

Reference Committee Staff Report



To	Infrastructure and Community Investment Committee
Subject	Kempenfest Consultation
Date	November 19, 2025
Ward	All
From	K. Datema, Director of Recreation and Culture Services S. Schlichter, Director of Economic and Creative Development
Executive Member Approval	J. Schmidt, General Manager of Community and Corporate Services B. Araniyasundaran, General Manager of Infrastructure and Growth Management
CAO Approval	M. Prowse, Chief Administrative Officer

Recommendation(s):

1. That the Infrastructure and Community Investment Committee receive this report and Appendix A, Kempenfest Festival Review Final Report, for information purposes.
2. That future municipal support for larger-scale festivals and events such as Kempenfest, be administered through the creation of a granting program, as recommended in the Report Back – Culture Plan Update report for the creation of an In-Kind Tourism and Culture Event Grant to be proposed as part of the 2027 budget process.
3. That for 2026, City of Barrie support for Kempenfest be as follows:
 - a) Up to \$5,000 of in-kind staff support for site services (ie. waste removal) to assist Kempenfest in 2026;
 - b) Cost recovery of up to \$17,000 for shuttle bus service supplied by Barrie Transit to be funded from the Tourism Reserve;
 - c) Up to \$10,000 to support rental and equipment costs for the Family Side Stage to serve as a showcase for local talent and artist development, to be funded from the Tourism Reserve.
4. That the Kempenfest Board be requested to seek fundraising sponsorship to support the City's fiscal contribution of up to \$27,000 and should they be unsuccessful, that Kempenfest advise Council in writing prior to Council's 2026 summer recess.
5. That the recommendations from Bannikin for the City related medium and long-term infrastructure and environmental sustainability support of events be considered as part of the future development of a Waterfront Festivals and Events Strategy.

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this staff report is to report back to committee regarding the Kempenfest Festival Final Report, Appendix A, that was completed via a consultation process through the City procured consultant, Bannikin. This is in response to Staff Report ECD004-24 and Council motion 24-G-098 which included the following directions:

“That up to \$25,000 be allocated from the Tourism Reserve to support Recreation and Culture Services and Economic and Creative Development in collaboration with the Kempenfest Board and Tourism Barrie, to retain a consultant to support Kempenfest with assessing the overall economic impact of Kempenfest and a financial and governance review to determine opportunities for operational and financial sustainability.

That staff in Economic and Creative Development and Recreation and Culture Services report back on the findings of the economic and impact analysis and overall event review and provide recommendations on future support of Kempenfest.”

Key Findings:

The City of Barrie engaged Bannikin, including the Executive Director of Ontario Culture Days, to provide Kempenfest and the City of Barrie with strategic recommendations for festival evolution and sustainability. Bannikin is a Canadian company that has worked with multiple municipalities and tourism organizations since 2011. Their projects have included Tourism Simcoe County's Destination Stewardship Plan, Town of Collingwood's Tourism Master Plan, and Curve Lake First Nations' Tourism Branding Strategy. Through the company's connection with Ontario Culture Days, they have worked with 15 official provincial Festival Hubs including the County of Brant, Centre Wellington, Town of Oakville, City of Burlington, City of Guelph, City of St. Catharines, City of Thunder Bay and City of Vaughan.

The project took place from December 2024 to May 2025. Bannikin are presenting a final report to committee on November 19th in tandem with this staff report which will address the City's portion of the recommendations for future support of Kempenfest per Council Motion 24-G098.

The Kempenfest Review Final Report did not make specific recommendations for the City to support the event from a fiscal capacity and provided a series of recommendations for the City's role to include championing the use of more sustainable materials, encourage community engagement and to define the City's relationship with Kempenfest beyond an event permit that includes a Memorandum of Understanding and associated reporting information.

As part of the Waterfront Master Plan, a Waterfront Festival & Events Strategy is a component of the implementation. The recommendations from Bannikin related to environmental and sustainability practices for events are to be included for evaluation as part of the scope of work for the future Waterfront Festival & Events Strategy.

The Council motion requires staff to provide recommendations on future support of Kempenfest.

