

Committee of the Whole Meeting
City Hall
1707 St Johns Avenue,
Highland Park, IL 60035
November 10, 2025
5:30 PM
Agenda

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I. Call to Order

II. Approval of Minutes

- A. Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole Held on October 20, 2025

III. Scheduled Business

- A. 2026 City-Sponsored Events
- B. Review Spring Clean-Up Program

IV. Other Matters

V. Closed Session

VI. Adjournment

Staff Report



Meeting Date: November 10, 2025

Staff Contact: Ashley Palbitska, Assistant to the City Manager/Deputy City Clerk

Department: City Manager's Office

Title: Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole Held on October 20, 2025

Recommendation:

For the City Council's approval are the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole held on September 25, 2025.

Attachments:

1. MIN COTW 10-20-2025

Minutes of a of a Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole of the City of Highland Park

Meeting Date: October 20, 2025
Meeting Location: City Hall - 1707 St Johns Avenue, Highland Park, IL 60035

I. Call to Order

At 5:30 PM, Presiding Officer Blumberg called the meeting to order and asked for a roll call:

II. Roll Call

Present: Presiding Officer Blumberg, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia (Remote), Lidawer (Remote)

Absent: Mayor Rotering

Staff Present: City Manager Neukirch, Director of Public Works Bannon, Community Development Director Fontane, Assistant City Manager Jason, Police Chief Jogmen, Finance Director McCaulou, Fire Chief Schrage, Commander Curran, Sergeant Soldano, Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska

Also Present: Corporation Counsel Elrod

All Councilmembers present at City Hall were in consensus to allow Councilmembers Tapia and Lidawer to attend the meeting remotely.

III. Approval of Minutes

A. Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole on October 6, 2025

Councilmember Center moved to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole on October 6, 2025. Councilmember Bruckman seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the Presiding Officer Blumberg declared the motion Passed (6 - 0).

MOVER:	Councilmember Center
SECONDER:	Councilmember Bruckman
AYES:	Presiding Officer Blumberg, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer
NAYS:	None
ABSENT:	Mayor Rotering

B. Approval of the Minutes of the Closed Session of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole Held on October 6, 2025

Councilmember Bruckman moved to approve the Minutes of the Closed Session of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole Held on October 6, 2025. Councilmember Center seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, Presiding Officer Blumberg declared the motion Passed (6 - 0).

MOVER:	Councilmember Bruckman
SECONDER:	Councilmember Center
AYES:	Presiding Officer Blumberg, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer
NAYS:	None
ABSENT:	Mayor Rotering

IV. Scheduled Business

A. E-bikes and E-Scooter Regulation Review

City Manager Neukirch provided an introduction to the conversation as it relates to e-bikes and e-scooters regulation review.

Sergeant Soldano, Chief Jogmen, Corporation Counsel Elrod, and City Manager Neukirch presented information on e-bikes and e-scooters. They presented information regarding amendments to Section 71.360 of the City Code, including a number of recommendations for policy consideration.

The Council, Corporation Counsel Elrod and staff discussed:

- If the operator of a pedal assist bike needs to pedal up to the maximum speed or if they can simply turn on the pedal assist feature; the increase of speed is gradual once engaged
- How these devices have precipitated the influx of accidents around Highland Park, the State and the Country
- Perceived reactions to the regulations that were implemented by Highland Park and how they may have been prohibitive in the beginning
- Benefits and complications of regulating the speed of these devices; hard to enforce speed with larger groups
- Concerns with allowing devices on bike trails and paths due to the smaller space and active pedestrians in the area
- Appreciate the work completed by the Police Department and collection of data that was provided in the presentation
- Citations that were issued were to those individuals with devices that would have exceeded 750 watts
- Prohibitions currently within the State statute
- Importance of updating and providing education as it relates to these types of devices and allowing individuals to come into compliance
- Most interactions between individuals and Police Officers were with those that were operating e-motos
- Enforcement challenges related to the difficulty with distinguishing between Class 1, 2, or 3 e-bikes through simple observation
- Signage that has already been implemented and will be updated if there are any changes requested to amend the Code, including increasing the “Share the Road” signage
- Enforcement should be more punitive in regards to e-moto devices; fine should be \$1,000 instead of \$100
- The juvenile age group presents a majority of the issues
- Ease or difficulties of modifying e-bikes

- Those operating these types of devices should know and understand the rules of the road; should continue to require a driver's license
- Highlighted prohibitions within neighboring communities
- Highland Park is a leader when it comes to being a walking and biking community
- Interest in the breakdown of residents and non-residents in regards to traffic stops
- Continued work with sister governments and community partners on educating the community and amplifying regulations
- Staff does not recommend regulating each class separately
- While establishing a speed limit is possible, it may not be affective and it will be difficult to enforce
- The City has used all communication modalities when the regulations were enacted and will continue to share regulations requesting that partners amplify the information, such as the park district, school districts, library and others.
- The importance of work done by the School Resource Officer
- The impact of staff's recommendations would allow for enforcement to become easier, along with being able to adjudicate violations more clearly
- The importance of continuing to review this topic as actions continue to change within other municipalities and at the State level

City Manager Neukirch reviewed direction provided by the Council. She noted that a majority of the Council support regulating Class 1, 2, and 3 together; a majority of the Council supports waiving the driver's license requirement; and a majority of the Council does not support speed limit restrictions. She voiced that there is a split decision as it relates to allowing or not allowing these devices on a bike trail or pathway. She explained that an ordinance will be drafted to reflect the amendments and information for the next available meeting, and information will be shared with the Mayor for her feedback.

At 7:02 PM, Presiding Officer Blumberg recessed the Committee of the Whole meeting.

At 8:05 PM, Presiding Officer Blumberg reconvened the Committee of the Whole meeting.

