

REPORT

Community Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council in Workshop **Date:** March 17, 2025

From: Blair Fryer, Director of Community Services **File:**

Item #: 2025-88

Subject: Response to Council Motion: “Re-establishing Vancouver Canucks Outdoor Community Gatherings”

RECOMMENDATION

1. *THAT the report titled “Response to Council Motion: ‘Re-establishing Vancouver Canucks Outdoor Community Gatherings,’” which outlines the operational and financial impacts as well as revenue generating opportunities associated with hosting outdoor/indoor Canucks playoff events, be received for information.*
 2. *THAT staff be provided with feedback and any direction on whether and/or how to proceed with planning for the 2025 NHL playoff series.*
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PURPOSE

This report responds to Council’s motion from the January 27, 2025 meeting on “Re-establishing Vancouver Canucks Outdoor Community Gatherings” and provides Council with information to provide staff with direction.

SUMMARY

Staff have conducted feasibility analysis and have concluded that large-scale outdoor or indoor viewing parties for a potential 2025 Canucks playoff series have a high cost associated, and have the added complexity of uncertain dates and times. As in 2024, staff are able to arrange for games to be viewable on existing facility monitors, where possible, and to support local businesses by working with business associations to compile a list of those who will be showing the games in their location. In preparation of this report, staff have consulted with the New Westminster Police Department,

Downtown Business Improvement Association, the New Westminster Chamber of Commerce, Tourism New West, and other stakeholders at the Arts, Culture, and Economic Development Advisory Committee.

BACKGROUND

On January 27, 2025, Council resolved:

- 1. THAT staff be directed to consult with the Arts, Culture and Economic Development Advisory Committee, Downtown Business Improvement Association, the New West Chamber of Commerce, Tourism New Westminster, and the New Westminster Police Department before considering hosting a series of outdoor Canucks viewing events if they make it into the playoffs in 2025.*
- 2. THAT staff report back to Council prior to March 31, 2025 with the operational and financial impacts as well as revenue generating opportunities associated with hosting outdoor/indoor Canucks playoff events.*

DISCUSSION

2024 Canucks Viewing Parties:

In 2024, a similar analysis took place after direction from Council. Staff's analysis was presented to Council on May 6, 2024. In that report, staff concluded: "...*the expense of such an undertaking has not been contemplated in existing budgets, and would require additional resourcing. As well, associated safety and logistics required may prove challenging when also coupled with unpredictable weather, playoff game scheduling, costs, staff capacity, and availability of necessary equipment.*"

Despite these identified challenges, staff were able to successfully arrange for indoor viewing experiences on existing screens at several City recreation facilities without added costs, and arranged for three larger scale viewing events at Anvil Centre on days it was not rented by corporate clients. These, along with a list of businesses known to be showing the games, was advertised through City channels such as social media and the Citypage e-newsletter.

Attendance at recreation facilities was in line with number of residents attending to watch past sporting events, although one recreation facility reported a reduction in the usual attendance and heard feedback from "regulars" that it was because they anticipated a large crowd due to the City advertising the opportunity. Average attendance at the events held at Anvil Centre was 150-200 people per event, with patrons reporting a fun, family-friendly atmosphere. Some attendees did submit complaints about the pay parking costs, but also expressed appreciation that staff provided a Kids' Zone with some craft activities.

The events did not generate significant revenue for the City (about \$750 in concession sales combined for the three days) and cost a total of \$9,500 in event staffing costs for

room conversion, event staff, and rental of audio-visual equipment (\$3,900 for May 10, \$3,000 for May 18, and \$2,600 for May 20.) This amount does not include staffing time from the Communications or Events divisions, who were able to temporarily postpone components of their regular duties to support these events.

2025 Canucks Viewing Opportunities:

Staff have developed the following analysis of factors for 2025 Canucks viewing opportunities.

Series Dates, Times, Number of Games and Odds:

Because the Stanley Cup Playoffs are scheduled based on factors such as what teams are playing one another, how many games are required to win the best of seven series in the four rounds of playoffs, and who advances to later rounds, it is impossible to know in advance what dates and times the games will take place. First games for the playoffs are scheduled for April 19, 2025 and typically happen every second night; however, teams may sometimes need to wait to determine who they will play in a second round based on how quickly they win in the best-of-seven series. The last possible date for the Stanley Cup final is June 23, 2025.

As of early March, the Canucks had a 36% chance of making it into the first round of the playoffs, with a rapidly decreasing chance of making it to round two (11%), round three (4%), and the finals (2%). This uncertain scheduling presents challenges in terms of securing contractors, suppliers, and staff, as well as notifying businesses and other stakeholders that would be impacted by large-scale events.

Equipment Considerations:

The purchase of outdoor LED screens is anticipated as part of Council's direction for the City to participate in the 2026 FIFA World Cup; however, staff have not yet researched nor purchased the screens. In addition to the screen purchase, a plan for how to store the screens and who will operate them is required. This work is planned for late 2025, after the temporary FIFA coordinator staff role is filled. This temporary position was approved by Council in the 2025 Budget for recruitment later this year.

