

Parking remains concern in plan for joint festivals

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
Wednesday, 03 April 2013 18:31

Committee explores ways to alleviate potential traffic congestion during Centennial Park holiday celebration

Plans to combine two popular Grafton festivals into one celebration received a thumbs-up from the Village Board on March 18.

However, officials are still exploring ways to iron out a large wrinkle: parking.

The board unanimously approved a request to hold Grillin' in Grafton and Holidaze as a joint festival June 28 and 29 in Centennial Park.

The request was made by Celebrate Grafton, a committee that oversees most local festivals, and recommended by the Parks and Recreation Board.

The approved plan, which will move Holidaze from its longtime location in Lime Kiln Park to the 17th Avenue venue, calls for a fireworks show at dusk June 29.

To avoid potential problems with noise and fireworks residue falling in a residential area next to Centennial Park, the committee received permission from the Grafton School District to have the fireworks launched from a baseball diamond adjoining the Grafton Elementary School parking lot.

Village Board members said they supported combining the festivals, which Celebrate Grafton said would save money by combining volunteer staffs and fundraising.

Holidaze is a decades-old festival that celebrates Independence Day. Grillin' in Grafton, which was established two years ago, features culinary competition between national and local barbecue teams.

However, some trustees questioned how parking would be provided for festival goers, particularly for a fireworks show that has traditionally attracted as many as 2,000 spectators.

No vehicles will be allowed in Centennial Park because vendors will occupy the parking lot. Street parking is limited near the park.

In addition, the Grafton Elementary School parking lot will be unavailable due to the fireworks launching, and a lot at nearby St. Joseph's Church will be reserved early Saturday evening for parishioners attending services.

"There's going to be a mass of people trying to find parking," Trustee Jim Grant said.

John Safstrom, the village's parks and recreation director, said he and other Celebrate Grafton officials are working to resolve the problem.

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“This will be a little difficult, but we think we can work it out,” he told the board.

Safstrom said other options include providing shuttle buses for festival patrons who use parking lots elsewhere in the village.

Use of the Grafton High School parking lot has been suggested by Pam King, executive director of the Grafton Area Chamber of Commerce, which provides administrative services for Celebrate Grafton.

King recently asked the School Board to allow use of the lot, where she said festival parking could be a school fundraiser.

King said last week that concerns with alcohol being brought onto school property could be alleviated by having security checks in the parking lot.

“As a taxpayer, I believe they should open it,” King said. “What a great opportunity for them. The school district could work with the committee to make the festival a success.”

Although the School Board took no action on King’s suggestion, Supt. Jeff Pechura said he is unlikely to support use of the high school parking lot.

“School policy doesn’t allow alcohol on any school grounds. That could be a problem,” Pechura said.

Allowing parking in a school lot would likely lead to festival patrons staying on school property to watch the fireworks, Pechura believes.

“If they can park there, people will assume they can put blankets down and sit there. Who’s going to monitor that?” he said.

“There are a lot of unanswered questions.”

King said the committee will continue to explore other parking options. Among them are using lots at the former Leeson Electric building on Highway 60, former Pick ’n Save store off Falls Road and Target and Costco stores on Port Washington Road. Shuttle bus service could be provided from most locations, she added.

“They all have ample parking. It’s just a matter of working out the details,” King said.

Festival plans, including parking and traffic control, are expected to be discussed by the village’s Public Safety Commission on April 9.

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