

Revised event permit limits will include health, safety criteria

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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Events held in city parks next year will have to meet a few new standards the city plans to impose to limit crowds, noise and intrusion into surrounding neighborhoods.

In the past, permits have only addressed food preparation and things that directly affect city property, such as street closures for block parties, or security when alcohol will be served.

“We treat all of the venues where special events may occur the same. There is really nothing in [the existing ordinance] that explicitly allows tailoring of the permit to the reality of a specific venue,” City Attorney Curtis Hayes said.

The new rules will take into consideration factors like anticipated attendance and event duration. The goal is to keep events manageable and avoid conflicts that can arise when too many people show up where there are no bathrooms, little room to park, or events are intrusively loud.

An event at Viro Circle Park in June triggered the review, after neighbors complained about the noise and attendees parking across nearby driveways and disrespecting neighbors. That event also included cooking hot dogs and the use of a generator to power movie and sound equipment.

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“We need to decide, are we going to allow permits at any neighborhood parks or just no, not at all, and if we are going to allow it, what is the number [of people who would be allowed to attend],” Councilor Sarah Piano, Dist. 3, said.

Many of the city’s parks – Bubany, Golden Age, Hadden, Henrietta, Indian Hills, Mossman, Sky City, Stagecoach and Viro Circle – are neighborhood parks and “are more designed for neighborhood-scale events, and we have not really defined that,” City Manager Maryann Ustick said.

That leaves Ford Canyon, Playground of Dreams and the Sports Complex, plus Courthouse Plaza, to accomodate large-scale events.

Larger events can also drain scarce city resources, Community Services Coordinator Ben Welch said, especially when cash-strapped nonprofits are the hosts.

“They want the city to be first and foremost all – security, cleanup, whatever it takes to provide whatever they don’t have, whether it’s a nonprofit or not,” he said. “The police department just doesn’t have the man- and woman-power to do that.”

As it is, Gallup charges just \$10 to process event permits, while many similar cities start fees at \$100, Welch said.

The revised ordinance is expected to set limits on how many people will be allowed at events based on park size. It may also set limits on time/duration, noise and availability of bathrooms and electricity.

“All of the recommendations we came up with in the proposal are really safety and health recommendations. We noticed that our ordinance didn’t have those kinds of criteria that would allow us to deny a permit,” attorney Thomas Lynn Isaacson, who reviewed the ordinance, said.

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With those parameters in place, the City Council is expected to take up the new rules in December or early next year.

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