



**TO:** Portland Downtown Marketing & Events Committee, Executive Committee, and Board of Directors

**FROM:** Old Port Festival Ad-Hoc Committee (Chairs: Suzie Rephan and Erik Urbanek. Members: Trish McLellan, Matt Veith, Holly Martzial, Adam MacDonald, and Casey Gilbert)

**SUBJECT:** Old Port Festival Recommendations for 2018 and Long-Term

The Old Port Festival has taken place in downtown Portland for 44 years. This year will herald the event's 45th anniversary and, with it, a re-envisioning of how the festival can better represent the unique and vibrant community that is Portland.

Portland Downtown inherited producing the event – the organization itself only having been established in 1992. The original mission of the Old Port Festival was to bring people downtown to explore, shop, and eat in the Old Port – which, at the time, was in need of foot-traffic and commerce. Over the years, the Old Port Festival has grown to include over 250 food, retail, and arts & crafts vendors; live music on multiple stages; and carnival rides and games for children.

In recent years, members of Portland Downtown's staff and board have been recipients of constituent feedback that the festival may have drifted from its original mission. In an effort to gather data to support or counter this belief, Portland Downtown staff conducted an intercept survey at the 2017 OPF to gauge attendee perceptions. The results of the survey revealed that the majority of attendees felt the festival 'lacked culture,' as well as a spirit or identity that feels true to what Portland is today. As well, at Portland Downtown's board retreat in March of 2017, board members identified the Old Port Festival as an area that was in need of a 'deep dive' and thus, the OPF Ad-Hoc Committee was established. The primary goal of the committee was to identify how the Old Port Festival could better serve downtown property and business owners – and the community at large. Additionally, the committee was charged with the task of examining the goals, mission, and actual impact of the event.

Over the course of three months, the Ad-Hoc Committee had robust discussions, both internally among committee members, and with external stakeholders. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected through:

- Weekly Ad-Hoc Committee meetings (discussion, planning, research);
- Outreach to festival stakeholders including downtown merchants who have seen the festival grow and change over the years;
- Outreach to organizers of other largescale community festivals such as the Common Ground Fair and the Yarmouth Clam Festival;
- The aforementioned attendee survey (implemented at the 2017 Old Port Festival); and
- A survey for downtown business and property owners designed to assess their positive or negative opinions of and experiences with the Old Port Festival.

The most important piece of research was the survey that went out to several hundred business and property owners. There were 86 respondents, and the survey revealed that, overwhelmingly, respondents felt that **the Old Port Festival should be an accurate representation of Portland's local culture and community, but that it is not currently living up to that expectation.**

With the deadline looming for OPF vendor registration for the upcoming 2018 event, the committee felt a sense of urgency to draft recommendations for OPF 2018, which would propel the event in the direction of what the community and downtown stakeholders envision – while also enabling the Ad-Hoc Committee to continue its work in 2018 to develop a more comprehensive list of recommendations. As well, with the FY18 budget already set, the Ad-Hoc Committee was cognizant that larger changes,

which could dramatically affect festival income, should be put on-hold and possibly phased in gradually over the coming years.

What was clear from discussions both internally and with external stakeholders is that **Portland Downtown wants to create an Old Port Festival that both the organization – and the community – can be proud of, and that is representative of Portland – its heritage, culture, and unique and talented people.**



The OPF Ad-Hoc Committee would like to present the following for the consideration of the Marketing & Events Committee, the Executive Committee, and the Board of Directors:

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AT OLD PORT FESTIVAL 2018**

1. Portland Downtown has sole discretion over vendor placement. Veteran vendors whose prime vendor locations have been “grandfathered in” will no longer have “dibs” on those spots.
2. Carnival rides and games will be discontinued within the festival footprint. The Ferris wheel will operate in the DiMillo’s parking lot for 2018.
3. All carnival food vendors will be located in a designated area, dependent on ample access to electricity (potentially on Federal Street from Temple to Pearl).
4. Signage will be placed at street intersections emphasizing the ‘theme’ of the street – for example “Maine Artists”, “Maine Eats”, “Children’s Stage,” etc.
5. Arts & Craft vendor fees will increase from \$100 to \$150.
6. Businesses within the festival footprint may reserve the space in front of their shops at no cost, a reduction of \$99 per participating business. The businesses that sign up must agree to have an active presence at the event with a staffed table, but are not required to open and staff their store. If they choose not to participate, Portland Downtown reserves the right to place a vendor in front of their store. (Note: vendors are placed in the street, and not on sidewalks. Sidewalks remain open during the event.)
7. Businesses within the PD footprint, but not in the festival footprint will continue to receive a discounted vendor fee and will receive preferential vendor placement.
8. Portland Downtown staff and Marketing & Events Committee members will make an intentional effort to recruit local businesses (i.e. food vendors).
9. A “Touch-A-Truck” attraction will be implemented in the Kid’s Area to highlight our local community and Portland Downtown’s programs/services.
10. OPF will continue to be promoted as part of Portland Downtown’s “Summer Kick Off Weekend.” Summer Kick off Weekend includes Square Hop, Shop for a Cause Day, and Walk the Working Waterfront.
11. Event marketing and logistics will continue to promote and enforce the festival as smoke- and tobacco-free during the hours the event is scheduled.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LONG-TERM**

- The OPF Ad-Hoc Committee will reconvene in January 2018 to review community-wide survey results, organize focus groups, and collect additional data and information.
- The OPF Ad-Hoc Committee will work alongside the Growth Committee to ensure that any long-term changes that may affect revenues will be off-set in future budgets via budget adjustments.
- The goal of the OPF Ad-Hoc Committee’s final recommendations will be to make a plan that will ensure that the Old Port Festival is a true reflection of Portland’s local community and culture.
- The committee recognizes that the evolution of this event may require annual adjustments that include, but are not limited to: festival footprint, participants, vendor jurying, fee structure, local discounts, etc.