



Office of the City Manager

May 20, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager 

Re: Interim Measures to Address Special Events Staffing Challenges

This memo provides updates to the City Council about administrative changes to Special Events for the remainder of the 2026 calendar year.

Currently, the Neighborhood Services Division in the City Manager's Office (Neighborhood Services) has one full-time staff person dedicated to issuing all street and park event permits throughout the City. This is the only full-time position in the organization whose sole duties cover special events, and this person oversees and coordinates the complex, multidepartment process of reviewing and approving all event permits.

Due to sudden and unanticipated reductions staffing for Special Events, this report provides an overview of interim measures to ensure that Special Events can continue. It is important that these measures be put into place immediately. Not implementing these measures will lead to slowed response times and may compromise the ability to timely issue permits to some of Berkeley's most beloved annual events.

Challenges Facing the Special Events Team

As discussed in the October 14, 2025, Information Report to City Council¹, the City has seen tremendous growth in demand for Special Events permits since the pandemic, and the City now issues more permits annually than it did pre-COVID. Excluding Farmers Market permits, the number of street and park event permits has roughly doubled since 2021 (from 92 to over 180) and permits have increased 22% since 2019, the year before the pandemic, when 152 permits were issued. This growth in workload, coupled with stagnant staffing levels across the numerous operational departments (Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront, Public Works, Fire, Police, and Health, Housing, and

¹ <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-10-14%20Item%2014%20Changes%20to%20Special%20Events%20Permitting.pdf>

Community Services) who participate in event permitting and street and park closure implementation, has created enormous strain on the organization and affects baseline work and core functions of each of these participating departments. For example, in addition to reviewing and approving all Special Event street closure applications, Public Works Traffic Maintenance is responsible for addressing sign fabrication, installation, and maintenance; striping and pavement marking maintenance and installation (including thermoplastic applications); graffiti removal; support for block parties; traffic control; and emergency standby. The team is currently managing a backlog of 958 service requests and 15 work orders (though these numbers fluctuate daily) and an increasing Special Events workload crowds out their ability to perform these baseline, basic services for the community.

Recently, Neighborhood Services experienced a sudden decrease to staffing capacity to coordinate and oversee special events permitting. This decrease is expected to last nearly all of the remainder of the 2026 events season. Additionally, on April 14, 2026, the proposed budget balancing plan was released, which necessitates reductions in staffing across all departments that are involved in special event permitting (Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront, Public Works, Fire, and Police). If adopted by Council, this will further impact the City's ability to support special events as it has in the past.

These two unfortunate but rapidly converging realities have forced the City Manager's Office to implement a series of interim measures to stabilize the workload associated with special events and, in some cases, shift additional costs associated with events to event organizers. Implementing these measures will maintain staff's capacity to permit some of Berkeley's most beloved and iconic annual events.

Overview of Interim Measures

The following changes are effective immediately and are anticipated to remain in effect for the remainder of the 2026 events season. These changes were communicated to Berkeley's known event organizers and to the Chair of the Civic Arts Commission an email sent on May 14, 2026.

1. *New Applications.* The City can no longer accept any additional event applications for new or expanded events not already in the team's 2026 queue for permitting or known to be returning to Berkeley from a prior year. As of May 1, this includes over 30 events for which dates have already been identified and up to an additional 110 returning events for which dates have not yet been identified or application materials not yet received.

2. *Application Completeness.* Staff are currently in various stages of reviewing a large volume of events already in the queue for 2026 or preparing to review known returning events later in the season. To ensure timely review, it is imperative that event organizers:
 - a. Ensure their application materials are complete and up to date
 - b. Clearly define the event footprint
 - c. Provide a detailed traffic control plan for any proposed street closures
 - d. Respond promptly to any staff follow-ups or requests for clarification

Incomplete or outdated applications will be promptly returned to the organizer for resubmission, and resubmitted applications are subject to the event filing deadlines (see below).

