TO: Mayor and Members  
General Issues Committee  
WARD(S) AFFECTED: CITY WIDE

COMMITTEE DATE: September 18, 2013

SUBJECT/REPORT NO:  
Canadian Comedy Foundation for Excellence - 2014-2018 (PED13169) (City Wide)

SUBMITTED BY:  
Tim McCabe  
General Manager  
Planning and Economic Development Department

PREPARED BY:  
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SIGNATURE:

Council Direction:

That the opportunities presented by the Canadian Comedy Experience/Canadian Comedy Foundation around Hamilton’s role in bringing the Canadian Comedy Awards Festival to Hamilton in 2014 and establishing Hamilton as the permanent home of the Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame be referred to the City Manager for a report back to the General Issues Committee.

Information:

The City of Hamilton’s Tourism & Culture Division received a copy of a request for funding presentation from the Canadian Comedy Foundation for Excellence in the last week of August 2013. A meeting was then convened on Tuesday, September 3, 2013 at 1:00 p.m., with the Director of Tourism and Culture and the Manager of Tourism. The purpose of the meeting was to determine the City of Hamilton’s interest in hosting their Comedy Awards and Festival for five years commencing the fall of 2014.

According to information provided by the Canadian Comedy Foundation of Excellence, the organization was incorporated in 2003 and the Canadian Comedy Awards and Festival has been an annual event since 1999. This is the first time ever that Hamilton has been approached for this event. Staff research confirms that many other municipalities across the country have been approached during the history of this event.
On Thursday September 5, 2013, Mr. Tim Pr ogosh, President of the Canadian Comedy Foundation for Excellence, appeared as a De legation at the City’s General Issues Committee (GIC). At that time, Mr. Progosh described the benefits of hosting the annual Comedy Awards and Festival and proposed the potential of Hamilton being the permanent home of a Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame.

A request was made to GIC to commit to five years of festival funding at a cost of $200,000 per year and a $75,000 up-front cash contribution. With this commitment, Mr. Progosh publicly stated that Hamilton would be the preferred choice for the future location of the Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame. Councillors Lloyd Ferguson, Brad Clark and Terry Whitehead each expressed serious concerns in regard to the need to see a business plan, the status of funding from other levels of government and the private sector, and financial statements and performance-based information related to the festivals.

At the conclusion of the Canadian Comedy Festival presentation and questions from Committee members, a motion was approved that the City Manager prepare a report on this request and bring it back to the next GIC meeting (September 18, 2013).

Pursuant to the direction by GIC, staff requested the last five years of financial statements and related event reports on the Canadian Comedy Awards and Festivals from Mr. Progosh. The following are the key points that staff have identified after conducting their research and analysis of the information provided by Mr. Progosh and including additional sources such as other Ontario municipalities:

- According to the draft financial statements provided by Mr. Progosh, staff is of the opinion that there is reason for concern.
- Staff was unable to identify any quantifiable measures regarding the economic impacts of the previous Canadian Comedy Awards and Festival events. In their post-event reports, revenue figures are not stated and, instead, a pie chart depicting sources of revenue was presented.
- At the previous two events (2012 and 2011) held in Toronto, the President confirmed that there were few hotel rooms booked for the event since 90% of the attendees were from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Similarly, Ottawa city staff report that, to date, there has been limited hotel room bookings for the 2013 Festival.
- The City of Ottawa has only agreed to a one-time $40,000 commitment for this year’s Canadian Comedy Awards and Festival. This is the first time it has been held in the nation’s capital.
- To the best of staff’s knowledge, there is no Federal or Provincial government imposed September 30, 2013 deadline for commitment of funding by the City of Hamilton to this event.
- Staff has not been provided with, nor have they been independently able to find, any confirmation that there is private sector funding committed to the Canadian Comedy Awards and Festivals event. It is the opinion of staff, from the information staff obtained, that the event’s sustainability relies primarily on public sector support.
At the September 5, 2013 GIC meeting, there was considerable discussion regarding the potential establishment of a Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame. It is the opinion of staff that, based on the information provided by Mr. Progosh, the establishment of a Canadian Comedy Hall of Fame is a long term goal for the Foundation. Little information was available or received regarding this initiative. In addition, it is staff’s opinion, based on the information provided by Mr. Progosh, that the primary objective for The Canadian Comedy Foundation for Excellence is to secure five year funding for the Comedy Awards and Festivals, only.

Accordingly, based on all of the information above, staff would suggest that the Committee consider no further action on this request.

NE/dkm