

# **Port Elgin Pumpkinfest Sustainability Plan and Funding Request**

# Original Request

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.

# **What We Were Asked to Do**

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

# **Pumpkinfest Sustainability Plan**

# Sustainability Plan

This plan outlines the strategic steps necessary to secure the long-term viability of Port Elgin Pumpkinfest. By strengthening our leadership, optimizing our budget, re-evaluating revenue streams, and securing our perimeter, we ensure that this beloved autumn tradition continues to thrive for decades to come.

# Recruitment of Directors and Committee Chairs

Securing passionate and qualified leadership is the cornerstone of a sustainable festival. We need individuals who not only love Pumpkinfest but bring specific skills to the table.

## Strategic Recruitment Goals:

- Targeted Outreach
- Role Clarity
- Succession Planning
- Value Proposition for Leaders

# Optimizing Spending: "Sharpening Our Pencils"

To maintain our high-quality programming—from the giant vegetable weigh-offs to the classic car show—we must ensure every dollar works harder.

## Expense Reduction Strategies:

- Vendor Audits
- Sponsorship In-Kind: For example, trading sponsorship recognition for free equipment rentals, printing services, or volunteer catering.
- Zero-Based Budgeting: Every expense must be justified anew based on current needs and ROI.
- Resource Consolidation and Review

# Improve Venue Security

Protecting our revenue stream means ensuring that every person inside the grounds has contributed to the festival's success by purchasing a ticket.

## Perimeter and Entry Control:

- Fencing Upgrades: Replace low-barrier snow fencing in vulnerable "blind spots" (e.g., near wooded areas or rear parking lots) with 6-foot temporary chain-link fencing.
- Eliminate informal shortcuts and concentrate the number of entrances
- Empower gate volunteers with specific training on spotting unauthorized entry and handling difficult interactions.
- Enforce the Wristband Policy  
Visual Deterrents e.g., "Ticketed Area Only"

# Adjusting Admission Prices

While Pumpkinfest remains one of the best value events in Ontario, rising operational costs necessitate a review of our pricing structure to ensure financial health. Pumpkinfest will increase their gate prices by %15 in 2026.

There will be transparent communication indicating adjustments to admission prices support increased security, insurance, and infrastructure costs. Price increases also allow us to sustain the festival for future generations.

# Adjusting Admission Prices

## Strategic Pricing Adjustment:

- **Market Analysis:** Comparative data shows similar large-scale regional festivals charge 15-20% more than our current rates. A moderate increase is justifiable given the breadth of entertainment provided (live music, midway, weigh-off access).
- **Tiered Pricing Model:** Introduce an "Early Bird" online ticket option at the old price to reward early commitment, while applying the price increase primarily to "Day-Of" gate sales. This encourages pre-sales and improves cash flow.
- **Family Value:** Maintain the "Family Pass" at a deeply discounted rate to ensure affordability for our core demographic, while slightly increasing individual adult admission.

# Operating Budget

# Budget Considerations

The funds currently in the bank serve as a **rainy-day reserve**, not discretionary spending. All fixed expenses must still be paid regardless of revenue performance, and future revenues may be significantly lower. Sponsorship funds are typically secured in advance, but gate revenues and concert income are vulnerable and may decline.

Coming out of 2024, we experienced deep cuts to our reserve fund—it was essentially lost. We were fortunate to rebuild a portion of it this year. However, **2026 remains an unknown until it is complete**. Without a second trained individual learning and preparing to take over the event, we risk serious operational challenges. One poor year could easily put us in a position of needing far more than \$50,000 if our reserves are depleted.

Each year, we intentionally build the budget starting at zero. This approach helps staff and volunteers remain mindful of the financial realities and the true cost of producing an event of this scale.

For 2026, the \$47,000 allocated is required to cover **early, unavoidable expenses** such as deposits, office costs, and printed materials—costs that must be paid well before any revenue is realized.

# FISCAL BUDGET 2025/2026/2027



	2025 Final	2026 with Town support	2027 Estimate
Revenue	\$306,410.42	\$306,992.63	\$257,600.00
Expense	\$261,828.90	\$252,781.26	\$210,903.76
Net Income	\$44,581.52	\$54,211.37	\$46,696.24

Wages and Contracts	2025 Final	2025 notes	2026 Proposed	2026 notes	2027 Proposed	2027 notes
Summer Students	\$4,819.36	Summer Students are paid in full by grant	\$0		\$0	
Coordinator	\$40,000	Joanne's role	\$90,000	Joanne to train and transition new Coordinator	\$50,000	Coordinator retires, new Coordinator onboarded
Part-time Assistant	\$10,000		\$10,000		\$10,000	
<b>Total Wages and Contracts</b>	<b>\$62,365.41</b>		<b>\$100,000</b>		<b>\$60,000</b>	

# Summary of Request and Commitments

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.

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.

With these changes in place, Pumpkinfest will be self-sufficient in 2027 and would no longer be seeking direct funding from the Town.