

Aug. 3, 2023

Mayor and Council
City of Vernon
3400 30th Street, Vernon, B.C., V1T 5E6

Re: Recommendations on City of Vernon facilities process

Your Worship and Council

On Aug. 1, 2023, the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce hosted a task force that brought together a diverse representation of non-profit organizations that organize events in City of Vernon facilities, including arenas, auditoriums, parking lots, parks and sports fields.

The focus of the task force was to review the report from the City of Vernon's third-party consultant on facility rental fees and to provide recommendations to City Council as it considers reports from the consultant and City of Vernon administration.

After thoughtful deliberation, several areas of concern materialized. They include:

Proposed Discretionary Grants

- The initiative could penalize small organizations that do not have the time and resources to complete applications;
- It would create another level of bureaucracy at the City and the City would have to direct resources towards reviewing applications;
- Instances of favouritism towards certain organizations could occur;
- Some organizations may not receive grants some years and events will fall under budget.
- Equitable and balanced user rates are more desirable than grants.

Proposed Five Per Cent CPI Fee Increase

- There should be an alignment between service levels and current rates prior to assessing a potential increase in rates;
- A fee for model service should be implemented prior to any potential fee increases;
- Rising facility fees make it impractical for non-profits to take on financial risk of hosting events;
- Fee comparisons with other communities should be available to City council, user groups and the community;
- Facility renters need a transparent breakdown of facility costs and services.



Customer Service

- There needs to be a single point of contact for after hours issues, and contact information needs to be posted;
- City staff need to be proactive with contract and permit timelines. A checklist and fee menu for user groups would be beneficial;
- The issue of double bookings needs to be reviewed, and there needs to be communication with vendors about bookings in adjacent facilities;
- Renters should be welcomed and made to feel that their investment in the facility and community is appreciated by the City.

Events Coordinator

- The events coordinator needs to have a strong and integrated connection with the economic development and tourism department;
- Hours of operation need to align with events or have emergency contact information available;
- There is a need for the coordinator to advocate for facility users and to liaise between event organizers and City managers and staff;
- The coordinator needs to meet with stakeholders regularly to determine where improvements to service can be made;
- The event coordinator must advocate for more usage of facilities and promote the use of City facilities to local and travelling promoters.

Finances

- The economic development and tourism department needs to partner with City managers and the events coordinator to incentivize new events as a way of enhancing economic development and tourism;
- The need for the City to recover costs must be balanced with the community benefit of events;
- Increased level of facility use increases revenue for the City.

The Greater Vernon Chamber, through its task force, makes the following recommendations to City Council:

- The discretionary grant proposal not proceed, and instead, fees be reduced and aligned in an equitable manner;
- The proposed five per cent CPI fee increase not proceed, and instead, fees be aligned with service levels, and comparison data with other communities be collected;
- The new facility coordinator be aligned with the economic development and tourism department, and provided with the ability to work across City departments to ensure customer service and development of events;
- Council establishes an advisory committee of stakeholders to provide input and support for the event coordinator and City administration;
- Customer service training be made available to City staff;

- Establish business friendly best practices to ensure Vernon provides an open door to events.

The Greater Vernon Chamber and the organizations that participated in the task force are passionate about Vernon, economic development and celebrating this community. We are confident that our recommendations are constructive and realistic, and that through a partnership between the City of Vernon and stakeholders, Vernon can establish itself as an events leader.

We urge council to consider this matter with extreme importance and timeliness.

Thank you for your time.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Cardew', with a stylized, cursive style.

Robin Cardew
President
Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce
Workandinvestvernon.ca

