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Item No. 5.1.1
Special Events Advisory Committee
January 7, 2026

TO: Chair and Members of Special Events Advisory Committee

FROM: Jacqueline Hamilton, Acting Commissioner of Operations

DATE: November 14, 2025

SUBJECT: 2026 MLSER Major Hosting Events

ORIGIN

Applications received pursuant to Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV - Respecting Marketing Levy Special Event Reserve Grants.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pursuant to Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV - Respecting Marketing Levy Special Event Reserve Grants (AO), this report summarizes the recommended Marketing Levy Special Event Reserve (MLSER) grant awards for two Major Hosting Events: 1) \$90,000 from the 2025/2026 Community and Events Reserve, Q621 to fund the 2026 U SPORTS Men's University Cup to be held in March 2026; and 2) pending approval of the 2026/2027 budget award \$1,000,000 from the 2026/2027 Community and Events Reserve, Q621 to fund the 2026 ICF Junior and U23 Canoe Sprint World Championships to be held in July 2026. Both Major Hosting applications were received in October 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Special Events Advisory Committee recommend Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve an event grant in the amount of \$90,000 from the 2025/2026 Community and Events Reserve, Q621 to fund the 2026 U SPORTS Men's University Cup; and
2. Pending approval of the 2026/2027 budget, approve an event grant in the amount of \$1,000,000 from the Community and Events Reserve, Q621 to fund the 2026 ICF Junior and U23 Canoe Sprint World Championships.

BACKGROUND

In October 2025, Saint Mary's University and the Atlantic Division Canoe Kayak Canada (ADCKC) applied for funding to the MLSER Major Hosting Event grant program to host events in March and July 2026 respectively.

Funding for the MLSER grant awards is provided from the Community and Events Reserve (Q621) and withdrawals are approved by Regional Council, in accordance with the MLSER AO. The purpose of the MLSER AO is to direct financial support to large scale special events in HRM that support and promote tourism and business development. The Major Hosting Event program supports national or international events that do not recur annually within the municipality and are awarded to a host destination. The Major Hosting Events program application process is open with no intake deadline.

Staff undertakes the grant application and evaluation process as outlined in the MLSER AO. This report outlines the recommendation for funding for the 2026 U SPORTS University Cup (2026 U Cup) and the 2026 ICF Junior and U23 Canoe Sprint World Championships (Canoe '26) for the Special Events Advisory Committee's consideration for recommendation to Regional Council.

Eligibility

The definition of the Major Hosting Event states:

Events must be of a size and scope sufficient to draw tourists to the Municipality's communities, attract significant media exposure, profile Halifax destinations nationally and globally, and is awarded to a host destination through a competitive bidding process.

The 2026 U Cup and the Canoe '26 is eligible for consideration under the MLSER Major Hosting Event program.

DISCUSSION

2026 U SPORTS Men's University Cup

In August 2024, Saint Mary's University won the rights to host the 2026 U Cup in Halifax. On October 28, 2025, HRM received a Major Hosting Event funding application.

Saint Mary's University will partner with Sports & Entertainment Atlantic (SEA) who will manage the event with their knowledge and experience managing three previous U Cup tournaments here in Halifax. The former CIS University Cup organized by SEA was held in Halifax at the Scotiabank Centre in 2015 and 2016. The 2016 U Cup hosted in Halifax holds the U SPORTS total attendance record of 43,513. The 2020 U Cup was scheduled to take place in Halifax in March 2020; however, it was cancelled after the first day of competition due to the COVID-19 pandemic (only two games played). The 2020 tournament was later rescheduled for 2022 with the same host school, Acadia. Although originally set to take place at the Scotiabank Centre, a two-week postponement by U SPORTS resulted in a venue conflict and led to all games being played in Wolfville, while the teams were still accommodated in Halifax.

