

Staff Report

FOURTH OF JULY FIREWORKS

May 26, 2020

BACKGROUND:

At the May 12, 2020 meeting, the City Council directed staff to provide a report regarding the Fourth of July fireworks display, to consider whether the display should proceed in light of the precautions against COVID-19.

The Fourth of July fireworks display is typically held on July 3, with fireworks launched from ISU's Southeast Athletic Complex, across University Boulevard from Jack Trice Stadium. Spectators typically gather on the ISU parking lots adjacent Jack Trice Stadium, and on private property within view of the display. The fireworks display is organized by the Ames Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB).

At the May 12 meeting, the Council approved the cancellation of a number of events on City property, and the use of a series of criteria to evaluate other events proposed before August 31, 2020. **Although this event is not held on City property, City Council approval of the Fireworks Permit is required for the event to proceed. Therefore, staff has evaluated this event in its current form against the criteria for events on City property:**

Is the event allowed under the Governor's emergency proclamations?

The Governor's orders still prohibit mass gatherings (no groups larger than 10 people) through May 27. It is unknown whether this order will be extended or modified. The current order indicates that "a gathering of people inside parked cars, trucks, or other enclosed motor vehicles shall not constitute a gathering of more than 10 people if no more than 10 people are inside each vehicle, all people remain inside the vehicle at all times." Historically, attendees at the fireworks display have not remained in their vehicles. Because parking occurs for hours prior to the display, it would be difficult to confine attendees to their vehicles for the entire time they are there.

How many attendees are expected, and how densely crowded are they?

It is difficult to estimate the number of attendees at the event, since gatherings occur in the stadium parking lots and other parking lots within view of the fireworks display. Attendance is in the thousands. Many attendees bring food and activities while they wait for the display to begin. Attendees begin arriving a few hours prior to the display. It takes approximately an hour after the display to clear attendees from the lots to the point where traffic control measures are no longer needed.

Do event organizers have a plan and equipment/supplies needed for increased hygiene?

It would be difficult or impossible to provide hygiene supplies for the large numbers of attendees.

Is there sufficient staffing by event organizers to maintain social distancing among participants?

It would be difficult or impossible to provide staffing to maintain social distancing for the large numbers of attendees.

Is there an increased risk that the event will require City staff to be in close contact with participants or organizers for an extended period of time?

City staff would not be in close proximity to the attendees for a long period of time. However, ISU Police patrol the lots during the period when attendees are present. This generates a considerable amount of contact between ISU Police and the public. In 2018, records indicate there were 15 calls for service in the stadium lot area, with most related to fireworks violations. The 2019 data regarding calls for service does not appear to be representative because the display was delayed to an alternate day due to rain.

ACVB staff has contacted other communities to investigate what each is planning related to fireworks. Responses include:

- Iowa City – cancelling fireworks
- Cedar Falls – the city does not do fireworks, but has cancelled the Sturgis Falls Celebration the weekend before
- Dubuque – postponing fireworks until August
- Des Moines – fireworks after the Pops Concert at the Capitol was cancelled. The Des Moines CVB reports the concert is cancelled; the fireworks aspect is managed by the City and no decision has been reached
- Boone – Boone CVB reports the city manages fireworks after a race at the track; the fireworks will be held in some fashion, although organizers are still unsure if fans will be in the racetrack stands or not

ACVB AGREEMENT

The City has an agreement with the ACVB regarding Hotel/Motel Tax revenues. Under the terms of the agreement, the ACVB receives five of every seven cents of Hotel/Motel Tax revenues from the City. In exchange, the agreement provides that ACVB is to finance “activities and programs that encourage conventions or events, enhance visitors’

experiences, and improve the quality of life for residents, including the annual 4th of July fireworks display.”

If the fireworks display does not proceed, it would be appropriate to also waive the requirement in the ACVB funding agreement for ACVB to host the display. ACVB would then be able to use the fireworks funds for any other purpose allowed by the agreement.

OPTIONS:

1. Do not proceed with a 4th of July fireworks display for 2020, and waive the requirement in the ACVB funding agreement for ACVB to use a portion of its revenues for a 4th of July fireworks display in 2020.
2. Direct staff to continue to work with ACVB and ISU to identify an alternative method of displaying the fireworks.

STAFF COMMENTS:

City staff has consulted with ISU Police and ACVB officials regarding the fireworks. A concern for ISU officials is the level of contact this event generates between ISU Police and the public. ISU’s goal is to have staff healthy for the start of classes in the fall, and the question is whether introducing significant face-to-face interaction in July could impact the health of officers.

This group of City staff, ISU Police, and ACVB officials has worked to identify alternative viewing locations or options that may reduce the level of group interaction that occurs by viewers of the fireworks display. **However, staff from ACVB, ISU, and the City all concur that the best option is to not host the fireworks for the Fourth of July this season.**