

COUNCIL REPORT

M&C No.	M&C 2019-231
Report Date	September 04, 2019
Meeting Date	September 09, 2019
Service Area	Transportation and Environment Services

His Worship Mayor Don Darling and Members of Common Council

SUBJECT: King's Square Bandstand – Events Support

OPEN OR CLOSED SESSION

This matter is to be discussed in open session of Common Council.

AUTHORIZATION

Primary Author	Commissioner/Dept. Head	City Manager
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RECOMMENDATION

Your City Manager recommends Common Council support City staff exploring sponsorship opportunities to fund a more permanent, safe, secure, and functional solution to access the upper level of the King Square Bandstand while continuing to support booking of ground space around the Bandstand for community events in the interim.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013 the City of Saint John received a gift from Mr. Irving and Dr. Richard J Currie in the form of refurbishment of the King's Square Bandstand. This gift included the refinishing of the steel ornamental structure, including the domed roof, and a set of mobile pre-fabricated stairs to allow access to the upper level for special events.

During the seasons immediately following the refurbishment there was strong demand for use of the facility, particularly to offer free musical entertainment for the public. Labour costs to transport and place the pre-fabricated mobile stairs were significant.

However, after the first two seasons immediately following the refurbishment the demand for use of this facility has reduced significantly and the access stairs are in need of repair or replacement.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Having the King's Square Bandstand available for public programming supports Common Council's priorities to support opportunities for growth and prosperity and to foster a vibrant city through investment in arts, culture, and recreation experiences that create a sense of community pride. However, with demand for the facility reducing annually, and alternatives for use of ground space around the bandstand for musical entertainment, return on an investment to provide safe and secure access to the upper floor into the future is diminishing.

REPORT

Demand

In the couple of years following recent refurbishment, demand for the upper level of the King Square Bandstand was significant. Demand has subsequently reduced. The annual number of requests for events booking at this facility have been as follows:

2015 - 26
2016 - 42
2017 - 7
2018 - 2
2019 - 1

It is worthwhile to note that many of the artists who were booked to play in the bandstand chose to play from the ground once they arrived on site as the sightlines to the upper level of the Bandstand do not allow for easy viewing.

Some recent community interest in the upper floor of the bandstand has initiated the need for staff to re-evaluate challenges and opportunities with the venue.

At this point City staff has no reason to forecast any increase in usage of the Bandstand over current levels.

Challenges with the Mobile Stairs

The stairs that were gifted to the City as part of the refurbishment are not designed to secure safely to the bandstand without having staff present to physically support them.

The stairs are also not designed to be easily transported and require a minimum of three City staff to transport, erect, and remove these stairs for every usage. The cost for each event that the City supports in the Bandstand is in the \$500-1000 range depending on the length of the event. This cost can double if the event takes place outside of normal working hours and requires an overtime call in. When occurring during normal working hours, these events use Parks Maintenance staff time that must be re-allocated from other services such as grounds maintenance, thereby reducing service levels in other areas.

Potential Solutions

The majority of the cost to the City for supporting events in the Bandstand comes from transporting, erecting, and removing the stairs. Therefore City staff did explore two potential options to mitigate these costs in 2015 when demand was greater:

- The fabrication and installation of a custom and permanent set of stairs in the Bandstand that could be easily raised and lowered. The cost for these stairs would be approximately \$15,000 and could nearly eliminate the per event support cost.
- With the help of Uptown Saint John, sourcing a nearby secured storage location for the portable set of stairs to reduce transportation time. City staff was unable to source a location, and this solution was not ideal as there would still be significant staff resources required to erect, support and remove the stairs.

SERVICE AND FINANCIAL OUTCOMES

Although use of the upper level of the Bandstand would add to the vibrancy of King Square, demand for this venue has been low in recent years. Low demand coupled with the cost to install a more permanent solution to access the upper floor and the available alternatives causes staff to question a recommendation that would lead to taxpayer Capital investment in the facility. Staff is therefore seeking Council support to identify if a sponsorship opportunity is available to fund this initiative while continuing to support use of groundscape around the bandstand in the interim.

City staff also intend to continue to explore, and subsequently present to Council for approval, opportunities to fairly recover operational costs to support recreational events at City facilities such as King Square through the City's Sustainability Plan. As has been recently completed for arena facilities, the level of public good received and financial health of the City needs to be considered along with benefits received by the users of the facility.

INPUT FROM OTHER SERVICE AREAS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Uptown Saint John has confirmed they do not foresee demand for the upper floor of the bandstand increasing. Limited musical programming that does occur at this venue makes use of the ground around the bandstand.

The Growth & Community Services Department, specifically their Arts & Culture Coordinator, has also provided valuable input. Promotion of events and programming that do not require use of the upper floor of the bandstand is the preferred approach. The upper floor is not conducive for most artists given the obscured sightlines to the audience and challenges transporting instruments up and down stairs. The amplification benefits provided to bands on the upper floor in the early 20th century when the bandstand was gifted to the City is not as critical today given available modern amplification equipment.