

City officials sour on excursion boat deal

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
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Miffed by lack of communication from cruise firms, commission decides to charge them for winter marina use

A frustrated Harbor Commission on Monday decided that if two excursion boats want to dock in the Port Washington marina this winter, they will have to pay.

The city had reached an agreement with Foxy Lady Cruises of Green Bay and Harbor Lady Yacht Cruises of Sturgeon Bay to allow two of their boats to remain in the marina over winter in return for the firm offering several public cruises.

The boats were expected to pull into the harbor on Oct. 15, but that date came and went with little communication from the ships' owners, Harbormaster Dennis Cherny said.

"People are asking, 'Where are these boats?'" he said.

He called the cruise operators and was told they were going to extend their season and remain in Sturgeon Bay for two weeks, Cherny said.

But when the boats didn't arrived at the end of October, he went to check again and discovered that, according to their Web site, they are moored in McKinley Marina in Milwaukee through Dec. 15, offering cruises there, Cherny said.

"I saw them go by on Sunday," he said. "I'm thinking this deal has fallen through.

"I don't have a clue what's happening. I don't know if they're anticipating coming here on the 12th of December. There's nothing on the Web site about Port Washington."

He noted that, in return for mooring here, the boats were to offer three community cruises between Oct. 15 and April 15 — with the city receiving \$2 of each ticket sold — host a welcome back party for marina tenants in spring and pay the cost of electricity needed to run the ice eaters in the north slip marina, where they would be docked.

"When are we going to get those free charters?" Cherny asked. "They had three or four nice weekends when they could have offered them here."

Springtime, he noted, is generally too chilly for cruising.

Frustrated commission members expressed skepticism about the deal, which was approved by the Common Council last month.

"Their attitude stinks," Commission Chairman Gerald Gruen said.

City Administrator Mark Grams said, "The time for them to come would have been in October. Spring cruises are questionable because the weather is more questionable then.

"They went to Milwaukee instead to extend their season. I think they're just looking for free

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storage from Port Washington.”

He suggested that, since the deal the city had with the companies was verbal, the marina now charge the boats to remain in the marina over winter.

Commission members concurred, agreeing to charge them \$2,000 per boat for winter storage, plus the cost of electricity.

“It sounded like a nice thing,” Cherny lamented, adding he will contact the boat owners again to see what is happening. “This was going to be a win-win for both of us. It doesn’t appear to be a win for us.”

Grams said he hopes that if the boats do moor in the marina over winter, the owners will offer the cruises to residents.