

Public Exhibition - Events in Parks Policy

File No: X084995

Summary

This report provides details on the implementation and application of the Events in Parks Policy (the Policy).

In October 2022, via a Lord Mayoral Minute, Council requested that the Chief Executive Officer review the City's policies for booking City public parks in relation to any existing and future events. This review resulted in the development of the Events in Parks Policy that sets out the updated arrangements, including the approval process, for events in City parks and open spaces.

The Policy defines the key principles and assessment process that applies to all outdoor temporary events proposed in City parks and reserves, as well as the specific approval process for events determined by the City as 'High Impact'.

This is a new Policy and seeks to ensure events in parks represent an appropriate balance between the community's desire for outdoor events in City parks, maintaining access to such spaces for the amenity of day to day use by the community, and minimising unreasonable impacts on parks such as damage associated with an event's activity and use of space.

Overarching principles are included within the Policy of which Event Organisers must satisfy within their applications and event management plans for assessment and approval by the City, including:

- 1) Asset Protection
- 2) Contingency Planning
- 3) Event Duration
- 4) Park Access
- 5) Event Infrastructure
- 6) Financial Capacity

The Policy includes assessment criteria to determine whether a park event proposal constitutes 'High Impact' and thus represents a higher risk of damage being caused to a park, despite mitigating measures being taken, as well as a greater impact on the usual amenity of the park proposed for the event.

Event proposals identified by the City as being High Impact will require public notification and Chief Executive Officer endorsement, in consultation with the Lord Mayor, as part of the approval process. This may increase the lead times for such events. Following Chief Executive Officer endorsement, Event Organisers will be required to enter into a licence agreement with the City and pay a security bond.

The increase in asset protection requirements for all events, such as turf and ground protection to be laid under all vehicle pathways and infrastructure positioned on turf areas throughout a park, will incur increased costs for event organisers as well as a likely increase in the number of associated vehicles to deliver and manage such products on site. These asset protection requirements will apply to all events, including for not-for-profit and community group applicants.

Event proposals that conflict with the City's values, the key principles set out in the Policy, the City's Event Guidelines, other applicable policies or legislation, or High Impact events that are not endorsed by the Chief Executive Officer, will not be approved by the City.

This report is seeking Council approval to exhibit the Events in Parks Policy.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve for public exhibition the Events in Parks Policy, as shown in Attachment A to the subject report;
- (B) Council note that the Events in Parks Policy, including any recommended changes, will be reported to Council for adoption following the exhibition period; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to undertake minor editorial amendments for clarity or correction of drafting errors prior to the exhibition of the Events in Parks Policy.

Attachments

Attachment A. Events in Parks Policy

Background

1. The City has a number of parks and open spaces that are used for events from time to time of differing types and scale. These events are produced by a range of organisers, including commercial and not-for-profit entities, community groups, government agencies, as well as the City itself, and may be free to attend or require payment for entry.
2. Examples of events that occur in City parks and open spaces include festivals, cultural ceremonies and celebrations, live outdoor entertainment, industry related promotions and exhibitions, and temporary markets. There are approximately 60 to 80 events approved to occur in City parks per financial year (excluding wedding ceremonies).
3. City approvals are required under the Local Government Act 1993 for an event to occur on public land under the care and control of the City. Fees are payable for approved events, in accordance with the City's Revenue Policy.
4. General recreational uses of parks such as public picnics or informal gatherings do not constitute events and therefore do not require notice to or approval from the City.
5. Annually, the City has a sustained demand for use of its parks and open spaces for events. However, the City has very limited hardstand areas that are available or suitable for events. As such, larger events often seek to use City parks as they have the open space necessary to produce such events, which often require infrastructure and vehicles to be positioned on turfed areas to construct and operate an event.
6. In lieu of directed design considerations or retrofitting for park spaces to specifically accommodate event activities, including vehicle access and hard stand areas, some larger scale events in parks have a higher impact on the park's turf, existing pathways, and the general amenity of such spaces. The impact of events on parks are further increased by inclement weather conditions preceding or during an event.
7. Due to extreme weather conditions during 2022, several outdoor events that went ahead in City parks resulted in extensive turf damage due to the extreme levels of rainfall during periods of installation, event operation and 'bump-out' of event related infrastructure.
8. Instances where extensive turf damage occurred required such areas to be fenced off from public access and remediation or replacement of damaged top soil and turf. These remediation areas are removed from public access for extended periods to allow for new turf to establish, affecting access and the general amenity of the park.
9. In October 2022, a Lord Mayoral Minute was endorsed by Council requesting the Chief Executive Officer review the City's policies for booking City public parks in relation to any existing and future events. The review has resulted in the development of a new Events in Parks Policy that sets out the arrangements, including the approval process, for events in City parks and open spaces.
10. The Policy includes a set of overarching principles which all Event Organisers must satisfy within their application and event management plans for assessment and approval by the City, including
 - (a) Asset Protection: asset and turf protection measures must be implemented for events in grassed parks and spaces where vehicles, infrastructure and/or event attendees pose an unreasonable risk of potential damage to the space.

