



2026 PARADE GUIDELINES

STARS, STRIPES AND HOLIDAY LIGHTS



SAVE THE DATE DECEMBER 5, 2026



THE COLUMBUS FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS PARADE

The Columbus Festival of Lights Parade has long been an event where families, neighborhood groups, and businesses from across the city come together to provide an outstanding, family-friendly, holiday-themed special event that is enjoyed by tens of thousands of families each year. The parade engenders a feeling of belonging through a shared experience; it connects friends, and neighbors in a community; it improves the quality of life for residents, brings all people together; inspires a positive image of the city with a shared pride in their community; bring vitality to the community; and promotes economic impact and tourism. The 2025 event is no different; we invite each of you to make this a tradition for your family, organization, or business by participating in this year's parade. Please read through this guide and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us.

This year's parade will be held Saturday, December 5th, 2025, at 6 pm.

PARADE THEME

The 2025 Columbus Festival of Lights Parade theme is **"Stars, Stripes and Holiday Lights"**.

PARADE COORDINATION

The Columbus Festival of Lights Parade is produced and coordinated by Red Arch Community Events, Inc. The event has a large number of partners and sponsors. Please see the event website for a full list of sponsors and partners. If you have any questions or you would like information about becoming an event sponsor or participant, please contact Amy Stoughton Berquist at (812) 552-4737, or through email at ColumbusFestivalofLights@gmail.com

Event details are also located on the Columbus Festival of Lights website: ColumbusFestivalofLights.com.

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

For more than 30 years, the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade has become a holiday tradition for Columbus families. Please help us compile an event history by sharing pictures, videos, or stories from the event, of entries you've been a part of, special memorable moments you have while attending or from being a part of the parade, and more. Please send your memories to Info@ColumbusFestivalofLights.com or on social media. Please note, by submitting, Red Arch Community Events, Inc. reserves the right to utilize those images, videos, and stories in any way necessary for, but not limited to, event promotion, the website, fliers, and other printed parade materials, social media, tv broadcast, award applications, etc.

**There are a number of holiday events around the Bartholomew County area that love to invite the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade entries to be a part of their events. Parade staff will provide information on those events as it becomes available.*

PARADE ROUTE

Columbus Festival of Lights Parade entries are staged at Cummins west parking lot between Lindsey and Brown Street (larger units may be staged on Brown Street). Entries head out of the parking lot southbound on Brown Street for two blocks, then turn east (left) on 3rd Street for two blocks, then north (left) on Washington Street for five blocks, then turn west (left) on 8th Street for two blocks. At the end of the route, the parade entry can either exit the area northbound on Brown Street to the roundabout or may turn southbound (left) to enter the staging area to dismantle their floats.

The route is approximately 1 mile long and takes entries about 30- 45 minutes to reach the end. A route map can be found in the attachment section at the back of this guide.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Registration opens on August at 8:00 am. There is a limited number of entries of 100, and then a waitlist will be started. Registration for the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade is accepted through our online registration system at <https://columbusfestivaloflights.com/parade-entry/>. Registration is payable by credit card, debit card, or preferably checks (checks shall be payable to Red Arch Community Events, Inc.). Invoices will be sent AFTER you register. Please do not make payment before your invoice is sent.

All entries must be approved for size and content by the parade committee and must be fully described on the application. It is vitally important you include the dimensions of the unit for staging purposes.

All those considering registration for the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade should review the entry category list below, to determine which entry group they fall within. If you are unsure which entry category you qualify under, please contact the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade Committee prior to registering. **Additional information will be requested following registration and must be provided by the deadline provided.**

***There are a limited number of spots available and many will fill before registration ends.*

ENTRY CATEGORIES

Interested in registering for the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade? Review the entry category descriptions listed below to determine which one of the categories your entry fits. If you are unsure which category your entry qualifies for, please contact the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade Committee prior to registering. Register early for this year's Columbus Festival of Lights Parade. ****All walkers or marchers must be at least 5 years of age, unless in a stroller or wagon being pulled by someone 18 years or older. Unless special circumstances have been granted. Each float entry is allowed one vehicle that is pulling the float only. If you have a standard vehicle, you may have one vehicle and an ATV. If you have ATVs or golf carts, you are allowed two per entry. You may have additional vehicles, ATVS or golf carts but you will be charged an additional entry fee. If you wish to have more than one vehicle in the parade, you will only need to fill out one application but we will invoice you the proper amount. .**

- It is encouraged that all entries, walking, riding, or driving be lit, outlined, or accented by light products or glow sticks. Please refer to Lighting Guidelines below, for more information
- All music is required to be holiday music on the route.
- Entries may NOT stop the flow of the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade route; these activities cause gaps in the parade which negatively affect the attendee experience.
- Each driver and walking marshal MUST attend one of the two mandatory parade entry meetings. Meeting dates are listed below.

