

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: James P. Kozik, AICP Director of Planning and Economic Development
DATE: January 27, 2022
SUBJECT: **One Year Review of Special Use Permit - Memorial Park**

Request

City Council review of Memorial Park Activities for 2021 pursuant to Special Use Ordinance.

Background

In 2019 and 2020, the Mayor and City Council approved Ordinance Nos. O-2019-21 and O-2020-11 respectively which authorized a Special Use Permit to the Park District for a new bandshell at Memorial Park.

Section 5 of Ordinance No O-2019-21 required that following the first full year of operation of the new bandshell, the Park District shall submit to the City information regarding the efficacy of the conditions set forth in Sections 4 A-F of the ordinance, including the capacity of the park to accommodate the size of the crowds attending scheduled events including the number of attendees at each event with a description of the event and the ability of the area surrounding the park to accommodate traffic and parking for the scheduled events. Attached as Exhibit "A" is a copy of a spreadsheet of data prepared by the Park District for the events that took place in Memorial Park in 2021. The dates that are highlighted in yellow have corresponding City LPR data (Exhibit "B").

While the improvements to Memorial Park and the bandshell were ready for the 2020 season, the COVID 19 Pandemic prevented its use. The Park did open for use in 2021, albeit initially under Covid restrictions and without the full schedule of events anticipated by the Park District.

Section 5 of Ordinance No. O-2019-21 was made part of the approval of the Special Use because the City concluded that the impact of the proposed special use was based on the available information and that such use was reasonable so long as it is in conformance with the special use requirements and restrictions imposed by the Ordinance.

Because actual operating conditions were not available at the time of their approval, the Council further concluded that it was reasonable and appropriate to permit the demolition and construction pursuant to the special use permit and to allow operation of the activities at the park in conformance with the special use restrictions and requirements imposed, subject to an evaluation of the effectiveness of the special use restrictions and requirements set forth by the Ordinance, after a full year of operation of the Park in accordance with the terms of the special use permit to determine only what, if any, fine tuning of the special use could improve the special use's compatibility with surrounding properties.



Section 5 further stated that the City may conduct a public meeting where it will review the evaluation of the conditions including all information provided by the Park District for the purpose of possibly fine tune, change, supplement or eliminate conditions associated with the special use permit.

Summary of 2021 Events

Attendance

A total of 45 events were held at Memorial Park in 2021. Section 4D of Ordinance No. O-2019-21 limited the number of events or activities utilizing amplified sound to no more than 30 days in any calendar year and no more than 4 days in any calendar week. Practices and Performances of the Wheaton Municipal Band however are not included in this limitation.

For each event held at Memorial Park, the Park District Staff performed a headcount of those in attendance as well as provided information on the approximate time the park was cleared of attendees. All of the events held in 2021 at Memorial Park with greatly under the maximum design capacity of the park at 1,800 seated and 2,500 standing.

School District 200

From April 16, 2021 to May 16, 2021, Wheaton North and Wheaton Warrenville High Schools held 14 musical rehearsals and performances were held at Memorial Park as COVID restrictions prevented the high schools from conducting these activities indoors at their respective schools. These rehearsals and performances were lightly attended with attendance averaging 76 persons. It is not expected that these rehearsals and performances will take place at Memorial Park in 2022.

Wheaton Municipal Band

The Wheaton Municipal Band utilized Memorial Park 16 times in 2021 for 8 rehearsals and 8 concerts. The average attendance for Municipal Band concerts was 596; with a high of 900 on 7/1 and a low of 350 on 6/10.

Wheaton Park District

The Wheaton Park District held 12 events at Memorial Park as part of their District's Summer Entertainment Weekend Series. The dates and times were as follows: June 4, 5-8 pm (Ribbon Cutting) June 5, 6-9:30 pm; 25-26, 5:30-9:30 pm (both nights); July 9-10, 5:30-9:30 pm (both nights); 23-24, 5:30-9:30 pm (both nights); August 7-8, (Brewfest on August 7) 12:30-4-30 pm (both days) and September 10-11, 5:30-9:30 pm (both nights). The average attendance at the Park District's events was 571, with a high of 899 on 9/11 and a low of 134 on 6/4.

Shakespeare in the Park

Wheaton College and the Wheaton Park District held 2 Shakespeare in the Park performances on June 26 and 28 with an average attendance of 315 persons.

City of Wheaton

Lastly, the City of Wheaton's Fine and Cultural Arts Commission held two events at Memorial Park; Music in the Park on July 25 and The Festival of Cultures on September 12. Both of these events were lightly attended.

