage the use of reusable water bottles;
- Working with accommodation partners in all festival cities, including Vancouver, that are leaders in sustainability or Greek Key Eco certified;
- Providing free bike lock up areas to encourage eco-friendly transportation; and
- Development of internal and external communications plans around sustainability to educate and encourage sponsors, attendees, and suppliers to utilize sustainable practices.

Public/Partner/Stakeholder Benefits

Benefits for the public, the Park Board, and other partners/stakeholders, included:

- Large scale engagement of residents and visitors through comedy and supporting services (food and beverage, retail merchandising, etc.);
- Collaboration and support with Stanley Park partners/stakeholders;
- Collaboration and support for local artists and creative industries; and
- Generation of important incremental revenues that can be used to deliver non-budgeted programs and services in Vancouver's parks and recreation system.

The Festival produced roughly \$2.6 million in direct economic impact and over \$4.0 million in total economic benefits. Additionally, the event generated an estimated 3,320 room nights at Vancouver hotels.

The Festival has also contributed over \$350,000 to charitable and non-profit organizations since its establishment in 2021. Some of the benefactors in Vancouver included the Stanley Park Ecology Society and Talaysay Tours.

As proof of the event's overall popularity, the Comedy Festival will grow from 4 cities in 2023 to 8 cities in 2024, including its first activation in the U.S. market.

Event Delivery & Key Learnings

While the Comedy Festival was enjoyed by thousands and acknowledged as an overall success, as is the case with most first year events, a number of lessons were learned and several areas were identified for future operational improvements. These include:

Compliance with Park By-Laws

A detailed plan was developed and implemented to inform and enforce Park Board by-laws at the Festival (most notably those pertaining to no smoking). The vast majority of festivalgoers complied with the by-laws, however, infractions related to smoking were occasionally observed. Going forward, additional action may be needed to increase compliance in this area, including reinforced communications, onsite signage, regular announcements, and security personnel oversight.

Congestion Points/Bottlenecks

The Festival's traffic management plan delivered acceptable results, however, some key pressure points were noted, including:

- Congestion during ingress/egress; vehicle ingress/egress is an area of focus and attention for all large scale events occurring in Stanley Park, however, impacts during the Comedy Festival were further exacerbated due to nighttime closures on the Lions Gate Bridge; potential solutions in the future could include the introduction of event shuttles, utilizing other areas of the park to support event operations, the introduction of new park access approaches during large events, and closer collaboration with the provincial Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure to avoid future bridge closures during large events;
- High use of ride-hailing services increased vehicle activity to/from the park, contributing to vehicle congestion; establishing a dedicated location for ride-hailing vehicle drop-off/pick-up may assist in addressing this issue in the future; and
- Festivalgoers using public transit experienced longer than expected waits at bus stops; it is anticipated that closer collaboration with Translink to enhance bus service to the park, especially during egress, will better address this issue.

Other Follow-Up Issues

Consistent with the delivery of new events, every aspect of the Festival was analyzed by both the Event Producer and Park Board staff. Based on these observations and assessments, a few additional issues were identified for improvement at future Festivals, including:

- Given the size and popularity of the event, along with enhanced dwell time of festivalgoers, food and beverage services will likely need to be increased, particularly in the VIP section; and
- Egress effectiveness can likely be improved through increased pathway lighting, more directional signage, and support from event volunteers.

Stakeholder Feedback

As noted earlier in this report, the overall response to the Comedy Festival was favorable. Some key highlights are summarized below:

- Positive response from Festival attendees, artists, suppliers, and other stakeholders;
- Strong feedback from local tourism agencies and downtown businesses; and

- Despite the traffic impacts created by the event, Stanley Park stakeholders are generally supportive of the Festival.

DISCUSSION

Event Proposal

Given the positive response to the inaugural Great Outdoors Comedy Festival, and recognizing that the success and viability of the Festival is dependent on delivering the event in future years and increasing the number of paid tickets, Trixstar is seeking approval to add this event to the Park Board's annual Calendar of Major Special Events. It is anticipated that future Festivals will be executed in much the same manner and have the same form factor as in 2023. Notwithstanding the addition of the Festival to the Park Board's annual Calendar of Major Special Events:

- The initiative would be subject to annual reviews by both Park Board staff and the Host Nations before proceeding each year;
- Any major changes to the delivery of the Festival would be subject to Board approval; and
- The Park Board reserves the right to remove the Festival from the annual Calendar of Major Special Events if the event is not delivered as intended and/or the Board determines that it no longer wishes to host the Festival in Stanley Park.

