



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

October 14, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Submitted by: Peter Radu, Assistant to the City Manager

Subject: Changes to Special Events Permitting Fees and Requirements

SUMMARY

The City of Berkeley has long had a reputation for being a city that is a destination – for culture, for food, and for a vibrant street scene. The City’s Special Events Team is a critical component of the vibrancy, as it is responsible for reviewing, approving, permitting, and overseeing all gatherings and events of 50 or more people on City property (in City parks and on City streets). However, the number of permitted special events (185 in 2024, not including the City’s three weekly farmers’ markets) now surpasses pre-pandemic levels, with this trend driven by a 27% increase in street closures since before the pandemic. The Special Events Team consists of staff from multiple departments, none of whom work solely on special events and many of whom also work on priority issues like encampment operations.

The impact of this increase in the number of requested and ultimately permitted special events has placed great strain on key participating departments (mainly Neighborhood Services, Public Works, Fire, and Health, Housing, and Community Services). As a result, the Fire, Public Works and Health, Housing, and Community Services Departments have recently proposed or will soon propose a range of fee increases to better recover costs for the increased staff time spent on events. In addition, recent accelerating changes in Berkeley’s built environment, with growing numbers of taller buildings and a multitude of street construction and redesign projects, has required staff to newly examine the regulatory framework (i.e., applicable state and local codes; traffic control requirements) for special events in order to ensure uniformity and rigor in its application, so that public safety can be upheld while also ensuring a vibrant events calendar.

Because such changes are usually proposed by individual departments in isolation, considered by Council individually, and paid by customers individually, it can be hard to understand the holistic impact that the sum total of concurrent changes across multiple departments will have on organizers wishing to host special events in Berkeley. The purpose of this report is to compile the changes that will have the greatest impact on event organizers (from a time and budget perspective) into one document. These include:

- **Fire Code compliance** for use of tents, canopies and other membrane structures; use and storage of propane; fire watch requirements; minimum fire lane width requirements; and others.
- **Proposed (forthcoming) Fire Inspector fees** to recover Fire Inspector costs associated with event plan check and event staffing.
- **Proposed (forthcoming) changes to Public Works street closure fees** to better recover staff costs associated with street closures and to make Berkeley's pricing more consistent with those of neighboring jurisdictions.
- **Forthcoming changes to traffic control plan (TCP) requirements** to ensure that all events are held to the same standards for rigorous traffic control planning.
- **Forthcoming transition of costs for street closures** (message board and traffic control device costs as well as Public Works staff time) to event organizers.
- **Changes to Environmental Health food vendor fees** for compact mobile food operations to comply with recent changes to State law.
- **Proposed (forthcoming) changes to Environmental Health's fee structure for food permits and amplified sound permits**, again with the goal of recovering staff costs for reviewing, inspecting, and staffing special events.

Staff will delay implementation of any new fees and regulatory requirements not already in place but highlighted in this report until January 1, 2026, to minimize impacts on remaining 2025 events and help ensure 2026 event organizers can better work with the Special Events Team in planning ahead for fun, safe, and successful future events. For some planned events, it is too late to include the proposed special event fees, requirements, and equipment costs outlined in this report in the current (FY26) Civic Arts Grants cycle.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Overview of the Special Events Team

The Special Events Team, which is managed by the Special Events Coordinator (1 FTE Program Manager II) in the Neighborhood Services Division of the City Manager's Office, consists of representatives from the Public Works Department, Fire Department, Health, Housing and Community Services Department, Police Department, and Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Department. The involvement of particular staff from each

department in the review and approval of any given event depends on the nature of the event itself. For example, low-impact events (like small block parties) usually create minimal impacts to City operations and require comparably little staff review for a permit to be issued. Conversely, high-impact events (those with higher anticipated turnout and requiring a traffic detour from a major street, collector street, or scenic route and/or requiring the rerouting of any public transportation buses or shuttles) can be complex and require the issuance of multiple permits. Consider the following two examples:

1. Small event. An example includes the closure of a single block of a residential street in which the applicants plan to close the street to through-traffic for a community gathering with carnival games. This event usually creates no major traffic impacts and can be reviewed and permitted with minimal review by participating departments.
2. Large event. An example includes an event in a major commercial corridor, showcasing live music on an event stage that offers a variety of food options from food trucks and canopied tents to several thousand anticipated attendees over two weekend days.

