Richmond Hill

Richmond Hill Events Strategy

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consulting group

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Executive Summary

Events play a vital role in shaping community life in Richmond Hill, bringing people together, animating public spaces, celebrating cultural diversity, and strengthening civic pride.

The **Richmond Hill Events Strategy (2026–2036)** provides a framework to guide how events are planned, supported, and delivered across the city over the next decade. Building on the foundation established by the City's 2014 Festivals and Events Strategy, this updated Strategy responds to a changing community context, including a growing and increasingly diverse population, evolving resident expectations, and new opportunities for collaboration and innovation.

The Strategy builds on the City's strong foundation of civic celebration and community engagement, aligning with the City's Strategic Plan, Recreation and Culture Plan, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy, Parks Plan and associated Council approved Park Master Plans, and Age-Friendly Community Strategy.

Developed through research, best practice review, and engagement with residents, community organizations, City staff, and Council members, findings confirm that events are highly valued by residents while also highlighting opportunities to strengthen coordination, improve access to event spaces, support community organizers, and expand programming across seasons and neighbourhoods.

The Strategy is guided by a clear vision:

Events for Everyone:
Connecting People, Places, and Possibilities.

This vision recognizes that successful events depend not only on the experiences themselves, but also on the spaces, partnerships, governance structures, and operational systems that support them.

To support this vision, the Strategy is organized around three interconnected pillars that establish the City's approach to events moving forward.

Spaces

Create a flexible network of accessible, event-ready parks, civic spaces, and downtown areas that support year-round events and neighbourhood-scale activations. Key directions include:

- Developing a venue readiness and access framework to identify and prioritize event-ready spaces
- Investing strategically in event infrastructure such as stages, power access, lighting, and amenities
- Integrating event planning considerations into future park, downtown, and placemaking projects

Experiences

Deliver a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable calendar of events that reflects Richmond Hill's communities and strengthens the city's identity. Key directions include:

- Expanding the geographic distribution of events across neighbourhoods
- Increasing programming during shoulder and winter seasons
- Expanding and refreshing the roster of City events over time
- Continuing to integrate accessibility and sustainability into event planning
- Reviewing existing events to identify opportunities for improvement

Process

Strengthen governance, coordination, and evaluation to support efficient and transparent event delivery. Key directions include:

- Enhancing the Special Events Advisory Team (SEAT) to improve coordination and support for organizers
- Establishing a cross-departmental Events Leadership Group to guide strategic planning
- Improving the City's centralized events calendar and digital coordination tools
- Developing a City Event Framework that clarifies roles, expectations, and standards
- Strengthening support for community events through grants and resources
- Introducing standardized event data collection and reporting tools
- Establishing an Event By-law to ensure consistent oversight and coordination

Together, these directions position Richmond Hill to build on its strong tradition of community celebrations while adapting to future opportunities and challenges. By strengthening event spaces, expanding experiences, and modernizing processes, the City can ensure that events continue to connect residents, celebrate diversity, and contribute to a vibrant and inclusive City of Neighbours.

Introduction

The Richmond Hill Events Strategy (2026–2036) provides a framework to guide how events are planned, supported, and delivered across the city. It replaces the City's 2014 Festivals and Events Strategy and reflects the evolving role that events play in Richmond Hill as the community continues to grow and diversify.

This Strategy provides direction for how the City will support, coordinate, and deliver events in the years ahead. It builds on past successes while introducing a clearer structure for event types, improved coordination and evaluation processes, and a stronger focus on expanding event spaces and diversifying programming opportunities.

The sections that follow provide an overview of the community context, examine Richmond Hill's current event landscape, and outline a strategic framework to guide the evolution of events over the next decade.

What is an Event?

In this Strategy, an event is a planned gathering that brings people together at a specific time and place to participate in organized activities. Events may be delivered directly by the City or initiated by community groups.

What's Not Considered an Event

To keep roles and processes clear, the following are not considered events for the purpose of this Strategy:

- Workshops and resident meetings associated with regular municipal business, City plans and initiatives
- Facility rentals (i.e., weddings, birthday parties, corporate meetings)
- Spontaneous, informal, or unpermitted gatherings in parks or other public spaces (i.e., flag raisings, marketing campaigns)
- Demonstrations and rallies (as defined by the City's Demonstration and Rally Policy)
- Performances for which attendees are an audience and are required to purchase tickets or reserve seats
- Gatherings and activities that are intended to advance the goals of programs
- Open Houses that attendees can visit over periods of time to participate in or view regularly offered programs or activities

The Role of Events in a Vibrant and Inclusive City

Why Events Matter

Richmond Hill's Strategic Plan envisions "a vibrant and inclusive City of Neighbours." Events are one of the most visible and meaningful ways this vision comes to life. They transform principles such as connection, inclusion, and shared pride into lived community experiences. Aligned with the City's Recreation and Culture Plan, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy, and Age-Friendly Community Strategy, events play a vital role in strengthening civic engagement, belonging, and well-being across all ages and backgrounds.

Here's why events matter, in Richmond Hill and beyond:

Building Civic Connection

Events contribute positively to the social fabric of communities. They create opportunities for people from all neighbourhoods, cultures, and generations to come together in shared spaces, fostering connections, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Events can also serve as informal platforms for learning and knowledge sharing, helping residents better understand one another, local history, civic initiatives, and community resources. In Richmond Hill, where diversity and growth continue to shape community identity, events can serve as important bridges, connecting long-time residents and newcomers, and transforming public spaces into places of shared meaning.

Strengthening Identity, Place, and Belonging

Events help residents see and celebrate themselves in their city. They animate public spaces (our parks, plazas, and streets), turning them into stages for community expression and civic pride. By marking milestones, traditions, and cultural stories, events build a collective sense of "who we are" as Richmond Hill evolves. This connection to place not only supports individual well-being but also enhances neighbourhood vibrancy and civic identity, aligning with the City's broader placemaking goals.

Advancing Equity and Inclusion

Inclusive events are a tangible expression of an equitable city. They provide opportunities for participation, visibility, and leadership among communities that may have historically been underrepresented in civic life including newcomers, youth, people with disabilities, and diverse cultural groups. Richmond Hill's commitment to ensuring that "events are for everyone" reflects its broader dedication to inclusion and accessibility. Through equitable design, outreach, and partnership, events can become vehicles for representation and shared ownership of civic life.