- (b) Contingency Planning: Event Organisers are required to develop comprehensive contingency plans. These plans must be sufficient to address potential issues, including the potential necessity for event postponement, cancellation, or work stoppage, whether initiated by the Event Organiser or the City.
 - (c) Event Duration: Event Organisers must minimise their use of the park to the least amount of time, including that required for bump-in, event delivery and bump-out. The City will consider the entire duration of an event including possible post-event remediation when making its assessment of whether or not it can proceed.
 - (d) Park Access: Event Organisers will be required to maintain as much access as reasonably practicable during their use of the park, with the event site only being obstructed due to safety protocols and/or legislative licensing requirements.
 - (e) Event Infrastructure: Event Organisers will be required to minimise their use of infrastructure to as little as reasonably practicable, and where available utilise existing structures or hardstand surfaces to reduce impacts on the park.
 - (f) Financial Capacity: Event Organisers are obligated to demonstrate financial capacity. This entails having adequate budgeting in place to cover all liabilities associated with event operations, including City approval fees and potential remediation costs resulting from event-related damages.
11. The Policy also includes criteria for determining which event applications constitute 'High Impact' and thus require Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Lord Mayor, endorsement and public exhibition of notices before an event can be approved. Following Chief Executive Officer endorsement, Event Organisers will be required to enter into a licence agreement with the City and pay a security bond.
12. Of the approximately 60 to 80 current known events that occur in City parks each year, it is estimated that approximately 10 such events would fall within the 'High Impact' criteria. A number of these events are produced by the City (e.g. Christmas Concerts).

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

13. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This policy is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 1 - Responsible governance and stewardship - the Policy provides a governance framework in which Staff and the community can refer to when reviewing the appropriateness of event applications and ensuring best practice is applied to events in City parks.
 - (b) Direction 3 - Public places for all - the Policy provides a framework to ensure applicable event activities meet the correct balance between meeting community demand for such activities while maintaining space for public recreation and passive use.

- (c) Direction 4 - Design excellence and sustainable development - the Policy supports the application of sustainable standards for applicable events and reduce occurrences where avoidable damage to park assets, such as turf, may occur.
- (d) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - the Policy applies to all temporary events approved to occur within City parks and turfed spaces, including events produced by community, commercial, charitable, and not-for-profit organizations as well as the City's own produced events.
- (e) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural and creative life - the City supports diverse and creative uses of public spaces by events and activities. The Policy encourages sustainable principles in the planning and implementation of event management to ensure such uses meet the demands and interests of the community.
- (f) Direction 9 - A transformed and innovative economy - the City acknowledges the important contributions temporary event activities have on the local economy and wider industry sectors, with the Policy providing a structure in which to maintain event uses within the boundaries of community benefit.

Organisational Impact

- 14. This Policy assists staff in assessing applications for events in City parks as well as determining which applications constitute High Impact and require Chief Executive Officer endorsement before an event can be approved.
- 15. The implementation of the Policy will increase event application assessment time and require additional resources to facilitate identified proposals through the public exhibition and Chief Executive Officer endorsement processes.
- 16. Resources will also be required to assist with assessments of event proposals in parks, including assistance establishing the likely impact of a proposal on a park, continued liaison from pre-production to event delivery, and escalation procedures for inclement weather assessments prior or during an event that may require cancellation of an event.
- 17. Appropriate resources will be required to manage pre and post event condition reports of parks for approved events, including undertaking any required remediation works outside the normal scope of maintenance for such parks.

Risks

- 18. The requirement for High Impact events to be publicly advertised and endorsed by the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Lord Mayor, before an event is approved will increase lead times, and create some uncertainty on permissibility, which may deter some Event Organisers from applying. There may be reputational risks associated with these additional processes, with Event Organisers instead choosing to produce their events in other locations.
- 19. The increase in asset protection requirements for all events, such as turf and ground protection to be laid under all vehicle pathways and infrastructure positioned on turf areas throughout a park, will increase costs for Event Organisers.

Social / Cultural / Community

20. Adherence to the Policy principles and process will ensure transparency for the community while continuing to support outdoor events that align to the City's cultural objectives. The adoption, publication and application of the Policy will support transparency and consistency when assessing and determining applicable park event applications.
21. The Policy seeks to strike a balanced approach to manage the recreational needs of general park users while also addressing the community's demand for outdoor events, fostering inclusivity by providing clear guidelines for assessing and approving events proposed for city parks.

Environmental

22. Adherence to the Policy will assist in reducing unreasonable or avoidable damages to City parks from event activities, including during bump-in, event operation and bump-out. However, it should be noted that the nature of events in parks will also result in some degree of impact, which degree is often dependent on factors that cannot be controlled such as adverse weather before or during event activities.

Financial Implications

23. The approval of events in City parks and open spaces does generate revenue by way of the imposition of fees and charges in accordance with the City's Revenue Policy.
24. Unavoidable reasonable wear and tear will continue and therefore inclusion of ongoing maintenance will still be required.
25. Due to the increased lead times involved in obtaining Chief Executive Officer endorsement of events characterised as 'High Impact' under the Policy, there may be some loss of revenue should Event Organisers choose to produce such events in other non-City locations.

Relevant Legislation

26. Local Government Act 1993.
27. Crown Land Management Act 2016.

Public Consultation

28. Once the draft Policy has been presented to Council it will be placed on public exhibition for 28 days. During this period the City will accept submissions from the community for consideration.
29. The City will continue to discuss the proposed Policy with regular Event Organisers, and will inform the event industry of the exhibition of the Policy and mechanism to provide a submission.

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