

BACKGROUND FACTS ON THE PROPOSED SPECIAL EVENTS ORDINANCE FOR IOWA COUNTY

Posted Feb. 7, 2014

Grassroots urges you to contact your County Board Supervisor before the Feb. 18 meeting.

IOWA COUNTY HAS NOT HAD A SPECIAL EVENTS ORDINANCE BEFORE.

The current proposed Ordinance, which will come before the full County Board at its Tuesday, February 18 meeting (7 p.m. at the Health and Human Services Building) came about because a small number of folks complain loudly to their elected officials about the bad-apple cyclists who are not courteous to farmers and other drivers and don't ride safely. On the other hand, the vast majority of people participating in Special Events – biking, running and motorcycling -- are respectful. And the economic and health benefits of Special Events to our County are significant.

A low cost, well defined permit system for Special Events in Iowa County may be in order. Unfortunately, the proposed Ordinance is not well designed. Several problems exist. The proposed fees and vague insurance terms, which were added at the last minute at the Jan. 13 Transportation Committee meeting are guaranteed to cause on-going conflict. A more thoughtful approach to the Ordinance would let both sides communicate concerns: educate each other and work toward a better experience for all.

An Ordinance needs to keep in mind that Special Events are very important to our recreation-centered County where our medical professionals will attest to the fact we need to be promoting more physical activity among our residents. They also provide a significant economic benefit to the County by bringing in people to our hotels, restaurants and shops and potentially new active young families to live here.

WHEN TALKING TO YOUR COUNTY BOARD SUPERVISOR OR IN WRITING LETTERS TO EDITOR:

- 1) Let them know you are in support of Special Events on county roadways – not only those that already exist but potential new events. Such events are essential to the quality of life and health of our community members. Our county is blessed with natural beauty. We need to be enjoying it and encouraging others to move to our county for the same reason.
- 2) A Special Events Ordinance may be in order but the current one is badly flawed. It will lead to constant conflict and no doubt the cancellation of some existing events as well as the curtailing of new ones.
- 3) If there are going to be fees for Special Events, keep them low. Concerned folks fear that the fees may be doubled or tripled when County budgets are tight. This would not be good for Iowa County residents. The same is true of county services fees. Be sure these remain in line with county services fees already established.

- 4) Let them know are very concerned about the newly inserted, vague proposal about insurance which reads as follows: Special event organizers “shall procure at their expense, a policy of insurance coverage at limits satisfactory to the County...” This particular section definitely needs to go back to Committee to have insurance limits much more clearly defined. Keep in mind: A) Organized events require participants to sign a release. B) Organizers already carry insurance to prevent from being personally sued. C) Iowa County is already insured. Do not discourage events by leveling exorbitant insurance requirements at the event organizers. This insurance provision was added at the last minute at the Jan. 13 Transportation Committee meeting.
- 5) Per the proposed Ordinance the Highway Department and the Sheriff may deny the permit request or cancel the special event. Ask your Board Supervisor how the public will be able to obtain information on Special Event permits granted, denied or cancelled by the Highway Department or Sheriff. These needs to be a transparent process.
- 6) Opponents like to mention “those events that happen in the County with no notice.” Ask them which events, where, when? These claims seem to have been exaggerated by the handful of people who don’t like biking events in general. Communities closer to Dane County may be more affected by this but the whole County should not suffer as a result.