



CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: August 21, 2007
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Phone No.: 604.871.6146
RTS No.: 6825
VanRIMS No.:
Meeting Date: September 20, 2007

TO: Standing Committee on City Services and Budgets
FROM: City Clerk
SUBJECT: Vancouver Athletic Commission - Sanctioning of Combat Sports

CONSIDERATION

Option 1

- A. THAT Council direct the Vancouver Athletic Commission to cease sanctioning ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts contests and exhibitions in the City.
- B. THAT Council request that the Province of British Columbia establish a provincial body for the purpose of regulating and supervising professional boxing, kick-boxing, wrestling, ultimate fighting, and mixed martial arts contests and exhibitions.

OR

Option 2

- C. THAT Council permit ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts contests and exhibitions in the City of Vancouver.
- D. THAT Council direct the Vancouver Athletic Commission to implement risk mitigation measures to the satisfaction of the Director of Risk Management and Director of Legal Services.

- E. THAT Council prohibit ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts contests and exhibitions from being held on lands or at facilities owned or operated by the City of Vancouver or Pacific National Exhibition.
- F. THAT Council authorize the Vancouver Athletic Commission to charge an increased seat tax of fifty cents per occupied seat to every person conducting any contest or exhibition for the purpose of providing funds for the operating and administrative expenses, including office support, of the Commission;
- G. THAT Council request the City Manager to provide a staff program liaison to the Vancouver Athletic Commission.
- H. THAT the Director of Legal Services be instructed to bring forward for Council approval any necessary amendments to the Vancouver Athletic Commission By-law No. 2875 to reflect the direction of Council.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager puts forward the foregoing for Council's CONSIDERATION.

The Vancouver Athletic Commission fulfills an important function in regulating, controlling, and supervising professional boxing, wrestling and kickboxing competitions in the City of Vancouver. The Commission exercises its delegated authority independently of the City. Combat sports have grown to include the more violent ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts contests. The Commission is currently regulating, controlling, and supervising these events as well.

Due to the more violent nature of these combat sports, the lack of a professional sports association (i.e. governing body) to oversee ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts, the Commission is more actively involved in regulating and supervising these events. The expanded nature of the Commission's activities now draws heavily on City staff resources - including the City Clerk's Office, Legal Services, and Risk Management. Based on the nature of the ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts events and the staff resources spent in facilitating the sanctioning of these events by the Commission, it is appropriate to advise Council of the matter so that Council may provide direction as to which combat sports the Commission may sanction and regulate.

COUNCIL POLICY

The *Vancouver Charter* s.338 and City of Vancouver By-Law No. 2875 define the jurisdiction and authority of the Vancouver Athletic Commission.

PURPOSE

To obtain Council's direction as to the types of combat sports that Council approves being sanctioned by the Vancouver Athletic Commission to be held within the City of Vancouver.

Also, that Council consider the use of facilities owned or operated by the City of Vancouver or any related organization for these purposes.

BACKGROUND

Under the *Vancouver Charter* s.338 Council may establish by by-law the Vancouver Athletic Commission (VAC). In 1945, Council established the Commission by by-law to control and supervise professional boxing and wrestling contests and exhibitions held in the City of Vancouver. More recently, the Charter recognized professional kickboxing as being within the mandate of the Commission. Boxing, wrestling, and kickboxing, etc. are often referred to as 'combat sports'. The VAC consists of five board members, all of whom are appointed annually and serve without remuneration.

In recent years, combat sports have grown to include 'mixed martial arts' and 'ultimate fighting'. Mixed martial arts involve a mixture of jui jitsui, boxing, kickboxing, wrestling and other forms of hand-to-hand combat. Ultimate fighting is a fighting competition in which the participants use mixed martial arts of various disciplines. Ultimate fighting contests are frequently held in cages. As is the case with athletic commissions in other jurisdictions within Canada and the United States, the Vancouver Athletic Commission often receives applications from promoters to hold mixed martial arts and ultimate fighting events.