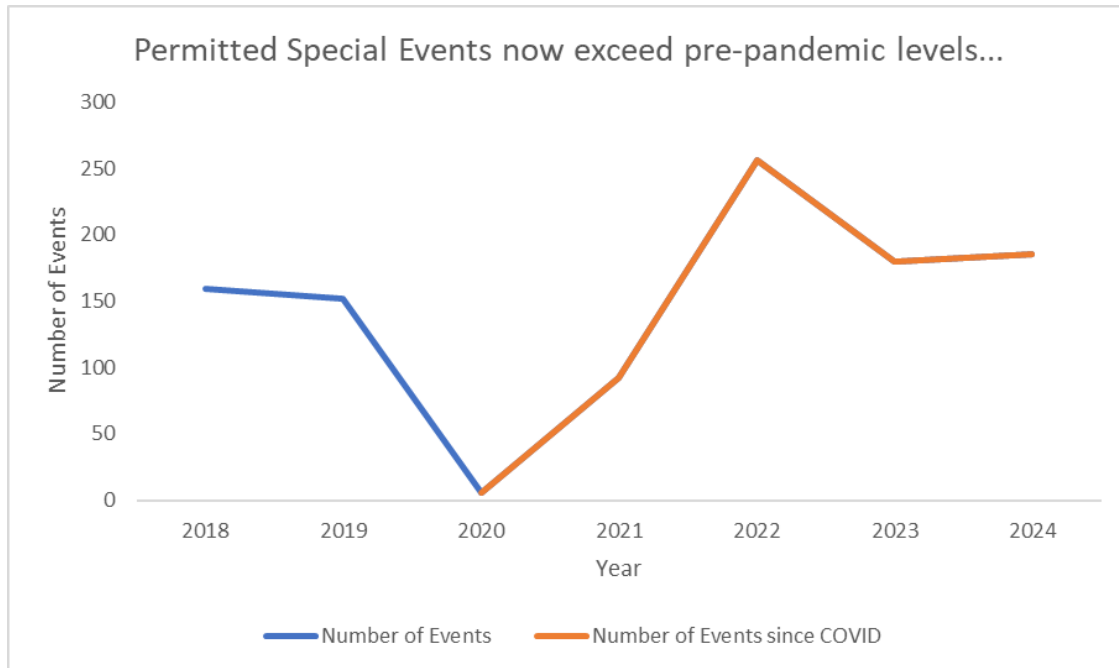
This event requires extensive review, permitting, and staffing from a number of City divisions, including:

- Environmental Health (for food and amplified sound permitting);
- Public Works Transportation (for traffic control and street closure) and Zero Waste (for waste, compost, and recycling management and compliance);
- Fire (for compliance with medical and life safety requirements as well as Fire Code regulations); and
- Police (for public safety review and overtime staffing).

