



PHILADELPHIA POLICE DEPARTMENT DIRECTIVE 3.11

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SUBJECT: CARNIVALS, BLOCK PARTIES, PLAY STREETS, AND SPECIAL OCCUPANCY LICENSES

1. PURPOSE

- A. The Philadelphia Police Department recognizes the vital role that carnivals, community block parties, street events and special assemblies play in fostering relationships and building connections among residents. These gatherings promote a sense of neighborhood pride, encourage positive interactions, and create an environment where citizens can engage with one another in a celebratory atmosphere. The PPD wholeheartedly supports the community in organizing and participating in these events, as they offer an excellent opportunity for residents to come together, share experiences, and strengthen community bonds.
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2. POLICY

- A. All applications for carnivals, block parties, street events, and Special Assembly Occupancy Licenses are presumed approved unless substantial, verifiable evidence proves an unmanageable risk to public safety, traffic, infrastructure, legal compliance, or community well-being. Public safety concerns must be real and documented, not based on speculation, stereotypes, or assumptions about location or attendees. Before denial, reasonable mitigation measures must be considered. Decisions must be fact-based, with written explanations for any denials or modifications.
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3. DEFINITIONS

- A. Carnival - Any moving, temporary or traveling show at which a charge is made for admission to or participation therein, held in any building, tent, enclosure or lot, where the following forms of amusement or entertainment are conducted: riding devices, such as Ferris wheels, carousel, whips, swings, seesaws, or similar devices, illusion shows, mechanical shows, active games of skill, such as ball-throwing games, pitch-till-you-win games, swinging-ball games, hoop-throwing games, or games of like character.

- B. Block Party - A neighborhood celebration or event, sponsored by the residents of a block that requires the temporary closure of the street of the block, or a portion thereof. Arterial streets can't be closed for these kinds of events.
 - C. Non-Block Party Event - An event, other than a block party, including but not limited to, birthday celebrations, weddings, proms and serenades.
 - D. Special Assembly Occupancy - Refers to establishments where fifty (50) or more people gather for social entertainment at least once a year. These include nightclubs, discotheques, cabarets, taverns, bars, restaurants, private clubs, banquet halls, and similar venues without primarily fixed seating. Social entertainment encompasses patron dancing, live or recorded music (with or without video), disc jockey performances, theatrical acts, and similar activities, excluding food and beverage consumption, lectures, television viewing, and athletic events.
 - E. Promoted event - Any event where the operator of a special assembly occupancy hands over operational control to an outside operator. However, it does not include regularly scheduled events at the venue or the exhibition of motion pictures or stage dramas at a theater.
 - F. Promoter - someone who invests resources to organize and produce social entertainment events at a special assembly occupancy, excluding movie screenings or stage dramas. This does not include venue licensees or their employees, the City of Philadelphia and its agencies, individuals hosting private events (e.g., weddings or banquets) without an admission fee, those organizing one charitable event under state law, or political committees.
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2. STANDARD OF REVIEW FOR APPROVAL AND DENIALS – EVIDENCE BASED DECISIONS

A. Presumption of Approval

- 1. All applications shall be presumed approved unless the Commanding Officer determines, based on substantial, objective evidence, that the event or license presents an unmanageable risk under the criteria below.

B. Limited Grounds for Denial

- 1. A permit or license may only be denied if there is a clear, evidence-based determination that the event poses a real and demonstrable risk that cannot be mitigated.
 - a. Public Safety Risks (Must Be Real, Not Perceived)

