



City of Arts & Innovation

# Governmental Processes Committee

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**TO: GOVERNMENTAL PROCESSES COMMITTEE**      **DATE: JANUARY 7, 2026**

**FROM: CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE**      **WARDS: ALL**

**SUBJECT: REVIEW OF CITY COUNCIL FEEDBACK AND DIRECTION ON THE PROPOSED CITYWIDE WARD-SPECIFIC SPECIAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS, AND PROJECTS POLICY**

## **ISSUES:**

Review City Council feedback regarding the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* and provide direction on key policy considerations, including roles and responsibilities, election-period safeguards, planning and reporting expectations, and budget visibility, prior to revising the proposed policy and returning the item to the City Council for further consideration.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the Governmental Processes Committee:

1. Receive and review City Council feedback provided during consideration of the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy*; and
2. Provide direction to staff on potential policy revisions, including but not limited to:
  - Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and the event approval process;
  - Refining election-period provisions related to branding, promotion practices, and the treatment of recurring annual events;
  - Establishing expectations for pre-event planning and post-event reporting and outcomes;
  - Improving budget visibility and transparency while maintaining staff administration of event funding and costs; and
3. Direct staff to revise the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* consistent with Committee direction and return the item to the Governmental Processes Committee or City Council, as appropriate, for further consideration.

## **BACKGROUND:**

On June 27, 2023, the City Council approved the amended Fiscal Year 2023/24 budget, which included funding for Citywide events intended to support community engagement, tourism, and economic development throughout the City. As part of this effort, staff developed the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* to provide a consistent framework for the planning and implementation of ward-based programming that is open Citywide for attendance.

On August 6, 2025, the Governmental Processes Committee reviewed the draft policy and voted to recommend City Council approval with minor modifications related to budget clarification and the prohibition of donations to individuals or organizations. Those clarifications were incorporated into the draft policy presented to the City Council.

On October 28, 2025, the City Council considered the proposed policy but did not adopt it. Following discussion, the City Council voted to refer the item back to the Governmental Processes Committee for further review. During City Council consideration, multiple Councilmembers provided feedback and raised policy questions regarding the structure, implementation, and safeguards associated with ward-specific events and funding.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The Committee is now being asked to review that feedback and provide direction to staff prior to revising the policy and returning to the City Council to be considered for adoption. The proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* was developed to provide a consistent framework for the planning and implementation of ward-based events, programs, and projects that are open Citywide for attendance. The policy outlined eligibility criteria, implementation responsibilities, budget considerations, and election-related safeguards.

During City Council consideration, Councilmembers raised several questions regarding whether the proposed framework sufficiently addresses process clarity, election-period considerations, transparency, and accountability. The discussion below summarizes those themes and identifies areas where Committee direction is requested prior to revising the proposed policy.

### **Roles, Authority, and Implementation Process**

Councilmembers raised concerns regarding the clarity of roles and responsibilities outlined in the proposed policy, including how decisions are made and how events move from concept to implementation. Some Councilmembers expressed discomfort with language suggesting that staff has final authority without sufficient clarity regarding Council input, while others emphasized the importance of maintaining staff responsibility for execution. Councilmembers also noted that the approval chain outlined in the proposed policy would benefit from additional detail, including clearer expectations regarding review steps, timelines, and points of coordination. Committee direction is requested regarding how to clarify roles and processes in a way that provides predictability and transparency while preserving appropriate staff-led implementation.

The Committee is also asked to consider Section 407 of the City Charter, which provides the following:

## **Sec. 407. - Interference in administrative service.**

Neither the Mayor nor the City Council nor any of its members shall interfere with the execution by the City Manager of his/her powers and duties, or order, directly or indirectly, the appointment by the City Manager or by any of the department heads in the administrative service of the City, of any person to an office or employment or their removal therefrom. Except for purpose of inquiry, the Mayor, the City Council and its members shall deal with the administrative service under the City Manager solely through the City Manager and neither the Mayor nor the City Council nor any member thereof shall give orders to any subordinates of the City Manager, either publicly or privately.

