



Madison Parks Division

210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Room 104
Madison, WI 53703
608-266-4711 • cityofmadison.com/parks



Date: May 10, 2022
To: Board of Park Commissioners
From: Eric Knepp, Parks Superintendent
Subject: Jack O' Lantern World Event

The Parks Division received a request from All Community Events for the use of Elver Park for Jack O'Lantern World. According to organizers, the event is designed to be a family-friendly celebration of Halloween and fall that features thousands of hand-carved pumpkins and will offer music along with food and beverages, including beer and wine. The anticipated use of the park is scheduled to run from September 19 through November 14, 2022. Set up would take place September 19-29 and the display will remain in place until approximately November 14. The paid admission, ticketed event will be open Thursdays through Sundays between September 30 and October 30, and is expected to attract between 1,000 and 4,000 visitors per night. While the setup of the event will be contained to the four softball diamonds, the impact to the park and surrounding community is expected to be significant due to anticipated traffic volume through the park.

Organizers have worked with staff since the application was submitted in March to address issues and concerns that exist. While conditions have been drafted to address some of these concerns, staff remain apprehensive about an event of this scale, scope and duration that will significantly impact the use of the park. These concerns are as follows:

- **Impact to other park users:** The proposed display will require a significant footprint within the park and set up around entire perimeter of the softball complex will prevent any use of the softball diamonds for games from mid-September through mid-November. If anticipated attendance levels are achieved, the general public will likely not be able to access the parking lot or shelter on these evenings. Organizers have been made aware that access to the diamonds must be maintained for field maintenance purposes.
- **Impact to street traffic:** Traffic into and out of the park from McKenna during peak hours is expected to be quite heavy. Pedestrian safety is a serious concern in this area already. Organizers must plan for traffic control and consider limiting the number of tickets sold during peak travel times if the event is to be permitted. In the event MPD officers are required to direct vehicle traffic, organizers will be responsible for paying any staffing fees.
- **Duration of event:** There have been no permitted park events of this duration that impact the park to the extent the proposed event does. Holiday Fantasy in Lights is perhaps the longest in duration, but its use does not in any way prevent people from using the park spaces as they would normally. Fantasy in Lights is also free and open to the public. Other permitted uses for longer durations are those contracted partners with whom the City has substantially different agreements, terms and conditions.
- **Paid admittance to the event:** This event will require attendees to pay in order to access the event. Several other permitted park events require paid admission. Organizers have not shared plans that would allow for free or reduced entry fees for those in the community

wishing to attend but without the financial resources to do so. Organizers have indicated they plan to contribute a portion of the profits to a local charity, but have yet to name the charity.

- **Monitoring of beer/wine sales:** Organizers have requested permits for beer and wine sales during the event. Organizers have been advised they are responsible for ensuring no guests leave the event area or enter the parking lot with beer/wine.
- **Site security plan:** Organizers plan to have security on site during the event hours and weekend nights, but have not shared plans for days during the week when it's not open to the public. Staff have concerns regarding potential vandalism and the impact this may have on others' ability to use the space. The City is not responsible for any damage that is caused to the event set-up for the duration of the setup dates, event dates, and take down dates.
- **Daily Cleanup:** Organizers are aware of obligation to clean up the event space daily Thursday through Sunday. This will also include the parking lots. Any additional cleaning required by Parks staff will be charged on a per hour basis.
- **Traffic Control in lot during event nights:** Application doesn't address how traffic will be monitored in the lot or how they propose getting people to leave at the end of the event. In the event Ranger staff is required to manage traffic flow, organizers will be invoiced on a per hour basis. The last ticket entry is at 10pm, if softball diamond lights are needed to deter guests from staying in the park after 11PM, organizers will be charged the standard light fees per usage.

The organizers have expressed some concern regarding the fees that staff have calculated. Estimated fees for the event are expected to be approximately \$64,000 for the 55 day use of the park. These fees are consistent with fees paid by other large community event organizers offering similar types of events, level of disruption of the park and with similar permits. Please keep in mind that those events are often free to the public and significantly shorter in duration.

This request was considered by the Facilities Programs & Fees Subcommittee (FPF) on April 18. During the meeting it was discovered that additional due diligence was required with current partners that have priority use of the softball diamonds through formal Use Agreements, which created confusion around the certainty of the diamond availability for this event. Staff have since confirmed that there are no conflicts, and the softball diamonds are currently available should the event move forward. FPF referred the item to the Board of Park Commissioners contingent upon clarification in event and access information with other park users and clarification on which charity with which the organizers intend to partner, and evaluation of alternative locations to that may be more suitable than Elver Park for such an event.

The event in total brings about a number of policy issues that the Board of Park Commissioners will need to consider in evaluating this request. Currently there are no parameters around maximum length of time for a permitted event regardless of the impact those events have on ability to use the space for intended purposes. While a number of permitted events generate revenue from their use of park space, Commissioners may want to consider how to approach private and/or non-profit organizations financial gains from the use of park space. An event of this scale is significantly different from events typically seen by staff, and potentially begins to approach the scale of partners with whom Lease Agreements exists. Those partners have been thoroughly vetted and have gone through significant processes to meet the legal requirements placed on them by the City. As always, I trust that Commissioners will thoroughly evaluate this request and balance the needs of the community.