For the Board's reference, a summary of some of the key event parameters are provided below.

Event Site Use Period

To accommodate the Festival, site set-up, event delivery, and tear-down at Brockton Fields would occur in a phased manner over a 9-day period in order to minimize access restrictions to sport user groups and the public in general. The proposed site use periods are in line with other Park Board large event initiatives.

A post-Festival restoration plan for the event site, with expenses to be covered by the Event Producer, would be implemented to ensure the fields are ready for use by sports user groups after load out.

Compliance with Park Board By-Laws

Consistent with any event taking place in Park Board spaces, the event organizer would be responsible for attendee compliance with applicable Park Board by-laws. Accordingly, the plan developed for the 2023 event would be implemented and improved to inform and enforce regulations (most notably those pertaining to no smoking in parks).

Key plan elements would include, but not be limited to, advance notification/communications, reminders at gate/bag check locations, on-site signage, stage announcements, and Park Ranger oversight. Staff would also work with the organizer's security team, the Vancouver Police Department, and Park Rangers to ensure the plan is delivered successfully.

Event Benefits

Staff recognize that sensitivities and concerns exist when access to public spaces is restricted, and as a result, consider all requests of this nature carefully. Staff are supportive of adding this initiative to the annual Calendar of Major Special Events due to its uniqueness, its marquis nature, and the significant benefits identified earlier in the report that would accrue to the public,

the Park Board, and its partners/stakeholders, including most notably:

- Large scale engagement of residents and visitors through comedy and supporting services (food and beverage, retail merchandising, etc.);
- Inclusion of Indigenous representation throughout the Festival (which will recognize the Host Nations of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) peoples) and the provision of opportunities for Host Nation members and the broader Indigenous community;
- Collaboration and support with existing Stanley Park partners/stakeholders;
- Collaboration and support for local artists and creative industries; and
- Generation of important incremental revenues that can be used to deliver non-budgeted programs and services in Vancouver's parks and recreation system.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Festival Expediting Staff Team (FEST) Committee members, including the Vancouver Police Department, Vancouver Fire & Rescue Services, Engineering Services, BC Ambulance Service, and the BC Liquor & Cannabis Regulation Branch Licensing Branch, have provided a favorable review of the 2023 event.

This event proposal was previously reviewed by the Stanley Park Intergovernmental Working Group, which includes representatives from xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) peoples. No issues of concern were noted or identified through this engagement process. The Festival organizers will continue to work closely with the Host Nations to deliver a series of offerings and will move forward only with the support/endorsement of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) peoples.

NEXT STEPS

Subject to Board approval, Park Board staff will work collaboratively with the FEST Committee and the Event Producer to plan and deliver The Great Outdoors Comedy Festival in 2024 in the same manner and form factor as the inaugural event in 2023. Both the Park Board and Trixstar work very hard to be good neighbors to area residents and will design and deliver the Festival in a manner which mitigates the identified issues and concerns, while simultaneously enabling the Comedy Festival to be a wonderful local entertainment experience and important contributor to the Vancouver-area economy.

CONCLUSION

Large scale special events activate public spaces, foster community connectedness, and provide enriching cultural experiences. The 2023 Great Outdoors Comedy Festival established a new marquis event for the city that enhanced the vibrancy of our city, recognized and showcased the uniqueness and diversity of Indigenous culture, and generated important benefits for a wide range of partners/stakeholders.

Notwithstanding the identified operational/production issues typical of first year events, the Comedy Festival was a notable success and future festivals are eagerly being anticipated by Vancouverites and visitors to the city. Park Board staff have carefully considered the many aspects of this application and are confident that the initiative can be executed successfully and

as intended. Accordingly, staff recommend that the Board approve the application from the Event Producer as outlined in this report.

General Manager's Office
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

Prepared by:
Octavio Silva, Manager, Business Development – Business Services

/os/jk

Preliminary Site Plan – The Great Outdoors Comedy Festival