### **Election Cycles, Branding, Event Classification, and Geographic Scope**

Councilmembers discussed the proposed policy's election-related provisions, including the 90-day restriction prior to an election cycle, and raised questions regarding how election periods should be defined and applied. Several Councilmembers expressed concern that the current approach could unintentionally limit recurring annual events that have historically served the community, even when those events are not intended to be political in nature. Staff suggests that this section be modified to prohibit Councilmember participation in the planning of such an event "within 90 days preceding an election in which the Councilmember's name will appear on the ballot at that election," which is similar to the Political Reform Act's ban on mass mailings at public expense (Gov. Code section 1090 et. seq., Regulation Sections 89000 - 89003).

Related discussion focused on branding and promotion practices, including whether Councilmember names should be associated with ward-specific events, whether events should be generically branded, and whether limits should be placed on marketing or promotion activity, particularly during election periods. Committee direction is requested regarding whether election-related safeguards should focus on timing, branding and promotion practices, or a combination of approaches.

The State's Political Reform Act places restrictions on mass mailings at public expense that feature an elected officer, and staff will continue to monitor such mailings to avoid any inadvertent violations of this Act.

In addition, questions have been raised regarding whether Councilmembers should be permitted to voluntarily make suggestions as to ward-specific funding to events or programs located outside of their ward boundaries, particularly where such activities may provide broader community benefits. Committee direction is requested regarding whether the policy should continue to restrict funding based on ward boundaries or allow limited flexibility under defined conditions.

### **Pre-Event Planning and Post-Event Reporting**

Councilmembers broadly expressed support for strengthening post-event accountability for ward-specific events. Feedback included the value of requiring a brief post-event summary to improve transparency and inform future planning. Suggested information included basic event details, total costs, attendance or participation, partners or vendors involved, and observations or lessons learned. Councilmembers also discussed the potential value of a simple dashboard for larger-scale or ongoing events to provide visibility into expenditures and outcomes over time.

Separately, staff have identified the benefit of establishing a structured pre-event planning meeting to support more effective coordination and implementation. The concept would involve a comprehensive planning discussion, likely at the beginning of the fiscal year, between each Council office and the Arts & Cultural Affairs team to outline anticipated events, priorities, and

expectations for the year. Early, consolidated planning was identified as a way to improve staff workload planning, reduce last-minute requests or changes, and support smoother execution throughout the year.

Committee direction is requested regarding whether standardized post-event reporting and a pre-event planning process should be incorporated into the policy, including the appropriate timing, scope, and level of detail for each.

### **Budget Visibility and Cost Structure**

Councilmembers emphasized the need for greater visibility into their ward-specific event budget, including regular updates on expenditures and remaining balances. While recognizing that budgets are administered by staff, Councilmembers noted that they are often publicly associated with ward events and therefore need timely access to accurate budget information.

Discussion also addressed the treatment of costs associated with City services such as permits, public safety, staffing, and public works support. Staff clarified that these costs are part of the total cost of delivering events and that departments do not currently have a dedicated budget to absorb them. While questions were raised regarding alternative approaches, maintaining a consolidated view of total event costs was also identified as important for transparency and accountability.

Committee direction is requested regarding how budget information should be shared with Council offices, the frequency of updates, and whether any changes to the current cost allocation approach should be considered as part of policy revisions or addressed through the annual budget process.

### **Committee Direction Requested**

Based on the feedback received, staff is seeking Governmental Processes Committee direction on the issues outlined above prior to revising the proposed *Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy* and returning the item to the City Council for further consideration.

### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

Funding for ward-specific events, programs, and projects is included in the Fiscal Year 2025/26 Citywide allocation approved by the City Council during the annual budget process. No additional fiscal impact will result from this action.

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Approved as to form: Rebecca McKee-Reimbold, Interim City Attorney

### **Attachments:**

1. Proposed Citywide Ward-Specific Special Events, Programs, and Projects Policy
2. Presentation