

## Council ponders new waiver policy for special event fees

**By Jeanne Davant**

A new policy on waiver or reduction of special events fees would formalize the circumstances under which these fees would be waived.

Council discussed the policy, drafted by Councilwoman Ingrid Richter, at Tuesday night's work session.

Under the policy, waivers would be granted only to nonprofit organizations that are based in or serve Manitou Springs and would require an application submitted at least 30 days before the event and proof of insurance.

The policy would create a special category, "Manitou Springs signature events" that are "uniquely Manitou." Events such as Clay Fest and the Carnivale Parade could qualify for fee waivers, and the city would become a co-sponsor. But waivers would be contingent on funds being available in the city budget.

"My intention is to not have to deal with these waivers every single meeting," Richter said.

Rental fees for Memorial Hall and city parks would rise under a new fee schedule also discussed Tuesday night.

After hearing from organizers of several local events, Council modified a fee schedule drafted in December by Council members Matt Carpenter and Aimee Cox. Under the most recent proposal, fees would be set as follows:

- Seven Minute Gazebo: Manitou resident users would pay \$200 for three hours and \$300 a day; nonresident users would pay \$250 for three hours and \$350 a day
- Mansions Park Pavilion: Resident fees would rise to \$75 a day plus \$50 for 100 persons or more (maximum use is 200 people); nonresident fees would remain at \$100 for fewer than 100 people, but an additional \$50 would be charged for more than 100.
- Soda Springs Park Pavilion and Memorial Park: Local use fees would rise to \$100 a day plus \$50 for 100-499 people or \$100 for 500 or more; nonresidents would pay \$ 150 a day plus \$50 for 100-149 or an additional \$100 for 500 or more
- Memorial Hall: Fees for local users would be \$25 for two hours or \$200 a day for residents and \$50 for two hours or \$400 a day for nonresidents.

In addition, special event sponsors would be charged a \$25 application fee.

Vendor fees would rise to \$ 10 per vendor per day, but total vendor fees for an event would be capped at \$350 per day.

Budgetary considerations are behind Council's discussions of fee increases and limiting fee waivers. The city's year-end budget balance has been decreasing for several years. At the same time, Council wants to come up with a fair and equitable system that events sponsors can factor into their own budget planning.

"This issue has been around since as long as I've been on Council," Mayor Marc Snyder said. The city tracked fee waivers granted in 2009 on a case-by-case basis, and Council members were shocked to learn that they had excused \$18,000 of a possible \$21,000 in fees. The city also incurs labor and equipment costs for many events that are not recaptured when fees are waived.

Last year's waivers amounted to a "tax" of some \$3 on every Manitou resident, Carpenter said. Carpenter has been asking tough questions of events sponsors who have sought waivers this year because Council has faced tough budget choices, and has consistently opposed granting waivers until a new policy is in place.

"It's one thing to do this in years when we have money," he said Tuesday night. "I can't get behind waiving \$2,500 for the (Pikes Peak) Marathon, even though it's my event. That's because we don't have the money."

Cox said she felt the fee increases were reasonable, especially given that Colorado Springs is boosting its fees.

But some events sponsors warned that they would not be able to continue if fees were raised and they could not qualify for waivers.

"Our event will cancel" after this year, said Bud Ford, sponsor of the Mountain Music Festival held annually in Soda Springs Park. "While I'm sympathetic to the city's needs, I don't want to see us lose these events."

"Special events stimulate visitation to Manitou Springs," said Julia Wright of Commonwheel, organizer and sponsor of the annual arts and crafts fair in Memorial Park. "We generated \$215,000 of sales in three days. That means a lot of people came to Manitou to spend that money."

Council scheduled another discussion of the fees and waiver policy for its March 9 meeting.

## **In other business, Council...**

- Authorized Snyder to sign a statement of commitment to work cooperatively with other jurisdictions and community organizations to promote "an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable and prosperous future for the Pikes Peak region."

- Discussed changes to Council meeting agenda formats that could reduce attorney fees and make meetings more "user-friendly."

[Return to Article Index](#)