Present: Presiding Officer Blumberg, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia (Remote), Lidawer (Remote)

Absent: Mayor Rotering

Staff Present: City Manager Neukirch, Community Development Director Fontane, Assistant City Manager Jason, Police Chief Jogmen, Commander Curran, Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska

Also Present: Corporation Counsel Elrod

B. Discussion of Bicycle Parking and Connectivity Policy

Community Development Director Fontane presented information on bicycle parking and connectivity policy considerations and feedback was requested.

The Council and staff discussed:

- The presentation provided information that represented the likeness of a

Plan and Design Commission (“PDC”) agenda and a clear recap of the development that has taken place within the City

- How each development is different and the message from the Council, staff and the community has been received by the development companies
- Need to review the list of public benefits and possibly update the list to include the importance of bicycle parking and connectivity within the community

A majority of the Council were in favor of keeping the current policies, highlighting bike access and parking on the list of public benefits, and not making any further changes at this time.

City Manager Neukirch noted that the public benefit list will be reviewed and updated accordingly and then shared with the Council

V. Adjournment

Councilmember Bruckman moved to adjourn the Committee of the Whole meeting. Councilmember Ross seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, Presiding Officer Blumberg declared the motion passed unanimously.

The Committee of the Whole adjourned its meeting at 8:28 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley Palbitska
Assistant to the City Manager/Deputy City Clerk

Staff Report



Meeting Date: November 10, 2025

Staff Contact: Amanda Bennett, Communications Manager
Diane Larson, Marketing Coordinator
Erin Jason, Assistant City Manager

Department: City Manager's Office

Title: 2026 City-Sponsored Events
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Recommendation:

At the Committee of the Whole meeting on September 25, 2025, the City Council approved the event budgets outlined within the proposed FY2026 budget document. Due to time constraints, consideration of City contributions for privately run events not already identified in the FY2026 budget was postponed. Follow-up information and recommendations will be presented as follows for City Council consideration.

Additional Event information for Discussion:

- Diverse Line-ups, Arts Integration, Intergenerational Programming, Infrastructure Enhancements.
- Consideration of bringing back the World Music Fest event last held in 2023. No dollars are allocated for this event in the proposed FY2026 budget.
- Consideration of bringing back Oktoberfest as a City event to be held in mid-September. Presently, \$20,000 is allocated in the proposed 2026 budget to support the private production of Oktoberfest by a third party.

Policy Consideration:

Additional Information Regarding 2025 Events

Council requested additional information regarding the 2025 slate of events:

- Attendance at Oktoberfest (September 20, 2025): 2K visits with an average dwell time of 112 minutes over the course of a 12-hour event (max one-hour attendance at approx. 650)
- Attendance at Stews & Brews (October 11, 2025): 1.2 K visits with an average dwell time of 102 minutes over the course of a 5-hour event (max one-hour attendance at

approx. 850)

While overall attendance for Stews & Brews remains consistent relative to 2024, the average dwell time increased by 60%. Staff attribute this increase to two primary drivers: scheduling the events for mid-October as opposed to early November (a 10-degree difference in temperature), and changing the entertainment lineup from all blues music to acts with broader multi-generational appeal. Feedback from attendees and vendors indicates that the Cubs' postseason game likely impacted overall attendance as guests who may have otherwise attended the event elected to watch the game.

Updates for Approach for the Proposed 2026 Slate of Events

Diverse Music Lineups

Staff continue to approach planning with a view towards ensuring that performances represent a diverse spectrum across cultures and musical genres, location (national headliners vs. local performers) and multi-generational appeal. In 2025, headlining acts featured a wide range of genres, included, but were not limited to the following:

Event	Performer	Genre
Taste of HP (note: Council requested theme of “Decades” for the Taste)	Boy Band Review – Requested “Fuego!” performance set	‘90s Latin wave (cover band playing hits of Menudo, Enrique Iglesias, and Ricky Martin)
Taste of HP	Too Hype Crew	‘80s & ‘90s hip hop tribute vocalists and dancers
Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton	Urban Roots Band	Reggae
Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton	Guitarra Azul	Flamenco
Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton	Radio Free Honduras	Latin rock
Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton	Dave Specter	Chicago blues

Other acts were chosen for broad multi-generational appeal, including:

Event	Performer	Genre
Taste of HP	Abமானία	'70s disco pop
Taste of HP	Queenflash	'70s/'80s stadium rock
Downtown Concerts at Port	Kaleidoscope Eyes	Beatles tribute

Clinton		
Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton	Guy King	Vocal jazz
Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton	Mary Macaroni, Istvan & His Imaginary Band, Ben Tatar & the Tatar Tots	Children's entertainers
Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton	Mary Macaroni, Istvan & His Imaginary Band, Ben Tatar & the Tatar Tots	Children's entertainers
Stews & Brews	88 Keys	Dueling Pianos
Stews & Brews	Anchors Away	Yacht rock

Other acts highlighted local performers, including Uptown Music Theater, Highland Park Players, and Steve Kessler & the Saturday June Band.

In 2026, staff will continue to seek out high-quality performers representing a diverse array of genres with broad appeal, in line with goals to engage the community and attract a regional audience to events in Highland Park. Staff will also take steps to expand performance opportunities for local artists, including inviting Bitter Jester Music Festival to curate an hour of music at the Taste of Highland Park.

World Music Fest

Based on vendor and attendee feedback from the 2023 World Music Fest event, staff does not recommend production of a standalone World Music Fest in 2026. In 2023, World Music Fest attracted approximately 2.9K visits to the event and the immediate surrounding area, an average of 290 hourly visitors over the course of a 10-hour event. Feedback from 2023 indicated that guests felt the nature of brief sets throughout a day-long event did not do justice to each performer's repertoire and lacked cohesion; this is supported by Placer.ai data indicating dwell time at 55 minutes. When reviewed in totality, staff and the event management team believe that while the theme of world music is very attractive to community members, a one-day festival is not the most effective or fiscally responsible approach.

Based on feedback from Council and participating businesses and community members during the World Music Fest, staff propose planning the 2026 Downtown Concert Series as a summer-long festival of world music and food. The weekly Downtown Concert Series offers the opportunity to engage these talented artists for a longer set (2 hrs/ea) and invite a Highland Park restaurant featuring that cuisine to serve as a vendor for the event. This approach would give this diverse mix of entertainers an opportunity to truly shine. Additionally, staff believe that an overarching theme for the concert series may be the missing piece needed to spark a more significant increase in weekly attendance than what was observed in 2025 relative to 2024.

Arts Integration

Local partners, such as The Art Center, the Highland Park Public Library, and the Park District of Highland Park will once again be invited to participate as part of additional family-friendly programming at all events, building on positive feedback from the 2025 concert season.

Additionally, in line with the City’s work to nurture Highland Park’s reputation as an arts destination, the 2026 Taste of Highland Park will serve as the showcase for a seasonal, outdoor display of winning photography from the Capture the Heart of Highland Park photography contest. The Cultural Arts Advisory Group is strongly supportive of this plan, as the group felt that finding a high-profile way to incorporate other art forms into an already well-attended event was likely to be successful in raising awareness about initiatives such as the photography contest and public art collection. As an additional incentive to photographers, in 2026 the contest will include a new category, Food Photography, that will feature dishes from Highland Park restaurants. The City will use the winning and honorable mention photographs in this category as part of Enjoy Highland Park marketing ahead of the Taste.

Intergenerational Programming

Council requested staff evaluate opportunities to enhance intergenerational programming at the Taste of Highland Park based on feedback from attendees and vendors that activities, whether guided or passive, promote additional engagement from families and encourage them to spend longer at events. To that end, staff recommends extending Taste hours on Saturday, beginning at 3:00 PM. Family-focused entertainment such as live performers, strolling characters, balloonists, jugglers, and face painters, and programming in the square would be featured from 3:00 to 5:00 PM. This would also be an opportunity to engage The Art Center, the Park District, and the Library to provide activities in the plaza. Vendors would have the opportunity to open early if they wish; all vendors would be required to open at 5:00 PM as always. As indicated above, the Bitter Jester Music Festival would be invited to program the transitional hour between 5-6 PM before the headlining acts take the stage.

Children’s entertainers will also be incorporated into Stews & Brews. Based on feedback from attendees and the event management team, the City will be investing in additional fire pits and exploring the possibility of adding s’mores stations as a child-friendly alternative to the more adult-oriented menus at Stews & Brews. Several Highland Park restaurants did this to great success in other years.

Infrastructure Enhancements

Based on feedback from Council, City staff have explored opportunities to enhance the visual appeal of the event footprint and make the space more comfortable for guests by incorporating the following infrastructure enhancements into the 2026 season:

- A festival tent at the Taste of Highland Park, following positive feedback from Stews & Brews
- Incorporation of misters and additional shade structures throughout the event footprint as allowable by budget and space constraints

- Potential reconfiguration at Port Clinton Square to maximize shaded seating
- Potential to plan for licensing and setting up a livestream of significant sporting events that might otherwise undercut attendance (this occurred in 2025 due to the Cubs' playoff game on the same night as Stews & Brews; vendors reported that attendees would have appreciated the opportunity to watch the game at the event)

The City will also continue investing in safety equipment that can be used throughout the season at various events.

Capital investment of the plaza will be considered as part of a 2026 planning project which will also align with the Place of Remembrance planning. The prominent, primary place of remembrance will be located at the Rose Garden, adjacent to City Hall. A subtle, secondary place of remembrance was approved to be located at Port Clinton Plaza. Design of the two locations is planned in 2026.

Considerations Pertaining to Oktoberfest

In 2025, Life Rhythms, Inc. and Steep Ravine Brewing Company partnered to host Highland Park's 4th Annual Oktoberfest events, sponsored by a \$15,000 contribution by the City to fund marketing, entertainment, and activity costs. Funding for sponsorship in 2025 was made available from a reallocation of funds from the Exterior Grant program. Should the presenting agencies wish to continue the event in 2026, staff has allocated \$20,000 in funding towards sponsorship in the FY2026 draft budget to assist in covering needed infrastructure costs.

In response to the producing businesses and Council, staff has explored the possibility of bringing the event in-house. If that is the preferred approach, staff recommend continuing to host the event in the Ravinia District, given prior feedback about a desire for additional fall programming in the RBD, existing infrastructure, and potential for additional funding to be provided by the Special Service Area towards the event. The space at Jens Jensen Park and along Dean Ave. is particularly well-suited to a variety of family-friendly Oktoberfest activities and more food vendors that would be possible in Downtown Highland Park without the closure of Central Ave. Hosting the event in the Ravinia District also offers the most cost-effective approach, particularly as the layout of Jens Jensen Park does not require manned Public Works vehicles and it entails less staff impacts. Additionally, fewer restrooms would need to be brought in, as the restrooms for Food Truck Thursdays would act as supplemental. There is already power access at Jens Jensen Park, eliminating the need to bring in generators, further reducing infrastructure related costs.

If Council's preference is to transition this event to Downtown Highland Park, to remain within the budget above, staff recommend aligning Oktoberfest with a Downtown Concert night featuring extended hours until 10 PM, similar to the Scarecrow Grand Finale in 2025. However, as noted above, without closing Central Ave. there would not be sufficient space to support more than approximately five vendors, and limited ability for vendors to cook on-site. Additional power would need to be brought in, as well as restrooms. Non-musical programming, such as acrobats, hammerschlagen, high striker, and axe throwing would also be limited due to space

constraints.

