

Item 3.1**Activating Oxford Street for a Safe 2021 Mardi Gras****File No: S051491****Minute by the Lord Mayor**

To Council:

For the first time in its 42-year history, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade will not take place on Oxford Street due to the continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Ltd, the community organisation responsible for the annual Mardi Gras Parade and Festival has instead successfully reimaged Mardi Gras events for 2021 so they can occur in line with NSW Public Health orders.

On 9 November 2020, I joined Mardi Gras for the announcement that the 2021 Mardi Gras Parade will relocate to Sydney Cricket Ground. After a difficult year, it filled me with joy to see the Sydney Cricket Ground come alive with rainbow banners and colourful costumes. I commend the Mardi Gras for their hard work finding a way for the LGBTIQ community, its friends and supporters to celebrate.

While Mardi Gras will be different, it will still be a great opportunity for our LGBTIQ communities to get together both in person and online. With the easing of restrictions the Sydney Cricket Ground should be able to operate at full capacity, enabling 46,000 people to enjoy the Parade. Mardi Gras has expanded its free ticket offering for community members who are feeling the financial impact of Covid-19 and will give away 2,000 free tickets randomly allocated via a ballot system.

As a long-term supporter of Mardi Gras, the City welcomes these developments.

In June, Council approved \$289,700 worth of financial support for Mardi Gras in 2021 and 2022, comprising \$240,000 cash and \$49,700 value-in-kind for the use of street banners and venue hire. This is consistent with our funding for 2019 and 2020.

While the reimaging of Mardi Gras is essential to ensure it can continue as a safe event, Oxford Street businesses fear a loss of social and retail activity on the night of the Mardi Gras Parade, and in particular during the Mardi Gras Festival. The Mardi Gras usually plays a major role in attracting international visitors to Sydney, linking interstate visitors and local residents on Oxford Street.

City staff are already in discussions with Mardi Gras and the Darlinghurst Business Partnership about activating Oxford Street in the lead up to Mardi Gras.

In June, Council approved a grant of \$25,000 to the Darlinghurst Business Partnership for Otravaganza; a street festival with live music and street art in the lead up to Mardi Gras. The City's grants and sponsorships programs will support other cultural and creative initiatives including live music and theatre, art installations, talks, workshops and markets.

The City will work closely with grant recipients to potentially deliver these activations during Mardi Gras and promote them via the City's digital channels, as well as through our current \$100,000 media partnerships with Concrete Playground, Broadsheet and Time Out Sydney.

Mardi Gras banners will be flown on Oxford and South Dowling Streets and at Taylor Square and staff are exploring with Woollahra Council the opportunity to extend banners across the other side of Oxford Street.

Mardi Gras has long been a hallmark event. This status should continue even though the Parade itself has been moved to the Sydney Cricket Ground. Oxford Street can still be at the centre of Mardi Gras festivities with many people attending the Parade making their way there after the event.

To cater for this, we need to ensure pedestrian and patron safety once the event at the Sydney Cricket Ground has finished. Closing Oxford Street will help with this by ensuring people can practice physical distancing without crowding the footpaths close to traffic lanes.

To ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone, the City will work with Mardi Gras organisers and the NSW Government to explore this and other options to ensure public safety and address the flow of patrons leaving the stadium towards the Oxford Street area.

It is essential Mardi Gras in 2021 is a safe and successful event for our LGBTIQ communities and for Oxford Street, internationally recognised as the major Australian home for the LGBTIQ community.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

(A) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:

- (i) work with Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Ltd and the Darlinghurst Business Partnership to activate Oxford Street and surrounds during Mardi Gras 2021;
- (ii) promote local businesses who are participating in Mardi Gras and Oxtravaganza through What's On, e-newsletters and the Sydney Local marketing campaign; and
- (iii) work with the NSW Government, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Ltd and the Darlinghurst Business Partnership Incorporated to ensure pedestrian and public safety on Oxford Street during and after the Mardi Gras Parade and any other activations.

(B) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Premier requesting:

- (i) the Mardi Gras event at Sydney Cricket Ground be recognised as a hallmark event; and
- (ii) Oxford Street be closed during the evening to assist with public and pedestrian safety and enable it to be a centre of Mardi Gras festivities.

- (C) Council approve funding of up to \$200,000 from 2020/21 General Contingency to support clause (A) above;
- (D) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to report back to Council regarding the proposal and final funding allocation via a CEO Update.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor