

SEATTLE SPECIAL EVENTS

Permit Fees, Permit Process, and Policy Feedback

Special Events in Seattle: Where are we now?

Since 1991, the City of Seattle has supported community, commercial, and private events on public property through the Special Event Committee and Special Event Permit process. After 25 years, in 2016 the City passed legislation updating the Special Event Permit fee structure and several processes managed through the Special Event Committee and Special Events Office.

With two years of permitting experience under this new structure, the City Auditor has issued its *Special Events Police Staffing and Cost Recovery* report, the Special Events Office has collected event and fee data, the Mayor and City Council are receiving feedback from key Committee departments, **and the City needs to hear from you.**

Seattle's Special Events legislation – A brief history

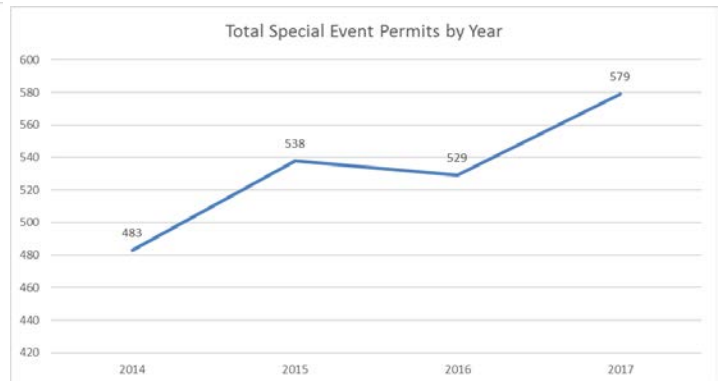
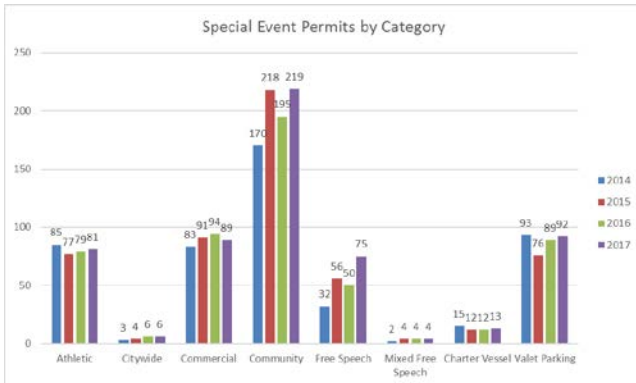
1991: Seattle's first major ordinance related to special events was enacted in 1991 to create the Special Events Committee to review and regulate public event activity, to define large public events separately from stadium and Seattle Center events, and to encourage the growth of special events through a highly-subsidized fee structure.

With the low cost billing mechanism, event numbers grew from a few dozen in 1991 to 538 in 2015, yet cost the City's cost recovery for the City's resource and staffing costs remained at about 23%.

2016: After moving from the Parks Department to the Office of Economic Development in 2012, the Special Events Office was mandated to review and update legislation for the City's special event process and fees. In 2012, the Special Events Office contracted an independent special events consultant report, performed peer city research in 2014, and collected cost and operational data through an internal examination in 2015. This information helped to inform a series of over 50 individual and work group discussions in 2015 with event organizers, government agencies, and neighborhood associations, and business district organizations.

This work informed updates to the City's special events vision and values, policies and procedures, cost recovery levels, event categorization, and definition for free speech activity. The intent of the new "fee for use" Special Event Permit fee schedule was to align with the City's values in supporting and encouraging free, open to the public, community events, while incorporating police officer cost recovery for commercial, ticketed, and athletic events to offset the City's costs.

What have we learned since 2016? What else has changed?



Permit Volume: In 2015, 538 permits were issued. In 2016, 23 fewer community events were produced, resulting in a drop to 529 permits issued. In 2017, 24 new community events were produced, and 25 new free speech rallies/marches were held, for a total of 579 permits issued.

Permit Fees: The 2016 billing change has resulted in approximately 45% of permitted events seeing an increase in fees, and about 55% seeing little change or a decrease in fees. The fee restructure increased the City's cost recovery for permitted events from approximately 23% in 2015 (before the change) to approximately 40% in 2017.

While free and open to the public community events do not pay fees for police, larger community events with significant street closures and commercial vendors count saw fees increase as much as 400% or 500%.

Commercial, ticketed, and athletic events generally saw the greatest fee increases, as they now pay a fee for police officers assigned to the events.

Committee and Process: The 2016 ordinance updates added the Seattle Center and WSLCB to the official Special Event Committee roster. Additionally, to better represent business and business district input, one of the Committee's four Citizen Representatives is now required to have experience working for a commercial district (BIA, Chamber, etc.) organization that has produced permitted special events.

The permit application process has been expanded to provide more logistic and activity information for deeper Committee review. A comprehensive Special Event Handbook, and a permit fee estimator have been created for quicker event organizer access to requirements and costs. The writable PDF application format, and submission via email, mail,

or in person, have not changed since 2015. Online application and payment resources have not been implemented since 2015.

Committee Communication: An intent of the 2016 ordinance updates was to create better communication processes with Special Event Committee representatives, particularly Police, Fire, Transportation, and Neighborhoods. Internally, the communication has been significantly streamlined. Departmental communication within the Committee has increased in frequency and availability.

Individual department's outreach and communication with event organizers, and review and processing timelines, however, have been inconsistent. Considering the 90 day application requirement for event organizers, we should be, but are not, meeting our goals for timely advance permit issuance.

What is next?

The Special Events Office is scheduling a series of public, group, and individual meetings from **September through December 2018** to get feedback and learn from business districts and agencies, independent event organizers, neighborhood associations, and the general public. **We need to hear from you**, and how the 2016 process and fee changes have changed the way you consider, plan, produce, and fund the events you produce in your neighborhood. This information and your recommendations, along with feedback from the departments and agencies on the Special Events Committee, will be presented to the City Council and Mayor's Office for their consideration in policy and legislative updates. Key policy issues to consider in your participation of these meetings should include:

- Cost recovery for City safety and security staffing resources
- Administrative and commercial activity fees
- Event type category definitions
- Response to Audit Report recommendations
- Committee and administrative process updates

Resource Links

[Seattle Special Events Ordinance](#)

["Special Events - Police Staffing and Cost Recovery"](#) City Auditor Report

["Preserving the Soul of a City Through Special Events"](#) – 10/25/18 seminar presented by WFEA and the City of Seattle