

SenecaFest moving back downtown

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Riley Johnson
Seneca events coordinator

BY NORM CANNADA
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SENECA — SenecaFest is returning to downtown in 2019.

The Seneca Events Committee approved a plan Wednesday to move the annual event from Gignilliat Field to downtown Seneca May 23-25, with the focus on Main Street from Ram Cat Alley to Walnut Street. City staff was directed to come back to the council events committee with a schedule and logistics for holding the event downtown.

Councilman Scott Durham, who chairs the events committee, said the move will be good for downtown businesses and the city's ongoing effort to revitalize and prioritize the area.

"We want them to grow; we want them to flourish; we want them making money," Durham said. "It's advantageous for everybody to work together in this. We want these buildings full of people and vibrant and everybody enjoying it."

City events coordinator Riley Johnson said it has been "at least five or six years" since the annual Memorial Day weekend event was held downtown.

"I think the whole world knows that we're wanting to build up our downtown, so this is just another way to bring 10,000 or 20,000 people down here," he said.

During the meeting, Durham and

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others suggested having the event stretch out along Main Street all the way to Walnut Street where the new Keowee Brewing Company is scheduled to be open by late spring. There were discussions about using local bands each night, with bands set up on both sides of Main Street.

The staff will also be discussing ways to offer alcohol throughout the event and working with the police department to make that feasible.

Durham said having craft beer available at the event as people walk down the street would be good for SenecaFest.

"We travel to Waynesville, Hendersonville, Asheville, Greenville on weekends, and this craft beer thing is everywhere," Durham said. "These millennial people seem to want to enjoy your town and see what you've got,

but they also want to have some craft beer. I think it's great. It brings money into the town, and we have security here. Our police are going to be on top of things, and I think it will really help us grow here."

Councilman Dana Moore said SenecaFest began at Norton Thompson Park years ago before it moved to Gignilliat. While acknowledging that moving the event downtown with local bands would save money, he said his vote at the meeting was "a decision to come back downtown."

"There was a lot of discussions when we moved and a lot of discussions ever since we moved," Moore said, adding that businesses were concerned. "This is more to me about coming back and helping the people, helping the businesses."

Seneca businessman and former councilman Stuart Pohl was at the meeting

representing the Downtown Seneca Merchants Association. He said he was happy to hear the event was moving back to the downtown area.

"That's a big time change," he said. "We hated to see it go. I understand why it went. They wanted to try something different. All the merchants miss it a lot."

City administrator Scott Moulder said he was pleased to hear more people talking about downtown Seneca at the meeting.

"It's exciting to hear that there are people behind a vision and the vision is becoming a reality," Moulder said. "I hope that these sidewalks are so full of people that you can't walk straight without bumping into somebody. That's going to be a benefit for the property owners and businesses."

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With live music among its many offerings, the annual SenecaFest will make its return to downtown this year after several years at Gignilliat Field.