Closing Central Ave. for another event is not recommended as this is disruptive to businesses throughout the area and requires significant in-kind resources from the City, including additional police presence/private security and increased requirements for Public Works staff before, during, and after the event. The costs to produce Oktoberfest along a closed Central Avenue are also significantly higher: increased power needs, additional restrooms, increased security, hydraulic stage with ADA-accessible ramp, increased backline and lighting, additional marketing, etc.

Staff has reviewed the costs associated with hosting Oktoberfest in the RBD as well as Downtown. Projected costs* are as follows:

Location	Entertainment & Decor	Marketing	Security	Infrastructure	Total
Ravinia District: Jens Jensen Park	\$12,900	\$10,800	\$3,000	\$12,500	\$39,200
Downtown HP: Downtown Concert	\$12,900	\$10,800	\$3,000	\$17,000	\$43,700
Downtown HP: Closure of Central Ave.	\$24,000	\$12,500	\$4,100	\$33,000	\$73,600

For reference, the cost of 2024’s Oktoberfest at The Lot was \$45,696. Please note, infrastructure (including restrooms) was stored on-site and did not require transport, additional power was not needed, and the City was able to re-use existing marketing materials such as banners and signboards.

**Costs do not include event management fees or staff costs related to City Manager's Office, Police, Fire, Public Works or Community Development.*

Since the September 25 meeting, staff received feedback from both agencies that produced the 2025 Oktoberfest event. At this time, they have both expressed that they are not interested in pursuing funding to run the event together in 2026. That said, both are eager to see Oktoberfest continue as a City-run event in future years.

Staff requests that should Council wish to pursue Oktoberfest as a City-run event in 2026, an additional \$20,000 would be necessary for this event to be held in the Ravinia Business District. As part of the planning, staff would evaluate all 2025 components for consideration including the BBQ contest.

For reference, the staff report for the September 25, 2025 Committee of the Whole is attached.

Core Priorities:

Economic Development

City-sponsored events provide opportunities to showcase Highland Park businesses to a regional audience, encouraging them to experience all that the City has to offer, and then return after the event to shop and dine.

Vibrancy

City-sponsored events enhance the quality of life for residents and businesses by building community and neighborly bonds, creating a sense of place that is uniquely Highland Park, and providing an opportunity to celebrate Highland Park's cultural and culinary best.

Attachments:

1. September 25 COTW Staff Report



Request for Council Action

Referred to Council: September 25, 2025
Subject: 2026 City Special Events
Staff Contact: Amanda Bennett, Communications Manager
Erin Jason, Assistant City Manager
Department: City Council

TITLE: 2026 City Special Events

Recommendation/Purpose:

A presentation will be provided pertaining to the City's 2025 Special Events, proposed City hosted 2026 Special Events, and privately run community events seeking financial sponsorship from the City. Council feedback is requested. The proposed FY 2026 budget relating to City events is comparable to FY 2025 revenue and expenses. The proposed budget has been submitted to the Mayor & City Council and currently in policy review.

The following major City-presented special events are proposed as part of this discussion (dates TBD):

- Taste of Highland Park (Central Avenue at Port Clinton Square); two days
- Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton Weekly Series (Port Clinton Square); ten concerts
- Vintage Car Show (North St. Johns Lot); one day
- Stews & Brews (Central Avenue at Port Clinton Square); one day

These events would be complemented by the following major events organized by third parties with financial or in kind sponsorship by the City:

- Bitter Jester Music Festival (Port Clinton Square); four small-scale concerts and one Grand Finale Concert in June
- Port Clinton Art Festival (Downtown Highland Park); two day festival in August
- Oktoberfest (Ravinia District); one day in September
- Randolph St. Market Highland Park Shindig; two day indoor fall event

Council feedback is requested if there is an interest to also provide in-kind services and to waive fees for Arts on Sheridan which is also a private event, hosted by the same event organizer as the Port Clinton Art Festival.

Background

The City's calendar of events in Downtown Highland Park are at the core of the City's event season. Focused on creating a sense of place, promoting engagement and visibility of Highland Park businesses, and drawing regional visitors to Highland Park's core commercial district, the City's annual event calendar includes a variety of events to attract various audiences. All events include a family-friendly component, in keeping with the City's goal of enhancing quality of life for families and Highland Parkers of all ages.

Based on available Placer.ai data, the City's events consistently attract an audience that meets the City's goal of fostering economic development by encouraging regional tourism. As Highland Park's local business community cannot be sustained by local spending alone, it is important that the City works to increase economic development through marketing of our community as a regional destination for shopping and dining. In alignment with the City's core priorities, events create a sense of community for residents (vibrancy) and provide opportunities for local businesses to promote themselves to new customers beyond Highland Park (economic development).

During the 2024 event season, more than 25,000 visitors came to Highland Park, of which 60% were from other communities. These tourists were exposed to the plethora of dining, retail, and service experiences Highland Park has to offer. Based on data from Placer.ai, 15,946 of those visitors were from outside of Highland Park, an increase of 14.93% from 2023 (13,566 visitors). After Stews & Brews on October 11, City staff will be able to provide comparative statistics for 2025.

Note: Placer.ai is a subscription-based location analytics tool the City uses to analyze visitor demographics and journeys.

2025 Downtown Events

In 2025, the City shifted the location of Downtown Highland Park events to Central Avenue at Port Clinton Square. While this resulted in additional budgeted costs as discussed during the 2025 budget planning process, the shift was well-received by community members and most participating businesses. As previously shared, the stage and site plan must meet both ADA requirements and also provide at least a 20' clear lane for emergency service access. This limits size of stage, placement of stage and vendor tents, as well as other on street infrastructure for events. Staff also works to highlight and not block existing brick and mortar businesses within the event footprint whenever possible.