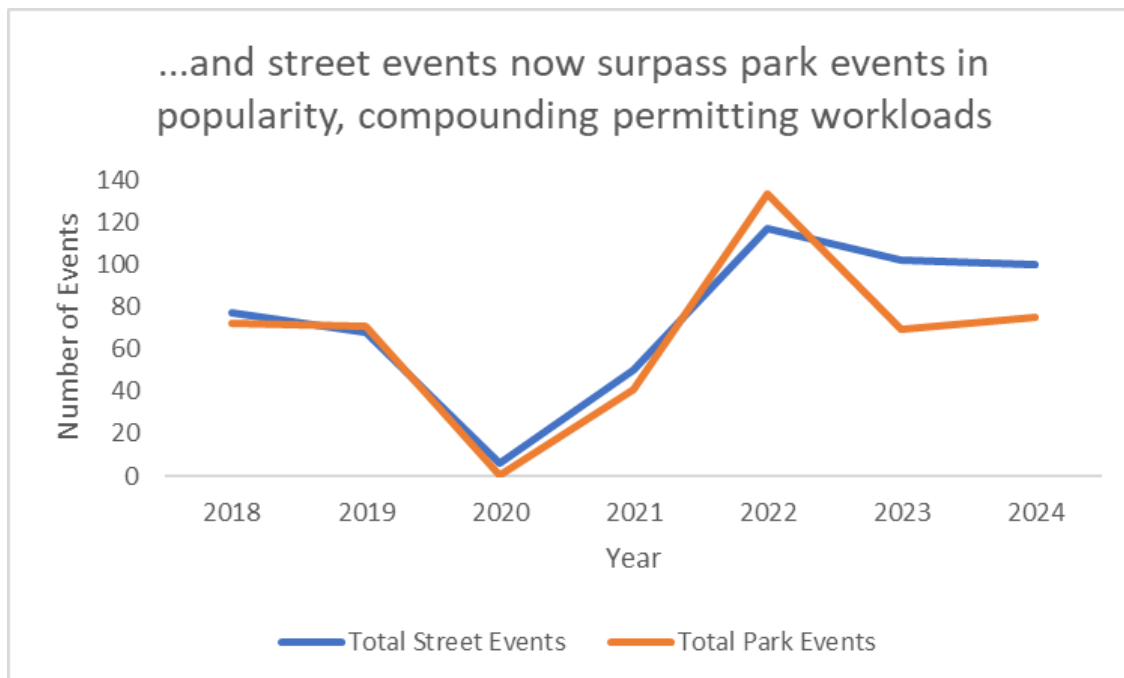
The Special Events Coordinator is responsible for coordinating and synchronizing the many staff involved in the plan check process, liaising with event organizers, ensuring plan compliance, coordinating with other affected agencies (such as AC Transit for bus re-routing), and more before issuing the final permit.

Increased Special Event Demand and the Impact on City Operations

Over the past several years, the number of permitted events in the City has now surpassed pre-pandemic levels: not including the anomaly year of 2020, when many events were canceled due to pandemic lockdowns, the average number of events post-pandemic (2021-2024) increased 15% from before the pandemic (2018 – 2019).



Importantly, data suggest that the increase has been largely driven by an increase in popularity for street closure events: while the average number of post-pandemic (2021-2024) park events increased 11% over pre-pandemic (2018-2019) averages, average street events increased significantly more (27%) over the same period.



Special Events Team staff believe that, in addition to Berkeley's enduring regional reputation as a cultural destination, this increase in demand for outdoor events, and in particular street events, in Berkeley can be attributed to two other phenomena:

1. When the early days of the pandemic closed down indoor entertainment and gathering opportunities and business operations, many community members and event organizers sought outdoor spaces (in parks and on streets). This trend has not reversed.
2. The City of Berkeley is a relatively inexpensive destination for special events, and in particular street closure events. Filing fees for street events are significantly lower than nearby jurisdictions. The following table summarizes the fees for a high-impact event (i.e., a large event as described above) in Berkeley and surrounding cities:

Jurisdiction	Fee
Alameda	\$750
Berkeley	\$250
Oakland	\$4,935
San Francisco	\$2,283

Similarly, the City's Block Party Permit fee is significantly lower than neighboring cities:

Jurisdiction	Fee
Berkeley	\$15
Oakland	\$81
San Francisco	\$278

The City Council last adjusted filing fees for street events on July 8, 2014 (Resolution No. 66,725-N.S. Establishing Permit Filing Fees for Street Events and Certified Farmers' Markets, and Rescinding Resolution No. 66-662-N.S.).

Irrespective of the reasons behind this trend, however, the effect has had material impacts on City staffing and budgets. With the exception of the Special Events Coordinator, none of the staff on the multi-departmental Special Events Team are dedicated to working full-time on special events. These are the same City staff who (for example) engage in community policing, citywide fire inspections, street closures for construction projects, encampment clean-up and closure operations, restaurant inspections and vector management, and much more. An increasingly demanding special events calendar, for example, has significantly impacted the Homeless Response Team's ability to schedule more citywide encampment clean-ups due to staff scheduling and equipment availability challenges.