Types of modes of transportation

- Float
- Walking / Performance - They will perform while they march, no stopping is allowed in the route.
- Equestrian / Dogs / Other Animals pending Board Approval
- Vehicles / Trucks / ATVs / Golf Carts
- Bicycle Clubs / Motorcycle Clubs / Car Groups

Non-Profit / Community Organization Entry

A Non-Profit / Community Organization entry is an organization certified as a 501(c)(3) organization, or Community Service Group such as Girls/Boys Scouts, High School Clubs, Marching Bands, and others determined by the Board of Directors. Community entries may not advertise sponsors' or corporate supporters' names; signage shall reflect only the name of the entry group or individual. You may have the non-profit name on the float but you cannot have a commercial sponsor name on the float.

General Entry

General entries are businesses, individuals, families, or groups that are not community-based organizations or non-profits. The General entry may display their company logo however, it must be lit according to the standards provided in these guidelines.

First Responder Entry

A First Responder Entry will include a Police Department, Sheriff's Department, Fire Department, and EMS/Paramedic.

If you are unsure of your status or category entry, please contact the Parade Coordinator through the event email address (info@columbusfestivaloflights.com).

ENTRY CATEGORY AND FEE

Entry Category	Fee
General Entry	\$50
Non-Profit / Community Entry	\$25
First Responder Entry	\$0

***There are a limited number of spots available, so submit early. Entry fees are non-refundable.*

ENTRY APPLICATION

The application is a fillable document, and we request that you make every effort to complete it as such rather than printing and hand-writing the information onto it. The application is a critical component of the effective presentation of the event. The application must be complete as the details are important to effective staging/destaging as well as for your placement in the parade. After registering, each entry will receive an email which is used to collect entry information and the commentary.

When completing the commentary section, include information that can be used to identify and describe your entry for the spectators. The Emcees will use this description to announce your entry. Your commentary should be a brief narrative – Use 2-5 sentences. Remember, to maintain the spirit of the event, the script should be fun to hear! Event producers and media networks reserve the right to edit and use the material as needed and at their sole discretion. Every entry **MUST** complete and return the document within two weeks of receipt.

Commentary Samples

- "A heartfelt salute to our troops as the parade showcases a patriotic float, reminding us of the sacrifices made for our freedom. It's a poignant reminder that the holiday spirit extends beyond festivities and into our gratitude for those who serve."
- "Wow, folks, talk about a winter wonderland that came to life! As the Nutcracker-themed float waltzes past, notice the intricate detailing on those costumes and the way those lights dance to the rhythm of Tchaikovsky's music. Pure enchantment!"
- "Hold onto your reindeer reins, because the Griswold family has joined our parade with their over-the-top Christmas lights extravaganza! Clark would be proud. This one is definitely lighting up the neighborhood."

SOCIAL MEDIA

FOLLOW. LIKE. SHARE.

We'd love for you to engage your friends, family, business partners, etc through the use of social media. Please join the Columbus Festival of Lights and Red Arch Community Events, Inc. in the promotion and showcasing of the annual

Columbus Festival of Lights Parade. Through social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram, we can share this great parade with a much broader audience. The Columbus Festival of Lights and Red Arch Community Events, Inc. will take a proactive approach in posting parade content leading up to, and throughout the event.

Please take a moment to Follow and Like our current social media accounts:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ColumbusFestivalofLights> (@ColumbusFestivalofLights)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RACEventsInc/>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/columbusfestivaloflights> (@ColumbusFestivalofLights)
- YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@columbusfestivaloflights>

We invite parade entrants and spectators to tag us directly using the information noted above; additionally, we would like entries to share posts using the hashtag: **#CFoL2026**
Don't forget to tag our great sponsors so they can engage as well.

