

**From:** "Johnston, Sadhu" <Sadhu.Johnston@vancouver.ca>

**To:** "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"

**CC:** "City Manager's Correspondence Group - DL"  
"Matthews, Lesley" <lesley.matthews@vancouver.ca>

**Date:** 5/1/2020 2:24:33 PM

**Subject:** Memo - Weddings at Vancouver City Hall - RTS# 12933

**Attachments:** Memo - Weddings at Vancouver City Hall – RTS# 12933.pdf

Dear Mayor and Council,

On December 18, 2018, Council passed a motion directing staff to explore options for a civil wedding program at Vancouver City Hall (RTS# 12933). The motion aims to make City Hall an accessible and affordable venue option for couples wanting to get married. The following memo provides an update on staff's progress regarding a wedding pilot program at Vancouver City Hall and recommendations on next steps taking into consideration the COVID-19 pandemic.

Below is a summary of staff's proposal:

- Staff is proposing a modified wedding pilot program at City Hall starting the summer of 2020 to help couples secure outdoor wedding space that is affordable, attractive and provides appropriate physical distancing for guests.
- The cost of the pilot for 6 dates between June and September 2020 is \$3,800, with potential revenue of \$4,000.
- This pilot will fill an immediate need for couples and marriage officiants wanting to continue with wedding plans during this public health emergency, while assisting staff with the development of a full-scale wedding.
- Staff consulted with local wedding industry professionals and registered marriage commissioners to obtain feedback on what a modified wedding pilot program could look like in the summer of 2020, and whether there would be demand for small, short and socially distant wedding ceremonies.
- Feedback confirmed that many couples planning to get married this summer were forced to alter their plans due to the pandemic, and many are looking for affordable venue options to hold small-scale wedding ceremonies so that they can still get married for legal or cultural reasons and begin their lives together.
- Staff also received feedback from local marriage commissioners that they would be comfortable performing outdoor ceremonies at City Hall as long as physical distancing protocols are followed, and there is a limit of 10 guests maximum including the couple, marriage commissioner and witnesses.
- Staff will report back to Council with key successes, lessons learned, and recommendations for full wedding program implementation in June 2021.

Should you have any questions, please contact Rosemary Hagiwara at [rosemary.hagiwara@vancouver.ca](mailto:rosemary.hagiwara@vancouver.ca) or Lesley Matthews at [Lesley.matthews@vancouver.ca](mailto:Lesley.matthews@vancouver.ca)

Best,  
Sadhu

Sadhu Aufochs Johnston | City Manager

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Pronouns: he, him, his



*The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.*

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## MEMORANDUM

May 1, 2020

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Sadhu A. Johnston, City Manager  
Paul Mochrie, Deputy City Manager  
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager  
Lynda Graves, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office  
Rena Kendall-Craden, Civic Engagement and Communications Director  
Neil Monckton, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Alvin Singh, Communications Director, Mayor's Office  
Anita Zaenker, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Lesley Matthews, Chief External Relations and Protocol

FROM: Rosemary Hagiwara, Acting City Clerk

SUBJECT: Weddings at Vancouver City Hall – RTS# 12933

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### PURPOSE

The following memo provides an update on staff's progress regarding a wedding pilot program at Vancouver City Hall. On December 18, 2018, Council passed a motion directing staff to explore options for a civil wedding program at Vancouver City Hall. The motion aims to make City Hall an accessible and affordable venue option for couples wanting to get married.

### CONTEXT

In British Columbia, municipalities have no jurisdiction over marriages; however many municipalities rent space to couples for wedding ceremonies and receptions. It is the Province's role to issue marriage licences through registered *Marriage Licence Issuers* and issue marriage certificates through the Vital Statistics Agency of BC.

The *BC Marriage Act* provides for couples to marry: 1) in a religious ceremony performed by a recognized religious body, 2) in a civil ceremony performed by a provincial government-appointed marriage commissioner, or 3) in a ceremony performed in accordance with the rights and ceremonies of a treaty First Nation or Doukhobor community.

