

LO may tighten event permit process

More events, more people beginning to overload city’s staff and budgets

The City of Lake Ozark is quickly becoming the most popular community in the lake area for events – most certainly the most popular hangout for anyone attending events on the east side of the lake.

Bikefest in mid-September is the most recent example of how tens of thousands of people swarmed The Strip to relax and enjoy what the city and the Lake of the Ozarks have to offer.

But there’s a cost for Lake Ozark being the hub of good times.

Lake Ozark Police Chief Gary Launderville told the board of aldermen recently that through Sept. 29 his department had spent more than \$22,000 on straight time and overtime for special events only. He expected that to grow to about \$25,000 by year’s end with several smaller events and the annual Christmas Parade in early December yet to come.

“I understand this is a tourist community and it’s going to cost us,” he said. “The money is one thing, but the strain on the staff keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger and we don’t have the manpower. I think it’s time we start thinking about requiring some of these events to supply their own people.”

He said that for Bikefest, for example, all of his department was devoted to The Strip for hours along with help from Public Works employees. LOPD officers typically spend most of their time handling traffic control, or just having a presence on The Strip.

He acknowledged that some event organizers have donated back to the LOPD to help cover costs, but that financial support seems to be dwindling. Others supply volunteers for traffic control, but it’s rarely enough.

Harrison Fry, assistant city administrator and community economic development director, noted that a city ordinance and the event application require that event organizers supply their own volunteers as applicable and should be the primary service provider rather than city staff. Any security personnel or security company



The Magic Dragon Street Meet Nationals Car Show, sponsored by the Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, is one of the more organized events held in Lake Ozark. Organizers begin meeting months in advance and coordinate with the City of Lake Ozark.
Photo courtesy of the Lake Area Chamber of Commerce

must be approved by the Chief of Police.

Solution

Lake Ozark and The Strip are geographically and historically suited for events because of their proximity to Bagnell Dam, Highway 54, Horseshoe Bend Parkway, Osage Beach Parkway and Route 242. The Strip has been popular since Bagnell Dam construction was completed in 1931.

“We’re proud of our heritage and that’s something we want to preserve,” City Administrator Dave Van Dee said. “We most certainly welcome events to the community and we’ll do what we can to accommodate them and the tourists and local residents. But we’re at the point now that we may have to look at involving event organizers more in the planning process and figuring out a way the events can help the city cover some of its costs.”

He said one or two events begin planning months in advance and meet with city officials, while most wait until a couple of weeks before their event to contact the city. There’s little communication before the event even though the application says event organizers are supposed to meet with the Chief of Police 30 days before the application is submitted, Van Dee said. Applications can be made 90 days in advance of the event.

“When people apply, isn’t there a way that we could at least collect some type of fee to cover police costs?” Alderman Vernon Jaycox asked.

Fry explained there is a \$250 permit fee and a \$35 fee per day of the event along with a \$1,000 deposit -- but that doesn’t begin to cover the total cost.

“In the application it clearly states that the PD can charge for services,” Chief Launderville said. “Have we ever done that? No. And that’s because there’s a fine line that we have to walk because we want the events because they bring dollars to businesses on The Strip. But at what expense?”

Tightening the permit process is one option being considered along with establishing a special event review committee. The committee would review each event application and make a formal recommendation to the board of aldermen for its consideration based on specific criteria.

The committee would be comprised of one or two city officials, a Lake Ozark resident, one or two business owners, an event representative and possibly others.

“We need to get a better handle on this. We’re having more events and the existing events are getting bigger. We only have so much space and personnel,” Chief Launderville said.