Current and Impending Departmental Changes Affecting Special Events

Because the Special Events Team consists of staff from multiple departments, each with their own mission and competing priorities, individual participating departments in the Special Events Team have proposed or are beginning to implement changes to fee structures and regulatory requirements, partly in an effort to address the increasingly unsustainable budgetary and staffing demands placed on their teams by City priorities, such as the Special Events calendar. However, because such changes are usually proposed by individual departments in isolation, considered by Council individually, and paid by customers individually, it can be hard to understand the holistic impact that the sum total of concurrent changes across multiple departments will have on organizers wishing to host special events in Berkeley. The purpose of this report is to communicate clearly to the City Council the anticipated impacts that recent or proposed changes in the Fire Department, Health, Housing, and Community Services Department, and Public Works Department is anticipated to have on the Special Events landscape. An overview of each department's changes is summarized below.

Fire Department

California Fire Code Compliance

A number of recent changes to the California Fire Code (CFC), as well as a renewed focus within the Fire Department on equitable compliance with the CFC across all events, means that these standards will be more uniformly applied during the Special Events application review process. The Fire Prevention Division is in the process of creating approximately six documents for placement on the City website that detail specific requirements for vendors to help ensure alignment with the CFC. This will include diagrams as well as code sections for event applicants to reference.

Additionally, the Fire Department will offer a more comprehensive document with general fire safety information that applies to all special events that occur within the City. Content areas of particular focus, which will be detailed in the documents on the city website, include:

- Tent, Canopy and Temporary Structure Standards – these include standards for spacing, anchoring/bracing, and ingress/egress, as well as fire safety standards that require flame-resistant materials, availability of fire suppression devices, and govern the use of open flames within or near tents and other membrane structures.
- Fire Watch Guidelines – A fire watch is a temporary measure intended to ensure that a building or a space is surveilled by qualified individual(s) for the purpose of identifying and controlling fire hazards, detecting early signs of fire, and notifying the fire department in the event of a fire. This document includes the types of events/situations in which a fire watch would be mandated, the event organizer's responsibilities and obligations, and requirements for watch personnel, patrols,

and record keeping. For outdoor special events, a fire watch protocol would typically be mandated if the Fire Marshal notes potentially hazardous conditions and would be at the Marshal's discretion.

- Use and Storage of Propane – this includes requirements for propane container storage, positioning, security, and inspections prior to and during the event.

Uniform enforcement of these standards for special events will begin on January 1, 2026, aligning with the implementation of the 2025 updated CFC.

Additionally, Berkeley's increasing density has placed renewed focus on existing CFC standards such as minimum acceptable widths for fire lanes (26' where adjacent buildings exceed 30' in height), as well as street closure layouts that do not in any way impede public safety vehicle access and critical mutual aid pathways. Unfortunately, this will have the effect of rendering some popular destinations for special events in the past – including Telegraph Avenue and stretches of Adeline Street in South Berkeley – unavailable for future street closures. Special Events staff are committed to working closely with all event applicants to ensure any impacted event proposal is offered an alternative that meets the needs of the event as best as possible. To this end, Special Events staff are excited about the possible creation of Entertainment Zones in select areas throughout the city, discussed in more detail later in this report.

Fees and Costs

The Fire Department currently charges special events organizers for staff overtime expenses when performing fire watch for special events (at a cost of approximately \$100 per hour). The City Council adopted a new Fire Fee schedule on June 24, 2025 that adjusted existing fees for the first time in nine years. The new/increased fees that will impact certain special events include:

- Increased fee for using parking facilities, from \$196 to \$250 for fewer than 15 spaces and from \$250 to \$500 for 15 or more spaces.
- Large temporary membrane structures (larger than 400 sq ft) require a permit with a fee that increased from \$392 to \$500.
- Other fees at increased rates may apply in unique circumstances.

The Fire Department estimates that special events account for approximately 30% of a Fire Inspector's total hours completing event plan checks, corrections, inspections, and event staffing. There is currently no cost recovery for staff time required to process a special event permit. Accordingly, the Fire Department plans to create a fee structure for consultation for special events, subject to Council approval. There are currently a small number of specific events occurring each year that require on-site Fire Inspectors to be present either during setup and/or layout or throughout the duration of the event.

Under a special events fee structure for Fire consultation, such complex events would incur higher fees, which would raise the cost of hosting such events.

