

Balloon fest gets the all-clear

Council OKs event despite debt concerns

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Freedom Weekend Aloft will indeed take flight from Heritage Park this year.

Simpsonville City Council has voted 4-3 to move ahead with this year's event after discussing the festival with some of its organizers as Freedom Weekend Aloft works to pay the \$40,000 it owes the city for rent at Heritage Park.

Bad weather in 2009 and 2010 caused the organization to fall behind in 2010 and 2011, said Keri Hall, Freedom Weekend Aloft executive director.

Hall and Chuck Morton, a member of Freedom Weekend Aloft's board of directors, fielded questions from council members such as why some of the them were unaware of the debt and what happens if 2012 is a rough year.

There was a breakdown in communication between 2010 and 2012, Hall said.

But, she said, "Now we're back on track, have those communica-

tions the way they need to be, have that working-together, co-operative partnership that we need."

Morton said they are looking at ways to strengthen the event.

"It's a showcase event for this area," he said.

"We're going to continue holding this event for as long as we possibly can. I think what it does is bring a value of quality of life to this area."

Simpsonville council members Matthew Gooch, Geneva Lawrence and Mayor Perry Eichor voted against it; council members Brown Garrett, Julius

Welborn, George Curtis and Sylvia Lockaby voted for it.

Lawrence said she voted against the festival because of the money issue. Lawrence said she would like to see the event be more of a partnership between Freedom Weekend Aloft and the city.

"I don't think anybody has ever said it's a bad event," she said. "It's just the issue of the money."

Curtis said that before the vote there was the possibility that Freedom Weekend Aloft wouldn't

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