City considering Halloween fireworks display after Oktoberfest cancellation

BY NORM CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — With Oktoberfest canceled for the first time in more than four decades, Walhalla City Council is considering providing a fireworks display downtown on Oct. 31.

Councilman Dennis Owens proposed the idea at Tuesday's monthly council meeting. He said city administrator Brent Taylor estimated the display would cost $2,000-$3,000.

"Fireworks are entertaining and would bring people into the town, and since fireworks is an outdoor activity, there shouldn't be any problem at all with social distancing given our current situation with the virus," Owens told council. "Maybe we can do something to boost the spirits of the people since we're not having the overall Oktoberfest event."

The Oktoberfest Committee recently canceled the annual event on Sertoma Field, citing concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic and financial concerns if the crowd was smaller this year.

Main Street Walhalla director Libby Imbody is working on several small events downtown during October to celebrate Walhalla's German heritage. Councilman Keith Pace said the last of Imbody's Oktoberfest events is scheduled for Oct. 31 and would go well with a fireworks display.

"She has a big day planned that Saturday," he said. "It will be a really full day. I think Mr. Owens' suggestion would be great."

Councilman Josh Roberts agreed and suggested officials check on the availability of fireworks not used for the Oktoberfest last year because of rain, which could help the committee

FILE

After the city's annual Oktoberfest was canceled recently because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Walhalla City Council members agreed Tuesday night to move forward with trying to schedule a fireworks display on Oct. 31 to help draw people to town.

FIREWORKS: Council looks at curfew

recoup funds and provide the fireworks at a cheaper cost.

Council agreed to move forward with trying to coordinate a fireworks display on Oct. 31.

CURFEW ORDINANCE PASSES FIRST READING

Council also approved first reading of a proposed ordinance setting up procedures for enacting an emergency curfew "during times of great public crisis" such as a tornado or other natural disaster, rioting, civil disturbance or other situations where police "are unable to maintain public order."

Taylor said the proposed ordinance was put together to try to have "a little better process than we had before." The city enacted curfews earlier this year after several days of protests at a Confederate memorial in the city. Police arrested some people, but most were for minor offenses.

The proposed ordinance calls for the mayor to call for a state of emergency and enact a curfew after consultation with the police chief, city administrator and council members.

Owens proposed an amendment that was approved that required officials "make an attempt" to contact a majority of council members before imposing a curfew.

"We would actually try to call them all just to get that support," Taylor said.

Owens also sought to eliminate the words "firearms or ammunition" among items people could not buy, sell or possess

rules, Stumphouse changes

on his or her person during a curfew. That motion failed.

CHANGE MADE FOR FREE STUMPHOUSE PASSES FOR CITY RESIDENTS

Walhalla residents will now only need photo identification or a city water bill showing they live inside the city to be eligible for a free annual pass to Stumphouse Park.

Council approved the change at Tuesday's meeting. Taylor said residents had to have both documents prior to the change. He added some people may live in the city but not be the person responsible for paying the water bill.

Overall, the fees for entry into the park haven't changed. Daily park entrance remains $5, with annual passes available for $25 for Oconee County residents and $35 for those living outside the county.

Taylor said visits to the park are increasing, adding that 5,000 cars went through the park in July.

ncannada@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6680