

REPORT

Parks and Recreation

To: Mayor Cote and Members of Council **Date:** January 10, 2022

From: Dean Gibson,
Director of Parks and Recreation **File:** 1997286

Item #: 2022-24

Subject: Joy and Whimsy Initiative

RECOMMENDATION

THAT this report be recieved for information.

PURPOSE

This report is provided to inform Council on how special events and initiatives brought joy and whimsy to New Westminster during the COVID- 19 pandemic in 2021.

BACKGROUND

At a Council meeting on June 7th 2021, Council directed staff to investigate the support for community events that would draw the community out of the COVID-19 Pandemic and bring joy and whimsy to New Westminster.

A Joy and Whimsy Working Group comprised of staff from Parks and Recreation, Arts Services, Engineering and Finance was formed to look at ways to support external and internal initiatives to help residents and staff deal with isolation, loss and struggles to find happiness during this very difficult year. The working group looked at three (3) categories that would support joy and whimsy in the city:

1. City Supporting Community Organizations
2. City Initiatives
3. Staff Recognition

ANALYSIS

City Supporting Community Organizations

The City of New Westminster came alive with community spirit in 2021. There were a variety of opportunities for residents to spend time with family and friends in outdoor venues enjoying new experiences. City staff worked with many community organizations to support their efforts in contributing to the social fabric of the community since the onset of the pandemic. Many organizations struggled to find ways to operate as they worked through the ever changing Provincial Health Orders. The City's Special Events staff team played a pivotal role in helping community organizations reimagine their events resulting in fifteen (15) organizations providing joy and whimsy to New Westminster.

All of these community projects, events and initiatives were funded by the City Grants Program and supported by the Special Events staff team. This included a street gardening project; a Christmas Celebration; a Halloween family event; a holiday themed Farmers Market; Quilts for Grief and Gratitude; a Music and Art Street Festival; Downtown Shop Nights; a Mini 12th Street Festival; a Celebration on the Fraser River; Recovery Day; New West Pride celebrations; Queensborough Children's Festival; Hyack Festival Drive-thru Parade; Shoreline Cleanup in Queensborough; and Shine Bright Downtown.

During the spring intake of the One Time Small City Grants program, applicants were also encouraged to apply for projects or initiatives that will celebrate our City, lift community spirit, recognize loss and support our community's collective recover as we move forward from the pandemic.

City Initiatives

The City led ten (10) initiatives in 2021 that supported and lifted the spirits of our residents. These community opportunities, developed in collaboration with a number of local organizations, included Family Day, Drive in Outdoor Movies, The Rest of New West, National Indigenous Peoples Day, Easter Eggstravaganza, Canada Day, Pride Celebrations, Diwali Activities, Remembrance Day and Shine Bright New West/Shine Bright Anvil. For 2022, City staff will continue to support these initiatives and seek out opportunities to deepen collaborations with community partners as well as implement a series of community art projects.

Staff Recognition

It has also been recognized that city staff played a vital role in keeping our city operating and to express gratitude for their work a special food truck lunch was offered in October to show thanks for a job well done. Mayor and Council, the CAO and Department Directors were on hand to acknowledge the staff efforts as they worked through the pandemic. Staff were able to choose one of the three days to attend a Gratitude Lunch following all Provincial Health Orders in order to gather safely.

A special gratitude tree was also introduced which gave staff the opportunity to express gratitude by writing messages and placing them on a tree. This initiative was so extremely well received that another four trees were set up for the community to participate at the Library Main Branch, City Hall, Queensborough Community Centre and Centennial Community Centre. In December, the trees became wishing trees where staff and community members were invited to hang ornaments and to express their thoughts and wishes.

In 2022, Thankful Thursday will be launched where staff teams will be recognized on how staff stepped up to support each other and the community during a very uncertain and challenging time. This initiative will be a pictorial journey on social media.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The City's Special Events staff team will continue to provide support to non-profit organizations as they offer their community events in New Westminster. Through the pandemic many working relationships have been strengthened and new ones were formed. Many community organizations looked to the Special Events staff team for guidance during this challenging time as well as seeking other ways they could collaborate with the City to produce memorable events in New Westminster.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Many of the community projects and initiatives were supported under the City's Grant program and the City led initiatives were supported by the Special Events operating budget.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Office of the CAO, Finance and Parks and Recreation worked closely in supporting all the Joy and Whimsy initiatives.

OPTIONS

1. Receive this report for information;
2. Provide staff with additional direction.

Option #1 is recommended

This report was prepared by:

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This report was reviewed by:

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This report was approved by:

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Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer