

Community Events – Kelli Lamberty / Kelly Post: Lessons Learned from COVID

TITLE:

A summary of the challenges and opportunities presented to Madison Parks Community Events during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. What was learned from making decisions with limited information, responding to the public health concerns directly impacting the essence of community events – people gathering in public spaces?

LESSONS LEARNED

We were challenged, along with the rest of the world, to make decisions with limited information about what we were facing and what actions were needed to address the pandemic in relation to Community Events in Madison. What we learned will have a significant impact on the permitting process for Park events and activities well into the future.

- 1) Flexibility and adaptability are key. With things changing so quickly throughout the pandemic, we needed to be able to communicate and work with organizers to relay the latest health orders, and help them reschedule, relocate, postpone and finally cancel events – and then turn around and make things work when the orders were lifted.
- 2) Authority to make decisions – In order to be flexible and adaptable, it was essential to have the ability to make/approve requests for park use outside of the regular process and procedures. This included being able to administratively approval park event applications and requests; developing and utilizing new permits to allow safe events and activities to occur; ability to create and provide opportunities for the Madison community to access Madison parks and streets for safe outdoor activities and provide new venues to assist in the economic recovery of local entrepreneurs.
- 3) Ability to develop procedures/processes quickly – Linked to the other lessons, was learning how to create and develop COVID protocols. We learned where to find resources – local and national Health agencies were very helpful, especially PHMDC. Also very helpful were other municipalities' event offices/sites. We used the information at these sites to assist us in where and how to best communicate with event organizers. (a plug here for continuing to send Community Event staff to the Municipal Special Events Summit if/when it happens again) We also had invaluable assistance from Ann Shea and the City's IT Department.
- 4) Coordination and cooperation with other Parks agencies, commissions, other City departments, event organizers and the Madison community at large. Very little of what is listed here would have happened if we hadn't had the help and assistance of the broad community. From organizers that were exceptionally understanding about the predicament we all found ourselves in to our operations, front desk and ranger staff graciously helping us to make sure the events that did happen were safe and had what they needed. New relationships were forged and better communication will result from going through this challenging and unusual situation.
- 5) Finally, we learned that “telework” is a good fit for Community Event staff. Kudos to City IT for their tireless work to provide tools and resources making it feasible for City staff to work from home during the pandemic.

For our team, teleworking has proved to be convenient, efficient and effective and offers needed flexibility to us and the community we work with. I didn't think it would be the

case, but having virtual Street Use Staff Commission meetings worked out well. This is especially true for the groups that don't plan events on a regular basis. It is easier for them to make time for a meeting they can attend from their home or office than it is to make their way downtown at 10am on a Wednesday. I would request that Street Use meetings remain virtual, or that organizers have the option to attend virtually, in the future.