



# Getting Started Guide

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## *Outdoor Special Event Permits & Planning*



chapelhillarts.org  
artsandculture@townofchapelhill.org  
919-969-2065

## WELCOME!

Community celebrations and special events contribute to a vibrant and inclusive community, positively impacting residents, businesses, visitors, and the community at large.

This publication is intended to help organizers minimize potentially negative impacts to people and the environment, and to maintain community health, safety, and quality of life.

If you are considering organizing an event in the Town of Chapel Hill, please use this information to ensure it is safe, compliant, and successful.

If you have questions about a particular event or activity, whether a permit is required, or anything else about your proposed event, please contact: Community Arts & Culture, [artsandculture@townofchapelhill.org](mailto:artsandculture@townofchapelhill.org).

## WHO NEEDS TO SUBMIT A SPECIAL EVENT PERMIT APPLICATION?

All organizers whose event is outdoors on Public Property; and,

All organizers whose event is outdoors on Private Property and-

1. The event size or activities may impact nearby residents or businesses; or
2. The event is publicly advertised and open to the public; or
3. The event is near a public street or parking lot;

Organizers who are unsure whether or not their event needs to be permitted should reach out to [artsandculture@townofchapelhill.org](mailto:artsandculture@townofchapelhill.org) or 919-969-2065.

## A Note on Free Speech

The Town of Chapel Hill encourages the free expression of ideas. No permit is required for non-commercial speech activities in public pedestrian spaces, but notification of Town officials and reservation of Town facilities, including Peace and Justice Plaza, is **recommended** to avoid conflict with other events. Information on using Peace and Justice Plaza can be found [here](#).

Activities related to free speech issues including picketing are specifically covered by the [Code of Ordinances of the Town of Chapel Hill](#).



## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO SUBMIT A SPECIAL EVENT PERMIT APPLICATION?

Before submitting an application, organizers will need to:

1. Review and understand this guide.
2. Have a clear vision for your event.
3. Create a detailed (and legible) map of your event. Show us the locations of the event features like barricades, tents, portable restrooms, structures, bounce houses, equipment, parking, first aid, emergency access lanes, evacuation routes, etc.
4. If you are hosting an event at a Town facility or park, make sure you reserved the facility. You will need proof of your reservation. More information on Town facility rentals is [here](#).
5. Develop a plan for public safety and emergency situations during the event.
6. Have a credit or debit card handy to pay the \$50 application fee. (Application fees may be waived for neighborhood events.)

Some events will require additional materials such as a certificate of insurance or proof of reservation of a town facility.

## HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR AN EVENT PERMIT?

Visit [chapelhillarts.org/applications](http://chapelhillarts.org/applications) to enter the application portal, where you'll find our Event Organizer Checklist and online event permit application. Follow the directions to fill out the online application and to pay the \$50 application fee. You will be asked to upload your event map and other applicable documents within the application. If you have questions, email [artsandculture@townofchapelhill.org](mailto:artsandculture@townofchapelhill.org) or call 919-969-2065.

Applicants will receive a confirmation message and receipt immediately. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit applications as early as possible in advance of events. The Town review process will range from a few weeks to several months, depending on the complexity and scope of the event. Organizers who do not submit applications well in advance of their events may be denied a permit.

## WHAT DO SPECIAL EVENT PERMITS COST?

All applicants are charged a \$50 non-refundable service fee when submitting an event application. Many applicants will be subject to additional fees for event-related services based on the nature and scale of the event. The Town will notify organizers of additional fees after review of the event application. Organizers must pay all fees prior to receiving final event permit approval. See below for more information about fees for event-related services. The complete Town fee schedule is available [here](#).



## **ACCESSIBILITY**

Events on public property must be accessible. Event organizers are required to comply with all Town, County, State, and Federal Disability Access Requirements. All temporary venues, related structures, and outdoor sites must be accessible to persons with disabilities. If a portion of the area cannot be made accessible, an alternate area must be provided with the same activities. The alternate area cannot be offered only to patrons with disabilities.

Disability access may include parking, restrooms, telephones, clear paths of travel, transportation, signage, and accessible vendors and booths. If all areas are not accessible, a map or program must be provided to attendees indicating the accessible restrooms, parking, telephones, drinking fountains, etc. For more information visit [ADA.gov](http://ADA.gov).

## **ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE SALE & CONSUMPTION**

Both the Town of Chapel Hill and the State of North Carolina regulate the possession, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Special permits and licensing are unconditionally required for the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages at all Outdoor Special Events.

All events that include the possession of alcohol will require the presence of town-approved security staff to ensure compliance with local ordinance regarding alcohol consumption.