Generating Cultural, Economic, and Community Benefits

Beyond social impact, events contribute to a thriving local economy and creative culture. They generate spending in hospitality, retail, and services, while supporting local artists, cultural organizations, and small businesses. A strong events calendar can enhance a city's reputation, attract visitors, and support local employment. In Richmond Hill, events also amplify municipal investments, showcasing public spaces, parks, and facilities as dynamic community assets.

Guiding Principles

Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

Events reflect Richmond Hill's diversity, ensuring equitable access and participation for everyone, regardless of age, culture, or ability.

Collaboration and Partnership

The City works across departments and with community stakeholders (i.e., non-profit organizations, community groups, businesses, and regional agencies such as York Region) to co-create meaningful events that strengthen civic life.

Environmental Sustainability

The City integrates sustainable practices into event planning and operations to reduce environmental impact and promote stewardship of shared spaces.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

The City embraces new ideas, evaluates outcomes, and adapts to changing community interests.

Fiscal Responsibility

Events are delivered transparently and maximize value for residents through responsible use of resources.

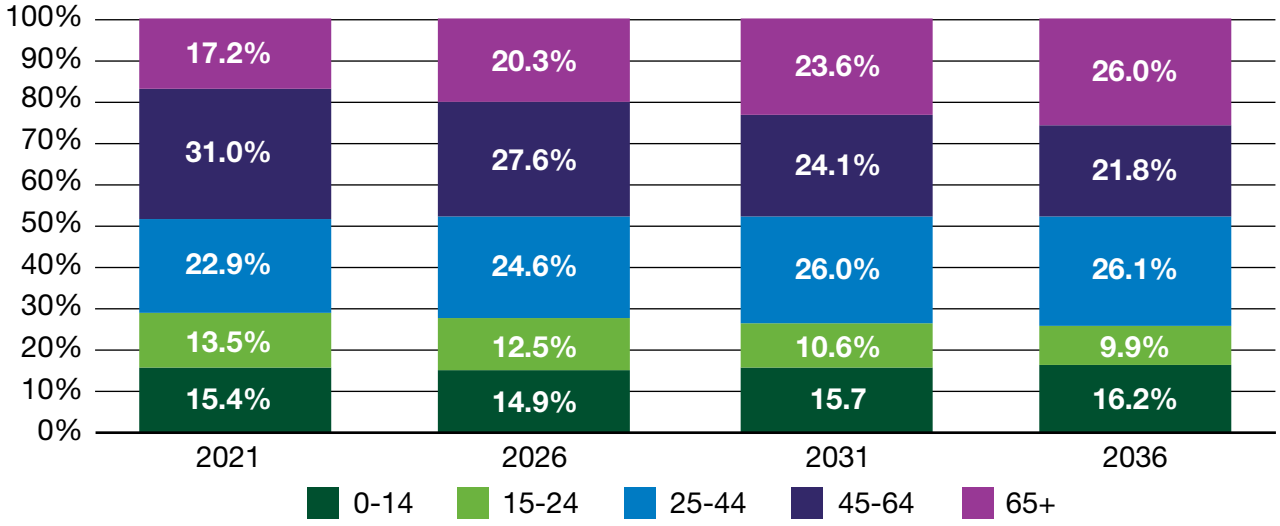
Community Connection and Belonging

Events build pride and shared identity, celebrating Richmond Hill's people, culture, and places.

Community Profile

According to the 2021 Census, Richmond Hill is home to just over 202,000 residents, reflecting a 3.6% increase since 2016 and the addition of more than 7,000 new residents. While growth has slowed compared to earlier decades, the community continues to attract new families, professionals, and immigrants seeking a balance between urban amenities and suburban character. Based on forecasts from York Region and the City's Housing Needs Assessment, Richmond Hill's population is expected to reach approximately 242,200 by 2031, and 322,100 by 2051. This steady long-term growth will continue to shape event demand and pressure for community spaces.

Actual (2021) and Projected (2026-2036) Distribution of the Population by Age, Richmond Hill



The city's average age of 42.2 reflects an aging trend, with older adults (65+) now accounting for 17.2% of the population, surpassing the share of children under 15. That group is projected to rise to about 58,500 seniors (24% of the total population) by 2031, highlighting the importance of age-friendly event planning. Based on national prevalence applied locally, the City's DEI Strategy estimates over 45,000 adults in Richmond Hill live with a disability. Regionally, the share of residents with a disability rose from 17% (2017) to 21% (2022), suggesting a similar upward trend in Richmond Hill.

Richmond Hill's average household size (2.9) and diverse mix of detached, townhouse, and apartment dwellings illustrate the city's gradual transition toward higher-density living, particularly within intensification areas along major corridors and centres.

Richmond Hill remains one of the most diverse municipalities in Ontario, with two-thirds identifying as a visible minority, with over half identifying as Chinese (31.9%), West Asian (13.2%), and South Asian (7.6%) communities, with over 120 languages spoken across households; most prominently Mandarin (13.7%) and Cantonese (12.1%). This diversity enriches the city's cultural fabric and reinforces the importance of programming that celebrates multiple heritages and traditions. At the same time, housing affordability pressures remain a defining feature of local life: nearly half of homeowners and over half of tenants spend 30% or more of their income on shelter, while the proportion of renter households has risen to 21.8%. These dynamics underscore the growing need for inclusive, accessible community experiences that strengthen social connection and civic pride.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census; York Region Official Plan (2022); City of Richmond Hill Housing Needs Assessment (2024); Age-Friendly Community Strategy (2023); Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy (2023).

Implications for Events

- Plan for demographic balance: With both aging and family populations, events should include accessible amenities (shade, seating, early scheduling) while maintaining youth- and family-oriented programming.
- Reflect cultural diversity: Multicultural events that engage cultural associations can strengthen participation and inclusivity.
- Enhance geographic and financial accessibility: As affordability pressures rise, maintaining free or low-cost community events that are supported by good transit and walkability will be helpful in supporting equitable participation.
- Use space creatively: Growing density and limited open space reinforce the need for additional infrastructure and flexibility in locations for community events.

