

Staff Report

EVENT NOTIFICATION IN DOWNTOWN AND CAMPUSTOWN

December 12, 2017

BACKGROUND:

At the April 25, 2017, City Council meeting, the Council requested to place on a future agenda a discussion regarding the process for organizers of events in Campustown and Downtown to notify affected neighbors.

The current special event process requires the organizer of an event that occurs even partially on City property to submit a Special Event Application at least 30 days prior to the event and to obtain approval from the City's Special Event Committee should the event occurs (even partially) on City property (streets, sidewalks, parking lots, parks, etc.). Some events may be approved administratively by City staff. Events that require the closure of arterial streets, metered parking, or CyRide routes typically come before the City Council for approval. It should be noted that City staff will typically work with an event organizer even if the application is filed with less than 30-day notice, so long as City staff could arrange a review meeting and put approvals before the City Council before the event. Holding event organizers to a firm 30-day requirement would result in many significant events in the community not taking place.

In 2014, the City Council requested a staff report regarding options to ensure affected properties are notified about special events. City staff provided a report on September 9, 2014, outlining how other cities approach this issue and providing options for the City Council to consider. The City Council considered options including requiring event organizers to: 1) Submit a written notification plan to the City prior to event approval, 2) Obtain approval signatures from affected parties, 3) Mail notifications to affected parties, or 4) Post temporary signage throughout the affected area. **The City Council chose to require that event organizers prepare a notification plan as part of their application. City staff would review that plan and recommend additional measures for any notification plans it deemed insufficient.**

Since that time, event organizers have been asked to describe their efforts or plans to communicate the details of their event to affected residents and businesses. On the Special Event Application form, organizers are given several options to consider. These options and an assessment of how frequently they are utilized are below:

Option	% of Events
Place signs in the affected area prior to the event	24%
Go door-to-door with event information	22%
Present the event to officially recognized community groups that represent the affected area (e.g., MSCD, CAA, neighborhood associations, etc.)	22%
Distribute event details to affected neighbors via email	11%
Obtain approval signatures from affected residents and business owners	7%
Other (describe):	7%
Mail notices to affected residents and businesses	6%

Other forms of notification organizers described included phone calls to affect parties, social media, and newspaper announcements.

Based on the comments raised at City Council meetings regarding event notification since this 2014 discussion, it is common for City staff to advise event organizers to follow the following process:

1. Submit special event application well in advance of the event. Participate in Special Event meeting with City staff.
2. Notify affected property owners, renters, and establishments of the proposed event and the date and time the City Council will discuss the event. Do not yet advertise the event.
3. Receive City Council approval for the event.
4. Begin advertising the event to the public.

Staff has noted that not all event organizers wait to receive approval prior to preparing advertisements for the event. Further, City staff has only been providing guidance to follow this process based upon the general discussion by the City Council; the Council, as a body, has not provided firm direction regarding how staff should handle advertising prior to an event being approved. City staff could require stricter adherence to these application and procedural requirements, but it would likely result in a variety of events being denied.

SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS:

Complaints to the City regarding special events are rare. When written complaints are received, City staff forwards the complaint to the organizers and keeps the complaint on file for planning future iterations of that event. Staff strives to communicate verbal complaints as well. So far in 2017, eight complaints have been recorded.

Year	Event Applications	Complaints Recorded
2014	40	3
2015	44	1
2016	39	1
2017	45 (YTD)	8

Following the City Council discussion regarding this topic in April, City staff received an email from the Main Street Cultural District (MSCD) proposing that a petition be required for proposed events and that signatures of support be obtained, as opposed to acknowledgement of notification (Letter attached). In November, MSCD approved a policy outlining the notification steps an event organizer must follow if it intends to obtain a letter of support from MSCD. Event organizers are asked to meet with MSCD at least three months in advance of the event. MSCD will provide a contact list of those who may be affected by the event, and the organizers may then consult with the affected individuals to notify them and gauge support.

MSCD will not provide a letter of support for an event unless more than 50% of the affected businesses and residents express support for the event. **It should be noted that support from MSCD or CAA is weighed by City staff as one component of a successful outreach process, but ultimately it is City Council (or City staff, if appropriate) who determines if an event may proceed on City property.**

NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS IN OTHER COMMUNITIES:

City	Notification Requirements
Ankeny	Street closures require approval signatures from all property owners within the closed area. The City Clerk’s Office verifies the signatures.
Cedar Rapids	Written notification, a minimum of 48 hours before the event, to all affected property owners. Written notification includes the event route, date, start and finish times, and the applicant’s contact information.
Council Bluffs	Organizers mail or hand deliver a flyer/letter. Block parties require signatures indicating 100% approval.
Des Moines	A petition indicating approval/disapproval of the street closure must be signed by all-business/residents for street closures lasting more than one hour. The petition must be approved by 60% of affected businesses/residences. Applications with petitions containing less than 60% support are referred to City Council for consideration.
Dubuque	The City recommends that the organizer notifies the affected neighbors. At the City’s choice, the applicant may be required to obtain signatures of approval from 75% of adjacent business and property owners.
West Des Moines	60% of residents in a residential area must sign off and approve the event in a residential area. Events in Valley Junction must receive 75% approval from businesses. For very large events such as the triathlons, the City sends notices and charges the event organizers for the postage.
Sioux City	No written standard; however, if an event is in an area where it is known that residents or business owners have expressed concerns in the past, the event coordinator is required to develop a flyer to provide to the property owner and to provide the City with written notification from property owners supporting/denying the event.