From March 19 to 22, 2026, Saint Mary's University will host the 2026 U Cup at the Scotiabank Centre. The top eight men's teams from all four conferences (West, OUA, RSEQ and AUS) will play single elimination knock out over 4 days with the top two national university hockey teams competing for the national championship.

Teams will begin to arrive in Halifax on Monday, March 16, 2026. To recognize the top performing players and coaches for the season, an Awards Gala for the top eight teams will be held on Wednesday, March 18, 2026. The tournament will officially begin on Thursday, March 19, 2026 hosting two games per day through to Sunday. Additionally on Sunday, the bronze medal and championship games will be played.

The municipal funding request for the 2026 U Cup is \$90,000. The Province of Nova Scotia has confirmed funding to support the event in the amount of \$100,000.

Event Summary

- The event will attract approximately 37,445 people throughout the tournament;
- The event will require 200 volunteers, which will provide over 6,000 volunteer hours over the course of

the weekend.

- The event estimates that 1,500 room nights would be generated by participants, spectators, media and VIP's;
- The event will be ticketed for the public to attend; and
- The estimated budget for the event is \$510,000.

Economic Impact Projection

- The combined total of visitor, capital and operational spending as a result of hosting the 2026 U Cup is expected to total \$2,724,105. These initial expenditures are estimated to support \$3,448,076 of economic activity for the municipality; and
- The event is estimated to support 26.5 jobs, and \$1,120,045 in wages.

The detailed economic impact assessment can be found in Attachment 1.

Media Exposure

- A mix of traditional print, radio and digital channels will be used to reach local regional and national audiences;
- Outdoor advertising (both digital and print) is planned at the Scotiabank Centre, as well as downtown Halifax flag placements;
- All games will be live streamed to cbc.ca and YouTube; and
- The Championship game will be broadcasted nationally on CBC TV.

Destination Recognition

Hosting a university national championship in Halifax, utilizing the city's sport hosting venue promotes the municipality as an accessible sporting event destination for future national championships. The municipality would be recognized in appropriate places within the venue and in areas on TV that will receive national exposure.

Recommendation

Based on the information provided and the budget capacity remaining in the 2025/2026 Community and Events Reserve (Q621) it is recommended that the municipality provide funding in the amount of \$90,000 to Saint Mary's University to host the 2026 U SPORTS Men's University Cup.

2026 ICF Junior and U23 Canoe Sprint World Championships

In late August 2025, ADCKC was confirmed Lake Banook, Dartmouth will be the host city and venue for Canoe '26. On October 3, 2025, HRM received a Major Hosting Event funding application.

Shortly after the funding application was received, the Canoe '26 Society formally applied to the Registry of Joint Stock Companies. The application was approved and on October 29, 2025, the Canoe '26 Society became active. ADCKC has transferred the funding application to the new host society which will serve as the lead entity responsible for planning and implementing Canoe '26. Moving forward, ADCKC will act as a service provider to Canoe '26 but will not serve as the event organizer.

From July 1-5, 2026, the world's top junior and under 23 athletes will compete in canoe and kayak sprint events, including men's, women's and mixed disciplines in 200 m, 500 m, 1,000 m, and 5,000 m distances. Building on the success of Canoe '22, the 2022 ICF Canoe Sprint and Paracanoe World Championships, Canoe '26 will continue the tradition of hosting world-class paddling events at Lake Banook, one of Canada's premier flatwater racing venues with a longstanding legacy in international paddling sport.

The competition will be held over five days and will host over 55-70 national federations representing all six continents. Participating countries select their teams for competition, therefore are not open for local athletes to compete. The final number of federations competing will be determined the week prior to the event as the ICF entry deadline is June 21, 2026; 10 days before competition. 1,000 athletes with 400 accompanying staff are estimated to attend the event.

A short training camp is offered to Canadian athletes that depending on school schedules will begin to arrive June 21 to 26, 2026. International athletes are expected to arrive June 27 to 28 to climatize to the Atlantic Canadian weather and time zone change. Official practices for all athletes will be held June 29 and 30. Athletes are staying in various hotels and university residences throughout Halifax and Dartmouth and are being shuttled to the competition grounds.