The *Marriage Act* stipulates that there must be the couple, two witnesses and an officiant present at a marriage ceremony. An officiant can either be a marriage commissioner registered with the Vital Statistics Agency or a religious representative. The officiant is responsible for

performing the marriage ceremony, signing the *Marriage Licence and Registration of Marriage*, and submitting the registration to the Vital Statistics Agency where the registration becomes a permanent legal record. The Vital Statistics Agency issues a marriage certificate to the couple once the marriage is registered by the officiant.

Currently, the Vital Statistics Agency is advising that while restrictions on gatherings are in place due to COVID-19, couples wishing to proceed with a legal marriage ceremony may do so with an officiant and two witnesses in attendance. Officiants; however, have the right to refuse to proceed with a wedding ceremony if there are more than the couple and two witnesses present, or where social distancing measures are not being followed.

## **BACKGROUND**

There is no formal program for weddings to occur inside Vancouver City Hall or on its adjoining property. Two wedding ceremonies have taken place on the Helena Gutteridge Plaza but these have been organized and approved on an ad hoc basis.

The Vancouver Park Board has a formal wedding program whereby couples can apply for a wedding permit to hold an outdoor ceremony within a four hour time slot at predefined outdoor wedding sites. Wedding receptions (e.g. catering, alcohol, etc.) are not allowed at these wedding sites. In addition, the Vancouver Park Board, Vancouver Public Library and the Vancouver Civic Theatres all offer indoor multipurpose spaces that can be rented by couples for weddings.

City staff researched wedding programs at 8 Canadian municipalities, including Toronto, Hamilton, Kitchener, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Victoria, Waterloo and Richmond. All cities allow weddings to take place, and the majority of these cities:

- allow wedding ceremonies at their City Halls,
- operate wedding ceremonies on a cost-recovery basis,
- have designated days each year when weddings occur, with allocated time slots between 30-60 minutes for each ceremony,
- do not allow catering or decorative items to be thrown or sprinkled on the floor,
- provide only the room and clean-up after the ceremony,
- require the couple renting the space to organize their own sound, decorations, photographer and officiant, and
- allow up to a maximum of 30 guests per ceremony due to space restrictions and impact on facilities.

## **DISCUSSION**

As directed in the December 2018 Council approved motion, and in review of the collective experience of the 8 cities listed above, staff considered a range of options for a pilot program to hold wedding ceremonies at Vancouver City Hall.

Staff evaluated interior and exterior spaces on the City Hall grounds and determined that the Council Chamber and Helena Gutteridge Plaza offered the most accessible and attractive space for wedding ceremonies.

Staff also looked at designating specific days for wedding ceremonies in order to: a) provide predictability for couples looking to book a ceremony, and b) assurances that wedding ceremonies do not conflict with other City business such as Council meetings, public hearings, and other public events. Fridays emerged as the most suitable day to designate for wedding ceremonies because sufficient staffing levels are already in place, relatively few official meetings and events take place on Fridays, and it is the most convenient day for couples seeking a week-day wedding.

As planning for a pilot program progressed in March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency in British Columbia, and the Chief Public Health Officer placed restrictions on public gatherings and physical distancing protocols. Staff considered its options to either postpone a pilot until 2021, or provide a modified pilot program starting this year that allows couples to hold short, small and affordable ceremonies that adhere to public health guidelines.

Staff consulted with local wedding industry professionals and registered marriage commissioners to obtain feedback on what a modified wedding pilot program could look like in the summer of 2020, and whether there would be demand for small, short and socially distant wedding ceremonies. Feedback confirmed that many couples planning to get married this summer have altered their plans, and many are looking for affordable venue options to hold small-scale wedding ceremonies so that they can still get married for legal or cultural reasons and begin their lives together. Staff also received feedback from local marriage commissioners that they would be comfortable performing outdoor ceremonies at City Hall as long as physical distancing protocols are followed, and there is a limit of 10 guests maximum including the couple, marriage commissioner and witnesses.