How the Strategy was Developed

The Richmond Hill Events Strategy was developed through a comprehensive process that combined research, review of past work, and engagement with residents, community stakeholders, and City staff. The goal was to create a strategy that reflects community needs and desires, aligns with City priorities, and builds on lessons learned from the City's existing event landscape.

The process began with a review of Richmond Hill's existing Festivals and Events Strategy (2014), along with other relevant City strategies, policy documents, and Council and staff insights. This helped establish a clear understanding of the current direction and the conditions shaping event delivery today. Additional research into municipal best practices and evolving trends in events planning ensured that the Strategy reflects both local context and broader industry standards.

Engagement played a central role in shaping the Strategy. Input from online public surveys, staff workshops, interviews with Council members, and discussions with community event producers and local partners offered insights into resident priorities, challenges faced by organizers, and opportunities to strengthen the City's role as facilitator, supporter, and producer of events. Internal staff consultations further helped identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement across the event system.

Combined, this process, grounded in research, past work, and engagement, creates a strong, community-informed foundation for the updated Richmond Hill Events Strategy.

Understanding the Current Landscape

This section provides a snapshot of Richmond Hill's current event landscape. It reviews how the event system has evolved since the 2014 Festivals and Events Strategy, highlights key strengths, challenges, and opportunities identified through engagement and internal review, and considers broader trends and best practices shaping municipal event planning. Together, these insights help frame the context for the updated Events Strategy and set the stage for the directions that follow.

Looking Back: Progress Since the 2014 Festivals and Events Strategy

Richmond Hill's 2014 Festivals and Events Strategy provided an important foundation for the City's current approach to events. At the time, the Strategy focused on strengthening civic celebrations, clarifying roles, improving coordination across departments, and supporting community-led initiatives as Richmond Hill continued to grow and diversify.

Over the past decade, many of the core directions set out in the 2014 Strategy have been advanced and embedded into how events are planned and delivered today. The City has continued to invest in well-loved, high-quality civic events that foster pride, participation, and a strong sense of place. Flagship celebrations such as Canada Day and Concerts in the Park have remained central to community life.

The City has also made meaningful progress in strengthening internal coordination and professionalizing event delivery. The establishment and evolution of the Special Events Advisory Team (SEAT), along with clearer permitting processes and operational standards, has improved safety, consistency, and cross-departmental collaboration. These systems have enabled the City to manage a growing and increasingly complex event portfolio while maintaining a high standard of delivery.

Since 2014, Richmond Hill has also seen the continued growth and visibility of community-initiated events that reflect the city's cultural diversity. Celebrations such as the Persian Food Festival and Uptown Asian Festival have become valued additions to the local event calendar, alongside community initiatives such as charity walks, cultural celebrations, and neighbourhood markets.

At the same time, experience over the past decade has highlighted areas where aspirations from the 2014 Strategy were more challenging to fully realize. Over the past decade, expectations for events have evolved. While many core events have remained consistent year to year, delivering them has become more complex as attendance expectations, operational requirements, and community expectations for accessibility, safety, and programming have increased. These factors have placed additional pressure on staff capacity, available venues, and supporting infrastructure.

The 2014 Strategy also envisioned a gradual shift toward greater community leadership in delivering some events that had historically been organized by the City.

In practice, building the capacity for community groups to assume this role has proven challenging. Efforts to transition certain events to community organizers, such as Ribfest, have not been fully realized. This experience highlights the importance of balancing community empowerment with realistic expectations around volunteer capacity, resources, and organizational support. The updated Strategy therefore considers alternative approaches to strengthening community involvement while ensuring the sustainability of major events.

Importantly, many of the guiding ideas from the 2014 Strategy remain highly relevant today. The emphasis on collaboration, clear governance, community empowerment, and the role of events in building connection and belonging continues to underpin this updated Strategy. What has changed is the context: Richmond Hill is larger, more diverse, and more complex, and expectations around accessibility, sustainability, and accountability have increased.

Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities in Today's Event Landscape

Strengths

Strong Tradition of Events and Celebrations

Richmond Hill has a proud record of hosting award-winning, well-loved events that draw thousands of residents each year, including Canada Day, Ribfest, and Concerts in the Park. These celebrations reflect community spirit and demonstrate the City's ability to deliver safe, high-quality, and family-friendly experiences.

A list of current City events, which provides a snapshot of Richmond Hill's existing event portfolio, is provided in ***Appendix A***.

Dedicated Staff and Volunteers

The City's event services team brings deep knowledge and professionalism to event planning, logistics, and production. Staff collaborate effectively across departments with operational teams and with community stakeholders, supported by countless volunteers who contribute their time and energy.

An Engaged and Supportive Community

Richmond Hill residents are enthusiastic participants in civic life. More than 90% of respondents to the Event Strategy public survey reported attending at least one event each year, and indicated interest in more opportunities to celebrate the city's diversity, food, music, and cultural traditions.

Foundational Processes and Resources

Richmond Hill has key tools already in place to support event planning, including permitting systems, guidelines for organizers, and the Special Events Advisory Team (SEAT). These resources create a solid foundation for streamlining and modernizing event support.

Alignment with City Vision and Values

Events play a direct role in advancing the City's broader goals including supporting the Strategic Plan's vision of "A Vibrant and Inclusive City of Neighbours," and the Recreation and Culture Plan, the DEI Strategy, and the Age-Friendly Community Strategy. Together, these frameworks reinforce that events are about more than entertainment; they are about connection, inclusion, and pride of place.

Challenges

A Complex and Evolving System

As the City has grown, so has the number and variety of events. The current system for defining how events are produced, supported, and evaluated can feel fragmented. Event organizers, both internal and from community organizations, have expressed a need for clearer guidance and more consistent support.

Barriers for New or Small Organizers

The current event application, approval process and permit fees can be challenging for small community groups or first-time organizers. Many residents and groups with creative ideas find the process unfamiliar or resource-intensive, which can discourage participation and innovation.