LIGHTING GUIDELINES

- Only UL-approved wiring, lights, and batteries may be used.
- Each individual (walking or riding) and their accessories must be illuminated. Glow products may substitute for the lights.
- All batteries, battery packs, and wires must be concealed within the costume or attached to the individual in an organized pattern.
- The use of spotlights and/or interior-lit inflatables is okay to use if the entry is completely lit.
- There is no minimum number of lights on a float however, the float and/or tow vehicles must be covered in lights. LEDs, neon, and glow products are also acceptable.
- All tow vehicles must cover or turn off their headlights throughout the parade route.

LIGHTING TIPS:

- Portable gas-powered *generators*: provide a simple way to light without complicated wiring.
- Any standard holiday lights, inflatables, and decorations easily plug in.
- *Batteries* are permitted and easily power some battery-operated devices and novelties; unfortunately, batteries have a limited power source that can become heavy and wear down over time.
- *Inverters*: An inverter is a device that converts 12-volt DC current into 110-volt AC. This device easily connects to a cigarette lighter, generator, car battery, or electrical source. Inverters are fairly inexpensive. The inverter must match the capacity of the wattage needed to operate your lights. • It is ok for entries to use a combination of the three power systems.
- LED lights are great; they are bright, they draw very little power, and you can generally string 20- 25 strings together.
- Net lights work great for large areas of the float; net lights are easily zip-tied together to create full area coverage.
- You don't have to build it yourself; there are a number of vendors that rent holiday lights, equipment, and props that you can use to make your entry special.
- For optimum effect, it is suggested that lights be placed one to two inches apart (Light reflectors are suggested for better illumination).

MORE LIGHTS BRING MORE SMILES AND CHEERS

GENERAL PARADE REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES

- The success of the annual Columbus Festival of Lights Parade depends on the amazing entries developed with the event theme in mind. Build your entry with quality materials and use more lights than you ever planned to.

- All participants **MUST HAVE CHEER!**
- To keep the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade moving smoothly, entries **WILL NOT** be permitted to stop for pictures or performances; entries are required to keep pace with the line of march; there are no counter or reverse marches or stunts contrary to forward progress allowed on the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade route. (These activities cause gaps in the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade that result in a bad visual experience for attendees and viewers.)
- The Columbus Festival of Lights Parade has **ONLY ONE** live Santa and Mrs. Claus; additional Santas are **STRICTLY** prohibited.
- Per the City of Columbus and Columbus Police Department, candy or any other **objects MAY NOT be thrown** from parade entries. If you wish to distribute any goodies, walkers may hand items to spectators along the route. Walkers must be at the curb. This is a safety rule and will keep children from running between moving parade units in the dark. If we receive complaints or reports from law enforcement, volunteers, or numerous spectators about your organization throwing candy or any other object from any vehicle, your organization will not be permitted to participate in future parades. Safety is our primary concern, and we will enforce this policy.
- Primary Contact, Walking Marshals, and all Drivers of entry in the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade are required to attend one of the mandatory parade entry meetings. Staff will walk attendees through the guidelines and answer any questions groups may have.
- All drivers will be required to have a valid driver's license and a copy of current insurance on them the day of the parade.
- No open flames permitted.
- No drones permitted.
- All parade entries must be appropriate, tasteful, and festive, and promote a holiday spirit and parade theme.
- Inappropriate, unsafe participation, failure to follow instructions or other violations of parade guidelines can result in denied participation for individuals and/or organizations in future parades.
- The entry contact person who registered the entry acknowledges that all walking participants are 5 years old and older unless they have access to a stroller or wagon.
- Columbus Festival of Lights Parade entries must have proof of insurance in every vehicle being driven on the route.
- Each entry is required to be identifiable based on the information submitted in the application. The sign/name must align with the name submitted for the commentary. horse
- Entries cannot exceed 13 feet in height due to overhead obstructions. There is no limit on the length of a float entry as long as it can successfully navigate the route. If an entry is wider than 8 feet pre-approval is required from the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade producer.
- All equestrian/animal entries must provide a person and have a clean-up system to pick up waste along the route and to ensure there is proper disposal of the waste products.
- Horses should be comfortable walking at night on city streets. Horses often become skittish on asphalt at night due to glare or flashing lights. Be sure your animals have experience with night parade conditions and you have full confidence in your ability to control the animals if they become spooked.
- All entries are required to provide a person to walk (walking marshal) to lead their entry (Instructions are provided in these guidelines).
- All entries must be able to travel at a speed of at least two miles per hour for just over two miles.
- The use of unlicensed character likenesses as part of an entry is not recommended. All fines associated will be the responsibility of the parade entry.
- Cummins property, entries/vehicles, and the parade route are smoke and alcohol-free areas. Smoking or the consumption of alcohol by any individual will result in immediate removal from the event.
- Failure, by a participant or parents of participants, to obey any police officer or Columbus Festival of Lights Parade Volunteer will cause that entry to have a lifetime ban from the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade.
- There is no unauthorized vending permitted at the event site(s).
- Unless you are registered as a general entry, you must cover any commercial logos/names on your entry and tow vehicle.
- If you suffer a breakdown during the parade, move the vehicle to the left side and allow the entries behind you to pass. Call the Emergency number 812-379-1689 and stay stationary until a Columbus Festival of Lights Volunteer escorts you.
- Street closures begin early Saturday and continue and increase as the parade starts getting closer. It's critically important for groups to be in place at the designated staging point early to ensure the destaging plan is effective. (Especially important to groups that arrive by bus.) Overflow parking is available in the Mill Race Park parking.
- Entry placement location in the parade is made by the Columbus Festival of Lights Committee; entries with a specific request related to their parade placement must submit the request in writing to include the special need and/or reason for the request with the application; all requests are considered; however, there is no guarantee

