

To: Mercury Payton, Town Manager

From: Leslie Herman, Parks & Recreation Director

CC: Steven Barlow, Finance Director
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Date: January 4, 2026

Subject: Vienna Holiday Market – Event Proposal



A start-up holiday market on the Town Green would capture the spirit of the season by blending local shopping, community connection, and festive charm. The Town would commit funding to support the logistical planning and activation of the market, including site preparation, permitting, public safety coordination, and core infrastructure. Due to limited Town staff capacity to directly manage and operate a multi-day special event of this scale, the Town intends to partner with a qualified non-profit service organization, similar to the operational model used for the Town's Farmers Market, to manage and operate the event.

Under this model, the Town's role would focus on strategic oversight, funding support, interdepartmental coordination, and evaluation of the pilot program, while the non-profit partner would be responsible for day-to-day operations. These responsibilities would include vendor recruitment and management, event staffing and volunteer coordination, on-site logistics, and compliance with established Town policies and guidelines. The non-profit partner would also expect to receive a portion of the revenue generated from vendor fees to support its operational responsibilities and organizational mission.

The holiday market would be implemented as a pilot initiative, with clear performance measures established to evaluate attendance, vendor participation, operational effectiveness, financial performance, and overall community impact. Results from the pilot year would guide decisions related to future scale, scheduling, and funding, with the goal of transitioning the market to a financially and operationally sustainable annual event. Set in a welcoming outdoor setting with seasonal lights and décor, the market would provide a warm, inviting atmosphere for residents and visitors alike while celebrating local artisans, small businesses, and Vienna's strong sense of community leading up to the holidays.

Start-Up Holiday Market – Concept Overview

Purpose & Vision

- Establish a start-up holiday market on the Town Green that enhances seasonal programming.
- Create a festive, outdoor community gathering that supports local artisans, small businesses, and non-profit engagement.
- Activate the Town Green and surrounding downtown area during the holiday season.

Event Scope

- Pilot holiday market held over a three-day weekend.
- Outdoor, seasonal event with 20 vendor booths, festive décor, and family-friendly programming.

Town Role & Responsibilities

- Commit Town funds to support logistical planning and market activation.
- Provide strategic oversight and program direction.
- Coordinate permitting, site preparation, public safety, and interdepartmental support.
- Provide core infrastructure (e.g., tents, utilities, lighting, signage, Wi-Fi support, and related services, as applicable).
- Establish evaluation criteria and assess pilot-year performance.

Non-Profit Partner Role & Responsibilities

- Operate and manage the holiday market under a model similar to the Town's Farmers Market.
- Day-to-day responsibilities include:
 - Vendor recruitment, selection, and management
 - Event staffing and volunteer coordination
 - On-site logistics, set-up, and tear-down
 - Security coordination and crowd management
 - Compliance with Town policies, procedures, and guidelines

Preliminary Pilot-Year Financials - 3-Day Weekend (Fri. 5-8pm, Sat. 12 – 6pm, Sun. 12 – 5pm)

- Estimated total event costs: **\$19,000 (1 weekend), \$30,000 (2 weekends)**
 - Planning, site set-up and breakdown, infrastructure (including tents, lighting, heaters, generators, and utilities), staffing, security, and operational support.
 - Non-profit organization revenue share (30% of revenue).
- Estimated total event revenue: **\$4,000 (1 weekend), \$8,000 (2 weekends)**
 - Vendor fees and related program revenue. Estimated 20 vendors.
- Net Town investment (pilot year): **\$15,000 (1 weekend), \$22,000 (2 weekends)**
 - Represents an intentional start-up subsidy to launch and evaluate the event.

SWOT Analysis Summary (with Mitigation Strategies)

Internal Strengths

- Shoppers are actively seeking holiday gifts during the proposed timeframe.
- Emphasis on unique, handcrafted, and locally produced goods.
- Creates a festive atmosphere that enhances Vienna's downtown experience.
- Attracts local and regional shoppers.
- Supports small businesses and local entrepreneurs.
- Serves as a hub for social interaction and community building.

Internal Weaknesses & Mitigation Strategies

- **Weather dependency**
 - Mitigation: Utilize tents, heaters (as feasible), and weather-resistant infrastructure; schedule flexible programming and promote "rain-or-shine" messaging.
- **Logistical and operational complexity**
 - Staffing and volunteer coordination
 - Vendor management, set-up, and tear-down
 - Security and crowd control
 - Wi-Fi capacity for credit card processing
 - Mitigation: Leverage the non-profit partner's experience operating the Farmers Market; develop a detailed operations plan; coordinate early with Police, IT, and Public Works.
- **Regulatory and approval requirements**
 - Need Town Manager and/or Council approval for sales on Town Green property.
 - Potential need for a policy governing commercial activity on the Town Green.
 - Need approval from Historic Vienna to use the side lawn.
 - Mitigation: Address approvals in advance of the pilot year; align policies with existing Farmers Market and special event frameworks.

External Opportunities

- Increase foot traffic to Church Street businesses and the Freeman Store.
- Strengthen community engagement and establish a new seasonal tradition.
- Develop partnerships with local businesses, non-profits, and tourism organizations.
- Incorporate themed programming (e.g., workshops, Santa visits, live music) to broaden appeal and increase attendance.

External Threats & Mitigation Strategies

- **Perceived competition with existing businesses**
 - Mitigation: Prioritize local vendors; coordinate promotions with downtown merchants; encourage cross-shopping and shared marketing.
- **Economic shifts impacting spending**
 - Mitigation: Maintain affordable vendor fees during pilot year; diversify vendor mix; seek sponsorships to offset costs.
- **Competitive holiday marketplace**
 - Other regional holiday markets
 - Big-box and online retailers
 - Mitigation: Differentiate through local focus, unique products, community-driven programming, and a distinctly Vienna-centered experience.

Pilot Year Evaluation & Sustainability

- Evaluate pilot performance based on:
 - Attendance and community participation
 - Vendor participation and satisfaction
 - Operational effectiveness
 - Financial performance and cost recovery
 - Overall community impact
- Use evaluation findings to:
 - Adjust scale, duration, or programming
 - Identify opportunities for sponsorships and increased revenue
 - Refine Town and non-profit roles
- Determine feasibility of transitioning the holiday market into an annual, financially and operationally sustainable event.