- **Taste of Highland Park**

The Taste of Highland Park is the City's ultimate outdoor entertainment and dining experience, where guests sample over a dozen local premier food and beverage vendors and get a taste of what sets Highland Park apart on the North Shore. Diverse flavors and dishes include Italian, Mexican, Indian, American, European, Asian, and more, as well as sweet treats, wine, beer, cocktails, and more. The theme for the 2025 Taste of HP incorporated former City event Decades and attendees relived favorite hits from the 60s through the early 2000s across multiple genres: hip hop, Latin, disco, rock, and more. In addition, globally-recognized DJ Madrid returned as the City's resident

DJ. The entertainment also featured performances from Uptown Music Theater and Highland Park Players.

Participating restaurants included BWB Shakes, Cafe Dacha, Central Cafe (Saturday), DeNucci's, Fluffy Bunny (Friday), Indus Progressive Indian, Judy's Pizza, Lynfred Winery, Michael's Grill & Salad Bar, Mil Colibris Bakery + Cafe, Ordo, Steep Ravine Brewing Company, Tamales, and Yana's Speakeasy.

Attendance Trend

2025 saw an increase of about 8% attendance in the event footprint as compared to 2024; 3,570 attendees in 2025 vs. 3,310 attendees in 2024. The inclement weather on Saturday more than likely limited attendance on that day. The 2025 Friday attendance was the best single day showing of the Taste of Highland Park since its separation from Port Clinton Art Festival.

Because the goal of the Taste of Highland Park, the City's only two-day event this year, is to attract residents and visitors to explore the Central Business District as a whole and move outside the event footprint, attendance analysis also includes overall visitors to the CBD. While overall attendance data indicates an approximately 5% decrease in attendance from 2024, this was driven by a 12% decline in foot traffic on the east side of the train tracks from the 2024 high which accounts for 60% of the overall attendance decrease. This was to be expected given the footprint of the street closure. Businesses on the east side of the tracks that had previously reported satisfactory in-restaurant foot traffic on event days reported that foot traffic at their restaurants in 2025.

Feedback

The City conducted an online survey of participating vendors and collected anecdotal reports from Ripple Public Relations staff and City staff.

Overall, impressions from most participating businesses and attendees indicated appreciation for the new venue along Central Avenue. However, some vendors in the plaza reported lower foot traffic due to their tent placement and recommended relocating as many vendors as possible to Central Avenue, leaving the square for guests to enjoy. Additionally, other attendees reported disappointment that the performers were not visible from Port Clinton Square.

Vendors reported good sales, either selling out/minimal leftovers or breaking even. One vendor suggested planning kids' activities to encourage families to spend more time at the event, or reconfiguring the layout to include additional vendors that would add more value to attendees beyond food and music.

One vendor suggested finding ways to increase participation from Highland Park restaurants, such as limiting menus to the small "taste" to encourage visitors to purchase smaller bites from more vendors and spotlight the breadth of Highland Park's restaurant scene.

Overall, attendees enjoyed the performances, particularly the Friday night headliners, Too Hype Crew. The featured performances from Uptown Music Theater and Highland Park Players attracted guests during the typically slow 5 – 6 PM hour.

Some attendees shared feedback that the entertainment was less of a draw than the 2024 lineup, which featured well-known, nationally touring headliners, and shared that the City should maintain the same caliber of performers in future years, especially in light of other municipal-sponsored festivals which attract a broad audience, including the Winnetka Music Festival and Evanston Folk Fest.

In addition to higher performance fees, performers such as the 2024 headliners Nine Days and Spin Doctors require larger stage infrastructure that cannot be accommodated within the same event footprint while also meeting required emergency services and ADA thresholds.

Several attendees and vendors recommended avoiding conflicts with the Winnetka Music Festival, which fell on the same weekend, and extending the Saturday event time to a full day, recommending a DJ and kids activities during the daytime on Saturday.

- **Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton**

In 2025, the City hosted an extended season featuring 10 Friday evening concerts with performances from a variety of artists and Highland Park performing arts groups, on-site food and beverage vendors, and an exciting extended finale scheduled for September 26, 2025 with a festive scarecrow trail through Downtown Highland Park. The range of genres included folk, reggae, blues, soul, classic rock, Latin, and more. Each week, at least two Highland Park businesses were able to reserve a vendor spot in the plaza, including Steep Ravine Brewing Company, Yana's Speakeasy, Central Café, and Fluffy Bunny. Due to staffing considerations, not all businesses were able to participate on the weeks they had reserved.

Attendance Trend

While the footprint of the Port Clinton Concert Series is too small to be accurately reported via Placer.ai, staff estimate that attendance at the weekly concerts held steady from 2024, with the concerts attracting ~150 guests each week.

In 2024, Scarecrow Fest was planned as a full-day event focused on the scarecrow trail through participating businesses (all day), with live music, on-site food vendors, and activities for kids in the afternoon/evening. The total foot traffic through the Central Business District on that day was 13,600; an average Saturday sees approximately 7,500 people downtown. While this year's event will be held on a Friday afternoon, staff anticipate increased attendance of approximately 500 during the four-hour expanded concert on September 26.

- **Vintage Car Show**

Guests at the fourth annual Vintage Car Show experienced the elegance, craftsmanship, and the nostalgia of a bygone era. Working on behalf of the City and contracted event manager Ripple, resident Joe Peddle coordinated a fabulous array of vintage vehicles. Entertainment was provided thru a live radio broadcast from Free Country 102.3 and music from DJ Russ Fritz. Kid-friendly activities included an arts & craft activity with assistance from The Art Center. Participating Highland Park restaurants were Steep Ravine Brewing Company, BWB Shakes, Michael's Grill & Salad Bar, Ordo, and Fluffy Bunny.

Attendance Trend

Attendance at the Vintage Car Show held steady from 2023 & 2024, with approximately 1.1K visitors as determined by Placer.ai.