Event organizers will need to provide the following in advance of their event:

1. Proof of Licensing from the North Carolina Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission
2. Proof of Liquor Liability Insurance Coverage from organizer's insurance provider

## **ELECTRICAL REQUIREMENTS**

Portable generators must be installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If grounding is recommended by the manufacturer, organizers must hire a licensed electrician.

Electrical extension cords must connect to an exterior Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) outlet and may not pass through doorways or windows. Extension cords must be covered by proper covering devices. Fire extinguishers must be supplied.

Organizers must hire a licensed electrician to conduct any event-specific electrical work or make changes to what already exists at the event location. All electrical work must be permitted, inspected, and approved.

For electrical work permits and requirements, Contact the Inspections Department (919) 968-2718.



## **FIREWORKS**

There are limited locations within the Town of Chapel Hill that can be used to launch fireworks. A fireworks permit (\$300.00) is required to display fireworks in Chapel Hill. Fireworks require a Fire Department unit standby on site. This permit and fee are in addition to any other permits and fees required by State Law and Local Ordinance, including any applicable requirements for permits contained in Chapter 14, Article 54, of the North Carolina General Statute. Application must be made in writing to the Town of Chapel Hill Fire Department no less than sixty (60) days prior to the date of the proposed display of fireworks.

Contact the Fire Department (919) 968-2781 for more information.

## **FOOD**

If the event includes food sales, event organizers must contact the Orange County Health Department to discuss inspection and permit requirements for food vending.

The event organizer is responsible for following all rules and regulations regarding any food preparation and service as established by the Orange County Health Department. Organizers should be aware that:

1. Organizers and vendors are subject to additional fees if permits are needed.
2. Application for temporary food establishments must be submitted to the Health Department at least 30 days prior to the event. To access this application and more information, click [here](#).
3. Events hosted by non-profit organizations, political fundraising events, businesses with limited menu items, permitted food trucks and pushcarts, and permitted establishments selling packaged food under their own supervision may be eligible for exemption from temporary food establishment permitting requirements. Please inquire with the Health Department to verify exemption.
4. Inspectors have the right to close booths operating outside of health regulations.
5. Beverages must be served in non-breakable cups. Compostable cups are preferred.
6. Event organizer is responsible for all clean-up, including grease removal.

## **INSURANCE**

For events on Town owned or leased property, organizers must provide evidence of current valid insurance (if applicable) in the minimum amounts stated below during the duration of the event. The Town must be named as an additional insured for Commercial General Liability and Business Automobile policies. The required coverage limits are: 1) Commercial General Liability and Business Automobile - \$1,000,000 per occurrence and 2) Workers' Compensation - \$100,000 for both employer's liability and bodily injury by disease for each employee and



\$500,000 for the disease policy limit. The Town must be listed as: Town of Chapel Hill, 405 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Chapel Hill, NC 27514. The Town and its insurer may waive or reduce the insurance requirements for small events, based on an assessment of risk posed to the Town. Such a waiver can only be granted at the discretion and approval of the Town Attorney or Risk Manager. Additionally, based on the type of event to be held on Town-owned or leased property, and an assessment of risk posed to the Town, the Town may require evidence of supplementary insurance coverages.

## **MAP / ROUTE / EVENT LAYOUT**

Organizers must provide a clearly legible site map / route map showing the location of all barricades, tents, portable/prefabricated and site built structures such as stages, platforms and bleachers, vendor booths, portable restroom facilities, drinking water, first aid, electrical supply points, generators and key equipment locations, emergency egress lanes of 20 feet, and evacuation routes. An example of an event map is located at the end of this guide.

## **MITIGATION OF IMPACT ON NEIGHBORS**

For neighborhood parties and other events that will have significant impact on others, the Town requires organizers to notify neighbors in advance of the event.

The Town may also require organizers to post advisory signs in advance of their event notifying regular users of streets and lots of scheduled closure. A copy of this notice should be pre-approved by the Town before use.

For more information regarding neighborhood block parties, see [Town ordinance](#).

## **NOISE**

Organizers must comply with the [Town's noise ordinance](#). Event organizers may be required to secure a noise permit for events using amplified sound (fees apply). Complaints of loud, disturbing, or unnecessary noise will result in action by the Chapel Hill Police Department.

## **PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION**

Organizers must plan for the safe arrival and departure of event attendees, participants, and vendors. Organizers should encourage the use of carpools, public transportation, and alternate modes of nonpolluting transportation whenever possible. Parking plans must include wheelchair accessible parking and/or accessible access.