of approval. Requests are due by November 1, 2026.

- No unregistered entries and/or uncertified entries (passed inspection) are permitted on the parade route.
- Every entry that includes a vehicle/s, motorized towing apparatus, or a generator, the unit must be equipped with a 2-A, 10-B: C rated portable fire extinguisher for every 20 linear feet of the unit. If more than one extinguisher is required, one should be readily accessible to the operator of the/vehicle. This is for the safety of everyone on the float, nearby floats, and parade spectators.
- Inform all persons associated with your entry that they should dress appropriately for the weather. They should anticipate being out in cold weather for a long period of time.
- Horns and/or sirens will be allowed along the parade route if they do not disrupt bands and musical floats. They are not to be used in the staging area. Please note the use of horns and/or sirens on your application so organizers may stage you accordingly.
- Any units that are motorized (car, truck, towing apparatus, or other vehicle of any size) OR have a generator, the unit must have an emergency spill kit on board in case of hazardous material spills. Most likely in the case of the parade, a spill means oil leaks, antifreeze spills, gasoline leaks, etc. We suggest you designate someone who will be with the unit on parade day to be familiar with basic clean-up procedures. Various professional kits are available from auto stores or online vendors. An easy kit to make yourself includes a shovel, a 5-gallon bucket with a lid, a bag of gray sorbent (like kitty litter), gloves, 2 socks filled with sand, and a disposable bag (double layer). Many web pages can give you specific tips for making a simple spill kit that would be enough for the vehicle you have in the parade. Plus, then you will have one for your home's garage if it is not used!

PARADE STAGING

What is parade staging? Staging refers to getting all parade entries placed in a preset spot at Cummins west parking lot which allows for an organized and systematic approach to moving all participants onto the parade route. Staging begins from 1 pm to 4:30 pm.