Both ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts (UF/MMA) events are more violent than the more traditional professional boxing, wrestling, and kickboxing contests. As a result of the degree of violence associated with these combat sports, numerous jurisdictions having athletic commissions within the United States and Canada are refusing to sanction UF/MMA events. These include the Provinces of Ontario and Prince Edward Island, both of which have provincial athletic commissions - as well as the City of Richmond which recently created its own Athletic Commission. Currently no other municipality in the Lower Mainland sanctions these events. The Prince George and Vernon Athletic Commissions sanction such UF/MMA events.

Ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts contests are becoming very popular and have a growing fan base. During the past year or so, the VAC has sanctioned five or six such events which were held in Vancouver.

To protect the fighters from injury, the VAC has regulated that certain safety requirements be adhered to by the promoters, including the requirement that:

- two doctors be in attendance at each competition;
- an ambulance with attendants be on-site;
- a neurologist be on-call at the nearest hospital;
- pre and post-bout medicals for each fighter be conducted; and
- each fighter be licensed. (This includes having various medical tests completed each year and an independent medical confirmation of fitness).

To date, the VAC is not aware of any serious injuries to fighters participating in any UF/MMA events sanctioned by the VAC.

Due to the more violent nature of these combat sports, the lack of a professional sports association or governing body to oversee and regulate ultimate fighting and mixed martial

arts, the Commission is more actively involved in regulating and supervising these events. To assist in this regard, the City has found it necessary to direct an increasing amount of staff resources to the VAC. It is estimated that roughly 250 - 300 staff hours (i.e. approximately \$12,000 - \$15,000) from the City Clerk's Office, Legal Services, and Risk Management are now being spent on Commission-related business annually.

DISCUSSION

In response to the current situation, two options are proposed for Council's consideration: A) Prohibit UF/MMA; or B) Allow UF/MMA events generally.

With respect to the first option where Council prohibits UF/MMA, Council could request that the Province of British Columbia establish a provincial body for the purpose of regulating and supervising professional boxing, kick-boxing, wrestling, ultimate fighting, and mixed martial arts contests and exhibitions. While this action would result in the elimination of the Vancouver Athletic Commission, a provincial commission is better positioned to regulate combat sports throughout British Columbia. Such provincial (and state) authorities are common practice throughout North America as evidenced by the Ontario and Prince Edward Island Athletic Commissions.

With respect to the second option where Council allows UF/MMA events to be held in the City, appropriate risk mitigation measures should be taken to the satisfaction of the Directors of Legal Services and Risk Management. Additionally, to mitigate risk, an option is to cease sanctioning UF/MMA events on lands or at facilities owned or operated by the City of Vancouver, or Pacific National Exhibition.

As indicated previously, significant staff resources are being spent on Commission-related business due to the types of combat sports events being sanctioned by the Commission and the absence of office support to the VAC. It is anticipated that the need for support will continue should UF/MMA events be allowed to be held in the City. However, if the risk mitigation measures are implemented, it is anticipated that the level of staff support provided to the Commission would be roughly 100 - 150 hours.

An option to Council is to allow the Vancouver Athletic Commission an increase in the seat tax from its current amount of 10 cents per occupied seat to 50 cents per seat. Over the past few years, approximately 10,000 seats were occupied at VAC-sanctioned combat sports events in the City on an annual basis. The increased seat tax would provide up to \$4,000 in additional funds to the Commission. These funds could be used by the VAC to hire administrative support to assist in implementing the risk mitigation measures recommended by Legal Services and Risk Management and the related processes are adhered to.

As well, Council may wish to consider having a staff program liaison to oversee the operation of the Vancouver Athletic Commission to ensure that satisfactory operating processes are in place.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications for the City of Vancouver.

CONCLUSION

Ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts are violent combat sports of growing popularity. The Vancouver Athletic Commission receives several requests annually to sanction such events in the City. As a form of combat sport, the VAC has sanctioned numerous events.

It is recommended that Council provide direction with respect to allowing ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts in the City and also with respect to allowing such events, if permitted in the City, on lands or at facilities owned or operated by the City of Vancouver or Pacific National Exhibition.

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DEPARTMENTAL APPROVAL AND REPORT CONCURRENCES

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Date:

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This report has been prepared in consultation with the departments listed to the right, and they concur with its contents.

Concurring Departments:

Legal - Francie Connell _____
Signature

Risk Mgmt - Trish Doge _____
Signature