Limited Infrastructure and Event-Ready Spaces

Richmond Green continues to serve as the City's primary event venue, but its multi-use nature creates operational challenges. The site is used to accommodate large-scale outdoor events alongside regular use of the sports centre, arenas, and outdoor sports facilities. During major events, parking and site access become strained, and conflicts can arise between event operations and other facility users. Beyond Richmond Green, there are relatively few smaller-scale, event-ready spaces distributed across neighbourhoods. Limited access to power, lighting, parking and water also constrains the ability to host events in parks and plazas, particularly during colder months or for emerging community organizers.

Programming Gaps and Seasonal Imbalance

While Richmond Hill offers a variety of well-loved events, they are generally concentrated in the summer months and in a few central locations and the downtown core. Expanding the geographic and seasonal reach of events, through smaller neighbourhood gatherings, mobile programming, and winter-friendly formats, could help ensure all residents can experience events year-round
and closer to home.

Limited Data and Evaluation

While events are widely celebrated, the City currently has limited tools to measure their impact, whether in terms of attendance, diversity, accessibility, or community benefit. Without clear data, it's difficult to demonstrate outcomes (often required for funding and grant opportunities), identify trends, or tell the full story of events' value to the community.

Resource Limitations

Resource limitations have constrained the City's capacity to expand programming, refresh long-standing events, support community partners, and pursue new event opportunities.

Opportunities

A Clearer Categorization for Events

The City has an opportunity to introduce a simple, transparent categorization that explains how events happen in Richmond Hill and how they are funded.

Empowering Community Stakeholders

Creating a simplified process and offering clear pathways for community groups to bring their ideas to life, including training, mentorship, or small grants. A partnership or "community events support" program could nurture new events that reflect the city's diversity and creativity.

Building a More Balanced Calendar

Expanding programming across seasons and neighbourhoods can help ensure more residents can participate year-round. Smaller, local gatherings can strengthen community connection and pride, creating a more engaging annual calendar.

Investing in Spaces and Infrastructure

Enhancing event infrastructure through modular stages, technology, access to washrooms, power and water access, signage, and lighting will make it easier to host events in more places, from parks to urban plazas. This investment will expand possibilities for small and mid-sized gatherings and improve accessibility for all residents.

Improving Coordination and Evaluation

Developing a centralized event calendar and shared performance measures will improve coordination and transparency. Stronger data collection and regular reporting will help demonstrate the social, cultural, and economic value of events to Council and the community.

Expansion and Refreshment of the Inventory of Large Civic Events

The City has been offering the same large events annually for many years now, and there is an opportunity to expand and refresh the roster.

*More detailed consultation feedback is provided in **Appendix B**.*

Event Planning Trends and Best Practices

As part of the background research for the Richmond Hill Events Strategy, a review of event strategies, policies, and program approaches from other municipalities was undertaken. This benchmarking and best practice research helped identify emerging trends in municipal event planning and provided insight into how communities are evolving their event programs to better respond to changing community needs, operational realities, and broader strategic priorities.

While approaches vary between municipalities, several common themes emerged.

Key Trends In Municipal Event Planning

Supporting community-led events

Many municipalities are placing greater emphasis on enabling community organizations, cultural groups, and local partners to deliver events. This often includes providing practical supports such as permitting guidance, access to equipment or spaces, and grant funding programs that help community groups host events that reflect the diversity of the community.

Expanding the range of event spaces

Municipalities are increasingly using a wider variety of public spaces for events, including parks, trails, civic plazas, and neighbourhood-level spaces. This helps bring programming closer to residents and can facilitate smaller-scale, localized events alongside larger city-wide festivals.

Promoting inclusion, accessibility, and cultural representation

Event programming is increasingly designed to reflect the diversity of local communities and to ensure events are accessible and welcoming for all residents. This includes culturally diverse programming, accessible event design, and intentional outreach to underrepresented groups.

Strengthening partnerships and collaboration

Many municipalities are exploring partnership models that involve local businesses, community organizations, cultural groups, and regional partners. These collaborations can expand programming capacity, share resources, and support innovative event concepts.

Advancing sustainability and climate-conscious event operations

Municipalities are setting standards for integrating environmental sustainability into event planning and operations. This can include reducing single-use plastics, improving waste diversion, encouraging active transportation and transit access, supporting sustainable vendor practices, and incorporating climate-conscious operational practices into event planning.

Using data and evaluation to guide programming decisions

Municipalities are increasingly collecting event data such as attendance, participant feedback, economic impact, and demographic participation. This information helps municipalities evaluate event success, guide future programming decisions, and demonstrate the value of events to Council and the community.

Creating year-round programming opportunities

To better serve residents and support local economic activity, municipalities are exploring ways to expand events beyond the traditional summer festival season. This includes winter events, neighbourhood activations, and smaller-scale programming throughout the year.

Vision and Strategic Framework

Vision Statement

Events for Everyone: Connecting People, Places, and Possibilities.

Richmond Hill's events bring the community together through shared experiences that celebrate diversity, creativity, and local pride. They reflect a city where everyone feels welcome to participate, as attendees, organizers, or partners, and where public spaces come alive year-round with opportunities to connect, celebrate, and belong.

Guiding Approach

Richmond Hill's approach to events combines City leadership with community empowerment. The City plays a stewardship role by creating the conditions for events to thrive, while enabling residents, cultural organizations, and private partners to animate spaces in ways that reflect community character and identity.

This balanced approach helps to ensure:

- **Clarity of roles:** defining when and how the City leads, partners, or supports.
- **Alignment with civic values:** embedding inclusion, accessibility, and sustainability.
- **Shared responsibility:** engaging the community as co-creators of civic life.

Pillars for Action

The Events Strategy is built around three interconnected pillars that translate Richmond Hill's vision into action. Together, they outline how the City will empower people, activate city spaces, curate meaningful experiences, and strengthen internal processes to deliver on the vision of Events for Everyone.

Spaces

Activating and enhancing a network of accessible, event-ready places across the city.

Experiences

Curating a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable calendar of events that reflects Richmond Hill's people and identity.

Process

Strengthening coordination, governance, and evaluation to enable efficient, transparent, and innovative event delivery.

Event Types

Events in Richmond Hill generally fall into two broad categories based on how they are initiated, organized, and resourced: City Events and Community Events.

