



**Civic Arts Commission
Policy Subcommittee
Friday, November 21, 2025
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM**

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Agenda

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. ROLL CALL

3. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Berkeley recognizes that the community we live in was built on the territory of Huchiun (Hooch-yoon), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo (Cho-chen-yo) speaking Ohlone (Oh-low-nee) people, the ancestors and descendants of the sovereign Verona (Vuh-roh-nuh) Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to all of the Ohlone Tribes and descendants of the Verona Band. We acknowledge and honor the original inhabitants of Berkeley, the documented 5,000-year history of a vibrant community at the West Berkeley Shellmound, and the Ohlone people who continue to reside in the East Bay. We recognize that Berkeley residents have and continue to benefit from the use and occupation of this unceded stolen land since the City of Berkeley incorporation in 1878. As stewards of the laws regulating the City of Berkeley, it is not only vital that we recognize the history of this land, but also recognize that the Ohlone

people are present members of Berkeley and other East Bay communities today. The City of Berkeley will continue to build relationships with the Lisjan (Lih-Shawn) Tribe and create meaningful actions that uphold the intention of this Land Acknowledgement.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT (for items not on the agenda)

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS WITH POSSIBLE ACTION

- a) Special Events Permitting Fees and Requirements (Attachments 1 & 2)

6. ADJOURNMENT

Attachments:

- 1. Event Producers Bill of Rights Draft
- 2. Protecting Special Events Letter to Council

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Event Producers' Bill of Rights **DRAFT**

1. The Right to Partnership

Producers have the right to be recognized in partnership with the City of Berkeley in creating civic vitality.

- Event Producers are vital partners in building the civic identity, economic health, and cultural vibrancy of the City of Berkeley and should be acknowledged as such.
- From neighborhood block parties to city-wide festivals, their work transforms public spaces into places of connection, creativity, and pride.
- As an economic driver, Event Producers bring a great deal of funding into the City which should be considered when allocations for festival grants and fees are appropriated.
- Events should be encouraged, not discouraged. We do not want to lose them to other more welcoming cities.
- The City should convene a quarterly forum with the Event Staff and Event Producers.

2. The Right to Competent and Efficient Service

Producers have the right to adequate City staffing and professional courtesy.

- The City should adequately staff the special events department to encourage as opposed to discourage events in Berkeley. The City of Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan specifically states that a major goal is to expand the staff capacity for the arts.
- Discussions should be encouraged to possibly create a Special Events Department under Civic Arts leadership. Since the vetting and funding for festivals is here, it would make sense for the permitting to be here as well.
- Discussion should be encouraged to create Entertainment Zones in each district, simplifying mapping and permitting for multiple events.
- City staff should provide informed, solution-oriented guidance.
- Communication should be courteous, consistent, and proactive.
- Departments should collaborate internally, so producers receive coordinated feedback rather than conflicting directives.

3. The Right to Clarity and Efficiency

Producers have the right to a timely, consistent, and transparent process for event approval.

- The City should provide a single, accessible, online source detailing all required permits, documents, fees, and deadlines.
- The City should consolidate Park and Street Permits.
- Fees should be payable online or in person at the Permit Center.
- The City should provide clear points of contact in each department with defined response timelines.

- The City should create a unified workflow that minimizes redundant paperwork and repetitive plan reviews.
- The City should provide reasonable expectations that allow event organizers to plan responsibly and confidently as many events require a long planning timeframe.
- The City should create a simple online questionnaire form to allow event producers, City staff, and affected businesses to submit feedback after each major event cycle to continuously improve clarity and efficiency.

4. The Right to Fair and Proportionate Fees

Producers have the right to fees that reflect both real costs and public benefits.

- Costs should be transparent, standardized, and equitable across all event types and be scaled appropriately to event size and impact.
- Any fee increases must correspond to measurable improvements in City service, such as faster processing, better field support, and clearer public communication.
- Producers should know precisely what services are covered for the fees paid.
- Fees should be compared to other cities of comparable size.

5. The Right to Equitable Access

Producers of all large, small, commercial, nonprofit, and neighborhoods have the right to fair access to public space.

- Processes must accommodate first-time organizers and grassroots events, not just professional producers.

6. The Right to Safe, Clean Public Spaces

Producers have the right to event-ready streets, parks, and plazas that meet baseline safety, cleanliness, and accessibility standards.

- The City should provide a clean, landscaped public space prior to the event. Event producers should be responsible for leaving it in the condition in which it was found.
- The City should maintain clear, documented guidelines for emergency access, electrical availability, ADA compliance, and sanitation needs in public event spaces.

7. The Right to Reliable Safety Coordination

Producers have the right to predictable and professional collaboration with public safety departments.

- Fire, Police, Transportation, Public Works and other impacted City department representatives should coordinate through clear, standardized protocols.
- Reusable Traffic Management plans should be created by the City and paid for as part of the event permit fee.

- Requirements for crowd management, propane use, tents, fire watchmen, etc. should be documented and uniformly enforced.
 - City field staff should be trained to support, not obstruct, safe event operations.
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8. The Right to Marketing Support

Producers have the right to be included in City marketing.

- The City should promote permitted events through its own channels to encourage attendance and community pride.
 - Public reports should highlight the positive economic and cultural impacts of community events.
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9. The Right to Predictability and Continuity

Producers have the right to stable rules and consistent expectations from year to year.

- Permitting criteria and fees should not change mid-season or without adequate notice.
 - Event organizers should be notified well in advance of any regulatory adjustments to allow proper budgeting and planning. When appropriate, detailed explanation(s) of major changes in standards and/or procedures should be provided. Large events need lead time of 6-12 months prior to the event date.
 - An annual calendar and timeline for citywide events should help departments and producers plan efficiently, discouraging overlap and dilution of resources.
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10. The Right to Joy

Above all, producers have the right to bring joy to Berkeley's residents and visitors without unnecessary barriers.

