



Legislation Text

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The official copy considered by the City Council is the first reader copy.

Introductory*

City of Baltimore Council Bill R (Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmembers Cohen and Porter

A Resolution Entitled

A Council Resolution concerning Informational Hearing - Special Event Permitting Processes

For the purpose of inviting representatives from the Department of Transportation, Department of Recreation and Parks, Department of Public Works, Baltimore Police Department, Fire Department, Department of Human Resources, City Administrator's Office, and any other relevant parties to come before the City Council to: (1) detail the causes of widespread challenges with the City's special events permitting processes, including application backlogs, staff shortages, and system irregularities; (2) outline solutions to ensure that these backlogs, staff shortages, and irregularities do not continue to impact beloved City events and public safety; and (3) outline reasons for permit denials and detail the City's strategy for responding to unpermitted events.

Recitals

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated challenges within City special events permitting procedures and caused some processes to grind to a halt. Many of these have never resumed or recovered and, as a result, have threatened the cancellation of major events, including the 2022 Mayor's Christmas Parade, and have contributed to unsafe, unpermitted events, including Brooklyn Day in 2023.

City permitting processes protect public safety. When festivals, block parties, demonstrations, races, parades, and other such gatherings occur, permits ensure that organizers address concerns that include security, sanitation, and traffic.

With proper resources, the permitting process in Baltimore City is efficient and economical. It protects public safety, offers a major revenue stream for the City, and ensures that businesses and community groups adhere to City Code and regulations.

Due to the cumbersome nature of event permitting processes, situations arise where groups feel forced to circumvent the permitting process. The burden is on City government to make the event permitting process as efficient, clear, and inexpensive as possible.

Applicants for special event permits have reported the following frustrations, setbacks, delays, and miscommunication, among other complaints:

- Applicants have waited months to hear back from City officials regarding approval of a special events permit and, in some cases, have not known the status of the event just a few days before the event's scheduled date, which leaves organizers unsure if vendors can be prepaid or other advanced planning can take place;
- Applicants and organizers have been unable to reach a live representative or staff member by phone or email and general inquiry emails have been unanswered;
- Staff shortages in critical areas have created chokepoints for the overall permitting process;
- Agencies have not directly coordinated between themselves when 1 agency redirects a permit applicant to another agency, and applicants are not given a time line for the agency's response;
- Event dates that are not available due to conflicting City events and limited resources are not communicated to applicants early enough in the application process; and
- There is a general lack of information and inability for applicants to receive status updates about where the City or a specific City agency is in the permitting process.

Baltimore City's permitting process should be easy to navigate, transparent to the public, and operate efficiently. The permitting process should engender trust in the City's agencies and procedures, and should create a gateway to investment in and enjoyment of our City's public spaces.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of Baltimore, That the City Council invites representatives from the Department of Transportation, Department of Recreation and Parks, Department of Public Works, Baltimore Police Department, Fire Department, Department of Human Resources, City Administrator's Office, and any other relevant parties to come before the City Council to: (1) detail the causes of widespread challenges with the City's special events permitting processes, including application backlogs, staff shortages, and system irregularities; (2) outline solutions to ensure that these backlogs, staff shortages, and irregularities do not continue to impact beloved City events and public safety; and (3) outline reasons for permit denials and detail the City's strategy for responding to unpermitted events..

And be it further resolved, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Director of the Department of Transportation, the Director of the Department of Recreation and Parks, the Director of the Department of Public Works, the Commissioner of the Baltimore Police Department, the Chief of the Fire Department, the Director of the Department of Human Resources, the City Administrator, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.