City Events	Community Events
Approved by Council	Initiated, planned, and delivered by community groups, organizations, or residents
Funded through the City's operating budget, with costs partially offset through sponsorship and fundraising	Funded and resourced by the organizing group or organization
Typically take place on City-owned lands	The City provides guidance and coordination support through the Special Events Advisory Team (SEAT)
Planned and delivered by the Cultural Services Section of the Recreation and Culture Department, with support from volunteers	Some events may receive City support through the Community and Cultural Grants Program
Includes the City's current roster of major civic events (e.g., Canada Day, Concerts in the Park, Merry Marketplace (formerly Santa Claus Parade), Moonlight Movies, First Night)	The roster of Community Events changes from year to year depending on community interest and capacity

Note: The City also delivers other events associated with specific programs or initiatives; however, these are considered program-based activities rather than "City Events" for the purposes of this Strategy

Key Directions

Spaces – Activate and Enhance Event-Ready Places Across the City

Goal: Create a flexible and accessible network of parks, civic spaces, and downtown areas that support year-round events and neighbourhood-scale activations.

Key Directions:

1. Develop and maintain a venue readiness and access framework to establish a network of event-ready spaces, including civic, and parks. The framework will map, assess, and prioritize spaces for activation across the city. The venue readiness and access framework can include elements such as space readiness criteria (i.e., electrical access, technology, washroom, parking, accessibility features, capacity), access guidelines (i.e., how spaces are booked, what uses are suitable), and investment priorities.
2. Invest strategically in event infrastructure and amenities, such as modular, mobile or permanent staging, power access, water, washrooms, lighting, storage, placemaking installations, parking, and technology, to ensure spaces are safe, flexible, and adaptable for diverse events and audiences.
3. Integrate event planning into broader placemaking, including downtown and park revitalization efforts and ensure that future capital projects are designed with event planning, including capacity, in mind.

Creating a Network of Event Spaces – Why it Matters

A strong network of event spaces allows celebrations to happen everywhere, from large-scale gatherings at destination and community parks to small neighbourhood activations. By improving infrastructure, forming partnerships, and supporting local creativity, Richmond Hill can ensure every resident has access to spaces that inspire connection and community pride.

Experiences – Create Diverse, Inclusive, and Sustainable Programming

Goal: Deliver a balanced event calendar that reflects Richmond Hill's communities, expands seasonal and geographic reach, and strengthens the City's identity through local events.

Key Directions:

1. Broaden the geographic distribution of programming more evenly across the city, providing residents in all neighbourhoods opportunities to participate in accessible, local events.
2. Expand programming during shoulder and winter seasons to create a more balanced year-round calendar.
3. Expand the inventory of annual City Events by phasing in new events in the short term (next 4 years).
4. Continue integrating sustainability and accessibility in programming decisions, from vendor practices and waste reduction to inclusive design, active transportation, and accessibility.
5. Review existing City events to identify opportunities for improvement, refreshment, or evolution based on community feedback, attendance trends, and evaluation data.

Process – Strengthen Coordination, Evaluation, and Innovation

Goal: Modernize governance, clarify roles, improve support for community organizers, and introduce consistent evaluation to ensure events are delivered efficiently, transparently, and collaboratively.

Key Directions:

1. Enhance the City's Special Event Advisory Team (SEAT) to focus on operational delivery, service coordination, and on-site logistics while improving transparency and responsiveness for organizers. This will include a clearer intake pathway, defined approval process, and periodic reviews after larger events to identify lessons learned and make recommendations for future improvements.
2. Establish a Citywide Events Leadership Group (ELG) to focus on cross-departmental alignment, long-term planning, and innovation. It will guide implementation of the Events Strategy, identify policy gaps, and coordinate resource planning.
3. Improve the City's centralized events calendar and digital coordination tools to improve internal planning and enhance transparency and awareness for residents.
4. Develop a City Event Framework that clarifies how events are coordinated and supported in Richmond Hill, including event criteria, roles and responsibilities, expectations for accessibility and sustainability, safety requirements, and standard evaluation practices. Strengthen Community Events Support Program by establishing a new Community and Cultural Grant Program stream that enables more significant funding for established community events.
5. Introduce standardized event data collection and reporting tools (attendance, satisfaction, inclusion, economic benefit) to build shared evidence base, support continuous improvement of events, and strengthen accountability to Council and the community.
6. Establish an Event By-law requiring community events to be reviewed through SEAT, ensuring consistent oversight, safety standards, and coordination across departments.

City Event Framework – Why It Matters

Clear roles and responsibilities help everyone work better together.

The City Event Framework is a tool that fosters coordination across departments and with community stakeholders, ensuring that event organizers, staff, and Council share a common understanding of how events are supported, approved, and celebrated. By clarifying roles, the Framework strengthens collaboration, creates greater transparency, and helps to build trust, creating a more seamless experience for both organizers and residents.

How the City Coordinates Events

Richmond Hill's events governance model balances operational efficiency with strategic leadership.

- The **Special Events Advisory Team (SEAT)** continues to manage day-to-day event logistics, permitting, and risk management, ensuring that Community-led events are delivered safely and efficiently.
- A new **Events Leadership Group (ELG)** will serve as the City's cross-departmental forum for long-term planning, resource coordination, and innovation. The ELG will meet annually and as needed to review progress on the Events Strategy, guide policy development, and monitor the performance of the event portfolio.

Together, these two functions create a clear structure: SEAT focuses on execution; the ELG focuses on strategic direction. This model strengthens collaboration, improves transparency, and ensures that every event contributes to a unified vision of events for everyone.

Richmond Hill's Event Strategy at a Glance

The Richmond Hill Events Strategy (2026–2036) establishes a long-term framework to guide how events are planned, supported, and delivered across the city.