- **Stews & Brews**

Planned for Saturday, October 11, 2025, Stews & Brews has become a Highland Park tradition, with participating restaurants creating special menu items to participate in the best stew or brew contest. This cozy event wraps up the City's Downtown HP events season with savory stews, delicious brews, and live music. The entertainment lineup in 2025 will feature 88 Keys (dueling pianos) and yacht rock headliners Anchors Away. 11 Highland Park restaurants are slated to participate.

Attendance Trend

The 2024 event attracted 1.2K visitors in 2024; weather permitting, City staff anticipate an increase in 2025 consistent with the Taste of Highland Park trend.

- **Holiday Lighting**

Based on feedback from businesses, community members, and staff, planning is underway for a reimagined holiday light celebration on November 22, 2025. Staff anticipates inclusion of local performing arts groups, festive characters, a visit from Santa, and enhanced décor, as well as local business participation.

2026 Downtown Events

In 2026, staff proposes two large-scale “bookend” events, a concert series at Port Clinton Square from July through September, and the return of the Vintage Car Show in August. The proposed FY 2026 budget incorporates funding for events at the same level as 2025, supporting the return of the following events:

- Taste of Highland Park (Central Avenue at Port Clinton Square); two days
- Downtown Concerts at Port Clinton Weekly Series (Port Clinton Square); ten concerts
- Vintage Car Show (North St. Johns Lot); one day
- Stews & Brews (Central Avenue at Port Clinton Square); one day
- Holiday Lighting (Port Clinton Square); one day

In celebration of national America 250 celebrations in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the event management team will explore opportunities to incorporate related themes into City-sponsored events where appropriate. Additionally, staff will take feedback from vendors and participants regarding event layout into consideration as planning gets underway, to maximize visibility of participating businesses and optimize the flow for guests wanting to enjoy the entertainment.

Draft FY2026 Budget Summary (these expenditures are part of budget line 1110107.62100)

Event Management & Entertainment – (3) Core Downtown Events	\$245,000
Event Management & Entertainment – Port Clinton Concerts	\$20,000
Event Management & Entertainment – Holiday Lighting	\$15,000
Security & Staffing	\$40,000
CBD Event Infrastructure	\$131,000
Total Anticipated Expenditures	\$451,000

Anticipated Revenue

Sponsorships (less commission)	\$30,000
Vendor fees	\$7,000
Total Anticipated Revenue	\$37,000

The budget summary is in line with the FY 2025 budget. Additionally, the proposed CIP incorporates funding for potential enhancements to Buhai Plaza at Port Clinton Square, aimed at making the space more enjoyable for event attendees and facilitating participation of more Highland Park businesses.

Within the events budget staff is looking to include additional infrastructure such as dedicated restrooms for the Port Clinton concert series, increased shade structures for the larger scale events that close Central Ave., and allotting for additional infrastructure needs related to the potential of additional vendors, and entertainment costs associated with an extended Saturday event timeframe should local food vendors be willing to commit to a longer event timeframe for Taste of Highland Park.

Staff is seeking feedback from Council on allowance for staff to move forward planning for the 2026 event schedule as slated. Once the event schedule is determined, staff will go to RFP for a new event management contract and begin finalizing dates, booking entertainment and securing infrastructure needed for 2026.

Ravinia District SSA 17 Events

The City administers the Ravinia District SSA 17 budget, working annually with the property owners to develop a curated slate of events that highlight Ravinia District businesses, enhance the relationship between Ravinia District businesses and neighbors, and attract new visitors to the

District. City staff serve as the primary managers for the contractors working to plan and execute these events on behalf of the SSA. These events include:

- Food Truck Thursdays (weekly, June – mid-September)
- Halloween Candy Stroll
- Holiday Cookie & Cocoa Stroll

The SSA also funds decorations throughout the District, including enhanced holiday lights and storefront décor opportunities for participating businesses. SSA17 is currently in the renewal process; if approved by property owners and then Council the SSA will move into a new three year term at \$110,000 annual budget. Events outlined above are included in this budgeted number. If they SSA renewal is not approved funds; considerations will be made to reallocate funding to continue Food Trucks and other events in this district. SSA17 funding is recognized in the draft FY2026 budget under line item 1110108.62100.

Contributing Events

The proposed FY 2026 budget incorporates City funding where noted for the following events hosted in Highland Park but presented by local businesses/organizations in line item 1110103.62100:

- **Bitter Jester Music Festival**

The City sponsors the annual Bitter Jester Music Festival, a project of the Highland Park-based Bitter Jester Foundation for the Arts, which showcases outstanding young performers at a weekly, Battle-of-the-Bands-style concert series prior to a Grand Finale Concert at which performers compete for professional performance opportunities and a cash prize. Founded by Nic DeGrazia, BJMF's staff are professional musicians and educators who ensure that all performers receive constructive guidance to further their development as musicians. In 2025, the Bitter Jester Music Festival attracted 1,100 visitors to the Grand Finale Concert along Second St. in Downtown Highland Park.

The City's \$25,000 sponsorship funds marketing and production costs; this sponsorship is reflected in the FY 2026 draft budget.

Staff is seeking feedback from Council on continued financial sponsorship of this event.

- **Oktoberfest**

In 2025, Life Rhythms, Inc. and Steep Ravine Brewing Company partnered to host Highland Park's 4th Annual Oktoberfest events, sponsored by a \$15,000 contribution by the City to fund marketing, entertainment, and activity costs. Funding for sponsorship in 2025 was made available from a reallocation of funds from the Exterior Grant program. The event spotlights Ravinia District restaurants and provides fun, seasonal entertainment in the Ravinia District, extending the District's event season and encouraging regional visitors who enjoy attending Oktoberfest events to explore a new part of Highland Park. 2025 event attendance data is not yet available.