- Entries must enter the staging lot at 8th Street and Lindsey Street. Brown Street will be closed as of 12 pm. The only official entrance to the staging area is at the intersection of 8th & Lindsey Streets. To get into the staging area you **MUST** approach from the north via 11th Street to get to Lindsey Street. Be in the far left/east lane just after the roundabout so you can easily turn left onto 8th Street. You will be stopped at the intersection (there is a stop light) before you turn east/left onto 8th Street. Once allowed to turn onto 8th Street, you will be processed and directed to your staging location inside the COB parking lot (or on Brown Street). See attached diagram A.
- As Brown will be closed – you will **NOT** be able to come into the staging area from 4th, 5th, or 8th Street. You must go around the 11th Street roundabout and enter off Lindsey Street.
- Street closures begin early Saturday and continue and increase as the parade starting time gets closer- it's critically important for groups to be in place at the staging point early to ensure the destaging plan is effective. (Especially important to groups that arrive by bus.)
- Entry placement location in the parade is made by the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade Committee; entries with a specific request related to their parade placement must submit the request with the application to include the special need and/or reason for the request; all requests are considered; however, there is no guarantee of acceptance. Extra or Change of Requests is due by November 1st, 2026.
- All entries will be inspected to ensure adequate and safe float and lighting before the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade. Inspections take place during staging. All inspections should be completed by 5pm. Entry groups or individuals that fail to pass inspection will be pulled from the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade.
- Staging can become very busy and congested with floats; each entry can have one vehicle at a time at the staging point to unload equipment. All support vehicles **MUST** be removed from the staging areas **immediately** once they have been unloaded. You must pull in and drop off the items and remove the vehicle. This should take no longer than 5-10 minutes. There are **NO** entries or vehicles permitted inside the staging areas after 4:30 pm on Saturday because of the large number of pedestrians in the areas.
- The support vehicle in the staging areas may not restrict access to the entry position of others and may be required to leave the staging area if staff determines it is necessary. It is expected for the support vehicle to unload and then vacate the staging area. Support vehicles can park anywhere in Mill Race Park or in the city parking lot south of Hotel Indigo. Please do **NOT** park in Hotel Indigo parking lot as vehicles could be towed.
- Entries that are not checked in and in their assigned staging spot by 4:30 pm will be considered as a no-show, and not allowed to participate in the parade.
- Groups that only have walkers need to arrive no later than 5:30 pm.

ENTRY INSPECTION

All entries will be inspected by Columbus Festival of Lights Parade security personnel to ensure adequate and safe float and lighting before the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade. Inspections take place during staging. All inspections should be completed by 5pm. Entries that fail to pass the initial inspection have time to fix the issue. If the issue cannot be resolved, the entry will be removed from the Columbus Festival of Lights Parade.

The following items are part of the inspection.

- The driver must have an unobstructed view of the road to the front and to the side.
- Driver must have their drivers license and insurance ID card with them.
- The driver must have access to an exit; must be escapable.
- The driver seat must be securely mounted to the frame.
- The driver must have adequate ventilation to bring in outside air; there can be no exhaust leaks in the driver compartment.
- All drivers must possess a valid motor vehicle operator's license, insurance and be adequately trained to drive their assigned entries.
- A minimum of one 2A10BC-type fire extinguisher must be provided on each entry or unit. If an individual is in an enclosed entry, there should be one extinguisher inside and within reach of the driver and another extinguisher outside. A spill kit will also be required on each float or motorized entry. Kitty Litter accepted, refer to the attachment for more details.
- Batteries must be secured with no loose connections.
- Fuel tanks must be secured and there may not be any leaks.
- Spare fuel must be secured and stored away from any heat source.
- All wiring must be properly secured to prevent mechanical damage and injury to float riders.
- All connections must be made with UL-approved electrical boxes or devices.
- Portable generators or compressors used on the float must be securely mounted on a vehicle or other substantial base. A minimum of 12 inches clearance must separate any part of the generator/compressor from combustible fabrication material.
- A portable generator may not be secured or braced in an enclosed space with the driver or rider.
- The steering must work properly.
- Exhaust pipe(s) must extend at least 6" beyond the rear of the float's skirt.
- Exhaust pipe(s) must be wrapped with fire retardant tape where it passes through the skirt.
- Generators/compressors must be equipped with firmly attached exhaust systems that terminate either into a common exhaust serving the vehicle or in the same manner as vehicle exhaust.
- Generator exhaust must be properly vented; not in contact with anything combustible.
- Castors or wheels must be securely attached and in good condition (i.e. no cracks in wheels)
- The entry may not contain sharp or jagged metal or boards that could cause injury to the driver, walkers, or spectators.
- For self-propelled floats, tow bar(s) must be secured and remain with the float at all times in case of breakdown.
- Draw bars must be secured.

****Depending on your entry, a number of these inspection items may not apply.*

ENTRY WALKING MARSHAL INSTRUCTIONS

Entry Walking Marshals are critical to the success of the parade by keeping their group on the required pace which eliminates parade gaps. All entries **MUST** have a walking marshal!