Sound Level

For each event held at Memorial Park, the Park District Staff measured the decibel level (Db) of the sound from a fixed location within the park. The average measured sound level for all performances in 2021 was 68 Db. The average decibel level for the Wheaton Municipal Band was 68 Db. The average decibel level for performances associated with the Summer Series Concerts was 77 Db. The two Shakespeare in the Park performances had sound level readings of 60 and 67 Db respectively. A note from the performance from which the 60 Db was taken states the plays dialog was barely audible over the noise of the cicadas.

Parking

Park District Data

In an effort to determine the ability of the area surrounding Memorial Park to accommodate traffic and parking for the scheduled events, for each event held at Memorial Park, the Park District Staff counted vehicles parked within the parking lots of Gary Memorial Church, City Hall, and on Karlskoga, Wheaton Avenue, Union Avenue, Franklin Avenue, and Lincoln Avenue.

The data revealed during performances of the Wheaton Municipal Band and the Park District's Summer Concert Series, an average of 104 vehicles parked on Karlskoga, Wheaton Avenue, Union Avenue, Franklin Avenue, and Lincoln Avenue. As expected, the data also revealed a greater number of vehicles were parked closer to the park and fewer vehicles were parked on those streets further away from the park.

City Data

For a number of dates during 2021, the City also performed counts of vehicles for a larger area within the Downtown utilizing the Police Departments LPR (License Plate Recognition) technology. This technology allowed the City to calculate parking occupancy for various areas by having the LPR vehicle drive a fixed route. This data is presented in Exhibit "B". As previously stated, those dates highlighted in yellow are for several Summer Concert Series dates, while the last page (8/7/21) contains data for Brewfest.

The parking occupancy data for the on-street parking within the neighborhood north of Memorial Park corresponds closely to the parking counts performed by the Park District Staff. The parking occupancy data also shows the impact other simultaneous activities in the Downtown as well as busy weekend nights have on parking in the greater downtown Wheaton Area (7/9/21). The City data also reveals very low occupancy of the Wheaton Public Library parking lot and City Hall parking lot during Memorial Park events.

Conclusions

Section 5 of Ordinance No O-2019-21 required that following the first full year of operation of the new bandshell, the Park District shall submit to the City information regarding the efficacy of the conditions set forth in Sections 4 A-F of the ordinance, including the capacity of the park to accommodate the size of the crowds attending scheduled events including the number of attendees at each event with a description of the event and the ability of the area surrounding the park to accommodate traffic and parking for the scheduled events.

While the improvements to Memorial Park and the bandshell were ready for the 2020 season, the COVID 19 Pandemic prevented its use. The Park did open for use in 2021, albeit initially under Covid restrictions and without the full schedule of events anticipated by the Park District.

Even without a full slate of events operating at maximum capacity, Staff was able to draw some conclusions from the data that has been provided.

Attendance

With an average attendance of 596 for the Wheaton Municipal Band Concerts and 571 for the Park District's Summer Concert Series, attendance was well below the design capacity of the park of 1800 seated persons and 2,500 persons standing. Based upon how attendees "used" the park. i.e., spread out with chairs and/or blankets, the Park District has stated that going forward, they will limit ticket sales to around 1,000 persons.

Parking

The data collected by the Park District revealed during performances of the Wheaton Municipal Band and the Park District's Summer Concert Series, an average of 104 vehicles parked on Karlskoga, Wheaton Avenue, Union Avenue, Franklin Avenue, and Lincoln Avenue. As expected, the data also revealed a greater number of vehicles were parked closer to the park and fewer vehicles were parked on those streets further away from the park.

The parking occupancy data gathered by the City through its LPR technology for the on-street parking within the neighborhood north of Memorial Park corresponds closely to the parking counts performed by the Park District Staff.

The City parking occupancy data also shows the impact other simultaneous activities in the Downtown as well as normal weekend nights have on parking in the greater downtown Wheaton Area. The City data also reveals very low occupancy of the Wheaton Public Library parking lot and the Willow Avenue Garage. Efforts should be made to encourage the use of these two existing facilities, and to better coordinate events amongst organizations to not have simultaneous events occurring at the same time that attract large numbers of attendees to the downtown. A useful illustration of this is the data in Exhibit "B" for 8/7/21 during Brewfest. The event was held during the day, on a day when there were no other large-scale events happening in the downtown. The resulting impacts on available parking were minimal. Contrast this data with that from 7/9/21 when a concert was taking place in Memorial Park and the DWA was conducting a Margarita Crawl along with a Car Show and Frida Friday.

While in most cases excess capacity existed in the Wheaton Place Garage and the immediately adjacent street system for events that had less than half of the full capacity of the park, staff is very concerned about events which could reach the full design capacity of the park.

Police Services

The Police Department indicates that no calls for service or incidents for any of the noted dates during the 2021 season at Memorial Park.