- 1) Denials based on public safety concerns must be supported by specific, objective evidence and not speculation, generalized fears, or assumptions about the event's location, attendees, or organizers. A permit may be denied as a Public Safety risk only if:
 - a) Credible intelligence or verified reports indicate a specific threat of violence or criminal activity that cannot be reasonably mitigated,
 - b) The applicant refuses to cooperate with the Commanding Officer or fails to provide adequate security, crowd control, or emergency access plans necessary to prevent foreseeable harm, or
 - c) The event directly interferes with emergency services, such as blocking access to hospitals, fire stations, or essential infrastructure.
- b. Negative Traffic & Infrastructure Impact
 - 1) Denial is justified under this section only if the event would cause an unmanageable disruption that cannot be addressed through reasonable traffic control measures, such as:
 - a) Severe congestion or complete obstruction of major roadways without feasible detour options,
 - b) Disruption of essential public services (e.g., transit, utility maintenance, or emergency response routes), or
 - c) Insufficient or impractical parking, pedestrian safety, or traffic diversion plans.
- c. Noncompliance with Laws, Ordinances, or Regulations
 1. A permit or license may be denied if the event or its organizers fail to meet clear legal requirements, including:
 - a) Failure to meet minimum fire codes, health and safety regulations,
 - b) Lack of required permits, liability insurance or security plans when applicable, or
 - c) Noncompliance with City Code and/or state alcohol laws
- d. Adverse Community Impact (Must Be Substantiated, Not Speculative)

- 1) An event's adverse impact on the community must be evaluated based on measurable, documentable harm and a general opposition or inconvenience. Denial under this section is justified if:
 - a) The event will cause excessive noise, waste accumulation, or environmental hazards beyond reasonable mitigation, or
 - b) There is clear documented evidence of substantial disruption to residents, businesses, or essential services.
 - e. Applicant Responsibility & Competence
 - 1) Approval may be denied under this section if the applicant has demonstrated an inability or unwillingness to responsibly manage the event, such as:
 - a) A history of permit violations, law enforcement interventions, or noncompliance with event conditions.
 - b) A history of refusing to cooperate with police regarding any incident or crime that occurred during a previous event.
 - c) Failure to provide an adequate security, safety, or clean-up plan despite reasonable opportunity to correct deficiencies.
 - d) Providing false, misleading, or incomplete information on the permit application.
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3. PROCEDURE

A. Carnivals

1. The Law - City Code §9-702 Carnivals

A Temporary Carnival License from the **Department of Licenses and Inspections** is required to operate any ride or attraction at a carnival. The license is limited to a maximum of eight consecutive days, and only one can be issued per location each calendar year.

- a. To obtain a license, the applicant must:
 - 1) Provide required details, including the carnival's date, location, beneficiary organization, structures, and entertainment.

- 2) Comply with all relevant provisions of The Philadelphia Code, including the Health, Fire Prevention, and Plumbing Codes.
 - 3) Certify they are not delinquent on city taxes, fees, or other payments, or have an agreement in place to address any delinquencies.
 - 4) Certify that all receipts will be collected by and proceeds, minus necessary operating costs, will benefit a bona fide religious, educational, or charitable organization, with the carnival taking place on its grounds.
- b. Licensed carnival operators in Philadelphia must:
- 1) Pass all required city inspections, including health and fire safety, and obtain written approval before operating.
 - 2) Close by 11 p.m.
 - 3) Comply with all relevant city codes, including health, fire prevention, and plumbing regulations.
 - 4) Take necessary actions reasonably required to prevent the use of loud, noisy devices or activities and the occurrence of disorder.
2. Commanding Officer will:
- a. Upon receipt of a carnival application from the Department of Licenses and Inspections, which comes in through the chain of command, whether it is new or a renewal, notify the Neighborhood Town Watch, other local Community organizations, and conduct the necessary investigation to determine if the application should be approved or disapproved based upon the Standard of Review set forth in Section 2.
 - b. If approved, notify the Department of Licenses and Inspections
 - c. If an application is disapproved, follow the procedures in Section 4. If the disapproval decision is upheld, notify the Department of Licenses and Inspections
 - d. Whenever an approved carnival has not been conducted in a lawful manner (with or without arrest), submit a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner of Patrol outlining the incident.
 - e. A notification of the final recommendation and copy of all related documentation shall be added to the district's Carnival application file.

