



# Corporate Report

NO: R188

COUNCIL DATE: JULY 23, 2007

---

## REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: July 16, 2007  
FROM: General Manager, Parks, Recreation and Culture FILE: 8200-20/SF  
SUBJECT: *First Night Surrey Celebrations*

---

## RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Receive this report as information.
2. Authorize staff to develop production concepts for a *Spirit of BC Family WinterFest* Event for early 2008, and report back to Council on the concept at the September Council Meeting.

## BACKGROUND

The Whalley Business Improvement Association (the BIA) and the City of Surrey first partnered in 2005 to put on *First Night Surrey* celebrations at Central City Plaza. The BIA worked with an event management company to secure sponsorship and to plan and execute the event, which was warmly greeted by the community and was well received by corporate partners and member businesses within the Whalley BIA. The City provided financial support of \$15,000 for the event from the Council Initiatives fund, played a permitting role and did a significant portion of the marketing of the event.

In 2006, the BIA continued with the event as a sponsor, with a financial commitment of \$32,000, but the City in addition to direct financial support of \$20,000 took on the coordinating role, managing volunteers, recruiting sponsors, and engaging a production company to run the event.

For the December 31, 2006 event last winter, City staff secured official sanctioning and licensing of *First Night Surrey 2007* by **First Night International**. Along with Whistler, the City was one of only two cities in the province to hold sanctioned First Night celebrations.

The alcohol-free *First Night Surrey* celebrations featured live performances throughout the day on the Family stage. The Whalley BIA provided tents for children's crafts, face painting and other family-oriented events. The Main Stage featured a number of big-

name bands such as Spirit of the West. The evening concluded with spectacular fireworks.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Event Success – Positive Media Attention and Attendance**

*First Night Surrey 2007* was the largest public celebration in the lower mainland. As such, Surrey received considerable favourable press in print, radio and television. However, the City received few comments from the public following the event, and only six enquiries have been received to date asking if the event will be repeated in 2007.

Last year's event attracted approximately 5000 participants over the day and evening. Few sponsor representatives and elected officials attended the event itself due to other commitments. Attendance at the event is influenced by a number of factors. One of these factors is the day of the week on which December 31<sup>st</sup> falls. In each of the past two years, the event has fallen on a weekend day, allowing those who would normally work on weekdays to attend. This year, December 31 falls on a Monday; this may affect daytime attendance for some workers. Further, New Year's Eve day is viewed by many as family time, and many families have competing activities that dilute the impact of our First Night celebrations.

Another factor influencing attendance is weather. Good weather will bring out large numbers of residents and visitors. However, the weather at the end of December is often inclement, which dissuades people from attending this primarily outdoor event. Given the amount of resources put into this one-day event, it would be hoped that many more than 5,000 persons would attend. By comparison, Canada Day 2007, with a budget only 80% greater than that of First Night, attracted crowds in the order of 100,000 for the daylong event.

### **Financing the Event**

There are significant costs in staging a major *First Night Surrey* event. These include production management, sound and lighting, staging, artist's fees, children's activities, advertising and marketing, licensing, and fireworks. Costs of production of an event on December 31<sup>st</sup> are generally higher than at other times of the year, because the set up and execution of the event has taken place over a weekend and on New Year's Eve, when the cost of contractors and artists are at a premium. Further, City staff that normally would be not working because of the City Hall Winter Closure must work during this period, causing some disruption to family lives and costing a premium for wages.

In 2006, the expense budget of \$150,000 was offset through financial support of \$32,000 from the Whaley BIA, corporate sponsors, the City contribution of \$20,000 from the Council initiative fund and revenue from ticket sales. Admission was \$10 per person with children under the age of ten allowed in free if accompanied by a paying adult.