Public Works Transportation Division

Street closures and block parties are an important part of the Special Events landscape in Berkeley. People who organize events on City streets are required to obtain a City-approved Special Event Permit or Block Party Permit and to pay a filing fee to the City. Fees vary depending on the degree of the event's impact on the city (for example, traffic impacts). All requests for street closures, except block parties, must submit a traffic control plan as part of the permitting process.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the Public Works Department alone spent almost \$1.5 million to staff special events. But in FY24, the City only received approximately \$31,798 from street closure and block party fees -- \$29,158 in event filing fees from 151 low-impact and 82 high-impact events, and about \$2,640 in fees from 176 block party permit applications. To help address this gap, Public Works is working on a revised fee structure, subject to Council approval, that will bring street closure fees – particularly those for complex, high-impact events – more in line with those of Berkeley's neighboring cities and cover the costs incurred by the City for reviewing and processing applications and supporting events. The proposed changes to the fee structure are detailed below.

Permit Fees for Block Parties

Block parties are street events that occur on a single residential block only and are only eligible to be hosted by the people who live there. A business, nonprofit, or other entity wishing to close this same block for an event would not be eligible for a block party permit and would instead be considered a Tier 1 event. These purely residential events do not require a traffic control plan nor specialized equipment, as described below.

Public Works staff will recommend increasing the Block Party Permit fee from \$15 to \$60 per event to better recover the cost of administering the block party program. This includes staff time to review applications, work with residents to approve them, and administer the permits.

Permit Fees for Street Closures

Any street event that is not a block party is considered a street closure. The current fee structure for street closures, which makes little distinction between the complexity of street closures and their impacts on City staff and operations, is in the table below:

Filing Date	Current Fee for Low Impact Events	Current Fee for High Impact Events
At least 60 weekdays before the event	\$128	\$250

30-59 weekdays before the event	\$150	\$350
20-29 weekdays before the event	\$175	\$450
Fewer than 20 weekdays before the event	\$200	N/A: Will not be approved

The proposed, revised fee structure establishes tiered event fees based on event size, impact, and timing and establishes Transportation Support Service fees for special events to reduce the operational deficit and recover costs associated with special events:

Tier	Proposed Fee	Filing Deadline	Definition
1	\$205	21 days in advance of event	No more than a one (1) block closure, no transit detour, and minor cross-departmental coordination
2	\$540	30 days in advance of event	No more than a one (1) block closure, transit detour, or moderate cross-departmental coordination
3	\$805	60 days in advance of event	Two (2) or more block closure, transit detour, or major cross-departmental coordination
4	\$1,545	90 days in advance of event	Multiple block closure of major arterial streets, major cross-departmental coordination, or consists of a marathon, parade, active attendee participation, or similar events

Each tier has different fees and submittal deadlines, as the amount of staff time required to review applications can vary substantially depending on the complexity of a particular event.

Transportation Support Service Fees

As authorized under Resolution No. 66,725-N.S., the City also proposes event fees for signage, traffic control or diversion, loss of parking meter revenue or other conditions specific to the designated location. On average, traffic control setup for special street events (not including block parties) requires two (2) Traffic Maintenance Workers I and two (2) Traffic Maintenance Workers II, each working at roughly \$200 per hour for eight (8) hours. Based on this, it costs the City a minimum of \$6,160 for Public Works Maintenance staff to work each special event. In the past, applicants have not been invoiced for Traffic Maintenance Support, but it is the City's intention to begin invoicing

for these services as appropriate, starting January 1, 2026. This will help cover existing City expenses to support special events in Berkeley.

Safety Barricades, Cones, and Changeable Message Boards

City staff work with event applicants to develop staffing, traffic control and other safety plans. Due to the growing and unbudgeted demands on city resources such activities impose, Public Works will implement the following changes effective January 1, 2026:

- Special barricades are used for all road closures, typically four barricades per block. Beginning January 1, 2026, if a special event is so large that it requires more barricades than the City is able to provide, event organizers can either purchase their own barricades that meet the City's requirements or the City can bill the organizers for additional barricades (approximately \$100 per barricade and \$25 per traffic cone).
- Additionally, beginning January 1, 2026, staff will uniformly direct all special event organizers to outsource changeable message boards from third parties that provide traffic control services and to coordinate with Public Works' Traffic Maintenance unit when such equipment is needed. Staff anticipate that typically, the event organizer will order and pay for the boards, and Traffic Maintenance staff pick up, deploy and return them. Most events require 2 – 4 message boards, totaling \$720 - \$1,440 per day. Large events will need more boards.

