



DATE: Friday, May 22, 2020

RE: 2020 Friendly City Fourth & Fireworks

Following the lead of many other communities and the guidance of the Governor's Office in regards to large gatherings, the HDR Board of Directors has decided to cancel the Friendly City Fourth festival due to COVID-19 considerations. It requests guidance from City Council as to whether to also cancel or postpone the fireworks display for 2020, for which the City pays nearly half of the cost (\$8,500), and provides in-kind Police, Fire, Parks and Recreation and Public Works support. As much as we all need things that bring joy and foster a sense of community in these challenging times, there were concerns among the HDR Board members and staff about the safety of attracting large crowds to the City for fireworks viewing, as well as the fiscal responsibility of spending resources on fireworks in the face of current economic challenges.

We anticipate that the fireworks, if held, would draw from well outside the City and County given the number of cancellations of celebrations in other communities (please see attached list, current as of May 20, 2020), creating a need for thousands of parking spaces for viewing as well as traffic control and crowd control in a significant number of locations across the City. We anticipate that pulling this together in the next month would require substantial effort and coordination by HDR and the City during a period in which the Governor's guidelines for large gatherings in phase II remain untested, and could drain staff resources which might otherwise be directed to assisting small businesses and the larger community in this time of transition.

These concerns were echoed by various City departments. It is the recommendation of Chief Eric English in the Harrisonburg Police Department that the City does not hold a fireworks display on the Fourth of July; a recommendation supported by the following concerns:

- A display may attract large crowds from outside of the area, as other localities have canceled their events and celebrations.
- Potential for phase II violations of the Governor's orders in reference to large gatherings. Gatherings are limited to no more than 50 people in phase II.
- Obtaining /security of viewing locations
- Traffic control/ crowd control
- Current budgetary restraints
- Want vs. necessity of a display
- Placing the Department in an unfortunate position if officers had to enforce violations during an event that the City co-sponsors.

In addition, from an emergency management perspective, Paul Helmuth of Harrisonburg Fire Department acknowledged that while it is possible to host a safe display, it would require 1) extensive support from the Police Department, and 2) spectators' strict adherence to either remaining in their vehicles for the duration of the display, or, if spectators exit their vehicles, limiting and enforcing crowd sizes to a maximum of 50 people in all recommended viewing locations.

However, if the city would like to explore hosting a fireworks display, HDR recommends a comprehensive plan that should include the following:

- 1) a substantial number of viewing locations that can be secured which allow for in-car viewing, or if it is anticipated that spectators will not adhere to in-car viewing recommendations, enough recommended viewing locations are secured to support several thousand driving into the City for the display.
- 2) Popular and recommended viewing locations that can be monitored and enforced with the support of HPD
- 3) A clear and instructive public messaging campaign with recommendations for safer viewing. Such a campaign would need to be produced in partnership with the City and HDR, and would likely need to extend beyond Harrisonburg City and Rockingham County.

The timing of this decision is critical, and we appreciate the City Council's prompt decision.

Organizations and municipalities in Virginia that have cancelled or postponed their fireworks displays as of May 20<sup>th</sup>:

- City of Staunton/Happy Birthday America
- Town of New Market
- City of Waynesboro
- City of Charlottesville (No permits have been filled with the Fire Marshal. All third-party displays)
- Town of Vinton

Organizations and municipalities that plan to move forward with their displays, as of May 20<sup>th</sup>.  
Decisions are still subject to change:

- Town of Luray (July 4<sup>th</sup>)
- Town of Bridgewater (July 3<sup>rd</sup>)
- Wintergreen Resort (July 3<sup>rd</sup>)
- Woodstock/Shenandoah County Fairgrounds (July 4<sup>th</sup>)

Municipalities that have cancelled nationally:

San Diego, Boston, Austin, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee and many other mid-sized