In consideration of the recommendations from Bannikin, the Tourism Master Plan and proposed Culture Plan Update, City staff suggest that the most effective use of municipal assets to support non-City events is through in-kind contributions that offset hard costs for the organizer. This is a financially sound mechanism for supporting tourism and culture events that levers existing municipal assets and expertise into economic stimulus and cultural enrichment with the following strategic benefits:

- In-kind grants ensure city investment remains focused on tangible, operational support, directly contributing to the event's feasibility and visitor experience.
- Higher Leverage: A \$10,000 cash grant may only pay for one vendor, but \$10,000 worth of in-kind services (i.e. waste removal, transit operations) frees up the event organizer's \$10,000 to be spent directly on programming, marketing, or capacity building.
- Capacity Building: Providing in-kind expertise (i.e. planning staff, technical mentorship) increases competency, resiliency in the non-profit arts and culture sector, increasing tourism and community participation.

Through the development of a granting program with criteria and scoring that considers tourism, cultural and community impacts along with mechanisms to ensure the fiscal and resource viability of the organizations delivering festivals and events to the public, City staff and Council are providing greater fairness and access within a municipal framework for all festival and special event requests for City support. Staff have structured the recommendations to allow for 2026 support while a grant program can be established. The recommendation provides for shuttle services, side stage and Parks staff to support on site for items such as waste removal. However, special event staff support for coordination and planning have been omitted because of competing priorities. The Supervisor of Special Events will continue to attend board meetings in an advisory capacity.

Staff will also assess opportunities to deliver on the mid, and long-term recommendations emanating from the Bannikin Final Report with a focus on:

- Infrastructure improvements that support all festivals and events.
- Be a liaison to assist Kempenfest in building and formalizing relationships with the Downtown Barrie BIA and Tourism Barrie.

Staff further recommend that Kempenfest pursue financial sustainability, as noted in Bannikin's Final Report, by ensuring Kempenfest has made enough revenue after the festival to be able to continue the following year without the need for financial and non-financial support from the City.

Financial Implications:

The financial implications for 2026 include in-kind staffing costs and a contribution from the Tourism Reserve of up to \$27,000. The Tourism Reserve retains a positive balance and is funded by the Municipal Accommodation Tax.

Future Financial Recommendations for Kempenfest:

- **Centralize financial oversight** by implementing a unified financial reporting system that aggregates financial revenues and expenses across all partner organizations as this will assist with audit gaps.
- **Strengthen financial leadership and administration** by assigning a dedicated financial role with Kempenfest, either staff or contracted, to be responsible for budget development, reporting and compliance. This will increase accountability and capacity for multi-year planning.
- **Achieve full audit readiness** by strengthening internal controls around sponsorship tracking, ticketing, and vendor income to enable full revenue auditability. Standardizing documentation and reconciliation procedures will be essential.
- **Build a reserve fund** by using the current surplus to begin creating a contingency or reserve fund to safeguard against future deficits and support sustainability initiatives.
- **Align budgeting with strategic goals.** Financial reporting and budgeting should directly reflect the organizations broader strategic priorities (i.e. community engagement, diversity and environmental sustainability) enabling more effective internal and external communications.

Future Monitoring and Evaluation:

- **Financial Sustainability** – ensuring Kempenfest has made enough revenue after the festival to be able to continue the following year without the need for financial and non-financial support from the City. This is achieved by setting a dollar amount to retain and reinvest in the festival the following year.
- **Economic Impact** – establish a baseline and measure spending at the festival and local businesses, as well as an increase in accommodation bookings during the festival weekend.
 - Amount of revenue generated by vendors, ticket sales, and sponsors accounted for within the Kempenfest organizational budget and financial reporting.
 - Amount of revenue generated by local businesses, especially in the downtown, during festival weekend.
 - Number of rooms booked at accommodations during the festival weekend.

Financial Support Options:

The consultants provided a resource scan that details grant opportunities that could support Kempenfest and went further to denote those that have strong alignment to the festival. There are 21 items listed in the resource scan and the 9 that demonstrate strong alignment are as follows:

Canadian Heritage	Local Festivals - Building Communities through Arts and Heritage
Canada Council for the Arts	Arts Across Canada: Public Outreach - Project grants
Government of Ontario	Experience Ontario
Government of Ontario	Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund
Ontario Arts Council	Artists in Communities and Schools Projects
Ontario Arts Council	Music Production and Presentation Projects
Ontario Arts Council	Ontario Arts Presenters Projects
Tourism Barrie	Arts and Cultural Assistance Program
RTO7	Partnership Program

Alternatives:

The following alternatives are available for consideration by General Committee:

