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Preliminary Main Street plans call for massive downtown Rock the Harbor street festival on Friday before Labor Day

As many as 30,000 visitors — many of them in the area for Harley-Davidson's 110th anniversary celebration — are expected to pack downtown Port Washington for Rock the Harbor, a one-day festival that's expected to turn the city into hog heaven on Friday, Aug. 30.

A nationally known band is expected to headline the festival, which will close Franklin Street and areas to the east at the beginning of Labor Day weekend and line the streets of downtown and parking lots with thousands of parked motorcycles.

The festival, a partnership between Port Washington Main Street and Suburban Harley-Davidson in Thiensville, would depend on sponsorships for financing, organizer Amy Gannon, president of Main Street, said.

"It's a rather large budget. If we get where we want to be, it's well over $100,000," she said, noting the bulk of the money would go toward entertainment.

Referring to the headline act, organizer Cathy Wilger said, "The one thing we don't want is someone people won't recognize."

Although organizers announced their intention to create the festival in spring, planning is still in initial stages, Gannon said.

"We're definitely holding the event," she said. "We don't have a clear plan of how we're going to do everything yet. We're taking baby steps.

"We have ideas, but nothing is set in stone yet. We're waiting for some of the pieces to fall into place. Budget right now is huge. We need to have money to put it together."

Although the Main Street board has endorsed the festival and the group is organizing the event, the cost will not be covered by Main Street, Gannon and Wilger said.

"Main Street will not be funding the event, but it may provide some in-kind services, such as volunteers," Wilger said.

The city endorsed the festival earlier this year, although aldermen would still need to formally approve closing Franklin Street and issuing liquor and cabaret licenses for the event, City Administrator Mark Grams said.

Organizers hope to meet with city officials during the next month or two to discuss the potential for using police, fire and public works services, Wilger said, as well as cost sharing for these.

They are looking for volunteers to form committees to organize the event soon, Gannon said.

“There are some wonderful people in Port Washington with great talents, and if we get them involved, this will come together quickly,” she said.

Fundraising is expected to begin soon, Gannon said, adding she hopes to have some solid sponsorships in place by November so the festival can begin to book entertainment.

The free festival will be held on Franklin Street and areas to the east with multiple entertainment stages, much like the Community Street Festival it is patterned after, Gannon said.

Suburban Harley-Davidson is considering a motorcycle ride that would lead enthusiasts to the festival, Wilger said.

Gannon said organizers have ideas for parking all the motorcycles that are likely to come, as well as cars. Existing parking lots will likely be used, as well as shuttle buses, she said.

Organizers have talked to the police department about parking, she said, and got some good ideas from officers.

Businesses and non-profit groups have contacted the organizers to see how they can get involved, she said.

Although organizers are still waiting to see if the festival will be endorsed by Harley-Davidson as part of the anniversary celebration — a move that would place the event on a list of official events printed on tickets — Port’s event is already drawing interest.

A man from Texas called to find out about the festival so he could incorporate a stop in his plans to ride to the anniversary, Gannon said.

“It’s great that we’re so in the baby stages and we’ve had so much interest,” she said.

Organizers plan to hold two informational meetings on the festival during December, Wilger said.

“Some businesses are very excited,” she said. “But a lot of people have a lot of questions right now. That’s why we’re having the informational meetings.”

Gannon said the festival will benefit the city in numerous ways, bringing revenue to downtown shops, restaurants and bars and new visitors to the community.

“Our event will be a great way to show them what we have, be it dining or shopping. And the more people we get to Port Washington, whether they’re from Sheboygan or California, the better,” she said, noting these visitors may return to the community or spread the word to friends about all the city has to offer.

Mayor Tom Mlada was equally enthusiastic, saying the festival would be a unique opportunity to showcase the city to a group that might not otherwise discover Port.

“It would be a huge, huge thing,” he said. “It’s a fantastic opportunity to bring people into our city, and it may keep people here on a holiday weekend who might otherwise leave.”

The city is willing to discuss contributions to the festival, Mlada said when asked about the potential for providing public works and safety services.

“Whenever you embrace these festivals, you open up those discussions,” he said.