With this feedback in mind, it is staff's recommendation to move ahead with offering "Micro-wedding" ceremonies to begin at City Hall in June 2020 on a pilot basis. Micro-weddings would allow couples to:

- Book 30 minute time slots online at [vancouver.ca/weddings-city-hall](http://vancouver.ca/weddings-city-hall) to get married on the Helena Gutteridge Plaza on designated Fridays between June and September 2020. Monday, July 27, 2020 would also be added to the available dates as a special day for LGBTQ2S+ couples to marry at City Hall during Pride Week.
- Invite up to 8 guests including the officiant and witnesses. The couple, officiant, witnesses and guests would stand on floor decals to ensure physical distancing of at least 2 meters between one another. The couple would share a floor decal.
- Pay a booking fee of \$85 + GST for use of a designated area on the Helena Gutteridge Plaza including 3rd party liability insurance. For shade or rain protection, couples could either bring their own umbrellas or use the City's large blue standing umbrellas that remain on the plaza throughout the year. The fee would also cover the cost of a City staff member to facilitate the move in and move out of wedding parties throughout the day, tidy and clean between ceremonies, and monitor adherence to physical distancing guidelines. Payment in full would be required to confirm the booking and no refunds would be issued in case of cancellation.

- Arrange an officiant of their choice and witnesses, as well as obtain a marriage licence prior to the ceremony. Marriage licences can be obtained at the London Drugs Insurance Services on Broadway Street close to City Hall.
- Bring their own sustainable decorations that can be packed in and packed out within the 30 minute time slot; however, no decorations can be thrown or tossed on the ground such as confetti, rice or flower petals.

The estimated cost of the micro-wedding pilot for 6 dates between June and September, including on the ground staff support for designated wedding days, 3<sup>rd</sup> party liability insurance coverage, directional signs and floor decals is \$3,900. It is anticipated that 8 ceremonies could be scheduled per day at \$85 + GST per ceremony, for potential revenue of just over \$4,000.

If the micro-wedding pilot program is deemed successful and feedback from couples, guests and marriage officiants is positive, staff will continue offering ceremonies one Friday per month from October 2020 to May 2021 in the Council Chamber. Staff will continue to review public health guidelines, directives from the Vital Statistics Agency and consult local wedding officiants to determine how indoor weddings can proceed in a safe manner starting in October, and if guest numbers can increase over 10.

In June 2021, staff will report back to Council with key successes, lessons learned, as well as options and recommendations for full program implementation.

The timeline for the pilot will be as follows:

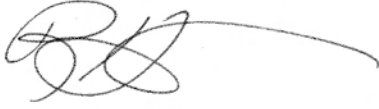
- **May 2020** - A webpage at [vancouver.ca/weddings-city-hall](http://vancouver.ca/weddings-city-hall) will be launched to provide couples with information, and an online registration form for couples to book a time slot to get married.
- **June 19, 2020** – Micro-wedding ceremonies to begin on the Helena Gutteridge Plaza on designated Fridays between June and September. In addition, Monday, July 27 will be designated for LGBTQ2S+ couples to marry at City Hall in celebration of Pride Week.
- **October 2020** – Staff to continue the pilot wedding program in the Council Chamber one designated Friday per month until May 2021, based on public health directives.
- **June 2021** - Staff to report back to Council with key successes and lessons learned, as well as options and recommendations for full program implementation.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is staff's recommendation to launch a wedding pilot program at City Hall starting the summer of 2020 to help couples secure outdoor wedding space that is affordable, attractive and provides appropriate physical distancing for guests. The cost of the pilot for 6 dates between June and September 2020 is \$3,800, with potential revenue of \$4,000. Based on public health directives and participant feedback over the summer, the pilot could continue one Friday per month inside the Council Chamber from October 2020 to May 2021.

This pilot will fill an immediate need for couples and marriage officiants wanting to continue with wedding plans during this public health emergency, while assisting staff with the development of

a full-scale wedding program. Staff will report back to Council with key successes, lessons learned, and recommendations for full wedding program implementation in June 2021.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rosemary Hagiwara  
Acting City Clerk

604.873.7177 | [rosemary.hagiwara@vancouver.ca](mailto:rosemary.hagiwara@vancouver.ca)