Staff issued concerns that the event budget outlined by the event producers of \$20,000 was low when this event was brought to the City. Council granted the event producers their full request for \$15,000 sponsorship, which represented 75% of the planned budget. As the event moved through the special event permit process, staff worked with the presenting agencies to provide additional infrastructure at no cost to assist in keeping budget dollars down. However in order to keep overtime costs down this requires closure of Dean Ave as part of this event until the Monday following. Infrastructure was outside the identified scope of City assistance.

Should the presenting agencies wish to continue the event in 2026, staff has allocated \$20,000 in funding towards sponsorship in the FY2026 draft budget to assist in covering needed infrastructure costs.

Staff is seeking feedback from Council on continued financial sponsorship of this event.

- **Port Clinton Art Festival**

Annually, the Port Clinton Art Festival attracts thousands of attendees to Downtown Highland Park for one of the country's finest juried art shows. Alongside more than 200 nationally-recognized artists, PCAF features kid-friendly activities, on-site food-and-beverage options, and more. PCAF regularly attracts art lovers from throughout the region to explore Highland Park and is produced by Amdur Productions. The two-day festival attracted 17,600 visitors total in 2025.

Currently, the City does not contribute funding to the PC Art Festival. After the budget was drafted for FY 2026, event producers approached the City with a request for \$20,000 to offset rising event costs particularly as they relate to event security and barricade infrastructure. No funding for this event has been included in the proposed FY2026 budget. Event producers reported that neighboring communities have provided water barricades or similar crash barriers without charge, and the City's vendor fees at \$60 per vendor cost more than \$12,000 in 2025.

If there is an interest by the Council to contribute financially to support the PC Art Festival, it is recommended that vendor fees be waived, and barricades provided to the extent that staff has the infrastructure in-house to offer. The in-kind assistance would have a value of approximately \$20,000.

- **Arts on Sheridan**

On September 17, 2025 the City also received a request for financial support to offset private costs to produce Arts on Sheridan. This event is fairly new and offers an event on the east side of downtown Highland Park whereby guests can explore a curated selection of art from talented artists across all mediums. The event producer is the same as the Port Clinton Art Festival. It was reported that The Port Clinton Art Festival costs more than \$100K to produce and Arts on Sheridan costs approximately \$75K to produce. If there is an interest in offsetting some of the expense, it is recommended that the financial incentive be limited to vendor and permit fees. Although these fees are assessed to offset significant staff time and in order to obtain necessary information, it is possible to waive these fees. Please note that this precedent will also likely have impact on other private events in the community.

- **Randolph St. Market Highland Park Shindig**

The Randolph Street Market Festival has brought their antiques and vintage style celebration to the north shore at the Vintage Shindig in Highland Park since 2024. At the Vintage Shindig, shoppers can scour curated displays featuring coveted, mint condition collectibles of posh living from days gone by. Add in Food and DJ's makes for an unforgettable and nostalgic shopping experience. Building on a successful Fall 2024 event at The Highland Park Community House, Highland Park Shindig expanded its footprint to The Art Center in 2025 to include decorative and fine art, antiques, and jewelry the event also expanded outdoors and included vinyl dealers as part of the North Shore Record Fair.

Staff has been in conversation with the event organizers discussing opportunities to potentially partner with the popular event in 2026 to assist in their ability to return to Highland Park. One item of note, the Randolph St Market currently operates with an entry fee component of approximately \$12/person with discount rates for students and others. City hosted and sponsored events outlined within this report are all free to attend. Staff recommends that the City only partner with the Market if they are amenable to removing costs of entry for their Highland Park event. No funding for this event has been included in the proposed FY2026 budget.

Staff is seeking feedback from Council on allowance for staff to work with the event organizers to offset costs and revenue lost by waiver of entry fees thru in-kind assistance such as use of The Moraine and fee waivers.

Other City-Sponsored Events

The City produces several other major events throughout the year that are budgeted separately from these large-scale events. For reference, these events include:

- Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service
- Arbor Day
- Highland Park Awards Ceremony
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- National Night Out
- *in 2026: 25th Remembrance of September 11*
- Fire Department Open House/Pancake Day
- Veterans Day

Financial Impact

Events for FY 2026 are budgeted comparably to FY 2025 revenue and expenses.

Staff Report



Meeting Date: November 10, 2025
Staff Contact: Erin Jason, Assistant City Manager
Department: City Manager's Office

Title: Review Spring Clean-Up Program

Recommendation:

Staff will present information on the existing Spring Clean-Up Program and is seeking Council feedback on the following considerations:

- Should the City hold a Spring Clean-Up in 2026
- Should the City remove Spring Clean-Up from the next Residential Refuse Contract

Policy Consideration:

Background:

As of January 1, 2016, Lakeshore Recycling Systems (LRS) is Highland Park's waste and recycling hauler for all residential, commercial and multifamily properties. The current residential contract was approved on March 14, 2022, effective through March 30, 2027. In accordance with the agreement, LRS shall provide an Annual Spring Clean-Up Program whereby at least once per calendar year during April and May, on specific dates mutually determined by LRS and the City, LRS provides curbside collection from each residential customer, and disposal, of large and bulky items which are not ordinarily collected as part of the residential services. LRS is not obligated to collect more than one cubic yard of construction material from a residential customer during Spring Clean-Up. Collection results of refuse collected during Spring Clean-Up from 2019-2024 are as follows (in tons):

Year	Tons	Additional Info
2019	397.87	
2020	415.83	August pick-up due to COVID
2021	207.72	
2022	344.16	
2023		Info unavailable for this year
2024	290.56	

Alternate Options to Spring Clean-Up

In addition to the Annual Spring Clean-Up Program, the LRS agreement provides for a Weekly Bulk Item Service whereby residential customers are permitted to dispose of one bulk item placed curbside (up to 50 pounds) per pickup on the same day as service. The Weekly Bulk Item Service was offered in the agreement as a method to decrease the volume of waste set out by customers during Spring Clean-Up. The following items are not collected during spring clean-up or the weekly bulk item collection: white goods, electronics or e-waste (televisions, computer monitors, etc.), items over 50 pounds (requiring two employees to lift safely), or construction debris. In addition, LRS also offers free curbside pick-up of one large electronic item under 50lbs (televisions, monitors, computers, speakers, etc.) or three small electronic waste items (phones, computer mice, radios, adding machines, etc.) on the first customer collection day of each month.

