

Genoans reject competing festival permits

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Genoa Town Board members voted Tuesday night to recommend denial of outdoor festival permits proposed by two local businesses for the weekend of Candy Dance.

Both the Peddler's Fair and the Autumn Boutique have been approved by the county over town board members' objections in the past.

The two businesses have also asked that the county reduce their share of costs for security, basing that cost on the number of booths instead of splitting it three ways.

Genoans asked that if the county does approve the outdoor permits they require the festivals to continue splitting security fees as they have been.

In a letter to county commissioners, both Martha Williams of the Peddler's Fair and Phil Stoll of the Autumn Boutique asked that the county divide the security fee by the number of booths.

By that reckoning, the Autumn Boutique would pay \$1,879.50 for their 70 vendors or \$26.85 per vendor.

That would leave Genoa paying the majority of the \$11,600 security fee for the festival for its 290 booths.

The cost of security was split three ways in a compromise in 2009, after the county reformed the outdoor permit rules.

Stoll said that both she and Williams felt that they should be paying per booth.

"It's pretty ridiculous that Martha's paying the same amount that the town pays when she only has 30 booths," she said. "When we go to the county commission, I can't imagine they would deny the request because it makes sense."

Stoll wasn't surprised the town rejected her permit request.

In the past county commissioners have voted to approve permits from both businesses, saying that if they meet the requirements the county must allow them to hold their events.

That position has prompted hard feelings from the town board, which has protested the county approval in the past.

The event raises about 80 percent of the town's annual revenue, dwarfing that received in taxes or rent on town buildings.

"Douglas County saves about \$100,000 a year because of the volunteerism in this community," town board member Dave Whitgob said.

On Tuesday night, town board members voted to present the issue of standards for Candy Dance to townspeople at their annual meeting on Feb. 15.

Concern for the future of the event has prompted the town to try and hold other fundraisers, such as the Cowboy Poetry & Music Festival in the spring.

Whitgob said establishing standards and sticking to them won't solve the conflict with the two other festivals, but it's worth doing.

"We need to revisit the standards for Candy Dance, and once we have new ones, we should stick to them moving forward."

But Town Board member Greg Pace said in many cases the standards aren't enforceable by the town.

"I don't see a way to enforce all this," he said. "As they say, the 'horse is out of the barn.'"

Candy Dance was established in 1919 as a way to pay for streetlights in the town and keep them burning.

What was a dance in the townhall, where people sold candy to raise money, turned into a crafts festival in the 1970s designed to fund recreation for the town children.

The festival grew to take over the town for a weekend in September, which prompted Williams and then Stoll to do their own festivals.

Williams has said that because of Candy Dance, she can't conduct her business.

Revenue from Candy Dance pays for the town staff and to maintain town property.

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