Moving forward, these changes—while necessary for the City to recover its costs—may mean event organizers must rent special equipment to support their activities or pay the City to cover its costs to do so.

Traffic Control Plans

For years, the City of Berkeley has accepted traffic control plans from event organizers that do not meet traffic engineering standards. Beginning January 1, 2026, engineered and stamped traffic control plans (TCPs) will be required at time of filing, similar to filing requirements for adjacent jurisdictions. In the Bay Area, the costs of such TCPs can range up to \$5,000 depending on factors including the complexity of the street closure and duration of the event. While Public Works recognizes the cost burden that this places on some events' budgets, failure to obtain an engineered TCP places the City at great liability – and its residents at risk – in the event of an emergency. The Special Events Team is committed to working with long-time event organizers to navigate this process, and TCPs may be reusable for multiple years if street conditions and event parameters do not change.

HHCS Environmental Health Division

The Environmental Health (EH) Division within HHCS is responsible for reviewing applications and issuing permits for event participants who wish to sell or provide prepared food and/or propose to have amplified sound (i.e., a musical stage).

Compact Mobile Food Operators

Passed in 2022, California SB 972 established a new type of retail food facility called a “compact mobile food operation” (CMFO) as a subcategory of mobile food facility that is nonmotorized and operates from a pushcart or stand, and exempted CMFOs from various provisions of the retail food code law, including certain sink requirements. This bill has affected Environmental Health’s Temporary / Special Events program in two ways:

- Environmental Health (EH) is now issuing “**Known Vendor Letters**” (KVLs), an exemption that allows booth operators to sell pre-packaged, Non-Potentially Hazardous Food (i.e. non-perishable food that does not require temperature control, under 25 sq. ft. with no open food sampling). Beginning with the Council’s passage of EH’s revised fee structure in 2024, EH charges a one-time fee of \$44 to obtain this letter, plus \$44 for any changes to the vendor’s list of food items. This is the lowest listed fee for Temporary Food Facilities (or more commonly known as “food booths”).
- In addition, in 2024 EH established the **Compact Mobile Food Operation (CMFO) Annual Permit**. This category is the newest category of a food facility, which is a limited-service operation as defined in the California Retail Food Code to include service from an individual, or from a pushcart, food stand, display table, pedal-driven cart, wagon, showcase, rack, or other non-motorized conveyance. CMFOs can now qualify for annual permits that allow them to vend in multiple locations similar to a Mobile Food Facility (MFF, or more commonly referred to as a food truck). For example, vendors that had operated at three of Berkeley’s farmers markets at \$546/yr per permit, now qualify for just one permit at \$704/yr. For operators, this means just two inspections per year vs. six inspections previously for a limited-risk operation. While this changes event planning and increases up-front costs, it reduces burden on both EH staff and food vendors as well.

Fees

Consistent with other Bay Area Temporary Food Facility programs, EH instituted a “late submittal fee” of \$170, passed by Council in 2024. This fee is collected at application submittal with less than 14 days prior to an event with guarantee of permit approval. The purpose of this fee is to:

1. Cover overtime often required with last-minute applications;
2. Discourage vendors who use last-minute tactics to try to get applications through without proper vetting and application review (which was a common practice prior to the new fee);
3. Discourage event coordinators from waiting until the last minute (often a day before the event) to invite additional vendors; and
4. Ensure fairness to vendors who submit their application on time, only to see vendors who “sneak” into an event with no ramifications.

EH has experienced an almost 70% increase in the number of temporary food permits over the last year (272 in 2024 vs. a projected number of approximately 400 by the end of 2025). In part to help recover the costs associated with this increased workload, in late 2025, EH plans to introduce a revised fee structure. The goal is to cover operating costs and reduce dependence on the City’s General Fund.

