



**To:** Mayor and City Council  
**From:** Brian Phillips, Assistant City Manager  
**Date:** February 24, 2017  
**Subject:** Request to Hold Firefly Country Night on Friday, September 8

At the February 14<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting, the City Council moved to direct staff to talk to the Main Street Cultural District (MSCD), requesting that its Firefly Country Night not be held on the Thursday before Cy-Hawk weekend. Since that time, City staff has had discussions with event planners, and has received an application to hold this event on Friday, September 8, the day before the Cy-Hawk football game.

This is the second of two Firefly Country Night events planned for this summer. The event, which was formerly organized directly by the MSCD, has now been turned over to Jess Clyde of London Underground and Bill Malone of Café Diem, who will organize the event and share a portion of the profits with MSCD. The MSCD executive director has endorsed the event. City staff anticipates recommending approval of the first Country Night this summer, which will be held July 14<sup>th</sup>.

Staff and organizers have held several discussions regarding the September 8<sup>th</sup> event. City staff has concerns about hosting the event safely, given the large influx of people from out-of-town during the lead-up to the football game. A substantial proportion of those cited and arrested during football game weekends for nuisance and alcohol violations are individuals who live outside Ames. Firefly Country Night tends to draw a crowd both from Ames and elsewhere, as the event talent is nationally known.

On typical Cy-Hawk game weekends, the Police Department has historically begun to see an uptick in call activity in other parts of Ames by Friday. In addition, Ames Police officers will be working mandatory overtime shifts on game day, which makes it difficult to secure additional officers for a special event held the day prior.

To mitigate these issues, organizers have proposed enhancing the event security and adjusting some of the environmental factors, including: 1) shifting the event time earlier so the headliner starts at 7:30 p.m. and the event is over by 9:00 p.m., 2) ending beer sales at 8:00 p.m., 3) limiting total attendance to 1,500, 4) limiting pre-sale ticket sales to 1,000 and reserving 500 tickets for door sales to avoid turning away large numbers at the door who might become disgruntled, 5) hiring a security

firm more experienced with large events and increasing the number of security personnel from eight to fourteen, 6) utilizing security teams who will patrol inside and outside the event area, 7) setting price points that will cater to an older audience. Staff should note that this event has been held successfully in the past, with only a few incidents requiring intervention by security or police.

Staff has learned that the event was proposed for this date because a national act had an opening. Moving the event to another date would not be possible. The organizers have indicated that their deadline to sign the headliner is approaching soon.

It is evident that the organizers have thought through the safety of the event and have worked to mitigate potential issues to a great degree. City staff continues to have reservations about whether those changes will be sufficient to control the crowd, given the potential for significant delays in responding should a problem arise. Staff is not confident that it could recommend approval of this event that week, regardless of what measures are taken to modify it. Of course, if directed by the City Council, staff would make every effort to ensure a safe and successful event.

**City staff cannot recall a prior instance where the Council has weighed in regarding an event prior to it occurring, as it did on February 14<sup>th</sup>. The staff, therefore, assumes there is a concern on the part of the City Council for this event on this particular weekend. However, the motion was in the form of a request. City staff is not clear about whether the Council meant to indicate that it would not entertain a request for this event to be held that week at all, or if it was simply an appeal to organizers to attempt to find an alternative date.**

Given the staff concerns and the organizer's efforts to mitigate the safety hazards, City staff would like direction as to whether it should:

- 1) Accept the Special Event Application and work with the organizers to ensure the event is as safe as possible; or
- 2) Reject the Special Event Application and indicate that the event may not be held that week.

**If the City Council is not interested in having the event that week, City staff does not wish to spend significant time working through the planning for this event, nor does City staff want the organizers to waste their efforts. If the City Council directed staff to proceed with accepting the application, additional staff time would be required to continue to review and discuss the proposed plans. A Staff Report with the requests would be brought back to the City Council for approval at a future meeting. If the City Council directed staff to reject the Special Event application, no further action would be taken.**