

NYC Council Hearing - September 24, 2020  
Oversight - NYC's Tourism Industry and the COVID-19 Crisis  
Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination and the Street Activity Permitting Office  
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Good morning, Chairs Van Bramer and Vallone, and members of the committees. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on permitting opportunities for cultural organizations.

My name is Ellyn Canfield, and I am the Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination (CECM), which oversees the Street Activity Permitting Office (SAPO). I'm joined by my colleague Stefan Grybauskas, Director of SAPO.

CECM serves as the broad umbrella overseeing and coordinating events and other temporary use of streets, plazas, sidewalks, and parks. We are the one-stop-shop for guidelines and permissions from agencies who ensure events are safe and positive for all New Yorkers – from NYPD, FDNY, DSNY to DOB and DEP. SAPO grants permits for streets, sidewalks, and plazas – including signature events like the NYC Marathon to the smallest neighborhood block party.

In a typical September, my office would be wrapping a busy summer of music festivals, street fairs, and parades. This year was a bit different. As soon as the pandemic hit and we made the difficult but necessary decision to cancel event permits, my team pivoted to providing interagency coordination to facilitate the quick construction and maintenance of hospital extensions, dozens of testing sites, temporary morgues, and now, vaccine trial sites.

Aside from to immediate COVID response, we've mobilized streets and parks in brand new ways to support the priorities of reopening our City. Currently, we have confirmed over 475 outdoor learning sites with DOE in parks and streets, in addition to over 10,200 Open Restaurants and 79 miles of Open Streets.

In addition, we are currently permitting events and activations for hundreds of community organizations, non-profits, and of course, cultural organizations. The Mayor's Executive Order regarding event permits allows for small events – for streets, they must be one block or less (and not interfere with Open Streets, Outdoor Learning, or other permits) and for Parks they must not interfere with the public's use of a park. In addition, the Governor's Office Executive Order regarding nonessential gatherings makes it clear that events of this type must not exceed 50 individuals at any one time.

We recognize these limitations are discouraging to those who are desperate to bring back performances and celebrations. The reality is that the opportunities we can safely offer are geared toward visibility, engagement, and, of course, entertainment.

Just this week, we issued permits for the Philharmonic to host pop-up performances in plazas throughout the City, a jazz trio to provide music for clients waiting for a meal at

the Bowery Mission, and a non-profit arts organization to hold a musical press conference in the middle of Times Square. We're even working on a pop-up drag show: stay tuned!

As long as the event is free and open to the public, these permits are free for the applicant.

While the Mayor's Office and myself are undeniably in support of cultural organizations utilizing parks, streets, and plazas, I'd like to address Councilmember Van Bramer and Councilmember Cumbo's legislation, Intros. 2034 and 2068 which may be duplicative of efforts the city is already taking.

To speak to Intro 2068, I believe that our existing permitting process is the safest and most efficient and equitable way for all individuals and organizations to secure public space.

We are committed to working with you and our fellow agencies in making sure the information about obtaining permits is as streamlined and accessible as possible. My office serves as a hub for any applicant interested in applying for a permit, and DPR has a similar shop with their Special Events office. We both have staff available to answer truly any incoming email or phone call within 24 hours and are here to help organizations throughout the process. It's actually very unusual for permits to be denied by either office – we almost always find a way to make an event come to life, even under our current COVID mitigation limitations.

We will continue to work with DCLA and others to host webinars, attend meetings, and craft resources to help cultural organizations navigate use of public space. In addition, we're happy to present this information to any of your constituents.

Regarding Intro. 2034, Both Parks and SAPO already utilize mobile friendly online application forms, and stand ready to provide translation and accessible application alternatives to those who may need it. In addition, there would be an additional cost associated with creating a new mobile app.

The online application form for both agencies populates our Citywide Event Management System, which allows us to coordinate with all of our support agencies – DOT, NYPD, FDNY, DSNY, as well as to identify and mitigate conflicts with existing open streets, outdoor learning, and outdoor dining. Using our existing application system is critical to maintaining safe and equitable use of public spaces.

In closing, I look forward to working with the Council and our sister agencies in continuing to support cultural organizations in utilizing streets, plazas and parks. We all long for the moment we can sit in a darkened theater and wait for the curtains to open – but in the meantime, we have some beautiful stages across our City, and we will support our beloved institutions in keeping the show going.