



Corporate Report

NO: R227

COUNCIL DATE: November 24, 2008

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: November 14 2008
FROM: General Manager, Parks, Recreation and Culture FILE: 4320-01
SUBJECT: Concerns with the Procession (Parade) to Mark the 300th Centenary of Gurta-Gaddi of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

1. receive this report as information; and
2. authorize the City Clerk to forward a copy of this report and the related Council resolution to the delegation who appeared before Council regarding the subject parade.

PURPOSE

This report responds to concerns regarding the Gurta-Gaddi Parade that was held in Newton in the late summer that were raised by Bill and Dianne Mitchell during their delegation to Council-in-Committee on October 20, 2008. Council-in-Committee had requested at that meeting that staff provide a report to Council on the matter.

BACKGROUND

The Gurdwara Dukh Nivaran Sahib Society submitted an application to the City in March 2008 to hold a procession/parade on September 13th 2008 to mark the 300th Centenary of Gurta-Gaddi, establishment of the embodiment of Guru Granth Sahib Ji. The route that the procession/parade followed is illustrated on the attached Route Map. The parade event was reviewed by the *Festival and Events Support Team* (FEST) Committee. The Committee developed conditions for the Parade permit, which included requirements related to routing, policing, risk management, first aid, traffic control, garbage & recycling, lost children and other similar matters.

To assist in ensuring that the public that may be affected by the parade was notified of the parade, the following actions were taken:

- information regarding the parade and the parade route was posted in the local newspapers one week prior to the event;
- traffic disruption signs were installed by Engineering staff along streets that would be affected by the parade route a week prior to the event; and
- the event organizer/applicant was required to distribute information flyers, including parade information and a parade map to the properties along the parade route and in the immediate surrounding area approximately two weeks prior to the event.

As this was the first event of this type staged by the Gurdwara Dukh Nivaran Sahib and no other parade had ever used this route, the parade organizers were uncertain about the potential attendance. The organizers had predicted attendance of between 5,000 and 10,000. Based on other parades, which have been held in the City, the FEST Committee and the RCMP recognized that crowds could be considerably larger than predicted, and thus 32 uniformed officers and a command vehicle were assigned to the event to ensure traffic control and safety for event patrons. BC Ambulance provided a command vehicle and were supported by three First Aid stations that positioned along the parade route.

As noted above, the event took place on September 13, 2008. The weather was very favourable, being a sunny day with a temperature of approximately 20 degrees. The parade involved a total of six floats. The parade commenced at the Gurdwara, located at 15255 – 68th Avenue (See the attached illustration), at approximately 10:45 a.m. and after proceeding around the parade route returned to the Gurdwara at approximately 3:30 p.m. Based on police estimates, approximately 30,000 people attended the event.

Garbage clean up and recycling for the event was carried out before, during and after the event. The parade route had six locations where large garbage bins and recycling receptacles were placed. In addition, a large garbage truck followed the parade, with personnel collecting dropped garbage.

The parade route had 26 portable washrooms placed along it on the day of the parade.

DISCUSSION

Parade Route

The 300th Centenary of Gurta-Gaddi is primarily a Sikh religious event. The applicant wanted the parade to start and finish at the Gurdwara, which is located at 15255 – 68 Avenue. As part of the FEST Committee review of the application, Engineering Traffic Operations staff, the RCMP, Surrey Fire Services and staff of the BC Ambulance Service carefully evaluated several possible routes, taking into account existing traffic volumes on the affected roads, road widths, potential detour routes, presence of commercial/residential properties, and other considerations. The route that is illustrated on the attachment, which was ultimately approved, was considered to be the best alternative based on the various criteria that were considered.

The parade floats were to be brought to the west side of 152nd Street to start the parade. However, at the last moment, the event organizers decided that the floats would start from the Gurdwara grounds on the east side of 152 Street, which required that the floats cross 152 Street

near the beginning of the parade route. The very slow procession took twenty minutes to cross 152nd Street, bringing all traffic on that busy arterial road to a standstill for that length of time.

Most traffic control points (i.e., traffic blockages at streets that intersected the parade route) managed by the police were removed immediately after the floats had passed. However, in some circumstances people attending the parade lingered on the streets well after the floats had moved on. This accounted for some prolonged traffic congestion in some locations, especially in the area of private residences.

Garbage & Recycling

The event organizers met all expectations for garbage and recycling, including a pre-parade cleaning of the route that resulted in construction refuse and general litter being cleaned from the route. City staff inspected the parade route on the day following the event and observed that satisfactory clean-up had been completed.

Emergency Response

There was a medical emergency during the procession, and Fire Service responded. While there was a delay in shifting the crowds to the side, the fire truck was able to make its way through the crowd to the residential destination. Representatives of the BC Ambulance Service observed in hindsight that paramedics deployed on bicycles would have been a good approach based on the number of people that attended the event.

RCMP were able to respond to a police complaint within the area during the parade, as they had numerous officers located along the parade route, and others available in back-up from the District No. 3 police office.

Complaints From the Public

In all, the City received five complaints about the parade, including the complaint from the delegation that appeared before Council.

The Gurta-Gadi Event in Context

The City of Surrey is the location of many events that are organized by community groups and cultural organizations. The City exercises considerable effort to accommodate these events while addressing through FEST Committee review and appropriate permit conditions potential impacts that may result from such events. Approximately 100 events are reviewed and approved every year by the FEST Committee, including 4 annual parades (Vaisakhi Parade in Newton; Espirito Santo Parade in Whalley; Cloverdale Rodeo and Country Fair Parade in Cloverdale; and Surrey's Santa Parade of Lights in Cloverdale). The 300th Centenary of Gurta-Gaddi parade was reviewed by the FEST Committee in the same manner that all events are reviewed, and was executed by event organizers, with support from FEST-related agencies and City staff.

Future Events

Staff and the FEST Committee will take the experience gained from the subject parade into account in relation to considering any future similar events in the City. It is noted that with

respect to the subject parade, the event organizers have advised staff that the parade was a “one only” event (i.e., will not be repeated in the future). The issue of the attendance estimates provided by the organizer prior to the parade in comparison to the number of people that actually attended the event was clearly problematic. The FEST Committee will be reviewing its practices to ensure that attendance estimates used by the Committee in relation to planning for any particular event are conservative. Similarly, the routing of the parade along local residential streets given the level of attendance had the potential to create more disruption to adjacent property owners than was anticipated in planning for the event. With respect to public notification of parades, the FEST Committee has typically delegated to the parade applicant the responsibility of delivering notices “door to door” along the parade route and in the immediate vicinity of the parade route that provide information regarding the date and duration of the parade and of potential disruptions to the adjacent properties that may be occasioned as a result of the parade. Given the concerns raised by the delegation to Council that the notice regarding the parade was not delivered to every property along the parade route by the applicant, the FEST Committee is considering alternative approaches in relation to ensuring that such notices are properly delivered relative to future events so that owners of properties potentially affected by an event are not caught by surprise.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended that Council authorize the City Clerk to forward a copy of this report and the related Council resolution to the delegation who appeared before Council regarding the subject parade.

Laurie Cavan
General Manager
Parks, Recreation and Culture

ROUTE MAP