Spaces

Developing a venue readiness and access framework to identify and prioritize event-ready spaces

Investing strategically in event infrastructure such as stages, power access, lighting, and amenities

Integrating event planning considerations into future park, downtown, and placemaking projects

Experiences

Expanding the geographic distribution of events across neighbourhoods

Increasing programming during shoulder and winter seasons

Expanding and refreshing the roster of City events over time

Continuing to integrate accessibility and sustainability into event planning

Reviewing existing events to identify opportunities for improvement

Process

Enhancing the Special Events Advisory Team (SEAT) to improve coordination and support for organizers

Establishing a cross-departmental Events Leadership Group to guide strategic planning

Improving the City's centralized events calendar and digital coordination tools

Developing a City Event Framework that clarifies roles, expectations, and standards

Strengthening support for community events through grants and resources

Introducing standardized event data collection and reporting tools

Establishing an Event By-law to ensure consistent oversight and coordination

Vision

Events for Everyone: Connecting People, Places, and Possibilities.

Richmond Hill's events bring the community together through shared experiences that celebrate diversity, creativity, and local pride, and ensure everyone feels welcome to participate as attendees, organizers, or partners.

Pillars and Goals

Spaces

Activate and enhance event-ready places across the city

Experiences

Create diverse, inclusive, and sustainable programming

Process

Strengthen coordination, evaluation, and innovation

Implementing the Events Strategy

This Events Strategy establishes a clear vision and strategic framework to guide Richmond Hill's approach to events over the next decade. Its purpose is to provide long-term direction while allowing flexibility in how priorities are advanced over time in response to community needs, emerging opportunities, and available resources.

Implementation will occur through a phased and coordinated approach, supported by future operating and capital planning, policy development, and ongoing collaboration across the organization and with community partners. A separate implementation plan will outline specific initiatives, timelines, roles, responsibilities, and performance measures.

Moving forward, key directions identified in the Strategy will be used to inform decision-making related to event programming, space investment, resourcing, and partnerships. Priorities will be integrated into annual work planning and budget processes to ensure alignment with Council priorities, fiscal responsibility, and the City's broader strategic objectives.

Continued collaboration will be essential to successful implementation. This includes coordination across City departments, sustained engagement with community organizers and partners, and clear communication about roles, expectations, and available supports. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will help the City track progress, assess impact, and adapt its approach as conditions change.

Together, these steps will support a responsive and resilient event system that builds on past success, strengthens community connection, and ensures Richmond Hill's events continue to evolve alongside the community they serve.

Appendix A: Current City Events

The following table provides a snapshot of Richmond Hill's current roster of City-led events based on the 2025–2026 event calendar.

This list is intended to establish a baseline understanding of the City's existing event portfolio, including typical timing, locations, and lead responsibilities. It reflects the events that are currently planned and delivered by the City at the time of preparing this Strategy. As outlined throughout this Strategy, the City's approach to events will continue to evolve over time.

	Event	Typical Timing / Frequency	Venue(s)	Lead Section
1	Canada Day	July 1 (one day)	Richmond Green	Cultural Services
2	Ribfest	July weekend (3 days)	Richmond Green	Cultural Services
3	Concerts in the Park (8)	Weekly June–August	Mill Pond, Lake Wilcox	Cultural Services
4	Merry Marketplace	Weekends Nov. – Dec.	Richmond Green	Cultural Services
5	Moonlight Movies (6)	Aug. to Sept.	Various	Cultural Services
6	Sports Awards Banquet	Sunday morning in May	Oakview Terrace	Cultural Services
7	First Night	New Years Eve	Bayview Hill	Cultural Services
8	Volunteer Achievement Awards	Evening during Volunteer Week (Spring) Biennial	RHCPA	Cultural Services
9	Cultural Summit	Spring, Biennial	RHCPA	Cultural Services
10	ArtWalk	September	RHCPA	Cultural Services

Appendix B: Engagement Summary

Input for the City of Richmond Hill Events Strategy was gathered through multiple engagement activities held between late 2023 and spring 2024. In total, feedback was received from 754 residents through an online survey, approximately 50 City staff who participated in internal workshops, 20 community event producers and partners, and members of Council through interviews and working sessions. Together, these voices helped to create a picture of how Richmond Hill's events are experienced, managed, and valued, and what opportunities exist to strengthen them moving forward.

The following summary captures key themes heard from residents, community groups, City staff, and Council members through workshops, surveys, and interviews.

What's Working (Strengths)

- Well-run, well-attended City events: City events are seen as professional, safe, and a source of civic pride.
- Capable event services team: Staff are recognized for organization, promotion, and operational know-how.
- Range of offerings: The existing mix (i.e., Canada Day, concerts, seasonal events) serves varied audiences.
- Clear safety and operational standards: Event protocols, risk management practices, and SEAT coordination help ensure consistency, compliance, and safe delivery across all events.
- Keen partners: Community groups, service clubs, and businesses are open to collaboration where roles are clear.

Friction Points (Challenges)

- Space constraints: Limited event-ready venues and competition for bookings restrict growth and geographic spread.
- Complex approvals: Organizers cite SEAT/permits as too administrative, especially for small or one-off events.
- Blurred roles: Unclear lines between event types can create confusion about authority, resources, and accountability.
- Limited internal capacity: Staff and resources are stretched, challenging new initiatives, or expanding support for community partners.
- Promotion gaps: Many residents do not hear about events.
- Financial/risk hurdles: Insurance requirements, costs/fees, and limited small-grant options deter some community organizers.

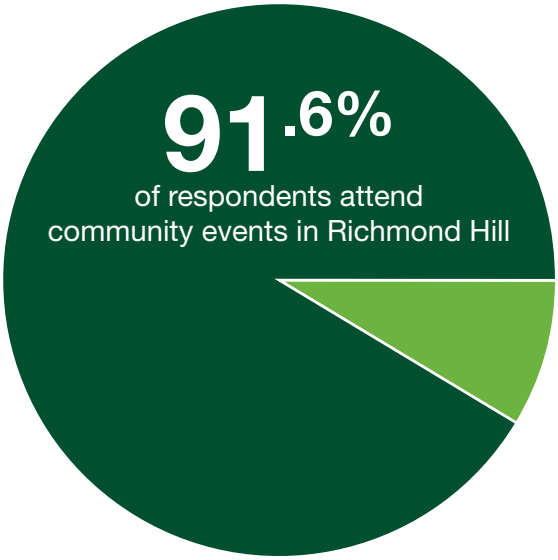
Where We Can Grow (Opportunities)

- Streamlined and scalable approvals: Modernize the SEAT and permitting process by introducing clear pathways that match the size, scope, and risk level of events, making it easier for community groups to host small or low-risk activations.
- Partnerships for space: Establish agreements with private/institutional landowners to expand the event footprint.
- Balanced event portfolio: Focus on a small number of high-impact City-led “anchor” events that define Richmond Hill’s identity, complemented by smaller, mobile or neighbourhood-scale activations across the community.
- Invest in infrastructure: Acquire mobile stages, vendor huts, seating/shade, storage for equipment and improve priority parks for event-readiness.
- Unified communications: Create a single, branded events calendar and coordinated marketing approach.
- Capacity building: Provide templates, training, and micro-grants to help organizers navigate the system.
- Inclusive programming: Expand culturally reflective and youth/teen-focused events, and leverage sites like DDO/Lake Wilcox for programs.