Alternative #1 – Committee could maintain the existing approach of considering financial and in-kind support for festivals and events through delegation and written requests from festival and event organizers. This alternative is not recommended as it is not a structured, manageable or sustainable approach to a support framework.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Affordable Place to Live	X	Support of local business with a focus in the downtown core.
Community Safety		
Thriving Community	X	Championing diversity and inclusion and continue to support a vibrant downtown.
Infrastructure Investments	X	Update and improve infrastructure for all festivals and events.
Responsible Governance		

Additional Background Information and Analysis:

Tourism Barrie has provided an Event Economic Impact Report which is provided as Appendix B. The following are excerpts from the full report:

Kempenfest 2025:

- Total attendees – 145,335
- Economic Impact – \$8,291,275

- Barrie Residents Attending – 75%
- Visitors Attending – 26%

The following details the proposed supports emanating from the Kempenfest Review Final Report (Appendix A).

Short-Term to Mid-Term Recommendations:

- City of Barrie to provide service infrastructure grants for festivals to reduce single-use materials and rely on more environmentally friendly materials.
- City of Barrie and Kempenfest to collaborate on vendor familiarization and single use reduction/removal initiatives.
- City of Barrie to revise and strengthen environmental reporting requirements for festivals and events.
- City of Barrie to source and feature positive volunteering stories to include in City communications and encourage community engagement.
- City of Barrie and Kempenfest to formalize the relationship by developing a memorandum of understanding for clarity on support and expected reporting needs.
- Kempenfest to formalize the relationship with Tourism Barrie by developing a memorandum of understanding for support with marketing planning and inclusion in marketing efforts.
- Kempenfest to formalize the relationship with the Downtown Barrie BIA through a memorandum of understanding for clear network access to local businesses and support in package or special promotion creation.

Long-Term Recommendations:

- City of Barrie to facilitate space or processes (i.e. advisory committee) for festival organizers to inform City planning processes and future infrastructure projects and improvements based on their festival/event locations and associated needs. Focusing on renewable energy, such as transitioning away from the use of generators and exploring ground power, and use of electric vehicles.
- City of Barrie to encourage environmental protection and enhancement of festivals through grant incentives with dedicated environmental targets.
- City of Barrie to work with festival organizers to develop waste-free policies and set City wide goals for fully removing single-use plastics and other waste from festivals by 2030.
- City of Barrie and Kempenfest to collaborate on a communication campaign to highlight the social and environmental benefits of festivals and events in Barrie.

Staff Report ECD004-24, dated April 24, 2024, provided background information from a previous Kempenfest consultation in 2018 from which Kempenfest received several recommendations regarding event operations and challenges related to the financial sustainability of their operation model. The consultant's report also outlined recommendations on how Kempenfest could improve their event from an operational perspective and provided options for increasing revenue.

Several of the recommendations provided to Kempenfest from the 2018 consultant's report are themes currently noted within Bannikin's 2025 consultation final report as follows:

- Increase grant revenue.
- Review and edit governance membership based on festival operational contributions.
- Draft a new Terms of Reference and Financial Policy around proceed sharing and consolidated expenses.

Kempenfest provided the following information regarding progress on the implementation of the recommendation emanating from the 2018 consultation as noted within Staff Report ECD-004-24 as follows:

- Fiscally increased or attempted to increase grant revenues and applied to grants in 2024. In 2022, Kempenfest received \$440,000 in grants and \$0 in 2023.
- Review composition of the Board to reflect a larger community demographic beyond programming related partners such as the Downtown Barrie BIA, Tourism Barrie and the Chamber of Commerce.
- Present concept approach to larger collective Boards, Major Partners, Political allies, and key Sponsors.

Consultation and Engagement:

The City of Barrie engaged Bannikin to support the goal of providing Kempenfest and the City of Barrie with strategic recommendations for the festival's evolution and sustainability to grow as a community and tourism event. Significant consultation and engagement were applied through the process.

Environmental and Climate Change Impact Matters:

There are no environmental and/or climate change impact matters related to the recommendation.

Appendix:

Appendix A – City of Barrie: Kempenfest Festival Review Final Report

Appendix B – Tourism Barrie Kempenfest 2025 Impact Report and Methodology for Measuring Economic Impact for Festivals and Events

Report Author:

K. Datema, Director Recreation and Culture Services

S. Schlichter, Director of Economic and Creative Development

File #: Not applicable

Pending #: P13/24