- Walking Marshal (WM) must carry an entry number for entry identification for the judges and ensure the number is visible as the entry approaches the judges' table and sound stations areas. Entry number is issued the day of the parade.
- WM must be at least 16 years of age.
- WM are required to walk approximately five feet in front of the entry on the left driver's headlight side and, through communication with their entry, maintain the pace required to ensure no gaps are created.
- WM must have the ability to listen, follow instructions and communicate issues to the parade monitors along the route.
- WM must be able to provide instruction/direction to their entry. If your entry suffers a breakdown during the

parade, move the entry to the left side and communicate with and allow the entries behind you to pass. WM must notify the closest parade monitor of the breakdown.

PARADE DESTAGING

What is destaging? Destaging refers to the process of getting all entries off the parade route at 8th Street and Brown Street and to their designated areas to shut down and prepare for getting the entry home as well as to get the walking groups connected with their families.

In general, entries (trailed and non-trailed and walking) are sent south on Brown Street into the destaging area. At the end of the route, the parade entry can either exit the area northbound on Brown Street to the roundabout or may turn southbound (left) to enter the staging area to dismantle their floats. As you approach the intersection of Brown and 8th Street, turn on your left turn signal if you plan to go back to the destaging area. If you plan on immediately leaving please turn on your right turn signal. Do not go straight at that intersection!

- Effective destaging is reliant on effective staging; groups, especially those arriving by bus, **MUST** adhere to the established timeline and be staged early to ensure the buses can get down to the destaging zone prior to street closures. We ask that all entries move as far south in the destaging area as possible to allow for the following entries to safely come into the destaging area.
- If an entry has a special destaging need that does not fit the aforementioned model, please make the request with the destaging lead before the end of the meeting. Must be noted in the application.
- The official end of the parade is just prior to the intersection of 8th & Brown Streets. A parade official will assist you with directions on de-staging once you reach that location.
- There are 2 options to end the parade. Please think about which is most relevant for you prior to parade day. This must be included in the application.
 - Option #1 | Exit the Parade Route: you must turn right onto Brown Street (use your right turn signal) to leave the downtown area. This option is best if you do not need to drop off participants in the COB parking lot or un-decorate your entry prior to leaving the area. For example, company trucks, passenger cars, or other vehicles that can drive away as soon as they cross the finish line may leave via this option right away. To get to Mill Race Park, please use this option with the roundabout to get to Lindsey Street.
 - Option #2 | Returning to Staging Area: As the front of the parade always reaches the end of the route prior to Santa starting the parade, we ask that only those that must drop off people or undecorated their unit prior to leaving use this option. You will be asked to turn left onto Brown Street (use your left turn signal) and enter the COB parking lot via the northernmost driveway. Follow a volunteer to your area for destaging. Once you are finished, you will be able to leave the COB lot via one of the driveways on the west side (closest to Lindsey on the park side) of the lot. This will put you on Lindsey Street heading south. As you pull in to destage, use the left lane first and pull forward as much as possible. Once that lane is full, use the second lane and so on.

INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

Parade entry fees for accepted entries are non-refundable. There is no 'reschedule date' should the parade be canceled or shortened due to inclement weather. No entry fees are refundable in the event of cancellation due to acts of God, fire, natural disaster, terrorism, war, military hostilities, or any other force majeure events, or cancellation by government agencies.

Usually, the parade will be held in rain, snow, or clear weather. In the event of inclement weather, the parade will go on schedule, except in the event of extreme and/or dangerous conditions such as ice storms, temperatures (including wind chill) nearing zero degrees, blizzards, etc. Red Arch Community Events, Inc. defines these conditions as situations when the downtown streets cannot be cleared by the City of Columbus AND/OR it is deemed unsafe to be outside by the National Weather Service.

Should inclement weather occur prior to the parade, the Red Arch Community Events, Inc. will determine if it is sufficiently severe to cancel or delay the parade. Any decision to cancel the parade will be announced no later than 10 am on parade day. Outlets to make the cancellation public will be the radio stations, local newspapers, the parade website, and social

media pages. The contacts identified by entries will be sent an email to the address provided on the application.

You may decline to participate when the weather threatens to damage uniforms, props, or instruments. No refunds will be given. All participants should make provisions for foul weather.