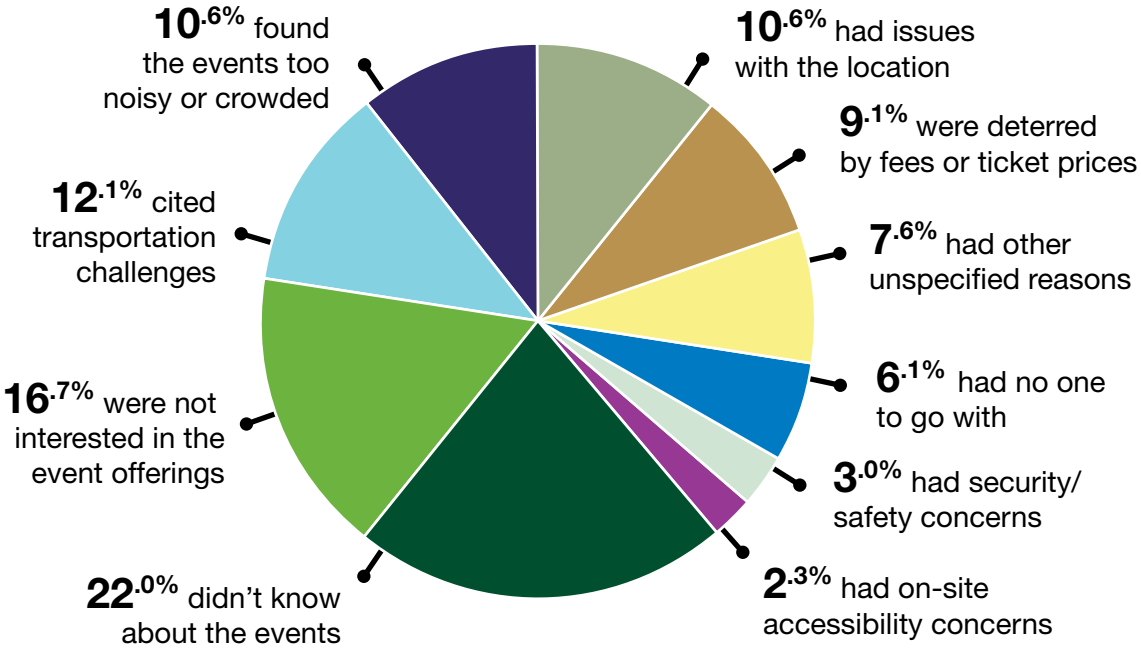
Survey Highlights (n=754)

Participation & Awareness

Attendance

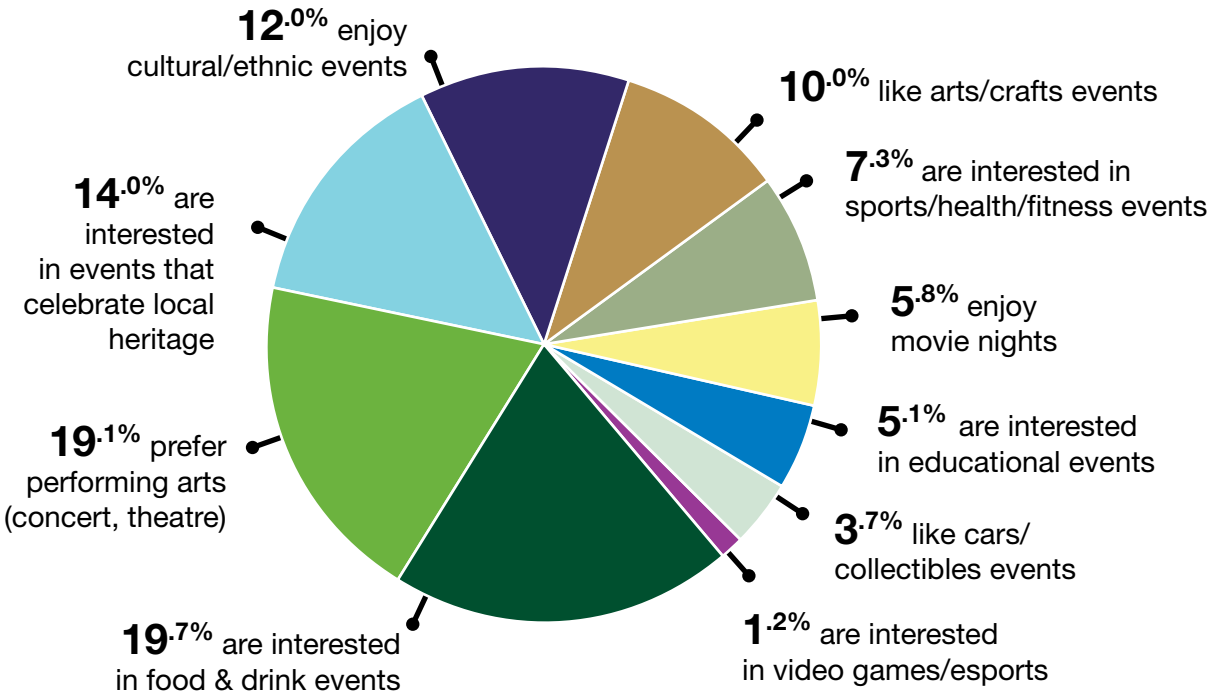


Top reasons for not attending (among non-attendees):