## **PARKS, PICNIC PAVILLIONS, AND OTHER FACILITIES**

Event organizers must reserve space at [Town Facilities, Picnic Pavilions, and Parks](#) before submitting their event application. Facility reservations are granted based on availability and acceptable use. Reservations are subject to fees and require organizers to agree to terms.

Organizers may not charge admission fees for any event held on Town-owned or leased properties. Exemptions may be made for special events that align with Town goals and priorities. Exemptions must be governed by a Performance Agreement between the Town and the event organizer.

## **SAFETY PLAN**

In compliance with the 2018 North Carolina State Fire Prevention Code, all organizers will be asked to provide information that describes how they will address public safety and emergency situations during their event.

Larger and more complex events will require a formal emergency action plan. The Town may require organizers to coordinate with Town Emergency Management staff for emergency action plan development and are subject to additional service fees.

## **SANITATION AND WASTE**

**TOILETS.** Event organizers must provide adequate on-site toilets for attendees at their event. Orange County recommends organizers provide one (1) toilet for every 250 people, or portion thereof, who attends the event. Ten percent (10%) of these facilities must be ADA accessible. This figure is based upon the maximum number of attendees during peak time. Portable toilets must be maintained daily if contracted for a multiple day event.

For more information contact the Orange County Health Department at (919) 245-2360.

**TRASH / RECYCLING / COMPOST.** Event organizers are responsible for the management and cleanup of all waste related to their event. Failure to properly dispose of waste from an event may result in additional fees. The Town is committed to environmental sustainability and encourages all event organizers to minimize waste and promote sustainable behaviors at their events. Please encourage event vendors to do the same, using compostable materials when possible and clearly directing attendees to sort waste appropriately. For more information on waste minimization, recycling, and composting, please contact [Orange County Waste Management](#).

**GREASE / COOKING OIL.** Event organizers are responsible for ensuring proper disposal of event grease, oils, and other potentially hazardous materials. Spills and improper waste

management may be classified as hazardous waste and result in fines. For more information on recycling grease and cooking oil, please contact Orange County Waste Management.

### **STAFFING REQUIREMENTS - SAFETY, SECURITY, & MEDICAL**

The Town may require organizers to contract with traffic, security, or EMS personnel prior to permit approval based on the nature and size of the event. These costs are the responsibility of event organizers.

If organizers fail to meet security requirements for the event, or if security provided proves inadequate, the Town maintains the right to shut down any or all components of the event and/or to provide additional police services that will be billed directly to the organizer.

For events with estimated attendance of more than 1,000 attendees, North Carolina Fire Prevention Code requires trained crowd managers to be present at the event at a ratio of one crowd manager per 250 people. Crowd manager training is available free online at this [link](#).

### **STREET, LANE, LOT, & SIDEWALK CLOSURES**

Organizers requesting closure of Town streets, sidewalks, or public parking spaces must create a traffic plan showing:

1. The re-direction of traffic flow around the requested closure
2. Locations of all directional/detour signage and barricades
3. Egress and evacuation routes

More complex events such as road races will require a professionally engineered traffic control plan. Additional charges may apply.

Vehicles obstructing barricades or fire lanes will be cited for a violation of the fire code and may be towed and stored at the owner's expense. No posters, signs, or similar materials may be attached to or placed on barricades.

Sidewalks must remain clear and unobstructed unless the closure permit specifically states that the sidewalk is to be closed or if the sidewalk is within a festival boundary area where streets are closed for a special event.

Event Organizer must maintain a twenty (20) foot emergency egress lane for emergency vehicle access at all times.



## TENTS & TEMPORARY STRUCTURES

The North Carolina State Building and Fire Codes and town ordinances regulate the construction and placement of any structure, including tents, canopies, bounce houses, and shelters, constructed of canvas or other pliable materials.

1. Any temporary structure (with sides) in area over 800 square feet, and any open-sided temporary structure in area over 1,800 square feet will require a permit and must be inspected and approved before occupancy or use by the public. Fees apply.
2. The organizer must have a copy of the approved Fire Permits (as applicable) on site during the course of the event.
3. No tent may be erected in front of a building used as a place of public assembly, within fifteen (15) feet of a fire hydrant, or in any way obstructing any building exit or doorway.
4. Tents must not block streets.
5. A minimum twenty (20) foot emergency egress lane must be maintained on all streets.
6. Open flame devices, flammable/combustible liquids, gas, or charcoal should be more than twenty (20) feet away from tents.
7. Spark or grease laden vapor from outdoor cooking should be more than twenty (20) feet away from tents.
8. All tents must be secured, and no tents may be staked into the asphalt.

For more information call Chapel Hill Fire Department (919) 968-2781