For potential Canucks playoffs 2025 viewing opportunities, rental of a screen would be required. Staff have researched screen options and determined an LED screen would be required to accommodate daytime lighting conditions and to withstand inclement weather. Staff have sought quotations for an LED screen rental. One provider has indicated that if there is an opportunity to co-brand the viewing events, they are willing to offer a discount, and as such cost estimates for each day's rental would range from \$4,500 (co-branded) to \$9,000 (not co-branded) per event day.

Broadcast Rights:

In order to show professional sports broadcasts, a licence to show a game to the public is required. This is typically done through a commercial subscription for bars and pubs; however, the City does not have the same type of account set up on a corporate level and currently each facility has individual arrangements for cable television access. An account that would allow for a public outdoor broadcast would be required. Staff continue to seek more information; however, at this time, the cost is not known.

Community Organization Partnerships:

As directed, staff reached out to the New Westminster Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown New Westminster BIA, and Tourism New Westminster to collect their feedback and to gauge their capacity to participate. The topic was also discussed at the Arts, Culture, and Economic Development Committee (ACEDAC) meeting on February 13, 2025. Staff received the following feedback:

- Tourism New Westminster is able to offer some marketing support and the use of two large tents but is unable to provide a financial contribution.
- The Chamber of Commerce has not provided a response to date.
- Massey Theatre Society, which operates the Anvil Theatre, noted concerns about access to already scheduled productions in the event a road closure would be required.
- The Downtown BIA conducted a survey of the public and then shared these results with their business members. A second survey was conducted with their business members:
 - Forty-five members of the public responded to the public survey. Survey responses from the public show limited support for viewing inside a community centre or convention centre (9%) or in a public plaza or square (13%), and only moderate support for viewing at an event held in the park (31%). When asked where they would prefer to watch sporting events, most respondents selected at home (29%) or at a bar or pub (18%), and “location” was the most important factor in selecting where they would watch a sporting event. Sixty (60) percent of respondents indicated they would only attend one or two events. Respondents were mixed on whether children in attendance would add or detract from their experience. The survey also validated the potential for economic benefit to businesses: respondents indicated they would be willing to spend up to \$60 “while out celebrating,” though the survey question was not framed in relation to a specific location.
 - The results from the business survey were more limited, with only 20 respondents. The questions were framed related to “events” more broadly,

rather than specific to the Canucks viewing opportunities. However, the majority of respondents (70%) found events put on by the Downtown BIA extremely helpful, very helpful or somewhat helpful. In terms of what days events should be hosted, responses were mixed. While Saturdays and Sundays were the most popular answer, one survey participant noted that Saturday was their busiest day, and that closing the street has unintended negative impacts to their business.

Location Challenges:

It is difficult to conduct analysis when a playoff schedule is unknown, as most locations would require the cancellation of bookings already rented to community groups. Although Council's motion was specific to Downtown and Hyack Square, staff also considered some of the larger fields and parks as well as other squares across the city. For a variety of reasons, there is no clear candidate location that would easily accommodate a large-scale Canucks viewing event. For example:

- Port Royal Park is likely one of the few parks without existing regular bookings, but parking is extremely limited in the area, and the location is not as transit accessible as other fields.
- If the fields are available, both Moody Park and Terry Hughes Park may be suitable locations, as they are centrally located with access to transit, however additional equipment would be required to protect the turf from damage by the rigging needed. This would come at an added cost.
- Hume Park lacks significant parking. It is also in a neighbourhood mostly populated with single family homes which could result in resident complaints from noise and parking for games that extend into the evening.
- Sapperton Park is a good candidate with its proximity to SkyTrain and area parking, however it is heavily booked by user groups in April/May because it offers a ball diamond, soccer field and has good field lighting. This choice would require the cancellation of bookings by numerous groups.
- Westminster Pier Park is a viable location, however parking is a challenge, and the wind from the river and noise from the rail line might necessitate additional audio or rigging equipment rentals. Set up is also very difficult at Westminster Pier Park due to area construction, both for the Pattullo Bridge replacement and for private development.
- Both Mercer Stadium and Queen's Park Stadium are reasonable options as they would have seating available. However, both locations are heavily booked by users, requiring the City to cancel bookings, and would require additional equipment rentals to protect the artificial and grown turf.
- Uptown Plaza is unavailable due to construction.
- Sapperton Plaza is too small.

- Westburnco Park is a possible unique option, however the City would need to work with Metro Vancouver to review weight restrictions and options for access.

Traffic Management and Policing:

Staff have conducted investigation into traffic management and policing components for an event at Hyack Square and have determined that for pedestrian safety and to manage anticipated crowds that would gather to view, a road closure would be required on Columbia Street from Begbie Street to Front Street, extending up to the Anvil Centre parkade entrance. The road closure would need to be in effect approximately two hours before the game start time, and possibly up to two hours after the game ends.

