

Park use fee increases postponed

Events sponsors ask Council for more time to adjust budgets

By Jeanne Davant

Manitou Springs City Council postponed proposed increases in use fees for city parks and vendor fees and set a second work session to consider the increases and a new policy on waiving fees.

At Tuesday's meeting, sponsors told Council that the fee increases could jeopardize events that already have been planned or advertised at current rates.

Bud Ford, who produces the annual Mountain Music Festival, said he could not afford a proposed increase to rent Soda Springs Park for the event.

"It is a big jump," he said. "I'm not in a situation where I can afford to lose money."

Ford said he thought events like his and the Commonwheel Fair "are sincere efforts to improve the quality of life in Manitou Springs. I would like the city to consider that."

Julia Wright, coordinator of the Commonwheel Fair, said the fee increases, including raises to vendor fees, "would triple our costs," add \$2,600 to the organization's budget and put it in a money-losing position.

"I think this is radical," she said, adding that she had already raised vendor fees and tried to find sponsors. "We can't because there's not enough profit. We greened up the festival, and that cost us more this year. I am going to look for a sponsor to cover that extra cost, but we're struggling."

Councilman Matt Carpenter dissented in the 4-1 vote to postpone consideration of the fee increases until the Feb. 9 work session. (Councilman Ed Klingman was absent.)

"It seems you can raise your fees for your needs, but the city can't raise its fees for its needs," Carpenter said. He said thought it was necessary to ask hard questions because of the city's tight financial situation.

Council discussed fee increases proposed by Carpenter and Council-woman Aimee Cox at its Dec. 15 work session. They said their goals were to create a new fee schedule so that users that have the biggest impacts on parks would pay the biggest fees while keeping fees reasonable compared with those in Colorado Springs and El Paso County.

The Finance Department staff suggested raising the vendor fee from \$4 to \$10 a day.

The proposed increases were posted at City Hall, and a story appeared on the front page of the Bulletin after the meeting.

Still, events planners including Leslie Lewis, executive director of the Manitou Springs Chamber of Commerce, said they hadn't realized the full impact the increases would have. Apparently, neither did Council. "What we maybe didn't take into consideration was some of those events are planned so far in advance," Mayor Marc Snyder said.

Council also postponed until Feb. 9 further consideration of a policy on waiving fees for certain events.

Council members had intended to have a policy in place at Tuesday's meeting, when fee waiver requests were on the agenda for the upcoming Climate Action Fair on Jan. 23 and the Carnivale Parade on Feb. 13.

Council unanimously voted to waive the \$200 use fee for Memorial Hall for the Climate Action Fair, but Carpenter again dissented in a 4-1 vote to waive \$2,740 in fees for the Carnivale parade.

"It is my very strong belief that this event pays for itself and is worthy of support," Carnivale committee member Jack Elder said. He said the city's bars, restaurants and motels benefit from the thousands of people who attend the parade each year. While the parade does have some sponsorships from downtown businesses, Elder said he was hesitant to ask the bars to contribute more in the dead of winter.

"I'm a huge fan of Carnivale, and I think it needs to continue, but there are costs to the city—it requires us to put police on overtime," Cox said. She added, however, that she thought events such as Carnivale are investments in economic development.

"I find your sponsorship levels extremely low," Carpenter said. "I feel like the events are using us as a primary sponsor. I'm not convinced that is a role of government. I feel like the downtown is benefiting the most. Why aren't they sponsoring, rather than us having to waive fees?"

Snyder said the figures compiled by the Finance Department on use fees "were a bit shocking to us." Those figures showed that the city waived \$18,000 of some \$21,000 in fees it could have collected in 2009.

"I think 2010 will be more of a transition for us," Snyder said. "In the spirit of what we've heard tonight, it may not be prudent to amend the waiver policy in 2010. But I expect all applicants to be prepared to cover whatever policy we decide on in 2011.... Whatever comes out of that process on Feb. 9 will be a hard and fast process."

Councilwoman Ingrid Richter said she would like events planners to provide figures on sponsorships, money collected and returns to the city such as sales tax figures at the Feb. 9 meeting.

Elder said the Carnivale committee is in discussions with the Chamber and promoters of other events such as the Coffin Races and the Fruitcake Toss as to how the organizations could pool their resources and partner with other organizations to cover increased costs next year.

In other business, Council...

- Passed on second reading an ordinance an ordinance modifying the city's storm water utility. Public Works Director Bruno Pothier stated in a report to Council that the changes will allow his department more flexibility in assigning costs and personnel. The changes do not affect the storm water utility fee that water customers pay.

- Appointed Roger Armstrong and Jennifer Bell to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board; reappointed Val St. Cloud to the Parking Authority Board, and reappointed Ed Sauer to the Urban Renewal Authority.

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