3. *Event Filing Deadlines.* Staff will adhere to the filing deadlines currently listed on the Special Events webpage (<https://berkeleyca.gov/city-services/event-permits-rentals/special-event-permits>), and incomplete or outdated applications will be returned to the organizer for completion and resubmission prior to the filing deadline. In previous years, staff have routinely accommodated late and/or incomplete submissions by event organizers, which places strain on the permitting team who must rush a coordinated and often complex application review and corrections process on a tight timeline.
4. *Event Staffing.* Previously, the Special Events Coordinator in Neighborhood Services was responsible not just for reviewing and permitting events but also routinely staffing them on behalf of the City to manage unforeseen issues in real time. This service was provided free of charge to event applicants. The City no longer has the staffing capacity to provide this service free of charge and will now begin more uniformly recovering any costs associated with staffing from Parks, Recreation and Waterfront staff at all permitted Park events. (The City already charges overtime costs for police officers at complex street events.) Depending on event size and complexity, this may result in an additional event permitting fee of several hundred dollars or more.
5. *Crowd Management.* Pursuant to state law and the City's municipal code, the Berkeley Fire Department is working to ensure that events consist of one (1) crowd manager for every 250 anticipated participants at any outdoor event with an anticipated total attendance of 1,000 people or more. The training for becoming a certified crowd manager is about 2 hours via a free class online. There is no requirement that they be paid staff—volunteers are eligible to receive certification.

As a reminder, effective January 1 of 2026, an engineered and stamped Traffic Control Plan (TCP) is required for all high impact street closures, as defined in BMC 13.44.020 (<https://berkeley.municipal.codes/BMC/13.44.020>). These TCPs must be provided by a professional organization that is licensed and qualified to provide such documents. Traffic engineers qualified to provide TCP services include street dimensions, striping patterns, and other information in their drawings that allow staff to calculate the placement and quantity of street closure barricades and materials, all of which must be verified by a Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices-approved engineer to ensure that the TCP reflects current code standards.

Looking Ahead

Special Events staff have long-identified issues with current permit workflow management practices, an often complex, multidepartment process that is currently managed via email and paper/PDF forms. Given the staffing shortages and increased work volume described above, this inefficient process translates into poor customer service to event applicants, whose valid complaints culminated in a recent recommendation from the Civic Arts Commission to (among other recommendations) streamline, modernize, and automate the Special Events permit process. To address this issue, the City is taking the following actions proactively:

- On May 12, staff presented a recommendation to amend an existing contract with Clariti to build a cloud-based Special Events permit application and workflow management module. Work is anticipated to begin in early 2027 and take roughly 3-4 months or more to build. Factoring in user training and public rollout, staff believe it is most realistic to aim for a launch in time for the 2028 events season.
- Until the Special Events permitting module referred to above is in place, staff are working to devise interim tools, using existing software in the Microsoft Office suite, to better manage the permit approvals process and reduce reliance on email. Staff also aim to translate the existing Park and Street Event Permit Application forms, currently in a PDF-only format, into a web form that will provide applicants with a more modern and less confusing application experience. More information on the latter will be shared once it is ready for launch.

In January 2026, the Civic Arts Commission voted to send Council a series of special events recommendations. As of the submission of this report, staff are currently preparing a City Manager companion report. Depending on the action taken by Council, staff anticipate that the spirit of these recommendations – the general spirit of which staff do not disagree with – will kick off an important public discourse about special events in Berkeley and how they are appropriately staffed and subsidized.

cc: David White, Deputy City Manager
Peter Radu, Neighborhood Services Manager
David Sprague, Fire Chief
Jen Louis, Police Chief
Wahid Amiri, Interim Director, Public Works
Scott Ferris, Director, Parks, Recreation & Waterfront
Scott Gilman, Director, Health, Housing & Community Services
Jenny Wong, City Auditor
Farimah Brown, City Attorney
Mark Numainville, City Clerk
Matthai Chakko, Assistant to the City Manager