

## Development Services

**DATE:** 7/17/2017

**MEMO:**

**TO:** Mayor Julie Moore Wolfe and Decatur City Council Members

**FROM:** Tim Gleason, City Manager  
Wendy Morthland, Corporation Counsel

**SUBJECT:** Decatur Celebration Request for Sidewalk Closure

**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends approval of the attached resolution allowing the Decatur Celebration to proceed with plans to fence in this year's event.

**BACKGROUND:**

This year the Decatur Celebration announced its desire to fence the event and charge admission as a way to provide the financial support necessary to fund the event going forward. This resolution, if approved, would facilitate the organization's ability to do so. A map showing the proposed locations of closures is attached and a list of responses to frequently asked questions related to this plan and submitted to the City include:

**In the event of an emergency, particularly one that requires moving large amounts of people in a short amount of time, is there enough places for people to exit, and will there be enough signage so people know where to exit?**

We have and continue to refine plans with the Decatur Police Department, EMS, and our Festival Security team to address safety in the event of an emergency. Each of our 7 admission gate will have (2) festival security representatives at all times who are trained on how to quickly move the fence out of the way if needed. If necessary, they would be alerted to do so via radio by our head of security, Dave Stout, who is also in direct radio contact with DPD. Additionally, there are logistics access gates on every street which would also be opened – some as wide as 40 feet. Combined with our admission gates, there is an exit that can be quickly cleared of fencing on every street the entire perimeter of the festival. We plan to open these gates nightly to allow for both public exit and entrance of clean up equipment. We will also place signage on every corner pointing to the nearest exit. In the event of an emergency we will also make announcements from our stages to direct people to safety and have both DPD and our festival security walk the grounds to help people find their way out.

**What is the response of the businesses that will be inside the fence?**

We hosted an informational session for all downtown businesses just after our announcement.

Businesses were hand delivered an invitation to come, have a beer on us, and ask any questions they have about the fence. Prior to that meeting our fence layout had both Coney McKane's and Sloan's Calzones outside of the fence line, but to my surprise they asked us to reconsider so they could be inside the grounds and benefit from festival foot traffic. We were happy to oblige their request. The biggest question we got was in regards to how employees will get to work. We assured everyone that any downtown businesses that have employees who need access during the festival will be given a specially marked wristband that will grant them access at all admission gates. We have also offered the same to downtown residents.

### **How will they handle their customers?**

The majority of the businesses benefit from the customers generated by increased foot traffic downtown during the festival. Some businesses like Robbies, Flora Gems, and Brass Horn have a tradition of closing for the weekend for staff vacation. Others like Busey Bank divert customers to other branches. However, I am training all my admissions staff to handle situations with grace. If someone comes to the gate and claims that they are only downtown to go to a specific business and not the festival, we have a plan to all for it. We understand that there will be learning curves and for that reason our mindset is handle any situation like that in the most peaceful way. I will say though, we have had a system in place for several years where if someone wants to park in a city lot that we are charging parking for, and expresses that they are only coming down to go to a businesses, we give them a voucher to have their parking reimbursed by that business, and the business in turn gets the voucher reimbursed by us. In the past 5 years I've probably only reimbursed 3 of those tickets.

### **How does the celebration plan to expedite those customers through the check-in points?**

We have 7 checkpoints that will each be set up in a reverse funnel. A security usher will divide the group into people who have wristbands already and those who need to purchase a wristband. If someone already has a wristband they get right in - easy breezy. If they need to buy a wristband they enter the gate and get in the line que were there will be three windows selling wristbands.

### **Does the Chamber of Commerce have a position on this?**

Mirinda has told me in conversations that they are happy to do anything to help us - including allowing us to sell wristbands at Chamber events. Also, the Chamber Ambassadors are hosting the VIP Tent this year, and one of the key Chamber employees - Jarrod Cox - is one of my key volunteers.

### **If the City council votes not to support the fencing, what is the alternative?**

Unfortunately, the model of a free festival just isn't sustainable. When I started as Producer 7 years ago the savings was depleted and we were losing money every year. We've started many new fundraising initiatives to help close that gap including the King & Queen Campaign, Haunted House, French Fried 5K, and many more ... but none have put us in a sustainable financial position. Should the fence not be approved my best guess is we would

limp along this year and it would be the last year of the festival.

**Why are you charging now after being free for so long?**

We have actually been charging since 2010 by selling the “Band Together” wristbands. Although the wristbands were designed to allow the public a way to financially support the festival, since we did not have an admission gate there was no way to enforce them except at the point of purchase for food and drinks. This method of enforcement led to the common mis-perception that the wristbands were only needed if you intended to buy food or drinks at the festival. However, the true intention of the “Band Together” wristbands was to offer a way for the public to financially contribute to the festival. All of our festival produced promotional materials were adjusted beginning in 2010 to exclude the phrase “free family street festival”.

**Will everyone need to have a wristband to attend?**

Yes, anyone age 13 or older will be required to purchase a wristband. This can be done in advance for \$5/weekend or at the gate for \$8/weekend.

**Does someone need a wristband if I do not plan on buying any food or drinks?**

Yes, the “Band Together” wristbands are required for anyone age 13 or older entering the festival grounds.

**Do people have to pay to get in to the carnival ride area?**

No. The carnival will have a fenced perimeter for safety and security, but will not require the “Band Together” wristbands. However, if you want to enter the festival grounds from the carnival you will be required to have the “Band Together” wristband. Wristbands will be sold at the entrance to the festival from the carnival.

**Why is the carnival fenced off if it's free?**

For safety and security - this is our top priority.

**Do volunteers need to buy a wristband?**

Volunteers who work longer than 3 hours will be given a wristband. This is the same policy we have had since 2010.

**Will people be able to climb the fence?**

We are not concerned about this because we are working with the Decatur Police Department, Macon County Sheriff's Department and our own festival security team and are very confident that they will have things under control. Also, the fence company we are working with sets up fences like this all the time and does not have that issue.

**Is there a danger of the fence falling down?**

The fence company we are working with has all the safety protocols in place to prevent that.

**Does the fence send a bad message about inclusiveness at DC?**

We think it does the opposite. The fence sends the message the Decatur Celebration listens to the community when shown there is a concern about safety and security. Also, we have been selling “Band Together” wristbands since 2010 without having that concern.

**How will you determine if a child is 12 or under?**

We will ask the child. Kids are pretty honest.

**What about people who can’t afford a wristband?**

We understand that this is a possibility; however, this is something that is required to come in to the festival. We recommend purchasing wristbands in advance to save money.

**Will people have to pay to attend the parade?**

No. Half of the parade route is on Main Street which is outside of the festival fence line. If you do not have a wristband you can still watch the parade from that area. If you do have a wristband you are welcome to come inside the festival grounds and watch on Franklin and North Streets.

**Will the fence impact parking?**

No, parking will be available in the same places as usual.

**PRIOR COUNCIL ACTION:** None

**POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS:** Some residents and downtown businesses have expressed both support and concern for the change.

**INPUT FROM OTHER SOURCES:** Decatur Celebration staff, Decatur Police, City Public Works Dept.

**BUDGET/TIME IMPLICATIONS:** None

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Description	Type
Resolution	Resolution Letter
Exhibit A - Map	Cover Memo