In a recent letter (Appendix 1) the BIA advised Mayor and Council that only \$10,000 has been reserved for a 2007 event, which will mean that should the event be carried out in

December this year, the City would have to either raise an additional \$22,000 dollars in sponsorship, increase gate revenues, or increase its direct contributions from City sources. It should be noted that existing and potential sponsors have been very excited about participating in the Mayor's Gala and Canada Day, but there has been a less enthusiastic response to early discussions about *First Night Surrey 2008*.

Presently, there is no budget funds allocated within the 2007 City budget for this event. The only available source of funds that may be available is the Council Initiatives Fund.

## **Event Planning**

To ensure a successful *First Night Surrey 2008*, event planning needs to start by the end of September.

## **Options for First Night Surrey 2007**

The following options are advanced for Council's consideration:

1. *Repeat the effort of last year for a December 31, 2007 Event* – Most of the event production for an event this year could be outsourced to an event production company, with minimal staff involvement leading up to and on the day of the event. Staff, however, would still need to engage very seriously in a search for sponsors for the event, to offset the reduced contribution from the BIA (i.e. reduced from \$32,000 to \$10,000) and to ensure a successful event. As always, weather will be a key factor in success of the event in terms of crowd turnout. At the very least, Council would have to commit a minimum of \$20,000 to the event from the Council Initiatives Fund, taking into account what was funded by Council last year. However, more City funding may be necessary depending on the success of finding sponsors.
2. *Not hold First Night Surrey Celebrations on December 31, 2007* – A successful community event would be lost, and with it the positive media exposure that would otherwise be generated. However, based on attendance figures of only 3,500 person in 2005 and 5000 persons in 2006, it could be argued that the expense of the event is not justified, as compared to other opportunities that may exist. The City would save considerably in direct financial support and in-kind support, with these resources available to be put towards other worthy projects.
3. *Hold a BC Spirit Family Winterfest in early 2008* – Staff resources and Council's financial contribution could be moved from First Night Surrey to a one-day family event that would coincide with the BC Spirit Week in early 2008. One advantage of this change would be that artist's fees and event productions costs would be less than for a First Night celebration, thereby providing for a larger event for the same investment. It would also allow the City to showcase its Olympic-related plans, while providing entertainment to the residents at a time of the year when there are few local events going on. Production concepts could be developed over the next two months and be brought forward at an early stage for review by potential corporate sponsors and other collaborating parties. A report on this could be brought forward for Council's consideration by the end of September.

In consideration of the costs and benefits to the City, Option 3 “Hold a Spirit of BC Family Winterfest” should be studied in more detail prior to a decision by Council.

## CONCLUSION

The non-alcoholic, family-oriented *First Night Surrey* event provides the community with an opportunity to celebrate the New Year and generates positive media attention. However, the event is costly to put on relative to the number of attendees, with participation subject to variability in the weather, which is often inclement at the end of the year.

After evaluating several options, it is recommended that staff be authorized to develop production concepts for a *BC Spirit Family Winterfest* for early 2008, and report back to Council on the matter by the end of September. This would still provide sufficient time to plan a *First Night Surrey 2008* event should Council decide not to pursue Option 3, after considering the report on the matter further.

Laurie Cavan  
General Manager  
Parks, Recreation and Culture

OCC

APPENDIX 1



May 16, 2007

Mayor Dianne Watts and Members of Council  
City of Surrey  
14245 - 56<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Surrey, BC V3X 3A2

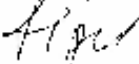
Dear Mayor Watts and Council:

In 2005 and 2006 the Whalley BIA collaborated with the City to mount successful **Surrey First Night** events. We were pleased to provide substantial seed money for these first two years.

As we move toward the third rendition of the event the WBIA has reserved \$10,000 for the "family zone" component of the event. We hope that the City is able to secure additional sponsorships so that the funding base for the event is broadened and thereby made more sustainable.

We look forward to hearing about this event as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

  
Iain Smith, President

cc. Laurie Cavan, Mgr. Parks, Rec & Culture  
Coast Capital Credit Union



Take a good look.