



FAQ: 2026 ARMED FORCES TORCHLIGHT PARADE

Q. Who presents the Armed Forces Torchlight Parade?

The Armed Forces Torchlight Parade is presented by a dedicated volunteer group of parade organizers known as the Parade Krewe, operating under the fiscal management of the Spokane Lilac Festival Association (SLFA).

The SLFA is a long-standing, volunteer-based civic nonprofit organization and registered 501(c)(3). The organization includes one staff member and a volunteer board of up to 99 directors who collectively oversee Festival programs, events, and year-round community engagement.

Q. What is the history of the Spokane Lilac Festival and Parade?

The first Lilac Parade was held in 1938 and organized by a group of garden enthusiasts, now known as the Associated Garden Clubs of Spokane. That inaugural celebration featured a floral parade through downtown Spokane and a flower show at the historic Davenport Hotel.

Due to its popularity, the event continued to grow. Following World War II, the Spokane Lilac Festival Association was formally established, and the Royalty Program was introduced in the 1950s.

The 2026 Festival marks the 88th year of the Spokane Lilac Festival, making it the longest-running event in Spokane to regularly close city streets. The next closest event is Bloomsday, which will celebrate its 50th year in 2026. The Festival also inspired Spokane's enduring nickname, the "Lilac City."

Q. Why is the parade an Armed Forces parade?

The Spokane Lilac Festival Association has a long tradition of honoring military service, particularly through its partnership with Fairchild Air Force Base.

This tradition began during World War II, when Festival representatives welcomed returning service members with sprays of lilacs. Over time, the parade evolved in format. At one point, multiple parades were held each year, until they were combined into a single Armed Forces Day parade in the 1980s.

What makes the Armed Forces Torchlight Parade unique is its focus on honoring members of the military and first responders. As a military parade, it follows specific regulations that differ from other parades, including restrictions on political campaigning or advocacy. The parade's purpose is to express appreciation, unity, and community pride.

Q. Why is the parade route different this year?

For 2026, the parade route has been reduced at the mandate of the City of Spokane administration. The adjustment reflects the City's efforts to manage rising operational costs associated with public safety, traffic control, and law enforcement services.

Reducing the footprint of the parade helps lower the overall impact on City resources while still allowing the event to take place.

Q. Why was that decision made?

The SLFA was informed by the Office of the Mayor that a new administrative policy has been implemented to standardize parade routes within city limits.

According to City Administrator Alex Scott, the purpose of this policy is to enhance participant and spectator safety, reduce strain on City departments, and manage the cost of traffic control and public safety services for event sponsors.

The city has also indicated that the approximately \$20,000 paid annually by the SLFA contributes toward cost recovery for these services.

Q. Did the City consult community groups, veterans, or parade organizers?

Discussions regarding potential route reductions took place prior to the 2025 parade. During those conversations, the SLFA advocated for maintaining the existing route, citing the short planning timeline and the significant logistical adjustments required for an event of this scale.

While SLFA representatives shared feedback and maintained communication with City decision-makers, the standardized route policy was ultimately adopted without a formal partnership process involving the SLFA or the Parade Krewe.

Q. Who funds the parade?

The Armed Forces Torchlight Parade is funded through private and charitable donations from individuals and sponsors, as well as fundraising events hosted by the Spokane Lilac Festival Association.

Q. How much does the parade cost each year?

The annual presentation of the Armed Forces Torchlight Parade represents approximately \$150,000 in combined cash and in-kind value. Expenses include promotion, insurance, fencing, portable restrooms, permits, fire and safety services, street signage, parking coordination, awards, travel, outreach, and related operational needs.

Q. Does the SLFA pay the City of Spokane?

Yes. Since 2021, the SLFA has contributed financially to help offset the cost of in-kind services provided by the City of Spokane, including but not limited to law enforcement, waste management, street coordination, and public safety support.

Q. How much money is being saved, and where does it go?

Currently, approximately 20 percent of the City's in-kind costs are recovered through SLFA payments. The SLFA has not yet received detailed figures on the specific cost savings associated with the 2026 route change. That information will be shared following the parade as part of the standard cost recovery process.

The SLFA remains open to continued collaboration and is committed to helping offset City costs where possible, particularly if it supports a future return to the historic route.

Q. Does the Spokane Lilac Festival benefit the City of Spokane?

Yes. As a member of Northwest Festival Hosting, the SLFA annually invites major Pacific Northwest cities to participate in the Festival. These visiting delegations often include floats, royalty, festival leadership, and marching bands. In addition, dozens of regional communities participate each year.

This activity generates significant economic impact through hotel stays, dining, retail spending, and local sales tax revenue. In return, the SLFA participates in festivals throughout the region, sharing Spokane's spirit of goodwill and civic pride.

Q. What does this mean for the future of the parade?

Even with a reduced route, the Armed Forces Torchlight Parade will continue to be the largest Armed Forces torchlight parade in the nation. The event regularly features nearly 20,000 participants and attracts more than 50,000 spectators.

The Spokane Lilac Festival Association takes pride in producing one of the most well-organized and impactful parades in the country. The event remains entirely volunteer-run and community-funded.

Q. Is the route change permanent or just for this year?

Throughout its 88-year history, the parade has followed multiple routes as the city and community have evolved.

While policies may change over time, the SLFA believes that an event with such a long and meaningful legacy merits thoughtful consideration, open dialogue, and mutual respect. The Association remains committed to advocating for the continued recognition and preservation of this historic parade and parade route.

Community members who wish to share their appreciation for the Armed Forces Torchlight Parade or express support for a return to the long-standing route are encouraged to contact the Mayor's Office or their elected City Council representative.

- Mayor Lisa Brown: mayor@spokanecity.org
- City Administrator Alex Scott: ascott@spokanecity.org
- City Council (all members): citycouncil2@spokanecity.org
- City Council President Betsy Wilkerson: bwilkerson@spokanecity.org

Q. How can I get involved or support the parade?

Anyone with a love for Lilac is welcome to get involved with the Spokane Lilac Festival Association as a director or committee volunteer.

Volunteer opportunities include the Float Crew, Parade Krewe, Ambassadors and Royalty Program, Events and Hosting, and Military Relations. Community members may also support the Festival through donations, attending events, or purchasing an annual theme pin.

For more information, please contact the Spokane Lilac Festival Association office.

509-535-4554 | office@spokanelilacfestival.org