

Festival plan hinges on fireworks, parking

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Proposal to combine Grillin', Holidayze tabled until concerns are addressed

A plan to combine the Grillin' in Grafton and Holidayze celebrations into one summer festival received the backing of the village's Parks and Recreation Board last week.

However, the proposal for a joint event at Centennial Park on June 28 and 29 remains on hold while officials investigate several potential problems, including parking and the setting for fireworks.

The Village Board on Monday tabled consideration of the plan at the request of Parks and Recreation Director John Safstrom, who said he needed more time to contact this year's fireworks vendor, J&M Displays of Yarmouth, Iowa.

The plan calls for relocating Holidayze, the popular Independence Day celebration, from Lime Kiln Park to the new venue on 17th Avenue. The change has been requested by Celebrate Grafton, a committee that oversees most local festivals, in an effort to save money by combining volunteer staffs and fundraising.

"It's designed to enhance the attractions associated with both festivals," Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said of the plan.

Both festivals offer live music, carnival games, vendors and other attractions. Grillin' in Grafton, which debuted in 2011, features culinary competition between national and local barbecue teams.

In a January report on the proposed change, Safstrom said use of Centennial Park for the joint venture had the support of Fire Chief John Place and Police Chief Charles Wenten and that his department had not received any complaints from neighbors about the plan. Safstrom said a letter outlining the plan was mailed to more than 30 neighbors of Centennial Park and that no one responded with concerns.

However, at the Feb. 13 Parks and Recreation Board meeting, two residents said they had not received the letter. One of those residents, Amy Smoody, of 1508 17th Ave., told the board that vehicles parked for last year's Grillin' in Grafton blocked her driveway.

Smoody also voiced concern that vibrations from the fireworks might damage windows and that fireworks residue could fall on crops in her backyard garden. She asked for assurance that the fireworks launching area be far enough away from nearby residences.

Safstrom said he was unable to contact J&M Displays in time for the meeting but that the vendor had to adhere to safety guidelines. The launching site was likely to be an open space near St. Joseph Church, which is across the street from the park, or an area in the park away from houses.

In response to potential parking problems, officials have proposed asking the Grafton School

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District for permission for festival goers to use nearby school lots.

Trustee David Liss, a Parks and Recreation Board member, said he was concerned about alcohol consumption by tailgaters using public parking lots before the fireworks. Alcohol bans on school property would have to be enforced by police, Liss said.

Members of St. Joseph Church complained last year when their parking lot was used by Grillin' in Grafton patrons. In response, Safstrom said, plans call for the church lot to be barricaded and open only to parishioners who have parking permits.

The combined festivals are expected to attract between 1,000 and 2,000 spectators.

The Parks and Recreation Board unanimously recommended a joint-festival celebration contingent on knowing the location of the fireworks launch site and alleviating concerns with fireworks vibration and fallout.

The Village Board is expected to consider the plan March 4.