AWARD JUDGING

Only one award per category will be allowed. Entry awards are detailed in the section below. Award winners will be notified via email and announced on the website and social media platforms. A rubric will be used for each category, completed by 3 judges placed throughout the parade route.

BEST OVERALL

The "Best Overall" float should be a harmonious blend of creativity, craftsmanship, thematic relevance, and audience engagement that captures the essence of the holiday season and leaves a lasting impression on all who witness it. A \$400 prize will be awarded.

Judging Criteria:

Theme Execution

Theme execution is the basic idea of the float and how well it is displayed. Was the main theme for the float well executed? Was it easy to understand what the float was displaying?

Community Engagement/Participation

Community engagement/participation is the overall enjoyment of the float by attendees. Does it appeal to various demographics, ages? Are there interactive effects or float personnel?

Creativity/Uniqueness

The creativity/uniqueness applies to the overall float and float personnel, contributing to the theme execution. Did the float creators think outside of the box? Are there items that make it stand out from the other floats?

Holiday Spirit

Holiday spirit applies to the display on the float, visually, verbally, etc. This does not have to be specific to Christmas, holiday spirit applies to the family-like feel of the holidays, the positive feelings people experience during the holiday season.

BEST USE OF LIGHTS AWARD

The "Best Use of Lights" award should go to the float that effectively uses lighting as a creative and integral element of its design, captivating the audience and contributing to the festive atmosphere of the parade. A \$400 prize will be awarded.

Judging Criteria:

Community Engagement/Participation

Entry demonstrates the WOW factor as it relates to lights.

Creativity/Uniqueness

Effective lighting levels; quantity of lights used is more than adequate to light up the entry and paints a picture for the viewers. Eye appeal/aesthetics; quality of the use of lights through placement, colors, and materials

KIDS CHOICE AWARD

The "Kids' Choice" award should go to the float that best captures the hearts and attention of the youngest audience

members, providing them with a magical and delightful experience that embodies the joy and spirit of the holiday season. A \$400 prize will be awarded.

Judging Criteria:

The kids of the committee will submit their favorite floats, each child will give their top three choices and the float with the highest score will be selected.

AWARD JUDGING POINT SCALE

Each criteria (noted above) will be judged on a 4-point scale (see scale below). Judges' scores will be combined to determine the overall score. In the case of a tie, judges will discuss their scores, possibly review entries and re-score each entry that is tied again, if a tie remains, both entries will be awarded.

1 Limited - Rudolph scoffs.

2 Fair - The elves can take a break.

3 Good - Mrs. Claus celebrates with cookies.

4 Exceptional - Santa is pleased.

PICTURES AND VIDEO

There are a variety of photographs and videos taken throughout staging, during judging, and during the parade; organizers reserve the right to utilize those images in any way necessary for, but not limited to, promotion, on the website, for fliers and other printed parade materials, social media, award applications, etc.

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES

August 1st, 2026	Parade entry registration opens Entry spaces are limited so register early.
When we hit 100 entries	Parade entry applications all notified. All parade entry applicants will be notified if they were one of the first 100 entries and invoices will be sent. If you are after the first 100, you will be placed on a waiting list.
November 1st, 2026	Special Requests Entries with a specific request related to their parade placement must submit the request to include the special need and/or reason for the request; all requests are considered; however, there is no guarantee of acceptance.
November 19th, 2026 5:30 pm November 18th, 2024 6 pm	Entry Meeting This is a MANDATORY meeting for all entry primary contact, walking marshals, and all drivers to review the staging and de-staging plans and any last-minute changes and announcements.. The virtual meeting link will be sent out the week prior to the meeting. The meeting place will be determined closer to the date. Final details will be sent in the email of acceptance.
December 5th, 2026	Entry check-in & staging 1 pm - 4:30 Entries can arrive, check-in and stage their entry at the designated location in the Cummins COB west parking lot between Lindsey & Brown Street. Walking groups need to arrive by 5:30 pm.
	Inspections Parade Entry Inspections will begin at 1 pm.

	Parade Go Time Entries should be lit up and ready to go at 5:30 pm. The staging manager will begin to move entries into the formation at 5:50 pm. Columbus Festival of Lights Parade begins PROMPTLY at 6 pm.
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MAPS