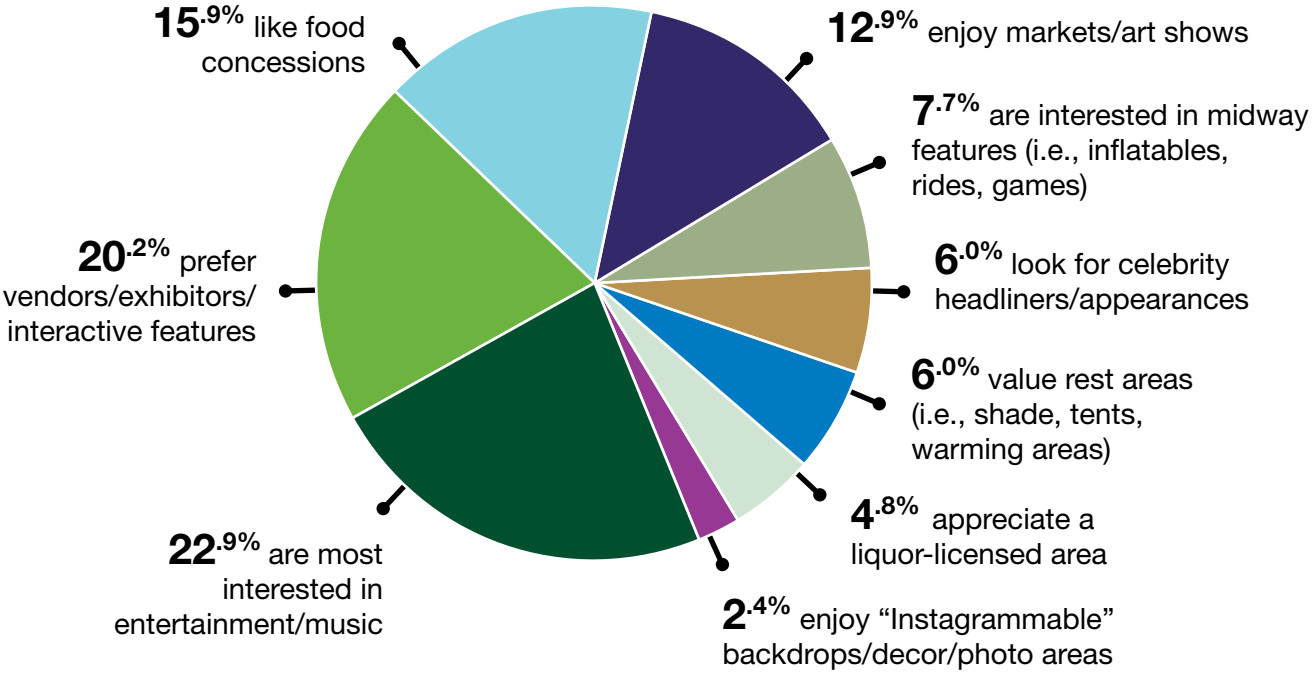


Event Preferences

Top themes (choose up to 3):

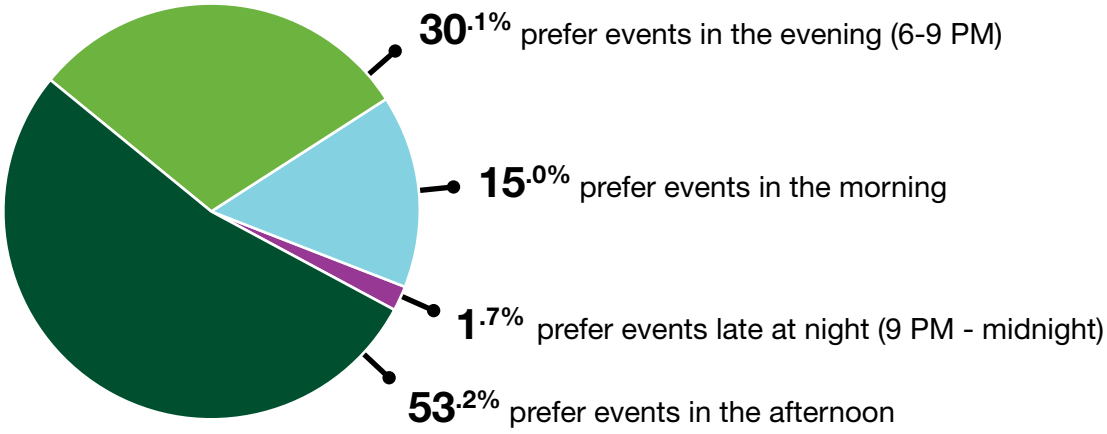


Top features (choose up to 3):

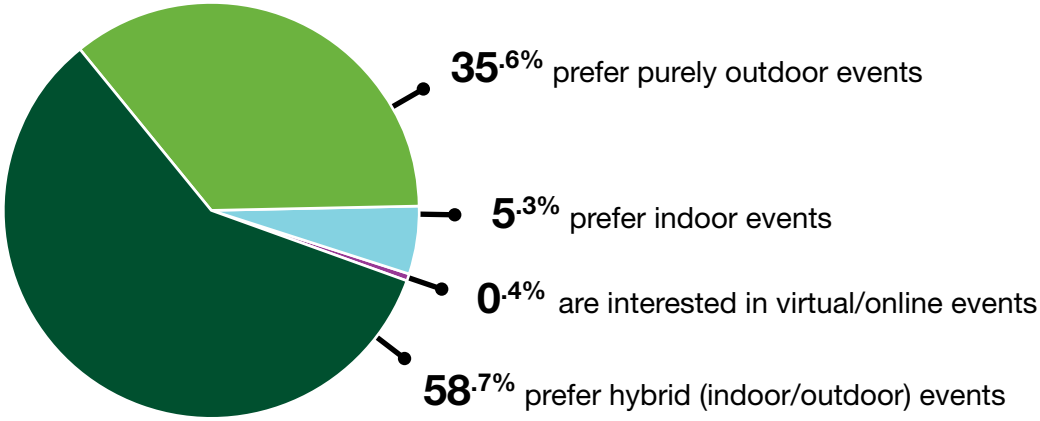


Timing, Location & Spend Preferences

Preferred time:



Preferred setting:



Willingness to spend: