

City moves to tighten up park event permits

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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The permit process for holding events in city parks will have a few more hoops to jump through next year.

The changes arise following a confrontation at Viro Circle Park in June, when neighbors complained about excessive noise and neighborhood intrusion from an event The Door Christian Fellowship held there. City officials decided staff should have a little more control over where and how events are held.

“We felt that the criteria for denying a special use permit were a little fuzzy and that they needed to be a little more concrete as far as reasons for denying a permit,” City Attorney Curtis Hayes said. “Another thing that led to [this decision] was that we really needed to have a middle ground, where we don’t approve it or deny [a permit], we put some special conditions on that because of the nature of the event or the thing that is being requested.”

Under the old ordinance, staff could deny permits if the events would disrupt traffic, demand too much time of city employees, interfere with access to emergency services or cause “undue hardship” on nearby residents.

The updated version includes new health and safety considerations. Permits may now be denied if “the proposed location of the special event is unsafe due to the absence of off-street parking, restroom facilities, or safe access to electrical services or connections;” or “the proposed time and location of the event will interfere with a previously scheduled special event.”

City staff indicated they may develop more specific rules for the three types of parks: neighborhood parks that are small, have few amenities and are intended for small groups; large

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parks like Courthouse Plaza meant for bigger events; and sports complexes.

“We felt that we need regulations that are tailored to the specific type of venue,” Hayes said. “[So we] put in 10 criteria the city staff and ultimately the city manager can look at in adopting regulations that are venue-specific.”

Staff may impose limits on event hours and maximum attendance, noise, use of portable generators and alcohol consumption. The update also lets them require the event host to provide portable restrooms and/or trash containers, private security, traffic control plans and supervisor personnel.

The update also makes it a misdemeanor to avoid or violate the terms of a permit, which is still required when an event “affects the ordinary use of city property, public streets, rights-of-way or sidewalks.”

As before, permits are not required for private social gatherings that will make no use of city streets other than for lawful parking.

Looking to head off another dustup, the Council voted Dec. 13 to approve the update.

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