




MEETING DATE: 01/18/05

ITEM NO. 9

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

DATE: January 13, 2005

TO: MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL

FROM: DEBRA J. FIGONE, TOWN MANAGER 

SUBJECT: ACCEPT STAFF REPORT AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON EVALUATION OF THE HAUNTED FOREST EVENT AND RECOMMENDATION THAT THE EVENT BE DISCONTINUED.

RECOMMENDATION:


Accept staff report and provide feedback on evaluation of the Haunted Forest event and recommendation that the event be discontinued.

BACKGROUND:

The "Haunted Forest" event was started in 1995 to promote a fun and exciting family-oriented event that provides a safe environment for kids, teens and adults. The event has been held at Oak Meadow Park, and involves a number of Halloween-themed activities and realistic displays, which takes place during an approximate 2 week period leading up to Halloween.

The event was managed by the Police Department, largely supported by Town volunteers, from 1995 through 2003 - with proceeds going to support the Police Foundation. The Police Foundation consists of members of the volunteer groups within the police department which includes the Police Reserves, the Disaster Aid Response Team, the Volunteers in Policing, and the Pipe and Drum Team.

While originally designed to be an event to be set up and run by volunteers for their own benefit, as opposed to being a Town sponsored event, it had evolved into an event which had required an increasing number of hours of staff time at a cost to the Town. The estimated cost to the Town in 2003 was \$30,000.00. Due to increasing costs, the Police Department recommended discontinuing the event after 2003.

PREPARED BY: Scott R. Seaman
Chief of Police 

Reviewed by: PS Assistant Town Manager _____ Town Attorney _____ Clerk Administrator
_____ Finance _____ Community Development

Revised: 1/13/05 4:00 pm

Reformatted: 5/30/02

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After the 2003 event, a private individual, Bryan Patterson (hereinafter referred to as "vendor") who had been involved as a volunteer during the entire nine year run of the Town-sponsored event, proposed to continue the "Haunted Forest" event as a private endeavor, with limited Foundation involvement. As proposed, the vendor asked for use of props which had been used at the event in the previous years, and continued use of the warehouse for the storage of the props, which the Police Foundation has rented from the Novitiate for several years. In exchange for the use and storage of the props, and some volunteer help from members of the Foundation, the vendor agreed to donate 20% of the event's net proceeds to the Police Foundation.

This information was shared with Council at their April 19, 2004 and April 29, 2004 meetings. With the concurrence of both the Parks Commission and the Town Council, this privately run event was approved for 2004, and was handled in accordance with the Town's existing Special Events Ordinance. Staff committed to bring an evaluation of the event back to Council.

DISCUSSION:

The 2004 Haunted Forest event occurred from October 15, 2004 through October 31, 2004 inside Oak Meadow Park. From staff's perspective in both the Police Department and the Parks and Public Works Department, the event experienced more problems and issues this year than in prior years. Staff recognizes that some of the issues may be due to the tremendous amount of creative design, coordination and management a new promoter faces in producing this event.

The overall appearance of the event was an issue. Staff in Parks and Public Works and the Police Department observed that the props, equipment and other items which are necessary for this two week event, and are left out in the middle of the park for the duration of the event, were not aesthetically pleasing, due to the manner in which the items were organized. Specifically, there were numerous electrical cords strung across the grass, props which weren't used were left sitting in the middle of the grass area, and other non-used equipment was poorly organized, taking away from the appearance of the park during the daylight hours. Staff discussed issues with the vendor as they arose. The vendor was generally responsive to staff requests; however, some issues such as placement of major displays were not done as agreed upon, which impacted other uses. What was supposed to be a private event this year required on-going staff time to constantly monitor the event and to ensure that the park was not overly impacted by the event for the normal park operations during the daytime.

Feedback to Town staff was that the event was much less organized than it had been in years past. Many believed that this was still a Town-sponsored event. While some disorganization is normal with any new event, the belief that this is still a Town-sponsored event did not reflect as positively on the Town as in prior years. Attendance was lower this year than prior years. Feedback from attendees varied with some individuals expressing that the event was of lower value this year.

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According to the Parks and Public Works Department, the park does not have all of the electric capabilities (locations of numerous outlets, etc) which are required by the vendor based on the way the event was designed. Many more electrical outlets, closer to the displays, would be required unless the vendor rented numerous portable generators as an alternative. While this event did not meet the attendance or financial projections of the proposal, staff acknowledges that lagging ticket sales and low attendance, especially during the first week of the event, was partially attributable to inclement weather.

The Police Foundation has decided that they intend to divest themselves of future involvement in the Haunted Forest event, including the transference or disposal of the props to another entity. At this time, they are prepared to give them to the vendor should he be able to move them. The Foundation no longer has an interest in storing the props, even if reimbursed by the vendor. Their storage arrangement was originally created when the Foundation was the sponsor and was receiving the full proceeds from the event. Since this is no longer the case, staff and the Foundation do not expect to be able to continue to store the props at the same location under the same arrangements. Staff shared feedback regarding the Haunted Forest event with the Parks Commission at its January 4, 2004 meeting and told the Commission of its intent to recommend discontinuance of the Haunted Forest event next year. The Commission accepted staff's input regarding the event, and did not express any concerns to staff regarding this recommendation.

Due to the fact that the Haunted Forest was only going to go forward as a private venture in 2004, staff informed the vendor in May 2004 that the storage facility would likely not be available after this year and asked that he look for an alternate storage location for the props if he were to continue the event past 2004. This was re-stated in September. As of the date of this report, the vendor has not been successful in finding an alternate storage location.

Based on the net proceeds this year, the tentative donation to the Police Foundation from the agreement for this year's event is going to be approximately \$2,600.00. As a point of comparison, when the Police Foundation originally started this event, the net funds received from the event, not accounting for staff time, was as high as \$35,000.00. In the last couple years of operation, however, this figure dropped on a yearly basis, to approximately \$5,000.00. Uncompensated staff time was valued at \$30,000. The Foundation and staff subsequently recommended discontinuing the event. As agreed this year, volunteers from the Police Foundation provided the vendor some assistance with security and first aid at the event; however staff believes that this volunteer effort could be better utilized with other fund raising community-based events throughout the year.

CONCLUSION:

Staff recommends that the Town and the Police Foundation discontinue their involvement in the Haunted Forest. This recommendation would result in the Police Foundation giving away or disposing of the props in a manner of their choosing.

If Council elects that it would prefer to see the event continue in the community, staff recommends

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were reimbursed by the promoter. If this year's promoter, or any other entity, desired to put on a similar event in future years, staff would ask the promoter to apply for a special events permit in accordance with the existing Town ordinance. Such a request for a special events permit would be evaluated by staff at the time, based on the individual merits of the application.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

Is not a project defined under CEQA, and no further action is required

FISCAL IMPACT:

None

Attachments:

None

Distribution:

General

Parks Commission