To reinforce the event's commitment to accessibility and community engagement, all programming will be offered free of charge to spectators. In addition to the sport competition, the event will include a festive atmosphere designed to enhance the spectator experience. These community-focused activities include family-friendly zones, cultural showcases, a vendor marketplace featuring local food and artisan products and promotional opportunities for regional paddling clubs and organizations. The festival portion of the event will be an open-access format designed to promote cultural exchange, foster community pride, and provide engagement opportunities for both local residents and international visitors.

The municipal funding request for Canoe '26 is \$1,000,000. The Province of Nova Scotia has confirmed funding to support the event in the amount of \$1,300,000.

Event Summary

- The event will attract approximately 23,000 people throughout the competition;
- The event will take on 600 volunteers which will provide over 60,000 volunteer hours over the course of the competition (including pre and post);
- The event estimates that 12,000 room nights would be generated by participants, spectators, media and VIP's;
- The event will be free and open for the public to attend; and
- The estimated budget for the event is \$3,013,500.

Economic Impact

- The combined total of visitor, capital and operational spending as a result of hosting Canoe '26 is expected to total \$7,746,764. These initial expenditures are estimated to support \$9,435,549 of economic activity for the municipality; and
- The event is estimated to support 62.1 jobs, and \$2,982,430 in wages.

The detailed economic impact assessment can be found in Attachment 1.

Media Exposure

- A combination of digital, print, radio and community outreach will be utilized to promote the event;
- Key efforts include social media, a dedicated website, local advertising and media relations;
- Discover Halifax has confirmed marketing support through their digital platforms;
- Engagement through local canoe and paddling clubs, schools and businesses will take place to build excitement and drive attendance;
- A drone film production contractor will be secured to manage all footage, production, and graphic design necessary for competition coverage, highlight segments, and interviews with participants, staff, volunteers, and spectators; and
- The event will be streamed on the official International Canoe Federation YouTube channel for the full duration of the event.

Destination Recognition

Hosting an international event of this calibre promotes the municipality as a key, accessible sporting event destination in a competitive, global market. Hosting Canoe '26 forms part of a broader strategy for Canoe Kayak Canada to bid on the rights to host the 2029 Senior World Championships in Halifax. The municipality would be recognized in appropriate places within the venue which as will receive national exposure.

Recommendation

Based on the information provided and pending final approval of the 2026/2027 Community and Events Reserve (Q621) budget it is recommended that the municipality provide funding in the amount of

\$1,000,000 to the Canoe '26 Society to host the 2026 ICF Junior and U23 Canoe Sprint World Championships.

Funding Disbursement

Grant awards for applications that receive final approval by Regional Council will be dispersed according to a schedule outlined in the executed HRM Contribution Agreement, with up to twenty per cent being withheld until the completion of the event and submission of the final report describing the impact of the funding received from the municipality, as well as outline the success and challenges associated with the event, including a detailed finalized budget.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The funding is available in Community and Events Reserve, Q621 with no additional increased withdrawal required.

Budget Summary: Community and Events Reserve, Q621

Projected Net Available Balances (as of Q2 2025/26)	\$8,119,915
Less: Unbudgeted Reserve Withdrawal	\$90,000
Less: Reserve Withdrawal (pending 2026/27 budget approval)	<u>\$1,000,000</u>
Balance Updated Available Balance	\$7,029,915

RISK CONSIDERATION

There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this report. The risks considered rate low. To reach this conclusion, consideration was given to financial and reputational risks. Contribution agreements between Saint Mary's University and the municipality and Canoe '26 Society and the municipality will be negotiated prior to the release of funding. The agreements will include details regarding the rights and benefits outlined including media coverage and advertising opportunities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Special Events Advisory Committee includes members of the public.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVE

The Special Events Advisory Committee may choose to make a different recommendation to Halifax Regional Council with respect to a particular event grant application or recommend that Halifax Regional Council amend the value of the award.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008. c. 39

29A(5) The marketing levy collected pursuant to this Section may be only used by the Council to promote tourism.