The proposed changes will increase the fees for food and amplified sound permits, which will more accurately reflect the true costs of providing these services, including reviewing, inspecting, and staffing special events. If approved by the City Council, these changes would increase the cost of certain special events in Berkeley.

More information will be shared with the public when the proposed fee revisions are presented to the City Council for consideration.

Civic Arts Grants

Some Berkeley-based festivals (which are considered special events) receive monetary support from the Civic Arts Grants Program (Community Festival category). Grants in this category are up to \$7,000 per applicant and are awarded annually. Grant-funded events must be open to the entire public and have a free component. Festival Grant applications typically open in January and are due by March, with a grant activity period of July to the following June (a fiscal year cycle). The Civic Arts Grant Program (Festival category) requires organizers to submit an itemized budget as part of the application process. For some planned events, it is too late to include the proposed special event fees, requirements, and equipment costs, outlined in this report for events supported in the current (FY26) grant cycle.

Conclusion

Taken together, these changes are anticipated to result in nearly all events in Berkeley being more expensive and demanding to plan and host. In turn, and all things equal, it is also expected that the number of event requests on an annual basis will decrease given

this rise in cost. The Special Events Team is committed and works tirelessly to support the vibrancy of Berkeley's street and park events scene and does not take this outcome lightly. Staff are committed to working with all event applicants, especially those of long-standing and beloved events in the community, to understand these requirements and evaluate all options for compliance. In addition, the City has the opportunity to streamline the permitting process for events by adopting one or more Entertainment Zones, discussed in more detail in the Possible Future Action section below.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

With the passage of California Senate Bill 969, which took effect January 1, 2025, the State of California, cities across the state now have the option of creating "entertainment zones," where bars and restaurants can sell alcoholic beverages for people to drink on designated public streets and sidewalks. Cities wishing to implement entertainment zones (EZs) need to adopt an ordinance to regulate the time, place, and manner of the zones. Staff from the Special Events Team recently met with the Downtown Berkeley Association about the possibility of creating one or more EZs in the downtown and in other designated areas around the city and have heard interest expressed by other members of the community as well. EZs have been reported to stimulate economic activity and foot traffic for brick-and-mortar establishments in existing areas, and some cities (such as Sacramento and San Francisco) tie the activation of EZs to special events held in the EZ footprint.

On July 29, City Council voted to create the Berkeley Nightlife Council, with the goal of supporting nighttime economic activity, cultural programming, and community safety in city commercial districts. The creation of one or more EZs by Council ordinance is one potential future action of that process. City staff look forward to participating in these forthcoming discussions to shape an effective event-based entertainment zone model that benefits event organizers and festival producers.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

An increase in event fees may lead to a decrease in the annual number of event applications in Berkeley. The increase in event fees might also cover the true cost of staff time and materials spent on supporting special event programming annually.

However, by adopting an event-based entertainment zone model in Berkeley, Special Events staff believe that the creation of one or more EZs could also create efficiencies for event applicants. For example, when designating EZs in the City, City staff could create a "common application" for events, that might include a principal traffic control plan; pre-approved event layout template(s) that meet Fire Code standards; streamlined approvals for amplified sound; and priority access to existing City materials such as street closure barricades for event organizers that opt to host their event within the EZ. While prospective event organizers would not be required to host events in a pre-

existing EZ, opting to host within an EZ would allow them to benefit from these existing templates, reducing costs and burden both for event planners and City staff alike.

BACKGROUND

On July 8, 2014, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 66,725-N.S., which is the most recent update to the Public Works Department's filing fee structure for street events/street closures.

On May 21, 2024, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 69,891-N.S., which is the most recent update to the Environmental Health Division fee schedule.

On June 24, 2025, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 71,837-N.S., which is the most recent update to the Fire Department's permit fees, inspection fees, and billing rates.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

Special events and the traffic they create into and out of Berkeley, as well as the traffic impacts they create when certain streets are closed and traffic is redirected, creates carbon emissions, waste generation, and other impacts, but quantifying the effects of the fee and regulatory changes on these impacts is not possible at this time.

CONTACT PERSON

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