The City along with partner agency, the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County (SWALCO), also hosts the Highland Park Recycling Center to promote residential recycling and provide residents with opportunities to divert large items from landfills throughout the year. The drop-off center is open every Tuesday and the first Saturday of each month from 7:00 AM to 1:00 PM. The drop-off program is available to all Lake County residents year round. Items collected include:

- Clothing and Textiles Recycling - Highland Park self-service collection bin available all hours (24/7) (additional bins located throughout the community)
- Electronics (limit of 7 items per visit)
- Foam #6 Recycling
- Fluorescent Light Bulbs (unbroken) (limit of 8 fluorescent light bulbs per visit)
- Rechargeable Batteries - Nickel Cadmium (NiCd), Nickel Metal Hydride (NiMh), Lithium-Ion (Li-ion)
- Shoe Recycling Program - Shoes must be paired together by a rubber band or tied laces to be accepted
- Holiday Lights

Impacts of Spring Clean-Up

The Spring Clean-Up Program presents challenges experienced by LRS and the City which include the following:

1. Environmental Impact

Pounds per capita per day (PCD) disposal rate

SWALCO of which the City is a member, tracks the pounds per capita per day (PCD) disposal rate in partner communities. In 2024 Highland Park met the goal of being at or below 1.35 PCD with a 1.25 PCD rate. However, if the Spring Clean-up tonnage was removed from the total waste landfilled would be closer to the lowest member rate of 0.80 PCD.

Greenhouse Gas Impact

Transportation is a high impact contributor to Highland Park's GHG number of over 30%. A high volume of garbage trucks are utilized for Spring Clean-Up; the start, stop, idle repeat nature of the trucks spikes GHG impacts during these collection days which likewise affects air quality, in addition to wear and tear on City streets. The tonnage of waste collected during Spring Clean-up is significant. Of the wide range of materials collected, LRS recycles construction debris,

metals, cardboard, and miscellaneous plastics. However, the majority of items picked up are sent to the landfill and contribute to methane production.

2. Material from outside of Highland Park



Fly Dumping

Each year, LRS and City staff observe instances of fly dumping during Spring Clean-Up. Fly dumped materials wind up on parkways along public property and also on residents' properties. Fly dumping typically occurs at night when there is low visibility. Materials being fly dumped are waste generated by non-residents, contractors, and commercial entities.



Contractors

In addition to fly dumping, LRS observes frequent occasions whereby large volumes of construction debris and contractor waste are being placed curbside which either are clearly not waste generated by the residential customer or are significantly in excess of the one cubic yard of construction materials allowed to be placed curbside for Spring Clean-Up.

Family and Friends

LRS is aware of instances where property owners have invited relatives or friends to bring their bulk waste into Highland Park and place the items at the curb on their friend's or family's property. According to City Code Section 96.103(B)(2), it shall be unlawful for any person to deposit litter and/or refuse upon private property or in any authorized private receptacle located upon private property, unless such private property is owned or leased by such person.

3. Aesthetics

Debris at Curb for One Month

In addition to the environmental impacts related to Spring Clean-Up, there are also aesthetic impacts to the community for a one-month period during which waste is placed on the parkway for up to seven days before their Spring Clean-Up collection date. Residents often put out a variety of waste which may get strewn about due to bad weather. Furthermore, some of the waste contains hazardous pieces such as sharp construction materials. In addition, scrappers drive through the area and break televisions screens to pull out metal components and also cause a mess while searching for various scrap materials in waste piles.

Parkway Damage

The large volume of materials placed on the parkway for up to seven days may cause damage to sections of the parkway.

4. Customer Service Perception

Ineligible Items

There are a number of items placed at the curb which are not accepted during Spring Clean-Up

including hazardous waste such as chemicals, gasoline, and polyurethane paint, electronic waste such as televisions and computers, yard waste, and construction materials above one cubic yard. The City and LRS issue communications through all modalities identifying what materials will not be collected and how those ineligible materials can be disposed of. LRS reports that residents frequently become upset when informed that ineligible items are not collected as part of Spring Clean-Up.

Timing of Spring Clean-Up

With Spring Clean-Up in April and May, inclement weather is possible. Rain and wind cause debris to spread and presents challenges to waste collection if waste is waterlogged.

If Spring Clean-up is supported for 2026, the following schedule will be in place. Due to the large volume of materials collected during Spring Clean-Up, the program spans four consecutive Saturdays over the course of four weeks.

- If your regular collection day is Monday, your Spring Clean-Up Day is Saturday, April 18
- If your regular collection day is Tuesday, your Spring Clean-Up Day is Saturday, April 25
- If your regular collection day is Thursday, your Spring Clean-Up Day is Saturday, May 2
- If your regular collection day is Friday, your Spring Clean-Up Day is Saturday, May 9

Core Priorities:

Fiscal Stability

According to LRS, there is no financial impact related to discontinuing Spring Clean-Up. Bulk materials would continue to be collected from residents at a rate of one bulk item per week as no additional cost. According to LRS, there would be no change to residential waste and recycling rates as a result of Spring Clean-Up being discontinued.

Environmental Sustainability

Diverting items sent to landfill is in line with the tenets of the City's Sustainability Plan and community GHG reduction efforts.

Attachments:

None