- Regulations should protect public safety while encouraging celebration, art, community building, and expression.
- The City should view cultural events not as logistical burdens, but as opportunities to strengthen civic life and local business vitality.

Protecting Berkeley's Vibrancy: A Call for Partnership on Special Event Policy

November 10, 2025

Dear Honorable Mayor and Councilmembers,

We are writing as members of Berkeley's event-producing community organizers, cultural leaders, artists, and business partners who create the events and experiences that make Berkeley vibrant. This letter is in response to the **City Council meeting on October 14**, when the **Information Report on Changes to Special Events Permitting Fees and Requirements** was presented.

We want to first acknowledge and thank staff for their work in compiling the report and for recognizing the strain on City departments tasked with managing an increasing number of special events. We also want to be clear that we **support the City's effort to adjust fees responsibly** to ensure cost recovery and public safety.

However, as written, these policy changes and new cost structures would have the unintended consequence of making it **prohibitively expensive, time-consuming, and discouraging** to produce many of the very events that define Berkeley's cultural identity and economic vibrancy.

The City's own report notes that these new regulations will make "nearly all events in Berkeley more expensive and demanding to plan and host," and that this could result in fewer events citywide. For Berkeley, that loss is not abstract, it is deeply tangible.

If implemented without a broader strategy for partnership and process improvement, these changes would jeopardize many of the cornerstone events that anchor community life in every district, including:

- **Bay Area Book Festival** – A nationally recognized literary gathering that draws tens of thousands of visitors downtown each spring.
- **Berkeley Juneteenth Festival** – Promoting community pride and bringing together South Berkeley businesses and residents in the celebration of a major African American cultural event.
- **Berkeley Farmers' Markets** – Among the longest-running in the region and critical to Berkeley's food culture and local economy.
- **Downtown Berkeley Programming** – Including the Front Row Festival, Roller Boogie, and seasonal activations that support local merchants and bring people into the city center.
- **Gilman District Street Fair and Music Events** – Which have helped revitalize one of the city's most historic industrial corridors.
- **Neighborhood and Park Festivals** – Such as those at Civic Center Park, Live Oak, Willard, and the Marina each provide vital community connection and accessible family programming.
- **Persian Festival** – A festival that plays a vital civic role bringing thousands of residents and visitors into the heart of the city, supporting small businesses and local restaurants, while fostering cross-community understanding and pride.
- **Solano Stroll** – A free local tradition since 1974, drawing over 100,000 attendees. The event showcases the talents, goods, and services of local artists, musicians, entertainers, and businesses, serving as a lasting cultural and economic cornerstone of the community.
- **Telegraph Holiday Street Fair** – A decades-long Berkeley tradition supporting artists, makers, and local businesses.
- **Telegraph Second Sundays** – The summer event series following the long-tradition of activating the Telegraph Ave. business district with street fairs, entertainment and free, fun attractions.

Losing even a few of these events would mean more than empty streets; it would mean a loss of **community cohesion, small business vitality, and civic pride**.

We recognize that the City’s intent is not to discourage events, but to manage resources and ensure public safety. Yet as structured, these changes, particularly the expanded fee schedules, new Fire and Public Works charges, and professional traffic control plan mandates risk doing exactly that.

There is, however, a constructive path forward. The City’s own report references the potential to develop **streamlined, pre-approved event frameworks** and “common applications” that could reduce staff workload, ensure safety, and improve efficiency. With Event Producers and the City of Berkeley working together, we can design a system where cost recovery and community vibrancy are not competing goals.

We respectfully request your support for a collaborative partnership between both parties so that we can create a Special Events Policy that is beneficial to all. We are currently working with the Civic Arts Commission and plan to present to them community-led Event Producers Special Events Recommendations that would protect what makes Berkeley special and build a permitting system that works for everyone: City staff, event organizers, small businesses and residents alike.

We ask the Council to acknowledge that Berkeley’s events are essential public goods, driving economic activity, public safety through activation, and cultural vitality across every district.

Before significant changes are made to the Special Events fee process, we ask the Berkeley City Council to recommend to the Civic Arts Commission to create **a collaborative committee of Event Producers, staff, and members of the Civic Arts Commission** to create a predictable, equitable, and transparent events permitting process that relieves staff burden while supporting producers, and **ensures that fee increases are paired with measurable service improvements** including timely communication, competent customer service, and coordinated interdepartmental support.

Events are not a logistical burden; they are an investment in Berkeley’s identity. They generate joy, revenue, and connection, and they make this city feel like itself.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and commitment to a thriving, joyful Berkeley.

With respect,

The undersigned Berkeley Event Producers on behalf of the community of cultural organizers, artists, and business districts who bring joy and vitality to Berkeley’s public spaces:

Lisa Bullwinkel, Berkeley Civic Arts Commission
Event Producer, Another Bullwinkel Show

Alex Knox, Executive Director
Telegraph Business Improvement District

Allen Cain, Executive Director
Solano Avenue Assn. and Solano Stroll

Daniel McChesney-Young, Berkeley Farmers'
Market Program Manager
Ecology Center

Jacob Cohen, Event Producer
North Shattuck Association

Niloo Nouri, Founder and Board Member
Persian Center and Festival

Delores Nochi Cooper, Executive Manager
Berkeley Juneteenth

Duane E. deJoie, Board of Directors
Berkeley Juneteenth

J.K. Fowler, Executive Director
Bay Area Book Festival

Matthew Jervis, Director of Downtown Vitality
Downtown Berkeley Association