



Hamilton Arts Council
279 King Street East
International Village
Hamilton, ON L8N 1B9
905. 481.3218

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Vanessa Robicheau
Legislative Assistant, Planning Committee
City Clerk's Office
71 Main Street West
Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5

Re: Changes to the Municipal Consent Process for Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario Liquor License Applications and Special Occasion Permits and Proposed New Fees and Charges To Be Added To The User Fee And Charges By-Law

On behalf of the Hamilton Arts Council, I am writing to express a growing concern in our arts community regarding the Notice of the Planning Committee brought forth from the City of Hamilton's Municipal Law Enforcement section. The Notice includes changes to the User Fee and Charges By-law that, if adopted, would strike a prohibitive blow to arts and cultural organizations, especially not-for-profits and registered charities that support their operations through special events that include the sale of alcohol.

While alcohol consumption is widely perceived as a synonymous feature of any cultural event from live performances to exhibition openings, the reality in Hamilton is one in which the current fee for review of a Special Occasion Permit already presents a barrier to many smaller organizations and not-for-profits that would otherwise choose to serve alcohol at their events. At best, the present fees for review allow a select few of these organizations to sell alcohol as a revenue-neutral part of their events, while many more are unable to recoup the SOP fee in addition to alcohol purchases from their bar revenues. As many arts organizations operate on minimal budgets with little allowance for overhead costs, cultural organizers in our community are faced with a difficult choice to either not serve alcohol and suffer lowered attendance at their event, or even more problematically to risk serving without a permit to the detriment of both arts organizations and Municipal Law Enforcement.

The challenges faced by our underfunded arts community, one that in turn has made significant and much publicized contributions to Hamilton's urban renewal, would only be exacerbated by this By-law's proposed increases in fees for review of Special Occasion Permits. Such increases would have the profoundest effect upon those most dependent on special events as a source of revenue – small galleries and burgeoning festivals with the potential to further advance this city's ongoing economic development. When issued to cultural events and the fundraising efforts of registered charities and not-for-profits, a Special Occasion Permit is, in fact, in the public's interest and an important means of supporting the good works of Hamilton's cultural community.

I ask the Planning Committee to keep the needs of Hamilton's vital cultural sector in mind when assessing these proposed fee increases, and to consider in turn whether organizations that achieve such significant public good should face the same prohibitive fee structure as those deemed by Council not to be in the public interest.

Kindest Regards,

Stephanie Vegh
Executive Director