Iowa City	Applicants must notify affected property owners.
Davenport	Organizers submit a copy of notices along with a listing of properties to whom the notice was delivered prior to approval of the special event.

NEXT STEPS:

If the City Council wishes to adopt specific event notification requirements for events in Downtown and Campustown, City staff offers the following questions to guide the Council’s decision making:

1. **Is the intent to inform affected neighbors of an event, or give them an opportunity to indicate their support (or lack thereof) for the event?**
 The Special Events webpage has a petition form that can be used by event organizers. It currently only indicates that the person signing has been informed. It does not ask for support or opposition. If the expectation is for affected neighbors to indicate support, what threshold of support needs to be shown? Examples of requirements in other communities include thresholds such as 60%, 75%, or 100% in limited circumstances.
2. **Who is considered an “affected neighbor?”**
 The Council could decide that those whose street frontage will be closed counts as affected. In some instances, a race route closes a circuit of streets, where access is controlled to the middle of the race route by volunteers. Should those in the middle of the route also be approached with a petition? Does the affected area include neighbors outside the confines of the closed streets to some extent?
3. **Are there minimum notification requirements the City Council believes all events in Downtown and Campustown should meet?**
 These could include the use of flyers, signature petitions, mailers, etc.
4. **What does the City Council believe should happen with events that do not meet the City Council’s expectations regarding the notification process? Should such events not be approved?**
 City staff estimates about 50% of the approved events in Ames are consistently organized by the same individuals; those organizers could easily be informed of any change in requirements easily. The remaining events are organized by committees and students groups that change who is responsible each year. Strictly applied notification requirements may be difficult for these groups to comply with.
5. **Does the City Council wish to see changes to notification requirements for all special events? Is the City Council comfortable having criteria for Downtown/Campustown events that are different from events that do not take place in Downtown/Campustown?**

Events held in the Downtown and Campustown area tend to be compact; events held in other areas of the City tend to be spread out, such as road races. Having two different notification procedures has the potential to be more confusing to applicants. However, a notification standard involving obtaining signatures from all affected residents and businesses in a business district would be much easier to achieve than obtaining signatures from all affected residents and businesses along a road race route, where hundreds to thousands of properties may be affected.



Downtown Events

Cindy Hicks

to:

bphillips@city.ames.ia.us, Heidi Petersen

04/27/2017 12:00 PM

Cc:

'Gloria J Betcher', Paul Livingston

Hide Details

From: Cindy Hicks <director@AmesDowntown.org>

To: "bphillips@city.ames.ia.us" <bphillips@city.ames.ia.us>, Heidi Petersen <hpetersen@city.ames.ia.us>

Cc: 'Gloria J Betcher' <gloriabetcherward1@gmail.com>, Paul Livingston <paul@hunziker.com>

Greetings Brian and Heidi,

I would like to propose a change to the process organizations follow to hold special events in downtown Ames. Currently MSCD directs those who want to organize an event (mainly those involving street closures) to use the petition form provided on the City website. I have included our entire process below. However, that petition just shows a business/resident has been notified of the event. The MSCD would like to see it changed to reflect support of the proposed event. I believe this is in line with what I heard from city council members on Tuesday evening as well. With the Velo race many downtown businesses expressed support for the event directly to me. Other than one, those who did not support the event never talked to me at all – even though I was in many of their shops last week. Only three of them indicated to the organizers of the race they did not support the event. While the letter of support was approved in February by the MSCD board – I did not give it to the organizers of Velo until the Wednesday - after they had talked to downtown business owners – and I had received numerous incidents of positive feedback from downtown businesses. I believe changing the petition so we the city and the MSCD are asking for the same thing would be very helpful and eliminate confusion. I understand this has never been an issue before this year. It is the belief of the MSCD, that by allowing outside organizations to produce events downtown we are adding to the diversity of what the heart of our community has to offer. We are also fulfilling the vision of the MSCD, which you can read below is to promote the district as a destination. It is my hope going forward, that streamlining our process for approval and the MSCD method of communicating the process to downtown businesses, we will eliminate the issues we are currently having. Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

Planning an event in downtown Ames

1. Determine a day and place to hold your event.
2. Notify all businesses/residents in the area and have them sign the affected business/resident signature sheet. You can find this at: <http://www.cityofames.org/government/departments-divisions-a-h/city-clerk/licenses-and-permits/special-events>
3. Present a copy of the signature sheet to the Main Street Cultural District (MSCD) Executive Director.
Note: *If you are closing a street for your event a majority of businesses should support the event. If you hold your event on a Sunday, or in the evening, many businesses are closed.*
4. Executive Director will present the event to the MSCD board and ask them to support it. If they agree, a letter of support will be written and submitted to the City of Ames.
5. Complete City Special Event application which can be found at: <http://www.cityofames.org/government/departments-divisions-a-h/city-clerk/licenses-and-permits/special-events>
6. The city will set up a meeting between you and city staff to go over the logistics of your event. The purpose of this meeting is for you to make any adjustments necessary in order to get your event approved by city council.

7. City staff will refer your event application to city council and a day will be set for it to be on the agenda. The special events are almost always in the consent agenda section. You should have a representative present just in case council has any questions. This doesn't happen often, but it does happen.

Cindy Hicks

Executive Director



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"Our mission here at Main Street Cultural District, is to advance and promote downtown as the destination District in the heart of the Ames community."

MSCD is an affiliate organization of the Ames Chamber of Commerce.