B. Block Parties and other Special Events (i.e. Non-Block Parties)

1. The Law - [City Code § 11-105](#) Block Parties and Other Special Events.
 - a. Permits and Applications - A permit from the Department of Streets is required for any block party or special event that involves closing a street. Applicants must submit an application via paper or the Department of Streets website, along with a petition of support. If submitted via paper, the Department of Streets manually inputs data into the system. The Department of Streets will notify the pertinent districts by email, including a link to the Department of Streets Application portal. The districts will be required to submit the Police Department's decision via the Department of Streets portal.
 - b. Block Parties require signatures from 75% of households on the block.
 - c. Non-Block Party Events: Require signatures from 90% of households.
 - d. "T" Streets: If the street to be closed is the only entrance to or exit from another street, a petition for the "T" street must also be submitted. This petition must meet the same signature requirements as the main event type (75% for block parties, 90% for non-block party events).
 - e. Petition Rules - One signature per household, signers must be 18+ and reside on the block.
 - f. Businesses: The Right-of-Way Unit must be notified if businesses are on the affected block to ensure the closure does not disrupt operations.
2. Permitted and Prohibited Activities
 - a. Permitted Activities
 - 1) Yellow caution tape may be used to block access to the street for a permitted block party or non-block party event, but vehicles shall not be used for that purpose.
 - 2) The following shall be permitted access to the closed street:
 - a) commercial vehicles for the purpose of making deliveries on the block; and
 - b) vehicles of persons, including those with a physical disability, who must gain access to the street to conduct normal daily activities.
 - b. Prohibited Activities

- 1) Organized gaming devices and gaming tables and the sale of alcoholic beverages,
 - 2) Noise and music levels shall not violate any City Codes.
 - 3) Charging for admission to the block party or non-block party event, having amusement rides or a carnival, or if the sale of merchandise or services will take place, without an additional permit issued by the Department of License and Inspections.
3. Permit Holder Responsibilities
- a. The holder of the permit shall be responsible for directing residents of the block in the proper disposal of all trash and recycling at the conclusion of the event, and the street must be clean and open to traffic by 8:30 p.m.
4. Commanding Officer will:
- a. Upon receipt of a Block Party or Special Event application from the **Department of Streets**, whether it is new or a renewal, which comes in through the chain of command, whether it is new or a renewal, notify the Neighborhood Town Watch, other local Community organizations, and conduct the necessary investigation to determine if the application should be approved or disapproved based upon the Standard of Review set forth in Section 2.
 - b. If approved, notify the Department of Streets.
 - c. If an application is disapproved, follow the procedures in Section 4. If the disapproval decision is upheld, notify the Department of Streets.
 - d. Whenever an approved Block Party or Special Event has not been conducted in a lawful manner (with or without arrest), submit a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner of Patrol outlining the incident.
 - e. A notification of the final recommendation and copy of all related documentation shall be added to the district's Block Party/Special Event application file.

C. Play Streets

1. The Law - [City Code §12-1204](#). Play Streets

- a. The Streets Department may designate any street or part thereof a play street by placing appropriate signs or devices in the roadway.
- b. No person shall drive a vehicle upon any designated play street or portion thereof except operators of vehicles having business or whose residences are within such closed area.

2. Process and Eligibility

- a. Permits are obtained from the Parks and Recreation Department.
- b. Signs are supplied by the Parks and Recreation.
- c. Hours of operation - 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Monday through Friday (Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, excluded), from June 26 through September 1.
- d. Barricades must be supplied by permit holder.
- e. Hydrants will be used with sprinklers only.
- f. Must have a block resident to be the Play Street supervisor.
- g. Play Street cannot be within two blocks of another approved Play Street or Recreation Center.
- h. The Play Street must be a small one-way street. No numbered streets will be considered unless it is a dead end
- i. 75% percent of residents on the block must sign the petition agreeing to a Play street.
- j. The street must be left in a safe and clean condition when not in use as a Play Street.

3. Vehicle Use

- a. Police, Fire, or any other City department may direct a play street to be opened.
- b. Commercial vehicles are to be admitted for delivery, selling or other occupational duties.
- c. Residents of the street may park their cars in the play street if they desire.

3. Commanding Officer will:
 - a. Upon receipt of a Play Street application from the Department of Recreation, which comes in through the chain of command, whether it is new or a renewal, notify the Neighborhood Town Watch, other local Community organizations, and conduct the necessary investigation to determine if the application should be approved or disapproved based upon the Standard of Review set forth in Section 2
 - b. If approved, notify the Department of Recreation.
 - c. If an application is disapproved, follow the procedures in Section 4. If the disapproval decision is upheld, notify the Department of Streets.
 - d. Whenever an approved Play Street has not been conducted in a lawful manner (with or without arrest), submit a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner Patrol outlining the incident.
 - e. A notification of the final recommendation and copy of all related documentation shall be added to the district's Play Street application file.