Traffic management for a road closure would range from \$1,800-\$2,400 per game, depending on what day of the week the game was on and what time the game took place. TransLink, Royal City Taxi, and other stakeholders would require notification in advance. The City would also need to develop a traffic management plan, which would involve staff time, costs for signage, etc. A road closure could also have unintended consequences for area businesses in terms of restricting access by customers or suppliers, as referenced in the Downtown BIA's survey data.

Staff also consulted with New Westminster Police, who were not able to provide a recommendation on the number of officers required to mitigate risk and manage potential crowds. They advised that a recommendation would partially be informed based on what other municipalities are doing (i.e., is New Westminster the only community, or are other municipalities offering free viewing events with such close proximity to the SkyTrain and thus the crowd may be spread out). As a benchmark, the cost for policing at the New West Pride Society Street Festival was \$26K to manage risk and safety for a one day closure of Columbia Street. While the footprint would be smaller for a Canucks viewing party in Hyack Square, the risk could be higher. Staff conservatively estimate that policing costs would be approximately \$15K per game to manage the road closure and public gathering.

Staffing Considerations:

Aside from Police and Traffic Management personnel, each viewing event would require additional staffing. The Community Events Office is already at capacity supporting City and community-led events, with over 75 "event-days" already scheduled in 2025. The Community Events Office consists of two Assistant Program Coordinators and a Supervisor who oversees three other functional areas. Adding additional "event-days" and planning tasks would require support from auxiliaries or overtime for existing staff. Staff estimate each viewing event would require up to four employees, for eight hours each, or a total 32 hours of staff time per event, plus additional time in advance to make preparations. This would include Events staff as well as Public Works staff. This staffing component would result in approximately \$1,250 in staff costs per event.

Revenue Generation Ideas:

Staff have explored a variety of ideas that could support revenue generation to help offset the costs of hosting public outdoor viewing parties, including corporate sponsorship, accepting vendors who pay a fee for the chance to sell wares to attendees, and City-operated concession services, with potential to offer alcohol sales in parks where there are alcohol permitted zones. The City does not currently have a sponsorship policy, and all of these options would require additional staff time to coordinate, however with playoff games not guaranteed, it is difficult to estimate what revenue could be generated, and whether vendors would commit without certainty of dates. For these reasons, potential revenue is not considered in the financial implications section, below.

Alternate Ideas:

As was done in 2024, staff can confirm that the past practice in recreation facilities to stream games on existing facility monitors when the facility is open is a viable option for a potential 2025 Canucks playoff run. Residents often stop by their closest community or recreation centre and watch the game.

Additionally, staff in Economic Development could support local businesses by compiling a list of where people can watch the games in New Westminster establishments, and work with Communications to share this information publically through Citypage, Invest New West, and the City’s website and social media channels.

NEXT STEPS

Should Council direct staff to pursue these viewing options, staff would begin securing additional staffing, contracting services, and begin planning. A funding source would need to be identified. Current workplan items on other City initiatives would likely need to be postponed or reduced in scope, such as the development of a sponsorship policy, continued work on the grants program, the development of the FIFA Coordinator job posting, etc.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Cost estimates are presented in the table below on a “per viewing” basis. Should the Canucks advance to the Stanley Cup finals, there could be up to 28 games (four playoff rounds, with a maximum of seven games per round) for a total potential financial implication of \$721,700 to \$859,880. These costs were not anticipated and are not reflected in the 2025 operating budget.

Item	Cost per Game
Equipment rentals	\$4,500 - \$9,000
Potential rentals to protect turf, improve sound, etc.	\$2,000
Policing costs	\$15,000

Traffic management	\$1,800 - \$2,000
Staffing costs	\$1,250
Broadcast fees	TBD
SUBTOTAL	\$24,550 - \$29,250
Contingency (5%)	\$1,225 - \$1,460
TOTAL ESTIMATED COST PER GAME	\$25,775 - \$30,710

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Staff from New Westminster Police, Transportation, Finance, and Parks & Recreation were consulted to develop this report.

OPTIONS

There are two options for Council’s consideration.

- 1. *THAT the report titled “Response to Council Motion: ‘Re-establishing Vancouver Canucks Outdoor Community Gatherings,’” which outlines the operational and financial impacts as well as revenue generating opportunities associated with hosting outdoor/indoor Canucks playoff events, be received for information.*
- 2. *THAT staff be provided with feedback and any direction on whether and/or how to proceed with planning for the 2025 NHL playoff series.*

Staff recommend Options 1 and 2.

CONCLUSION

Staff research has identified that large-scale outdoor or indoor Canucks viewing parties are a costly and challenging undertaking for a city like New Westminster with limited suitable and available gathering spaces for a large crowd and with limited staffing resources. These costs are not included in existing budgets, and would require additional resourcing. As well, associated safety and logistics required may prove challenging when also coupled with unpredictable weather, playoff game scheduling, and availability of necessary equipment.

APPROVALS

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