

Staff Report

Presented By: Amanda Monaghan, Community Development Officer

Meeting Date: March 9, 2026

Subject: Pumpkinfest Sustainability Plan and Funding Request

Attachment(s): Pumpkinfest Sustainability Plan and Funding Request
Pumpkinfest Sustainability Plan DRAFT
Pumpkinfest 2025-2026-2027 Comparison Budget FINAL
Pumpkinfest Board of Directors Recruitment Letter

Recommendation

That Council approve the one-time expense of \$50,000 for Port Elgin Pumpkinfest to be funded from Tax Stabilization Reserve.

Report Summary

Port Elgin Pumpkinfest is requesting one-time funding to support the recruitment of a full-time Coordinator. This funding will provide an overlap between the retiring and new Coordinator and allow for training and role transition.

Background/Analysis

On November 26, 2025, Pumpkinfest asked Council to fund the salary of a new Coordinator for one year in 2026. Council passed the following resolution:

That Council add a Division Highlight to Planning and Development to direct staff to work with Pumpkinfest in 2026 to establish a sustainability plan and return to Council with a funding request inline with that plan.

With support from Town staff, Pumpkinfest has developed a sustainability plan that could be implemented beginning in 2026 upon recruiting the new Coordinator.

Pumpkinfest Sustainability Plan

The Pumpkinfest Sustainability Plan outlines a strategy to ensure the long-term financial, operational, and organizational viability of Port Elgin Pumpkinfest. The plan focuses on leadership continuity, fiscal responsibility, revenue stability, site security, and risk management.

Governance and Leadership

The plan prioritizes the recruitment and retention of qualified Directors and Committee Chairs through targeted outreach, clear role descriptions, and structured succession planning. A Vice-Chair model will support leadership continuity and reduce volunteer burnout while preserving institutional knowledge.

Financial Management and Cost Control

To improve fiscal sustainability, the plan proposes a comprehensive review of vendor contracts, competitive procurement through RFPs, increased use of in-kind sponsorships, and zero-based budgeting. Purchasing will be consolidated across committees, and low-impact, high-cost activities will be evaluated for elimination.

Revenue and Admission Pricing

In response to rising operational costs, the Plan recommends a modest adjustment to admission pricing aligned with comparable regional festivals. Early Bird pricing and discounted Family Passes will be maintained to preserve affordability, while increased day-of gate pricing will improve cash flow. Clear public communication will emphasize transparency and reinvestment in the festival.

Site Security and Revenue Protection

Measures are proposed to strengthen perimeter control and reduce unauthorized entry, including fencing improvements, reduction of informal access points, enhanced volunteer training, strict wristband enforcement, and increased signage and visible security presence.

Staffing Sustainability

Annual budget provisions will continue for Coordinator and Assistant honorariums. Municipal investment is identified as essential during a 2026 transition year, supporting mentorship and training ahead of a planned move to a full-time Executive Director model in 2027.

Request Summary

Port Elgin Pumpkinfest requested Town Council to support one-time funding in 2026 of \$50,000 for the new salary while there is an overlap between the retiring and new Coordinator. This overlap will allow for training and role transition.

The Coordinator would manage planning and executing the renowned annual festival, increase potential event programming growing the event, and allow for succession planning. The salary to recruit a new full-time Coordinator is anticipated to be \$50,000 annually.

Pumpkinfest commits to implementing the sustainability plan and returning to Council later in 2026 with a progress update and review the impact of the new Coordinator. Pumpkinfest will also provide an overview and status of the tactics and initiatives that have been implemented year-to-date, completed, or that are in progress.

Town funding will allow Pumpkinfest to begin recruitment imminently, train and transition roles, implement the sustainability plan, and coordinate the 2026 Port Elgin Pumpkinfest event.

Linkages

- Strategic Plan Alignment: Pillar 4: Fostering a Vibrant Place to Live and Visit
- Business Plan Alignment: Development Services Division Highlight

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding

This report approves an incremental one-time expense of \$50,000 associated with this program, funded by Tax Stabilization Reserve.

Prepared By: Amanda Monaghan, Community Development Officer

Reviewed By: Dwayne Evans, Director, Development Services

Approved By: Kara Van Myall, Chief Administrative Officer