D. Special Assembly Occupancies (SAO)

1. The Law - [City Code § 9-703](#). Special Assembly Occupancies
 - a. Licenses
 - 1) A Special Assembly Occupancy License from License & Inspections is required for certain restaurants, bars, catering halls, nightclubs, and other gathering places offering social entertainment like dancing, live or recorded music, or DJs that have a lawful occupancy of fifty (50) or more people.
 - a) A license is not required for establishments using a strolling musician and establishments with a theater with fixed seating.
 - b. Operation of Special Assembly Occupancies
 - 1) It shall be the responsibility of every special assembly occupancy licensee to insure that patrons do not congregate in a disorderly manner, and do not engage in any illegal activity, including non-compliance with City Code Section [10-604](#) relating to alcoholic beverages in and around the immediate vicinity of the special assembly occupancy.

- 2) No special assembly occupancy shall operate between the hours of 2:00 AM and 7:00 AM. A special application may be made for permission for a special assembly occupancy to operate after-hours. L&I shall grant such permission only upon a showing of special circumstances, including, but not limited to, a showing that the proposed location and event are safe and proper for after-hours social entertainment.
- 3) It shall be the responsibility of every special assembly occupancy licensee as a condition to the receipt or retention of the special assembly occupancy license to:
 - a) Refrain from selling, transferring, delivering or manufacturing, illegal drugs to any person, or alcoholic beverages to a minor, or engaging in acts of prostitution or promoting prostitution as defined at 18 Pa. C.S. § 5902(a) and (b), or permitting a minor to remain upon the premises of said establishment in violation of City Code §10-300.
 - (1) All special assembly occupancies shall conclude all teen events and take reasonable steps to vacate all minors from the premises no later than thirty (30) minutes prior to the time restrictions set forth in City Code 10-300.
 - b) Licensees must not lease property to anyone they know, or should reasonably suspect, will use it for illegal drug activities, underage alcohol sales, prostitution, or allowing minors to remain on-site unlawfully.
 - c) Prevent public and private nuisances, including illegal drug sales on or near the premises, whether caused by patrons, employees, or third parties. Even if unaware of the issue, they are responsible for minimizing or preventing such nuisances through reasonable measures. Compliance is met if the licensee:
 - (1) establishes a clear policy against nuisances like drug sales,
 - (2) maintains adequate security staff to enforce the policy, and
 - (3) ensures security staff take good faith actions to uphold it.
 - d) Ban the use of pyrotechnic devices, fireworks, explosives, or similar materials within the premises and inform all performers of this prohibition in writing.
 - e) Do not contract with a promoter for an event if they are not registered with the Managing Director or lack a valid commercial activity license.

- f) Notify the local Police District Commander two weeks in advance of any promoted event. If notice is provided less than two weeks in advance, the licensee must demonstrate good cause for the late notice. The form for providing advance notice shall be available for filing online and shall include:
 - (1) The full name, address and commercial activity license of the outside operator
 - (2) The date, starting time and duration that the promoted event is scheduled;
 - (3) The lawful occupancy of the special assembly occupancy where the promoted event will be held;
 - (4) The anticipated number of persons who will attend the promoted event based upon the best information available, which may include advance ticket sales and the number of attendees at similar events in the past;
 - (5) Whether private security will be on location of the promoted event to manage security and traffic concerns;
 - (6) If private security will be on location of a promoted event, the name and telephone number of the person who will be in charge of security during the promoted event;
 - (7) If private security will be on location of a promoted event, whether or not the security staff will be armed or unarmed.