79A(1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality;

Administrative Order 2014-020-GOV – Respecting Marketing Levy Special Event Reserve Grants

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1: Economic Impact Assessments

Report Prepared by: Shari Dillman, Event Grants Administrator, 902.497.3729



2026 U SPORTS Men's University Cup (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Estimated Economic Impact Analysis October 2025

The Sport Tourism Economic Assessment Model – version 2.0 (STEAM 2.0) is a tool that has been designed to develop economic impact projections of sport events and festivals throughout Canada. Economic impact projections quantify the impact that special events have on the larger economy through a variety of measures such as GDP, Jobs, Wages & Salaries, Taxes, and Industry Output.

Used judiciously, these indicators can be used to garner support from public and private sector partners, provide a framework for comparing the relative size of impacts of events, or for communicating to the general public the importance of sport events and festivals to the community as a whole.

The combined total of visitor, capital and operational spending as a result of hosting the **2026 U SPORTS Men's University Cup** is expected to total **\$2,724,105**. These expenditures will support a total of **\$3,711,120** dollars of economic activity in the province, of which **\$3,448,076** is expected to occur in **Halifax**.

The **2026 U SPORTS Men's University Cup** is expected to support wages and salaries of **\$1,209,014** dollars and **27.9** jobs for Nova Scotia, of which **26.5** jobs and **\$1,120,045** dollars in wages and salaries will be supported in **Halifax**.

The total net economic activity (GDP) supported by the event is expected to reach **\$2,468,662** Canada as a whole, **\$1,850,751** for Nova Scotia and **\$1,662,944** for **Halifax**.

Disclaimer: The results of this pre-event economic impact analysis are intended to act as a guide and are not considered definitive of the actual events. All projections should be considered an event's potential economic impact. The projections are based on standardized spending estimates that may or may not reflect that of the highlighted event's attendees. In addition, the projections are based on the organizer's assumptions regarding attendance, composition and characteristics. These forecasts are subject to uncertainty and evolving events, therefore actual results may vary from forecasted results. Additionally, these forecasts only recognize the economic benefits of the event, and do not consider any displacement or substitution costs that may occur as a result of hosting the event. STEAM ^{2.00} is the federally recognized economic impact assessment model used for sport tourism in Canada.



2026 ICF Junior and U23 Canoe Sprint World Championships (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Estimated Economic Impact Analysis November 2025

The Sport Tourism Economic Assessment Model – version 2.0 (STEAM 2.0) is a tool that has been designed to develop economic impact projections of sport events and festivals throughout Canada. Economic impact projections quantify the impact that special events have on the larger economy through a variety of measures such as GDP, Jobs, Wages & Salaries, Taxes, and Industry Output.

Used judiciously, these indicators can be used to garner support from public and private sector partners, provide a framework for comparing the relative size of impacts of events, or for communicating to the general public the importance of sport events and festivals to the community as a whole.

The combined total of visitor, capital and operational spending as a result of hosting the **2026 ICF Junior and U23 Canoe Sprint World Championships** is expected to total **\$7,746,764**. These expenditures will support a total of **\$10,076,315** dollars of economic activity in the province, of which **\$9,435,549** is expected to occur in **Halifax**.

The **2026 ICF Junior and U23 Canoe Sprint World Championships** is expected to support wages and salaries of **\$3,379,686** dollars and **68.4** jobs for Nova Scotia, of which **62.1** jobs and **\$2,982,430** dollars in wages and salaries will be supported in **Halifax**.

The total net economic activity (GDP) supported by the event is expected to reach **\$6,956,011** Canada as a whole, **\$5,177,113** for Nova Scotia and **\$4,453,671** for **Halifax**.

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