 - g) Licensees are encouraged to update the local Police District Commander if there are substantial changes in the nature of the promoted event, including, but not limited to cancellation of the event. The form for providing updated notifications shall be available for filing online;

 - h) Keep written agreements with outside operators for promoted events, outlining the specific operational responsibilities during the event, and make these agreements available for inspection by city or state law enforcement agencies. The written agreement shall be on a form prescribed by the Managing Director and shall be available online.
- 4) L&I will take all necessary actions to shut down any special assembly occupancy violating these rules. This may include seizing illegal drugs in coordination with the PPD, padlocking and closing the establishment, and initiating legal action to prevent further operation.
- 5) Any special assembly occupancy licensed under City Code § 9-703 who violates these provisions or whose agents or employees violate these provisions shall also be subject to immediate revocation of their amusement and commercial activity licenses.

c. Registration of Promoters

- 1) No person shall operate as a promoter without first registering as a promoter with the Managing Director. The registration forms are available online.

d. Enforcement

- 1) Special assembly occupancies may be inspected by the Philadelphia Police Department or Department of Licenses and Inspections at any reasonable time or while open for business.
- 2) PPD or L&I can order a venue vacated and/or closed if it violates regulations.
- 3) The licensee and outside operator (if applicable) are responsible for costs incurred by police, fire, or city departments when responding to disturbances, including any disorderly crowds, disturbances of the peace or riots and any other private or public nuisances arising from the operations of the special assembly occupancy except for isolated crimes or medical emergencies.
- 4) L&I will set rules for issuing, revoking, and enforcing license conditions and penalties.
- 5) Violations of certain rules will be classified as a Class III offense, with penalties assessed per violation, depending on the nature and frequency of infractions.

2. Commanding Officer will:

- a. Upon receipt of a Special Assembly Occupancy License application from the Department of Licenses and Inspections, whether it is new or a renewal, notify the Neighborhood Town Watch, other local Community organizations, and conduct the necessary investigation to determine if the application should be approved or disapproved based upon the Standard of Review set forth in Section 2.
- b. If approved, notify the Department of License and Inspections.
- c. If an application is disapproved, follow the procedures in Section 4. If the disapproval decision is upheld, notify the Department of Licenses and Inspections.

- d. Whenever an approved Special Assembly Occupancy license has not been conducted in a lawful manner (with or without arrest), submit a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner of Patrol outlining the incident.
 - e. A notification of the final recommendation and copy of all related documentation shall be added to the district's Special Assembly Occupancy License file.
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4. DISAPPROVAL REVIEW PROCESS

- A. All disapproved applications will be reviewed through the chain of command based upon the Standard of Review set forth in Section 2. As such, all applications are presumed approved unless substantial, verifiable evidence proves an unmanageable risk to public safety, traffic, infrastructure, legal compliance, or community well-being. Any denial based upon public safety concerns must be real and documented, not based on speculation, stereotypes, or assumptions about location or attendees. Before denial, reasonable mitigation measures must be considered. Decisions will be fact-based, with written explanations for any denials or modifications.
 - B. In cases where any application is disapproved, the Commanding Officer will:
 - 1. Submit a Memorandum (82-S-1) up through the chain of command to the Deputy Commissioner of Patrol Operations containing the following:
 - a. Information on the application, and
 - b. A written justification for the disapproval, along with all supporting evidence upon which the decision was made.
 - c. If the disapproval is overturned by a superior commander, make notification to the appropriate City agency.
- NOTE:** Despite any reversal, all memoranda will be forwarded to the Deputy Commissioner of Patrol.
- C. The Deputy Commissioner, Patrol Operations will make the final decision on all disapproved applications. If disapproval is upheld, the Commanding Officer will be notified and advise the appropriate city agency accordingly.
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5. APPEALS

- A. If notification is received of any appeal regarding a denial by the Police Department of any applications identified in this Directive, the chain of command will be notified up to the Deputy Commissioner of Patrol.

B. The Deputy Commissioner of Patrol will coordinate with the Office of Legal Affairs to investigate whether new information has come to light or if existing favorable information that was not otherwise known during the initial application review would cause the Department to withdraw its disapproval.

NOTE: Favorable findings, which do not negatively affect public safety, may provide just cause to overturn an original denial recommendation decision.

C. Once the appeal review is complete, the Deputy Commissioner of Patrol will make the determination to either withdraw the disapproval or not and will coordinate with the Office of Legal Affairs for the appropriate response to the appellant.

RELATED PROCEDURES: Directive 3.12, Processions, Parades, Marches, and Races
Directive 4.7, Barricades and Flares”
Directive 12.10, Issuance of Non-Traffic Summary Citations”

BY COMMAND OF THE POLICE COMMISSIONER
